

multiple personae. The creative opus of la Castiglione thereby also presents analogies with an intimate journal in her obsession to freeze time and outlive herself, a modern expression of the Horatian *non omnis moriar*.

This undertaking, as original as it was fundamental, prefigured that of several modern-day artists: Orlan's series *Le Drapé-le Baroque* (1979–1986) recalls the series of photographs in which the countess presents herself as the Hermit of Passy; her very famous portrait *Scherzo di follia*, where her face is partly obscured by a cut-out card, clearly inspired Cindy Sherman for her *History Portraits/Old Masters* (1989); the various realisations of Sophie Calle recall the countess's biopictura, while certain images of the latter as on her death-bed anticipate the work of Robert Mapplethorpe on the *post mortem*. Underpinning her exposition with many other examples, Nicole Albert highlights the astonishingly up-to-date character of the Castiglione photographic opus. A veritable dramatist of the camera obscura, the passionate countess succeeded in capturing the ephemeral in all its melancholy grace. The novelist Gyp was not wrong when she acerbically wrote about the countess in a letter: "red turns black in photography".

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Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Micheline GALLEY (2010) *La Sibylle de l'Antiquité à nos jours*. Preface by André Miquel. Paris: Geuthner. 205 p. ill.

Addressing such a perennial and mysterious theme as that of the Sibyl is a fine and substantial task for historians. On this occasion, it is an ethnologist who is treating the subject, bringing to it the rigorous site-based observational methodology of her discipline, reinforced by a great erudition around the written and iconographic sources that she has assembled over ten years of investigations in France, Italy, Spain and Flanders.

Following the trail of Germaine Tillion and Fernand Braudel, Micheline Galley has devoted her research life to the cultures of North Africa and the Mediterranean basin. But it is in particular to the oral traditions in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Malta that she has directed her major attention, as witnessed by her work on the Bani Hilal epic, the tales of the Magic Figtree, and the life story of Maria Calleja of Gozo.

The starting point for this adventurous enterprise has been a simple file-card on the Sibyl kept after a lecture by the sociologist Maxime Rodinson, leading to the discovery in Malta of three cycles of legends: *The Sibyl and Solomon*, *The Sibyl and the Books of Wisdom*, *The Sibyl and the Young Virgin Mary*. With these, her interest was stirred. Then finally, one Christmas Eve in Majorca, the experience of hearing the "*Cant de la Sibilla*" in the contemporary Christian liturgy, followed by another moving occasion in Alghero in Sardinia hearing the chant's choral refrain: "*On Judgement Day we will behold those who have served well*", led to an intensification of Galley's research. This chant, originally in Greek, is a proclamation of the Nativity, sung in the Mediterranean Christian world first in Latin and then in the neo-Latin vernacular languages of Catalan, Castilian and Provençal. This whole florilegium is taken into consideration by the researcher, leading to numerous years of travelling and observation, of seeking evidence and collecting texts and iconography that was always displayed to be seen.

That is how we committed ethnologists are. An emotional experience, a moment of wonder, can be the start of a long involvement in a project and elicit the multiple methods appropriate for gaining an understanding of the phenomenon that fascinates us and which we ceaselessly turn over in our minds.

Micheline Galley quite clearly brings to our attention the powerful influence of a feminine oracle and its features and manifestations over time and space, from the Erythraean Sibyl of Ionia, the Pythian Sibyl of the sanctuary of Delphi, the Sibyl of Cumae, the Tiburtine Sibyl, and so many others across the Christian world. Recognized as a prophetess by the Emperor Constantine and adopted by the Church Fathers, the great Sibyl of Erythraea (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was to play a prominent role in the Medieval Church: she was represented in processions and was the centre of various Mystery Plays (in Rouen, in Portugal). Then there emerged the significant theme of the *Ara coeli*, the “Altar of Heaven”, which inspired numerous artistic developments.

But, first of all, who is this woman of ecstatic voice who utters a mysterious knowledge ?

The oracle is the voiced response granted by a God to an individual or collective question about the future. In the forest or court societies of South-East Asia with which I am familiar, there are certain birds which, by their calls or the direction of their flight – winged voices therefore - which are bearers of omens, whereas early-morning dreams are the object of coded interpretations.

In response to human anxiety, in the ancient Greek world both poetic and oracular utterances were united in one and the same goal: to seek out Truth. Apollo detains both knowledge and power, his lyre smoothes and pacifies, his dance is ordered by rhythm and harmony. He is the all-knowing Oracle, both cause and remedy. The Sibyl is Apollo’s priestess, she is possessed by the god, and the cult devoted to her enables us to sense this possession from the vapours which rise from the abyss, penetrating her body while augurs emanate from her mouth.

If, according to mythology, Hermes conveys but also interprets, the messages of the gods to men, the Sibyl for her part delivers messages that are oblique, enigmatic, infused with double meaning, utterances which both “signified” and invited reflection. Petitioners were therefore drawn into various possible interpretations. But consultation at the sanctuaries, whether individual and relating to one’s personal destiny (as those of Alexander or Oedipus), or else collective acts, was widespread. The proffered oracles constantly determined and directed human affairs at the highest level of social and political life (such as military campaigns, the foundation of colonies, the violation of prescribed rules, assassinations, etc).

The Church Fathers appropriated this ancient priestess, seeing in her a “true prophetess”. In the Renaissance period, the Sibyl became multiple, reaching the figure of twelve and becoming the feminine counterpart to the apostles and the minor Biblical prophets. This multiplication provided considerable choice, setting off a myriad artistic representations of the figure, for the Papacy and clergy directed such figuration and disseminated codified albums, while wealthy princes stimulated its artistic expression through their orders for art-works. As a consequence, the figure of the sibyl came to be shrouded with an aura of the sacred. But quite a different image – that of popular legend – on occasion made of her a beautiful woman who seduced Christian knights, or, rather more often, one with the role of educating young virgins in the ways of the world and interpreting their dreams. At once both divine and profoundly human, she was shaken with terrible wrath when her inspiration revealed that it was Mary who was the Chosen One, and not herself...

Since both poets and diviners are considered to be inspired, it is not surprising that from the 16<sup>th</sup> century (after the Council of Trent) up till the present time, this prestigious and multi-faceted prophetess should have become the inspiration of poets and musicians. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Sibylline chants in the various Western traditions of the Christian world were electronically recorded, while the Catalan manuscripts in particular, but also Castilian and Provençal ones,

have been studied and interpreted, as in the *El Cant de la Sibilla, Mallorca-Valencia 1400-1560*, by Jordi Savall and Monserrat Figueras, a fine example of such work.

It is also worth noting that this intangible, furtive and difficult to grasp form of utterance was materialised in writing from the early Roman era. The “Sibylline Books”, piously housed in the Capitol, bear witness to the broad influence of the oracles in the direction of the political life of the city.

Centuries later, the prophecies could be read on the phylacteries that were curled around the multiple silhouettes, postures, costumes and imagined portraits of the Sibyl, both by anonymous artists as well as by the greatest artists of the Renaissance and the Romantic period and by different artistic trends. Over the centuries, many artists indulged in the representation of this woman of exception in frescos, sculptures, paintings, tapestries, enamels and stained glass, and this book provides us with these various representations.

Though historians may well have obliterated the Sibyl, the erudition which permeates this fine book reveals the persistence across the centuries of the presence and fundamental function of this woman-oracle, a function occasionally messianic but still very much vivid in the collective psyche of certain cultures. Micheline Galley leads us by the hand, allowing us to understand the variations of conceptions and invites us to admire some magnificent works of art, “*from Antiquity to the present day*” that are scattered all over Europe but also in Mexico, in cathedrals, churches, palaces and museums.

This undertaking is that of a demanding scholar with a passion for the vocal and plastic arts, an anthropologist, Master of oral tradition, whose vocation is: “to let us understand by way of the text and let us see by way of the image” the history of an inspired woman who has become her friend and with whom she wishes to pursue her journey...

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