chapter 34

Mundus origo: A New Edition of Sibylla maga (5th–9th Century)

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This contribution contains a new critical edition of the early medieval Sibylline prophecy Mundus origo, more commonly known as Sibylla maga, arguably the oldest surviving specimen of Sibylline prophecy originally conceived in Latin-speaking Christianity.

1 Manuscript Evidence

The text has been edited and published before, by Bernhard Bischoff in 1951, on the basis of three manuscripts.1 A fresh comparison with photographs of two of these, now available on the internet, suggests that Bischoff’s transcription has not altogether been impeccable. Moreover, a fourth manuscript, of which photographs can also be consulted online, is now available; its additional evidence has here been included.

Translations of the text, based on Bischoff’s edition, were earlier proposed by Anton Kurfeß in 1953,2 and Ursula Treu in 1989.3 The edition below is provided with my own translation, which was originally made for the forthcoming second volume of the More Old Testament Pseudepigrapha project of Richard Bauckham and James Davila.4

The editio princeps was based on three manuscripts, preserved in Oxford, Valenciennes, and Prague respectively. A fourth manuscript, preserved in

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4 I am obliged to Eerdmans’ publishing house for its permission to pre-print my translation here.
Douai, was unknown to Bischoff, although it had been catalogued in 1878.\(^5\) No attention had been paid to this manuscript until it was noted by Nicoletta Brocca in an article of 2008.\(^6\) Photographs of this fourth manuscript are now widely available through the website “Bibliothèque virtuelle des manuscrits médiévaux” (BVMM) of the IRHT-CNRS. The evidence of the Douai manuscript is integrated into the edition below. The other manuscripts, except the Bodleian one, can also be consulted online; for the Bodleian (\(O\)), I have relied on digital photographs.\(^7\)

The available manuscripts are, in order of estimated dates:

\(O\): Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auctarium T.2.23 (ix–x), fols. 90r–93r

\(V\): Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale 404 (x),\(^8\) fols. 62v–65r

\(D\): Douai, Bibliothèque municipale 219 (xii),\(^9\) fol. 166r–166bisr. The upper corners of the pages are damaged by humidity, and a limited amount of text (words, rather than verses) has become illegible.

\(P\): Praha, Národní knihovna České republiky, XIII.G.18 (\(xv^{2/2}\) [1456–1481]),\(^10\) fols. 238r–239r

The text contained in each of these four manuscripts is practically identical. The following observations may nonetheless suggest more detailed links among the texts of the manuscript copies.

– That all manuscripts derive from a single exemplar, \(\omega\), is shown by the fact that they all share readings that cannot be primitive, but must be the result of events during the transmission process. Examples include *immortale iecur* (37); *scripta* (71); *honor* (122); *saeculo* (118); and *sacra dies nec ultrix colla caecidi* (134). I think it is likely that this exemplar also contained the marginal addition *dicta* (6), because in both \(V\) and \(D\) this marginal correction is found in exactly the same way. Similarly, for *refugium* (34) \(V\) and \(D\) both indicate a lacuna, possibly suggesting that such an indication was also present in \(\omega\).

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\(^7\) Photographs of this manuscript were gracefully provided to me by Lorenzo DiTommaso.

\(^8\) Images available at the BnF website: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8452582n/f129.item.

\(^9\) Images available on the BVMM website: http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/.