

XIV

THE SIBYL AND THE DREAM OF ONE HUNDRED SUNS AN OLD APOCRYPHON

By M. GASTER

IN addition to the more or less accredited ancient Sibylline oracles, others circulated, under the name of the one or the other of the Sibyls, which also claimed to be of equal authority. The name was a recommendation for a special kind of apocalyptic literature, and the example set of old of foretelling the future was thereby continued for many centuries. The character of this Sibylline Oracle was akin to some of the old Apocalypses, in which the future was revealed in a symbolical form, and the events to come foretold by allegories and signs, which were interpreted by the Sibyl as by one of the prophets of old. By connecting such apocalyptic revelations with some ancient name and ascribing to men or women of the past works composed at a much later time, these compositions entered into the domain of that apocryphal Christian literature which made use of old formulas for disseminating new teaching and thus prepared the mind of the people for untoward incidents. These oracles were soon drawn into the cycle of the Doomsday; the legends of Antichrist and of the Last Judgment were incorporated with the older oracle; and thus an oracle which originally may have been a mere forecast of purely political events became a religious manifesto, a prophetic pronouncement on the course of events, leading up to the final drama.

Such an apocryphal oracle was then ascribed to the Sibyl of Tibur. This was one of the best known among the nations of Europe and has been preserved in two ancient Latin versions, known as the Sibyl of Beda, one, however, dependent upon the other. According to the researches

of Sackur, it had assumed its last form in the ninth century, though its origin must be much older and is to be sought in the East. The most prominent feature in this oracle is a dream seen by one hundred noblemen on one and the same night, in which they saw seven or nine suns appearing on the horizon, each one distinguished from the other by some peculiarity. The Sibyl is called upon to explain the dream and what the seven or nine suns portend. This symbolical multiplication of the sun and its diverse aspects and manifestations, by which the future was to be foretold, and which required an expert interpreter, is of Oriental origin. Important events in the life of men and nations have often been connected with wonderful apparitions and signs in the skies. The appearance of the star which led the Magi from the East to the cave in Bethlehem is only one of numerous similar examples in Oriental literature. The Rabbinical literature knows of a brilliant star appearing at the birth of Abraham; and of four stars fighting, three of which were swallowed up by one at the birth of Moses. In both cases astrologers are called in to interpret their significance—in the one case to Nimrod, in the other to Pharaoh.

In the interpretation of those nine suns there was a wide scope given to the imagination of the successive interpreters and adaptors of the old oracle. For, after a lapse of time the same nine suns were represented as signifying some such series of events as the writer of the time took a more personal interest in. In the West, e.g., the history of the Frankish kingdom was read into it, and, as will be seen later on, in the East at a later period Muhammedan history had to do duty and become the object of the prophecy. The authors of these oracles were invariably Christians, and therefore the eschatological element was joined with the history of the appearance and spread of Christianity.

The vaticination of the Sibyl did not stop at a list of succeeding kings, but the last of them was to lay down his crown at the gates of Jerusalem and thereupon was to follow the time of the Antichrist and the final struggle, until the Day of Judgment would put an end to the rule of evil, and then would be ushered in the kingdom of heaven. It was this final portion which assured to the Sibyl the popularity which her prophecy enjoyed. Professor Bousset, in his exhaustive study on the Antichrist (*Der Antichrist in d. Ueberlieferung d. Judenthums*, etc., Göttingen, 1895), has devoted a special chapter to the investigation of the relation in which the Latin Sibyl of Beda stands to other compilations of a similar nature. He compared it with that of Adso, Pseudo-Methodius, the Syriac homily of Pseudo-Ephraem on the Antichrist, and the genuine writings of Ephraem. The date of this apocalyptic prophecy he thus moved upwards, first to the time of the irruption of the Arabs into the West of Asia and their spread far and wide, then higher up to the epoch of Leo the Isaurian (eighth century), then the period of Heraclius, the time of the invasion of the Huns, the allied nations from Asia, and still higher up to the time of the establishment of a Christian emperor on the throne of Byzantium. We are thus led back as far as the fourth century for the latter part of the prophecy. Curiously enough, the first part, the vision of the hundred suns, is missing in those ancient texts, even in Pseudo-Methodius (*Orthodoxographia*, Basel, 1555, fols. 387 ff., an edition unknown to Bousset and others), and must have been lost at an early period, so soon as the legend had reached the West of Europe. In the light of Arabic versions of the legend it cannot be doubted that the dream of the hundred suns was not only an integral part, but the very starting-point. In it lay the justification for ascribing the prophecy to the Sibyl and ensuring to it a wide circulation. It is precisely this first part which

claims our attention. Thus far no old parallels nor any link have been shown to exist between the oracle of the Sibyl of Beda and such Oriental versions as are preserved in Arabic and Ethiopian.

Dr. J. Schleifer¹ has now published for the first time these Oriental texts of the Sibylline apocryphon in Arabic and Ethiopian. One of them is a Karshuni text, of course Arabic, but written in Syriac characters. The editor confines himself primarily to a critical edition of these various texts, none of them very old, and yet each one interesting in its own way. The Karshuni text, the Ethiopian, and then three Arabic texts, are printed in five parallel columns, and so arranged that the relation between these texts should be seen at a glance. In the foot-notes various readings are carefully noted. A minute description of the MSS. used is given, and a German translation in three columns. In this translation Dr. Schleifer has combined the three Arabic versions into one, and given the result of the critical emendation of these texts. In the foot-notes to the translation reference is made to the Latin Tiburtan Sibyl (Beda), and the book concludes with an examination of the relation in which these versions stand to one another. They all go back to one ancient original, to which the Karshuni text is most closely related, and almost of equal value as the Arabic, though differing from the latter sufficiently not to be its immediate source. The latest is the Ethiopian, which rests on a text closely akin, though not identical with, Arabic iii.

This edition of the Oriental versions is of great importance for the history of the apocryphal tale, which has exercised so great an influence upon popular imagination, and was at the same time a reflex of the popular

¹ *Die Erzählung der Sibylle*. Ein Apokryph nach den Karschunischen, Arabischen, und Aethiopischen Handschriften zu London, Oxford, Paris, und Rom veröffentlicht von. (Denkschriften der Kais. Akad. d. Wissensch. Wien, vol. liii.) 4to ; pp. 80. Wien, 1908.

naïve philosophy of history, which sees in the present the realization of events foretold in the past, and finds in it a source of comfort and hope for the future, lifting the people above the temporary trials and holding out a promise of reward and of peace everlasting. For it is all fore-ordained, and it is part and parcel of the divine economy which shapes human life and leads the world on irresistibly to a final day of judgment, when the actions of man will be weighed—the good rewarded, the evil punished, and the destroyed harmony of the world re-established.

These Oriental texts start with the dream, and the interpretation given by the Sibyl brings us down to the time of the rule of Al-Ma'mun and his successors (ninth century), possibly also to that of the Crusaders and Richard Cœur de Lion. The king immediately before the appearance of the Antichrist will be the "son of the Lion" from the land of the Franks. In some points there is a close resemblance between these versions and the oldest Latin text. The question naturally arises: Where is the connecting link between the Eastern tale and its Western parallels, and which is their ultimate source? Dr. Schleifer might have turned his attention to this question, the importance of which for the history of this apocryphon cannot be gainsaid, but he scarcely touches it. The Arabic version rests probably on an older Syriac text, for that the book is of Oriental origin there cannot be any doubt. The whole setting and the detailed history of the Muhammedan Empire down to the tenth century and later, exclude the possibility of an Occidental origin. No old Arabic book has been translated from the Latin. But the Syriac itself could hardly be anything but a translation from a Greek text. That the Arabic may have been translated from the Greek is rather a remote probability, for if the book was originally written in Greek it has no doubt

reached the Arabs through Syriac mediation. A Greek text would be the natural link between East and West. Unfortunately, hitherto no such Greek text has come to light; at any rate, I am not aware of its existence. I have now discovered another version, which may safely be taken to represent the hitherto undiscovered Greek original. As far back as 1883, in my *History of the Rumanian Popular Literature* (pp. 338-9), I have discussed at some length an old Rumanian legend of "The Sivila and the dream which was seen of one hundred Senators in one night", the very same dream of nine suns and of the "Sivila" interpreting the dream to the emperor. This Rumanian version in its turn is only a literal translation of a much older Slavonic version, which again rests ultimately on a Greek original. All the Slavonic and Rumanian apocrypha go back to older Greek originals which were as a rule literally translated, and then only slightly altered in those details that affected their own nation. At times they ventured also—but very rarely—upon some small interpolations. A comparison between these texts and the oldest Latin form of the Tiburtan Sibyl shows the closest possible parallelism. No room for doubt is left that the one must be dependent on the other, and the internal evidence goes far to prove the dependence of the Latin on the Greek (= Slavonic) version. Moreover, the whole Slavonic-Rumanian text is very short, and all the eschatological portions, as well as every reference to the Antichrist and the Last Judgment, are entirely missing. The introduction is also very brief, and differs entirely from all other versions. Every apocryphal story or legend must be an addition to the history of the Bible. In one way or another it must embellish the narration of Holy Writ. By these means the apocryphal story enters the holy cycle and forms henceforth part of the "Historiated Bible". Only in the Slavonic version this connexion with the

Bible is found—a proof of its great antiquity and its independence of the Western versions. It is an attempt to connect the Sibyl with David, whose offspring she is in a marvellous manner. She is here the oldest form, if not the origin, of the legend of Reine Pédauque, and possibly the ancestor of “Mother Goose”. Professor Vesselofsky has studied this cycle exhaustively in his *Opyty po istorii razvitiya hristianskoi legendy* (ii, pp. 351–3). There he refers also to the legend current in the name of the Venerable Bede, and he shows that it agrees in the main with the Sibylline oracle in a Slavonic version, of which a copy had been placed at his disposal by Buslaev and Drinov. Since then an old Slavonic original and the Rumanian version, of which I wrote in my *Literatura populară română* (Bucharest, 1883, 337 pp.), have been published by L. Miletitch in the *Sbornikŭ* of the Bulgarian Minister of Public Instruction (vol. ix, Sofia, 1893, pp. 177–80). According to Miletitch the Slavonic MS. (now in the Library of the State Archives in Bucharest) of the sixteenth century is merely a copy of an older MS. which belongs at latest to the fourteenth century. The Rumanian codex (in the Library of the Rumanian Academy) from which I published many years ago, also a portion of the legend of Adam and Eve (*Revista pentru Istorie și filologie*, ed. Tocilescu, Bucharest, i, pp. 78 ff.), belongs to the end of the sixteenth century. It is an almost literal translation of the Slavonic. In a few details it differs from the text published by Dr. Miletitch and supplements the latter. I have now translated these texts into English, following in the main the Slavonian version as the oldest, and adding in brackets the variants of the Rumanian. I am also reprinting here the Rumanian text, for it is preserved in a unique copy; the edition of Dr. Miletitch is unfortunately faulty in many passages, and the text is practically inaccessible

in the Bulgarian Sbornik. Moreover, it is written in the old Slavonic or Cyrillian alphabet. I have transliterated it and corrected the mistakes which have crept into the last-mentioned publication.

The comparison between these texts and the Latin versions of the Sibylline oracles mentioned before proves identity of origin and close resemblance in details. The description of the nine suns in the Slavonic and in Beda and their peculiar appearance agrees in many points. The divergence begins with the interpretation, which has undergone the greatest possible change. It had to be adapted to local exigencies if it was to be of any use, and if it was to be believed in as an old prophecy of coming events. In the Slavonian, unlike the Latin, the name of the great emperor is called explicitly Constantin, which might settle one of the difficulties of the Latin texts where the names of the kings and emperors are not fully given; they are indicated only by the initial letter, and it was left to the imagination of the reader to supply the remainder, thus leaving an open field to fantastic interpretation and interested guesswork. In other respects the Slavonic also differs in the names of the various nations that were to make incursions into the western world and bring trouble upon the peoples. No doubt, as often happens with texts in which the names of ancient nations since extinct appear, more modern names are substituted by the later copyists for those of the older nations that had come and gone. Thus, the Tartars have no doubt taken the place of the ancient Huns, and the Saracens that of the Persians in the older versions. These names indicate the latest date for these Slavo-Rumanian versions, and lead us to the time of the invasion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, known among the nations of Eastern Europe mostly under the name of "Tartars".

Peculiar to these versions is the animosity against the

Greeks and the exaltation of the "Iberians" of Armenia, whom they describe as a God-fearing, pious, and modest nation, just the contrary to the rapacious, impious Greeks, who have changed their faith three times, and are inhospitable and greedy. This no doubt reflects the feelings of the Bulgarians, who were in constant warfare with the Byzantine emperors. The author of the translation and adaptation from the Greek probably belonged to the sect of the Bogomils, whose chief literary activity centred in the translation and dissemination of the old apocryphal literature. This predilection for the "Iberians" is found also in other apocryphal and popular writings which were translated from the Greek by the same agencies, the members of that famous sect, and then adapted to their own peculiar teaching. This may also be the reason why some of the eschatological details found in all the other versions, and which therefore formed part of the old original, are missing in the Slavonic text, and why the Archangel Gabriel, who was the special favourite of the Bogomils, is introduced as the restorer of peace at the end of days. I cannot here follow up in greater detail the examination and comparison of these texts. Until a Greek text of this apocryphal tale comes to light the Slavonian-Rumanian version forms the connecting link between East and West.

THE HISTORY OF THE SIBYL AND THE DREAM OF THE HUNDRED SENATORS OF ROME.

*Translated from the Old Slavonic and from the
Rumanian.*

King David was a man of overpowering strength, and it oozed out of him. The servant one day wiped the phial with some grass, and threw it out, and a goose came and ate it. No sooner had it eaten it than it laid an egg, and the egg burst, and out of the egg came a girl. They told it in secret to David, who when he heard of it understood what

had happened, and gave orders to hide the child; and they hid her away in the land Gorskia (Rum. Ugorsku), (and she grew up and studied), and she was wiser and more beautiful than the whole world, and through her wisdom (she obtained the rule over the whole land of Ugorsku), and she became the ruler of Rome (Rimŭ), and she considered (or, pondered over) the word of the prophets, for God had said unto David: "Of thy seed will I place upon thy throne;" and she considered also what the other prophecies foretold. And her name was Maria, but for her wisdom they gave her the name Sivila. And she hoped that from her Christ would be born, and she kept her virginity for fifty years, until one hundred of the great boyars saw a dream, and then Sivila understood that it would not come to pass as she had hoped.

And the boyars came together and said: "Let us go to the Queen and tell her the dream which we have seen." And they came to her and said: "May it please your Majesty. We the one hundred boyars have had one and the same dream." And Sivila said: "Tell me the dream, and I will endeavour to explain it." And the barons said: "We have seen nine suns rising." Sivila replied: "Tell me how these suns looked." And they said: "The first sun rose clear and gentle, and it was a pleasure for us to look at it. The second sun, its light was three times darkened and hidden. The third was black, with dark rays round about it. The fourth sun was like flaming dark smoke. The fifth sun was (white) and burning hot; it was difficult for us to look at it. The sixth sun was white as snow. The seventh sun had a blood-red glow, and in the midst thereof there were hands. The eighth sun had soft and clear rays. The ninth was the most terrible and awe-inspiring, and hotter than all."

The Sivila replied: "The nine suns signify nine generations (or, periods). The first sun is the generation of the Bulgarians, who are good and hospitable and true

believers and worship in the Christian faith. The second sun signifies the nation of the Greeks, for they have three times changed their faith and mix with other nations; they are fond of money, publicans (or, taking bribes), and they betray the kingdom of God. The third sun signifies the Franks; they will conquer all the nations, and from among them will be born a man from two nations (two origins or families?), whose name will be Constantin, and he will conquer many nations, and he will wage great wars on the earth, and signs will be shown to him in the heavens; and he will lift up the Greeks, and he will raise an empire among the Greeks, and he will build among them a town, and he will call it New Jerusalem, a fortress for the Greeks and a resting-place for the Saints. And to his mother the crosses of Christ will be revealed, and they will perform many miracles in the world. The fourth sun signifies the Arkadians, who will conquer the Franks and will take Rome. And Rome will again be rebuilt (or, sacked?), and that man will be drowned (die) in the water. The fifth sun signifies the Saracens, who will destroy Jerusalem and take Syria. The sixth sun signifies the Syrians, who held Jerusalem and lost their throne; and their country will be devastated for three hundred years. The seventh sun signifies the Jews. A woman will arise in their midst and give birth to a child from heaven, and his name will be called Jesus, and the girl that will give birth to him will remain a pure virgin. His throne is the heaven, and the earth his footstool. The name of the woman is Maria. And all the princes and judges will gather together and will hand him over to be crucified, and he will be buried, and on the third day he will rise and ascend to heaven. And he will send twelve men who will spread our faith, and that faith will grow strong, and that faith will have dominion from the rising of the sun to its setting."

The Jewish priests and the princes exclaimed then: "Be silent, O our Queen, for we wish to ask thee one thing more. Is it possible that God should descend from heaven and beget a son from a woman and destroy our faith?" And the Sibyl answered: "O my foolish people! do not wonder at great and marvellous things. Consider well in your minds on what do the heavens hang and on what is the earth established that it does not move? Our law is not a good one, and I up till now had hoped that the Christ would be born of me, and I have kept my virginity for fifty years, but now I know that he will not be born of me.

"The eighth sun signifies the Iberians, a righteous and hospitable people (loving the stranger); they keep the Church and fear God, and (observe His holy Word). There is no guile among them, and it is of them that God says: 'Blessed are the meek ones, (for they will obtain salvation).' The ninth sun signifies the Tartars, who shed blood upon the earth, and no one can withstand them; they will eat up the whole earth, and they will destroy from among men the name of the archangels (and for a time they will be so strong that no nation will be able to stand up against them, but in the end they will be destroyed from among men by the name of the archangel Gabriel). Our God be praised for ever and ever."

THE RUMANIAN TEXT

CUVÂNTU DE PRÉ INȚELEPTA SAVILA

David, prorocul lui Dumnezeu a vădit mare cât este vrătutea lui adevărul lui și pune un vas și pica în vas. Iară într-o zi un inas, al lui șterse plodul cu niște buruiane, și le aruncă afară. Și eși o gânsă și mănca burueanele. Și cum le mănca îndată o un ou, și crepă oul și din ou eși o pruncă parte muerescă, și intru ascuns, spuseră lui David. (Cum) a auzat de acesta David

bine înțelese precum se făcu. Acieași zise de ascuseră fata acéea intru pământul Ugorscului. Și ea crescu și învăță carte și fu înțeleptă mai vrătos decât toți oamenii ce petrecea in toată lumea. Și cu înțelepciune ei dobândi țara Ugorscului toată, și împărtași in Râm, și socotea zisele prorocilor, cum zise dumnezău lui David: "Din sâmbanța ta voi pune spre scaunul tău," și a altor proroci zisele le socotea. Numele ei era Mariea, și pentru înțelepciune ei îi ziseră Sivila. Și trăge nădejde că dintru dânsa se va naște Hristos, și feri fecorie sa în 50 de ani, până cândă vâzură o sută de boeari mari toți un vis. Atuncea înțelese Savila că nu easte acéea ce nădăjdueste.

Și să adunară toți boearii și ziseră: "Blâmați la împărtașea să spunem visul ce am văzut." Și veniră câtră însă și ziseră: "Să erti împărtașia ta, iată cum avurăm noi o sută de boeari ai tăi un vis." Sivila zise: "Spuneți visul și eu il voi dizlega." Domnii ziseră: "Văzut-am noao sori răsărind." Iară Sivila zise: "Spuneți-mi cum era acei sori." Ei ziseră: "Soarele dintăiu curat și lin răsăria și noi foarte cu drag îl așteptam și-l socoteam(n).
 2. Al doile soare de trei ori intunecă și se ascunse lumina.
 3. Al treile soare cu zări negre pregiur dânsul. 4. Al patrule soare ca o pară de fum negră. 5. Al cincile soare alb și fierbinte era noao a-l socoti. 6. Al șasele soare lumină avé ca zăpada. 7. Al șaptele soare cu zare roșie și în mijloc mâni avé. 8. Al optule soare zările lui era line și curate. 9. Al noile soare de toți era mai groaznic și spăimat, era și fierbinte."

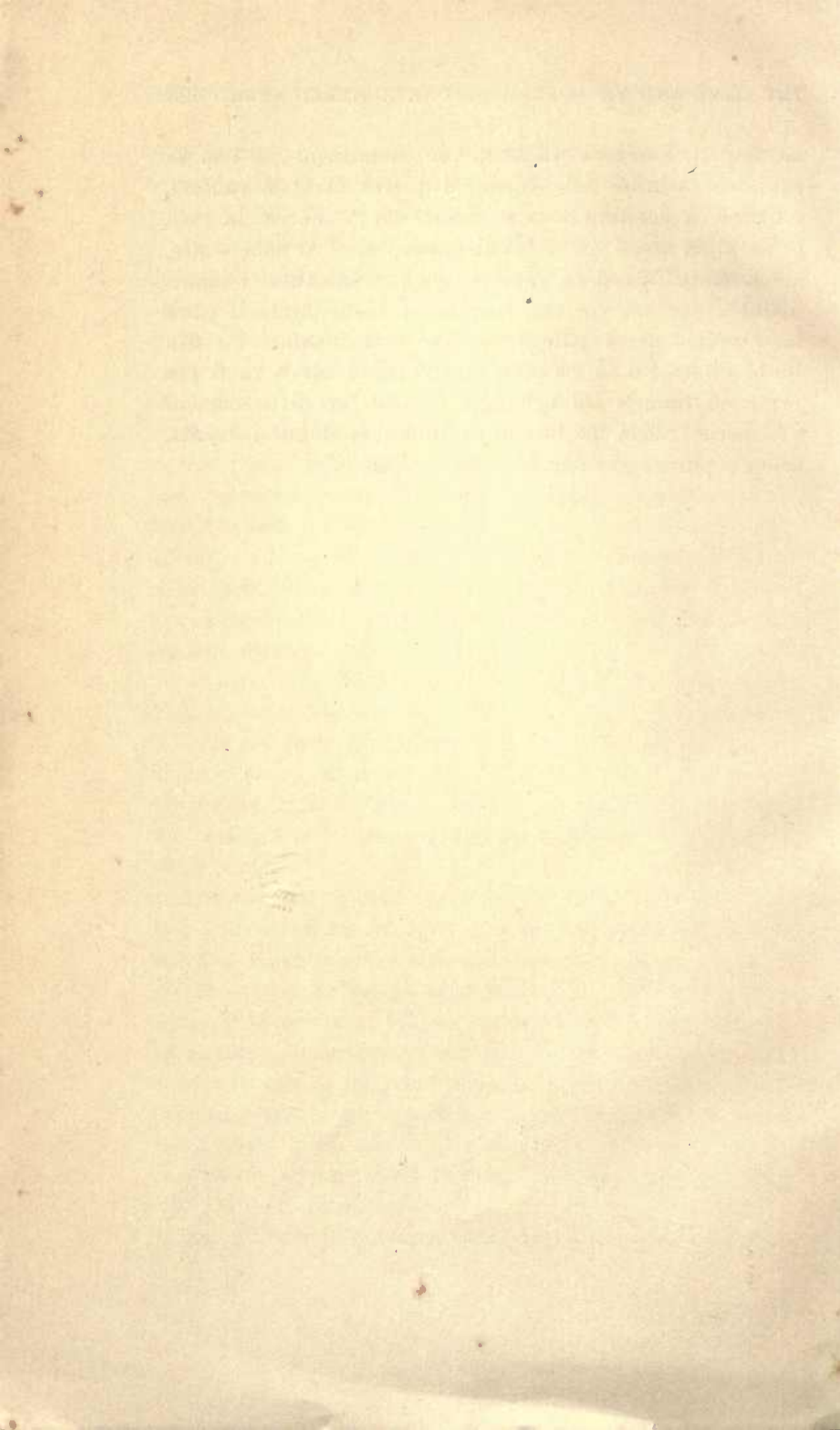
Sivila zise: "Noao sori sânt noao roduri. Cel soare dintăi este rodul Bâlgarilor, buni și iubitori la oaspeți și credincoși, și cea dréptă credință creștinescă lui Dumnezău au închinat. Al doile soare sânt Grecii, că ei de trei ori credința sa au lepădat-o și cu toate limbile să amestecă, iubitori de argint și luători de adamană împărtașie lui Dumnezău déderă. Al treile soare sânt Francii, ce ei vor călea toate limbile, eși-va dintru dânsii om

de 2 roduri, și numele lui va fi Constantin, și acela va călca toate limbile și va face războaie mari pe pământ și i să vor arăta lui semn pre ceri și va rădica Grecii, și va face împărăție întru Greci, și va zidi întru dânșii cetate și să va chiuma Ierusalimul nou, ograda Grecilor și răpaosul svânților, și mâni-sa i să vor arăta crucile lui Hristos ce iale vor face semn multe pe pământ. Al patru soare aceștea sânt Arcadei ce vor birui Frâncii și vor călca Rimul și iară va fi Rimul, și acela om într'apă va muri. Al cincile soare, aceștea sânt Sârâcineștii (-nenii ?), ce vor pustii Ierusalimul și vor călca Siria. Al șesele soare, aceștea sânt Sirieanii, ce ținură Ierusalimul, și pierdură scaunul său și pământul lor va fi pustii trei sute de ani. Al șaptele soare aceștea sânt Jidovi. Eși-va o mueare dintru dânșii și va naște fiu din ceri și-i vor zice numele lui Isus, și fata cea ce va naște va fi tot fecoară curată; scaunul lui iaste ceriul, iară pământul iaste așternut pîcoarelor lui. Numele fecoarei va fi Maria, aduna-să-vor toți domnii și toți giudecătorii, și-l vor da spre răstignire, îngropa-l-vor pre dânșul și a treea zi va învie și să va sui în ceri; și va trimite 12 bărbați și aceea legea noastră vor răsâpi, și a lor lege vor întări, și aceea lege va împărăți de la răsăritul soarelui până la apus."

Atuncea ziseră popii jidovești și toți boarii: "Năi, taci împărăția ta, câ încă una te vom întreba. Poate aceea a fi, să pogoară dumnezău din ceri și să nască din fecoară și să spargă legea noastră?" Atuncea Savila a zis: "O nebun rodul mieu cel mare și minunat! nu vă mirareți de acăsta, ci socotiți cu înțelepciună voastră, ci socotiți pre ce stă ceriul aninat și pământul întărit și neclătit; iară legea voastră nu spre bine stă, câ și eu până acum m'am nădăjduit, că dintru mine să va naște Hristos și mie-am ferit fecoria mea în 50 de ani, iară acnu cunosce câ nu-s eu aceea."

Al optule soare, aceștea sânt Iverii derepți și iubitori

la oaspeți, beséreca pázâscu, de dumnezâu se tem și cuvintele svinției sale éarcâ, și petrec fârâ de râutate, i unora ca acestora le zice dumnezâu : “ Ferice la ceea ce se plécâ aceea vor dobândi spáseniea.” Al noóle soare, aceea sânt. Tâtarii ce varsâ sânge pre pâmânt. și nimea înaintea lor nu vor sta, mânca-vor toate țârâle și pânâ la o vréme atâta putére vor avé cât. înainté lor din limbi nimea nu să va puté protivi ; iarâ când. va fi pre urmâ cu numele lui arhangel Gavriil iar de(n) oameni vor peri.—Slavâ pârintelui și fiului și duhului svânt. acum și pururé, și întru vécii de vécii amin.”




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