

Clement of Alexandria and the *Sibylline Oracles*

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ABSTRACT

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Clement of Alexandria, recognized as the most Greek among early Christian writers, is one of the patristic authors who quotes the *Sibylline Oracles*. Originally a collection of Greco-Roman oracles that were believed to have been uttered by the ancient prophetess Sibyl, the original Sibylline texts were a powerful tool for political and religious resistance throughout the Hellenistic world. The original oracles are not extant, but the *Sibylline Oracles*, a Judeo-Christian collection of pseudepigrapha oracles that closely mimic the original Greco-Roman Sibylline prophecies and which were believed to be authentic until the seventeenth century, has survived almost in its entirety, and is quoted by several patristic authors, including Clement.

The symbiosis between Clement and the Sibyl has been commonly exaggerated in scholarship until recently, perhaps blindfolded by the apparent positive treatment that Clement grants to the Sibyl – to the point of attributing to her the title of Hebrew prophetess – in comparison to other patristic authors. The present study focuses on the use of the *Sibylline Oracles* by Clement and his relationship with the Sibyl within his work and in relation to his overall rhetoric. Although the Sibyl played a prominent role in Clement's discourse of Christian precedence and Christianity as an universal race, as one progresses through the three stages of his three-fold work – a trilogy comprising the *Protrepticus*, *Pedagogus* and *Stromateis*, which represented three different steps in the quest of Clement's disciple towards becoming the true Gnostic – it becomes clear that Clement's view on the Sibyl fluctuates, and is more complex than has previously been assumed.

Dedication

To my parents, César Augusto and Márcia, with love.

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Introduction

The *Sibylline Oracles* are a collection of Jewish and Christian oracles, written in Greek heroic hexameters and dating from the late Hellenistic to the early Byzantine periods.¹ The earliest Jewish oracles, the core of the collection, are the products of the Egyptian Diaspora and date from the second century BCE to the second century CE. Some oracles exhibit a small measure of Christian interpolation, while others have been extensively reworked.

In both their form and concept, the *Sibylline Oracles* were modeled to mimic the classical *Libri Sibyllini*, a collection of Greek oracles held to have been uttered by an aged prophetess – or prophetesses² – the Sibyl. The *Libri Sibyllini* were extremely popular in the Roman world. The first recorded consultation of the books took place in 496 BCE, and thereafter the oracles are known to have been consulted in times of crisis as a guide for pacifying the anger of the gods.³ The Roman interest in Sibylline prophecies remained strong after the transition from Republic to Empire and they were considered part of the imperial cult.

To a certain extent, the popularity and importance of the Sibylline prophecies were maintained and defended by the Roman authorities because of the vagueness of their prophecies. This vagueness permitted a flexibility of interpretation, which allowed

¹ For a recent overview of the *Sibylline Oracles*, see L. DiTommaso, “*Sibylline Oracles*,” *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. J.J. Collins and D.C. Harlow; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 1226-1228.

² The fierce debate among cities in antiquity, each claiming the origin of the Sibyl for themselves, led ancient scholars to propose the existence of not one, but many *Sibyls*. As a result, ancient scholars began to produce lists of the ‘authentic’ *Sibyls*. See H. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1988), 23-25.

³ S. Satterfield, *Rome's Own Sibyl: The Libri Sibyllini in the Roman Republic and Early Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 15-19.

the Roman authorities to fit the Sibylline oracles to specific historical situations and personal agendas. Thus, the Roman senate saw in the collection a powerful political tool to justify their action.⁴

However, the Romans were not the only ones to realize the potential political applicability of the Sibylline prophecy. By the middle of the second century BCE a group of Jews in Alexandria had already begun producing their own version of Sibylline texts.⁵ These oracles of Jewish authorship eventually came to be the core of the collection known as the *Sibylline Oracles*, which until the seventeenth century was believed to be authentic. From the second century CE onwards, the Sibylline phenomenon became very popular among some Christian circles, and Christians began to add to and edit the *Sibylline Oracles*.⁶

Clement of Alexandria is one of the most influential second-century Christian writers. He knew the Judeo-Christian collection of *Sibylline Oracles* and incorporated it with enthusiasm in his rhetoric. With the exception of Lactantius, no other Christian author quotes the *Sibylline Oracles* more than Clement. He believed the collection of oracles to be authentic Greco-Roman prophecies uttered by the Sibyl, and went so far as attributing to them the same authority of the Hebrew Prophets (*Protr.* 6.71).⁷

⁴ E.M. Orlin, *Temples, Religion and Politics in the Roman Republic* (Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill, 1997), 81-84.

⁵ J.J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 21-33. There is some debate concerning the date of the *3SibOr*, the oldest of the Jewish *Sibylline* books, but the normative position holds that the book is not an unitary whole, but a set of shorter oracles from both Jewish and pagan origin, which have been combined between 146 BCE and 84 BCE – with some verses interpolates by Christians later on. John Collins argues that the main corpus of the *3SibOr*, however, was compiled in the middle of the second century BCE.

⁶ The term *Sibylline Oracles* refers exclusively to the Judeo-Christian collection. The official Roman collection of *Sibylline* prophecies, which was destroyed in 83 BCE, is referred to as *Libri Sibyllini*, or yet *Sibylline Books*. Finally, the terms *Sibylline* texts, oracles and prophecies will be used to denote any other type of *Sibylline* material, or yet to *Sibylline* prophecy as a general class.

⁷ See G. W. Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), 159.

Yet such positive attitude towards the *Sibylline Oracles* was hardly common. Early Christian responses to the *Sibylline Oracles* varied from indifference to outright rejection, and Clement's positive view was the exception rather than the norm.⁸ Part of the reasons for Clement's positive attitude towards the *Sibylline Oracles* was his own background. Eric Osborn, one of the main specialists on Clement of Alexandria, calls Clement "the most Greek of early Christian writers."⁹

Born Titus Flavius Clemens to non-Christian, probably Greek parents, Clement converted to Christianity later in life. When Clement embraced his new faith, he did not reject his origins, but rather tried to tie both things together. In his quest to knowledge, he moved into Alexandria, the intellectual and cultural pole of his time, where he became the leader of a Christian school. Deeply influenced by Philo, Clement sought to marry Greek philosophy and Scripture. In his endeavour to rationalize Christianity, while defending it and making it appealing to his Greek audience, Clement embraced several elements of classic literature – most notably Plato – with which he was exceptionally well-versed, and combined it with Jewish Scripture and Christian theology.¹⁰ It is thus not hard to understand why he would have held the *Sibylline Oracles* in such high esteem, considering the prominent role that Sibylline prophecy played in the Greco-Roman world.

Nevertheless, while it was the classical heritage of the *Sibylline Oracles* that appealed to Clement the educated Roman, it was their apocalyptic prophecies that appealed to Clement the Christian theologian. Although the content of the *Sibylline*

⁸ M. Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers* (Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, 2007), 398-400. According to him, rejection of the *SibOr* by Patristic authors was default. He argues that even more "accommodating" writers such as Origen and Eusebius rejected the *SibOr* – never questioning its authenticity, though, but arguing that the *SibOr* are not different from any other Greco-Roman prophecies.

⁹ E. Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25.

¹⁰ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 1-21.

Oracles varies according to each book, as a rule they predict disasters and the doom of nations, after which a restoration is expected to come.¹¹ Even though the *Sibylline Oracles* are not apocalypses per se, they are a form of apocalyptic literature, and as such are underwritten by apocalyptic motifs and imagery, such as eschatology and vindication. Thus, the *Sibylline Oracles*, “like the apocalypses, uses the eschatological horizon as a frame to lend urgency to an ethical and political message”¹² in order to convey hope to an audience in political distress.

The oldest Jewish *Sibylline Oracles*, books three, four and five, were all written in times of political turmoil. Book three achieved its final form in Alexandria at the end of the first century BCE, when the Romans had just conquered Egypt and downgraded the social status of Jews.¹³ Books four and five, on the other hand, were written after 70 CE and are a direct response to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. All three oracles, not surprisingly, present a strong anti-Roman attitude and foretell the doom of Rome and the vindication of the righteous.¹⁴ Thus, the apocalyptic connotation of the *Sibylline Oracles* served as a way to give voice for some people among the Greek-speaking Jewish population of Egypt to express their hopes and expectations, and to impart meaning for their historical situation, via a theodicy and the imposition of a horizon of imminent vindication.

John J. Collins stresses that the political connotation of the *Sibylline Oracles* must be understood against the broader background of political oracles in the Greco-Roman

¹¹ J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 119.

¹² Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 125.

¹³ S.W. Felder, *The Sibylline Oracles and the Problems of the Empire: The Construction of a Transcendent Christian Ideology*, (Irvine: University of California, 1999), 62-85.

¹⁴ Felder, *The Sibylline Oracles and the Problems of the Empire*, 85-95.

world.¹⁵ Oracular literature, which had other examples circulating in Egypt such as the Egyptian *Potter's Oracle* and *Demotic Chronicle*, or the possibly Persian *Oracle of Hystaspes* (quoted by Clement in *Stromateis* 6.5¹⁶) present similar themes and were used in a similar scenario of political resistance.

There is, therefore, clearly more at stake in Clement's use of the *Sibylline Oracles* than mere familiarity with Greco-Roman culture. As stated above, the main purpose of oracular prophecy in the ancient world was religious and political propaganda. The prophecies were broad enough to be adapted to practically any desired interpretations, and the *Sibylline Oracles* inherited the authority and prestige of the *Libri Sibyllini*.

Nevertheless, the *Sibylline Oracles* were not just political resistance material. They also offered a social and even psychological tool for groups to redefine their identity in face of the new circumstances of their reality under foreign rule. In Christian context, prophetic expectations played an important social, political, religious and psychological role.¹⁷ With the *Sibylline Oracles*, Christians could go a step further, by appropriating a Greco-Roman collection in order to define their own identity within Greco-Roman language and culture, and furthermore to use it against the very Greco-Roman institutions, thus claiming superiority over them. This is the key element for understanding Clement's use not only of the *Sibylline Oracles*, but of all Greco-Roman heritage in his work.

Clement is commonly depicted by ancient sources as a teacher and is known to have taught a circle of educated and wealthy Christian students – for example Origen,

¹⁵ Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, 1-19.

¹⁶ See Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 117-118 and Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, 9-15.

¹⁷ L. Nasrallah, "Taxonomies of Ecstasy, Madness, and Dreams," *Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 32-33.

another prominent early Christian writer, was his disciple. In a cosmopolitan city such as Alexandria, filled with multiple opportunities for syncretism, Clement's main goal was to convert the Greeks to Christianity. For him, Christianity was essentially a way of life; educating and instructing Greeks was more than teaching them the theoretical ideas of the Christian faith: it was to bring them to an inward transformation.

This strategy was conceptualised in his writings in a pedagogical manner, and reflects the three-fold way in which his work is structured. Clement teaches at different levels, according to the capacities of his intended audience. The first step of his pedagogy is his work *Protrepticus*, or *Exhortation to the Greeks*, in which he urges the Greeks to leave the falsehood of the “pagan”¹⁸ religions behind and embrace the truth of one God. The second step is the *Pedagogus*, or *The Educator*, a guide for correct daily-life behaviour. Finally, the *Stromateis* or *Miscellanies*, the third and final step, is aimed at advanced students and teaches the true knowledge (*gnosis*) of the mysteries of Christ.¹⁹

In his trilogy, Clement's relationship with Greek culture and philosophy is paradoxical. While he embraces it and quotes it extensively, he also criticizes it harshly. His ultimate goal is to convince his audience to abandon Greek religion and to embrace Christianity. Nevertheless, instead of confronting Greek culture directly, he engages it through a “inversion of discourses.” For example, he inverts the charges that were commonly attributed to Christians, claiming that the Greeks are the true atheists, not the

¹⁸ The word “pagan” will be used in quotation marks because it is not an unbiased term for academic use. In this study, it indicates Greco-Roman people, culture and religion from a Clement's own perspective of non-Christians. The purpose of using such term is not to endorse the pejorative term, but to help highlight Clement's understanding, while keeping in mind that it reflects his opinion, not mine.

¹⁹ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 5.

Christians as they claim, because the Greek worship statues, and that “even monkeys know better than this” (*Protr.* 4.52).²⁰

Clement also articulates a complex argument of precedence. He claims that the *Logos* – who is the Savior, Jesus Christ – is the common truth behind the eschatological predictions of the Hebrew prophets and of the natural-rationality of the Greek philosophers whom he considered in high esteem: Plato, Antisthenes, Xenophon, Cleanthes the Stoic, and the Pythagoreans. According to Clement, the Greek philosophers have glimpsed this truth, albeit imperfectly and not fully aware of the revelation, in their declaration of one God, creator and prime mover (*Protr.* 6.68.2).²¹ With this, he argues that it was Christ himself the origin of Greek philosophy and Hebrew prophecy. He claims, proud, that “we [Christians] were before the foundation of the world” (*Protr.* 1.6).

²²

According to Denise Buell, this was a common reasoning in ancient times, since no people could define itself without a past. Hence, early Christians borrowed and subverted histories and traditions from hegemonic groups, in order to reinvent themselves and assert greater antiquity and superiority. According to Buell, Christians were not the only ones inventing themselves in the Roman Empire: Romans, Greeks, Jews, and other peoples were continually negotiating and revising the meaning of their group. “The past,” she writes, “was a crucial site for authorizing the values and practices by which one could claim and demonstrate one’s present identity.”²³

²⁰ See Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 135.

²¹ See also D. Rankin, “Apologetic or Protreptic? Audiences and Strategies in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*,” *Sacris Erudiri* 44 (2005): 12.

²² See Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 17.

²³ Buell, *Why This New Race?: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 63-64.

In the midst of his rhetoric, Clement quotes the *Sibylline Oracles* not only to corroborate his point, as if arguing “even the pagan prophetess Sibyl knows best,” but as a primary source of authority, to the point of equating her to the Hebrew Prophets (*Protr.* 6.71).²⁴ In this sense, then, it is clear that the *Sibylline Oracles* play a central role in Clement’s argument, in both form and content.

Historiography and contribution to scholarship

Mischa Hooker outlines in his dissertation an impressive summary of the historiography of the patristic use of the *Sibylline Oracles*.²⁵ According to him, modern critical scholarship on the *Sibylline Oracles* began in the seventeenth century, when scholars first challenged the authenticity of the Judeo-Christian collection that had been taken for granted in Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. Isaac Casaubon and David Blondel were pioneers in the study of the oracles as forgeries.

Charles Alexander was the first scholar to do an extensive analysis on the *Sibylline Oracles*. In his work *Oracula Sibyllina*, published in several volumes from 1841-1856, he compiled all the Greek texts of the *Sibylline Oracles* and published a translation to Latin. His efforts would be followed by the work of many other scholars, who throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries offered different translations for the collection. The latest and most reliable translation available was published by John J. Collins in 1983 in James H. Charlesworth’s collection *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.

²⁴ See Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 161. Clement calls the Sibyl the “Hebrew prophetess”.

²⁵ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 22-59.

Studies on the patristic use of the *Sibylline Oracles* began in the nineteenth century. Both George Besançon in 1851 and Karl Prümm in 1929 contributed immensely to scholarship by proposing a shift in the understanding of the patristic use of the Sibyl as apologetic, instead of theological. In 1935, H. C. Weiland published his *Het Oordeel der Kerkvaders over het Orakel*, where instead of a broad treatment of the patristic corpus he selected a few Christian authors to work with. Clement of Alexandria is one of the authors he focuses on, and Weiland's concludes that Clement has an overall positive attitude towards the Sibyl.

There are quite a few other scholars from the 20th century who contributed with new insights to the study of patristic use of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Bard Thompson proposes in his article a trend among the early Fathers, particularly the Apologists, to use the Sibyl in a positive way, "as verification of the truths of the Gospel." He adds that "none of those who mention or quote her for this purpose feel the slightest need for defending this technique."²⁶ He also asserts that, although we are now aware that the *Sibylline Oracles* quoted by patristic authors is a forgery, the church Fathers quoted her as the pagan prophetess – whether they themselves believed in the authenticity of the collection or not.

Nicole Zeegers-Vander Vorst published a book in 1972 entitled *Les citations des poètes grecs chez les apologistes chrétiens du IIe siècle*, where she analysis patristic quotations of several classic materials, and classifies them to their function in the rhetoric – illustrative, authoritative or ornamental. She includes the *Sibylline Oracles* in her analysis, but she does not focus specifically on them.

²⁶ B. Thompson, "Patristic Use of the *Sibylline Oracles*." *Review of Religion* 16 (1951-52): 128.

Other scholar worth mentioning is H. W. Parke, who dedicates a chapter of his work *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* to the Christian use of the material, contextualizing it with the overall revival of oracles in second century Greco-Roman world. Attention should also be given to Teresa Sardella, who published in 1998 an article entitled *La Sibilla nella tradizione greca Cristiana della scuola de Alessandria ed Eusebio di Cesare* where she analyses several patristic authors and argues that the “Christianization” of the Sibyl did not mean granting her undeniable authority.²⁷ However, Sardella emphasises the positive attitude of Christian authors, and stresses the importance of the Sibyl as “warrantor of the true faith”.²⁸

Mischa Hooker submitted in 2007 a dissertation entitled *The use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Antiquity*, which is the latest analysis on the patristic use of the *Sibylline Oracles*. In his introduction and outline of the historiography on the subject, Hooker dismisses most of the previous studies as not having added much to the discussion due to their broad scope and lack of depth. According to Hooker, most studies on the patristic use of the *Sibylline Oracles* have been so general that they pay no attention to the specificities of each patristic author, which leads them to oversimplify or generalize the relationship of each Church Father with the Sibyl

In addition to that, Hooker argues that because scholars have been generalizing the use of the *Sibylline Oracles* by patristic authors, they have tended to overestimate the importance of the Sibyl to those writers, either for the lack of specificity, or because they

²⁷ T. Sardella, “La Sibilla nella tradizione greca cristiana dalla scuola de Alessandria ed Eusebio di Cesare,” *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito, storia, tradizione. Atti del convegno, Macerata-Norcia, settembre 1994*. (Edd. Colombo, I.C. and Seppilli, T. Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1998), 589.

²⁸ Sardella, “La Sibilla nella tradizione greca cristiana dalla scuola de Alessandria ed Eusebio di Cesare,” 602.

are blindfolded by the medieval enthusiasm with the Sibyl, interpreting the attitude of each Early Christian writer as a positive step within and overall crescendo pattern:

Scholars in general have not probed deeply enough the statements of Christian writers about the Sibyl; they have moved too quickly to an effort of synthesis before digesting the details of the Sibylline portraits offered by the early Christians. It has in general been too tempting to say that the Sibyl was “assimilated” into the Christian tradition, or functioned as the equivalent of the Biblical prophets.²⁹

This tendency to emphasize the positive views regarding the Sibyl entails two problems. First of all, the percentage of patristic authors who speak somewhat positively about the Sibyl is very low. Most early Christian authors either talked negatively about the Sibyl, or just ignored her altogether.³⁰ Moreover, as Hooker points out, most analysis on the use of the *Sibylline Oracles* by the Church Fathers have been small in scope – most of them are short articles – and are usually extremely broad.

When it comes to Clement of Alexandria, the fact that he associates the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess, granting her the same authority of the canonical Hebrew prophets, may seem extremely positive when compared with an author such as Tatian, who has a purely negative view of the Sibyl and who dismisses her along other Greek writers as being purely “pagan”.³¹ However, the picture might be different if one analyses Clement individually, putting his positive quotations in perspective of the overall of his work. After all, is his apparent exaggeratedly positive attitude toward a “pagan” prophetess unique, or is it simply a reflex of Clement’s affinity with Greco-Roman traditions and authors? Are all of his quotations positives, even when compared with one another? Or is

²⁹ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 59.

³⁰ For a recent catalogue of Patristic quotations of the *SibOr*, see Thompson, “Patristic Use of the *Sibylline Oracles*,” 115-136.

³¹ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 73.

there a sense of change – either growth or decay – on the authority of the Sibyl as the reader progresses through his trilogy?

Methodology and outline of the thesis

In order to answer these and other questions, the present study will focus on Clement and his work. One of the goals will be precisely to avoid generalizing Clement's attitude by focusing on him, in order to give him a more in-depth treatment opposed to a superficial, general view of the whole patristic corpus. The goal is to do a reception history, and thus to understand why and how Clement quotes the Sibyl within the boundaries of Clement's own universe instead of simply drawing parallels among Church Fathers in an attempt to delineate a general tendency.

The methodological approach in this study will be first to delineate Clement's main topics and themes, understand what kind of message he is trying to convey and which strategies he uses to do so. The quotations from the *Sibylline Oracles* will be organized according to their content, and inserted within each topic of Clement's rhetoric. Attention will be also given to the way in which Clement refers to the Sibyl – considering also the cases of omission. Each quotation will be first considered individually, in the context of the chapter and book in which they are inserted, and finally in relation to one another and to Clement's work as a whole.

Through this study, I intend to shed light on the understanding of the relationship between Clement and the Sibyl. Does he rely on the Sibyl mainly to give authority to his works, assertively? Or does he use her to corroborate his arguments, apologetically? Or is the Sibyl merely a literary ornament? Moreover, does Clement quote the Sibyl as a Greek authoritative figure, as a “pagan” prophetess or as an apocalyptic mediator?

Since Clement's trilogy represents three steps in the life of his disciples, this study will also enquire if there is a difference to Clement's approach to the Sibyl in the *Protrepticus* from the *Pedagogus* and also from the *Stromateis*. This study will investigate if there is a change in the way Clement refers to the Sibyl, and whether it reflects stability or fluctuation in his view of the Sibyl. In this way, this study aims to analyse how positive Clement's quotation of the Sibyl really is, not in comparison to other authors, but in light of the evidence of Clement's corpus.

Nevertheless, the purpose of the current study is not to isolate Clement altogether, because one cannot understand his work or his use of the Sibyl alienated from the reality in which Clement lived and to which he responded. Therefore, before diving into Clement's work, this study will first analyse the history of the *Sibyline Oracles* themselves, as well as the political, religious and social matrix in which Christians were inserted in second century Alexandria.

In this sense, this thesis is divided into two chapters, each divided into small sections. The first chapter is contextual. The first section offers an overview of the original Greek *Sibyline Books* (*Libri Sibyllini*) and of the Judeo-Christian *Sibyline Oracles*. Section two outlines how the Greek *Libri Sibyllini* became one of the most powerful political tools in the Roman Republic. The third section of chapter one continues on this theme, with a brief analysis of the use and importance of Sibylline prophecies under Augustus. The fourth section of chapter one outlines the history of the Jewish-Christian *Sibyline Oracles*, within a summary of the social-political scenario in which they were produced and read. The fifth section is dedicated to the analysis of Early Egyptian Christianity, and outlines not only the context where Clement lived and thought,

but also discusses the diversity of Christian schools of the time, and how they have been wrongly classified under a biased, academically invented category called “Gnosticism.” Finally, section six of chapter one sums the main elements of Clement of Alexandria himself and his work, which may help us to better understand him and his relationship to the Sibyl.

Chapter two contains the core of the thesis, which is the analysis of Clement’s use of the *Sibylline Oracles*. The chapter is divided in three sections, each one dedicated to one work of his trilogy. Because Clement intended these works to be read in such order, the analysis also follows this arrangement. Thus, the first section of chapter two is dedicated to the *Protrepticus*, and examines how Clement quotes the Sibyl as an authoritative figure to corroborate his claims of the superiority and precedence of Christianity. Section two investigates how the Sibyl fits into the *Pedagogus* concrete exhortations for daily life conduct. Section three inquires into the seemingly negative approaches to the Sibyl in the *Stromateis*, and what exactly is Clement’s goal with this intentionally confusing structured book, and how he fits the *Sibylline Oracles* within it. The third section of chapter two also ascertains the understanding of the “true Gnostic” for Clement, which not only sheds light into the discussion on “Gnosticism” explored in chapter one, but more importantly seems to be a key element in understanding Clement’s relationship with the Sibyl.

The main thread guiding all these different sections is the analysis of the relationship of Clement with the Sibyl. Known to be one of the most Hellenised Christian authors and a lover of Greek philosophy, Clement’s relationship with the Sibyl is not as monochromatic as one would expect it to be. Although most scholars have emphasized,

and perhaps even exaggerated Clement's positive attitude towards the Sibyl, this thesis intends to not take that assertion for granted, and provide a throughout, complex, deep interpretation to this relationship.

Although the primary goal of this thesis is to understand Clement's use of the *Sibylline Oracles*, it also hopes to be an effective contribution to the understanding of the broader Christian Sibylline tradition, which involved not only patristic quotations but the very production of Christian versions of *Sibylline Oracles*, and culminated with a powerful medieval devotion that carried the Sibyls unto the Renaissance, when Sibyls were prominent figures in the Christian imagination, which is attested by their iconic representations in sacred art. It is hoped that by sharing insights in the specific case of Clement, as well as by motivating further inquiry and deeper analysis of other patristic authors, this study will offer a constructive addition to the scholarship of the patristic use of the *Sibylline Oracles*.

Chapter 1 – Context: the *Sibylline Oracles*, Egyptian Christianity and Clement of Alexandria.

1. The Greco-Roman Sibylline texts and the Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*

The *Libri Sibyllini* are a collection of Greek oracles that were probably written in Hellenic Asia Minor³² and were believed to have been uttered by an ancient prophetess named Sibyl.³³ They were extremely popular in the Greco-Roman world. From the fifth century BCE onwards, the *Libri Sibyllini* spread among the Greeks, gaining a particular new impulse during the Hellenistic period when not only its reception expanded throughout the Mediterranean world, but also the way in which they were produced branched out.³⁴ Versions of Sibylline prophecies were being created in the Hellenistic world by different groups. These versions mimicked the original Greek oracles but their content was adapted to fit their authors' specific agendas. One of the most notable examples of this was the creation of the first book of the *Sibylline Oracles* by a group of Jews in Alexandria around the second century BCE, which promoted their own religious and political views through a "pagan" language that conferred an extra layer of credibility to them.

These spurious oracles were believed to be authentic and proved extremely popular throughout the following years, inspiring the production of many similar oracles around the world. The phenomenon also caught the attention of Christian groups, who

³² Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 51.

³³³³ And eventually came to be attributed not to one, but to several prophetesses.

³⁴ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 100 and 125.

not only quoted the oracles, but felt prompted to produce their own versions – either interpolating a Jewish Oracle or re-writing it altogether.

This collection of Judeo-Christian oracles was later compiled by a Byzantine scholar in the 6th century CE as the *Oracula Sibyllina*, or *Sibylline Oracles*. In order to avoid confusion between this collection and the original Greek Sibylline oracles – which were destroyed in 83 BCE and only survived through fragments in quotations from ancient authors³⁵ – scholars tend to call the Greek collection as *Libri Sibyllini*, while the term *Sibylline Oracles* refers exclusively to the Judeo-Christian collection. This convention will also be adopted in this study.

Although the *Libri Sibyllini* survived only through fragments, it is possible to know a great deal about their form and content. In the first place, it is possible to draw parallels between the style of the *Sibylline Oracles* and the *Libri Sibyllini*, since the first would have had to follow closely the stylistic structure of the latter in order to be convincing.³⁶ In this sense, Herbert W. Parke convincingly argues that we can know for sure some characteristic of the *Libri Sibyllini*.³⁷

For instance, it is clear that the *Libri Sibyllini* were always written in hexameter verse, and never in other metres or in prose, and that it addressed the world in general,

³⁵ A consistent, recent list of all the consultations of the *Libri Sibyllini* during the Republic can be found in E. Orlin, “Appendix 2,” *Temples, Religion and Politics in the Roman Republic* (Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill), 201-207. Most ancient sources merely cite the time and kind of prodigy that occurred, and the expiatory measure undertaken, but Phlegon of Tralles gives a quite extensive fragment of the actual oracles consulted in two different stances: the first consultation was in 125 BCE at the occasion of the birth of a hermaphrodite child, and the fragments of two different oracles consulted on the occasion are preserved in Phlegon’s *Books of Marvels* chapter 10; the second consultation was in 17 BCE, in response to three different prodigies that were associated with Augustus’ family, and the fragment of the oracle preserved by Phlegon in his *Long-lived Persons* shows that the expiatory measure adopted was the *Ludi Saeculares* (or Secular Games, a ceremony that occurred once every century in ancient Rome).

³⁶ Interestingly enough, there are some ancient authors who refer to the Erythrean *Sibylline Prophecy* and actually quote the third book of the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles*. See Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 4.

³⁷ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 6-10.

sometimes specific cities or kingdoms, foretelling events of general significance – such as wars, earthquakes, famine, floods and pestilence. Thus, it did not address particular individuals, nor specific issues, questions or situations. The prophecies were broad and lacked details, and therefore they were flexible and applicable to different circumstances.

Parke argues that the *Libri Sibyllini* did not offer guidance on controlling the future. The oracles prescribed the future in an obscure and baffling manner, and in a deterministic manner, as an inevitable fate. The *Libri Sibyllini* were likely to have begun with a historical account from primeval times, which would have suggested to the reader that the Sibyl herself was born in a distant past. The antiquity of the Sibyl would have accounted for her credibility in two ways: on the one hand, the author of the Books was able to utter *ex eventu* prophecies.³⁸ On the other hand, the author could also take advantage of the conventional tendency of respecting the antiquity of traditions. Displaying the Sibyl as a primeval figure, who had been an eye-witness of all historical events to the present times, conferred authority and credibility to her prophecies.

As for the figure of the Sibyl herself, Parke suggests that it is interesting to note that she was not depicted as a medium, who access oracles on her own, but rather a clairvoyant, who received inspirations from the outside and whose visions were rather forced upon her. It is also interesting to note that she attests her authority through her own name and paternity – in some cases she claims to be half divine – a rather peculiar claim in antiquity.

Parke also argues that some elements of the *Sibylline Oracles*, mainly concerning its content, could absolutely not have been part of the *Libri Sibyllini*, such as the

³⁸ *Ex Eventu* is an academic constructed term that refers to the phenomenon in which an author prophesies events that have already taken place in order to assert the antiquity and credibility of the text.

theological monotheistic appeal of the Judeo-Christian collection, as well as a clearly Jewish theogony – that is, account of the origin of the divine. Another prominent element in the *Sibylline Oracles* that could not have been present in the books was the motif of the final judgment. Although there was a wide range of ideas concerning the end times circulating in Greco-Roman thought, the idea of a judgment where the wicked are punished and the righteous are rewarded is an idea that first manifested in Judaism during the Hellenistic period.

Parke concludes that, although the *Libri Sibyllini* are not extant – with the exception of few fragments – we may reconstruct part of its characteristics due to hints left by quotations and material such as the forged collection of Judeo-Christian oracles. The very fact that the oracles did not survive does not imply their unimportance. On the contrary, the oracles played a central role in the Roman world, and influenced deeply Alexandrian Judaism and Early Christian fathers. Thus, the reason why the oracles did not survive is more likely due to historical accident than to lack of interest in them.

The importance of the oracles in antiquity can be further attested by the fact that cities would dispute among themselves, claiming to be the origin from where the Sibyl emerged. Such fierce debates led some ancient scholars to inquire about the various legends and traditions, in search for the historicity of the accounts and the true origins of the Sibyl. Heraclides of Pontus, a Greek writer from the fourth century BCE, was the first scholar to propose the existence of not one, but many Sibyls: different prophetesses belonging to different places and uttering different oracles, with the same authority.³⁹ The result was the production of lists of the ‘authentic’ Sibyls by ancient scholars.

³⁹ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 23-25.

Varro, an ancient Roman scholar and writer, wrote a list around the first century BCE, which has been preserved by Lactantius – a Patristic author from the fourth century CE – and which turned to be the most influential list for the Christian and Byzantine writers. Parke argues that Varro’s list seems to have been much more and that Lactantius offers an abridged version, with a list of ten Sibyls. Although Lactantius himself might have already received an abridged list from his source, the fact is that the Church Fathers and later Byzantine tradition bases themselves in this list, which accounts for ten Sibyls.⁴⁰ As for Clement, he quotes nine Sibyls in *Stromateis* (*Strom.* 1.132.3) (of Samos, Colophon, Cumae, Erythrae, Macedon, Thessaly, Thesprotia, Phyto and Taraxandra), as well as the Hebrew Sibyl in the *Protrepticus* (*Protr.* 6.71.4).

2. The *Libri Sibyllini* in the Roman Republic

As stated above, the Greek *Libri Sibyllini* spread throughout the Mediterranean world during the Hellenistic period. The introduction of the Books in Rome is told by many different versions of the same legend. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek historian of the first century BCE, displays an account where a certain woman, a traveler from another land, arrived in Rome with nine books.⁴¹ She offered to sell these to the ruler Tarquinius Superbus for an exorbitant price. He refused the offer, and the woman burned three of the books, and offered the remained six for the original price. Tarquinius refused the offer once more, and the woman burned three other books, and offered the three extent books, again for the original price.

⁴⁰ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 30-35.

⁴¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 4.62.

Perplexed with the situation, Tarquinius consulted the augurs for advice. These, lamenting the loss of the six books, advised him to take the offer. So Tarquinius bought the three books, and the woman disappeared from sight. He placed the books, which contained oracles, in the basement of the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and instituted a new priesthood, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, to watch over the Books and interpret the oracles.

The legend suggests, then, that the *Libri Sibyllini* were given to Rome by the Sibyl herself – the mysterious woman – and throughout the Roman Republic they stayed hidden in the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter, the religious and political center of Roman society. The first recorded consultation of the books took place in 496 BCE, and the Books were consulted and accessed exclusively by the *decemviri* priests, and only under the authorization of the Senate.

In Roman Republic, prodigies – that is, supernatural events such as aberrations of nature or natural disasters – as well as crises – such as plagues and wars – were believed to be a channel for the gods to communicate with the Romans, and particularly to demonstrate their dissatisfaction. There was a standard routine for dealing with prodigies, which were brought before the Roman elite and Senate every year. Prodigies were not understood as concerning one individual alone, since the anger of the gods would bring disasters and ruin for the Roman state as a whole. Thus, the Roman Senate was in charge of discussing the prodigies and deciding how to proceed in order to restore the *pax deorum* (peace with the gods). The procedure usually involved the offering of ritual

expiations such as sacrifices, processions or the introduction of new cults and importation of foreign gods into Rome. ⁴²

According to Livy, a Roman historian who lived in the first century BCE, only the direst prodigies were expiated through the *Libri Sibyllini*. ⁴³ Susan Satterfield argues that ancient historians and antiquarians during the Republic feature in the *Libri Sibyllini* prominently in their accounts as “Rome’s most important tool of expiation”, ⁴⁴ a “window to the will of the gods”. ⁴⁵ Thus, the *decemviri* entered the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter only by order of the Senate, when the Romans were compelled by some dread prodigy to turn to the *Libri Sibyllini* for answers. ⁴⁶

An aspect worth mentioning, which reflects the great power of the *Libri Sibyllini* in the hands of Roman authorities, is that the Books were practically the main source through which the Roman Senate justified importing foreign cults and the building of new Temples for the adopted deities. According to Eric Orlin, importing cults was a common practice throughout the time of the Republic, which attended a diplomatic need towards the people of the territories newly conquered by the Romans. ⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Orlin asserts that the Romans did not merely adopt foreign cults, but also “adapted them to their own religious needs and to shape their own system.” ⁴⁸ In this sense, Orlin argues that the Romans applied a dynamic that he calls “adopt and adapt”: they would put a distinctive mark on the new cults, in order to forge their own identity and maintain a

⁴² Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 15-19.

⁴³ Livius Titus, *The History of Rome*, 22.9.

⁴⁴ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 27.

⁴⁵ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 26.

⁴⁶ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 25.

⁴⁷ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 63-65.

⁴⁸ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 61.

sense of ‘Romannes’ in their religious practices, while revealing an openness to outsiders through the adoption of their deities and cults.⁴⁹

In the late Republic, civil wars and turmoil left religion open to question. Religious observance slipped from practice, priesthood was left unfulfilled and, in general, there was a sense of fragility of the religious system.⁵⁰ In this scenario of political instability, the *Libri Sibyllini* played a much more political role – perhaps more than they were supposed to, as interpretations were forced upon political agenda – and, contrary to tradition, they were often made public – many times to legitimize a political interpretation. Because of the restricted access to the the *Libri Sibyllini*, and because their prophecies were extremely vague – and thus allowed multiple possibilities of interpretation – they were easily adjusted to fit specific agendas, which turned the oracles into a great political tool for the Roman authorities.⁵¹

On July 6th, 83 BCE, the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter was burned, and almost all the objects inside, including the *Libri Sibyllini*, were destroyed. The oracles, which were long-time guardians of the *pax deorum* and which had been safely hidden for so many centuries in the basement of the Temple, were lost. Susan Satterfield argues that the ancient sources are unclear concerning the cause of the fire. She argues that people were not sure if the fire was on purpose or an accident.⁵² Political intrigue might have been a cause, but some people regarded the destruction as a sign of the anger of the gods.⁵³

The solution to the problem was the restoration of the temple and the assembly of a new Sibylline collection. A commission was appointed around 76 BCE to search

⁴⁹ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 76.

⁵⁰ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 169-171.

⁵¹ Orlin, *Temples, Religion and Politics*, 81-84.

⁵² Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 172.

⁵³ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 171-173.

throughout the Mediterranean for oracles, which were gathered, copied down and brought before the *quindecimviri* – the order had grown from ten to fifteen priests – who would determine which oracles were authentic and relevant to Rome. In this sense, there was a great flexibility in the compilation of this new collection, and significant editing and revision were necessary.⁵⁴

The flexibility of the collection allowed it to remain an anchor for the traditional Roman values, while adapting the oracles to Rome’s rapidly changing circumstances. The rather artificial assemblage of the collection did not undermine its authority, as one episode suffices to exemplify. Cassius Dio, a Roman consul and historian, displays an account of the first official consultation of the new collection in 56 BCE.⁵⁵ According to this account, a Ptolemy king asked the Romans to help him be restored to his throne and, when a lightning struck the statue of Jupiter on the Alban Mount, the Senate urged the *quindecimviri* to consult the Sibylline prophecies. They found a rather specific passage, “if the king of Egypt should come requesting aid, do not refuse him friendship (...); otherwise, you will have both struggles and dangers”.⁵⁶

Susan Satterfield argues that, before such oracle, Cicero’s attitude was of scepticism. Yet, he proposed a solution that matched his interests while still staying within the perceived boundaries of the oracle. In this sense, despite of Cicero’s personal attitude towards the oracle, he needed to be seen as if taking it seriously in public – even if his solution was rather hypocritical.⁵⁷ This episode evidences that, publicly, the new

⁵⁴ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 174-179.

⁵⁵ Cassius Dio, *Historiae Romanae*, 39.15.

⁵⁶ Translation taken from Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 187.

⁵⁷ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 186-192.

collection of Sibylline oracles was regarded with just as much authority as the previous collection.

3. Sibylline prophecies under Augustus

The political upheavals that characterized the late years of the Republic brought an unprecedented religious instability to Rome. The state was shaken by factionalism and struggles for power, and the consensus that had been the guiding principle of religion broke down. The Sibylline prophecies were made public like never before by individuals who hoped to use the oracles in their support against political rivals.

Amidst the decline of the Republic and the loss of Roman values and religious piety, Augustus promoted a reform of Roman religion through the restoration of temples, rituals and festivals. Although Augustus had a great respect for tradition, many of the measures taken to restore religious piety were actually invented by him, and he orchestrated everything so that he would become the center of the entire political and religious system – and thus, of the Empire.⁵⁸

The Sibylline prophecies figured prominently in the changes promoted by Augustus, perhaps due to the central role they played during the Republic. Augustus not only augmented the number of *quindecemviri* priests, but joined the priesthood himself in 37 BCE. In 19 BCE he relocated the Books to the Palatine Temple of Apollo – to which his own home was annexed. Augustus also authorized in 19 BCE a re-edition of the roman collection of Sibylline oracles, under the pretext that they were old and needed revision. A commission was sent to collect new oracles throughout the Empire, and the

⁵⁸ Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 205-207.

prophecies that were not considered as being authentic were destroyed. The purpose behind such measure was, on the one hand, to destroy private, competing oracles and thus validate de State's collection as the only and authentic one. On the other hand, the edition of the new collection of Sibylline oracles was also a strategy to assert and advertise its antiquity, under the argument that although the collection had been assembled recently it contained ancient oracles that had been preserved by individuals throughout the Empire.

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The policies orchestrated by Augustus regarding Sibylline prophecies evidence that he was trying to assert control and authority over the Books. He clearly understood that the books were a powerful political weapon. An episode that evidences his agenda regarding the Sibylline oracles was the performance of the *Ludi Seculares* – or Secular Games, a ceremony that comprised not only games but also religious rituals, and which played a prominent role since the late Republic as an effective way for politicians to gain popularity among the people.⁶⁰ According to Phlegon of Tralles, a Greek writer who lived in the second century CE, Augustus performed the *Ludi Seculares* in 17 BCE under the pretext that it was an expiatory measure suggested by the Sibylline oracles.⁶¹ Considering that the prodigies that were used to justify the consultation of the Books and the application of the expiatory measure are all related to Augustus himself and his family, Susan Satterfield argues that the whole endeavour was orchestrated.⁶² According to her, if one considers the dimension and the centrality that the games played in Roman

⁵⁹ See Parke, *Sibyls and sibylline prophecy in classical antiquity*, 141-142 and Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 216-218 and 235.

⁶⁰ Orlin, *Foreign cults in Rome: creating a Roman Empire*, 137-146.

⁶¹ A fragment of the oracle itself is preserved by Phlegon of Tralles in his *Long-lived Persons*, 5.2-4.

⁶² Satterfield, *Rome's own Sibyl*, 233.

politics and religion during the end of the Republic, it is not hard to understand how the *Ludi Secularis* fit perfectly within Augustus's project of religious and moral renovation.

The changes orchestrated by Augustus concerning Sibylline prophecies – from the relocation of the oracles in order to associate them with his household, to the re-edition of the collection, which allowed him not only to destroy competing oracles but also to transform prophecies that were already susceptible to manipulation into a mean of justifying his political actions – evidence how the Sibylline prophecies were a great political and religious tool also during the time of the Empire, and how both Roman authorities and the general public were aware of that.

4. The Sibylline Oracles: from second Temple period Judaism resistance material to Christian devotion

Because Judea was situated in a zone of potential conflict, in-between some of the world's greatest empires, immigration was not rare due to political and economic reasons. Among the possible destination of expatriated Jews, Alexandria was a favorite due to its cultural and economic richness. In fact, Philo asserts that many Jews moved to Alexandria searching for prosperity, because they were granted equal social and economic opportunities to those of the Greek settlers.

In his work *Against Flaccus*, Philo also describes how Jews in Egypt maintained a sense of connection to Jerusalem, “the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God,” as their mother land, but that this did not prevent them from also feeling

attached to Alexandria, nor from cherishing a sense of belonging to Egypt as their “fatherland.”⁶³

Nevertheless, it was not all roses in the Alexandrian Diaspora. Jews found themselves among different, sometimes hostile people, including native Egyptians and Greek settlers. There was a huge social disparity, where the majority of native Egyptians were relegated to the bottom of the social scale and resented the new settlers who they felt had invaded their land and deprived them from their rightful privileges. Macedonian Greeks, on the other hand, composed the upper class. Judean, Samaritan and Syrian immigrants who spoke Greek were counted among the Hellenes, and thus enjoyed of social prestige and economic advantage.⁶⁴

The friction between Jews and Egyptians was more visible, but although Jews refrained more from criticizing the Greeks, Greek religion still posed a problem for them. Thus, Jews kept their distance, and that, along with some of their unique habits – such as dietary laws – intrigued the Greeks.⁶⁵ According to Mireille Hadas-Lebel and Robyn Fréchet, there was, however, a relationship of business, and even friendship, which developed between Greeks and Jews, and although some Greeks found Jewish practices to be peculiar, others were interested in Judaism, to the point of adopting some Jewish practices – for instance, Philo writes about Greeks who adopted the habit of resting during the Sabbath.⁶⁶

Jews also manifested interest in Greek culture, and a process of Hellenisation can be clearly perceived from the evolution of Jewish literature in Egypt, which included

⁶³ Philo, *Against Flaccus* 46. See also M. Hadas-Lebel, and R. Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria: A Thinker in the Jewish Diaspora* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 32.

⁶⁴ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 40.

⁶⁵ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 42-43.

⁶⁶ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 44-45.

translations and original works of all genres, and which matured overtime from works written with a sloppy Greek up to Philo's major corpus.⁶⁷ The third book of the *Sibyline Oracles*, which was the first book of the Judeo-Christian Sibylline collection to be composed from the second to the end of the first century BCE, was also a product of the Hellenisation of the Alexandrian Jewish community.

In order to better understand this process of Hellenisation of the Alexandrian Diaspora, Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet propose that instead of seeing it in terms of an identity revolution, "it is probably more accurate to see them [the Egyptian Jews] as immigrants from Judea who, to the extent that they took root in the land of Egypt, underwent a loss of their original heritage in favor of the local culture practices, according to a recognized process of acculturation."⁶⁸ In this sense, the very translation of the Bible into Greek should not be seen as an active effort towards Hellenisation, but rather as an answer to a need, which was born from the fact that most Jews in Egypt could not read Hebrew anymore. Such endeavor did not arise without its opponents, as can be attested by the *Letter of Aristeas*, which was written around the third and second centuries BCE and is an exaggerated effort to legitimate the Septuagint.⁶⁹ Still, the opposition to Hellenisation was not generalized, since there were Jews, such as the author of the *Letter of Aristeas* himself and Philo, who thrived in Greek culture and did not see a problem for a Jew to associate himself with it.

Alexandria was thus a place where different communities tried to co-exist in a complex, sometimes pacific, sometimes difficult environment. And the already fragile social fabric of Egypt was torn apart with the arrival of the Romans. Some Greek

⁶⁷ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 54.

⁶⁸ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 59.

⁶⁹ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 59-61.

notables were granted Roman citizenship, but most local Greeks, especially those in the rural area, did not have their civil rights recognized. However, they at least had some tax exemptions. The Egyptians who were insufficiently Hellenised to be counted among the Greeks had no rights and had to pay a heavy amount of taxes. As for the Jews, Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet claim that they were a problem apart:

For the Roman viewpoint, the *Judaei* who originated in Judea (...) were regarded as being more like Egyptians than Greeks. So, all the Jews of Egypt, including the most Hellenised among them and those who lived in the capital, were compelled to pay the *laographia* tax, which was judged dishonourable.⁷⁰

The third book of Macabees was written around this time, and reflects the notion of danger experienced by the Alexandria Diaspora. The third book of the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles*, which has a composite redaction, had its main corpus written in the second century BCE, but gained several additions at this time. Many verses containing prophecies in favor of the Ptolemaic rulers – and paradoxically others that are against them, probably added after the outcome of the battle of Bactria in 30 BCE – as well as oracles predicting the destruction of Rome were added at the end of the first century BCE.

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The third book was the first of the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* to be written, but still at the end of the first century other oracles were written, following the same pattern of the third book and giving continuity to its prophecies. The three fragments of the now lost book two were also written at the end of the first century BCE, and also prophesied heavily against Rome. A few years later, the eleventh book of the *Sibylline Oracles* was

⁷⁰ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 49.

⁷¹ Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, 24-27, 33, 62-63, 66 and 69.

also added to the Jewish collection, containing an *ex eventu* prophecy that Egypt would be subjected because of their bad treatment of the Jews.⁷²

It is worth to remember that the main purpose of the *Sibylline Oracles* is religious and political propaganda, and that they must be understood against the background of political oracles in the Greco-Roman world.⁷³ It is known that the *Libri Sibyllini* and the Sibylline texts that were assembled after its destruction were powerful political tools, widely use for justifying political measures and decisions on the pretext of keeping the *pax deorum*, especially during times of crisis.⁷⁴ Moreover, the first century Alexandrian community was in contact with many other political oracles of the Hellenistic world, from the Egyptians *Potter's Oracle* and *Demotic Chronicle* to the Persians *Bahman Yasht* and *Oracle of Hystaspes*.⁷⁵ These and other Hellenistic oracles presented a promise of future vindication and restoration, often through an eschatological perspective, which granted hope and meaning to their audiences. Moreover, these oracles gave the communities by which they were read a powerful emotional and psychological tool for political resistance that was evidently effective, considering how political authorities were constantly chasing these prophecies down in order to destroy them.

Thus, by adding these *ex eventu* prophecies to a supposedly authentic oracle, uttered by one of the most ancient and authoritative prophetess of Greco-Roman imagery, the author of the third book of the *Sibylline Oracles* was drawing on the rich heritage of the Sibyl and inaugurated a new a powerful tool for political resistance, religious

⁷² J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles" in: James H. Charlesworth (ed.) *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments (Volume 1)* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 430-433 and 469.

⁷³ See J. J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 199-201 as well as Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, 1-19.

⁷⁴ J. R. Bartlett, "Sibylline Oracles," *Jews in the Hellenistic world: Josephus, Aristeeas, the Sibylline Oracles, Eupolemus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37.

⁷⁵ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 117-118; Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, 9-15.

propaganda and for spreading a sense of hope and meaning in face of adversities for the Jewish community in Alexandria. This pioneer endeavour was such a successful phenomenon that other Jews followed in its footsteps producing more of these forged oracles shortly after, including outside of Egypt.⁷⁶

As for the credibility of the *Sibylline Oracles*, it should not come as a surprise for us that people took their authenticity for granted. As Pier Franco Beatrice points out, many literary texts in the Greco-Roman world – including the works of ancient historians and of poets – were intentional forgeries.⁷⁷ The *Libri Sibillini* and other Greco-Roman Sibylline texts were forgeries as well and, despite the artificiality of the assembly of the Sibylline collection post 83 BCE, it remained authoritative and prestigious. Thus, it is worth remembering that people in the Greco-Roman world, and specially the Jewish community, were familiar with the pseudepigrapha phenomenon. It does not mean that no one ever challenged the authenticity of pseudepigrapha texts, but rather that people from Antiquity had a different understanding from our modern perspective of “legitimacy” and “accuracy” concerning a text, and somehow pseudepigrapha works had a type of authority that we may not be able to fully understand from a twenty-first century perspective.

The authority and political power granted by the *Sibylline Oracles* to its audience proved to be even more useful in the following century. Despite the loss of social status that the Jewish community suffered during the reign of Augustus, Jews still maintained religious freedom to observe their festivals and laws, due to Rome’s policy of preserving

⁷⁶ According to John Collins, the Jewish strata of books 1 and 2 was composed in Phrygia sometime between 30 BCE and 70 CE. See Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 331-332.

⁷⁷ P. F. Beatrice, “Forgery, Propaganda and Power in Christian Antiquity,” *Alvarium: Festschrift für Christian Gnülka*. Ed. Blümer, W. et al. *JAC, Ergänzungsband* 33 (2002): 40-44.

local practices in order to maintain the piece throughout the Empire. However, this scenario would change at the end of the reign of Tiberius and advent of the emperor Caligula on 37 CE, when Jewish religious freedom was not only advocated, but constantly challenged. There were several attacks against the Jewish community and riots organized by the Egyptian natives.⁷⁸ And the friction achieved its summit when Aulus Avilus Flaccus became the roman prefect of Alexandria on the third decade of the first century CE, for Flaccus not only gave incentive to the attacks against the Jews, but also dissolved the civil rights from Jews who were born in Alexandria. According to Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, the community was cornered into a ghetto, where they sunk into poverty. Philo also attests to the tremendous violence and cruelty towards the Jews in Alexandria at the time.⁷⁹

The discontentment of Jews against the Romans, both in Alexandria and around the world, grew in the following decades, with the culmination of the Jewish revolt of 66 CE and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. The fourth book of the Jewish *Sibyline Oracles* was written during this time, likely not in Egypt but in Syria or the Jordan Valley.⁸⁰ As mentioned above, the Jewish strata of books one and two also achieved its final form around 70 CE in Phrygia. The fact that Jews in other countries were producing their own version of *Sibyline Oracles* only a few decades after the first books of the Jewish collection took its final shape in Alexandria is a testimony to the power and weight that

⁷⁸ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 69.

⁷⁹ Hadas-Lebel and Fréchet, *Philo of Alexandria*, 71-76.

⁸⁰ In his introduction to the translation of the book, John Collins states that 4SibOr differs greatly from the other two Jewish *Sibyline Oracles* – 3SibOr and 5SibOr. It presents a scheme of history instead of an eschatological salvation *per se*, has a different emphasis on the Jerusalem Temple than the other two books and pays almost no attention to Egypt. Collins argues that, although the Egyptian provenance has been argued, most scholars agree with a Syrian provenance. Collins, “Sibyline Oracles,” 381-382.

these oracles had among the Jewish Diaspora, and how they have been circulating internationally.

A few years after the composition of book four, another book was produced in Egypt, the fifth book of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Egypt is central in this book, and the prophecies address the problems of the time – such as the legend of the return of Nero that had been circulating among Jews and Christians alike, as well as the destruction of the Temple. According to John J. Collins, book five is in the same tone of book three, with an emphasis in an eschatological savior and vindication against Rome, thus giving a sense of continuity between both oracles.⁸¹

After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, Christian groups also started producing their own versions of *Sibylline Oracles*. Initially they borrowed Jewish oracles and added some verses. The first *Sibylline Oracles* with Christian interpolations are books one and two – which, according to Collins, belong to the same manuscript and should be read as a unity⁸² – to which Christian verses were added between 70 CE and 150 CE. Although scholars cannot precise the location of composition, the fact that this oracle is only quoted by some Latin Fathers, such as Justin Martyr and Lactantius, suggests that the oracles were circulating among Roman Christian groups.

The Christian community in Egypt also began producing their own *Sibylline Oracles* on the second century. 8 SibOr took its final form before 180 CE and books 12 and 13 in the third century. All three oracles are composite texts, with a Jewish strata and Christian additions. All three oracles prophecy mainly against Rome – and according to

⁸¹ Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 390-391.

⁸² Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 331-332.

John Collins, some prophecies are even harsher than the ones found in the Jewish 5 SibOr, which was a direct answer to the destruction of the Temple.⁸³

Other Christian versions of *Sibylline Oracles*, books 6 and 7, are quoted by Lactantius and thus were composed before the middle of the third century, likely in Syria.

⁸⁴ It is known that Christians were persecuted by the Roman Empire until the fourth century, and perhaps the Christian additions to and original versions of *Sibylline Oracles* are a response to waves of persecution experienced by the Christian communities.

The phenomenon that had initially been started by Jews in Alexandria had gained by the second century a clearly strong repercussion within Christian communities throughout the world, attested also by the fact that several patristic authors from different places quoted both the Jewish and the Christian *Sibylline Oracles*.⁸⁵ However, the fact that Clement of Alexandria does not quote books one and two of the *Sibylline Oracles* is odd, given his positive disposition towards the Sibyl, and that by 150 CE the oracle was already widely circulating. It is probably safe to assume that he did not know of the existence of these oracles, as the Christian verses would have made a great addition to his argument of precedence. Therefore, we may assume that although the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* had international popularity attested as early as the first century, the Christian *Sibylline Oracles* became internationally known from the end of the second century onwards. Among the Christian interpolated versions that were originated in Alexandria, the only one that Clement could have possibly been acquainted with was book eight. It is

⁸³ Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 415-417, 443-444 and 453.

⁸⁴ Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 406-409.

⁸⁵ According to Bard Thompson's mapping of Patristic quotation of the *Sibylline Oracles*, books 1 and 2 were quoted by Justin Martyr and Lactantius; book 8 was quoted by Eusebius, Lactantius and later on by Augustine. The Jewish books (3-5) were also widely quoted by authors including Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. See Thompson, "Patristic Use of the Sibylline Oracles," 130-136.

impossible to tell if his silence about this book is due to the fact that he did not know it, or perhaps because he was aware of it being a forgery. Nevertheless, because he does not raise any doubts regarding the authenticity of other Sibylline texts, and also relies on the authenticity of other pseudepigrapha material, it is more likely that he was simply not familiar with book eight.

The Christian excitement with the Sibyl and the *Sibylline Oracles* that was already a global phenomenon gained a new boost in the third century, with various versions of oracles that had been interpolated by Christians circulating as authentic prophecies, and with the support of positive feedback from some authoritative patristic authors. The excitement with the *Sibylline Oracles* grew into a powerful devotion in the fourth century, even when Christianity had become the official religion of the empire and the persecution had ceased. The devotion perpetuated through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, when critical scholarship on the *Sibylline Oracles* began.

Knowing that in Antiquity most Christian authors had a negative opinion regarding the Sibyl, the question that remains is how the few positive voices from authoritative patristic authors contributed to fuel the excitement of Christians with the Sibyl. By focusing on Clement's personal view of the Sibyl, and trying to analyze how he uses the Sibyl in his work, this study intends to contribute to this main question by providing a perspective on one of the most prominent patristic authors, who lived and taught in the very birth place of the Jewish-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*.

5. Second century Alexandria and Egyptian Christianity

According to C. Wilfred Griggs, we do not have any evidence to precise the exact time when Christianity arrived in Egypt. He argues, though, that the evidence of the Christian papyri found in Egypt strongly suggests that the Christian religion probably arrived in Egypt before the end of the first century CE – a proposition he claims most scholars agree with.⁸⁶

One of the main evidences proposed by Griggs to support this early date is over one hundred Greek biblical fragments which were found in Egypt and were catalogued by C. H. Roberts, and which can be dated conservatively in the second, third and fourth centuries CE. Griggs argues that the papyri dating to the second century strongly suggest that biblical literature was being produced and circulated by early in the second century CE in Egypt.⁸⁷

In addition to the canonical biblical papyri, there are also significant Christian texts dating to no later than the middle of the second century that were also found in Egypt. Griggs calls special attention to the *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel*, which was published in 1935 by Harold Idris Bell and Theodore Cressy Skeat. According to Griggs, the *Unknown Gospel* is closer to the canonical tradition than to the apocryphal, and thus its date might be pushed back as far as the end of the first century.⁸⁸

Further discoveries in the twentieth century, particularly the discovery of the collection of Nag Hammadi, have helped to reconstruct the picture of early Egyptian

⁸⁶ C. W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 CE* (Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill, 1991), 13 and 28.

⁸⁷ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 24-25.

⁸⁸ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 26-27. Griggs argues that “(...) the three extant fragments from this codex show close affinities with all four canonical gospels, especially John, and at the same time are not simply a harmony or series of quotations from them. The text is not a collection of logia as those recovered in the *Gospel of Thomas*, but rather contains parts of four pericopes within the life of Jesus, (...)”

Christianity, and not only to understand the date when the movement arrived in Egypt, but mainly what was its nature.

Previous to the discovery of Egyptian Christian papyri in the twentieth century, scholars had to rely exclusively on the writings of the early patristic authors to obtain information about the movement in Egypt. Because at the time different Christian groups were competing to assert their authority and identity, the way in which different Christian texts and groups are presented by the extant patristic authors is often extremely negative and biased. And for many years mainstream modern scholarship has inadvertently repeated the ancient patristic discourse, seeing other Christian groups as merely heretics – or the so called “Gnostics”.

When a massive volume of apocrypha papyri was discovered in the mid-twentieth century, scholars immediately analyzed them under the patristic lenses, and quickly categorized these texts under the label of “Gnosticism”. Some scholars, however, started to challenge the term, igniting a debate that would permeate Christian scholarship for decades.⁸⁹

Nowadays, it is fairly well known that “Gnosticism” is a problematic category, because it oversimplifies and distorts the reality about the early Christian movement. Scholars are now aware that “Gnosticism” is an academically constructed term, which does not carry the same meaning from antiquity. While it has been used in modern times as a synonym for heresy, it was adopted by many ancient authors – including authors who came to be considered as orthodox, such as Clement of Alexandria – as something positive. “Gnosticism,” for many early Christian writers, was understood as the

⁸⁹ For a recent and innovative addition to the debate, as well as an insightful reconstruction of the historiography on the subject, see K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

achievement of knowledge, an indispensable step towards perfection. Different Christian schools in Egypt fought among themselves claiming to have the true Gnostic formula, and only later the term gained a negative connotation in the discourse of heresiologists.

Another problem of the modern academically constructed label “Gnosticism” is that it is an attempt to simplify the past in order to beautifully categorize it under a perfectly symmetric category. There has never been a religion called “Gnosticism,” only different interpretations and understandings of Christianity. Moreover, scholars are significantly more aware of the diversity of the early Christian movement, and understand that the apocrypha texts are so unique and point out to various traditions that differ so immensely one from the other that they can hardly be fit within the same boundary.

Finally, the main problem with the category “Gnosticism” is precisely that it repeats the ancient discourse of orthodoxy and heresy. It is not impartial, and it does not depict the reality justly and accurately. Most scholars are fully aware that, prior to the papyri discoveries in the twentieth century, it was nearly methodologically impossible to dissociate the biased negative view from the patristic authors, and still restore some useful information about the early Christian movement in Egypt. With the discoveries of non-canonical papyri, however, scholars were able to access the voice of other groups who had been silenced or distorted by extant Christian authors, as well as re-create a picture of the dynamic process of creating and asserting one’s authority and identity that took place among several Christian groups from the second century CE onwards.

Griggs also dismisses the idea of drawing a bold line between “Christianity” and “Gnosticism,” arguing that the heresy hunt did not begin until Irenaeus published his

Against the Heresies in 180 C.E. in Lyons. However, he also argues that there was indeed a certain emphasis on some texts, and that although we should not repeat the discourse of heresiologists, we should not ignore the evidence of mainstream “orthodox Christianity” existing alongside other Christian groups.⁹⁰

Although Griggs argues that “the archaeological evidence rather seems to point toward an undifferentiated Christianity based on a literary tradition encompassing both canonical and non-canonical works,”⁹¹ he is also bewildered by the striking silence of traditional literary sources regarding apocryphal texts and Christianity in Egypt as a whole, in spite of all the evidence that we now have of the richness of the Christian literature of that time.⁹² According to him, the lack of interest in Egyptian Christianity was not so much because authors such as Clement, Origen or Eusebius considered the teachings of the apocryphal texts as being heretic. He points out that in the few rare occasions where patristic authors quoted apocryphal texts they actually conferred them a certain authority – although clearly distinguished from the authority of canonical texts, which were put in evidence.⁹³

Grigg’s main theory to explain the reason behind the silence of patristic authors is that there was an early tendency toward geographical eclecticism:

(...) one might suggest that while some writings were rejected primarily because of teachings which were regarded to be heterodox, yet the wholesale rejection as heretical of those works which originated from or related to lands outside a limited geographical area indicates an early tendency toward geographical eclecticism.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 32-33.

⁹¹ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 32.

⁹² Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 28.

⁹³ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 31. Griggs cites de example of Clement of Alexandria, who refers in his *Stromateis*, 2.9.45 to the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. Although Clement grants a certain authority to these apocryphal gospels, he clearly distinguishes the four canonical gospels as being more authoritative.

⁹⁴ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 8.

In this sense, there might have been a certain distinction between different texts and traditions, based on their geographical origin. However, it was clearly not a bold distinction as heresiologists painted it, and modern scholars repeated. As Karen King puts it, the concept of otherness in this particular case of early Egyptian Christianity was not being articulated through the binary “like-us” and “not-like-us”, but rather on the problematic ground where the “other” is “too-much-like-us,” and even worst, “claims-to-be-us.”⁹⁵ In this sense, heresiologists were likely to exaggerate and distort competing Christian groups, texts and traditions, in order to accentuate the differences and the mistakes of the “other”, on a double endeavor of differentiating oneself and claiming superiority, while constructing their own identity through opposition: “we are that what they are not.”

In fact, King proposes that one of Irenaeus’ main strategies to undermine competing “Christianities” was to build a genealogy of heresies from a single origin. As King argues, “it is genealogy, not a common content, which continues to justify classifying all these varied persons, groups, practices, and mythologies under the common rubric of Gnosticism (...).”⁹⁶

The implication of the above elucidations is huge when analyzing any patristic author, and was a mandatory step before delving into Clement’s work. First of all, understanding the context of diversity, and not rare adversity, explains a lot of the motifs behind Clement’s rhetoric. His main goal was to evangelize and convert his Greek audience, but he did so through apology, through inversion and appropriation of other’s discourse, and often through defamation – as will be develop in chapter two. Clement

⁹⁵ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 25.

⁹⁶ King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 31-32.

needed to persuade his Greek audience not only of the supremacy of Christianity over Greek religion and philosophy, but also that his own Christian school was the right one. At that time, any Greek who desired to become a Christian in Alexandria had way too many options to choose from, and it seems the competition between schools was tight.

Another important element to bear in mind is that embedded in Clement's theology and philosophy is the idea of the "true Gnostic". By adding the adjective of truth, Clement hints a direct attack to other understandings of Gnosticism (here understood as the acquiring of knowledge, not as a label) that were being offered. In fact, Clement dedicates large sections of his work, particularly in the *Stromateis*, differentiating himself from other Christian groups – mainly the Valentinians and the followers of Basilides – in relation to their understanding of matter as something intrinsically bad.

It is important to stress that Clement was not rejecting Gnosticism. Much on the contrary, he completely embraced it. As he develops throughout the *Stromateis*, knowledge is understood by him as an indispensable element towards perfection. For him, the true Gnostic is he or she who achieves perfection, who holds the knowledge of God and sees Him face to face.

In this sense, it is important to understand that the academically constructed term "Gnosticism" (as synonym of heresy, that which is deviant) is not only problematic and inappropriate because it shadows the true picture of early Christianity, but also because different Christian groups understood it differently, and most of them, including Clement, attributed a positive meaning to the term. It would, thus, be impossible to fully understand Clement's thinking and rhetoric without properly reworking our understanding of Gnosticism.

6. Clement of Alexandria: life and works

Titus Flavius Clemens came from a non-Christian Greco-Roman background. According to Eric Osborn, he was likely born in Athens and received a high standard education there – which is hinted by the fact that he writes as a scholar with an extensive literary background.⁹⁷ He was not born to a Christian family, but converted later in life. In his quest to knowledge, he moved to Alexandria, the intellectual pole of his time, where he became the head of a Christian school and a presbyter.⁹⁸

Clement did not renegade nor downgrade his background when he converted to Christianity. On the contrary, he entered into what Osborn calls “an ambiguous relationship”, where he tried to marry Greco-Roman thought to the Scriptures, in an attempt to both rationalize Christianity as well as to appropriate what he considered positive in the classical literature. Today Clement is recognised as the most Greek of early Christian writers, and an original thinker.⁹⁹

Alexandria was the perfect scenario to boost Clement’s erudition, with a great richness of resources and with one of the most cosmopolitan settings of the Roman Empire. Clement was exposed and had access to numerous texts, cultures, philosophies and religions. On the one hand, Clement was in touch with traditions that strongly influenced his own thought, such as Philo, Stoicism and the Platonic tradition. On the other hand, Clement also encountered competing Christian schools that flourished in second century Alexandrian soil, such as Valentinians and the followers of Basilides, as

⁹⁷ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 21.

⁹⁸ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 14.

⁹⁹ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 24-26.

well philosophic trends that stood in direct contradiction to his mindset – for instance, Sophism. These encounters forced Clement to go beyond his own limits, to articulate apologies and rethink his very understanding of Christianity and Christian identity.

Philo is definitely one of the authors which Clement is most indebted to, since Philo had already given the big step of marrying the Bible with Greek philosophy. As a lover of philosophy, it would be inconceivable to think of Clement articulating Christianity separated from it. So he calls on philosophy as a helper on the interpretation of Scripture and “a cooperating cause (...) in understanding the truth.”¹⁰⁰

Eric Osborn calls attention to the fact that there is a span of 150 years between Philo and Clement, and thus that Clement was acquainted not only with the writings of Philo, but also with the Philonic tradition that, by his time, had already become part of the complex second century Christian tradition.¹⁰¹ According to Osborn, Philo taught Clement “how to connect his Platonism to biblical thought, and specifically to biblical exegesis, above all through the use of allegory.”¹⁰²

Another author to which Clement is immensely indebted is Plato himself. Albert Cook Outler summarizes the elements which Clement got from Plato into three main ideas. The first one is the idea of knowledge itself. According to Outler, both Clement and Plato shared a common view of the world as a complex, yet intelligible reality, which can be understood by man through knowledge. He argues that knowledge of the world-order was a fundamental concern for Plato, and is equally omnipresent in Clement.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Outler emphasizes that Clement and Plato differ fundamentally in their

¹⁰⁰ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 15.

¹⁰¹ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 84-85.

¹⁰² Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 81.

¹⁰³ A. C. Outler, “The ‘Platonism’ of Clement of Alexandria,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1940): 225-226.

definitions of the nature and conditions of knowledge, and thus Clement shares the ultimate value of knowledge, but not the platonic understanding of it.¹⁰⁴

The second element of Outler's list of what Clement borrowed from Plato is his very definition of the soul, with its nature, capacities and destiny that mimic Plato's definition closely. And finally, the last idea is a parallel between the *Demiurgos* – the platonic view of a rational and benevolent deity creator of the world – with the Christian God and the *Logos*. Outler argues that Clement is particularly interested in what Plato has to say about the transcendence and unity of God, as well as the idea that God is related to every-day human life.¹⁰⁵

Eric Osborn also adds to the list of contribution the influence that Plato had on Clement's writing style. As will be developed in the analysis of the *Stromateis* in the second chapter, Clement intentionally displays his writing in a chaotic manner, in order to veil the truth and protect it from the unworthy, while requiring study and dedication from his students to achieve the true *gnosis*. According to Osborn, Plato shared a similar view on knowledge, arguing that for Plato ideas are the greatest and most precious objects of knowledge, and therefore cannot be fully presented through writing. Moreover, for Plato the teaching needs to be concealed while the hearer becomes ready to understand it. The purpose of concealing the teaching was not merely for the sake of secrecy, but to avoid that the knowledge would be prematurely communicated.¹⁰⁶

Finally, Albert Outler points out that Clement appeals to Plato's authority and borrow his ideas, but he does not embrace Platonism nor becomes a disciple of Plato.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Outler, "The 'Platonism' of Clement of Alexandria," 231.

¹⁰⁵ Outler, "The 'Platonism' of Clement of Alexandria," 226-228.

¹⁰⁶ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 16-17.

¹⁰⁷ Outler, "The 'Platonism' of Clement of Alexandria," 227.

On the one hand, Clement reads Plato at first hand, but through the lenses of his own point of view. On the other hand, as with Philo, there is a huge gap of time between Plato and Clement, and thus Clement was not simply knowledgeable of the Platonic corpus, but also of the Platonic tradition that had flourished in the Hellenistic world, particularly in Alexandria. By the second century, to disassociate the original writings of Plato from the ideas that were added later was likely impossible.

Outler argues, therefore, that “Clement’s ‘Platonism’ is neither a direct nor faithful reproduction of the Plato we know (...).”¹⁰⁸ It does not necessarily come as surprise, though. As will be discussed in chapter two, Clement clearly saw philosophy as a limited help. For him, some philosophers such as Plato and Philo had arrived so close to the truth that they stay in clear opposition to what Clement considers as pure error, such as Homer and his accounts of the gods. Nevertheless, Clement still distinguished a clear gap between these “illuminated” Judeo and Greco-Roman authors and truth itself. As with many other authors, including Paul and the Sibyl, Clement appropriated Plato to the extent of his convenience, selecting whatever he considered true and useful within Plato’s philosophy, and irreverently distorting or dismissing the rest.

This strategy of selective appropriation is closely related to Clement’s own agenda, for he was the head of a prominent Christian school in Alexandria who taught and wrote to a Greek audience in the heart of cosmopolitan Alexandria. In this scenario, Clement had to make Christianity intelligible through Greek philosophy not only for his own personal love of philosophy, but for other Greeks to whom Christianity did not necessarily make much sense. As several scholars, including Eric Osborn, have put it,

¹⁰⁸ Outler, “The ‘Platonism’ of Clement of Alexandria,” 236.

Clement has produced a Christian Hellenism.¹⁰⁹ In addition to that, Clement also needed to create an apology to defend Christianity in face of charges of atheism, as well as to defend his own schools against competing views of Christianity.

In this sense, Clement went much further than merely justifying Christianity in Greek terms. As will be extensively explored in chapter two, Clement employed a method of inversion of discourse and appropriation, where he selected a variety of Greco-Roman and Jewish authoritative figures and philosophies and either used them to invert the charges that Christianity was being accused of towards the official Roman religion or, most importantly, he used those same selected authors to claim Christian authorship – through the *Logos* – as well as Christian precedence and superiority.

A concurrent theme of equal importance in Clement's rhetoric is that of the true Gnostic, which works as a double-edged sword that both constructs Clement's main thesis, while asserts the true Gnosticism in opposition to the teachings of other Christian schools of his time. What is striking about Clement's overall teaching is how dualistic and paradoxical it is, at least at first glance. For instance, for the achievement of perfection Clement advocates a perfect balance of study and faith, effort and grace. One need to be achieved, the other granted by God.

Another example of paradoxical dualism in Clement's work consists of the dichotomy of body and soul. While Clement strictly preaches the idea of *apatheia*, passionlessness, repeating a lot of the stoic ideal, he also dedicates much of his work in the defense of marriage and sexuality, striving to differentiate himself from other Christian circles that preached a more radical dualism between body and soul.

¹⁰⁹ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 23.

Finally, Clement also advocates the need for a *Paedagogue*, first the *Logos* himself, but also an experienced teacher who can guide the disciple through his transformation. However, Clement equally emphasizes that only the true Gnostic can know God, and that he needs to actively go through an arduous path to deserve the knowledge, which he can only do on his own, through study and effort.

This last paradox of pedagogy in opposition to Gnosticism is reflected in the way Clement structured his works. As was stated above, Clement inherited from Plato the idea of veiling the knowledge from someone who is not yet ready to receive it. In this way, Clement purposefully constructs his work in a chaotic manner, as Osborn calls it, “a literary puzzle” that the initiate must solve.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, there is an intrinsic logic to the way Clement’s works are structured that coexists with the intentional chaos. According to John Ferguson, we know of fourteen works written by Clement, from which five are extant and only four to its entirety. Besides *The Rich Man’s Salvation*, the other three works that are extant in their entirety are the *Protrepticus*, the *Pedagogus* and the *Stromateis*. According to Eric Osborn, F. Quatember was the first scholar to propose, and impressively argue for the unity of these works, especially Clement’s trilogy, where each book would represent a different stage of instruction.¹¹¹ This idea of Clement’s trilogy corresponding to three linear steps of initiation of the true Gnostic is nowadays widely accepted by most scholars, and it is a basic premise that we will assume throughout the argumentation of Clement’s use of the *Sibylline Oracles* on chapter two.

¹¹⁰ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 11.

¹¹¹ F. Quatember, *Die christliche Lebenshaltung des Klemens von Alexandria nach seinem Pädagogus* (Vienna, 1946), 29-32 cited in Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 6.

Chapter 2 - The Sibyl in the work of Clement of Alexandria

1. The Sibyl in Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus*

The *Protrepticus*, or *Exhortation to the Greeks*, is a mixture of persuasion and refutation.¹¹² It is addressed to a Greek audience, exhorting them to leave what Clement calls the falsehood of idolatry behind and to embrace Christianity. Although Clement harshly criticizes Greek religion, philosophy and culture, he does not discard any of these elements, but rather engages them in a strategy of inversion of discourses: by using elements of Greek culture that he deems negative to inverse the accusations against Christianity and undermine the rationality of Greek religion, while claiming authority and precedence over the aspects of Greek culture that he considers as positive.

1.1. “Even monkeys know better than this”:¹¹³ against statues and gods.

In the *Protrepticus*, the first discourse that Clement inverts is the charges that Christians have commonly been accused of: ‘orgies and cannibalism’ (2.13.5), ‘impious fables’ (2.13.5) and ‘deadly superstition’ (2.17.2).¹¹⁴ Clement claims on chapter two that the mysteries of Greek religion are, in reality, mere custom and vain opinion. He argues that with idolatry the Greeks worship not the gods but the *daemons*, which deceive and

¹¹² Rankin, “Apologetic or protreptic? Audiences and Strategies in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*,” 9.

¹¹³ See Butterworth, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, 135.

¹¹⁴ Rankin, “Apologetic or protreptic? Audiences and Strategies in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*,” 10.

allure mankind into idolatrous practice. Thus Clement accuses the Greeks of being the true atheists, because of their alleged ignorance of the true God and belief in the existence of beings that do not exist (*Protr.* 2.25). He claims that the gods are the invention of men, and in the midst of his exhortation to abandon idolatry and embrace the Christian faith he quotes the Sibyl:

Now the most part of the stories about your gods are legends and fictions. But as many as are held to be real events are the records of base men who led dissolute lives:

*But ye in pride and madness walk; ye left
The true, straight path, and chose the way through thorns
And stakes. Why err, ye mortals? Cease, vain men!
Forsake dark night, and cleave unto the light.*

This is what the prophetic and poetic Sibyl enjoys on us. And truth, too, does the same, when she unmasks from the crowd of gods, and adduces certain similarities of name to prove the absurdity of your rash opinions (*Protr.* 2.27.4).¹¹⁵

Here, Clement uses the Sibyl as an authoritative support on the defense of Christians – “this is what the (...) Sibyl enjoys in us” – and his accusation of Greek religion as being idolatrous. He continues to condemn the sacrifices to the gods as being cruel and pointless in book three, and turns, in book four, to a critique of statues of gods and of sanctuaries.

Clement attempts to show the senselessness of worshipping statues and idols made of matter, as well as tombs and mausoleums as if they were temples, arguing that such practices lead people to worship the dead as if they were gods. In his last quotation of the *Sibylline Oracles* on chapter ten, Clement mocks the divinization of Alexander the Great:

For these are they who have dared to deify men, describing Alexander of Macedon as the thirteenth god, though “Babylon proved him mortal” (*Protr.* 10.96).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Here Clement is quoting SibOr frag. 1.23-25, 27. See Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 55-57.

¹¹⁶ See Butterworth, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, 211.

Here Clement does not refer to the Sibyl, but is clearly drawing from 5 SibOr 6 (with a parallel in 12 SibOr 6), where the Sibyl prophecies of Alexander: “(...) whom Babylon tested and held out as a corpse to Philip, alleged, not truly to be descended from Zeus or Ammon, (...)”¹¹⁷ Mischa Hooker argues that the quotation seems to have primarily an ornamental function, for emotional impact, and that the line has been modified in order to adapt it to Clement’s theme.¹¹⁸

Clement continues his critique of statues of gods quoting the Sibyl once more from the Judeo-Christian collection, in order to show that the Sibyl prophesized the destruction of such hand-made temples and idols:

As your instructor I will quote the Sibyl,

*Whose words divine come not from Phoebus’ lips,
That prophet false, by foolish men called god,
But from great God, whom no man’s hands have made,
Like speechless idols framed from polished stone.*¹¹⁹

She, however, calls the temples ruins. That of Ephesian Artemis she predicts will be swallowed up by “yawning gulfs and earthquakes,” thus:

*Prostrate shall Ephesus groan, when, deep in tears,
She seeks along her banks a vanished shrine.*¹²⁰

That of Isis and Sarapis in Egypt she says will be overthrown and burnt up:

*Thrice wretched Isis, by Nile’s streams thou stayst
Lone, dumb with frenzy on dark Acheron’s sands.*¹²¹

(...)

*And thou, Sarapis, piled with useless stones,
In wretched Egypt liest, a ruin great.*¹²²

¹¹⁷ Although the passage does not refer directly to Alexander the Great, the symbolic language hints it. John Collins notes on a footnote that “Alexander (...) died of fever in Babylon in 323 B.C. (...) After his visit to the shrine of Zeus Ammon in 332 B.C., Alexander claimed to be son of that god.” See Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 393.

¹¹⁸ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 210-211.

¹¹⁹ Quoting 4SibOr, 4-7.

¹²⁰ Quoting 5SibOr, 295-296.

¹²¹ Quoting 5SibOr, 483-484.

¹²² Quoting 5SibOr, 486-487.

If, however, you refuse to listen to the prophetess, hear at least your own philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, when he taunts the statues for their want of feeling: “and they pray to these statues just as if one were to chatter to his house (*Protr.* 4.50.1-4).¹²³

Clement continues with his claim, arguing that thieves and warriors steal the statues, and that fire and earthquakes destroy them – as witnessed by the Sibyl. Moreover, he argues that statues do not have any sense – and thus “it would be better to worship a worm or caterpillar”.¹²⁴ He quotes a story of a man who fell in love with the statue of Aphrodite,¹²⁵ and claims that “even monkeys know better than this”, not being fooled by “lifeless toys”.¹²⁶ He thus concludes that whoever worships a statue proves himself inferior to a monkey (*Protr.* 4 *passim*).

Clement advances his critique in chapter four by quoting Homer in order to criticize not only the statues, but the “shameful stories of adultery and drunkenness about gods” associated to them.¹²⁷ According to him, whoever believes in the idols does so because of incontinence and lack of self-control, striving to justify illicit pleasures. He thus quotes the Sibyl once more, in order to support his assertion that the only blessed are those who reject idols:

The only men, therefore, who can with on consent, so to speak, be called “blessed”, are all those whom the Sibyl describes,

*Who, seeing the temple, will reject them all,
And altars, useless shrines of senseless stones;
Stone idols too, and statues made by hand
Defiled with blood yet warm, and sacrifice
Of quadruped and biped, bird and beast (Protr. 4.62.1).¹²⁸*

¹²³ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 113-115.

¹²⁴ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 115-117.

¹²⁵ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 131.

¹²⁶ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 135.

¹²⁷ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 135-141.

¹²⁸ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 141. Here Clement is quoting 4SibOr 24-27.

Right after quoting the Sibyl, Clement quotes Exodus 20.4 – “thou shall not make a likeness of anything that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath” – arguing that one should not worship the creation, but the Creator.

For Clement, the greatest danger of idols worship is precisely the theological justification for immoral lifestyles that they offer. Such images have a pedagogical or imitative potential, “models for your indulgence of pleasure; such are the theologies of wantonness, such are the teachings of the gods who are engaged in *porneia* just as you are” (*Protr.* 4.61.1), which would present an obstacle for the transformation of those striving for perfection and self-control.¹²⁹

According to Laura Nasrallah, Clement “fully engages the materiality of his own culture and is concerned with contemporaneous interests in statuary and painting.”¹³⁰ In this sense, Clement’s fierce attack on images of gods in the *Protrepticus* would be a response to the “theological messages available in the cityscapes of the Roman Empire, where physical reminders of human metamorphosis into the divine were common.”¹³¹

Clement uses a reverse language applied to sculpture in order to reinterpret the narrative of human creation from Genesis 2.7. According to him, humans who believe statues and images to be gods are as stupid as stones and wood, but just as God in-breathed humanity into his sculpture of clay, thus making an instrument after his own image, so will the petrified hearts of the idolaters be risen to true piety by the Word of God – that is, Christ (*Protr.* 1.5.4). Thus stone-hard humans will be enlivened as the

¹²⁹ L.S. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 283 and 290.

¹³⁰ Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 277.

¹³¹ Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 274-275 and 278.

image of God by the new cosmic song – the Gospel – which supplants the old songs of the Greeks and which can turn stones into men.¹³²

In this sense, humans are living and moving statues and images of God. However, they need to act righteously in order to achieve perfection, and undergo a transformation to resemble the model: “O ye who of old were images, but do not all resemble your model, I desire to conform you to the archetype, that you may become even as I am” (*Protr.* 12.120.4).¹³³

Clement thus believes that, by becoming human and diminishing himself, Christ attained salvation to humankind, and elevated humans so that they can transcend their status and blur into gods (*Protr.* 1.8). This blurring – divinization – is precisely what the gods-statues represent: something that is between human and divine. In this sense, through his attack against statues and Greek religion, Clement is also stating that by abandoning idolatry and embracing Christianity man can undergo the true metamorphosis, and achieve true perfection through participation in the true God’s divinity.¹³⁴

When it comes to attack Greek religion, Clement invokes the Sibyl as an authoritative prophet, whose divine words come from God but whose authority is still very much Greek. The Sibyl proves to be a powerful ally in Clement’s strategy of inversion of discourse, since the oracular verses against idolatry from Jewish origins are not only being placed in a context of “pagan” authorship, but are moreover being put in the mouth of the probably most powerful and respected prophetess of the Greco-Roman universe.

¹³² Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 273-274 and Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 30.

¹³³ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 259. See also *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 280 and 293.

¹³⁴ *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, 274-275.

1.2 “We were before the foundation of the world” (1.6.4): Logos and precedence

On chapter five of the *Protrepticus*, Clement condemns the error of philosophers, by which idols of matter are made. However, on chapter six, he acknowledges that some philosophers – including Plato, Antisthenes, Xenophon, Cleanthes the Stoic, and the Pythagoreans – have grasped a glimpse of the truth, though imperfectly and unaware, with their declaration that there is but one God, who is the creator and the prime mover (*Protr.* 6.68.2).¹³⁵

Clement argues that a divine effluence leads thoughtful men to confess the truth, and that the source of Plato’s wisdom is the Jews:

You learn geometry from the Egyptians, astronomy from the Babylonians, healing incantations you obtain from the Thracians, and the Assyrians have taught you much; but as to your laws (in so far as they are true) and your belief about God, you have been helped by the Hebrews themselves:

*Who honour not with vain deceit man’s works
Of gold and silver, bronze and ivory,
And dead’ men’s statues carved from wood and stone,
Which mortals in their foolish hearts revere;
But holy hands to heaven each morn they raise
From sleep arising, and their flesh they cleanse
With water pure; and honour Him alone
Who guards them always, the immortal God (Protr. 6.70.2).¹³⁶*

Although not explicitly, Clement quotes the third books of the *Sibylline Oracles*:

*They do not honor with empty deceits works of men,
either gold or bronze, or silver or ivory,
or wooden, stone, or clay idols of dead gods,
such as mortals honor with empty-minded counsel.
For on the contrary, at dawn they lift up holy arms*

¹³⁵ See also Rankin, “Apologetic or protreptic? Audiences and Strategies in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*,” 12.

¹³⁶ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 159.

toward heaven, from their beds, always sanctifying their flesh (note: Clement reads “hands”) with water, and they honor only the Immortal who always rules, and then their parents (3SibOr 586-588, 590-594).¹³⁷

He continues to quote other philosophers, who also proclaim one God, and again quotes the Sibyl, this time not only explicitly but also presenting her as a Hebrew prophetess, and claiming that Xenophon’s knowledge derives from her:

From what source, pray, does the son of Gryllus draw his wisdom? Is it not clearly from the Hebrew prophetess, who utters her oracle in the following words?

*What eyes of flesh can see immortal God,
Who dwells above the heavenly firmament?
Not e’en against the sun’s descending rays
Can men of mortal birth endure to stand (Protr. 6.71.4).¹³⁸*

Clement not only claims that the Sibyl is Hebrew, but he actually relies exclusively on her ‘Hebrewness’ to support his entire argument of Hebrew precedence over the Greek. On chapter seven Clement turns to the Greek poets, making a similar point – that some of them grasped the truth, such as Aratus and Sophocles – and, once more, he quotes from the *Sibylline Oracles*, referring to Orpheus in recognition of his error:

Now at the very last he (Orpheus) sings of the really sacred Word:

*(...) But hear thou, Child of the Moon, Musaeus, words of truth;
(...) Behold the word divine, to this attend,
Directing mind and heart aright; tread well
The narrow path of life, and gaze on Him,
The world’s great ruler, our immortal king.*

Then, lower down, he adds explicitly:

*One, self-begotten, lives; all things proceed
From One; and in His works He ever moves:
No mortal sees Him, yet Himself sees all.*

Thus wrote Orpheus; in the end, at least, he understood that he had gone astray:

*Inconstant mortal, make no more delay,
But turn again, and supplicate thy God.*

¹³⁷ Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 375.

¹³⁸ See Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 161. Clement is quoting from SibOr frag. 1.10-13.

It may be freely granted that the Greeks received some glimmerings of the divine word, and gave utterance to a few scraps of truth. Thus they bear their witness to its power, which has not been hidden. On the other hand, they convict themselves of weakness, since they failed to reach the end. For by this time, I think, it has become plain to everybody that those who do anything or utter anything without the word of truth are like men struggling to walk without a foothold (*Protr.* 7.74.6).¹³⁹

It is striking that Clement not only omits the reference to the Sibyl, but appears – at least at first glance – to actually attribute the quotation to Orpheus. It would be possible to argue that Clement expected that his audience would be familiar with the *Sibylline Oracles* and that they would have known where the passage came from. However, in this case, his attempt to identify the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess on 6.20 would be frustrated.

Mischa Hooker argues that the lack of attribution is to be explained by the fact that Clement is not using the Sibyl as an authoritative figure in these particular verses. Rather, he would be using the oracular verses in order to add emotional appeal.¹⁴⁰ That would be odd, since the whole point of quoting the Sibyl is precisely to show how Greek philosophers and poets derive their wisdom from the Hebrew prophets.

A more likely possibility pointed out by Hooker is that, in these quotations, Clement is intentionally omitting elements that are clearly Jewish: for instance the temple cult (3SibOr 575-9) and moral excellence, such as respect for parents and the marriage bed (3SibOr 594b-595), as well as a passage referring to the Jews' exclusive possession of divine favor and truth (3SibOr 582-5).¹⁴¹ Perhaps another possibility would be that because Clement finds himself in the place of endorsing the Sibyl as authoritative, while twisting her word, he decided to omit the reference on these quotations. Nevertheless,

¹³⁹ See Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 167-168. Here Clement is quoting 3SibOr 624-625.

¹⁴⁰ Hooker, *The use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 202.

¹⁴¹ Hooker, *The use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 202.

that argument clearly does not apply for Clement's interpretation of other well known Christian texts, such as the epistles of Paul, whose words are unceremoniously distorted by Clement at his convenience.

In any case, the logic behind Clement's argument is clear: because Christ is the *Logos* of God, he is pre-existent and through him everything was made, as it is stated in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."¹⁴² Hence, for Clement, Jesus Christ, the Savior, is the ultimate origin of everything that is true and good.

Eric Osborn argues that Clement's positive evaluation of Greek philosophy, knitted with Hebrew prophecy, goes in tandem with his understanding of history as guided by God according to a plan of salvation. In this sense, the purpose of history would be to train humanity to gain knowledge, piety and virtue, and thus it would move according to divine pedagogy, from law and philosophy to the truth of revelation.¹⁴³

According to Denise Buell, this is not an uncommon or surprising reasoning, since Christians, like any other people, would have been unable to ethnically define themselves without a past. Hence, Early Christians borrowed from hegemonic groups, in order to reinvent themselves and assert greater antiquity and superiority to their own identity. According to her, Christians were not the only ones inventing (and reinventing) themselves in the Roman Empire: Romans, Greeks, Jews and others were continually negotiating and revising the identity of their group. And "the past was a crucial site for

¹⁴² John 1.1-3.

¹⁴³ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 38-39.

authorizing the values and practices by which one could claim and demonstrate one's present identity".¹⁴⁴

Buell argues that Christians appealed to the past in order to portray themselves in two main ways: by promoting their antiquity and also their superiority. In one hand, they established a "rhetoric of restoration" to explain how they constituted a people with a past, despite their evident historic novelty. Clement does so with his argument of the *Logos*, attaching Christianity to the very creation of humankind.¹⁴⁵

(...) still, not one of these nations existed before this world. But we were before the foundation of the world, we who, because we were destined to be in Him, were begotten beforehand by God. We are the rational images formed by God's Word, or Reason (*Logos*) and we date from the beginning on account of our connection with Him, because "the Word was in the beginning." Well, because the Word was from the first, He was and is the divine beginning of all things; but because he lately took a name – the name consecrated of old and worthy of power, the Christ – I have called him a new song (*Protr.* 1.6.4-5).¹⁴⁶

Moreover, such rationalization claimed not only that Christians are the most ancient people, but also that they are the only and true human race. Because Christ offers the opportunity of metamorphosis to all humankind and also because any person can become a Christian through conversion, for Clement Christianity is an universal *genos*.

¹⁴⁷

Since Clement understands that Christianity is a way of life, and thus that becoming a Christian means undergoing a transformation – becoming a living statue in the likeness of God – he also claims that Christians are superior because they are better. Clement argues that Christianity fulfills previously unrealized potential in all humans, for all humanity has the possibility of getting reunited into one perfect *genos* through and

¹⁴⁴ Buell, *Why This New Race?*, 63-64.

¹⁴⁵ Buell, *Why This New Race?*, 71-74.

¹⁴⁶ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Buell, *Why This New Race?*, 90.

individual transformation that entails the adoption of proper religious attitudes and practices.¹⁴⁸

In this sense, it is interesting to note that a group of second Temple period Alexandrian Jews composed and used the *Sibylline Oracles* precisely to define and imagine their identity in regards to their present reality. Thus, it is not hard to understand why Christians would have done the same. As Stephen Felder points out, Jewish “Sibyllists” provided early Christians with a complicated discourse which blended both philhellenic and anti-Roman topos, which were of great advantage for early Christians. By ignoring the Jewish origin of the oracles, Christians were able to attribute them to the ancient “pagan” prophetess and to apply the prophecies to their own agenda.¹⁴⁹

That is precisely what Clement is doing in the *Protrepticus*. The Sibyl serves primarily the function of supporting Clement’s aim of converting the Greeks by showing how their religion is senseless, while also rationalizing Christianity and granting sense to aspects that seemed incomprehensible to a Greek audience – for instance, how Christians worshiped a criminal who died on a cross. David Rankin describes the rhetoric in the *Protrepticus* as a bridge: Clement first makes the “pagan” side of the river inhabitable, and then he starts to draw a bridge and invite the reader to cross to the Christian, greener pastures.¹⁵⁰ That is precisely what Clement is doing with his quotations of the *Sibylline Oracles* at the end of his work: he invites his readers to take an active step, to venture to desert their own tradition and step into Christianity, assured of its superiority (*Protr.* 10.96).

¹⁴⁸ Buell, *Why This New Race?*, 81.

¹⁴⁹ Felder, *The Sibylline Oracles and the Problems of the Empire*, 85 and 105.

¹⁵⁰ Rankin, “Apologetic or protreptic? Audiences and strategies in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*,” 7.

Although the *Protrepticus* is not primarily an apologetic work, in his argument for Christian superiority Clement also elaborated a defense of Christianity, for instance, reversing the charges of atheism, accusing the Greeks of being the true atheists (*Protr.* 2.27). Thus, Clement's citations of the Sibyl in the *Protrepticus* serve the dual function of apology and identity formation. At this point, the Sibyl is not just an authoritative Greek figure anymore, as Clement has already begun to distance her from her "pagan" setting and appropriate her as a Hebrew prophetess.

1.3 The Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess

In Ancient times, the *Sibylline Oracles* were read and transmitted as a genuine "pagan" collection. The interest of the authors and compilers in creating a believable forgery was so that they could support their arguments in supposedly 'neutral' base, claiming that even the "pagans" acknowledged the truth regarding their faith. In this sense, it is quite striking that Clement assimilates the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess:

From what source, pray, does the son of Gryllus draw his wisdom? Is it not clearly from the Hebrew prophetess, who utters her oracle in the following words?

*What eyes of flesh can see immortal God,
Who dwells above the heavenly firmament?
Not e'en against the sun's descending rays
Can men of mortal birth endure to stand (Protr. 6.71).¹⁵¹*

Later, on chapter eight, when Clement turns to the Hebrew prophets, the first prophet to be announced is actually the prophetess Sibyl:

Now that we have dealt with the other matters in due order, it is time to turn to the writings of the prophets. For these (...) lay a firm foundation for the truth. The sacred writings are also models of virtuous living, and short roads to salvation.

(...)

To begin with, let the prophetess, the Sibyl, first sing to us the song of salvation:

¹⁵¹ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 161. Here Clement is quoting SibOr Fragment 1.10-13.

*Lo, plain to all, from error free He stands;
 Come, seek not gloom and darkness evermore;
 Behold, the sun's sweet light shines brightly forth.
 But mark, and lay up wisdom in your hearts.
 One God there is, from whom comes rains and winds,
 Earthquakes and lightning, deaths, plagues, grievous cares,
 Snowstorms and all besides – why name each one?
 He from of old rules heaven, He sways the earth.*

With true inspiration she likens delusion to darkness and the knowledge of God to the sun and light (*Protr.* 8.77).¹⁵²

In these two quotations, Clement refers to the Sibyl as being Hebrew, and as holding the same authority as the Hebrew prophets. However, as shown in previous sections, Clement is not constant in this attribution. Sometimes he refers to the Sibyl as a Greek prophetess – for instance in *Protr.* 2.27, 4.50 and 4.62 – and relies on her Greekness to corroborate his argument. Sometimes he does not cite her at all – for instance in *Protr.* 6.70, 70.96 and 7.74, the later being where he ascribes the quotation to Orpheus. Nevertheless, even when Clement addresses the Sibyl as a Greek prophetess, he seems to set her apart: “if, however, you refuse to listen to the prophetess, hear at least your own philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus” (*Protr.* 4.50).¹⁵³

Hooker argues that Clement is trying to “get the best of both worlds”, enjoying the prestige that the Sibyl’s name has in the Greek world, while associating her with the Hebrew tradition. Hooker also argues that Clement is trying “to retain the emotional impact that an appeal to an oracular source might make on a potential convert, even while sporadically suggesting that the Sibyl was really Hebrew, although her name was well-known to the Greco-Roman world”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 174-175. Clement quotes from SibOr frag. 1.28-35.

¹⁵³ Butterworth, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 113. See also Hooker, *The use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 200.

¹⁵⁴ Hooker, *The use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 213.

However, I believe the solution to understanding Clement's assimilation of the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophet relies in analyzing what he means by "Hebrew" and "Greek". It seems that, since Clement understands that everything, from the Jewish law and Hebrew prophecy to Greek philosophy, is inspired by the *Logos*, he actually understands everything as belonging to the *Logos*, but in a spectrum of how well these elements absorbed the truth. That is, in one extreme of the spectrum he would put "Greek" or "pagan" – which he considers as pure lies and deceit of the *daemons* – while in the other extreme he would put truth itself – and thus his understanding of "Christianity" and the "true Gnostic", which are the full embracement of the truth revealed by God.

Homer, for instance, with his shameful accounts of the gods would be placed on the very extreme of the Greek side of the spectrum. Plato and other prophets who "grasped the truth" would be placed somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. The Hebrew prophets would be very close to the Christian extreme, separated from the entire truth only by the advent of the *Logos* incarnated, who would be the fulfillment and melioration of their prophecies. In this sense, the Sibyl would be associated with the Hebrew prophets not because she was not a "pagan" prophetess in origin, but because she fully held the truth about the *Logos*.

If understood in this way, the appropriation of the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess would not be in contradiction to his other quotations where he refers to her as a Greek prophetess. Furthermore, the assimilation of the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess would fit Clement's strategy of claiming a past for Christians "before the foundation of the world", while not undermining his use of her as a strictly "pagan" authoritative figure who criticizes "pagan" religion.

What we should now call “the theory of the spectrum” allows us to understand how Clement was able to appropriate everything he found useful from other cultures to the highest degree of convenience, while discarding anything he disagreed with or that did not seem useful.

2. The Sibyl in Clement of Alexandria’s *Pedagogus*

The *Pedagogus*, the second work of Clement’s trilogy, is quite different from the *Protrepticus*. For one thing it is no longer aimed at non-Christians, but rather to a converted Christian audience. Presumably Clement would have expected that, once his Greek audience would have gone through the first stage of his work, they would already have been convinced of Christian superiority, undergone baptism – or at least some sort of initiation in the new faith – and would be ready for the next level.

In this stage, Clement deals with the concrete, down-to-earth elements of the Christian daily life, and how a Christian is supposed to behave. Since for Clement philosophy is not just an intellectual activity, but a way of life,¹⁵⁵ it is not surprising that his treatise would eventually turn to the practical, as a way of training oneself to immortality (*Ped.* 2.1). What is surprising, however, is his concern with details, and the amount of instructions he provides for seemingly unimportant matters – such as a critique

¹⁵⁵ In the *Pedagogus* (1.1), Clement writes that the Instructor is practical, not theoretical, and thus He aims to improve the soul, to teach and to train it up to a virtuous life, and not merely to an intellectual one. Eric Osborn adds to this understanding by quoting A. C. Itter, “Method and doctrine: esoteric teaching in the writings of Clement of Alexandria” (Dissertation, La Trobe University, 2003), 190, who argues that “Clement aims to take his reader through a varied programme which will mould him ‘intellectually and spiritually so that he reaches the perfection of the complete Christian. Clement is a doctrinal theologian but also a metaphysician, a mystagogue, a skilled spiritual teacher, concerned not only with doctrines themselves, but also with the method of rekindling them to life in the Christian’.” See Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 15.

of the exceedingly softness of one's bed or his reproach of men who comb their hairs (*Ped.* 2.9; 3.3).

One of the main issues addressed by Clement is marriage and sexual relationships, and interestingly it is to corroborate his views on these particular matters that he quotes the Sibyl. At first his use of the Sibyl seems to be completely disconnected from the Hebrew prophetess of the *Protrepticus*. However, in order to inquire if there is a certain logic in the way Clement uses the *Sibylline Oracles* in his work as a whole, as well as on his overall relationship with the Sibyl, it is necessary to analyse in depth his main arguments in the *Pedagogus* and the core message he is trying to convey, instead of simply assuming that his quotations are not related to those of the other books just because they do not refer to the same subject. After analysing and understanding Clement's particular use of the Sibyl in the *Pedagogus* it will become clear that the transformation one must undergo in order to acquire the desired self-control, which is the goal proposed in the *Pedagogus*, goes in tandem with the metamorphosis that Clement articulates in the *Protrepticus* – where the petrified hearts of the idolaters are to be raised to true piety by the Word of God – the *Logos*.

The *Pedagogus* is divided into three books. In the first one, Clement introduces some of the main topics that permeate his work and upon which he develops his arguments: that of passions and the need for an instructor, that of Christians as children and finally an apology against other Christian circles.

Clement begins by making medical analogies, proposing that passions are like sickness, which keep human beings from achieving perfection, and that the cure is achieved through the aid of an instructor (a *pedagogue*), the word of God itself – the

Logos (*Ped.* 1.1.3). According to him, one is healed by being trained in virtue and guided by the *Logos* towards perfect knowledge of the truth. Once freed from human passion, one achieves stainless perfection.

According to Peter Brown, Clement incorporated much of the language and elements of Stoicism, particularly the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*. The austere introspective Stoic doctrine proposed that the passions were a source of fear, anxiety and hope, and that, in order to achieve “a state of high-hearted readiness, the individual *ego* had to undergo a ‘total transformation of its way of perceiving the world’”. Brown explains that, for the Stoics, the very “‘inner climate’ of the mind itself must change. Every situation was to be perceived for exactly what it was – not an occasion to experience fear, frustration, or inappropriate hope, but as an opportunity for joyful service.”¹⁵⁶

For Clement, the state of *apatheia* was not the repression of the passions, but a transformation that would bring the believer to master his passions, to attain self-control. Thus, the main issue which Clement deals with and condemns on the *Pedagogus* is hedonism and the attitude of maximizing pleasure – which included things seemingly unimportant to the modern eye, such as combing one’s hair, which was seen as vanity, to more problematic issues such as sexuality.

Another important aspect in which Clement insists in the *Pedagogus* is the fact that God instructs humanity through his son, the Savior and *Pedagogus*, who was given up for humanity out of love (*Ped.* 3 *passim*). In this sense, Clement stresses that the motivation for God’s action is love, and that God guides lovingly and didactically, with pedagogy. Although Clement will further explore the divine plan and providence as a

¹⁵⁶ P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 130.

crucial aspect of God's pedagogy, he focuses in book one on another important facet of such pedagogy: that which make Christians children.

For Clement, pedagogy is the training of children *par excellence*, and he introduces the view of Christians as the children of God as being a thread that knits together divine plan and divine love. Clement draws mostly from Paul, but reinterpreting the Pauline negative connotation of childhood. For instance, Clement interprets Paul's assertion "when I was a child"¹⁵⁷ as referring to when Paul was a Jew, claiming that Paul refers to childhood as the law which would have been reprehended by the Apostle – because, for Clement, the effects of the law would supposedly have been that of terrifying.

Clement argues for a positive image of childhood, understood as obedience to the *Logos* which would reflect the obedience of a young and mild infant, who is looked upon due to its feebleness. In this sense, Clement argues that childhood would be a desirable state of dependence of God, which would trigger divine mercy and commiseration. Hence, Clement exhorts his readers to embrace childhood, claiming: "let us defend this childlikeness of ours (...)" (*Ped.* 1.6.34).¹⁵⁸

Clement also draws from another reprehension that Paul makes of his followers in Corinth, saying "I have fed you with milk, not meat,"¹⁵⁹ completely shifting the original meaning. While Paul is clearly accusing his audience of being too childish and not

¹⁵⁷ 1Cor 13.11, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." Paul clearly gives a negative connotation to "childhood" throughout his letter, criticizing the disputes and rivalries of the community in Corinth and reproaching them by saying "I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ" (1Cor 3.1) and, later on, admonishing his audience to "not be children in thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults." (1Cor 14.20) In this sense, childhood is being portrayed by Paul as an immature behavior and 'unreadiness' to receive the truth of the Gospel.

¹⁵⁸ S. P. Wood, *Christ the Educator* (C.P. New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1954), 34.

¹⁵⁹ 1Cor 3.2-3: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?"

mature enough to receive his complete message, Clement articulates a complicated argument where milk is not only portrayed as a good thing, but actually as the very Word of God, incarnated to make himself accessible to men (*Ped.* 1.6.35).¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, Clement makes an association between milk and water as referring to baptism and illumination (*Ped.* 1.5). For him, once fed by the milk, which is the *Logos*, one would be perfected by the washing of baptism, which wipes out the sins that obscure the light and thus makes the vision free. In this sense, through the Word of God – and through baptism – one would acquire the knowledge of God and truth, which makes ignorance disappear. Such rationale is intimately tied to the Johannine theology of the *Logos*, where Jesus is portrayed as “the way, and the truth, and the life” through which one must pass to encounter the divine: “no one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”¹⁶¹

By now it has already become clear that Clement freely adapts, interprets and shifts the original meaning of the sources he quotes from. One of the finest examples of this is Clement’s use of the Pauline corpus – which is one of the main materials he draws from. As shown above, and in innumerable other instances, Clement often displays passages that, in their original contexts, state the very opposite of what he is saying. Clement edits these passages at will and offers an exegesis that allows him to claim not only these texts’ authority, but also the true understanding of the writings of the ‘Apostle’

¹⁶⁰ Clement argues that “the Word may be clearly shown to be both: ‘the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end;’” and thus that both meat and milk stand for the same thing in substance, the *Logos*, since “the very same Word is fluid and mild as milk, or solid and compact as meat.”

¹⁶¹ John 14.6-7.

– which would come in hand not only to convince his audience, but also to undermine his opponents.

Following his association of childhood and knowledge, Clement begins chapter six by arguing that “we are children and little ones, but certainly not because the learning we acquire is puerile or rudimentary, as those puffed up in their own knowledge falsely charge” (*Ped.* 1.6.25).¹⁶² Here the meaning of childhood is switched back to a negative one, and inaugurates the section of Clement’s trilogy that deals with the conflicts he had with other Christian groups, most predominantly with the Valentinians and the followers of Basilides, which permeates his whole work and lingers onto the *Stromateis*. Although not his main goal, Clement’s work also functioned as an apology, which was clearly responding to the claims of different Christian circles, as will be elaborated further in this chapter.

Clement ends his first book by introducing the topic of fear, which later proves to be of great concern for him and also a source of friction with – and an opportunity for calumniating – other Christian circles. For Clement, God is good and his justice cannot contradict that. By drawing once more from his medical analogies, Clement claims that God’s punishment and reproaches are to be compared to surgery, medicine and the cure for passions. Moreover, Clement insists that justice is the fruit of loving care and that love is the source of salvation. Because it is the prerogative of goodness to save, Clement argues that love is the prime motive for God’s guidance and instruction (*Ped.* 1.8-12).

Having set his main philosophical premises in the first book of the *Pedagogus*, Clement turns on book two to a concrete guidance for daily actions. His main concern is with continence, and how one must avoid mischievous pleasures and hedonistic

¹⁶² Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 24.

behaviour. He condemns gluttony and drunkenness, as well as wild impulses. He calls for decorum – literally exhorting his audience to not eat like pigs and dogs (*Ped.* 2.1.11) – temperance and modesty, criticizing elaborated vanity, frivolities and laziness in eating, drinking, dressing and sleeping (*Ped.* 2.1-2; 2.4; 2.9; 2.11-13). Furthermore, he condemns vanity of ornaments and objects, from dying or curling one’s hairs to eating on costly vessels (*Ped.* 2.3; 2.8).

Clement also dedicates a lot of his discourse to directions of behaviour and how to relate with others. He condemns filthy speaking and establishes some rules of behaviour chiefly in the public spaces – such as parties, gymnasiums and baths (*Ped.* 2.4; 2.6-7; 3.9-10). More importantly, he establishes the limits that one must impose to oneself, especially concerning sexual behaviour.

On chapter ten, Clement explains in detail the immoral sexual behaviour of the hyenas, which “so freely sow their seed contrary to nature” either by sexual activity between two males or intercourse through a particular organ that resembles the female genitalia but does not lead to the womb (*Ped.* 2.10.85).¹⁶³ He argues that the prohibition established by the Mosaic Law which prevents Jews from eating such animals should be understood by Christians as an exhortation to not imitate the hyenas’ “insatiable appetite for coition” (*Ped.* 2.10.83).¹⁶⁴ Clement thus specifies his two main concerns regarding sexuality: the begetting of children as the sole purpose of sexual intercourse and the condemnation of sexual intercourse for the sake of pleasure.

Clement builds up his argument promoting chastity in marriage through self-control and abstinence, especially during the period of time when the woman is

¹⁶³ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 166-167.

¹⁶⁴ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 164-165.

menstruating or pregnant – and thus cannot conceive. He states that even an intercourse performed licitly – i.e. within marriage – “is an occasion of sin, unless done purely to beget children” (*Ped.* 2.10.98).¹⁶⁵ Here Clement is not only concerned with the loss of fertile seed, “destined to become a human being”, but also with the continuity of humankind and, ultimately, of the Church: “If we should but control our lusts at the start and if we would not kill off the human race born and developing according to the divine plan, then our whole lives would be lived according to nature” (*Ped.* 2.10.96).¹⁶⁶

It is important to notice that in his reproach of immoral sexual activity, Clement does not condemn sexual intercourse *per se*, and neither does he look down upon marriage. On the contrary, he states that “marriage itself merits esteem and the highest approval, for the Lord wished men to be ‘fruitful and multiply’” (*Ped.* 2.10.95) and that “love (...) tends toward sexual relations by its very nature (...)” (*Ped.* 2.10.97).¹⁶⁷ In this sense, Clement defends sexuality as something natural, willed by God.

Peter Brown emphasizes Clement’s sense of “the God-given importance of every moment of daily life,”¹⁶⁸ arguing that, for Clement, it was precisely “the cares of an active life, even the act of married intercourse itself” which would have “served to tune the strings that would, in old age, produce the well-tempered sound of a perfected sage.”

¹⁶⁹ Brown suggests that Clement is not only arguing that sexual activity is not an obstacle to achieving Christian perfection, but more importantly, that Clement was doing an apology of marriage. According to Brown, Clement’s discussion of marriage and sexuality – both in the *Pedagogus* and in the *Stromateis* – were written for what he calls

¹⁶⁵ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 175.

¹⁶⁶ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 173-174.

¹⁶⁷ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 173-174.

¹⁶⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 126.

¹⁶⁹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 125.

the “moderate Christian,” the believers “who had not yet reached the huge serenity associated with the sage, whose passions were no longer in need of anxious control.”¹⁷⁰ In this sense, Brown argues that “Clement’s church had remained a loose confederation of believing households,” and that Clement’s audience was primarily the sexually active younger members of the community, the married couples.¹⁷¹

Brown argues that Clement’s Alexandrian milieu was that of a social struggle, especially in what concerns sexuality and marriage.¹⁷² Many Christian groups, such as Marcionites and Encratites, condemned the material world as evil and renounced marriage. Among these Christian groups, the Valentinians distinguished themselves by their toleration of marriage, but nonetheless posed as one of the main objectors of Clement’s defense of marriage, as can be perceived by Clement’s fierce attacks against them.

The Valentinians, who were one of the most prominent schools in Alexandria, depended heavily on the myth of the fall, the repentance and the return of Sophia, and according to Pete Brown they understood the human person as a mirror of the confusion of the physical universe, and the body as “deeply alien to the true self.”¹⁷³ For them, even the soul was an afterthought. The spirit alone, the *pneuma*, was the true person.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 131.

¹⁷¹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 135.

¹⁷² Brown, *The Body and Society*, 138.

¹⁷³ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 108-109

¹⁷⁴ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 109. See also M. Mayer, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 34: in his introduction to *The Gospel of Truth*, Einar Thomassen argues that the main Valentinian position was indeed to see matter and passion as something evil, but that “the cosmos, as matter and soul substance that have been given form and order by the Savior and the redeemed Sophia, is relatively good, ‘useful’ for the plan of salvation.” In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that Clement’s portray of other Christian school’s views regarding the body and matter are not necessarily accurate, but rather Clement’s perspective, his own understanding of other’s teachings, which might in fact had been similar to his own teaching.

According to Brown, Valentinus believed that the physical universe was a mistake that needed to be corrected. However, “liberation could not be made manifest solely by the peremptory denial of conventional social ties, such as marriage.”¹⁷⁵ The universe needed to be restored “by intricate labor at the very root of the soul,” with a “definitive modification of the sexual drive” which would abolish every otherness: “the polarity of male and female itself would be abolished.”¹⁷⁶

Brown argues that Valentinus adopted Plutarch’s concept of the female standing for “all that was lacking in shape and direction,” and that the sexual relationship between male and female, as well as the conjugal imagery would be a way of “bringing up form and discipline to the disorderly and inferior.”¹⁷⁷ Yet, Valentinus did not see the otherness of matter as an eternal aspect of the universe, but rather as something ephemeral. Therefore, although Valentinians tolerated marriage, they sought as a goal a mutation, a transformation which would eliminate sexual desire altogether. For them, mere renunciation was not enough: “The Gnostic redeemed person radiated a vast serenity in which sexual desire had been swallowed up along with all other signs of inner division.”

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Hence, according to Brown, “Clement wrote, in part, to block the rise of a dangerous mystique of continence. He reassured married householders that they did not

¹⁷⁵ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 110

¹⁷⁶ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 111. Also see the Gospel of Thomas, logion 114:

“(1) Simon Peter said to them, ‘Mary should leave us, for females are not worthy of life.’

(2) Jesus said, ‘Look, I shall guide her to make male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. (3) For every female who makes herself male will enter heaven’s kingdom.’

Trans. and Ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: Harper Collins, 2007.

¹⁷⁷ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 112.

¹⁷⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 117-118 He suggests a passage in the Acts of John where the apostle would have had reprehended a man for castrating himself, arguing that “it was thought prudent to respect the long, half-conscious labour of the spirit in the soul rather than to commit oneself to premature continence.”

have to feel ashamed to have married leaders, nor (...) unable to aspire to Christian perfection.”¹⁷⁹ In this sense, Brown argues that “Clement’s most daring act, in a time of increasingly vocal radicalism, was to have spoken up, in this ingenious and elegant manner, for the married Christian laity.”¹⁸⁰

Thus, Clement’s defense of marriage and sexual intercourse was clearly a reaction to the ideas that circulated in Alexandria among different groups of Christians at that time. On the one hand, Clement was concerned with the continuity of his own community – and ultimately of the human race. Although baptism had brought a new way through which the Church could grow, Clement still insisted on the necessity of perpetuating Christianity through childbirth. “Otherwise,” Brown writes, “the *word of the Lord* would not *abide*: ‘Without the body, how could the divine plan for us in the church achieve its end?’”¹⁸¹

On the other hand, Clement was also concerned in drawing a clear distinction between passion and desire, for Clement does not articulate self-control in opposition to nature. As Brown puts it, “sexual desire was not, for Clement, a palpable symbol of a fallen world, but mere crevasses that opened, for a time, between the prepubertal young and the serenity of an old age.”¹⁸²

A passage from chapter five, where Clement brings up the topic of laughter, can throw some light on this matter. Clement argues that one should laugh with moderation, decorum and sobriety, not like foolish clowns (*Ped.* 2.5.45). However, he emphasizes that “we need not take away from man any of the things that are natural to him, but only set a

¹⁷⁹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 138;

¹⁸⁰ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 137;

¹⁸¹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 132, quoting *Stromateis* 3.17.103.3:2.

¹⁸² Brown, *The Body and Society*, 135.

limit and due proportion to them” (*Ped.* 2.5.46).¹⁸³ In this sense, the transformation envisioned by Clement did not entail a harsh buffeting of the body. On the contrary, he claims that the human person attains its destined end through the very body, the soul’s “friend and companion” (*Ped.* 1.13.102).¹⁸⁴

In this sense, Clement claims that perfection is achieved through the body, and not by alienating the body or its nature. Moreover, sexual desire is not a bad thing in itself – since, for one thing, it enables procreation. Although it will become clear on the *Stromateis* that the goal of perfection is complete lack of passion and desire (*apatheia*), Clement understands that the transformation does not take place overnight. There is an arduous path to be walked towards perfection, and as a teacher – a *Pedagogus* – he is patient, he applies pedagogy when teaching his disciples. So he rebukes the other Christian views that advocate repression of nature. For him, there is a control of one’s body to be mastered, but it does not come from fear and repression. Rather, as he will develop in the *Stromateis*, mastery of oneself needs to be motivated by love of God, and the transformation of the nature that will eventually eradicate desire will come within serenity and peace, through the grace of God. It does not mean it will not be arduous or that men must not make an effort to acquire merit, but that the internal disposition is a positive one – love rather than fear, self-control rather than suppression.

While Clement defends marriage, sexual activity and, in a sense, even sexual desire, he is equally concerned in condemning illicit and hedonistic sexual practices and, particularly, in emphasizing that the sole purpose of intercourse is for begetting child.

¹⁸³ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 135.

¹⁸⁴ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 91. See also Brown, *The Body and Society*, 127.

However, reducing all his theology of sex and marriage to procreation would be to omit a very important part of the equation.

As stated before, Clement is really concerned in his rhetoric to defend God's motive for redemption and punishment as being love. This concern seems to also be the bottom line for understanding his position regarding sexual behaviour, as he states that "the hearts of lovers have wings; affection can be quenched by a change of heart, and love can turn into hate if there creep in too many grounds for loss of respect" (*Ped.* 2.10.99).¹⁸⁵ For Clement, loss of respect meant loss of love, and seeking sexual intercourse for the mere sake of pleasure would make the relationship sterile, literally but also figuratively.

In this sense, for Clement, *apatheia* is not an end in itself, but a way to protect love. In his logic, it is out of love that God sent his son to help the believers achieve *apatheia*, and it is to protect the love for one another that the *Logos* guides the soul towards perfection, towards *apatheia*.

Thus Clement exhorts self-control for the sake of love, arguing that "he who seeks only sexual pleasure turns his marriage into fornication" and resembles a pig (*Ped.* 2.10.98-99).¹⁸⁶ He then moves on to the next step, admonishing not only fornication within marriage but outside of it: "ribald speech, indecent behaviour, sensuous love affairs and all such immoralities" (*Ped.* 2.10.98).¹⁸⁷ In the midst of his admonition, Clement quotes from the fourth and fifth books of the *Sibylline Oracles*, without naming the Sibyl but referring to her as ἡ παρ' ὑμῖν ποιητική, a representative of poetry:¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 174-175.

¹⁸⁶ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 175-176.

¹⁸⁷ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 175.

¹⁸⁸ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 193-194.

Even the poetry circulating among you condemns the city and house in which immorality reigns, saying: ‘Wicked city, all unclean, adulteries and lawless lying with men and illicit effeminacy dwells in you.’ On the other hand, it admires the chaste ‘who have neither base lust for lying with other’s wives, nor passion for the loathsome and abominable sin committed with men,’ because it is contrary to nature (*Ped.* 2.10.99).¹⁸⁹

Here Clement is quoting first from 5SibOr 166-167, an oracle against Rome, and then from 4SibOr 33-34, where the Sibyl is praising the righteous for not desiring the spouse of others or abusing males, adding his critique also towards homosexual practices. Mischa Hooker points out that this is the sole instance in which Clement appeals to the Sibyl explicitly as a “pagan” authority. Moreover, he adds that in this specific passage the Sibyl is not called by the title of “prophet”, but of “poet.”¹⁹⁰ Although this change represents a departure from the gradual association of the Sibyl with the Hebrew prophets Clement worked out throughout the *Protrepticus*, the reason why he quotes the Sibyl as a representative of “pagan” culture in this specific passage is not incomprehensible. Clement is trying to mine Greek culture from within, making appear a contradiction by evoking a Greek authoritative figure to critique Greek culture itself.

Clement continues his reproach of hedonistic practices on the third book of the *Pedagogus* by criticizing those who embellish themselves with make-up, different hairstyles and ornaments, both women and men. However, he admonishes men who embellish themselves with an extra emphasis, calling them “effeminate”, “womanish creatures” who “detest the bloom of manliness” and “adorn themselves like women” (*Ped.* 3.3).¹⁹¹ Such accusations may stir the curiosity of a modern reader to what kind of circumstances is Clement reacting so harshly to, and it is even more surprising as

¹⁸⁹ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 175.

¹⁹⁰ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 193-194

¹⁹¹ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 211-220 *passim*.

Clement reproaches practices such as dying or even combing one's hair, as well as razing oneself (*Ped.* 3.3.16-19).

In the midst of his seemingly exaggerated reproach, Clement quotes the Sibyl once more: "Unreliable in manliness, they live, as the Sibyl says of them, 'only for unholy deeds of shame, committing evil and wicked deeds'" (*Ped.* 3.3.15).¹⁹²

Here Clement quotes once more from the fourth book of the *Sibylline Oracles*, more specifically from 4SibOr 154-155, a section from an account of the impiety of the last times. At first glance, it seems strange, even hilarious that Clement would choose such a harsh passage to then continue his account as follows:

Indeed, because of them [men who embellish themselves] the towns are full of pitch-plasters, barbers who pluck the hair of these effeminate creatures. Shops are set up and opened for business everywhere, and the craftsmen of this shameful trade akin to harlotry obviously amass a substantial income of money. They present themselves to these craftsmen, who then proceed to cover them with pitch and pluck out their hairs every sort of way; yet they are not in the least embarrassed either by the onlookers, or by the passerby, or even by their own manhood. This is the sort these hunters of base pleasure are, getting their whole bodies made smooth by the painful plucking of the pitch" (*Ped.* 3.3.15).¹⁹³

As shocking as it may sound to the modern reader that for Clement the signs of impiety of the last times would be barbershops and coiffeurs around town, it seems that the key element to understanding Clement's logic in his critique of these men is the term "hunters of pleasure." There is another passage, at the beginning of chapter three, which also throws some light on this matter:

What one must think when he sees them [men who embellish themselves]? (...) he must conclude that such men are adulterers and women, that they indulge in both kinds of immoral sexual pleasure (...)" (*Ped.* 3.3.15).¹⁹⁴

It is clear that, for Clement, what is at stake is an excess of vanity and hedonism, which falls short both in austerity and self-control. For him, because these men and

¹⁹² Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 211-212.

¹⁹³ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 212.

¹⁹⁴ Wood, *Christ the Educator*, 211.

women do not show self-control in a particular sphere of life – that of embellishing, clothing and, ultimately, of vanity – they are automatically unable to act with continence and temperance in any other circumstance, including their sexual behaviour.

From a modern perspective, embedded in a Western view of moral hierarchy, it is easy to see an exaggeration on the jump that Clement makes from one assumption to the other. However, Clement sees self-control as a constant. For him, one cannot behave with self-control in one instance and lack it in another, there is no middle-ground: either a person is restraint in her entirety, either he or she is not restraint at all. In this sense, lack of self-control is understood as equally grave in whatever instance it is manifested – whether in sexual behaviour or clothing, whether in eating or in one’s relationship with others.

Clement exhorts his readers to a stainless perfection. As Blake Leyerle puts it, “his aim is to reshape Christians so that their entire outward manner reveals their inward, Christian, disposition.”¹⁹⁵ The core problem for Clement is hedonism, which contraries the goal of love and gift of oneself to others, no matter how small the hedonistic action may be.

Leyerle also points out two interesting reasons behind Clement’s almost obsessive stance on table manners, which can shed some light in his overall approach to behaviour in any sphere of daily-life. One reason is that the function of table manners is, “in part, to separate humans from beasts,” in order to avoid a transformation contrary to the one desired. She argues: “Such behavior [eating without decorum], Clement warns, might lead to metamorphosis: ‘If you bury your mind deep in your belly, you resemble quite

¹⁹⁵ B. Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*. 3.2 (1995): 25.

remarkably the ass-fish, who alone of all living creatures, according to Aristotle, has its heart in its stomach.”¹⁹⁶ “The point,” she adds, “is precisely that we must act civilly and not naturally.”¹⁹⁷

According to Leyerle, Clement’s goal with his insistence with table manners – which can be applied to other exigencies on one’s daily conduct – is “a public display of temperance,” for the lack of manners testifies not only to self-indulgence, but it also attests social structure.¹⁹⁸ “Manner encodes social events by expressing, as Mary Douglas observes, hierarchy, inclusion, and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across those boundaries,” it constructs a sense of identity and of group definition.¹⁹⁹

Leyerle also argues that the fact that Clement’s advices on table manners comprises banal elements, which were probably conventional politeness in his society, reveals that “the people he addresses did not, in fact, know how to behave, (...) because they were not raised to move in this society.”²⁰⁰ Thus she argues that Clement is also concerned in minimizing the gaffes of social inferiors, “trying to lessen the possibility of arousing disgust, gestures of avoidance from others and the possibility of conflict, by explicitly inculcating a traditional standard of good behavior.”²⁰¹

Because Clement occasionally refers to the gathering of Christians as “ritual meals”, “love-feasts” and “agapes”, Leyerle argues that the interest of Clement in table manners goes beyond the daily life, but is also intended to distinguish religious meals

¹⁹⁶ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 126-127, quoting *Pedagogus* 2.1.18.

¹⁹⁷ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 126.

¹⁹⁸ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 125-126.

¹⁹⁹ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 132-133.

²⁰⁰ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 135.

²⁰¹ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 135.

from ordinary ones.²⁰² According to her, “he seems to be arguing against those who would reduce Christian ritual to the components of any lavish meal.”²⁰³ On the one hand, the rich who funded the meals could think that they could buy status with God. On the other hand, the poor who are “insatiable, for whom nothing is enough”, would come just for the food.²⁰⁴ Thus she argues: “in the face (...) of status dissonance in which wealthier members were displaying their resources (...) the format of the style is restraint: restraint in expenditure or pleasure in display, as well as restraint in appetite.”²⁰⁵

Leyerle argues that the bottom line for what Clement is articulating with his guide for behavior at meals is “a sense of common identity forged in part by a shared discipline or ritualized eating together.”²⁰⁶ It consists, “in Clement’s words, of knowing ‘what kind of daily behavior is necessary for the person called ‘Christian.’” Leyerle continues by arguing that “manners inevitably encode ‘a whole cosmology’ in which true belief is ‘learned by body.’ As similarly educated bodies form distinct groups, or ‘classes’ in Bordieu’s sense, we realize with Clement that politeness is not only a moral question but a political one.”²⁰⁷

Harry Mayer proposes a similar understanding of what he calls “the care of the self,” understood as the “cherishing of what is divine in oneself”.²⁰⁸ According to him, the care of the self was already a late-motif by the time of Clement, having evolved “from a more exterior care of the self in civic relationships to a more interior concern

²⁰² Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 136.

²⁰³ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 137.

²⁰⁴ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 138.

²⁰⁵ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 138-139.

²⁰⁶ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 139.

²⁰⁷ Leyerle, “Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette,” 140.

²⁰⁸ H. O. Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 62, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 720.

with oneself in an uncertain political arena” in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods.²⁰⁹ Following in the footsteps of his contemporaries Stoics, Clement understood passion as being a disease, “a product of a self in disarray”. The process of healing would thus lead to a perfect state of passionless, *apatheia*. Maier argues that:

Clement’s use of medical language and metaphors echoes pagan reflection on the nature of philosophical speech and rhetoric in the healing of the self. In the schools, healing is brought about through listening to the teacher’s lessons and speeches with the result of living according to one’s true nature.²¹⁰

However, he suggests that Clement brings in a novelty to this common Greco-Roman understanding of the care of the self by proposing the Mosaic Law as the remedy for passions. For Clement, it is through the commandments that the Gnostic trains himself in order to be pleasing to God, and Maier proposes that this judicial care of the self provides a whole new system, not only for perfecting oneself, but also for quantifying and measuring one’s level of perfection: “In place of weighing and balancing thoughts in a conversation with oneself (...) one applies a table of codes to oneself and measures oneself against a more static and absolute criterion.”²¹¹ Moreover, the fact that Clement understands the incarnate *Logos* as the personification of the Law brings in a whole new perspective as how one should let himself be guided by the *Pedagogus*.²¹² As will become clearer in the analysis of the *Stromateis* in the next section, Clement proposes a balance between human effort and divine grace in the path towards perfection.

Meier calls the attention of his reader to the fact that, while Clement launches a fierce battle against the flesh, he is equally careful to distinguish himself from other Alexandrian Christian circles who denigrated the body, seeing it as a creation of the

²⁰⁹ Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” 723.

²¹⁰ Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” 725.

²¹¹ Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” 726-728.

²¹² Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” 726.

Demiurge.²¹³ As will also be analyzed in greater detail in the following section of this chapter, Clement is careful in outlining in the *Stromateis* that, although less important than the soul, the body is good (*Strom.* 4.164.3-5).²¹⁴ For Meier, Clement's Gnostic is a "person who paradoxically cares for and renounces the self."²¹⁵

Meier also agrees that Clement sees the path towards perfection as a process, not an overnight transformation. The goal is high – to become as like God as possible²¹⁶ – but there are several steps to be followed. "Following baptism, one struggles to renounce the flesh and rid oneself of (...) its passions (...). As one approaches the perfect goal of *apatheia* the flesh is dead and one lives free from the flesh."²¹⁷ And he continues, quoting from the *Stromateis*, where Clement states that "the war to win freedom is waged not on the battle field of battle, but at banquet tables and in the bedroom where the self struggles within itself to avoid being captured by the enemy, pleasure" (*Strom.* 6.112.2).

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Thus he argues in the same line of Leyerle that Clement's excessive attention to details and almost obsessive interest in every daily aspect of his disciples has a deeper understanding of who Christians should be and how they should externalize their inner transformation towards perfection through good behavior, both as a testimony to others and also as a crucial element for building the identity of their group.

As analysed in the first section of this chapter, Clement develops in the *Protrepticus* the idea of a new race, universal and superior, to which all humankind is

²¹³ Meier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 730.

²¹⁴ See also Meier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 730.

²¹⁵ Meier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 732.

²¹⁶ Maier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 721.

²¹⁷ Maier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 730-731.

²¹⁸ Maier, "Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self," 732.

called through individual transformation. In the *Pedagogus* he is worried about outlining this new race, defining it. As the body expresses what one is and how it is shown, the identity of this new race needs to be expressed externally through actions. Because they are Christians, they need to behave on a certain way, in order to express what they are – a superior race, children of God – and to be a testimony to others.

Since Clement's work is aimed first to the conversion, and then to the perfection of his reader, he guides his disciples, teaching them how to become Christians through bodily practices that require self-control, restraint and austerity. The goal is to transform oneself, with the help of and in the image of the *Logos*, and to become God-like, passionless, stainless and perfect.

In this sense, it becomes clear that the attention-driven daily conduct guide of the *Pedagogus* is not far from the fierce attack against idolatry and statues, and the articulation of Christian superiority through an inversion of discourses of the *Protrepticus*. The bottom-line of both works is the same: the inward transformation towards the divine. In the *Protrepticus*, however, Clement is concerned with the philosophical and rhetorical articulation that will convince his readership to join his school and to desire the goal he is presenting. The *Pedagogus* is the second phase of the path, which concretizes the ideal so that his disciples can know exactly how to behave in his daily-lives. All of it ties well with Clement's understanding of philosophy as a way of life, and of knowledge as something that transforms the self, opposed to a mere intellectual activity alienated from the other aspects of life. In the *Stromateis*, Clement will outline the final stage of this transformation in his description of the perfect *Gnostic*, which will clarify how union

with and love of God are the key elements that knit together knowledge with table manners, moral and ethics with one's wardrobe.

As for the Sibyl, she has continued to play the role of supporting cast to Clement's arguments, sometimes as a Greek authoritative figure, sometimes as a Hebrew prophetess. So far Clement has only evoked her in a positive way, as to corroborate his arguments. Nevertheless, his relationship with the Sibyl seems to get more complex in the *Stromateis*, where he not only refers for the first time to the Sibyls in the plural, but also quotes her as a negative example of Greek thought.

3. The Sibyl in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*

The *Stromateis* or *Miscellanies* is the final part of Clement's threefold work. It is, as the name suggests, a compilation of all the topics that Clement considers essential for one's salvation. Moreover, it is addressed to those ready for the last step in the process of perfection – or as Clement calls it, of becoming a perfect Gnostic.

The collection is divided into eight books, throughout which Clement elaborates on ten main themes: 1) Christian superiority and precedence; 2) apologies against the Greeks, and especially against other Christian groups; 3) the journey towards acquiring knowledge, wisdom and love; 4) the problem of fear; 5) the need for veiling and mystery; 6) a description of the true Gnostic; 7) elaborations on self-restraint and perfection; 8) the duality of body and soul, passion and virtue, particularly applied to the reality of marriage; 9) the transformation of the soul; 10) martyrdom.

The way in which Clement structured his work reflects his underlying belief of how one is supposed to acquire knowledge and achieve virtue: through the grace of God

and through personal effort. As elaborated in his very work, Clement believes the path towards perfection is two-fold. On the one hand, knowledge, faith and wisdom are gifts from God and can only be achieved if He grants them to the soul. On the other hand, the grace of God alone is not enough, as the disciple need to walk the other half of the way on his own. Thus, knowledge, wisdom and, consequently, perfection can only be achieved through divine providence and guidance, but also by personal effort, through study, research and rational thinking.

Since Clement believes that knowledge needs to be both granted by God and merited by the Gnostic, he advocates it should not be easily accessible. In the *Stromateis* he elucidates on how meaningful it is to veil the truth through symbolism and mysteries. On the one hand, he believes that not everybody is worthy of the truth, and therefore the truth is veiled by the mysteries of faith as protection, so that the “pearls” would not be thrown “in front of pigs, in case they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you” (*Strom.* 1.12.3).²¹⁹ On the other hand, he believes that the truth also needs to be veiled through symbolism as a trial, so that those who have gone through it and thus proved themselves worthy might find the true theology and the true philosophy (*Strom.* 5.9).

Because the process of enlightenment includes the veiling of the truth, Clement decided to fashion his own work in a similar way. Thus, he does not structure his work in a coherent manner, but rather scatter his thoughts in a random, intentionally confusing way, in order to require from the reader to study ardently each section and find the hidden connections that will grant him the knowledge that leads towards perfection.

Such way of structuring his work was actually in vogue at the time of Clement, as many other Christian groups shared the idea of knowledge as the key towards perfection

²¹⁹ J. Ferguson, *Stromateis Books 1-3* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 63.

– and, as was elaborated in chapter one, other non-Christian circles, such as Platonist, shared similar views on hiding the knowledge from the ‘unready.’²²⁰ The “Gnostic,” far from carrying the pejorative connotation of heresy which the academically constructed term “Gnosticism” inherited from early Christian heresiologists, was considered by almost every – if not all – Christian groups in second century Egypt as the highest degree of Christian perfection – albeit each group had their own understanding of what that meant.

3.1. Knowledge and love

For Clement, true perfection consisted in the knowledge and love of God (*Strom.* 4.25). As stated before, the Gnostic was someone who had been considered worthy of receiving the true knowledge (γνῶσις) of God, in part because of his own merits – through his effort, study and facing of trials, and also through his righteousness – and in part through the grace of God – as someone who has been chosen to receive faith regardless of merit.

Clement randomly scatters throughout his work an explanation of how one attains perfection, and as the reader advances he will encounter apparent contradictions. In book one Clement claims that faith comes from knowledge and that knowledge is needed to understand Scripture (*Strom.* 1.6; 1.9). But in book two he states that knowledge comes from faith (*Strom.* 2.2-4; 2.6; 2.11-12). This seemingly circular argument is clarified when Clement distinguishes between two types of faiths and two types of knowledge. In

²²⁰ The *Gospel of Thomas* is a fine example of how the author structured his text in an intentional chaotic fashion, in order that only those who put a considerate amount effort into cracking it would be able to understand it.

book five he mentions the common faith – which he calls the basis – and superior faith, which results from study (*Strom.* 5.1.5-6). And in book six he talks about the knowledge “which is universal to all men, the knowledge of individual objects” and the knowledge *par excellence*, which “bears the impression of judgment and reason” (*Strom.* 6.1).²²¹

So the path towards perfection would start with common faith, from which knowledge would develop through the grace of God. And the more knowledge the Gnostic acquired – through study and hard work – the more faith would be granted to him, as faith is also susceptible to growth and improvement (*Strom.* 7.10).

However, Clement emphasizes that “knowledge is the principal thing” (*Strom.* 6.10) and that knowledge is the *Logos*, the Savior himself (*Strom.* 6.1).²²² Here flourishes the underlying, deeper understanding of *gnosis* that Clement develops in his work. Knowledge for him is not only an intellectual endeavour – although that is an important part – but something that involves the whole being, including one’s action and, more importantly, one’s heart.

As was stated in the analysis of the *Pedagogus*, the idea of love is at the core of Clement’s theology. For him, perfection is the knowledge and love of God; one cannot be dissociated from the other (*Strom.* 4.25). In fact, for Clement the very notion of knowledge is intertwined with his conception of love: the Gnostic is someone who the illuminating Spirit is close to, someone who is closest to the mind of the Master (*Strom.* 6.15). In book seven, Clement dedicates a few sections to describe and explain what the Gnostic prayer is like. He argues that the Gnostic is the true worshipper of God, a holy

²²¹ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A. C. Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies” in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2: Fathers of the second century - Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 480.

²²² Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 498.

soul that does not need a temple to pray in, nor any special place nor specific day or festival. The Gnostic prayer is a conversation with God, from a pure mind, which is better than any sacrifice (*Strom.* 7.1; 7.5-7).

In other words, the Gnostic is a Gnostic – a bearer of the perfect knowledge – precisely because he loves God, and thus is close to Him and able to know and understand Him without the veil of mystery and ignorance. Hence, for Clement, love is closeness to God, and closeness to God is the source of true knowledge.

Besides closeness to God, for Clement the concept of love also plays a prominent role is the sense of love as purity of intention, in opposition to fear. That is central because it dictates the attitude with which one should live in the daily-basis, as good deeds done out of fear or any other reason than love are not considered valid, and much less holy.

For Clement, fear is a problematic emotion, as he believes that love should be sole engine for one's relationship with God. The Gnostic, who is emotionless, does not fear anything, as the future is already present for him through love, faith and trust in God. The stoic ideal of *apatheia* was the final goal, and so Clement insists that love, not fear, needs to be the motivation for one to be able to truly achieve perfection: “And as knowledge (*gnosis*) is not born with men, but is acquired, and the acquiring of it in its elements demands application, and training, and progress; and then from incessant practice it passes into habit; so, when perfected in the mystic habit, it abides, being infallible through love” (*Strom.* 6.9).²²³

Clement accuses other Christian groups, especially the followers of Valentius and Basilides, of coercing people through fear. He claims that one should not be afraid, for

²²³ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 498.

instance, of the divine punishment, because it is the enacting loving care of a father who cares for his children and thus corrects them (*Strom.* 2.8; 4.23). Clement also emphasizes that one should not be afraid even of death, and acclaims the true Gnostic who, “when called, obeys easily, and gives up his body to him who asks,” reassuring his audience that in heaven there are different degrees of glory, according to the worth of the believer (*Strom.* 4.4).²²⁴ Even though Clement hints the perspective of a reward in opposition to fear, he evidently does not endorse that one should seek God for the reward in itself. For Clement, it is imperative that one should seek perfection with a pure intention, solely for the sake of responding to the love of God. For him, it is the pious service of God that results a pious mind and knowledge (*Strom.* 7.7).

As stated before, Clement sees a correlation between knowledge and faith. Both grow in tandem, one pre-dispose and at the same time needs the other. And another element needed to achieve knowledge is righteousness, expressed through self-control, which also falls in the same logic: the Gnostic also needs to be righteous in order to achieve knowledge, while righteousness is something that he achieves through knowledge.

As circular as this reasoning may sound, it is all connected to the core idea of love. Love cannot exist without knowledge, as one cannot love what one does not know. So for Clement, the knowledge of God leads to the love of God, while the love of God leads to closeness to God which, by its turn, generates an ever deeper knowledge of God. It is as if the Gnostic’s relationship with God would grow in a spiral movement, seemingly going in circles but never ceasing to augment. And that relates to how the Gnostic lives his daily life.

²²⁴ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 411. See also *Strom.* 6.14.

3.2. Self-control and ‘bodyliness’

For Clement, the true Gnostic is an imitator of God (*Strom.* 2.19-20). And as the Savior “showed his self-control in all that he endured,” to the point of eating and drinking “in a way individual to himself without excreting his food” - since “such was his power of self-control that the food was not corrupted within him, since he was not subject to corruption” - so the Gnostics “embrace self-control out of the love we bear the Lord and out of its honorable status, consecrating the temple of the Spirit” (*Strom.* 3.7.59.4).²²⁵

So for Clement, the Gnostic was someone disciplined, who showed patience and self-restraint in imitation of God (*Strom.* 2.19-20). His self-discipline would have applied not only to sexual conduct, but everything else – from the way he or she dressed, spoke and behaved, to the possessions he or she had (*Strom.* 3.1). However, discipline was much more than just the external action and attitude. Clement describes self-control as freedom from desire itself: “It is not a matter of having desires and holding out against them, but actually of mastering desire by self-control” (*Strom.* 3.7.57.1).²²⁶ In this sense, Clement attributes to the Gnostic and to perfection the stoic ideal of *apatheia*.

For Clement, the Savior was “entirely impassible (*ἀπάθης*) inaccessible to feelings, either pleasure or pain,” as were the apostles, “unvarying in a state of training after the resurrection of the Lord”. And it was the goal of the Gnostic to imitate the Savior. So, once filled with love and knowledge of God, the Gnostic would become emotionless. He would not desire even the good, because due to knowledge he would

²²⁵ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 293.

²²⁶ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 291.

already be in the bliss – through the gain of the “light inaccessible” (*Strom.* 6.9).²²⁷ The perfect Gnostic would not have anything more to desire, because he already possessed everything he longed for.

Clement emphasizes that the Gnostic impassibility is not the same thing as the moderation of passion, because there is no passion left in the Gnostic. However, he emphasized that it was not possible to acquire such form of self-control except by the grace of God (*Strom.* 3.7.58). Clement understood that *apatheia* was the goal of perfection, towards which his disciples were aiming and which they had not yet achieved. Clement knew that the transformation required towards becoming a true Gnostic did not happen overnight. It was achieved after an arduous path of instruction, self-denial and trial. So he guided his disciples with patience, with pedagogy. He defended those who were not yet able to take a further step. And he emphasized the need of an instructor in order to accomplish the task at hand – and the instructor *par excellence* was the *Logos* himself (*Strom.* 6.17).

So the first step towards knowledge and perfection was not *apatheia* itself, but a more outward self-discipline, which involved the detachment from frivolousness of the body and of all the passions (*Strom.* 5.11). Self-restraint should be exercised and practiced in every aspect of daily life, as elaborated more specifically in the *Pedagogus*, from clothes, gossip and diet to table manners. Together with the study and faith, it was daily-conduct that would help the aspirant to master knowledge and grow into a true Gnostic.

In the *Stromateis*, Clement takes the discussion on self-control to another level. Aware of the ‘bodyliness’ that passion and self-restraint involve, Clement lays on his work a battle ground in order to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, Clement

²²⁷ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 497.

articulates his argument in the form of an apology, mining the teachings of other Christian schools of his time regarding the body and matter. On the other hand, he profits his very apologetic arguments to articulate a defense of marriage and sexuality.

It is no surprise that Clement's work should take the tone of an apology every now and then. He lived in the most cosmopolitan city of the world, where Egyptians, Greeks, Jews and now Christians tried to co-exist among their differences, and where diverse Christian schools flourished and struggled to assert their authority. At the very beginning of the *Stromateis*, Clement anticipates critiques and starts off with a justification of his work and of apostolic tradition (*Strom.* 1.1-2). Clement, however, seems more worried with his disciples than with his opposition *per se*. In book seven he mentions people who did not want to join the faith on account of divisions, and lays a fulminant attack on what he considered to be heresy, naming Scripture as the criterion to distinguish the truth and evoking the authority of the tradition of the Church and apostolic succession (7.15-18). It seems Clement did not want to attack his objectors directly, but rather convince his audience of his own authority and loads them with arguments, so that they could decide for themselves and convince others.

When it comes to the issue of 'bodyliness,' Clement had a lot to respond to. Several other Christian groups taught that the body was intrinsically evil, and Clement is careful in distinguishing himself – since he too preached a self-restraint that was harsh on the body – by asserting the goodness of creation. He argues, for instance, on the third book of the *Stromateis*, that birth is not bad because of the struggles and temptation that follow; on the contrary, it is good because of the chance of redemption and perfection that it offers (*Strom.* 3.16). In this sense, for Clement, hatred of the body was considered

ingratitude towards the creator, and the very weakness that it presented could be used in favor of becoming a perfect Gnostic – as a trial that, once vanquished, would help achieve perfection.

Clement condemns other Christian groups for erroneously labeling the body as intrinsically evil. For instance, he responded to those who proposed that Jesus could not have had a real body – arguing that having a body would denigrate his divinity²²⁸ - by writing that the Saviour did not have bodily needs, but that:

(...) he ate not for the sake of the body, which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the minds of those who were with Him to entertain a different opinion of Him; in like manner as certainly some afterwards supposed that He appeared in a phantasmal shape (δοκησεί) (*Strom.* 6.9).²²⁹

However, other Christian schools were not the only target for Clement's accusation. He enumerates several Greek philosophers, poets and authoritative Greco-Roman figures, quoting different instances where they would have proclaimed that the body is intrinsically evil and that birth is a regretful event. In the midst of his quotations, he also quotes the Sibyl:

Heraclitus certainly deprecates birth when he says, 'Once born they have a desire to live and have their dooms,' or rather enjoy their rest, 'and they leave behind children to become dooms.' Empedocles is clearly of the same mind when he says,

I wept and wailed when I saw the unfamiliar face,
and again,

For out of living creatures he made corpses, changing their forms,
and once more,

Oh! Oh! Unhappy race of mortals, unblest!

Out of what strife, what groans were you born.

Further, the Sibyl says,

You are human, mortal, and fleshly, and are nothing.

This is not far from the poet's words:

Earth nurtures nothing feebler than a human being (*Strom.* 3.3.14.1-3).²³⁰

²²⁸ For instance, the followers of Basilides, of Marcion and the adepts of doceticism, whose schools taught that Jesus did not have a physical body, and only appeared to have one as in an illusion.

²²⁹ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," 469.

²³⁰ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 265. Clement quotes from *SibOr* frag. 1.1.

Here the Sibyl is quoted in the midst of several Greek authors, before and after, in a way that Clement does not differentiate her at all. He does not attribute any title to her, but simply calls her “the Sibyl”. However, what is most striking is that he is actually quoting her in a negative way. This is the first and only time that Clement cites the Sibyl not as an authoritative figure in order to support his claims, but as a shameful example of reproachful Greek error.

This puzzling piece of evidence certainly brings up some new questions to the equation. One possibility arises from the fact that in the *Stromateis* Clement refers for the first time to the *Sibyls*, in the plural. Could he be reproaching one of the prophetesses, while praising others? He certainly does not make it clear at this point, and perhaps the best strategy is to continue the analysis and compare this specific quotation with the others in the entirety of his work.

Within the issue of bodylines and goodness of creation, a frequent theme that always arises in the discussion is that of sexuality. Although sexuality is not the only field where one must exercise self-control, it seems that the divergence of views regarding sex and marriage among Christian groups really pinched a nerve from Clement. He begins book three by thoroughly describing the view of his opponents – or rather what he understood of it – and, accusing them of being heresies, which he divides into two groups: “Either they teach a way of life which makes no distinction between right and wrong or their hymn is too highly strung and they acclaim asceticism out of a spirit of irreligious quarrelsomeness” (*Strom.* 3.5.40.2).²³¹ Thus, for Clement, other Christian groups either used several pretexts in order to exercise licentiousness, or used practiced abstinence against creation and the creator (*Strom.* 3.4; 3.6).

²³¹ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 280.

It is clear from the way that Clement described several of his objector's teachings on marriage that he was trying to find a middle ground between the rejection of marriage – or at least the view that it was preferable not to marry – and the legitimating of sexual pleasure within marriage (*Strom.* 3.1-2).²³² The acetic view seemed to pose a greater challenge for Clement, since he preached self-restraint and freedom from desire (*apatheia*) himself. So he is quick in pointing out that not all asceticism is good:

There are some who in their hatred of the flesh ungratefully yearn to be free from marital agreement and participation in decent food. They are ignorant and irreligious. Their self-control is irrational (*Strom.* 3.7.60.1).²³³

On the one hand, he insists in the need of practicing self-control within marriage. On the other hand, he also emphasizes that marriage was a good thing, particularly because it is through marriage that children are produced. He tries to differentiate himself by distinguishing the sexual act which is the result of a disciplined act of the will from that which results from sheer sexual desire:

In general, let our affirmation about marriage, food and the rest proceed: we should never act from desire; our will should be concentrated on necessities. We are children of will, not of desire. If a man marries in order to have children he ought to practice self-control. He ought not to have a sexual desire even for his wife, to whom he has a duty to show Christian love.²³⁴ He ought to produce children by a reverent, disciplined act of will (*Strom.* 3.7.58.1-2).²³⁵

Clement argues that extreme opinion regarding marriage should be avoided, and quotes – or rather interprets – Paul in the defense of marriage:

Again, when Paul says, 'It is good for a man not to have contact with a woman, but to avoid immorality let each have his own wife,' he offers a kind of exegesis by saying further, 'to prevent Satan from tempting you.' In the words 'by using your lack of self-

²³² The first is exemplified by the view from the sect of Valentinus and the followers of Basilides who according to Clement did not disapprove marriage altogether, but consider those who have made themselves eunuchs as having made a better choice, since they see marriage as a distraction. The other extreme is exemplified by Clement as the Carpocrates and Epiphanes, who would have thought that wives should be held in common, and who were, according to Clement, the ones guilty for the ill-repute ascribed to Christians.

²³³ Ferguson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 293.

²³⁴ Here the translator notes that Clement is contrasting ἀγάπη, "unconditional love," with ἔρωσ, "sexual passion," and ἐπιθυμία, "sexual desire." See Ferguson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 292 (footnote 222).

²³⁵ Ferguson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 292.

control' he is addressing not those who practice marriage through self-control solely for the production of children, but those with a passionate desire to go beyond the production of children (*Strom.* 3.15.96.1-2).²³⁶

Clement returns here to a topic that was extensively argued in the *Pedagogus*: the defense of marriage and of licit sexual relationships – that is, within marriage and with the purpose of begetting children. As was previously stated, Peter Brown proposes that Clement's audience was the Christian married laity, and that Clement wanted to reassure these couples that they could aspire to the Gnostic ideal of perfection without giving up their marriage and sexuality – as some Christian schools seemed to have been suggesting.

²³⁷

Later on, in book four, Clement interprets Mt 5.28 – “But I say to you, that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” – arguing that “it was not bare desire that was condemned; but if through the desire the act that results from it proceeding beyond the desire is accomplished in it. For dream employs fantasy and the body” (*Strom.* 4.18).²³⁸ He continues:

(...) if along with the sight of the woman he imagined in his mind intercourse, for this is already the act of lust, as lust; but if one looks on beauty of person (the Word says), and the flesh seem to him in the way of lust to be fair, looking on carnally and sinfully, he is judged because he admired. (...) For, on the other hand, he who in chaste love looks on beauty, thinks not that the flesh is beautiful, but the spirit, admiring, as I judge, the body as an image, by whose beauty he transports himself to the Artist, and to the true beauty (*Strom.* 4.18).²³⁹

For Clement, the flesh was not bad. He argues that “the soul of man is confessedly the better part of man, and the body the inferior. But neither is the soul good by nature, nor, on the other hand, is the body bad by nature.” He thus proposes that “there are things which occupy a middle place, and among them are things to be preferred, and

²³⁶ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 316.

²³⁷ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 135-137.

²³⁸ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 430.

²³⁹ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 430.

things to be rejected” (*Strom.* 4.26).²⁴⁰ He then throws in a cryptic argument, where he states:

For all things are of one God. And no one is a stranger to the world by nature, their essence being one, and God one. But the elect man dwells as a sojourner, knowing all things to be possessed and disposed of (...) (*Strom.* 4.26).²⁴¹

What seems to be implied by Clement in his discussion regarding the body is that there is a hierarchy in perfection: there are things which are good, others which are better and others yet that are best. The body and even desire in itself are not bad. He writes: “The soul is not then sent down from heaven to what is worse. For God works all things up to what is better” (*Strom.* 4.26).²⁴² However, the organization of the senses tends to knowledge, and the members and parts of the body are to be arranged for good, not for pleasure. Therefore, the person who strives to become the perfect Gnostic must leave even what is good – i.e. not intrinsically bad – for what is better; and later on his or her path towards perfection, what is better for what is best. This transformation takes place gradually, as the soul learns how to detach from desire and how to unite herself with God. *Apatheia* is the final stage, the goal; Clement understands that in order to achieve it, however, it takes a process, in which those who aspire for perfection need to let themselves be guided by the instructor in order to be gradually transformed. And in the meantime, desire is a reality of the nature, which should not be suppressed as if it was an evil in itself, but mastered through self-control, as an obstacle that can teach the soul how to grow in virtue. The metamorphosis into the true Gnostic of the *Protrepticus* is thus shown in the *Stromateis* to be a gradual process.

²⁴⁰ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 439-440.

²⁴¹ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 440.

²⁴² Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 440.

3.3. The true Gnostic

At some instances, particularly in the last books of the *Stromateis*, Clement zooms out from the theme of ‘bodyliness’, and addresses the broad definition of the true Gnostic. It is important to remember that in Alexandrian Christianity, the figure of the Gnostic was prominent within most groups, but what each one understood by the term and how one is supposed to achieve *gnosis* varied greatly. Clement sought not only to differentiate himself by explaining what it meant to be a Gnostic, but also to assert his authority through claiming the knowledge of what the true Gnostic was like.

It is impossible to summarize Clement’s “true Gnostic” with a single word. This complex, perfect person, man or woman alike,²⁴³ was “as pious, and as patient, and as continent, and as worker, and as martyr, and as Gnostic” (*Strom.* 4.21).²⁴⁴ The true Gnostic was a man or a woman of understanding and perspicacity, to whom “the flesh is dead; (...) having consecrated the sepulcher into a holy temple to the Lord, having turned towards God the old sinful soul” (*Strom.* 4.22).²⁴⁵ Clement further says that true perfection consists in the knowledge and love of God, “such as one is no longer continent, but has reached a state of ‘passionlessness’; waiting to put on the divine image” (*Strom.* 4.22).²⁴⁶

This last expression, “to put on the divine image” is particularly powerful because it evokes the transformation – where one blends into the divine – which was addressed in the *Protrepticus*, and which is also the underlying goal of the *Pedagogus*. And the core of

²⁴³ It is worth noting that Clement expressly emphasizes several times that women and men alike, as well as slaves and freemen alike are all called to perfection, and to give their lives as martyrs if the occasion asks it from them. For instance, *Stromateis* 4.8 and 4.19-20.

²⁴⁴ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 433.

²⁴⁵ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 434.

²⁴⁶ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 434-435.

all the elements that make the Gnostic perfect – from *apatheia* to faith and knowledge – is love of God. As Clement summarizes the path towards perfection:

For he (Solomon) teaches, as I think, that true instruction is desire for knowledge; and the practical exercise of instruction produces love of knowledge. And love is the keeping of the commandments which lead to knowledge. And the keeping of them is the establishment of the commandments, from which immortality results. And immortality brings us near to God (*Strom.* 6.15).²⁴⁷

In this sense, to be a Gnostic is to be the closest to the mind of the Master (*Strom.* 6.15), “as near as possible to God” (*Strom.* 7.7).²⁴⁸ To express this unity with the divine, Clement beautifully describes the Gnostic prayer:

(...) the eagerness of the spirit directed towards the intellectual essence; and endeavoring to abstract the body from the earth, along with the discourse, raising the soul aloft, winged with longing for better things; we compel it to advance to the region of holiness, magnanimously despising the chain of the flesh (*Strom.* 7.7).²⁴⁹

As noted before, Clement did not consider the flesh and the body as something bad, but he established a hierarchy of things that are good, better and best. And although the goal was the best things, Clement understood that there was a progressive work to be done in the soul, which would take time, and effort. And he also asserted that, “since our soul was too weak to grasp the true realities, we need a divine master,” the Savior (*Strom.* 5.1.7.8).²⁵⁰ As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, Clement believes that perfection is only achieved by the joining of the grace of God and the effort of the one seeking perfection. It is the Savior, the instructor, who comes to the aid of the frail human; through the Savior “our foolish and darkened mind springs up to the light” (*Strom.* 4.17).²⁵¹ For Clement, knowledge itself – the *Logos* – teaches the ignorant

²⁴⁷ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 508.

²⁴⁸ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 506 and 534.

²⁴⁹ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 534.

²⁵⁰ A. Le Boulluec and P. Voulet, *Les Stromates: Stromate V*. Volume I (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1981), 37. Originally translated to French: “Puisque notre âme était trop faible pour saisir les vraies réalités, nous avons besoin d’un maître divin.”

²⁵¹ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 429.

(*Strom.* 4.22). And the Gnostic is also called to be an instructor and a testimony to others: “thanksgiving and request for the conversion of our neighbours is the function of the Gnostic” (*Strom.* 7.7).

The Gnostic is called to seek the common good and edify others through his words and through his teaching, and also by his deeds, by being an example of temperance (*Strom.* 4.15). Moreover, the love of God and of one’s neighbours should also, according to Clement, lead the Gnostic towards martyrdom, if necessary (*Strom.* 4.18). He writes:

Those who witness in their life by deed, and at the tribunal by word, whether entertaining hope or surmising fear, are better than those who confess salvation by their mouth alone. But if one ascends also with love, he is really blessed and true martyr, having confessed perfectly both to the commandments and to God (...) (*Strom.* 4.9).²⁵²

Clement reproaches those who seek martyrdom on their own, accusing those who “out of daring present themselves for capture” of being “an accomplice in the crime of the prosecutor” (*Strom.* 4.10).²⁵³ But he insists in clarifying that martyrdom is a good thing when necessary, and he is quick in reproaching other Christian group’s views regarding the martyrs (*Strom.* 4.11-13).

One point of particular interest, which has been previously discussed, is that Clement is concerned with the intention behind the action. For him, seeking martyrdom – as well as practicing self-restraint – out of fear or for the sake of a reward does not count for anything. The intention needs to be pure; one must seek *gnosis* and perfection out of love for God, and nothing more. However, that does not keep Clement from promoting the reward of the Gnostic. He writes on chapter 16 of the fourth book: “those who have

²⁵² Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 422.

²⁵³ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 423.

been perfect in love, through the grace of God, shall have the place of the godly at the kingdom of Christ” (*Strom.* 4.16). Further on that same chapter he writes:

The same work, then, presents a difference, according as it is done by fear, or accomplished by love, and is wrought by faith or by knowledge. Rightly, therefore, their rewards are different. To the Gnostic 'are prepared what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of men;' but to him who has exercised simple faith He testifies a hundredfold in return for what he has left (*Strom.* 4.18).²⁵⁴

The path towards perfection is, then, a complex one. It involves several elements and is not a linear, predictable endeavor. Clement sums it up in the following manner:

Gnostic attains proficiency not only by making use of the law as a step, but by understanding and comprehending it (...). And if he conducts himself rightly (...) and if, further, having made an eminently right confession, he becomes a martyr out of love, (...) not even thus will he be called perfect in the flesh beforehand; since it is the close of life which claims the appellation, when the Gnostic martyr has (...) yielded up the ghost: blessed then will he be, and truly proclaimed perfect, 'that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us,' as the apostle says (*Strom.* 4.21).²⁵⁵

Clement’s description of the true Gnostic was not an apology aimed solely against other Christian groups. Throughout the *Stromateis* he hints another source of friction: non-Christian Greeks. On book seven he writes that the Gnostic, being the true worshipper of God, is unjustly calumniated by unbeliever as atheists – possibly drawing from the general accusation against second century Christians of atheism (*Strom.* 7.1). He begins book six by introducing it as “a compendious exhibition of the Gnostic religion” in order to “show the philosopher that the Gnostic is by no means impious, as they suppose, but rather that he alone is truly pious” (*Strom.* 6.1).²⁵⁶

Clement begins his defense by quoting Paul and arguing that ““this worldly wisdom is folly in God’s eyes”” (*Strom.* 1.11 quoting 1 Cor 3.19-21),²⁵⁷ and that:

“This very God thought it right through the folly of what we preach” – folly in the eyes of the Greeks – “to save those who have faith. Since Jews,” he goes on, “demand signs” – to induce

²⁵⁴ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 430.

²⁵⁵ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 433.

²⁵⁶ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 480.

²⁵⁷ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 59.

faith – “and Greeks look for wisdom, (...) but we preach Jesus Christ nailed to a cross, a stumbling block to Jews (...) and folly to the Greeks” (*Strom.* 1.18.88.3-4).²⁵⁸

Since the audience of the *Stromateis* was a group of converts, Clement was likely not addressing his adversaries directly, as he does in the *Protrepticus*, which is aimed to a non-Christian Greek audience. Once more, Clement is likely answering the concerns of his disciples who might have encountered adversaries in their daily-life, and he was aiming to empower them with arguments both to strengthen them in their faith, and also so that they could defend it.

3.4. Inversion of discourse: appropriation and claim for precedence

Clement’s strategy in the *Stromateis* consists in attacking and appropriating Greek philosophy, in a very similar way from what he did in the *Protrepticus*. He begins by arguing how everything, from art to prophecy, proceeds from God (*Strom.* 1.4). And since for Clement there is one absolute truth, he claims that Greeks and non-Greeks alike have grasped some portion of the truth – and consequently of the *Logos*:

So in the same way, philosophy, Greek and non-Greek, has made of the eternal truth a kind of dismembering (...). If anyone brings together the scattered limbs into a unity, you can be quite sure without risk of error that he will gaze on the Word in his fullness, the Truth (*Strom.* 1.13.57.6).²⁵⁹

For Clement, Greek philosophy ultimately derives from God and thus it contributes to the comprehension of the truth and is good, as long as it paves the way for divine virtue and defends the truth by blocking out sophistry (*Strom.* 1.7; 1.20). However, Clement emphasizes that the philosophers have attained but a limited fraction of the truth, a glimpse that was covered by symbolism (*Strom.* 5.3). For Clement, only through the

²⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 88.

²⁵⁹ Ferguson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 65.

Logos, the Savior and instructor, one was able to acquire the full knowledge of the whole truth (*Strom.* 1.19-20).

Furthermore, Clement claims not only that Greek philosophy is just partially accurate, but also that whatever portion of the truth available through Greek poetry and philosophy was only possible due to plagiarism. Clement envisages proving his point not only through exhaustive examples of alleged proofs of Greek plagiarism, but first and foremost by rationalizing that the Greeks had already plagiarized non-Greek peoples – who Clement labels as ‘barbarians’. He names different authoritative figures that were or got part of their knowledge from non-Greeks: Homer was Egyptian, Thales was Phoenician and Zoroaster was Persian (*Strom.* 1.15). Clement includes the Sibyl in his list, arguing that:

Heraclitus claims that the Sibyl’s discernment of the future was not humanly achieved but divinely inspired. At any rate, they say that a rock can be seen near a council chamber at Delphi on which the first Sibyl is said to have sat; she had been brought up by Muses and was daughter to Lamia and granddaughter to Poseidon. Sarapion in his epic says that the Sibyl does not cease prophesying even after death and that after death part of her passes into air, and it is that which provides the prophetic element in prophecies and omens. Her body is changed to earth and out of it, as you would expect, a grass grows, and all the animals who browse on that grass at that particular spot show human beings a precise delineation of the future through their entrails (so he writes). He thinks her soul is the face which appears in the moon (*Strom.* 1.15.70.3-4).²⁶⁰

In this sense, Clement argues that even the Sibyl did not prophecy originally from its Greekness, but drew from somewhere else – that is, from God. And the same argument is applied for every single authoritative Greek philosopher, poet or writer whose work is approved by Clement. For instance, Plato is labeled as an imitator of Moses in framing laws (*Strom.* 1.25). Socrates, in his belief on life after death, would also be drawing from the Jews (*Strom.* 5.2). The Greeks would have, moreover, drawn ethics

²⁶⁰ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 75.

from the Mosaic Law and the Sacred writers (*Strom.* 2.5; 2.18). The bottom line was to prove the Greeks guilty of theft and to show how divine providence worked through it:

Philosophy was not sent out by the Lord, but came, says Scripture, either as an object of theft or robber's gift. Some power, some angel learned a portion of the truth, but did not remain within the truth, and stole these things and taught them to human beings by way of inspiration. The Lord (...) knew all about this but did not stop it. For the transmission of the theft to human beings did bring some advantage at the time – not that the thief had the advantage in view! – but Providence straightened out the result of the crime and turned it to our advantage. (*Strom.* 1.17.81.4-5).²⁶¹

He continues further by claiming that “‘The Shepherd, the angel of repentance’ says to Hermas about the false prophet, ‘He speaks some words of truth.’” (*Strom.* 1.17.85.4), and by arguing that:

(...) the supreme example of God's Providence lies in his not allowing the evil which springs from that freely chosen rebellion to lie in unprofitable uselessness, still less to become totally baneful. It is the work of divine wisdom, excellence, and power not only to create good (...) but above all to bring a course of action devised through some evil intentions to a god, valuable conclusion, and to make beneficial use of things which seem bad, like the emergence of martyrdom from a time of trial. So there is in philosophy, stolen as it were by Prometheus, a little fire which blazes up helpfully into a useful light; a trace of wisdom, an impulse about God (*Strom.* 1.17.86.2-87.1).²⁶²

Clement thus articulate a rhetoric of reverse pride, where he asserts and congratulates the goodness in Greek philosophy, limits it through partiality and now ascribes what is left of merit to the Jews, whose institutions and laws are argued to be of far higher antiquity and wisdom (*Strom.* 1.21). In order to corroborate his reasoning, Clement quotes de Sibyl again:

Not only Moses. The Sibyl too antedates Orpheus. Many accounts of her and the oracles attributed to her are recorded: that she came from Phrygia, was called Artemis, came to Delphi, and gave utterance:

*People of Delphi, servants of far-shooting Apollo,
I am come to proclaim the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus,
in anger against my brother Apollo.*

There is another Sibyl at Erythrae, called Herophile. Both are mentioned by Heraclides of Pontus in his work *On Oraclular Shrines*. I omit the Sibyls of Egypt and Italy (living in the

²⁶¹ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 85.

²⁶² Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 88.

Cermalus at Rome, mother of Evander who established the shrine of Pan in Rome called the Lupercal) (*Strom.* 1.21.108.1-3).²⁶³

Here Clement refers to the Sibyls in the plural, which he only does in the first book of the *Stromateis*. Because his main goal is to assert the antiquity of the Sibyl – which was supposed to have been a given – Clement seems to be referring to every single title she had in Antiquity as known from authoritative authors. Mischa Hooker corroborates this view, arguing that here Clement is presumably transcribing someone else’s list – likely someone who had a great deal of authority in the Greco-Roman world.

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With his accusations of theft and plagiarism Clement attempts to rationalize the Christian faith through Greek culture and philosophy. He claims that the *Logos* is the inspiration of Greek philosophy, as well as Judaism, and thus that it is logical for Greeks and Jews to adhere to Christianity, the full version of the truth that they have contemplated only partially (*Strom.* 6.3). He argues, supposedly quoting the Apostle Peter: “(...) the one and only God was known by the Greeks in a Gentile way, by the Jews Judaically, and in a new and spiritual way by us” (*Strom.* 6.5).²⁶⁵

In chapter fourteen of the fifth book of the *Stromateis*, Clement takes his argument of plagiarism to an eschatological level, describing how the Greeks drew from the Hebrews – and ultimately from Christians, through the *Logos* – in regards to theological themes such as cosmology and angelology. Clement’s main concern, however, is that of monotheism, and he quotes examples of authoritative Greek figures – from Plato and Xenophon to Sophocles and Heraclitus – who would have testified that there is

²⁶³ Fergunson, *Stromateis Books 1-3*, 106.

²⁶⁴ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 91.

²⁶⁵ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 489. Here Clement is quoting the Pseudepigrapha text known as *Peter’s Preaching*.

but one God, and that Greeks only practiced idolatry because they had not grasped the whole truth. In the midst of these examples, Clement quotes the Sibyl:

Quelle chair peut voir de ses yeux le Dieu supra céleste et véritable, le Dieu immortel, qui habite le pôle? Ils ne peuvent même pas soutenir en face les rayons du soleil, les hommes, qui sont nés mortels, ' a déclaré la Sibylle auparavant (Strom. 5.14.108.6).²⁶⁶

He continues quoting other examples of Greek figures – for instance, Sophocles and Heraclitus – and ends this section with a quotation from Deuteronomy 6.4 and an isolated quotation from fragment 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles*:

Voici en effet d'où découle cette opinion de vérité : 'Écoute, Israël, dit l'Écriture, le Seigneur ton Dieu est unique, et tu n'adoreras que lui.' 'Regardez : le voici, évident pour tous, infallible', comme dit la Sibylle (Strom. 5.14.115.5-6).²⁶⁷

In these quotations, Clement is evoking the Sibyl once more as a Greek authoritative figure, and although he is relying on her Greekness in a positive way – as an example of Greek acknowledgement of the truth – she is being used to criticize Greek religion. A few paragraphs after quoting the Sibyl, Clement states that every human being has a natural, unlearned apprehension of the father and creator of the universe (*Strom.* 5.14.133.7). Nevertheless, he states that the Apostle Paul also indicates that although God is Lord not only of the Jews, but also of the Greeks, when it comes to the sphere of knowledge He is not their God, since they have no clue of who He is and ignore the truth about him (*Strom.* 5.14.134.2).

Clement continues his argument on how God pedagogically expressed himself differently to each people, according to their language and culture – through philosophy to the Greeks and through prophecy to the Jews – but how in all cases God would have

²⁶⁶ Le Boulluec and Voulet, *Les Stromates: Stromate V*, 205. Clement quotes from SibOr frag. 1.10-13.

²⁶⁷ Le Boulluec and Voulet, *Les Stromates: Stromate V*, 215.

done so through the *Logos*, thus repeating his argument of precedence and uniqueness of the Christian race which he worked on the *Protrepticus*:

Accordingly, then, from the Hellenic training, and also that from the law, are gathered into the one race of the saved people those who accept faith: not that the three peoples are separated by time, so that one might suppose three natures, but trained in different Covenants of the one Lord, by the word of the one Lord (*Strom.* 6.5).²⁶⁸

Within this argument, Clement quotes the Sibyl once more, relying on her Greekness:

(...) in addition to “*Peter’s Preaching*,” the Apostle Paul will show, saying: “Take also the Hellenic books, read the Sibyl, how it is shown that God is one, and how the future is indicated. And taking Hystaspes, read, and you will find much more luminously and distinctly the Son of God described, and how many kings shall draw up their forces against Christ, hating Him and those that bear His name, and His faithful ones, and His patience, and His coming (*Strom.* 6.5).²⁶⁹

Here Clement claims that Paul exhorted the reading of the *Sibylline Oracles*, as well as other pseudepigrapha “pagan” oracles such as the *Oracle of Hystaspes*.²⁷⁰ His goal is to emphasize “pagan” testimonies of monotheism, which he had already done in the *Protrepticus* (*Protr.* 6.71.4; 7.74; 8.77.2). Nevertheless, in the *Protrepticus* Clement refers to the Sibyl as a Hebrew prophetess, an originally Greek authoritative figure that had been appropriated due to her extensive knowledge of the truth, whereas in the *Stromateis* the quotation is inserted in book six, where Clement attempts to prove the

²⁶⁸ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 489-490.

²⁶⁹ Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, “The Stromata, or Miscellanies,” 490.

²⁷⁰ The *Oracle of Hystaspes* is a supposedly Persian oracle that is not extant, except for a few fragments in patristic works. Although scholarship is divided between two parties regarding the authorship of the oracle – one asserts the Iranian authenticity of the text, while the other argues that it was most likely a Judeo-Christian forgery – early Christians read the *Oracle of Hystaspes* as a genuine ‘pagan’ prophecy, which conveyed an apocalyptic prophecy of the coming of the Savior. The *Oracle of Hystaspes* is commonly quoted by patristic authors along with the *Sibylline Oracles*, and at least for Clement Hystaspes seems to have played the same role of the Sibyl – as a ‘pagan’ authoritative figure with a monotheistic message. For two recent studies on the subject, see Flusser, D. “*Hystaspes* and John of Patmos.” *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988) as well as Hinnels, J.R. “The Zoroastrian Doctrine of Salvation in the Roman World: a Study of the *Oracle of Hystaspes*.” *Man and His Salvation: Studies in Memory of S.G.F. Brandon* (Edd. Sharpe, E.J. and Hinnels, J.R. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973).

limitation and distortion of Greek thought. Although in both cases Clement is arguing for Christian precedence, the role of the Sibyl changes immensely.

Clement dedicates the last books of the *Stromateis* to assert the usefulness and validity of Greek philosophy – claiming that every branch of study contributes to the knowledge of the truth, and asserting the necessity of the Gnostic to occupy him or herself also with Greek philosophy (*Strom.* 6.10; 6.18) – while alerting his disciples that it is an imitation that gives the illusion of truth – comparing it to geometry, which gives two dimensional drawings the illusion of three dimensions (*Strom.* 6.7) – and thus should be considered with caution and prudence, claiming that ultimately the soul needs an instructor, and not an imitation (*Strom.* 6.17). Considering that by the time the disciple would have reached the end of the *Stromateis* he or she would be as close to becoming a Gnostic as one can get, the striking change in the role attributed to the Sibyl may be understood in the broader context of a shift from Greek to Christian thought that underlines Clement’s trilogy.

4. The Sibyl in the work of Clement of Alexandria

Mischa Hooker argues that the evidence for a positive view of the Sibyl in medieval times mislead scholars to transfer that same reading to Antiquity, thus exaggerating the positive regard towards the Sibyl by early Christian authors.²⁷¹ For Hooker, however, Clement is one of the few Christian authors who hold the Sibyl as a positive figure, to the point of assimilating her as a Hebrew prophetess.²⁷² Nevertheless, after the analysis on this chapter it is clear that the positive view of the Sibyl developed

²⁷¹ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 9 and 14.

²⁷² Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 17.

by Clement in the *Protrepticus* is in direct collision with the sometimes indifferent, sometimes negative view in the *Stromateis*.

Hooker developed his analysis upside down, starting with the end, that is, with the *Stromateis*, and moving towards the *Protrepticus*, presenting Clement's appropriation of the Sibyl as a gradual process. However, the *Stromateis* is the last step in Clement's three-fold work, and the view of the Sibyl presented there should be considered as his conclusion, not his point of departure. Hence, through his works, Clement's view of the Sibyl deteriorates rather than improves.

According to Hooker's mapping, Clement quotes the Sibyl 17 times: 8 in the *Protrepticus*, 2 in the *Pedagogus* and 7 times in the *Stromateis*. Within these quotes, Clement does not name the Sibyl nor specify that he is quoting her 4 times – three in the *Protrepticus* and one in the *Pedagogus*.²⁷³ When he does refer to the Sibyl and explicitly attributes the quotation to her, he usually refers to her in the singular. He only mentions a plurality of Sibyls twice in the *Stromateis*, both quotations happening close to one another.²⁷⁴

From the thirteen explicit quotations, Clement refers to the Sibyl as an authoritative Greek figure 11 times – 64% of the total quotations, 84% of the total explicit quotations. In the *Protrepticus*, he gradually sets the Sibyl aside, by quoting her as a voice of dissonance who criticizes Greek religion, a prophet who spoke the truth because she was inspired by God, and finally assimilates her fully as a Hebrew prophetess, who supports Clement's claim for Christian precedence through the *Logos*.

²⁷³ *Protrepticus* 6.70.2; 7.74.6; 10.96.4 and *Pedagogus* 2.10.99.1-2 respectively.

²⁷⁴ The first one on *Stromateis* 1.21.108.1-3 and the second on 1.21.132.3

Nevertheless, as Clement advances to the following steps of his three-fold work, he gradually distances himself from the Sibyl, going back from his full assimilation in the *Protrepticus* to a seemingly neutral position in the *Pedagogus* – where the Sibyl is quoted as an authoritative Greek figure who seems to somehow be set aside – and culminates into a degradation in the *Stromateis*. Although the Sibyl remains as a prominent authoritative figure in most of the quotations of the *Stromateis*, she is now fully Greek again. In Clement’s argument of precedence, the Sibyl is not evidence of Christian superiority, but of Greek theft and plagiarism (*Strom.* 1.15.70.3-4). If she criticizes idolatry and recognizes the truth, that is not mentioned to set her apart as in the *Protrepticus*. Instead, she is quoted among many other Greek figures, without any hint of special relevance, simply to show the incoherence within Greek culture and Greek religion itself (*Strom.* 5.14.108.6; 5.15.115.6; 6.5.43.1). Finally, it is in the *Stromateis* that Clement refers negatively to the Sibyl for the first time, quoting her among other Greek authors to show their error in proclaiming that the body is intrinsically evil (*Strom.* 3.3.14.3).

Could Clement be fluctuating in his opinion of the Sibyl because he is making a distinction between many different Sibyls? Because of his reference to more than one Sibyl in the *Stromateis*, we know that Clement was aware of the existence of diverse Sibyls, and he could have been praising the Hebrew Sibyl in particular and referring to another Sibyl in his negative comments. Although a possibility, Clement does not hint in any moment that he is differentiating between one Sibyl and another. Moreover, in this particular passage where Clement refers to the plurality of Sibyls, he is quoting them

somewhat positively – although not as positively as in the *Protrepticus* – arguing for their antiquity.

Hooker proposes that Clement is particularly concerned in these quotations with giving a prominent place in the chronology of wisdom to the Sibyl.²⁷⁵ Therefore, if Clement was making a distinction between Sibyls, this would have been the key moment to clarify which Sibyls are set apart for their God-inspired prophecies, and which are filled with Greek error and misguidance. Since Clement does not hint this distinction at any moment, we may assume he did not differentiate one Sibyl from another.

A different way of approaching the problem is to go back to the *Protrepticus*, and to remember that in that book Clement tries to conciliate two paradoxical understandings of the Sibyl: as Greek and, at the same time, as Christian – in the sense that it is a prophecy inspired by the *Logos*, which is accomplished by the *Logos*, in the same way that the Hebrew prophets were understood by Clement.

To explain this paradox I proposed what was called the “theory of the spectrum”, according to which Clement would see all forms of human knowledge and philosophy as having its ultimate origin in God – and consequently, in the Word of God. For Clement, however, the truth was veiled, the *Logos* inspired different people in different degrees, and all forms of knowledge grasped only parts of the truth: some more, some less.

In this sense, in one extreme of the spectrum Clement would put Greek authors who are in complete opposition to the truth, such as the Sophists or the accounts of Homer where he narrates what Clement considers to be the immoral behavior of the gods. On the other extreme of the spectrum Clement would place truth itself, the knowledge of which can only be achieved through a perfect union with God. For Clement, the only

²⁷⁵ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 190.

person who could be placed in this extreme along with God would be the true Gnostic, he or she who attained this perfect relationship and, transformed by the *Logos*, would have achieved perfection and *apatheia*, and thus would be able to see God without a veil, and contemplate the truth fully, as it is.

Everything else, from Hebrew prophets to Greek philosophers, from ‘barbarian’ authors to the Sibyl, would be situated somewhere in between these two extremes, according to the percentage of the truth they had grasped and reflected. In the *Protrepticus* we have seen that Clement placed the Sibyl together with the Hebrew prophets, closer to the extreme of the spectrum that holds the truth, but still separated from it by the full revelation achieved with the incarnation of the *Logos*.

In the *Protrepticus*, Clement was addressing a non-Christian Greek audience, with the goal of converting them. In this sense, appropriating an authoritative figure such as the Sibyl was crucial to his strategy. He puts a lot of effort into augmenting the importance and prestige of the Sibyl, gradually sets her aside and finishes by evoking her as a main testimony to the message he wants to convey: ‘the Sibyl is awesome, and she plays in our team.’

The *Stromateis*, by its turn, was aimed to a selected group of disciples, who had already gone through baptism and a lot of moral instruction, and had experienced community life – as developed in section 2, Clement’s interest in daily actions and his emphasis in details reflects the need he found of forming his disciples to behave like Christians within their own Christian community, as well as with non-Christians that they would have encountered in their daily life. The third and last step of his work was aimed to those in the path towards perfection, who had already achieved an admirable degree of

self-control and were training and studying to achieve the *gnosis* that would bring the transformation towards perfection and *apatheia*. For this audience, Greek philosophy had not been discarded, but had been converted into a hobby rather than a relevant material to truly know the truth (*Strom.* 6.18).

For this instructed audience seeking to be transformed into true Gnostics, the Sibyl was not as appealing anymore. She was still an important figure – especially considering the Greek background of Clement’s disciples – and although Clement does not make it explicitly, it might be that the Sibyl was still associated with the Hebrew prophets regarding the place they occupy in the spectrum of truth. However, for those who were as close from knowing the truth without veil as the audience of the *Stromateis*, who had already achieved self-control and who were preparing themselves for the next step – the transformation – the Hebrew prophets did not seem that illuminated anymore, nor did the Sibyl, because they did not have the fullness of revelation.

In this sense, it is not the place of the Sibyl in the spectrum that has changed, but the perspective of Clement’s audience. In the *Protrepticus*, they were as close as the sophists from the Greek extreme. From that particular perspective, the Sibyl seemed a great example of a Greek figure that is closer to the truth. Moreover, not only was the Sibyl authoritative because of her message, but for this audience coming from a Greco-Roman milieu, her figure itself was powerful, because of the role that the *Sibyline Oracles* had played in Greek culture and in the Roman state. So Clement’s strategy of appropriating the Sibyl was a powerful move, as it helped to make the Christian faith intelligible and appealing to his Greek audience.

In the *Stromateis*, however, Clement's audience was not that of potential converts anymore, but of potential Gnostics. For those people, the Sibyl was definitely better than other Greek authors, but still had its share of error and misconception. The impression we get from the overall approach towards the Sibyl in the *Stromateis* is that she is important, but not that great; she is Greek, after all.

Still, Clement is one of the early Christian authors who quote the Sibylline texts the most, second only to Lactantius. As Hooker points out, the Sibylline quotations form 9.3% of the overall 107 quotations from Greek texts, a higher percentage than any other Greek author for the exception of Homer (45%).²⁷⁶ In this sense, although Clement's relationship with the Sibyl is sometimes ambiguous, she clearly plays a prominent role in his work.

Clement is, among the Greek Church Fathers, "the most given to the display of learning through citation of pagan Greek philosophy, poetry, and scholarship."²⁷⁷ He strongly believed that it was crucial to rely on the Sibyl's authority, either for praise or critique. Versed as he was in Greek culture, Clement certainly understood the prominent role that the *Sibylline Oracles* and the figure of the Sibyl herself played in the minds of his Greco-Roman audience. If we add to that the fact that the Sibylline corpus carries a powerful heritage as a tool for politics and religious propaganda – which Greeks, Romans and Jews alike had already made full use of – Clement not only felt the need to address the Sibyl because of the prominent role she played in the cultural background of his audience, but he also saw in her a powerful ally to support his arguments and corroborate his claims.

²⁷⁶ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 185.

²⁷⁷ Hooker, *The Use of Sibyls and Sibylline Oracles in Early Christian Writers*, 184.

Conclusion

Although Clement of Alexandria is one of the patristic authors who most quotes the Sibyl, the symbiosis between Clement and the Sibyl has been exaggerated in scholarship, perhaps blindfolded by the excitement with which the Sibyl was treated in medieval Christian imagination, or by the apparent positive treatment that Clement grants to the Sibyl – to the point of associating her as a Hebrew prophetess – in comparison to other patristic authors..

My main thesis is that Clement worked with as “spectrum of truth”, in which he classified all authoritative figures, traditions and philosophies according to their contribution towards true knowledge, and also according to their share in error. The *Sibylline Oracles*, seen by Clement as a “pagan” oracle that prophecies about the unity of God, was considered by him as being so close to the truth to the point of being positioned in the spectrum together with the Hebrew prophets.

However, as Clement’s disciple progressed through the threefold stages of his work, he himself or she herself made the journey from one extreme of the spectrum – that of pure Greek religion – towards the other extreme – that of the true Gnostic. In this sense, while the Sibyl was a powerful ally in the *Protrepticus* as “the Hebrew prophetess”, as the reader achieved the final step in the *Stromateis* she became a scapegoat to attack Greco-Roman religion and philosophy. Assuming that Clement’s trilogy represents a progression in Christian growth, the fact that the Sibyl is gradually depreciated along the different steps of his works reveals that it was not the position of the Sibyl in the “spectrum of truth” that fluctuated, but the reader him or herself.

In this sense, Clement's relationship with the Sibyl remains quite stable throughout his work, independently of the constant shifts between exaltation and depreciation with which he refers to the prophetess. That is because the main role of the Sibyl was that of supporting cast for Clement's arguments of precedence and transformation into the new *genos*. The shifts from positive to negative regards towards the Sibyl made it possible for Clement to conveniently use her authority and prestige for several different, often seemingly unrelated instances – from monotheism to sexual behavior. Clement was thus able to knit all the different elements in his work through the help of the Sibyl – not exclusively, but certainly prominently.

With his rhetoric of precedence, Clement was able to appropriate any element from Greek philosophy to Hebrew Scriptures to the highest degree of convenience, easily distinguishing the good elements that had been inspired by the *Logos* from those that had been corrupted by the *daemons*. The Sibyl was a particularly powerful tool, considering the political and religious heritage of the Sibylline prophecies in which Clement could rely on.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to see Clement's appropriation of the Sibyl only from a perspective of strategy and convenience. It is important to remember that Clement was a Roman citizen of Greek origin, a man with an extensive classical formation who had a personal experience and willingly acceded to Christianity, which at the time was an illegal religion whose adherence was punishable by death. These elements may be an evidence of the authenticity of Clement's religious experience and inclination towards proselytism. Moreover, Clement believed in the authenticity of the *Sibylline Oracles* – an assumption supported by the fact that he also believed in the

authenticity of several other pseudepigrapha works, such as (quote the ones from Paul and Peter).

In this sense, Clement did not merely see the Sibyl as a convenient authoritative figure to quote from, neither the *Sibylline Oracles* as a mere political and religious tool. Both of these elements are important for understanding Clement's relationship with the Sibyl, but they are only half of the equation. Clement, the Christian, the instructor, was thrilled with a "pagan" prophecy that asserted monotheism, which was so suitable for his preaching but also so relevant for his personal faith. A Jewish prophecy perfectly disguised as a "pagan" oracle certainly reassured him, and equipped him with powerful arguments to elaborate his arguments of precedence and universal *genos*, which are key to his theology of the metamorphosis into the true Gnostic.

To conclude, it is hoped that, by focusing on Clement and by pointing out his unique approach to the Sibyl, as well as successfully challenging the tendency that exaggerated the positivity of Clement's relationship with the Sibyl, the findings of this investigation have proven to be relevant not only to the study of patristic usage of the *Sibylline Oracles*, but also to understanding early Christian appropriation of Greco-Roman philosophies and traditions as a whole.

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Appendix: Map of Clement's citations with summary of contents and titles attributed to the Sibyl.

#	Citations by Clement	Overall content	Title attributed to the Sibyl
1	<i>Protrepticus</i> 2.27.4	Against idolatry	An authoritative prophet and poet
2	<i>Protrepticus</i> 4.50.1-4	Prophecy of the destruction of idols	An authoritative prophet
3	<i>Protrepticus</i> 4.62.1	Against idolatry	An authoritative prophet
4	<i>Protrepticus</i> 6.70.2	Precedence and Greek plagiarism	Sibyl is not mentioned; 3SibOr quoted without ascribing authorship to the Sibyl
5	<i>Protrepticus</i> 6.71.4	Monotheism	Hebrew prophetess
6	<i>Protrepticus</i> 7.74.6	Monotheism	Sibyl is not mentioned; passage ascribed to Orpheus.
7	<i>Protrepticus</i> 8.77.2	Monotheism	Hebrew prophetess
8	<i>Protrepticus</i> 10.96.4	Against the divinization of Alexander	Sibyl is not mentioned; Clement adapts a prophecy from 5SibOr.
9	<i>Pedagogus</i> 2.10.99.1-2	Clement applies an oracle against Rome from the SibOr to those who do not behave morally.	Sibyl is not mentioned, but Clement refers to her as "a representative of Greek poetry"
10	<i>Pedagogus</i> 3.3.15.2	Impiety of the last times (aka men who embellish themselves)	The Sibyl
11	<i>Stromateis</i> 1.15.70.3-4	Precedence: Greek philosophy derives from the <i>Logos</i>	A Greek authoritative figure
12	<i>Stromateis</i> 1.21.108.1-3	Antiquity of the Sibyl	Many Sibyls
13	<i>Stromateis</i> 1.21.132.3	Antiquity of the Sibyl	Many Sibyls
14	<i>Stromateis</i> 3.3.14.3	Reproach on Greek teaching of the body as something negative	A Greek authoritative figure (in a negative way)
15	<i>Stromateis</i> 5.14.108.6	Against idolatry	The Sibyl (as a Greek authoritative figure)
16	<i>Stromateis</i> 5.14.115.6	Just an isolated excerpt to corroborate his argument	The Sibyl (as a Greek authoritative figure)
17	<i>Stromateis</i> 6.5.43.1	One race through the <i>Logos</i> , the Son of God	Hellenic Books