

# The Sixth Sibylline Oracle as a Literary Hymn

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IN 1856 C. ALEXANDRE<sup>1</sup> remarked that the twenty-eight-line poem that comprises Book 6 of the *Oracula Sibyllina* is "not so much a prophecy as a hymn, and, apart from the meter, nearly a lyric."<sup>2</sup> Subsequent commentators have used the term "hymn" to characterize Book 6, but no one has provided a formal literary analysis of the book as such, or tried to classify it within a larger hymnic tradition.<sup>3</sup> The following study is offered toward that end.

<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations will be used: *Excursus*=C. Alexandre, *Excursus ad Sibylla* (Paris 1856); *OracAp*=H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (London 1985); *OS*=J. Geffcken, *Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig 1902); *SibProph*=H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London 1988); *SW*=A. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen* (Berlin 1951); *TU*=J. Geffcken, "Komposition and Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina," *Texte und Untersuchungen* 23 (Leipzig 1902); *VisDor*=A. H. M. Kessels and P. W. van der Horst, "The Vision of Dorotheus (Pap. Bodmer 29)," *VigChr* 41 (1987) 313-59.

The following will be referred to by authors' names alone: J. J. COLLINS, "The Sibylline Oracles," in J. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I* (New York 1983) 317-472; E. HEITSCH, *Die griechische Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Göttingen 1961); R. JANKO, "The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: A Study in Genre," *Hermes* 109 (1981) 9-24; L. KAPPEL, *Paian: Studien zur Geschichte einer Gattung* (Berlin 1992); K. KEYSNER, *Gottesvorstellung und Lebensauffassung in griechischen Hymnen* (Stuttgart 1932); W. H. RACE, "Aspects of Rhetoric and Form in Greek Hymns," *GRBS* 23 (1982) 5-14; D. F. SUTTON, "P. Ross. Georg. I.11," in *Papyrological Studies in Dionysiac Literature* (Oak Park, Ill. 1987); J. J. THIERRY, *Christ in Early Christian Greek Poetry* (Leiden 1972).

<sup>2</sup> *Excursus* 615: "non vaticino, non historiae sed potius hymno similis ... paene lyricus."

<sup>3</sup> Collins (406) does not address the poem's hymnic or poetic qualities. Thierry but not Heitsch includes it in his collection. M. Lattke, *Hymnus: Materialien zu einer Geschichte der antiken Hymnologie* (Göttingen 1991) 25, has an up-to-date bibliography but no new contribution.

The poem is best described as an "oracular hymn" that celebrates, as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, the career and apotheosis of Jesus of Nazareth. An unusually large number of bucolic diaereses and a relatively high poetic quality set Book 6 apart, statistically and stylistically, from the rest of the Sibylline corpus.<sup>4</sup> The poem's chief importance, however, derives from its status as our first extant piece of Christian hexametrical poetry. Lactantius' citation (*Div. Inst.* 14.15–22, published *ca* 311) provides the decisive *terminus ante quem* and makes Book 6 at least as early as *P. Bodm.* 29 ("The Vision of Dorotheus"), hailed by Kessels and van der Horst as "the earliest known specimen of Christian hexametric poetry." Their dating of the Dorotheus poem to the late third century, however, is nearly a century too early and has been convincingly refuted by J. N. Bremmer.<sup>5</sup> Book 6, then, written at least a generation before Lactantius and—as I shall argue—in Syria-Palestine by a Christian Middle Platonist during the Severan period (193–235), is the real beginning of Christian poetry.

Part I of this study presents a text, translation, and line-by-line commentary on the poem with a new interpretation of some troublesome lines and stylistic and semantic parallels from hymns, oracles, and other relevant literature. Part II addresses the problem of the poem's mixed genre and its literary and historical contexts. This two-part format best facilitates discussion of this little known work within the larger context of Greek hymns. Impatient readers are invited to read the hymn and proceed directly to Part II.

<sup>4</sup> A 71% incidence (20/28 lines) as compared with 44% for the *Orac. Sib.* as a whole. I base these numbers on the text I produce below. In his study of the Sibylline hexameter based on Geffcken's edition, J.-M. Nieto Ibáñez, *El Hexámetro de los Oráculos sibílinos* (Amsterdam 1992) 156–60, reckons 64.2% for Book 6 (18/28), as compared with 60% for Theocritus, 58% for Nonnus, and 56% for Homer.

<sup>5</sup> In J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst, edd., *Dei Laudes: Essays on Early Christian Poetry* (Leiden 1993) 253–62. Bremmer also shows that the identity of Dorotheus as the son of Quintus Smyrnaeus is unfounded. The other Dorotheus poem from the Bodmer collection, an acrostic about Abraham and Isaac, is dated by E. Livrea, "Un poema inedito di Dorotheus: Ad Abramo," *ZPE* 100 (1994) 175, to the late fourth century.

## I

Book 6 owes its current place in printed editions of the *Oracula Sibyllina* to Alexandre, the first to separate it from Book 7. Most Mss. of the major  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$  families include Book 6 with the subscriptions λόγος ἔκτος, στίχοι κη.<sup>6</sup> In establishing a text, given the complicated textual history of the *Orac. Sib.*, I agree with Geffcken (and reproduce here with abbreviated apparatus) the *Mischtext* he concedes is inevitable. Where I have differed from him I have done so, following his own advice and precedent,<sup>7</sup> using parallels drawn from hymns and related literature.

- ἀθανάτου μέγαν υἷὸν αἰοίδιμον ἐκ φρενὸς αὐδῶ,  
 ᾧ θρόνον ὑψιστος γενέτης παρέδωκε λαβέσθαι  
 οὐπω γεννηθέντι· ἐπεὶ κατὰ σάρκα τὸ δισσὸν  
 ἠγέρθη, προχοαῖς ἀπολουσάμενος ποταμοῖο  
 5 Ἰορδάνου, ὃς φέρεται γλαυκῶ ποδὶ κύματα σύρων.  
 ἐκ πυρὸς ἐκφεύξας πρῶτος θεὸν ὄψεται ἡδὺ  
 πνεῦμ' ἐπιγινόμενον, λευκαῖς πτερύγεσσι πελειῆς.  
 ἀνθήσει δ' ἄνθος καθαρὸν, βρύσουσι δὲ πηγαί.  
 δείξει δ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὁδοὺς, δείξει δὲ κελεύθους  
 10 οὐρανιας· πάντας δὲ σοφοῖς μύθοισι διδάξει.  
 ἄξει δ' ἔς τε δίκην καὶ πείσει λαὸν ἀπειθῆ  
 αἰνετὸν ἀυχήσας πατρὸς γένος οὐρανίδαο·  
 κύματα πεζεύσει, νόσον ἀνθρώπων ἀπολύσει,  
 στήσει τεθνηῶτας, ἀπώσεται ἄλγεα πολλά·  
 15 ἐκ δὲ μιῆς πῆρης ἄρτου κόρος ἔσσεται ἀνδρῶν,

3 τὸ δισσὸν  $\Phi \Psi$  / δοθεῖσαν  $\Omega$  6-7 ἐκ  $\Psi \Phi$  / ὅς  $\Omega$  θεοῦ ὄψεται ἡδὺ  
 πνεῦμ' ἐπιγινόμενον Fabricius / θεὸν ὄψεται ἡδὺν πνεύματι γεννηθέν-  
 τα  $\Omega$  / θεὸς ὅς τε καὶ ἡδὺν πνεύματι γινόμενον  $\Phi$  / θεὸς ὅτε ἡδὺν  
 πνεύματι γινόμενον  $\Psi$  12 βρύσουσι codd. aut βρύουσι / βρίθουσι  
 Lact.4.13 (Migne) 11 ἄξει  $\Phi \Psi$  / ἤξει  $\Omega$  ἀπειθῆ Alexandre / ἀπεχθῆ  
 codd. 13-15 secundum Lact. 4.15, 25 15 πῆρη cf. Lact. 4.15 16 / σπείρης  
 $\Omega$  / ρίξης  $\Phi \Psi$

<sup>6</sup> Unobserved by Parke, *SibProph* 168, 171 n.5, who believed that "Book 6, the most explicitly Christian of the *Oracula Sibyllina* ... as transmitted ... is very short and probably defective."

<sup>7</sup> OS xxvi: "Es bleibt aber immerhin von Wert, einmal einen Blick auf die Parallelliteratur zu werfen." A full discussion and complete apparatus at OS ix-lii, 130ff.

- οἶκος ὅταν Δαυὶδ φύῃ φυτόν· ἐν χερὶ δ' αὐτοῦ  
κόσμος ὅλος καὶ γαῖα καὶ οὐρανὸς ἠδὲ θάλασσα.  
ἀστράψει δ' ἐπὶ γῆν, οἶόν ποτε πρῶτα φανέντα  
εἶδον ἀπ' ἀλλήλων πλευρῶν δύο γεννηθέντες.  
20 ἔσσεται, ἠνίκα γαῖα χαρήσεται ἐλπίδι παιδός.  
σοὶ δὲ μόνῃ, Σοδομίτι γαίῃ, κακὰ πῆματα κείται·  
αὐτὴ γὰρ δύσφρων τὸν σὸν θεὸν οὐκ ἐνόησας  
παίζοντα θνητοῖσι νοήμασιν· ἀλλ' ἀπ' ἀκάνθης  
ἔστεψας στεφάνῳ, φοβερὴν δὲ χολὴν ἐκέρασσας  
25 εἰς βρῶσιν καὶ πῶμα· τό σοι κακὰ πῆματα τεύξει.  
ὦ ξύλον ὦ μακαριστόν, ἐφ' οὐ θεὸς ἐξετανύσθη,  
οὐχ ἔξει σε χθῶν, ἀλλ' οὐρανοῦ οἶκον ἐσόψει,  
ἠνικ' ἀπαστράψειε τὸ σόν, θεός, ἔμπυρον ὄμμα.

19 γεννηθέντες Alex. / γεννηθέντε Hase / γεννηθέντα codd. 23  
παίζοντα θνητοῖσι νοήμασιν Lact. 4.18, 20; cf. August. *De civ. D.* 18.23:  
*ipsa enim insipiens tuum Deum non intellexisti, ludentem mor-*  
*talium mentibus, sed et spinis coronasti et horridum fel miscuisti* 25  
εἰς βρῶσιν καὶ πῶμα · τό σοι Kurfess / εἰς ὕβριν καὶ πῶμα · τό σοι  
Alex. / εἰς ὕβριν καὶ πῶμα τί σοι (πνεύματός σοι aut οἱ) codd. 27  
οὐρανοῦ Kurfess / οὐρανὸν codd. 28 ἀστράψει(ε) Geffcken / δ'  
ἀστράψει aut ἀστράψεις aut ἀστράψη codd.

### Translation

- A great son, the subject of song, I sing from the heart  
immortal,  
To whom a begetter most high gave a throne to possess  
Before he was born. After he, in the flesh, has been a second  
time  
Raised, having bathed in the streams of the river  
5 Jordan, which moves with bright foot sweeping the waves,  
And having fled fire, he shall be the first to see God,  
A sweet spirit, alighting on the white wings of a dove.  
And a pure flower will blossom, and springs will surge.  
He will show people the ways and the paths,  
10 Heavenly ones, and will teach all with words of wisdom;  
And to justice will bring, and persuade, unpersuadable  
folk,  
Boasting praiseworthy descent from his father, son of  
Ouranos.  
He shall tread the waves, and cure human disease;  
He shall raise those who have died and banish much grief.  
15 And from one purse shall be surfeit of bread for mankind,

- When David's house shoots forth a sprout. In his hand  
 The whole world rests, earth and heaven and sea.  
 He will hurl lightning to earth—just as once at his first  
 manifestation  
 They saw him, those two born from each other's sides.  
 20 There will be a time when the earth shall rejoice in the hope  
 of a child.  
 For you alone, land of Sodom, is destined calamity.  
 For you were malicious, and did not recognize your own  
 God  
 When he was here playing with mortal perceptions. With  
 acanthus  
 You crowned him, and terrible gall you mixed  
 25 Into his food and his drink. *That* will cause you calamity.  
 O wood, happy wood, upon which God was  
 stretched,  
 Earth shall not hold you, but you shall see a home in  
 heaven  
 When your fiery eye, O God, flashes forth like lightning.

### Commentary

1. **ἀθανάτου ... ἐκ φρενός**: ἀθάνατος is possibly an adjective used absolutely as a noun (*sc.* θεοῦ) as Collins and Kurfess translate, but this leaves an awkward repetition of Jesus' father in the genitive then in the nominative (γενέτης). It is better taken as an adjective with φρενός. Medea prophesies from an ἀθανάτου στόματος at Pind. *Pyth.* 4.11 and in a Hellenistic epigram Apollo, the Sibyl's patron deity, possesses a φωνὴν ἀθα[νά]την (H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Seal of Posidippus," *JHS* 83 [1963] 89). Because the Sibyl's own 'immortality' lacked agelessness (*cf.* Ov. *Met.* 14.130), she was imagined as a perennially aged woman if not, with the conflation of yet another myth, a shrivelled-up cicada wishing very much to die (Hellanicus, *FGrHist* 4F140; Petron. *Sat.* 15.48; *SibProph* 57f), a motif first attested in the *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* in the myth of Eos and Tithonus.

**ἐκ φρενός**: The phrase amplifies the emotion with which the hymnist sings, *i.e.*, "from the heart" as at Aesch. *Cho.* 107, *Sept.* 919; *cf.* *Il.* 9.343, ἐκ θυμοῦ φίλεον. For the resultant hyperbaton with ἀθανάτου *cf.* [Longinus] who says that this figure is "the truest mark of strenuous emotion" (*Subl.* 22.3f). Here the emotional intensity inherent in the idiom ἐκ φρενός is heightened by the hyperbaton. Note also the prophetic φρῆν, which "sees something more than is apparent" that Prometheus offers as proof for the veracity of his prophecies to Io: σημεῖά σοι τάδ' ἐστὶ τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός ὡς δέρκεται πλέον τι τοῦ πεφασμένον (*PV* 842f; for this usage *cf.* Nonnus *Par. Jo.*

1.53). The Sibyl is, in these opening lines, laboring under the weight of time and inspiration.

**ἀοίδιμον:** "a subject of song." This, the only epithet of the anonymous son in this hymn, occurs only twice in the *Orac. Sib.*, here and at 14.310 (a late 7<sup>th</sup> c. Jewish oracle) of an unnamed diabolical prince. Other than at *Hymn. Orph.* 72.5, where Tyche is hailed as ἀοίδιμος, I find no example of it predicated of a Greek divinity. In Greek literature this somewhat rare word is variously used to describe prophets, poets, heroes, emperors, and villains. Predicated of Helen and Hector in Homer (*Il.* 6.358), it means "notorious," a passage imitated/parodied by Callimachus (*Ap.* 121), who uses the word of the μάντις Teiresias. Homer's ἀοίδιμος in bucolic diaeresis was the model for its use in later prosody, though it has a more positive meaning at *Hymn. Hom.* *Ap.* 299, where it refers to the god's oracular sanctuary (νάον; cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 8.59).

With the meaning "famous for song" Pindar refers to himself as an ἀοίδιμον Πιερίδων προφάτων (*Paeon* 6.1–6), as does the Christian Dorotheus (*VisDor* 272). We also find the adjective in a Delphic oracle (ca 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.) predicated of the poet Archilochus (see further W. Peek, "Neues von Archilochus," *Philologus* 99 [1955] 4–50):

ἀθάνατός σοι παῖς καὶ ἀοίδιμος ὃ Τελεσίκλεις.  
ἔσται ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν, ὅς ἄμ πρώτος σε προσεΐπει  
νῆος ἀποθρώσκοντα φίλην εἰς πατρίδα γαίαν.

Note the syntactical parallels here with the hymn: ἀθάνατός and ἀοίδιμος occupy the same position in the line; both texts use the future tense and preserve the anonymity of the son in question. The occurrence of this Archilochus oracle at *Anth. Pal.* 14.113.1 suggests that it once circulated in a *florilegium*. The author probably modeled his first line on oracles available to him via such a source—perhaps this one. Eusebius (*Praep. Evang.* 5.32–33.1) quotes these lines (as far as ἀνθρώποισιν) and knows that the unnamed παῖς of the oracle is Archilochus. From this he concludes that Apollo is a false prophet because the god sanctions so shameful a poet, the likes of which "even the noble Plato banished from his Republic." This vehement disavowal suggests that someone (Christians?) used the oracle, divorced from its original context, as a prophetic proof-text.

Herodotus' use of the adjective (2.79) to describe the mytho-historical figure Linus is also apt: "called by various names," this Linus was ἀοίδιμος throughout the Near East, the only-begotten son (παῖδα μουνογενέα) of Egypt's first king, who died young and is since honored by laments. This same "Linus," the legendary tutor of Orpheus (*Diod.* 3.67; *D.L. proem.* 3), later becomes a pseudonymous authority for Greek hexameters composed by Jews and remained current in Christian circles as well (*Aristobulus apud Eus. Praep. Evang.* 13.12.13, 13.34; see further H. Attridge in Charlesworth 823f).

*IV Maccabees*, a Hellenistic Jewish encomium, speaks of a martyr's life (10.15) and death (10.1) as *αἰδιδίμος* and is largely responsible for the meaning "of famous memory" or "renowned" in Christian hagiographies and sermons, where the martyr is e.g. *εὐδόκιμος μὲν παρὰ θεῶν, αἰδιδίμος δὲ παρὰ ἀνθρώποις* (Basil Caes. *PG* XXXII 1272). Eulogy and encomium combine in two epigrams from the *Anth. Pal.*: in a sepulchral epitaph the poem itself is a *μνήμα* ... *αἰδιδίμων* (669.1); in another, "Lord Christ gives the nod of assent" (*ἔνευσεν* ... *ἄναξ Χριστός*) to a Nicomedes who has entered into a *βίον* ... *αἰδιδίμων* (8.141.1). In both poems *αἰδιδίμων* is in the first line and in the same *sedes* as our hymn. From these uses of *αἰδιδίμος* it is clear that Jesus is being analogized to a Greek hero, martyred in his prime.

**αὐδῶ:** This denominative verb from the substantive *αὐδή* (which can mean "song" or "ode," e.g. Pind. *Nem.* 9.10f) is related to *αἰείδω*, "to sing," the verb par excellence for hymnic preludes (Janko 9f; Race 5ff) and is used in this way by e.g. Pindar (*Ol.* 1.7). In the hymnic prologue to the Orphic Hymns *αὐδῶ* at line-end is the single verb used to invoke a pantheon of twenty-five deities and daimones (line 39). In oracles Apollo uses it, also at line-end (*τίς σοφία πρῶτος πάντων, τούτῳ τρίποδ' αὐδῶ*, Diod. 9.3.2=L. Andersen, *Studies in Oracular Verses: Concordance to Delphic Responses in Hexameter* [=Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 53 (Copenhagen 1987)] no. 72). *αὐδῶ* sets this first line, indeed the whole poem, squarely in both the hymnic and oracular traditions.

2. **ᾄ:** The relative pronoun (or adverb) whose antecedent is the god in the accusative case is a well-known hymnic feature (Janko 9f); cf. *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 1.f, *Merc.* 1ff, *Bacch.* 7.1f.

**θρόνον:** Cf. *Orac. Sib.* 7.32: *τῷ γάρ τ' αὐτὸς ἔδωκε θεὸς θρόνον....* The throne or "seat" occupied by a divinity is a *topos* in Greek literature: generally, cf. *Il.* 5.360; specifically, *θρόνος* is used of Apollo's oracular seat at Delphi (Eur. *IT* 1254, 1282). Theocritus' encomium to Ptolemy uses language similar to that here: *τῆνον καὶ μακάρεσσι πατῆρ ὁμότιμον ἔθηκεν/ ἄθανάτοις, καὶ οἱ χρύσεος θρόνος ἐν Διὸς οἴκῳ δέδμηται* (*Id.* 17.16f). The NT concern with Jesus' accession to the royal "Throne of David" (Lk 1:32, Heb 12:2, etc.), however, is paramount. In Peter's speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:30f) the possession of Christ's *θρόνος* is said to have been "foreseen" (*προιδῶν*) by King David, a prophetic singer of *αἴσματα* (*viz.* Pss 132:11, 89:4, 16:10), and his foresight is interpreted as referring to the resurrection (*ἀνάστασις*; cf. *ἠγέρθη* below) of Christ. Here the Sibyl foresees Christ's kingship from the pagan quarter—*teste David cum Sibylla*, as it were.

**ὑψιστος γενέτης:** The word *ὑψιστος*, theological *Gemeingut* in the Greco-Roman world, is very common in the *Orac. Sib.* In *VisDor* it is the favorite appellation for God (lines 100, 134, 231). In the "Magnificat" the Holy Spirit is the *δύναμις ὑψίστου* descending upon Mary

(a NT prose hymn at Lk 1:35); in the "Benedictus" John the Baptist is lauded as the προφήτης ὑψίστου (Lk 1:76; cf. Pind. *Nem.* 1.90–93 of Teiresias; also *Nem.* 11.2; Aesch. *Eum.* 28). In Aristonous, Apollo, the son of Zeus, is praised as σέμνον ἄγαλμα ... ὑψίστου (Käppel 385 no. 42 line 7). The noun γενέτης ("father") is largely post-classical and relatively rare: only here and at *Orac. Sib.* fr. 5.3. Nonnus (*Dion.* 7.80) uses γενέτης to express the father-son relationship between Zeus and Dionysus (7.80) in an oracle about his son, not yet born, that Zeus utters in/to primordial time (Aion), wherein he prophesies Dionysus' future exploits, beginning at his nativity. Zeus' promise to his son—Ζηνὶ συναστράπτοντα δεδέξεται αἰόλος αἰθήρ (99)—recalls the closing scene of our hymn (see *ad* line 28).

3. οὐπὼ γεννηθέντι: A fine paradox/oxymoron with γενέτης probably referring to the pre-existence of Christ, a theology best known from the prologue to the Gospel of John. Nonnus' paraphrase of John's first verse is a poetic elaboration that also picks up the pre-existence, sonship, and enthronement of Christ in one stroke: the Logos is γενετῆρος ὁμήλικος υἱὸς ἀμήτωρ and ἀτέρμονι σύνθρονος ἔδρη.

ἐπεὶ κατὰ σάρκα ... κτλ.: Beginning with ἐπεὶ and continuing to line 7 these lines describing the baptism of Jesus (Mk 1:9–11 pars.) present problems of interpretation on a number of levels. The language shows considerable (perhaps considered) ambiguity, and the text may be corrupt. An "embodiment" of Christ's pre-existent spirit at baptism seems to be envisioned. ἀπολουσάμενος and ἐκφεύξας continue the temporal clause introduced by ἐπεὶ, which answers to ὄψεται in line 6. The aorist after ἐπεὶ, however, is unusual with a main clause in the future. Ἰορδάνου in line 5 may have been originally a marginal gloss on ποταμοῖο later filled out into a hexameter line (without caesura), and the ἐκ of Mss. Ψ and Φ corrupted to Ω's ὅς to accommodate it. For a similar explanatory interpolation involving a river note *Il.* 21.157f: ἐξ Ἀξιοῦ εὐρὸν ῥέοντος/ Ἀξιοῦ, ὅς κάλλιστον ὑπὼρ ἐπὶ γαίαν ἴησιν. ἐγείρω (in the passive) is the preferred NT verb for Christ's resurrection (e.g. Mt 28:6; Mk 16:6; 1 Cor. 15:12f), but is not used of his birth as it seems to be used here. κατὰ σάρκα is a NT idiom used by Paul (in a neutral sense) for Christ's human lineage (e.g. Rom. 1:3; 4:1; 9:3, 5). The first begetting that this second one (τὸ δισσόβ) presupposes must be the heavenly, non-corporeal one implied at lines 2f.

4–5. προχοαῖς ... σύρων: The personification of the Jordan River, in fact the hyperbole of the whole description, is strangely but pleasantly pastoral. The reading γλαυκῶπιδι κύματι of Ω is possibly correct (cf. Hes. *Th.* 587). γλαυκῶ ποδί is a bold metaphor making the Jordan a divinity (cf. *pede*, Verg. *Aen.* 9.125, of the Tiber). Although (as the text now stands) the first reference in this relative clause is to the river Jordan, the context and vocabulary here suggest that the foot in question may also be Christ's. A god's gait is especially



important in epiphanies. At the epiphany of Apollo in Callimachus the god "raps upon the doors with beautiful foot": τὰ θύρετρα καλῶ ποδί ... ἀράσσει (*Ap.* 3), καλῶ ποδί occupying the same *sedes* as γλαυκῶ ποδί in bucolic diareisis. Plutarch preserves an anapestic hymn to Dionysus in which the god is invoked to come βοέφ ποδί (see W. R. Halliday, *The Greek Questions of Plutarch* [Oxford 1928] 128). Nonnus (*Dion.* 1.104f) also puts ποδί in the same *sedes* but as here with the aquatic metaphor: the goddess Demeter ὑδροπόρῳ δὲ γλαυκὰ διασχίζει βοέφ ποδί νῶτα θαλάσσης. Note Nonnus' conflation of two images in our hymn: the personified water, here with "sea-green back" (*cf.* the Homeric εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσης), and a divinity (Demeter) "who parts the waves with cow foot leaving a watery trail." With reference to Jesus καλῶ ποδί is brilliant *hypallage* for the color of the water and a superb word play on γλαυκός, which can also mean "bright" or "gleaming" (for the ordinary meaning of "sea-green" *cf.* Nonnus *Dion.* 20.353; 2.14). For σύρων used personally *cf.* Limenius' *Paeon to Apollo*, where it describes that god's "tracing" or "spreading" the foundations of his oracular shrine "with immortal hand" (ἀπ[λ]έτους θεμελίου τ'] ἀμβρότα χειρὶ σύρων, Käppel 390 no. 46 line 24). Note also a hymn from Epidaurus in which the Mother of the Gods moves σύρουσα ῥυτά[v] κόμαν (M. L. West, "The Epidaurian Hymn to the Mother of the Gods," *CQ* n.s. 20 [1970] 212f). If, in similar fashion, σύρων describes the motion (or its effect) of Jesus stepping into or out of the river, it may be meant to suggest his walking on water (Mk 6:45-52 pars.)—an intimation at baptism of that mark of his divine character described in line 13.

6-7. ἐκ πυρός ἐκφεύξας ... πελείης: Note the similarities in *Orac. Sib.* 7.66f: οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὸν σὸν θεόν, ὃν ποτ' ἔλουσεν Ἰορδάνος ἐν προχοῇσι καὶ ἔπατο πνεῦμα πελείη (see further Part II *infra*). ἡδὺ is printed by Kurfess and Alexandre, but it should be noted that this line has many variants in the Mss., most of them attempts to make the ἡδὺ masculine or put the Spirit in the dative. If ἡδὺ is correct, then it modifies πνεῦμα; the phrase πνεῦμα ... ἐπιγινόμενον is in apposition to θεόν: thus "God, a sweet spirit alighting," *etc.*

λευκαῖς πτερόγεσσι πελείης: The color of the baptismal dove is not specified in the Gospels. It is probable that Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 4.15) gets the color white from *Orac. Sib.* 6.7, for three other quotations of Book 6 (not this verse) occur in his same chapter.

πελείη: At *Orac. Sib.* 1.247 πέλειαι is used of Noah's dove, but otherwise only here and at 7.67. The NT uses περιστέρα at the baptism, the same for Noah's dove in the LXX (Gen. 8:8). πελείη may be simply *metri gratia*, for περιστέρα is not well suited to the hexameter (though metrical correction is frequent in this poem). Πέλειαι at Paus. 7.21.2, 10.12.10 are the doves or dove-priestesses of the oracular shrine of Zeus at Dodona. Pausanias' excursus on Sibyls and Sibylline prophecy highlights these Peleiai (also "Peleiades") who

"though not called Sibyls by men give prophecies from God." To them, Pausanias reports, is ascribed the venerable oracle Ζεὺς ἦν, Ζεὺς ἔστιν, Ζεὺς ἔσσεται· ὦ μεγάλε Ζεῦ—a theology consonant with Christian beliefs about deity (cf. Rev. 1:4, 8: ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). The appearance of an oracular bird adds a nice touch to the poem.

8. ἀνθήσει δ' ἄνθος καθαρόν, βρύσουσι δὲ πηγαί: Cf. line 20: γαῖα χαρήσεται ἐλπίδι παιδός and also 8.475 (of Christ's nativity). Such sympathy of nature with the events recounted in the narrative, what Keyssner calls "the hyperbolic style," abounds in Greek hymns, and often accompanies the epiphany of the god (Keyssner 30–34), as at Apollo's nativity in the *Hymn. Hom. Ap.*—μείδησε δὲ γαί' ὑπέ-  
νερθεν (116f; cf. also 135, 139)—or Limenius' paeon (Käppel 390 no. 46 lines 7–10), where at the same event Πᾶ[ς δὲ γ]έγαθε πόλος οὐράνιος. For the collocation οὐρανός-γαῖα-θάλασσα cf. *Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 13f. βρύω, "a word belonging to the language of poetry and religion ... [for] ritual cries or the natural expression of religious exaltation" (Dodds *ad Eur. Bacch.* 107), occurs frequently in compound epithets in the *Hymn. Orph.* As an expression of hope and happiness, or of a return of a Golden Age—primal restoration is hinted at in lines 18f (Adam and Eve's glimpse of Christ in the Garden of Paradise)—the sentiment is not unlike the cosmic sympathy attending the birth of the child in Vergil's fourth *Eclogue*, (esp. lines 19f, 23; cf. E. Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes* [Leipzig 1924]) 46–50, 58).

ἄνθος: Cf. φύτον below (16). In the *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* Apollo is described as having ἄνθος ... φιλοκυδέος ἥβης and in paeans Apollo is often an ἔρνος (e.g. Macedonius [Käppel 383 no. 41 line 4). In *Hymn. Orph.* 50.6 to Lysios/Lenaeus (=Dionysus) the god is praised as ἕρον ἄνθον (i.e., wine). For Lactantius the floral imagery of the hymn stemmed from Isaiah 11:1, which he quotes in Latin: *Exiit virga de radice Jesse et flos de radice ascendit* (where *flos*=LXX ἄνθος). Lactantius explains that *Jesse autem fuit pater David ex cuius radice accensurum esse florem praelocutus est*, and quotes line 8 of Book 6 as Sibylline support for his interpretation (*Div. Inst.* 4.13= Migne, *PL XXXVII* 485f, with the variant βρίθουσι δὲ πάντα unreported by Geffcken and Thierry. For βρίθω in an epiphanic context cf. *Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 473). Isaiah was probably foremost in the hymnist's mind as well.

9–14. δείξει δ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὁδοῦς ... ἄλγεα πολλά: These lines are the hymnist's efficient epitome of Jesus' ministry. The whole section is akin to an aretalogy, and the healing mentioned at 13f is the stuff for a paeon to Asclepius—like Isyllus' where the god is τὸν νόσων παύστορα, δωτήρα ὑγιείας (Käppel 382 no. 40E lines 56f). In the same author's hexametrical aretalogy the Spartans αὐδήσαντος ἄκουσαν, σάτειραν φήμαν, Ἄσκληπιέ, καὶ σφε σάωσας

(Käppel 383 no. 40F lines 79f; for ἀυδήσαντος *cf.* line 1 above). Lactantius cites lines 13ff as *caelestis indicia virtutis*. Interestingly L. buttresses his argument with an oracle from "Milesian Apollo," which Parke regarded "as an authentic attempt of the prophets of Apollo to define their position with regard to the claims of Christianity" (*OracAp* 104). Apollo too acknowledges Jesus' miracles and crucifixion, going so far as to use the Christian phrase κατὰ σάρκα (see line 3) in his exposition (*PL XXXVII* 484):

θνητὸς ἦν κατὰ σάρκα, σοφὸς, τερατώδεσιν ἔργοις  
ἀλλ' ὑπὸ χaldaίων κριτῶν ὄπλοις συναλωθεῖς  
γόμεφοις καὶ σκολόπεσσι πικρὴν ἀνέτλησε τελευτήν.

10. **δείξει ... οὐρανίας**: Note the anaphoric repetition of δείξει and the assonance διδάξει/ἄξει. οὐρανίας here in enjambement emphasizes the quality of Christ's teaching. For "heavenly paths" *cf.* Clement's *Paedagogus* hymn: ἵχνια Χριστοῦ/ὁδὸς οὐρανία [*sc.* ἐστίν] (Thierry 10 no. 7.34f). *Cf.* also Christ's words in the Gnostic (anapestic) "Psalm of the Naasenes": μορφὰς δὲ θεῶν ἐπιδείξω τὰ κεκρυμμένα τῆς ἀγίας ὁδοῦ (Thierry 13 no.8.21f).

**σοφοῖς μύθοις**: Keyssner 55 notes "Auch die σοφία des Gottes be-greift gelegentlich seine Macht und seine Fähigkeiten in sich" and cites Macedonius' paeon (Käppel 384 no. 41 line 17; *cf.* the self-proclaimed oracular wisdom of Apollo cited above *ad* line 1).

11. **πέσει λαὸν ἀπειθή ... κτλ.**: Presumably the Jews are the "unpersuadable" or "disobedient people" (same collocation, same *sedes* at *Orac. Sib.* 1.204, 3.668; *cf.* Is. 30:9). λαός is the usual, positive term for "Israelites" in LXX as opposed to ἔθνη who are "Gentiles."

12. **αιετὸν ... οὐρανίδαο**: Christ here boasts of his "praiseworthy descent from his father, son of Ouranos." The rare patronymic οὐρανίδης is very peculiar. It occurs only here in *Orac. Sib.* and in Greek epic only once in the singular in Hesiod (never in Homer or Nonnus) of Cronos (*Th.* 486; imitated by Oppian, *Cyneg.* 3.12). The word belongs to the language of theogonic myth—an idea very popular in the *Orac. Sib.* (Collins 334; Kurfess, "Homer and Hesiod in 1. Buch der Oracula Sibyllina," *Philologus* 100 [1956] 147–53). In a related passage, *Orac. Sib.* 7.69ff (see Part II *infra*), "Ouranos has built three towers" for Christ who, as Logos, "donned flesh and swiftly flew to his father's home" (σάρκα τε δυσάμενος ταχὺς ἵπτατο πατρός ἐς οἶκους τρεῖς δ' αὐτῷ πύργους μέγας Οὐρανὸς ἐστήριξεν). Ouranos-Hyperion is a mythological figure known from the Gnosticism of Valentinus whom Epiphanius accuses of plagiarizing the theogonies of Hesiod and Stesichorus, "changing only the names" in his elaborate system of thirty aeons and spiritual pleroma (*Adv. Haer.* 31.2.4, 3.2). Thus, perhaps, οὐρανίδης=Helios, the son of Hyperion (*Th.* 374, 1011; *Hom. Hymn.* 31.4f)=Yahweh. This would explain the sun imagery at lines 26ff (*q.v.*). Though the language of Hesiod is



but the race of unstable men, though the light it up the sky (φέγγεος ἀστράπτοντος), loved more gloom."

οἶον ποτε πρῶτα φανέντα ... ἀπ' ἀλλήλων πλευρῶν δύο γεννηθέντες: "The two born from each other's sides" is an unparalleled circumlocution for Adam and Eve, who, the text implies, saw Christ in the Garden of Eden. The Christian apologist Justin Martyr explains the anthropomorphism of the Jewish God in the OT, including the one in Eden (*Dial.* 131), as Christophanies, i.e., appearances of a philosophic Logos personified. Though not called "Logos" in this poem, we find that term predicated of him in the related passage in at 7.83 (Part II, *infra*). In powerful hexameters Gregory Nazianzus hymns "the celebrated spark and aerial torch of the Logos (σπίνθηρ δὲ Λόγου καὶ πυρσὸς ἀερθεῖς ... αἰοίδιμος [*cf.* line 1 above]), which pervaded the whole world" at Adam's fall from paradise (*PG* XXXVII 1231). The words ἔμπυρον and ἀπαστράπτω juxtaposed have an astrological significance in a fantastic passage from *Orac. Chald.* (fr. 146.7 Des Places).

21. σοὶ δὲ μόνῃ, Σοδομίτι γαίῃ ... κτλ.: A city may be "spiritually" (πνευματικῶς) stylized a "Sodom" (Rev 11:8). The reference here as in Rev 11:8 is Judaea or Jerusalem. The Hebrew prophets speak of Judah in its worst days as Sodom (e.g. Is 1:9f; *cf.* Ezk 16:46, 55). For πῆματα κεῖται *cf.* an oracle from Hdt. 1.67: πῆμ' ἐπὶ πῆματι κεῖται (same *sedes*).

22. δύσφρων ... τὸν σὸν θεὸν οὐκ ἐνόησας: A heavily spondaic line for emphasis. Recognition of Christ is also important in the hymn-like piece to the Daughter of Sion (*Orac. Sib.* 8.335), recognition that the song fosters. At 7.53 the inhabitants of Ilias θεὸν οὐκ ἐνόησαν (same *sedes*, as also at *VisDor* 74).

23. παίζοντα θνητοῖσι νοήμασιν: This is the oldest reading *ap.* Lactantius, probably followed by Augustine. Of all editors only Thierry prints it. Geffcken rejected the reading on no certain grounds (*OS* xxviii n.1), though he accepted Lactantius' πῆρης in line 15 over σπείρης in Ω and ρίζης in Φ and Ψ (*OS* xxix). The vividness of the image is the stuff we have come to expect of this poet. Thierry adroitly compares Ps. 2:4: ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἐκγελάσεται αὐτοὺς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἐκμυκτηριεῖ αὐτούς—that in response to the previous verse where "kings and rulers have allied themselves against the Lord and His Anointed (χριστός)." Christ's "playing with mortal perceptions" is also much in the Dionysiac tradition, e.g., the hallucinations of Pentheus and Agave in Eur. *Bacch.* At *P. Ross. Georg.* (lines 29f) the god "pours an illusion" (ἴνδαλμον ἔχευ) over Lycurgus such that he, mistaking his children's consoling arms for snakes, slaughters them. For the "playing" *cf.* *Hymn. Hom. Bacch.* 7.14f, where bonds fall miraculously from Dionysus' hands and the god "smiles" (μειδιάω). There, unlike here, a lone helmsman "recog-

nized" or "understood" (νοήσας, 15) Dionysus' godhead. At *Bacch.* 497–518 Dionysus faces danger with sweet abandon. Christ displays the same attitude in the *Acts of John* 94ff, where, before going off to die, he sings a lengthy hymn and dances with his disciples. A Dionysiac recognition motif is crucial for the *Acts of John* hymn: cf. esp. 67–70: ὁ χορεύων νόει ὃ πράσσω, ὅτι σὸν ἐστὶν τοῦτο τὸ ἀνθρώπου πάθος ὃ μέλλω πάσχειν (Thierry 36).

23ff. ἀπ' ἀκάνθης ... στεφάνῳ ... χολὴν ... κτλ.: A drastic change of mood from "playing" to the vile elements and mockery of the Passion. Is it in the vein of mock-pastoral that we are to read the odd use of the singular ἀκάνθη (Vergil's *acantho*? *Ecl.* 4.20)? The NT and early Christian fathers use the plural for the crown of thorns. The detail of the poison/gall, found also at *Orac. Sib.* 8.303, 1.367; *Mk* 15:18, 23 (pars.), is ultimately dependent on LXX Ps. 69:21 (as in Kurfess' emendation βρῶσιν for ὕβριν): ἔδωκαν εἰς τὸ βρῶμά μου χολὴν καὶ εἰς τὴν δίψαν μου ἐπότισάν με ὄξος. For the Synoptic writers the sop given Jesus on the Cross was the fulfillment of prophecy; here it is that, but it also fills out the pathos of the scene. For Lactantius, line 24 (which he cites) brought Jer. 11:19 to mind, where that prophet describes himself as "slaughtered like a lamb without blemish" whose enemies propose to put "wood in his bread" (*lignum* [=ξύλον LXX] in *panem* [=ἄρτον LXX] *eius*) and "eradicate" him from the earth. Lactantius' allegorization of the Jeremiah passage is indicative of the metaphorical potential of bread (15) and Cross (26) in our hymn: *Lignum autem crucem significat, et panis corpus eius* [sc. Jesus], *quia ipse est cibus, et vita omnium qui credunt in carnem quam portavit, et in crucem qua pendit* (*Div. Inst.* 4.18.28).

26. ὃ ξύλον, ὃ μακαριστόν ... κτλ.: The word ξύλον ("Cross") is a favorite in kerygmatic passages in Acts (5:30, 10:39, 13:29). According to the apostle Paul (Gal. 3:13, quoting LXX Dt. 21:33) Christ's "hanging on the Cross" made him a "curse," but a beneficial one, for the Cross was believed to release Gentiles and Jews from the commands of Mosaic law, making them fellow sons of God, and "setting them free" to "serve each other in love." Some such paradoxical view of the Crucifixion informs our author's qualification μακαριστόν of what otherwise was an instrument of torture and not an object of Christian veneration until the early Byzantine period (G. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* [Macon (Ga.) 1985] 27). The ξύλον is apostrophized here metonymically for Christ. Most commentators have taken the hymnist to mean that the Cross literally will ascend to heaven. This literalist reading is based largely on a later vague tradition to this effect: examples in A. Rzach, "Sibyllinische Orakel," *RE* 2A.2 (1923) 2141. The legend, however, does not seem to antedate our hymn and was demonstrably influenced by it. Sozomen certainly was (*HE* 1.1.6, 2.1.10). We do best not to foist their literalism upon the hymnist.

ξύλον is perfectly understandable by metonymy as Christ—a view supported by the vast majority of Mss., in which at 8.31 τὸ ξύλον as Christ in the famous Sibylline acrostic takes a masculine participle (φωτίζων). In the *Wisdom of Solomon* (14.7) ξύλον rounds off a brilliant literary conceit in a *sententia* where, initially used for a pagan's "crooked" idol (ξύλον σκολιόν, 13.13), it becomes, by catachresis, metonymy, and synecdoche, the saving agent of Noah's ark: εὐλόγηται γὰρ ξύλον δι' οὗ γίνεται δικαιοσύνη. Similarly, an interpolation at *Orac. Sib.* 5.261 plays on ξύλον used in a periphrasis for Jesus' profession as a carpenter, but certainly also used ironically for "crucifixion" (see line 26 below; cf. also *Orac. Sib.* 1.291, 7.49). The hymnist, under the spell of theological paradox and poetic conceit, has abruptly reversed the lurid details of the Passion with this unexpected benediction to the device of death.

28. ἀπαστράψει ... ἔμπυρον ὄμμα: ἀπαστράπτω="flash like lightning forth" (cf. line 18). Although at Rev. 1:14 the heavenly Christ has fiery eyes (cf. 19:12) and could be represented as a Helios figure with horse and chariot, as he was in a mausoleum under St Peter's (Snyder 62 pl. 31), "God the Father" seems to be the recipient of this second apostrophe. Cf. Synes. *Hymn.* 1.368: σὸν δ' ὄμμα, πάτερ. θεός here is nominative for vocative as often. The indefinite temporal clause states when the action of the main verb (ἔσσωπει) will be fulfilled: Jesus (=ξύλον) will see his "home in heaven" (objective or appositive genitive; Smyth §1322, 1332–33) when God, as it were, gives the signal. For lightning as a divine sign cf. *Il.* 9.237f: Ζεὺς ... σήματα φαίων ἀστράπτει. Cf. the prophecy in Nonnus *Dion.* 7.99 (cited *ad* line 2), where father Zeus and son Dionysus are to be reunited in heaven amidst flashes of lightning. At *par. Jo.* 3:69f the Son of Man inhabits a "starry home (ἀστερόεντι μελάθρῳ) in the ethereal land of his Father (πάτριον οὐδας ... αἰθέρα). Justin Martyr describes Christ's relation to the Father as that of light emanating from the sun (*Dial.* 128), a metaphor that finds its muse in Synesius (*Hymn* 5; Thierry 23 no. 13): αὐτὸς φῶς εἶ παγαῖον συλλάμψας ἀκτὶς πατρί.

As for ὄμμα, Helios is παμφαῆς αἰθέρος ὄμμα in an Orphic-style hymn embedded at Nonnus *Dion.* 40.379 (see F. Braun, *Hymnen bei Nonnos von Panopolis* [Königsberg 1915] 8f). In hymns from the Magical Papyri, Helios is in fact identified with "Iao" (i.e., Yahweh; Heitsch 183 no. 5=PGM III 198–228 line 14). The Orphic Hymns laud the ὄμμα Δίκης (62.1, 69.15; cf. Procl. *Hymn* 1.38) and the Διὸς ὄμμα τέλειον (59.13). An oracle at Macrobi. *Sat.* 1.20.13 calls Serapis ὄμμα τετρηλαυγῆς λαμπρὸν φάως ἡλίου, and Apollo Didymus extols his "swift eye" (*OracAp* 78). Gregory Nazianzus, in hymning Christ's cosmic role, describes the sun as the κύκλον ... ἔμπυρον and the moon as the ὄμμα τὸ νυκτός. Perhaps due to the solar religion of the Severans and, later, the emperor Julian, ὄμμα was a popular word

in late antique oracles. The Christian editor of the *Tübingen Theosophy* shows a special interest in oracles mentioning the ὄμμα of Zeus, notably Ζηνὸς πανδερκέος ἄφθιτον ὄμμα (Wolff no. 7 239; see also *Orac. Ap* 207). These astrological, apocalyptic, and majestic connotations of the author's choice of words in this last verse create a grand pyrotechnic finale.

## II

The hymnic structure of Book 6 may be outlined as follows:<sup>8</sup>

- I. Invocation in the *er-Stil* (1)
- II. *Pars Epica*/Narrative and argument (2–20)
  - A. Heavenly preparations for Christ's birth and kingship (2–3a)
  - B. Epiphany at baptism (3b–7)
  - C. Career of Jesus (8–17)
  - D. Christophany in Eden and Christ's advent compared (18ff)
- III. Apostrophe I: Rejection/failed recognition of Christ by mortals (21–25)
- IV. Apostrophe II: Makarismos on the Cross and Ascension (26ff)

As outlined, this formal structure, unique among pre-Constantinian Christian hymns, doxologies, and prayers,<sup>9</sup> resembles the shorter Homeric Hymns. Some peculiar features, however, notably the double apostrophe—one of admonition (21–25), one of blessing (26ff)—bring the hymn to a close. A similar juxtapositioning of admonition and blessing (in that order) occurs at *Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 480ff, referring to initiation into the mysteries at Eleusis. The first apostrophe of our hymn entails the condemnation of a city. Although this is not characteristic of the hymn, the condemnation of cities is very Sibylline and gives the hymn its distinctively oracular quality. The second apostrophe, the macarism of lines 26ff, is a common feature, usually

<sup>8</sup> "Er-Stil" is E. Norden's term for third-person, as opposed to second-person, invocations: *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig 1923) 143–76. For general overviews of hymnic form and style and further explanation of the terminology used here, see Janko, Race, and Keyssner and J. Bremmer, "Greek Hymns," in H. S. Vernel, ed., *Faith, Hope and Worship* (Leiden 1981) 193–214.

<sup>9</sup> The most comprehensive collection of early Christian material is still W. Christ and M. Paranikas, edd., *Anthologia Graeca Carminum Christianorum* (Leipzig 1871); note also C. Del Grande, *Liturgiae preces hymni Christianorum e papyris collecti* (= *Biblioteca Filologica Loffredo* 3 [Naples 1934]).



found near the end of the Greek hymn.<sup>10</sup> "O happy the race of those mortals ... which builds a temple to lord Apollo" sings Philodamus, for example, in his *Paeon to Dionysus*.<sup>11</sup> The final element in a hymn, however, is most often a request or some expression of χάρις, addressed to the god directly in the imperative or optative mood. The request is based on an argument consisting in the accumulation of divine attributes and epithets (e.g. in the Orphic Hymns) or, as in this hymn, implied in the *pars epica* (a narrative of the past glories of the deity). In our hymn the fictive futurity of the events described and the oracular *persona* assumed by the hymnist render the argument a priori: Christ merits praise because the Sibyl has prophetically intuited his divine paternity, career, death, and ascension. Accordingly, the notion of χάρις, in addition to coming earlier than usual in our hymn (before both apostrophes in line 20), is presented as a fact, not couched as a request. Thus, though clearly working within the traditions of classical and Hellenistic hymnody, the author seems to have adapted the genre.

*The Hymn as an Oracle—The Sibyl as a Hymnist.* Lactantius cites this poem four times, each as if it were a Sibylline prophecy. Why was this hymn read in antiquity as a Sibylline oracle? The intrusion of prayers and hymns into other collections of 'popular' religious literature such as the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the *Corpus Hermeticum* is well known.<sup>12</sup> Thus the early identification of the poem as a Sibylline prophecy and its inclusion in the collection are most easily explained as accidents of manuscript transmission or the caprice of ancient editors. As I have tried to show in the commentary, however, the oracular quality of Book 6 is also a literary affectation of its author. We

<sup>10</sup> E.g. *Hom. Hymn. Cer.* 486f; *Hom. Hymn.* nos. 30.7 to Ge, 25.4f to Apollo and the Muses=Hes. *Th.* 94-97.

<sup>11</sup> ὦ μάκαρ ὀλβία τε κείνων γε[νεὰ] βροτῶν ... ἃ κτίσει ναὸ[v] ἄνακ[τι] Φοῖβω, Käppel no. 39 lines 118-21.

<sup>12</sup> For the papyri see E. Heitsch, "Zu den Zauberhymnen," *Philologus* 103 (1959) 216-20, 223f; for the Hermetic corpus see G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton 1993) 84ff. In the Sibylline corpus the didactic poetry of [Phocylides] is inserted between 2.55 and 149 (Mss. Ψ only). See further P. W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (= *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* [Leiden 1978]). The longer narrative poems about Christ at *Orac Sib.* 1.323-86, 8.251-336, which may also be intrusions, are closer generically to paraphrases of biblical passages, on which see in general M. Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool 1985).

find precisely this type of affect at *Vit. Plot.* 128, where Porphyry (or his source) passes off a hymn in praise of Plotinus as an oracle of Apollo. He likens the hymn to the Delphic oracle about the wisdom of Socrates. As Harder notes, "es ist hier auf sehr besondere Weise platonischen Philosophie in den Formen einer zeitgenössischen Kunstepik oder besser Kunsthymnik (und nicht im üblichen Orakelstil) ausgesprochen."<sup>13</sup> Porphyry's 'oracle' begins, in true hymnic fashion, with an invocation of the Muses and ends with the apotheosis of Plotinus. Our author has done much the same for Jesus with the Sibyl as his authority.

The Sibyl did in fact have a reputation for hymnody in antiquity. Plutarch for example can, without special emphasis, use the verb ὑμνεύω to cite the Sibyl (*Mor.* 388F). Pausanias, who prided himself on a firsthand acquaintance with oracular literature (10.12.11), believed her to be an authoress of hymns as well (10.12.2; cf. *SibProph* 40; 49 n.31). Pausanias reports that the Delians in his time claimed that a hymn to Apollo used at Delos was written by a Sibyl named Herophile, whom he places in the Troad and the local historian Apollodorus of Erythrae identifies as Erythraean.<sup>14</sup> That Herophile's alleged hymn is none other than the famous "Homeric" *Hymn to Delian Apollo* (*SibProph* 44) can be seen from what is agreed to be a genuine fragment of this Erythraean Sibyl,<sup>15</sup> in which she 'predicts' the literary career of Homer, alluding to his blindness and calling him the Chian (*Orac. Sib.* 3.419–22; cf. *Thuc.* 3.104) —details of Homer's identity that stem ultimately, perhaps exclusively, from the *Hymn to Delian Apollo* (172).<sup>16</sup> The Ery-

<sup>13</sup> R. Harder, ed., *Plotins Schriften* 5c (Hamburg 1958) 116.

<sup>14</sup> *FGrHist* 422; cf. *Paus.* 10.12.7. Parke, I think confusedly, says Pausanias co-identifies Herophile of Erythrae with a Delphic Sibyl (*SibProph* 38). But Pausanias speaks (10.12.5) only of her occasional (ὅποτε δὲ ἀφίκοιτο) presence at Delphi in order to chant her oracles from a rock. She is nowhere said to be resident at Delphi and was apparently itinerant, having spent time in Samos, Claros, and Delos as well as the Troad (*viz.* Marpessus) where, as a temple attendant (νεωκόρος) to Apollo Smintheus, she died.

<sup>15</sup> Collins 359, following Geffcken, *TU* 13; also Parke, *SibProph* 44. The correspondence of the subject matter in *Orac. Sib.* 3.401–88, corroborated by a report from Apollodorus of Erythrae in Varro (*ap. Lact. Div. Inst.* 1.6 = *FGrHist* 422), is the basis for identifying this section as ultimately Erythraean.

<sup>16</sup> Semonides of Amorgos (fr. 29 Diehl) places him in Chios without mentioning his blindness.

thraean Sibyl's implicit indictment of Homer for plagiarism<sup>17</sup> is very telling if she *is* in fact Pausanias' Herophile, reputed composer of the Homeric Hymn, which that blind man from Chios in the poem itself claims as his own.<sup>18</sup> It is less pertinent here whether an historical Sibyl named Herophile actually composed the *Hymn to Delian Apollo*, nor even if she ever was in fact Erythraean. Rather, the allusion of *Orac. Sib.* 3 to the Delian hymn she is thought to have composed shows that readers in Pausanias' time did not distinguish sharply between authors of oracles and authors of hymns. After all, 'Orpheus' bridged the two genres. Of course the hexameter and epic diction used in both oracles and hymns encouraged intertextuality, even verbatim borrowing.<sup>19</sup>

*Date and Provenance.* The date and provenance of this hymn depend upon the relationship of Book 6 to Book 7. The close connection of fire, water, and the dove at Christ's baptism (*Orac. Sib.* 6.3-7) has a puzzling parallel in the ritual prescription at *Orac. Sib.* 7.76-86, where a fire is sprinkled with water and a white dove (πελείη) is released to heaven.<sup>20</sup> The rite, apparently Christian, seems to involve the commemoration of the participant's baptism, a re-enactment of Jesus' own, and is accompanied by a ritual cry (βοήσας):

ὥς σε λόγον γέννησε πατήρ, ἀτὰρ ὄρνιν ἀφήκα  
 ὄξυν ἀπαγγελτῆρα λόγων λόγον, ὕδασιν ἀγνοῖς  
 ραίνων σὸν βάπτισμα, δι' οὗ πυρὸς ἐξεφαάνθης.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear from 7.76-86 that "the begetting of Christ is closely associated, if not identified, with his baptism" but to interpret it

<sup>17</sup> *Orac. Sib.* 3.423ff: ἐπέων γὰρ ἐμῶν μέτρων κρατήσει. πρῶτος γὰρ κεραίασιν ἐμὰς βίβλους ἀναπλώσει.

<sup>18</sup> As Alexandre (*Excursus* 12) notes, however, the charge of plagiarism against Homer was common: cf. Diod. 4.66.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. the famous Homeric line (from the description of Achilles' shield) on the "tireless sun and the moon waxing into her fullness" (ἥελιόν τάκαμαντα σελήνῃν τε πλήθουσας, *Il.* 18.484), which turns up once at *Orac. Sib.* 3.21 and in the entirely unrelated *Hymn to all the Gods* from Epidaurus (line 9).

<sup>20</sup> Geffcken emended 7.79 to ἀγρίν σὺ πέλειαν on rather questionable grounds: "die wilde Taube fliegt schneller davon, in alle Welt, man kann sie nicht verfolgen, gerade so wie der Λόγος sich zum Himmel aufschwingt" (*TU* 34 n.4). Wilamowitz's ἀργῆτα ("white") dove is better and reflects the connection of this passage with Bk 6.

<sup>21</sup> "Just as the Father begat the Logos, I have released a bird, the Logos, a swift messenger of words, sprinkling your baptism with holy waters, through which you appeared from fire."

as a "theophany by fire," as do Collins and Geffcken, is, strictly speaking, inaccurate.<sup>22</sup> The participant in this ritual is said to have "emerged" *from* fire much as Christ "escaped" in Book 6. I suggest rather that Christ's "flight from fire" in Book 6 is best understood as his descent from the empyrean realm of the γενέτης ὑψιστος at line 2 to become "embodied" at baptism in accordance with the cosmology of Middle and Neoplatonism, a cosmology promulgated in the (hexametrical) *Chaldaean Oracles*, through which (we might imagine) these ideas reached our author. In the Neoplatonic universe fire was the dwelling place of the supreme, transcendent 'father'<sup>23</sup>—an empyrean region created by a second god, the father's "intellectual power"<sup>24</sup> who was identified as his son.<sup>25</sup> This cosmology permeated popular culture. It underlies a theological oracle of Clarian Apollo (3<sup>rd</sup> c.) in Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.71.1, 8<sup>26</sup> and is found in hymns from the Magical Papyri.<sup>27</sup>

Proponents of Middle and Neoplatonism, the more prominent of whom hailed from Syria-Palestine, made much of the "rational man passing through the ... sublunary universe (γένεσις) and returning to his celestial home."<sup>28</sup> In particular, Nu-

<sup>22</sup> Collins 409. Geffcken overemphasized the epiphanic nature of the fire at baptism in Book 6 because he saw in it an echo of the (non-extant) Gospel of the Ebionites, which supposedly began with the baptism and included a *Feuererscheinung*: εὐθὺς περιέλαμψε τὸν τόπον φῶς μέγα (*ap. Epirh. Haer.* 30.13.7). J. G. Gager, "Some Attempts to Label the *Oracula Sibyllina*, Book 7," *HTR* 65 (1972) 94, however, has rightly pointed out that light, not fire, is mentioned and the description in Bk 6 is actually closer to Justin Martyr's report of the event: πῦρ ἀνήφθη ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ (*Dial.* 88.3).

<sup>23</sup> Fr. 3: ὁ πατήρ ἤρπασσεν ἑαυτὸν οὐδ' ἐν ἑῇ δυνάμει νοερᾷ κλείσας ἴδιον πῦρ (E. Des Places, ed., *Oracles Chaldaïques: avec un choix de commentaires anciens* [Paris 1971] 13).

<sup>24</sup> Fr. 5.3f: νοῦ γὰρ νόος ἐστὶν ὁ κόσμου τεχνίτης πυρίου (Des Places 124).

<sup>25</sup> A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris 1949–54) III 54 n.2.

<sup>26</sup> G. Wolff, *Porphyrus de philosophia ex oraculis haurienda librorum reliquiae* (Berlin 1856) 234 no. 2: ἔσθ' ὑπὲρ οὐρανίου πυρὸς ἀφθίτου αἰθρομένη φλόξ; a shorter version in the *Tübingen Theosophy* (Wolff no.1 line 15) speaks of God ἐν περὶ ναίων. A. S. Hall, *ZPE* 32 (1978) 263, cited in Parke, *OracAp* 66, has shown that yet another version of the Clarian oracle, found inscribed in the city wall of Oenoanda and datable to the late third century, actually formed part of a shrine to the "Most High God" ("Ὑψιστος θεός").

<sup>27</sup> One of four versions of a hymn to the sun from *PGM* reads: "Ἥλιε ... διέπων φλογὸς ἀκάματον πῦρ (Heitsch 181 no. 4 line 2).

<sup>28</sup> R. LAMBERTON, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley 1986: hereafter 'Lamberton') 53.

menius of Apamea developed his allegorization of the Odyssean Cave of the Nymphs along these lines,<sup>29</sup> in which reference to water and wave in Homer and Plato's myths were interpreted as symbols for the world of γένεσις (cf. Lamberton 71). Numenius loosely cites "the prophet" of Gen. 1:2 ("the Spirit of God hovered over the waters") as additional ancient support that "souls settle upon God-inspired water."<sup>30</sup> The resonances with our hymn are striking: a pre-existent Christ (as the πνεῦμα ... ἐπιγινόμενον in line 7) descends from the empyrean world of the Most High God (1-4), is materialized upon the water (5-8) as the human Jesus, and returns to his fiery home (οἶκον ... ἔμπυρον ὄμμα, lines 27f). It is worth noting that when the author of *Orac. Sib.* 7 speaks of a "baptism through which you appeared from fire," he uses the verb ἐξεφάανθης at line end, the same metrical position as at *Od.* 12.441—the book of sea adventures culminating in that 'rational man's' escape from Charybdis (*i.e.*, the world of γένεσις).<sup>31</sup> Numenius may well have been familiar with the life of Jesus. Origen reports that he "published a story about Jesus, not mentioning his name, which he allegorized" (Fr. 10a Des Places=Orig. *c. Cels.* 4.51). Numenius, if not our anonymous hymnist, is thus the model from which to sketch a profile: a Syrian religious philosopher conversant in pagan, Jewish, and Christian literatures. Celsus, a perceptive critic of early Christianity, actually mentions a Christian group called the Sibyllistae. But who these Sibyllistae were, whence they came, and whether Sibyllistae was their own label or Celsus' is unclear.

The relationship of the ritual passage in Book 7 to Book 6 is closer than Geffcken and Collins have allowed. Alexandre and Kurfess rightly insist that much else in Book 7 stems from Book 6, especially lines 64-95, which are introduced by a woe pronounced upon Coele-Syria for "not recognizing your God when the Jordan washed him in its streams and the Spirit soared in (the form of) a dove" (οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὸν σὸν θεόν, ὃν ποτ' ἔλουσεν Ἰόρδανος προχοῆσι καὶ ἔπτατο πνεῦμα πελείη). Book 6 and 7.64-95 also show especially strong (non-formulaic)

<sup>29</sup> *Od.* 13.110ff; Numenius *frr.* 30f, 33 Des Places.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. 30.3-6 Des Places: καὶ τὸν προφήτην εἰρηκέναι ἐμφέρεσθαι ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος θεοῦ πνεῦμα.

<sup>31</sup> Same position at *Il.* 4.468, 13.278; Sutton line 4.

verbal affinities.<sup>32</sup> To the arguments of Kurfess and Alexandre in favor of the relationship between the two books, I would add two further observations: (1) the *Orac. Sib.*'s only two references to the Jordan River by name occur in Books 6 and 7, and (2) the mythological figure Οὐρανός at 7.71 parallels the odd use of the rare patronymic οὐρανίδαιο at 6.12. In both passages Ouranos is linked contextually to each book's description of the baptism of Jesus, which involves the unusual (non-NT) manifestation of fire. Furthermore, in the Ω MSS. Books 6 and 7 often form one continuous book; this suggests that ancient editors, among whose ranks may well be our hymnist, felt the similarities. Alexandre thought that the same author did in fact have a hand in both books;<sup>33</sup> if so, the verses against Tyre, Coele-Syria, and Berytus (7.64ff), coupled with warnings of the time "when another warlike tribe of Persians will come to rule" (7.40ff), referring to the establishment of the Sassanid dynasty in 224, point to a Syro-Palestinian provenance<sup>34</sup> and a date roughly in the Severan period.<sup>35</sup> Alexandre's suggestion (*Excursus* 384ff) of 233–235, compensating for the *ex eventu* nature of Sibylline prophecy, is eminently sound.

In further support of a Syro-Palestinian provenance I offer the case of the Christian apologist Justin Martyr, a Greek from Samaria and one of only two other authors to refer to fire at

<sup>32</sup> Alexandre persuasively demonstrated this point but subsequent commentators have neglected his discussion: *Excursus* 382f; cf. esp. *Orac. Sib.* 6.11 with 7.24ff, 6.16 with 7.31.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Excursus* 380: "doctrina, sententiis ipsisque aliquando verbis ita inter se convenient ut plane ab eadem manu profecti videantur." Kurfess, in E. Hennecke, W. Schneemelcher, M. Wilson, edd., *New Testament Apocrypha* (London 1963–65) II 708. Gager's discussion of Book 7 (*supra* n.22: 91–97) does not treat evidence from Book 6.

<sup>34</sup> Geffcken (*TU* 31, following Mendelsohn) speculated a Syrian provenance, seeing an Ebionite influence in the conjunction of fire and baptism. Collins and Kurfess (*SW* 313) rightly object that nothing in Bk 6 necessarily indicates a sectarian much less Ebionite origin. Collins (406), however, who like Geffcken minimizes the relationship of Books 6 and 7, dismisses the hypothesis of a Syrian locale.

<sup>35</sup> In 194 Septimius Severus divided Roman Syria into two provinces, "Syria Coele" stretching north and east of Mount Lebanon, and "Syria Phoenice" to the south, including Palestine. But, as F. Millar notes (*The Roman Near East: 31 BC-AD 337* [Cambridge (Mass.) 1993] 21, 423f), Septimius' designation of the northern reaches as "Syria Coele" was "against all previous usage," for epigraphic and numismatic evidence shows that Greek cities of the Decapolis (trans-Jordan) described themselves as belonging to Coele Syria decades before and after Septimius officially divided the province.

Jesus' baptism (*Dial. Tryph.* 88.3)—a detail for which he is probably dependent upon local Levantine traditions. The details of the hymnic argument too are remarkably close to Justin's, who in a compressed passage (*Apol.* 1.30) cites Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and his miracles as evidence for his divinity and the truth of Christian teaching—a teaching that he believed was also adumbrated by Greek philosophers and poets including the Sibyl.<sup>36</sup> With Justin our author shares an interest in pre-existence, miracles, and Christophany (see *ad* 1ff, 13ff, 18f). With a deft touch, an apologist's criteria have been carefully interwoven to form the fabric of our hymn. Justin also anticipates our author's developed symbolic, metaphorical interest in the Cross (lines 26ff), seeing visual reminders of it in the shape of the human body, a ship's mast, even the standards of the Roman army (*Apol.* 1.55).<sup>37</sup>

*Two Parallels.* Finally and briefly, the relation of this poem to other ancient literature. We have seen how in Book 6 the author's use of *prosopopoeia* evokes the authenticating power of the Sibyl for early Christian apologetic: the hymnist sings as a Sibyl and by so doing wields the great authority of pagan antiquity. This prophetic impersonation has an intriguing prototype in Lycophron's *Alexandra*, which Parke aptly called "a Sibylline oracle transmuted into high literature." The first-person *persona* and the predominant use of the future tense for narrative action in Lycophron's iambic poem certainly anticipate the technique employed in our hymn, also characterized by the future tense, which in the *pars epica* is a feature virtually unknown in other hymns.

It will be more readily observed that Book 6 shares many stylistic and thematic features with Verg. *Ecl.* 4. Kurfess has discussed the possible influence of Sibylline oracles on *Ecl.* 4 and (more persuasively) the influence of *Ecl.* 4 on the *Orac. Sib.* (notably at 7.146–49),<sup>38</sup> though he does not mention Book 6 in

<sup>36</sup> *Apol.* 1.30, alluding to *Orac. Sib.* 3.42f. The Sibyl is proffered as pagan testimony to a final eschatological conflagration for which Justin also cites the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis*.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. H. Rahner, in J. Campbell, ed., *Pagan and Christian Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, trr. R. Manheim and R. F. C. Hull (New York 1963) 186.

<sup>38</sup> "Virgil's vierte Ekloge und die Oracula Sibyllina," *HJ* 73 (1954) 120–27; "Virgil's 4. Ekloge und die christlichen Sibyllinen," *Gymnasium* 62 (1955) 110ff.

either study. Nonetheless, Vergil's Sibylline posture,<sup>39</sup> his use of the future tense to describe narrative action,<sup>40</sup> the nativity/epiphany of an ominous child,<sup>41</sup> his cosmic destiny<sup>42</sup>—all of it clothed in natural imagery, rooted in agricultural metaphors—is present in our hymn as well.<sup>43</sup> It is unlikely that our author read Lycophron. As for influence from Vergil, as Norden says of influence in the opposite direction, this is "schwer zu antworten."<sup>44</sup> Greek translations of Vergil did exist in the second and third centuries,<sup>45</sup> and a Greek translation of virtually the entire *Ecl.* 4 is cited by the Emperor Constantine in his speech *Ad sanctorum coetum* (delivered at Antioch in 325), where he offers the earliest surviving Messianic interpretation of the poem and cites the Sibyl to support it.<sup>46</sup> I leave open whether or not we have in Book 6 a rare case of Greek dependence on Latin poetry. If nothing else, clearly the *Ecl.* 4 illustrates how hymnic (or encomiastic) and Sibylline elements may co-exist in the same poem.

Whatever its classical and Hellenistic prototypes, Book 6 is surely a welcome exception to Norden's claim that "Die Sibyllistik war künstlerisch so wertlos, dass sie kaum Poesie heissen darf." This oracular hymn, probably written by a Christian Middle Platonist in Syria-Palestine in the Severan period, is also without question the first bloom of a poetic tradition of late antiquity that will reach full flower in an author like Nonnus of Panopolis, whose hexameter paraphrase of John's Gospel is a bold attempt to lift the Gospel story to the level of epic drama. In Nonnus, Jesus virtually carries the

<sup>39</sup> *Cumaei ... carminis* (4); *non me carminibus vincet nec Thracius Orpheus* (55).

<sup>40</sup> *solvent* (14), *accipiet ... videbit* (15), *videbitur* (16), *reget* (17), *fundet* (20), etc.

<sup>41</sup> *nova progenies caelo demittitur alto* (7); *cara deum suboles, magnum Iovis incrementum* (49).

<sup>42</sup> *pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem* (17).

<sup>43</sup> For pastoral description in *Orac. Sib.* 6, cf. lines 5, 8, 16–20, (23f), and comm. *ad. locc.*

<sup>44</sup> *Die Geburt des Kindes* (Leipzig 1924) 145.

<sup>45</sup> B. Baldwin, "Vergilius Graecus," *AJP* 97 (1976) 361–68; E. A. Fischer, "Greek Translations of Latin Literature in the Fourth Century A.D.," *YCS* 27 (1982) 173–215.

<sup>46</sup> R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York 1986) 647–52, attributes the translation and Messianic interpretation to Lactantius—an intriguing suggestion given Lactantius' interest in Bk 6; see above comm. *ad* 9–14, 23ff.



thyrsus,<sup>47</sup> and the depiction of Christ as a Dionysus is no less bold, or perhaps intentional in our hymn. The apostrophe to the Cross in particular, found first (so far as I know) in this hymn, has had a long literary life. Fortunatus develops this motif into a conceit in his famous hymn *Pange lingua* (*Misc.* 2.2), to which Robert Herrick adds an Alexandrian touch, rounding off his *Hesperides* with *His Anthem, to Christ on the Crosse*, a cross-shaped poem to "the sacred tree."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> E.g. *Par. Jo.* 7.185=Jo. 7:49. Conversely in Nonnus' *Dion.* a Christic Dionysus appears now and again, displaying behavior inconceivable without a literary/theological influence from Christianity. For this view of Nonnus see G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor 1990) 41-54. For the syncretism of Christ and Dionysus on late antique sarcophagi see E. C. Olsen, *Dionysiac Sarcophagi in Baltimore* (Baltimore 1941).

<sup>48</sup> I would like to thank C. A. Faraone and Peter White for carefully reading earlier drafts of this paper and making excellent suggestions for its improvement.