The Four Kingdoms Motif and Sibylline Temporality in Sibylline Oracles 4

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1 Introduction

The best-known example of the four kingdoms motif in the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles can be found in Sib. Or. 4. The fourth sibyl prophesies a succession of kingdoms, also framed as ten generations, that will each end in destruction: Assyria (4.49–53), Media (4.54–64), Persia (4.65–87), Macedonia (4.88–101), and finally, Rome (4.102–151). This text has attracted scholarly attention primarily in debates about the source(s) for the four kingdoms motif, especially as that motif occurs in Daniel.¹ Secondly, scholars have turned to the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 as providing data about the compositional layers of the book, arguing that an earlier four kingdoms oracle underlies the final five kingdoms Jewish oracle.²

Recently, the four kingdoms motif has been re-examined within a brilliant study by Paul Kosmin on periodized time in the Seleucid empire.³ Sibylline Oracles 4, however, did not appear in this analysis. This chapter will review the source and redactional conclusions of John Collins and David Flusser on the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4, and place them in conversation with Kosmin's proposal, which reads the motif primarily as an anti-Seleucid response to imperial periodized time. This chapter argues that although our historical knowledge of the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 is reconstructed, scholarly speculation about the date and focus of the oracle call the universality of the motif as a third- and second-century BCE anti-Seleucid trope

- 1 See David Flusser, "The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel," *IOS* 2 (1972): 148–75; John J. Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl in the Development of the Jewish Sibyllina," *JJS* 25 (1974): 365–80; idem, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 167–68; and Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Four World Empires of Daniel 2 against its Near Eastern Environment," *JOT* 12 (1979): 17–30, esp. 19–20. Joseph Ward Swain connected the Sibylline Oracles with the four kingdoms "philosophy of history" in 1940, but did not explicitly reference Sib. Or. 4 (Joseph Ward Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies Opposition History under the Roman Empire," *CP* 35.1 [1940]: 1–21, esp. 15–16).
- 2 Flusser, "The Four Empires;" Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl."
- 3 See Paul J. Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), and discussion below.

into question. It is just as likely that the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 is anti-Macedonian. This does not undermine Kosmin's reading of the motif elsewhere in light of Seleucid historiography, but it does provide a significant example of the motif that may not have been engaging with Seleucid imperial power in its production.

This first level of engagement with Sib. Or. 4 in the chapter, then, is concerned with locating the four kingdoms motif in light of the proposed redactional layers of the book. It adopts a posture of looking backwards from the text, fragmenting it into sources and strata. While this is an act of imaginative reconstruction, it has value for attending to breaks in the text and aiming to locate the text as precisely as possible in its own historical moment. There are other postures, however, that we can and should adopt as we read texts like the Sibylline Oracles. Hindy Najman has issued a forceful call to biblical philologists to consider the formation and transformation of ancient Jewish texts as they move *forwards*—not just backwards—training their focus on what she has called a “traditionary process.”⁴ Kosmin also has specifically encouraged this shift in focus with respect to the four kingdoms motif, indicting earlier scholarship for becoming preoccupied with debates about the motif's origins.⁵

After looking backward, then, from the text of Sib. Or. 4 to its reconstructed four kingdoms oracle, this chapter will look forward, focusing on the traditionary process of the four kingdoms motif within the book. On the surface, time appears to be increasingly linearized in Sib. Or. 4, as the writer(s) add a fifth and final kingdom to the four kingdoms motif. A closer reading, however, finds that sibylline writerly activity produces timelines that are multiple and fragmented—the multi-layered periodization of time into ten generations and four kingdoms breaks off as a later redactor adds another kingdom and obscures the final generation. I argue that the fragmentation and multiplicity of the transformed four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 could destabilize ancient audiences.⁶ The predictability of the four kingdoms motif and the final

4 Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 46–48; idem, “Configuring the Text in Biblical Studies,” in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, ed. Eric F. Mason et al., JJS 153/1 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 13–22.

5 Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 182.

6 In marking sibylline time as fragmentary, multiple, and less linear, I am influenced by an enormous body of research challenging notions of time as a singular linear whole. I have been particularly influenced by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985); Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World,

conflagration are undermined with a sense of unpredictability and chaos, disorienting the audience and escalating the threat of divine judgment.

2 The Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles

Before considering the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4, however, a few words of introduction about the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles are needed.⁷ The Sibylline Oracles are a collection of Jewish and Christian prophecies that place teaching about God and the kind of life that God requires in the mouth of a type of “pagan” prophetess, a Sibyl. In antiquity, Sibyls were perhaps best known in relation to a collection of prophetic books owned by the Roman Senate and under the care of a group of men who consulted them under orders from the Senate.⁸ In art history, Sibyls are now perhaps best known for their presence on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Each Sibyl in the Jewish-Christian Oracles

1968), 253–64. I have also been influenced by a growing number of scholars who have applied the field of temporal studies to the study of ancient Judaism. One such scholar is Hindy Najman, who takes Benjamin's notion of rupture as a way of reading varied Jewish reactions to the destruction of the second temple, in Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future*, 1–25. A second is Paul Kosmin, who brings insights from temporal studies to an analysis of time in Seleucid-era texts and material culture (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*). Kosmin will receive more attention below. Third and finally, my thinking in this essay is deeply indebted to the papers and conversations at the Enoch Colloquium, “The Sense(s) of History: Ancient Apocalypses and Their Temporalities,” organized by Giovanni Bazzana and Paul Kosmin, Harvard Divinity School, November 16–17, 2017.

- 7 See, e.g., Johannes Geffcken, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902); John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, SBLDS 13 (Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974); idem, “Sibylline Oracles,” in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:317–472; idem, “Sibylline Discourse,” in *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 251–70; David S. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Erich Gruen, “Jews, Greeks, and Romans in the Third Sibylline Oracle,” in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 15–36; idem, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 268–91; Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting: With an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, SVTP 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); J. L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles: With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Olivia Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry, Gender, and Economics: A Study in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); Ashley L. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity in Book III of the Sibylline Oracles: Gender, Intertextuality, and Politics*, JSJSup 194 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020).

- 8 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4.62.4–6; Cicero, *On Divination* 2.54.112.

is a pseudepigraphic creation of the writers. John Collins has written that even if there was an historical Sibyl, “she was already lost in the mists of legend by the fifth century.”⁹ Written in hexameter verse, the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles combine a traditional trope of sibylline prophecies as proclamations of doom with an initially Jewish, then Christian, innovation of sibylline ethical and theological instruction.¹⁰

The Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles survive in two manuscript traditions. The first manuscript tradition contains books numbered 1–8, but subdivides into versions that contain a prologue and versions that do not. The second contains two books numbered 9 and 10 that reduplicate material in the first tradition, followed by books 11–14. Modern editions thus contain 1–8, and then 11–14. The earliest manuscripts date to the fifteenth century.¹¹ Scholarly suggestions about the dates of sibylline composition do not stem, therefore, from the material evidence. Rather, scholars date the texts in light of the contents of the oracles themselves and the citations of ancient readers, including Clement of Alexandria and Lactantius.¹²

Scholarly consensus on the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles holds that they are composite with respect to time and place of composition. In addition, some books were produced by Jewish writers and editors, and others by Christian writers and editors. As a whole, the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles date from approximately the second century BCE to the seventh century CE.¹³ Book 3 was probably composed earliest; the majority of it was produced by Hellenistic Jewish writers and editors in Egypt in the second century BCE.¹⁴ Book 14 was probably composed latest, most likely in the seventh century CE by an Alexandrian Jewish writer. According to Collins, “[t]here is nothing to suggest Christian authorship.”¹⁵ The remainder of the books were probably

9 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 317.

10 John J. Collins, “The Jewish Transformation of Sibylline Oracles,” in *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic Roman Judaism*, JSJS 54 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 181–97, esp. 189; idem, “Sibylline Discourse,” 251–70, esp. 252–53; H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1988), 7, 10–11, 12–13; Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 8 n. 31, 16–17, 136.

11 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 321; Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 257.

12 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 322. For discussions of early Christian reception of the Sibylline Oracles, see Madalina Toca, “The Greek Patristic Reception of the Sibylline Oracles,” in *Authoritative Texts and Reception History: Aspects and Approaches*, ed. Dan Batovici and Kristin De Troyer, BibInt 151 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 260–77; Bard Thompson, “Patristic Use of the Sibylline Oracles,” *RR* 16.3–4 (1952): 115–36.

13 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 317–472.

14 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 354–55; idem, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, 21–33.

15 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 459.

composed at different times during the first three centuries CE, and Collins suggests that books 3, 5, and 11–14 were probably written in Egypt.¹⁶ In addition to books 3 and 14, books 4, 5, 11, and 12 have been characterized as Jewish, although Christian interpolations occur in Sib. Or. 3, 5, and 12.¹⁷ Several of the other books in the collection appear to have earlier Jewish layers transformed by later Christian writers, namely, Sib. Or. 1–2 and 8.¹⁸

Complex scholarly proposals for dating individual books within the collection—and for reconstructing redactional layers within individual books—strengthen the probability that numerous literary agents contributed to the writing, redaction, and assembly of Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles.¹⁹ One cannot take for granted that the literary agent(s) behind one book of the collection knew about other books. The influence of one Jewish-Christian Sibylline text on another has to be proven. Collins has argued compellingly that Sib. Or. 3 and 5 “form a coherent tradition”²⁰ within Egyptian Judaism. Manuscript evidence suggests continuity between books 1 and 2,²¹ and interpretive activity suggests some knowledge of book 3 by book 8.²² Each relationship has to be investigated on a case-by-case basis.

This chapter will focus on the reconstructed redaction of the four kingdoms motif found in one book within the sibylline collection, Sib. Or. 4. Book 4 seems to have at least two layers, as I will discuss in detail below. There is more scholarly agreement about the date of the final layer, at the end of the first century—approximately 80 CE—as Sib. Or. 4 demonstrates awareness of the eruption of Vesuvius, and that is the last datable event detectable in the book.²³

16 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 317–472, esp. 322.

17 Cf. Sib. Or. 3.776 (Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 354); Sib. Or. 5.257, and perhaps also 5.51 (Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 390; Arnaldo Momigliano, “From the Pagan to the Christian Sibyl: Prophecy as History of Religion,” in *The Uses of Greek and Latin: Historical Essays*, ed. A. C. Dionisotti, Anthony Grafton, and Jill Kraye [London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1988], 3–18, esp. 8); Sib. Or. 12.30–34, 152 (Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 443).

18 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 330–31, 415–16.

19 I have argued elsewhere that the number of agents likely involved in producing these texts—as well as ancient understandings of prophetic writing that posited the collaboration of deities, prophets, and scribes—make the language of a single “author” inappropriate for describing the literary activity of producing Sibylline Oracles, from both ancient and modern perspectives (Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 145–51).

20 Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, xiii.

21 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 330; Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 258–59.

22 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 415–17.

23 Flusser, “The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel”; Collins, “The Place of the Fourth Sibyl,” 365–80; Emil Schürer, “The Sibylline Oracles,” in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)*, rev. and ed. Géza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 3.1:618–53, esp. 641.

Sib. Or. 4 is one of the Jewish books of the Jewish-Christian Sibylline collection, with no Christian interpolations.²⁴ I have argued elsewhere that Sib. Or. 4 demonstrates the ongoing Jewish pseudepigraphic use of the figure of a sibyl for political critique of Rome and prophetic rivalry with traditions about Apollo's prophecy at Delphi.²⁵

Given the complexities of sibylline production, the argument of this essay that sibylline temporality in book 4 is fragmentary and multiple is not a claim about redactional or writerly intent. This chapter does comment on redactional and compositional activity with respect to the four kingdoms motif, but I am not arguing that the resulting temporality was the conscious design of sibylline writer(s) and editor(s). This chapter is, rather, a description of possible literary effects on audiences of the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles, ancient and modern. It considers interpretive possibilities for the seams that scholars have used to work backwards to proposed sources, and the kinds of sibylline temporality such seams could create.

3 The Four Kingdoms in Sibylline Oracles 4

The fourth Sibyl initiates her prophecy with a triumphant call to the “people of boastful Asia and Europe”²⁶ to hear her. She boldly claims,

I am not an oracle-utterer of false Phoebus,²⁷ whom vain
men called a god, and falsely called a prophet,
but of the great God, whom no hands of men made
like speechless idols of polished stone.²⁸

24 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 381: “There is no trace of Christian redaction in Sibylline Oracles 4.”

25 Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 161–66.

26 λεώς Ἀσίας μεγαλαυχέος Εὐρώπης τε (Sib. Or. 4.1). All Greek texts are from J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902). Translations of the Sibylline Oracles are my own, in consultation with Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 317–472.

27 This disavowal of Apollo functions simultaneously to differentiate the Sibyl of book 4 from other sibyls associated with Apollo (cf. Cumaean Sibyl, Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.77–82) and to undermine traditions about Apollo's prophecy at Delphi (Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 164–67).

28 οὐ ψευδοῦς Φοίβου χρησμηγόρος, ὄντε μάταιοι
ἄνθρωποι θεὸν εἶπον, ἐπεψεύσαντο δὲ μάντιν·
ἀλλὰ θεοῦ μεγάλοιο, τὸν οὐ χεῖρες ἔπλασαν ἀνδρῶν
εἰδώλοισι ἀλλάοισι λιθοξέστοισιν ὅμοιον (Sib. Or. 4.4–7).

The book then details how people should and should not interact with the Sibyl's God. The great God, according to the Sibyl, is not worshipped in a temple of stone, like idols (4.6–17); rather pious people reject temples, look to God's glory, and avoid a list of vices, including murder, dishonest gain, and adultery (4.24–39). This leads to an assertion of God's judgment of the world and of mortals, including the impious and the pious together (4.40–48). Twice in Sib. Or. 4.6–48 she invokes a ten generation framing for the prophecies to come. After differentiating her God from idols who are worshipped in temples, the Sibyl explains,

This one drove a whip through my heart within,
So that I would recount accurately to men as many things as are now,
and as many things as will be hereafter,
from the first generation until the tenth comes.²⁹

The Sibyl proceeds to describe how the righteous live, pronouncing the certainty of God's judgment and rewards (4.24–46). Then, closing her introductory comments, she reiterates the ten generation framework:

But all things will be accomplished in the tenth generation;
And now, as many things as will happen from the first generation, these
I will tell.³⁰

In both instances, the Sibyl associates the tenth generation with the completion of her prophecy, claiming that the things she predicts will happen for ten generations to come.

Immediately after the passage quoted above, the fourth Sibyl launches into oracles against various nations, predicting their rise and fall in succession. It is in this litany of nations that the list of ten generations is partially realized. The kingdoms are not numbered, except for the first,³¹ Assyria, whose rule begins

29 οὗτός μοι μάστιγα διὰ φρενὸς ἤλασεν εἶσω,
ἀνθρώποις ὅσα νῦν τε καὶ ὀπίσσω ἔσσεται αὐτίς
ἐκ πρώτης γενεῆς ἄχρις ἐς δεκάτην ἀφικέσθαι
ἀτρεκέως καταλέξει· (Sib. Or. 4.18–21). For discussions of divine violence against the Sibyl during inspiration, see Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth: Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinthians*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 146–55; Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 168–80.

30 ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν δεκάτῃ γενεῇ μάλα πάντα τελεῖται·
νῦν δ' ὅσ' ἀπὸ πρώτης γενεῆς ἔσται, τάδε λέξω (Sib. Or. 4.47–48).

31 Described adverbially (πρῶτα, Sib. Or. 4.49).

after the flood.³² Unlike the generations, there is no indication in advance that the audience should expect a list of four kingdoms. Nevertheless, Sib. Or. 4 follows the elevation and destruction of four kingdoms: Assyria (4.49–53), Media (4.54–64), Persia (4.65–87), and Macedonia (4.88–101). The Sibyl then connects the decline of Macedonia with Rome's ascent to power, without any immediate discussion of Roman downfall:

Nor will the strength of Macedonia exist; but from the west
A great Italian war will flourish, under whom the world
will be enslaved, bearing a servile yoke for the Italians.³³

All told, the Sibyl prophesies about the rise of five kingdoms in succession: the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans.

Unlike the previous four kingdoms, Rome's destruction does not follow the explicit cyclical rise and fall of its predecessors. The fourth Sibyl first describes the havoc wreaked by the Romans, including the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (4.115–29). Rome's destruction eventually occurs after a chaotic series of predictions that begin with the eruption of Vesuvius (4.130–34). The volcanic eruption then leads to military conflicts, during which Rome will make retribution for her plundering of Asia (4.147–48). The power of Rome implicitly ends with a final conflagration that will destroy the whole world, although Rome is not singled out in this devastation.³⁴ The book ends with a post-conflagration resurrection of the dead; this is one of Sib. Or. 4's most famous characteristics, along with its anti-temple polemic and its exhortation to baptism.³⁵

The ten generations promised in 4.20 and 4.47 appear in a complex relationship with the different kingdoms indicted by the Sibyl. Throughout 4.49–101, the Sibyl parcels out nine of the generations among the first three kingdoms: Assyria, six generations (4.50); Media, two generations, (4.55); Persia, one generation (4.66). In 4.86, she declares that the destruction of the Persians will happen in the tenth generation.³⁶ She never assigns the tenth generation

32 Sib. Or. 4.51–53.

33 οὐδὲ Μακεδονίης ἔσται κράτος· ἀλλ' ἀπὸ δυσμῶν
Ἰταλὸς ἀνθήσει πόλεμος μέγας, ᾧ ὕπο κόσμος
λατρεύσει δούλειον ἔχων ζυγὸν Ἰταλίδησιν (Sib. Or. 4.102–104).

34 The final conflagration is promised in 4.159–61, then described in 4.171–78.

35 See discussion in Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 381–83.

36 "But when the race of mortals comes to the tenth generation,
Then will there be servile yokes and fear for the Persians."
ἀλλ' ὅταν ἐς δεκάτην γενεὴν μερόπων γένος ἔλθῃ,
καὶ τότε Πέρσῃσιν ζυγὰ δούλια καὶ φόβος ἔσται (Sib. Or. 4.86–87).

to any kingdom, however.³⁷ Once the Sibyl begins prophesying against the Macedonians and the Romans, there is no further mention of numbered generations.

On the basis of this combination of nine generations and five kingdoms, David Flusser and John Collins have both argued that Sib. Or. 4 was likely composed in a multi-stage process, with an original oracle that contained four kingdoms and assigned the tenth generation to the Macedonians.³⁸ They differ, however, in their proposed models of composition. Flusser and Collins also argue that Persian source(s) underlie the four kingdoms model in Sib. Or. 4.

Flusser argues that there were three stages of composition: (1) a four kingdoms oracle, ending with the Macedonians; (2) a redacted oracle, which added the Romans after the Macedonians and removed the tenth generation; (3) the final form of the book, produced by a Jewish writer before 80 CE, which made judgment against Rome more explicit.³⁹ Flusser suggests that there was a first layer of redaction because the language at the beginning of the Roman section so closely resembles the previous oracles (4.102–104). He notes that although a five empire scheme (ending with Rome) is widely attested in ancient literature, the first redactor did not know it; instead, “he followed the old scheme of four empires with the Macedonians as the fourth empire, and only stated that the Romans will follow them, without actually putting them in his scheme.”⁴⁰ Flusser offers little speculation about the production of the first two layers, except to suggest that if the mention of the flood in 4.51–53 is part of the earliest stratum, the source may already have been Jewish, produced around 140 BCE.⁴¹

Positing a strong contrast between attestations of the pre-Roman four-empire scheme and the Roman-era scheme of five empires, Flusser contends that both the ten generation framing and the four kingdoms motif are derived from Zoroastrian historiographical concepts. He finds meaningful resemblances between Sib. Or. 4 and Daniel and two Persian texts: *Zand-ī Vohūman Yasn* and *Dēnkard*, both later interpretations of a lost Avestan text. These Avestan interpretations periodize time into four ages associated with different metals, and the *Zand-ī Vohūman Yasn* connects the fourth kingdom with a

37 Flusser, “The Four Empires,” 150.

38 Flusser, “The Four Empires;” Collins, “The Place of the Fourth Sibyl.” For the more general suggestion that a pagan oracle underlies Sib. Or. 4, see also Geffcken, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit*, 18–19.

39 Flusser, “The Four Empires,” 150–52.

40 Flusser, “The Four Empires,” 151.

41 Flusser, “The Four Empires,” 152.

tenth century.⁴² Flusser takes these Persian historiographical concepts, rather than the specific texts, as the source for the four-empire motif in Sib. Or. 4 and Daniel.⁴³

Collins follows Flusser, and a more general suggestion of Geffcken,⁴⁴ in arguing for an earlier, Hellenistic oracle that predates Sib. Or. 4. He agrees that this oracle would have placed the tenth generation among the Macedonians.⁴⁵ He adds to this argument a suggestion that the description of the final conflation and resurrection of the dead in 4.175–92 also belonged to the earliest layer, as they fit with Zoroastrian expectations.⁴⁶ In contrast to Flusser's suggestion that the earliest layer was Jewish, and his proposal of two redactional stages, Collins argues that the earliest layer was probably non-Jewish, and that there was only one layer of redactional activity in the book, at approximately 80 CE.⁴⁷ In Collins's reconstruction, the Hellenistic oracle could date from Alexander's lifetime to the mid-first century BCE, with more probability resting on an earlier date in that range, shortly after Alexander, because only one generation is assigned to the Macedonians.⁴⁸ Collins makes the compelling case that a legendary great flood is attested in many places outside of Jewish sources in ancient literature; therefore, beginning the kingdom of Assyria after the flood in 4.51 does not necessitate Jewish composition for the Hellenistic oracle. In addition, he avers that Jewish composition during the Macedonian empire would likely bear traces of Jewish resistance to the Greeks, and that such resistance is unlikely to have been omitted by a second Jewish redactor.⁴⁹ Collins does not specifically interrogate Flusser's proposal of a two-stage redactional model, but his proposal is the more probable, as a first-century Jewish redactor could certainly write in a continuous style with the earlier oracle, and indeed does in the subsequent sections (4.103–72). Positing a first redactor on the basis of linguistic resemblances in 4.102–104 with the earlier oracle is unnecessary for imagining the composition of this text.

Collins also concurs with Flusser about the likelihood that Persian historiographical concepts influenced the fourth Sibyl's periodization of history. He

42 Flusser, "The Four Empires," 165–74. For the tenth century, *Zand-ī Vohūman Yasn* 11, 1; Flusser, "The Four Empires," 170. Transliterations of this text's title vary: Flusser and Collins name it as *Zand-ī Vohūman Yasn*; Paul Kosmin names it as *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, as in the discussion below.

43 Flusser, "The Four Empires," 172.

44 See n. 38.

45 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 370.

46 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 374.

47 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 375–77; idem, "Sibylline Oracles," 381.

48 Collins, *Daniel*, 167; idem, "Sibylline Oracles," 381.

49 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 375–76.

affirms Flusser's reading of resemblances with *Zand-ī Vohūman Yasn*, and also contends for similarities with the Oracle of Hystaspes and with the examples of a five-empire schema in Roman historians that Flusser separates out from the four kingdoms motif.⁵⁰ In Collins's reading, "schematization of history began as a feature of political oracles, especially in Persia."⁵¹

The proposal that Persian or Iranian sources are behind the four kingdoms motif in Daniel has been a topic of much scholarly discussion,⁵² but Sib. Or. 4 has been almost entirely left out of these conversations. A notable exception is Gerhard F. Hasel, who argued against linear proposals for the development of the four kingdoms motif, either from Greek or from Persian sources.⁵³ Hasel's article included specific discussion of Sib. Or. 4.⁵⁴ Expanding his sphere of inquiry beyond the four kingdoms pattern of Assyrians, Medes, Persians, and Macedonians, and including texts such as the Babylonian "Dynastic Prophecy," Hasel suggested the existence of "a common Near Eastern prototypical schema of successive kingdoms, dynasties, or empires."⁵⁵ Hasel rightly argues that tracking cross-cultural periodizations of history that employ a pattern of one kingdom following on another more broadly tells us something culturally significant about history in the ancient Near East. His proposal obscures the more specific similarities, however, between Sib. Or. 4 and the Iranian sources, including the intersection of a tenth generation and a fourth kingdom, noted by Flusser, and the joint beliefs in a final conflagration and a resurrection, noted by Collins. This is by no means to undermine the deeply Hellenistic character of Sib. Or. 4, but rather to reaffirm Iranian, as well as Hellenistic, influence.

Recently, Paul Kosmin has returned to the question of the four kingdoms motif within a rich study of presentations of time during the Seleucid era. Kosmin analyzes a vast range of textual and material sources, making a

50 E.g., Tacitus, *Histories* 5.8–9; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.2.1–4; Appianus, *Roman History*; and Velleius Paterculus. Contrast Flusser, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 159–62, with Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 372 n. 40. Collins and Flusser adduce the same texts in these two places, but for different ends.

51 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 372.

52 See, e.g., Paul Niskanen, who re-invigorated an insight from Arnaldo Momigliano and suggested that Daniel 2 draws its succession of kingdoms from Herodotus (along with Daniel's theology of history), rather than from Persian sources. Paul Niskanen, *The Human and the Divine in History: Herodotus and the Book of Daniel*, LHBOTS 396 (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Arnaldo Momigliano, "Biblical Studies and Classical Studies: Simple Reflections upon the Historical Method," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, ed. S. Berti, trans. M. Masella-Gayley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3–9.

53 Hasel, "The Four World Empires," 23.

54 Hasel, "The Four World Empires," 19–20.

55 Hasel, "The Four World Empires," 23–24.

compelling proposal about notions of time in Seleucid-era texts. Like much of the scholarship on the four kingdoms motif, however, Kosmin does not discuss the Sibylline Oracles. Kosmin's argument is that the Seleucid Empire introduced a new and enduring way of periodizing and characterizing time: numbering years in continuous succession, rather than counting the years of individual rulers one after the other.⁵⁶ Kosmin then reads various expressions of time and historiography produced in the third and second centuries BCE as responses to Seleucid projections of imperial power through time.

More specifically, Kosmin traces two "total history" responses to Seleucid time that emerge within Hellenistic Judaism: (1) histories found in the Pentateuch, (later canonical) Prophets, and Hellenistic Jewish historical reviews (e.g., Ben Sira, 1–2 Maccabees, Judith), and (2) apocalyptic total histories (e.g., Daniel, Animal Apocalypse and Apocalypse of Weeks in 1 Enoch).⁵⁷ Of the first, he argues that they assume a break in history with the Macedonian defeat of the Achaemenid empire that seals off pre-Hellenistic history as a self-contained unit. Although these texts tell total histories, they do so only from an ancient past until just before the rise of Macedonian power, excluding the "imperial present"⁵⁸ in which the writers live. Kosmin interprets this break in part through the idea of the cessation of prophecy, which he takes to be the end of these self-contained histories and contemporary with the rise of Macedonian and Seleucid power.⁵⁹ This group of texts, in Kosmin's reading, "present their indigenous pasts as the completed precondition of the Seleucid empire."⁶⁰

Kosmin's second strand of Hellenistic Jewish total history has more relevance for the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4. Kosmin argues that apocalyptic total histories periodize time from the beginning through lists of Near Eastern empires and Seleucid rule, where time ends in divine judgment.⁶¹ Texts such as Daniel and portions of 1 Enoch include the Seleucids in their descriptions of history, but relativizes them with the impending doom of divine judgment at the end of time. Kosmin compares these texts with the periodizing schemas of the Babylonian Dynastic Prophecy and the Iranian *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, which, he argues, reflects earlier Zoroastrian ideas about time. Kosmin locates all of these periodizing strategies that culminate in the end of time as responses to Seleucid rule. He reads them as engaging in tactics of

⁵⁶ Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 22.

⁵⁷ Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 105–86.

⁵⁸ Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 105.

⁵⁹ Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 123–36.

⁶⁰ Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 138.

⁶¹ Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 137.

“preceding, incorporating, and surpassing the Seleucid empire and exploding its logics of time.”⁶²

It is here that Kosmin discusses the four kingdoms motif, suggesting that the scholarly focus has been too backward-looking:

There has been protracted scholarly debate over the source of this apocalyptic periodization, particularly the sequence of four empires. Lines of debt and descent have been traced between the historiographic and religious traditions of Greece, Iran, Judea, and to a lesser extent Mesopotamia, reaching back into the Bronze Age. The disciplinary claims mirror, perhaps a little too closely, Hellenistic apologetics over national priority. Every possible path of derivation has been explored, as if an origin, like the source of the Nile, can be found (or would suffice as an explanation) ...⁶³

Kosmin then continues with his own proposal, which locates the four kingdoms motif in light of Seleucid historiography. He interprets not just apocalyptic eschatology generally, but also the four kingdoms motif specifically—in both Jewish and Iranian iterations (i.e., Daniel and the origins of the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*)—as a set of third- and second-century-BCE reactions against Seleucid projections of continuous imperial time.⁶⁴

Kosmin does not discuss the Sibylline Oracles, but the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 complicates his proposal. First, Sib. Or. 4 belongs to a body of literature that challenges the concept of prophecy’s cessation.⁶⁵ While some ancient Jewish texts such as 1 Maccabees, Prayer of Azariah, 2 Baruch, and Josephus’s *Against Apion* do attest to a notion of prophecy’s end, there are numerous Jewish texts that counter this idea, affirming prophecy’s continuation.⁶⁶ Surveying texts on both sides of the question of the cessation of prophecy, James Kugel has argued for a broadening and redefinition of prophecy in the postexilic period.⁶⁷ Hindy Najman has refined further the sense in which

62 Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 138.

63 Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 182.

64 Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 137–86.

65 For a strong articulation of the argument for prophecy’s end, see Benjamin D. Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 31–47.

66 As evidence for prophecy’s continuation, James L. Kugel cites: Wis 7:27; Philo, *Heir* 259; 1QH^a 4:16; 1 Cor 11:4–5; 12:10; 14:4–5; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.311–13; 20.97; 169. For the cessation of prophecy, Kugel cites the following: 1 Macc 4:46; 9:27; 14:41; Prayer of Azariah 15; 2 Bar 85:3; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.40–41. See James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 11–12.

67 Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*, 12.

prophecy is redefined in Jewish texts, arguing that “revelation inflected by destruction” becomes an enduring literary tendency within postexilic Judaism, as can be seen in texts such as Jubilees and 4 Ezra.⁶⁸ Najman’s category of “revelation inflected by destruction” is where I would locate Sib. Or. 4, and I have argued elsewhere that the prophetic rivalry espoused by the book participates in a much larger discourse that speaks to prophecy’s endurance as a literary strategy. Sib. Or. 4 does not give us information about prophetic practices in ancient Judaism, but it does speak to the persistent appeal of prophecy as a literary tendency, especially when we locate it alongside other texts, including Sib. Or. 3 and 5.⁶⁹ Given that Kosmin’s examples for the cessation of prophecy are also literary sources, Sib. Or. 4 raises important questions about the universality of prophecy’s decline in ancient Judaism.

Second, Sib. Or. 4 complicates Kosmin’s proposal that the four kingdoms motif is a particular third- and second-century-BCE response to Seleucid periodization of history. Sib. Or. 4 does not fit neatly with either of Kosmin’s models. Unlike his “Total History 1,” the oracle does not exclude Hellenistic history. It begins with the Assyrians and proceeds through the Macedonians, when the tenth and final generation occurs (4.88–101). Sib. Or. 4 resembles “Total History 2” more than “Total History 1,” by virtue of its resemblances with apocalyptic eschatology and use of the four kingdoms motif. Unlike the apocalyptic eschatology of other texts in Kosmin’s “Total History 2,” however, the oracle does not engage the Seleucids directly. It assigns one generation to the Macedonians, and then breaks off. The four kingdoms motif ends with the Macedonians, without giving any indication that the kingdom will be fragmented.

Granted, the text is a challenging test case. One must first accept the idea that at least two redactional layers are even present in this text to analyze it as part of Kosmin’s proposal. Dating from about 80 CE, however, Sib. Or. 4 is at a smaller remove from the Seleucid era than the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, which Kosmin does consider.⁷⁰ In addition, the disappearance of the last generation at Sib. Or. 4.102 can be read viably as a literary seam, marking redactional activity and suggesting an earlier date for the four kingdoms oracle. While there is some reconstructive work necessary to bring Sib. Or. 4 into a conversation about early iterations of the four kingdoms motif, the text does merit analysis alongside Kosmin’s other literary examples.

68 Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 6–7.

69 Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry*, esp. 5–17, 214–15.

70 The text dates from the ninth or tenth century CE (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 177).

If one accepts that the four kingdoms motif belongs to an earlier layer, then we can only speculate about the original oracle. The speculations of Collins and Flusser, however, complicate Kosmin's proposal, as they both read the text as anti-Macedonian, rather than anti-Seleucid. Flusser reconstructs the four kingdoms material as directly concerned about Macedonian rule: "if we are right, history ended in the original source with divine or political vengeance against the Macedonian empire for the atrocities which it had committed against the Persians."⁷¹ Collins is more circumspect about the ending, wondering whether Macedonia was destroyed by another kingdom or whether history ended with the Macedonians.⁷² He leans toward the latter possibility, suggesting further that the conflagration described in Sib. Or. 4.174–92 was also original to the Hellenistic oracle, and would have followed the Macedonian kingdom.⁷³ Either way, Collins reads Sib. Or. 4 as "anti-Hellenistic propaganda."⁷⁴ Because only one generation is assigned to Macedonia, Collins's reconstruction, dates the original oracle shortly after the life of Alexander.⁷⁵ If Collins is right, this is an earlier date than Kosmin's other examples. The timing would undermine the suggestion that the four kingdoms source behind Sib. Or. 4 was a direct response to Seleucid rule. All of these reconstructive speculations raise important questions for Kosmin's proposal.

Sibylline Oracles 4 does not disprove Kosmin's model. Read a certain way, Sib. Or. 4 could be compatible with Kosmin's proposal that the four kingdoms motif is anti-Seleucid. Kosmin makes an important point that texts can seal history off before the time of their composition; this opens up the possibility of a later date for the four kingdoms oracle than the first generation of Macedonian rule. The earlier layer of Sib. Or. 4 could have been looking backward at the Macedonians, rather than being roughly contemporaneous with them. Collins's reminder about the unknown end of the oracle could leave space for another power to succeed Alexander, and perhaps allow for an anti-Seleucid motive for composition. Finally, it is possible that the term "Macedonians" (Μακεδόνες, 4.88, 95) could be inclusive of the Seleucids, or even refer to them directly, as it does in the writings of Strabo, Tacitus, Josephus, and others.⁷⁶ Ultimately, our knowledge of the underlying text of Sib. Or. 4 is too inconclusive, and an exception need not dismantle Kosmin's general rule.

71 Flusser, "The Four Empires," 151.

72 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 373–74.

73 Collins, "The Place of the Fourth Sibyl," 374.

74 Collins, *Daniel*, 168.

75 Collins, *Daniel*, 167; idem, "Sibylline Oracles," 381.

76 Charles Edson, "The Seleucid Empire and the Literary Evidence," *CP* 53 (1958): 153–70. I am grateful to Paul Kosmin for this suggestion and this reference.

The fact remains, however, that in its preserved, reconstructed form Sib. Or. 4 does not align neatly with either type of the totalizing histories Kosmin assesses as anti-Seleucid. The earlier layer periodizes time in a way that is inclusive of the Hellenistic era, but not of the Seleucids. It seals time after Alexander, without gesturing toward a fragmented kingdom to follow. If Collins is right that the end of the book (4.175–92) may also be original, it envisions a dramatic end of the world—not to mention a resurrection—but it does so without drawing the Seleucids into the crosshairs of divine judgment. Either way, Sib. Or. 4 raises important questions about the universality of the four kingdoms motif as a distinctively anti-Seleucid response. Sibylline Oracles 4 attests to the possibility, at least, that anti-Seleucid texts could have taken up ways of thinking about time and political power already found elsewhere (e.g., in the underlying four kingdoms oracle of Sib. Or. 4) with new urgency under the Seleucids. This motif may have been especially prominent among the Seleucid empire's subject communities, as Kosmin argues,⁷⁷ but Sib. Or. 4 functions as an example that it was perhaps not unique to them.

Kosmin's first comment on the four kingdoms motif—that scholarship should emphasize the deployment of the motif over its origins—resonates with Najman's call to interrogate the forward-moving trajectories of Jewish texts and figures, or their "traditionary processes."⁷⁸ Sibylline Oracles 4 only allows us to speculate about the original deployment of the four kingdoms motif, but as I have just argued, even those speculations raise important questions for Kosmin's proposal. What we can do more readily is study the traditionary process of this motif, tracing the ways it is transformed within the book. This, too, involves imaginative reconstruction. If we accept the suggestion that there are at least two layers to this text, however, which the presence of a textual seam in 4.102 makes likely, we can apply a forward-moving literary analysis to this motif, asking after its characteristics within the fuller form of Sib. Or. 4.

The traditionary process of the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 constructs a temporality that is multiple, fragmented, and less linear. Within the earlier

77 Regarding the four kingdoms motif, Kosmin writes, "I would suggest, instead, that what must be accounted for is ... the concurrent emergence in the third and second centuries BCE and within the core regions of the Seleucid empire of a historiographical and theological obsession with such totalizing, highly schematized periodizations. These segmentations of history are the central concern of the eschatological total histories ... they are not outlined with such clarity or centrality in earlier texts; and they do not appear elsewhere in the Hellenistic world (including Ptolemaic Egypt). We are dealing with a phenomenon specific to the Seleucid empire's subject communities" (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 182–83).

78 Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future*, 46–48.

layer of the book, there is an overlay of kingdoms onto generations (4.49–101). Multiple timelines converge here, as the promised ten generations are distributed onto various kingdoms. The reader has been prepared for ten generations in 4.20 and 4.47, but the kingdoms emerge unannounced. Already in the original oracle, the sibyl names multiple ways of periodizing time, and this creates multiple timelines. A reader's sense of the progress of time could differ, depending on whether they were counting by generations or by kingdoms. The early layer of the text, then, contains at least two timelines. When this material is redacted, a third timeline is produced, albeit one that is far less linear.

With the addition of the Romans after the Macedonians in 4.101, the line of kingdoms continues, but the line of generations comes to a halt before it reaches its end. The final generation is never directly assigned; the fourth sibyl only gestures towards it, in a promise of destruction coming to the Persians (4.87). The sibyl's generational periodizing of time breaks off after the Macedonians, but the future extends onward. Sibylline Oracles 4 continues to describe Roman military destruction and natural disasters, leading to a final conflagration, but the fourth sibyl does not locate the audience in any particular generation, orienting them on her earlier timelines. Instead, with the break after the Macedonians, her prophecy describes one long generation. This shift simultaneously fragments the sibyl's generational timeline and creates a new timeline, with a prolonged Roman era.

As this Roman era stretches out, the fourth sibyl's depiction of time becomes less linear. Sibylline Oracles 4.102–161 depicts a chaotic mass of military clashes, including the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, and natural disasters. The line of generations has been frozen in time, and the fifth kingdom continues until the intervention of divine judgment (4.171–78)—except that there is another interruption, from the sibyl herself: a call to repentance (4.152–61). Whether the lines are broken by the dropping off of a tenth generation, the extension of time under Roman rule, or the prophetic interruption of the sibyl's invitation to repent, sibylline temporality here is decidedly less linear.

One literary effect of this plurality and fragmentation is to dislocate the reader in the timeline(s), disorienting them about exactly where they are.⁷⁹ In

79 I have not found evidence of early readers remarking on this quality of the text, but that may be due in part to the uses to which early Christian writers put the fourth sibyl. Clement of Alexandria, for example, cites her anti-temple speech in 4.27–30 against pagan worship (Clement, *Protrepticus* 4.50.1; Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 384; Toca, "Greek Reception," 296–70); Lactantius appeals to descriptions of the flood and the final conflagration in Sib. Or. 4 to support his argument for the anger of God (Lactantius, *De ira dei* 23; Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 384–89). It might not be in the rhetorical interests of these writers to undermine the certainty of the sibyl's prophecy by noting the instability

Sib. Or. 4, the ultimate future is certain: divine destruction by fire, followed by a resurrection and judgment (4.175–92). This is deeply connected with traditional associations between sibyls and doom, a trope which is re-purposed in the Jewish-Christian collection to include ethical instruction, as I discussed above. The predicted future in this book, however, is both certain and unpredictable. It is inevitable, in a final sense. But with the addition of Rome as an “indecisive prolongation of the series of empires without reference to the numerical patterns,”⁸⁰ as Collins has it, the timing of the future becomes more unstable. Even granting that ancient readers may have been able to locate references to specific events, such as the eruption of Vesuvius, the logic of the book espouses a much less linear view of time with the insertion of Roman material, making it harder for a reader to track where they are in the sibyl’s own total history. Kosmin’s insightful research on ancient historiographies opens up new possibilities for understanding Sib. Or. 4 here, as this is something like his “imperial present,”⁸¹ albeit under a different imperial power. There is an extended Roman era in the fourth sibyl’s telling, sudden in its emergence and unpredictable in its duration. Although its future destruction is definite, the reader does not know it that will happen.

The fragmented, multiple, less linear temporality that results from the transformation of the four kingdoms motif in Sib. Or. 4 is not unique within the sibylline collection. I have explored Jewish-Christian sibylline temporality more fully elsewhere, and the dynamics of time found within this book occur in other sibylline books as well.⁸² For example, generations are broken off again in Sib. Or. 1–2, where Christian redaction of the material results in a loss of two generations from a ten-generation schema.⁸³ Seven generations are introduced in book 1, with the seventh appearing at 1.307. Following this, there is a long gap, where material about Jesus and an anti-Jewish description of Jewish dispersion is inserted (1.387–400). Then, somewhat suddenly, a tenth generation appears in 2.15. Generations eight and nine are omitted. In books 1, 2, and 4, sibylline timelines, while having some initial linearity, demonstrate

of time. In this chapter, I am not asserting that temporal instability is the only way to understand transformation of the four kingdoms motif in the book. I am suggesting an alternate interpretive possibility for a literary phenomenon noted by scholars interested in redactional analysis of Sib. Or. 4.

80 Collins, “The Place of the Fourth Sibyl,” 373.

81 Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 105.

82 See Olivia Stewart Lester, “Views of the World to Come in the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles,” in *Dreams, Visions, Imaginations: Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Views of the World to Come*, ed. Tobias Nicklas and Jens Schröter, BZNW (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming), 261–82.

83 Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 345; Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, 109–52.

breaks, gaps, and sometimes even rupture⁸⁴ when we read forwards as well as backwards.

4 Conclusion

Sibylline Oracles 4 contains prophecies of destruction against the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. Both David Flusser and John Collins see in this oracle an early iteration of the four kingdoms motif, to which the Romans were added later by a late-first century redactor. In this chapter, I have brought the redactional conclusions of Collins and Flusser into conversation with Paul Kosmin's recent proposal that the four kingdoms motif is primarily a response to Seleucid periodized time. Collins and Flusser's reconstructions pose important questions for Kosmin's proposal, as does the text of Sib. Or. 4, which does not align neatly with Kosmin's two versions of Seleucid subjects' total history. At the same time, Kosmin's sophisticated readings of ancient Jewish historiographical texts calls the security of anti-Macedonian dating of Sib. Or. 4 into question. Sibylline Oracles 4 is not incompatible with Kosmin's model. It serves as an example of the possibility, however, that the four kingdoms motif might have been attested elsewhere, and its use may have intensified during the Seleucid era, rather than being created by it.

After considering the text of Sib. Or. 4, broken apart into its sources and redactional layers, I examined the forward-moving transformation of the four kingdoms motif, drawing on Hindy Najman's notion of "traditionary processes."⁸⁵ The traditionary process of the four kingdoms motif reveals a sibylline temporality that is multiple, fragmentary, and less linear. I suggested that, when taken from a literary perspective, these characteristics could serve to disorient a reader of Sib. Or. 4, dislocating them within a chaotic final era. Drawing on Kosmin's research, I suggested that the extension of time during the Roman era could amount to a kind of prophetic "imperial present,"⁸⁶ a long final generation that is never explicitly named. Finally, I also noted similarities between the fragmentation of generations in Sib. Or. 4 and Sib. Or. 1–2, where two generations are lost. An analysis of the four kingdoms motif contributes to a sense that in its fragmentation, instability, and chaos, the future in Jewish-Christian sibylline temporality is simultaneously inevitable and unstable.

84 Cf. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History;" Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 1–25.

85 Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 46–48.

86 Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 105.

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