

‘HIS BLOOD ON US AND ON OUR CHILDREN’ (MT. 27.25) IS  
MODELED ON OEDIPUS’S UNWITTING KINSHIP OATH TO  
HIS FATHER IN SOPHOCLES’ *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*

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Washing his hands, Pilate swears his innocence in Jesus’ death. The assembled, to this point called the ‘crowd’, now abruptly called the ‘entire people’, answer, ‘His blood on us and on our children’. The words of Pilate and the Jewish people are in the form of two-part oaths of complete non-involvement (Pilate) and complete involvement (the people). In both M<sup>1</sup> and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, an individual foreign tyrant (*hēgemōn*)<sup>2</sup> orates outdoors with his subject domestic community assembled. They interact by exchanging matching opposite oaths of complete non-involvement and complete involvement, the distinctive two-part formulae of which are similar.<sup>3</sup> As far as I can ascertain, in all ancient literature, these two oaths are found together only in *Oedipus* and M.

1. The parts of Matthew referred to herein are special M material, not from Mark or Q, but by Matthew’s final compiler, redactor, editor and author. Donald Senior, ‘The Special Material in Matthew’s Gospel’, in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2010), III, pp. 1875-1900 (esp. 1878-80, 1898); J. Engelbrecht, ‘The Language of the Gospel of Matthew’, *Neot* 24 (1990), pp. 199-213; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; London: T. & T. Clark, 2000), I, pp. 95-96, 124-25; Stanley Stowers, ‘The Concept of “Community” and the History of Early Christianity’, *MTSR* 23 (2011), pp. 238-56.

2. Between 27.2 and 28.14, M uses *hēgemōn* eight times.

3. Citations to Sophocles, *Ajax. Electra. Oedipus Tyrannus* (trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones; LCL, 20; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

It has already been observed that Pilate's handwashing and oath are modeled on Deut. 21.1-9, which describes the exoneration ritual in the case of an unsolved murder. The same observation has been made for the non-involvement oath in Oedipus, which also contains the Deut 21.7 formula. However, no corresponding similarity was discerned between the occurrences of the other oath in both M and Sophocles: the involvement oath. Oedipus's involvement oath was of ironic covenantal kinship with his father, while conventional wisdom held that the Jewish peoples' oath accepted bloodguilt in Jesus' murder.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, during the first two centuries CE, Jesus' blood had the meaning Jesus gave to it as the blood of the covenant—sacred, sacrificial blood—not the innocent blood of bloodguilt. Over the past thirty years, critical scholarship has increasingly come to realize that the people's oath ironically accepts Jesus' offer of his blood.<sup>5</sup> Once one realizes that the Jewish people's oath is of covenantal kinship with Jesus, as a corollary, it becomes evident that their oath has the same formula as Oedipus's oath of kinship with his father. Thus, M replicates *both* of the oaths in *Oedipus*, those of non-involvement and involvement. To test whether it is sensible that M alludes to *Oedipus*, we examine the relative prevalence of M's use of Greek literary devices and the use of similar material by other contemporaneous writers.

4. Catherine Sider Hamilton, *The Death of Jesus in Matthew: Innocent Blood and the End of Exile* (SNTSMS, 166; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 3-12.

5. Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimension of Matthean Salvation History* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 14; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), p. 269; Timothy B. Cargal, "'His Blood Be upon Us and upon Our Children': A Matthean Double Entendre?," *NTS* 37 (1991), pp. 101-12; Desmond Sullivan, 'New Insights into Matthew 27:24-25', *NBf* 863 (1992), pp. 453-57; Andrew Simmonds, 'Uses of Blood: Re-Reading Matt. 27:25', *Law Critique* 19 (2008), pp. 165-91; *idem*, 'Mark's and Matthew's *Sub Rosa* Message in the Scene of Pilate and the Crowd', *JBL* 131 (2012), pp. 733-54; Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week. From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), p. 187; Andre LaCocque, *Jesus the Central Jew: His Times and His People* (ECL, 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2015), pp. 227-35, 232; on the controversy, see Hamilton, *Death*, pp. 3-4 and nn. 3-4.

Notice, however, that the link between *Oedipus* and M is obscured by the oaths being reversed. Thus, while one individual (Oedipus) makes the involvement oath, the other individual (Pilate) makes the non-involvement oath. Similarly, while the Theban people make the non-involvement oath, the Jewish people make the involvement oath. Nevertheless, *unlike* Oedipus, Pilate *only* makes his own oath (of non-involvement), while Oedipus also joins in the people's oath (of non-involvement), meaning Oedipus makes both oaths of non-involvement and of involvement. Oedipus making the non-involvement oath (like Pilate) allows for both Oedipus and Pilate to portray the individual foreign tyrant orally interacting with a subject domestic populace and swearing non-involvement.

Initially, I argue that Jesus' blood in the people's oath has the meaning Jesus gave to it (blood of the covenant), explaining the difference between sacred blood bonds and bloodguilt, and that the two are mutually exclusive. I then examine the parallel use of the matching opposite oaths in *Oedipus* and M, and how the involvement oath, in both Sophocles and M, creates ambiguity but steers the meaning toward one leg of the ambiguity, namely kinship blood bonds over bloodguilt. Next, I examine M's use of Greco-Roman literary devices. I then examine the popular trope of presenting Caesar and Romans as practicing maternal incest. This is followed by an examination of the convention of using classical allusions and particularly Theban material as safe anti-Roman political criticism. Finally, I examine Origen's perception of similarities between *Oedipus* and Jesus' passion narrative continuing in popular medieval legends.

*'Blood' In Mt. 27.25 Means Sacrificial Blood Not Bloodguilt*

Jesus' blood can have one of two mutually exclusive meanings.<sup>6</sup> The first is sacred sacrificial blood, which is Jesus' meaning at the Last Supper—blood of the covenant. The blood of the covenant is the kindred blood that binds or bonds the covenant people together, uniting them with one another and with God. A blood sacrifice was a *contract* that involved God or (a) god(s) and required the standard, universal contractual elements of an offer and acceptance. The landing of the sacrificial blood on persons or objects (most commonly the altar) was acceptance, the most important ritual step of blood

6. Hamilton, *Death*, pp. 3-4; Simmonds, 'Uses of Blood', pp. 175-79.

sacrifice that concluded the contract.<sup>7</sup> Moses concluded his Mosaic covenant by putting the blood of the covenant on the people (Exod. 24.8).<sup>8</sup> And Jesus does the same with his blood of the covenant (Heb. 9.12-22; 10.29; 12.24; 13.12).

Furthermore, it cannot be gainsaid that the events discussed here fell on Passover with its Paschal blood on the houses of the people. Blood symbolism ran throughout the holiday's ritual, particularly the phrase in the prayer, 'Through your blood you shall live', and in the connection between the original exodus and the arrival of the Messiah.<sup>9</sup> Blood kinship also played a special role in Jewish culture where all Jews were literally considered 'children', descendants of Israel, not merely citizens, subjects or members of a polity.<sup>10</sup> According to *b. Pes.* 65a1-2 and nn. 4-5, 15, the sacrificial blood of the Paschal lambs was so revered that the drains of the temple courtyard were stopped up so that their blood rose up to form a lake, and to transport the blood offerings to the altar, the priests had to stand on elevated stones. While this description of praxis is probably not historical, it does accurately reflect the extraordinary reverence with which Paschal blood was held. Additionally, from the earliest records available, Jesus was the Paschal lamb (1 Cor. 5.7). Paschal blood is sacred sacrificial blood, not innocent blood.

The second and different potential meaning of Jesus' blood is innocent blood, which is produced by the crime of murder. Innocent blood is the meaning Judas gives Jesus' blood (Mt. 27.3). Murder is in the legal family of *delict* (comprised of crime, tort and insult), which is different and distinct

7. Simmonds, 'Uses of Blood', pp. 177-79. With few differences, blood sacrifice operated the same in Roman, Greek and Jewish (Near Eastern) culture. Stanley K. Stowers, 'On the Comparison of Blood in Greek and Israelite Ritual', in Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin (eds.), *Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs* (BJS, 320; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 179-94.

8. M's Jesus is a Moses-like figure (slaughter of the innocents, sojourn in Egypt). In 1.20 God uses a dream to present Jesus like Moses as the savior of his people. Senior, 'Special Material', p. 1881.

9. Herbert W. Basser and Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance Based Commentary* (BRLA, 46; Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 672-73.

10. Calum M. Carmichael (ed.), *The Collected Works of David Daube. I. Talmudic Law* (Berkeley: Robbins Collection, 1992), p. 158.

from contract. A blood sacrifice was not a murder, and the blood of a murder was not sacred and could not be used for sacrifice.

Sacrificial blood and innocent blood have very different characteristics, one being positive and the other negative. Sacrificial blood purifies, cleanses, blesses, consecrates, saves and bonds. Innocent blood pollutes, defiles and produces guilt.<sup>11</sup> The most prominent distinguishing characteristic of innocent blood is that it is endlessly restless and noisy, incessantly crying out to be redeemed (undone) by the redeemer of the blood. Sacrificial blood, on the other hand, is stable and does not cry out. Manifestly, Jesus' blood, the blood of *the* Redeemer himself, is not unstable and does not cry out to be undone or redeemed. The Redeemer is not himself in need of redemption, as would be the case were his blood innocent blood.

Greek and Greek-influenced Roman literature frequently exploited the mutually exclusive categories of sacrifice and murder by portraying a murder performed as though a sacrifice, making it doubly depraved as both a homicide and a sacrilege.<sup>12</sup> Seneca's *Thy.* 691-743 is an example. This genre is called 'murder as corrupted sacrifice'. But while a murder could be carried out as a corrupted sacrifice, a true blood sacrifice was not a murder. In Matthew, per force, Jesus' death is not portrayed as a *corrupted* sacrifice but as a *perfect* sacrifice, which it could not be if it were a corrupted sacrifice or murder.

It is common in English to describe Jesus' blood as 'shed', which gives it a sense of murder, as in bloodshed. Thus, for example, KJV Mt. 26.28 has Jesus offer the sacramental wine using the word 'shed', which gives Jesus' offer a connotation of murder. This is a mistranslation of the underlying Greek word best glossed as 'poured', which can be used for either sacred blood or innocent blood.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, depictions of emperors pouring liquids

11. Hamilton, *Death*, pp. 58, 70, 99, 174, 181.

12. Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Motif of Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *TAPA* 96 (1965), pp. 463-508. This includes a horrifying parody of ritual (472), pretense of sacrifice (475), parody of sacrifice (479), sacrifice that is no sacrifice and sacrilegious blasphemy (498, 504); John Gilbert, 'Apollo's Sacrifice: The Limits of a Metaphor in Greek Tragedy', *HSCP* 101 (2003), pp. 159-206 (161-62, 179, 183, 197).

13. Hamilton, *Death*, p. 60 n. 32. The vernacular Catholic Mass has recently been corrected from 'shed' to 'poured'.

from a *patera* (sacred offering bowl), especially common on coins, visually represented the act of sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that Jesus' blood in the people's oath should mean innocent blood because of Mt. 23.29-36, the seventh and final woe, that the scribes and Pharisees are the prophet-killing sons of prophet-killing fathers.<sup>15</sup> However, the seventh woe is explicitly about innocent blood and says nothing explicitly about Jesus' blood.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the seventh woe contains Q material, while Mt. 27.24-25 is exclusively M. Additionally, the seventh woe is the capstone of a hyperbolic rhetorical crescendo, a literary genre unlike that of M's passion narrative.

While admittedly the sources may not be entirely consistent, the difference between innocent blood and sacred sacrificial blood is that a martyr's blood does not cry out to be avenged and does not rest on the killer(s).<sup>17</sup> The blood of martyrs instead lands on and blesses the place of their martyrdom (Peter and Paul in Rome, for example) and the martyrs' coreligionists. Thus, the blood of a child martyr landed on its mother.<sup>18</sup> Jesus' blood lands on and consecrates the people (Heb. 13.12).

14. Jonathan Williams, 'Religion and Roman Coins', in Jörg Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion* (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 150, 153-54.

15. Merrill P. Miller, 'The Social Logic of the Gospel of Mark: Cultural Persistence and Social Escape in a Postwar Time', in Barry S. Crawford and Merrill P. Miller (eds.), *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark* (ECL, 22; Atlanta: SBL, 2017), pp. 207-400 (384-85); Catherine Sider Hamilton, "'His Blood Be upon Us": Innocent Blood and the Death of Jesus in Matthew', *CBQ* 70 (2008), pp. 82-100; *idem*, *Death*, pp. 33-37.

16. Bassler and Cohen, *Matthew*, p. 695, suggest that the model for the people's oath may be Jer. 26.15 in which Jeremiah says to the crowd, 'if you put me to death you shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves, this city and its inhabitants'. Neither Pilate nor the crowd/people use the words 'innocent blood'. Pilate says *he* is innocent.

17. J. Petruccione, 'The Martyr's Death as Sacrifice: Prudentius' Peristephanon 4.9-72', *VC* 49 (1995), pp. 245-57 (245-50, 252, 254-55 and nn. 14, 21). Particularly in apocalyptic literature, martyrs may cry out for retribution and vengeance (Rev. 6.9-11, for example).

18. Robert Levine, 'Prudentius' Romanus: The Rhetorician as Hero, Martyr, Satirist, and Saint', *Rhetorica* 9 (1991), pp. 5-38 (32, also 10); Michael J. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (Ann

Until the third century, Jesus' blood on the people in Mt. 27.25 was not given the meaning of innocent blood.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, before the third century, there is no reference to Mt. 27.25.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, in the New Testament and other early Christian writings there are many references to Jesus' blood that are favorable, giving it the meaning of covenantal blood, not innocent blood or bloodguilt. For example, Acts 5.28-31 (not guilt but repentance and forgiveness), Rom. 3.25 (expiation), 5.9 (justification), 1 Cor. 10.16 (*koinōnia*/partnership/partake), 11.25 (new covenant in my blood), Eph. 1.7 (redemption), 2.13 (made near), Heb. 9.12-14 (eternal redemption), 18-20 (covenant), 22-29, 11.28 (Passover), 12.24 (more eloquent than blood of Abel), 13.12 (consecrates), 13.20 (brought from dead by blood of eternal covenant), 1 Pet. 1.2 (sprinkling of the blood), 1.19 (precious blood of unblemished lamb), 1 Jn 1.7 (cleansing from all sin), 5.8, Rev. 1.5 (freed from sin), 5.9 (purchased), 7.14 (washed white), 12.11 (conquered), 19.13; Ignatius, *Phild.* 4 (unity of blood), *Smyrn.* 6 (believers in the blood), Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 13 (purified), 24 (salvation), 54 (power of God), 111 (delivery from death); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.5.3, 7.7, 16.9, 18.2; 4.17.5, 20.2; 5.2.1-3, 14.3, 33.1. The only references in the New Testament to Jesus' blood meaning innocent blood are by Judas (Mt. 27.4), implicitly by Pilate (Mt. 27.24) and by the High Priest (Acts 5.28).

The earliest reference to Mt. 27.25 as meaning bloodguilt is from Tertullian, who in *Adv. Jud.* 8.18 combines Mt. 27.25 with Jn 19.12 to read, 'We have no king but Caesar'. Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.15, misquotes Mt. 27.25 as

Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 11-16; H.A. Fischel, 'Martyr and Prophet (A Study in Jewish Literature) (Continued)', *JQR* 37 (1947), pp. 363-86 (372).

19. Hans Kosmala, "'His Blood on Us and Our Children' (The Background of Mat. 27,24-25)", *ASTI* 7 (1970), pp. 94-126 (94 n. 1, 117); Fadiev Lovsky, 'Comment comprendre "Son sang sur nous et nos enfants"', *ETR* 62 (1987), pp. 343-62 (346-48); Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (ABRL; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 832.

20. Edouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Matthew on Christian Literature Before Saint Irenaeus*. III. *The Apologists and the Didache* (ed. Arthur J. Bellinzoni; trans. N.J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht; New Gospel Studies, 5.2; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), pp. 205-207, 220, 351, 354.

‘His blood be on our *heads* and on our children’s’.<sup>21</sup> Blood on heads or hands suggests innocent blood.

Nearly contemporary with Tertullian, Origen states there is ‘no salvation for anyone except in the blood of Christ’, but, regarding Mt. 27.25, ‘for those refuting, his blood effects punishment, for those who believe, salvation’ (*Hom. Jes. Nav.* 3.5).<sup>22</sup> The introduction of *religio animi*, which is intention or belief, as the test vitiates the notion of unwitting agreements (and *peripeteia*), which are the fundamental concept underlying formalism and sacred, permanent, immutable treaties and covenants.<sup>23</sup>

By the third century, it had become clear that Judaism had normatively rejected Christianity (Origen, *Cels.* 2.8-9). Therefore, to have said that Mt. 27.25 represents the Jewish nation’s acceptance of Jesus’ covenant, when hindsight suggested otherwise, might reflect poorly on Matthew. Furthermore, blood sacrifice had become a point of contention between the Roman authorities and Christians (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96).<sup>24</sup> With increasing Christian opposition and ascendancy, though widely practiced for thousands of years, blood sacrifice waned and finally was abolished (and a great deal of knowledge surrounding it lost).

#### *Unwitting Acclamations, Peripeteia, Classical Unities*

The people have no conscious knowledge of Jesus’ offer that was made in the upper room without their presence. Their unwitting acceptance is an *ef-fetto maravilloso, coup de theatre*, miraculous corroboration by an

21. It is fairly common for scholars to add the word ‘head’, which is not in Mt. 27.25. Hamilton, *Death*, pp. 5, 9, 11, 32, 44, 185, 232-33, for example.

22. Compare 1 Cor. 11.27-31. This makes the Eucharist diagnostic as in the *sotah* ordeal.

23. Alan Watson, ‘The Evolution of Law: The Roman System of Contracts’, *Law and History Review* 2 (1984), pp. 1-20 (4, 7-8); S.R.F. Price, ‘Between Man and God: Sacrifice in the Roman Imperial Cult’, *JRS* 70 (1980), pp. 28-43 (29).

24. Scott Bradbury, ‘Julian’s Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice’, *Phoenix* 49 (1995), pp. 331-56; Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSup, 176; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Daniel C. Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

otherwise inexplicably close coincidence.<sup>25</sup> The classic example is the legend of the Septuagint, where 72 translators—though working strictly independently—produced Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible that were word-for-word identical.<sup>26</sup> The legend expanded to ascribe divine significance to the few instances of differences between the Hebrew and Greek, of which the most celebrated was Isa. 7.14 (cf. Mt. 1.23), which was translated as ‘virgin’ (*parthenos*) birth.<sup>27</sup> Another example is in Gal. 3.16, when Paul maintains, because the word ‘seed’ is singular, ‘Abraham’s seed’ must refer to but one person, Jesus. In addition to these two examples, seemingly spontaneous acclamations made in unison by a large group were frequently taken as signs of divine inspiration and purpose.<sup>28</sup> For example, in Josephus, *War* 2.174, the indignant Judean masses opposing Pilate instinctively spontaneously act in close order ‘as if by agreed signal’.<sup>29</sup>

Aristotle notes that such coincidences are most striking when they have the air of design, and seemingly spontaneous occurrences, upon closer examination, prove to be providential (*Poet.* 1452a, 1462b).<sup>30</sup> This effect can be augmented by *peripeteia*, which is unwitting action and speech coming to the surface propelled by uncomfortable, repressed, subconscious

25. Calum M. Carmichael, ‘The Law of Witnesses in Transferred Operation’, in Calum M. Carmichael (ed.), *The Collected Works of David Daube. I. Talmudic Law* (Berkeley: Robbins Collection, 1992), pp. 397-400 (400); Samuel Leiter, ‘Worthiness, Acclamation, and Appointment: Some Rabbinic Terms’, *PAAJR* 41/42 (1973–1974), pp. 137-68.

26. Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), *passim*.

27. *Parthenos* had a broader meaning than ‘virgin’, as in Athena and her legends and the Parthenon.

28. Charlotte Roueché, ‘Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire: New Evidence from Aphrodisias’, *JRS* 74 (1984), pp. 181-99 (187-90).

29. Steve Mason, ‘The Writings of Josephus: Their Significance for New Testament Study’, in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2010), II, pp. 1639-86 (1662).

30. Robert L. Kane, ‘Prophecy and Perception in Oedipus Rex’, *TAPA* 105 (1975), pp. 189-208 (196 n. 12).

suspicion, like a Freudian slip.<sup>31</sup> *Peripeteia* is a major M leitmotif repeated in unwitting acclamations made by persons hostile to Jesus.

- (1) Herod: 'Bring me word that I too may pay him homage' (2.8)
- (2) Pilate: 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus: 'Thou sayest it' (27.11)
- (3) Entire Roman cohort: 'Hail, King of the Jews' (27.27-31)<sup>32</sup>
- (4) Sign above the cross: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews' (27.37)
- (5) Chief priests, scribes, and elders: 'He is Israel's king' (27.42)<sup>33</sup>
- (6) Chief priests and Pharisees: 'He said he would rise after three days' (27.63).

M's use of *peripeteia* likely derives from Aristotle, who considered Sophocles the greatest writer, *Oedipus* his greatest play and Oedipus's involvement oath the greatest line in all literature because it was the greatest example of what Aristotle considered the greatest literary device, *peripeteia* (*Poet.* 1451b-1453b).<sup>34</sup> This is the line and device that M copies. Thus, Oedipus subconsciously chooses an oath of kinship with Laius because Oedipus, in his repressed subconscious, suspects Laius *is* his father. Despite not knowing of Jesus' offer, M's people must have some psychological inkling of it that impels them to choose a formula that accepts it. Thus, using *peripeteia*, M has the crowd repress its love for their fellow Jew, Jesus, in order to spite Roman Pilate. Nevertheless, their residual angst at the crowd having condemned Jesus causes the people to choose a formulation that invokes their Jewish kinship solidarity with Jesus, with whom they share

31. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1451b-1453b; Marjorie Barstow, 'Oedipus Rex as the Ideal Tragic Hero of Aristotle', *The Classical Weekly* 6 (1912), pp. 2-4 (2); Bernard Knox, 'Oedipus the King: Introduction', in *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (trans. Robert Fagles; Penguin Classics; New York: Viking Press, 1982), pp. 131-53; Joseph S. Margon, 'Aristotle and the Irrational and Improbable Elements in *Oedipus Rex*', *CW* (1976-1977), pp. 249-55.

32. Paralleling the entire people (27.25).

33. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary* (trans. James F. Crouch; ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 539 (acting '*in corpore*', 'official veneer', 'everything the Jewish leaders state only ironically is true'); Simmonds, 'Uses of Blood', p. 175.

34. Barstow, 'Oedipus Rex', p. 2; Knox, 'Introduction', pp. 131-53; Margon, 'Aristotle', pp. 249-55.

kindred blood. In parallel, both Oedipus and the Jewish crowd/people make kinship oaths with someone they kill.

To make a formal (in contradistinction to informal) contract, such as a covenant, the offer and acceptance must be oral and contiguous, meaning there can be no interruption. Legally, Jesus' offer has to be accepted immediately by its intended recipient. Legally, Jesus cannot offer his covenant for it to remain inchoate awaiting some future, at that time far from certain, piecemeal Gentile acceptance. Moreover, being sacred, permanent and immutable, the Jewish covenants could not be terminated by a breach alone. Treaty-covenant oaths are unconditional.

The people's acceptance occurs approximately twelve hours after Jesus' offer. M eliminates this time gap between Jesus' offer and the people's acceptance by the famous Greek literary device of the dramatic classical unities that suspend time during a single day, provided the unities of time, place and action are met (*Poet.* 1462b).<sup>35</sup> Thus, Jesus' offer and the people's acceptance occur in a single day of Passover, in a single place of Jerusalem, and the action is completely continuous without any break even at night. Nevertheless, despite the classical unities being quintessentially Greek, M calculates the day the Jewish way from dusk to dusk, not the Greco-Roman way from dawn to dawn.

#### *The Complete Non-Involvement Oath*

Pilate's hand washing and oath are modeled on the Jewish ritual and oath in Deut. 21.1-9.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, in 1982, Howard Jacobson observed that the Theban people's oath in Sophocles' *Oedipus* has the same formula as Deut. 21.7.<sup>37</sup> That is, Sophocles' non-involvement oath (277-278) has the

35. Richard T. Urban, 'All or Nothing at All: Another Look at the Unity of Time in Aristotle', *CJ* 61 (1966), pp. 262-64; H. Carrington Lancaster, 'The Introduction of the Unities into the French Drama of the Seventeenth Century', *Modern Language Notes* 44 (1929), pp. 207-17 (216); Margaret J.H. Myers, 'Has Greek Drama a Message for Today? A Further Study of Aristotle's Canons of Tragedy', *The Sewanee Review* 34 (1926), pp. 421-30 (421).

36. Luz, *Matthew*, pp. 21-28, 494 ('intentionally bizarre'), 500 ('readers are certainly surprised that Gentile Pilate performs a biblical ritual').

37. Howard Jacobson, 'Ritualistic Formulae in Greek Dramatic Texts', *CIQ* 32 (1982), pp. 233-34. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation and*

distinctive two-part formula, ‘I did not do it and cannot point to who did’, which is the same formula as Deut. 21.7: ‘hands have not, eyes have not’. They also both involve the case of an unsolved murder.<sup>38</sup> Although there are many allusions to Greek law in the *investigation* of Laius’s death, there are not in the oaths.<sup>39</sup> The oaths in Sophocles are exotic, foreign imports lacking any Greek analogue.

After the Greek victory against Persia, Greek audiences were fashionably interested in everything foreign and exotic, which playwrights and historian Herodotus supplied.<sup>40</sup> In Athenian theater, Thebes, which among other things had sided with Persia and whose eponymous founder came from

*Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 980. He states of Deut. 21.3: ‘the whole community is plagued with the miasma of bloodguilt—like Thebes at the beginning of *Oedipus*.’

38. On Greek law where the identity of the murderer was unknown, see Plato, *Leg.* 9.

39. Bernard M.W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 82; R.G. Lewis, ‘The Procedural Basis of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*’, *GRBS* 30 (1989), pp. 41-66 (41-44, 48, 50-63); Edwin Carawan, ‘The Edict of Oedipus (Oedipus Tyrannus 223–51)’, *AJP* 120 (1999), pp. 187-222 (205).

40. E.D. Francis, ‘Oedipus Achaemenides’, *AJP* 113 (1992), pp. 333-57 (347, 351-53). Aeschylus’s *The Persians* and the story of Deborah (Judg. 4.17-22; 5.28-30) both portray the royal women in the enemy camp fretting awaiting word of the outcome of the battle and the fate of their men. Both the Bible and many Greek dramas employ multi-generational ‘dynastic tragedies’. Calum M. Carmichael, ‘Communal Responsibility’, in Calum M. Carmichael (ed.), *The Collected Works of David Daube. III. Biblical Law and Literature* (Studies in Comparative History; Berkeley: Robbins Collection, 2003), pp. 487-95. Antigone’s famous explanation of her commitment to her brother, that one can have a new husband and new children but after one’s parents’ deaths never a new brother, comes from Herodotus’s story of an episode in Darius’s (Persian) court. Stephanie West, ‘Croesus’ Second Reprieve and Other Tales of the Persian Court’, *CIQ* 53 (2003), pp. 416-37 (434-36). The brief Neo-Babylonian Empire (coinciding with the Babylonian captivity and supplanted by the Persian Empire) was a time of intense archaizing/antiquarianism copying the long bygone age of Babylonian suzerainty a thousand years prior. Paul-Alain Beaulieu, ‘Mesopotamian Antiquarianism from Sumer to Babylon’, in Alain Schnapp (ed.), *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014), pp. 121-39.

Phoenicia, functioned as an anti-Athens,<sup>41</sup> which is a mirror opposite: surreal, bizarre and irrational. Thus, Sophocles presents Oedipus as a foreigner (219-220, 222), an ‘unconstitutional’, ‘oriental potentate’, tyrant,<sup>42</sup> and as circumcised (by references to his name ‘swollen-foot’, euphemistic, with its humiliating injury, its tip cut by metal at birth, 718, 1030-1036).<sup>43</sup>

Sophocles need not have specifically known Deut. 21.1-9. Its operation and oath were established in Near Eastern law tracing back to ancient

41. Susanna Braund, ‘A Tale of Two Cities: Statius, Thebes, and Rome’, *Phoenix* 60 (2006), pp. 259-73, 396 (260).

42. Bernard M.W. Knox, ‘Why Is Oedipus Called Tyrannos?’, *CJ* 50 (1954), pp. 97-105, 130 (97).

43. Richmond Y. Hathorn, ‘The Existential Oedipus’, *CJ* 53 (1958), pp. 223-30 (230 n. 32), cites and quotes Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes*, pp. 182-84, ‘I venture the suggestion that Oedipus, “Swollen Foot”, may originally have been a euphemism for the ithyphallos or its wearer in a fertility rite.’ In 1912, Freud’s collaborator, Sandor Ferenczi, postulated that swollen foot meant erect penis. While infant-exposure was common in ancient Greece, Oedipus’s infant foot piercing is unparalleled. Rather, ‘feet’ was a common ancient sexual euphemism. Calum Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 158-75 (166-73); S.H. Smith, ‘“Heel” and “Thigh”: The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives’, *VT* 40 (1990), pp. 464-73; 2 Kgs 18.27 (‘they drink the water of their feet’ meaning urine); Isa. 7.20 (‘hair of the feet’); 2 Sam. 11.8 (David told Uriah to go home and wash his feet). Ruth uncovered Boaz’ ‘feet’ on the ‘threshing room floor’ (*b. Nid.* 41b3 and n. 25). In the chalitzah ritual, the widow loosened the shoe of the man who refuses to fulfill his levirate duty. *Oidi*, ‘swell’ is punned with *oida*, ‘know’ (in the carnal sense). In the context of the Sphinx’s riddle, Oedipus walks/‘knows’ with his one foot. Oedipus is full of contrasts between ‘one’ and ‘more-than-one’. Oedipus’s feet are bound together as one. R. Drew Griffith, ‘Corporality in the Ancient Greek Theatre’, *Phoenix* 52 (1998), pp. 230-56 (236) (the ‘Greek, from Homer onward, seems to our taste oddly preoccupied with knees and feet’, p. 239); Anthony G. Keen, ‘Undoing the Wineskin’s Foot: Athenian Slang?’, *CIQ* 59 (2009), pp. 626-31; Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, ‘Feet, Fate, and Finitude: On Standing and Inertia in the *Iliad*’, *College Literature* 34 (2007), pp. 174-93, where Nikolopoulou notes that ‘Feet and fate seem to be curiously related in the ancient Greek tradition’ (174); Amy Richlin, ‘Retrospect: Sex in the Second Sophistic’, in Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 115-35 (124) (Philostratus in *Love Letters* is obsessed with feet).

Babylon,<sup>44</sup> and forward to Muslim law,<sup>45</sup> with the Deut. 21.1-9 ritual itself specifically traceable to Hittite law.<sup>46</sup> From early on, Greek literature (Hesiod, for example) was influenced by Hittite stories.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, in Sophocles, Oedipus and the Theban people perform a relatively well-known and distinctly foreign Near Eastern ritual without any Greek analogue. In M, Roman Pilate performs the same Near Eastern ritual, which also lacks any Roman analogue. Nevertheless, M, mocking Pilate and Rome, has Pilate incompetently mangle the Deut. 21.1-9 ritual and oath, which are supposed to be about the innocent blood of the victim (Jesus). Pilate thus perversely claims that he, Pilate, is innocent.<sup>48</sup> Pilate's profession of his own innocence, while executing an innocent (27.24), recalls the famous line from Sophocles' *Antigone*, where Creon condemns innocent Antigone swearing *his*, Creon's, own innocence (988).<sup>49</sup> (*Antigone* was extolled by Aristotle though not so highly as *Oedipus*.) Nevertheless, despite Pilate mangling the oath, it is clear that Pilate's oath is based upon Deut. 21.1-9 because Pilate accompanies it with hand washing. (However, in an ambiguity, Pilate might be performing the Levabo, which is a prefatory, sacrificial handwashing ritual and innocence oath.)<sup>50</sup>

44. Hossein Badamchi, 'Old Babylonian International Law and the Protection of Merchants against Robbery: Responsibility of Local Ruler for Robbery', *ZABR* 19 (2013), pp. 59-78; Cyrus H. Gordon, 'An Akkadian Parallel to Deuteronomy 21:1ff', *RA* 33 (1936), pp. 1-6.

45. Rudolph Peters, 'Murder in Khaybar: Some Thoughts on the Origin of the *Qasāma* Procedure in Islamic Law', *ILS* 9 (2002), pp. 132-67.

46. Jacob Milgrom, '*Eglah arufah*', in Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopedia Judaica* (22 vols.; Detroit: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 2007), VI, pp. 475-77; Harry Angier Hoffner, Jr, *The Laws of the Hittites* (DMOA, 23; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 20, 170-74. Late Hittite Code, para. 6 (revised) and Deut. 21.2-3 both have measurement mechanisms to ascribe liability to the nearest town. Law from Ugarit also bears similarities.

47. Billie Jean Collins, *The Hittites and Their World* (ABS, 7; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), pp. 152, 219.

48. Simmonds, '*Sub Rosa*', p. 749 and n. 90; y. *Sotah* 48a4. The Deut. 21.1-9 ritual was the most inappropriate ritual possible to perform in Jerusalem on Passover, like mixing a wedding with a funeral.

49. The name of Antigone's fiancé and Creon's son, Haemon, is a pun on 'blood', *haima*. *Ant.* 1175; 111 n. a.

50. Simmonds, '*Sub Rosa*', p. 749.

*The Complete Involvement Oath*

Like the non-involvement oaths, the involvement oaths in Sophocles and M also have a distinctive two-part formula of ‘this, and more’, producing maximal legal breadth. Thus, Oedipus swears (272-273) that (1) he will discover who killed Laius, and (2) still more, he will ‘fight’ for Laius with the greatest legal right and duty, as though Laius were Oedipus’s father. Fictive father-son oaths and legal relationships were common in Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty-covenants, not in Greek law. Oedipus’s commitment to ‘fight’ for Laius has an ironic double meaning. Oedipus fought *against* Laius. ‘Fight’, or ‘wrestle’, in this context ambiguously can mean to make love.<sup>51</sup> Unwittingly (*peripeteia*), Oedipus swears he is ‘fighting’ (making love) for Laius, in Laius’s place with Laius’s wife. The other most popular Near Eastern treaty-covenant form, also used in biblical covenants, was husband-wife.

Likewise, M uses a two-part formula of (1) the entire people (broad) and (2) its children (meaning in perpetuity, greatest breadth).<sup>52</sup> Indeed, M’s identification of the assembled as the nation and its children marks their acceptance as *ex officio* in the maximal breadth required for an acceptance in the Hittite-Assyrian treaty-covenant tradition (which gave rise to the biblical covenants, and the same form came to be used frequently by the Etruscans and Romans, but little by the Greeks).<sup>53</sup> This is the covenant form of ‘(1)

51. Stefan van den Broeck, ‘Foulmouthed Shepherds: Sexual Overtones as a Sign of *Urbanitas* in Virgil’s *Bucolica* 2 and 3’, *Electronic Antiquity* 12.2 (2009), pp. 1-72 (46, 51). The chorus speaks of a foothold (800) and describes Oedipus’s defeat of the (female) sphinx as a ‘wrestler’s throw’; Robert Guay, ‘Tragic Ambiguity in the *Oedipus Tyrannos*’, in Craig J.N. de Paulo, Patrick Messina and Marc Stier (eds.), *Ambiguity in the Western Mind* (New York: Lang, 2005), pp. 35-50 (49).

52. ‘The souls of all future Jews were brought to Moses to join in the oath’. *b. Šebu*. 39a2 n. 29. Oedipus’s first words are ‘My children’.

53. Ada Taggar-Cohen, ‘Biblical Covenant and Hittite *išhiul* Reexamined’, *VT* 61 (2011), pp. 461-88 (488); Karl-Heinz Zeigler, ‘Conclusion and Publication of International Treaties in Antiquity’, *Israel Law Review* 29 (1995), pp. 239-49 (233, 237-39, 245); Jacob Lauinger, ‘The Neo-Assyrian *ade*: Treaty, Oath, or Something Else?’, *ZABR* 19 (2013), pp. 99-116 (109); Moshe Weinfeld, *Normative and Sectarian Judaism in the Second Temple Period* (LSTS, 54; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 27-28.

thus, (2) and (yet/still) more'.<sup>54</sup> 'As I do to this blood sacrifice, so may the gods do to me, and my children, only *more*, as the gods are more powerful than I' (Livy, *Hist.* 1.1.24). In the first century, this sacred treaty-covenant acceptance oath (that formulaically included children) was employed in the Roman *Kaisereid* ('Caesar-oath') of the imperial cult and the Roman military pledge of allegiance, the *sacramentum*, sacred oath, from whence our word 'sacrament'. *Neque me neque liberos meos eius salute cariones habebo*, 'Nor will I hold myself or my children more dear than' (Seutonius, *Cal.* 15; Diodorus Siculus 37.11).<sup>55</sup>

Not to rival the Roman treaty-covenants, Philo and Josephus downplay the Jewish covenants with God.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Seneca omits Sophocles' oaths. In John, the crowd's involvement oath is to Caesar: 'We have no king but Caesar'. In Matthew it is to Jesus. Only M incorporates Sophocles' oaths.

54. Paul Sanders, 'So May God Do To Me!', *Bib* 85 (2004), pp. 91-98 (91); George E. Mendenhall, 'Puppy and Lettuce in Northwest-Semitic Covenant Making', *BASOR* 133 (1954), pp. 26-30 (26, 29-30).

55. Daniel G. Van Slyke, 'Sacramentum in Ancient Non-Christian Authors', *Antiphon* 9 (2005), pp. 167-206 (179) ('curse upon self and kin'); Greg Rowe, *Princes and Political Culture: The New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 139 ('I bind myself, body, soul, and life, and my children and descendants', Paphlagonia; 'ourselves and our descendants', Palaipaphos); T.B. Mitford, 'A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius', *JRS* 50 (1960), pp. 75-79 ('WE, ourselves and our Children, SWEAR'). Although the Western *Kaisereid* form of 'health', *salus*, is in the true treaty-covenant tradition, the Eastern Greek form of 'love' is not.

56. Louis H. Feldman, 'Josephus's Portrait of Moses', *JQR* 82 (1992), pp. 285-328 (285, 307, 320); *idem*, 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses, Part Three', *JQR* 83 (1993), pp. 301-30. Feldman notes that 'Josephus shifts the attention from the covenanted land of Israel, so dear to the revolutionaries, to the biblical personalities themselves and to the role of the Diaspora' (319); Philo, *Heir* 38.182; *idem*, *Moses* 2, 29-30 (149-52).

*Ambiguity That Resolves*

As Laius's son, Oedipus would have the status of blood avenger.<sup>57</sup> Oedipus's involvement oath might thus seem to be about murder and blood vengeance. However, that begs the question because the status of blood avenger depended upon the nearness of kinship 'blood' affiliation between the victim and avenger. *Oedipus* is deliberately written ambiguously,<sup>58</sup> which prompts the question: is the essential relationship between Oedipus and Laius (and analogously between Jesus and the Jewish people) based on bloodguilt or blood kinship? Via subtle indications, Sophocles resolves this ambiguity in favor of blood kinship. Thus, Oedipus gives family ties as his reason for treating Laius as his father. 'I have his power, marriage, wife, and had he not died and had children, they would have been siblings of mine own, likening Laius to me' (255-266). Oedipus calls Laius by his bloodline: 'son of Labdacus, sprung from Polydorus, from Cadmus before, from Agenor long ago' (266-268). And of course, the concept of incest involves blood.<sup>59</sup> Speaking of his parricide, Oedipus says he slew his own blood with his own hands (1400).<sup>60</sup> Likewise, in Matthew, Jesus and the people are of kindred blood.<sup>61</sup> And similarly, the people's oath can be heard/read to express blood affiliation. The people have jurisdiction over one of their own with whom they share the same blood. In both Sophocles and M the involvement oaths swear kinship with someone they kill.

57. Haim Hermann Cohn, 'Blood-Avenger', in Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopedia Judaica* (22 vols.; Detroit: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 2007), III, pp. 772-73. Greek blood-avenger law was essentially identical to Jewish.

58. Guay, 'Ambiguity', p. 35, who is citing Arnold Hug, 'Der doppelsinn in Sophokles Oedipus könig', *Philologus* 31 (1872), pp. 66-84; Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*', *New Literary History* 9 (1978), pp. 475-501 (475); P.E. Easterling, 'Repetition in Sophocles', *Hermes* 101 (1973), pp. 14-34 (14-16, 18); Carawan, 'Edict', pp. 213-15 and nn. 60-61, 195-96, 216; Kane, 'Prophecy', p. 195; Judith Fletcher, *Performing Oaths in Classical Greek Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 110.

59. Diskin Clay, 'Unspeakable Words in Greek Tragedy', *AJP* 103 (1982), pp. 277-98 (289).

60. Thomas F. Hoey, 'On the Theme of Introversion in "Oedipus Rex"', *CJ* 64 (1969), pp. 296-99 (297).

61. LaCocque, *Jesus*, p. 232.

To save Thebes from the plague, the oracle called for banishing those who polluted the land by not revealing what they knew, or by repaying killing with killing (95-101). Oedipus was not killed, which is the punishment for killing, but only banished, which is the punishment for not revealing. Thus, Oedipus's punishment was on account of his non-involvement oath (250-251, 744-745, 817-824, 1436-1454), not on account of his involvement oath. Oedipus's fault was for having harbored in his 'house' (literally and figuratively) a witness to the killing (lack of *complete* non-involvement), not for failing to discover and punish Laius's killer (involvement). And Oedipus's self-blinding was for his having been blind when he had sight (which is the essence of *peripeteia*). Thus, Sophocles' emphasis is not upon Oedipus's patricide and incest, but on Oedipus's failure to see them, particularly given the intimacy of the marriage bed.<sup>62</sup> Any ordinary man would have asked his wife about her previous husband's violent death. But because he had killed a man at about the same time, Oedipus repressed any curiosity about Laius's murder. Any ordinary woman would have asked her husband about the injury marks to his 'feet' (literal and euphemistic), but because Jocasta's baby had that done to him, she repressed her natural curiosity.

#### *Strong Defenses against Bloodguilt*

Both Oedipus and the Jewish people have strong defenses against charges of murder, which suggests that the dominant meaning of their oaths is not of bloodguilt but blood kinship. Oedipus acted in self-defense (1451-1454). Laius had tried to kill Oedipus, not once, but twice, first at birth and then along the road.<sup>63</sup> And marrying Jocasta was not Oedipus's choice. She was given to Oedipus (among the trappings of kingship) by the Theban people for defeating the sphinx.

Another reason why Oedipus was not guilty of murder was because Laius was condemned by the gods to be killed—and worse still—by his

62. Kane, 'Prophecy', p. 192; Carawan, 'Edict', pp. 211-14; cf. P.J. Finglass, 'The Interpolated Curse', *Hermes* 134 (2006), pp. 257-68 (260-61).

63. Seneca, *Oed.* 770-71; Calum M. Carmichael (ed.), *The Collected Works of David Daube*. IV. *Talmudic Law* (Berkeley: Robbins Collection, 2009), p. 201; Vernant, 'Ambiguity', p. 481.

own son, because Laius had committed a doubly grievous crime. While a guest in another king's home, Laius raped his host's young son, who, distraught, committed suicide.<sup>64</sup> Making the crime much worse, Laius violated his host's hospitality. (Recall Sodom was destroyed for violating the rules of hospitality.) Viewed thus, Oedipus's killing and marriage were on account of Laius's actions.

Like Oedipus, the Jewish people have strong defenses against charges of murder. Jesus' crucifixion was his choice. Jesus could easily have prevented his death had he wished (26.53-54). But Jesus chose silence, going to his death voluntarily. The crowd condemned Jesus for an ironically commendable reason—to oppose Pilate/Rome. Furthermore, since the people's oath embraces and accepts Jesus' blood, the people, a new party from the crowd, accept Jesus and reverse the crowd's condemnation of Jesus. Finally, Jesus came back to life (a full, physical resurrection in contemporary Jewish/Pharisaic/rabbinic tradition).<sup>65</sup> This results in Jesus' death being physically reversed in his resurrection, as well as any bloodguilt in his death (Seneca, *Ira* 1.18).

#### *Emphasis by Repetition with Variation*

To steer the meaning of the involvement oath to blood kinship, not blood-guilt, M employs the Greek literary device of emphasis by repetition with variation (Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.64-65; 9.2.67).<sup>66</sup> The purpose of emphasis was to give greater prominence and salience.<sup>67</sup> Ordinarily, emphasis by

64. Havi Hannah Carel, 'Moral and Epistemic Ambiguity in Oedipus Rex', *Janus Head* 9 (2006), pp. 97-115 (99).

65. Daniel Boyarin and Seymour Siegel, 'Resurrection', in Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopedia Judaica* (22 vols.; Detroit: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 2007), XVII, p. 242 ('clearly and literally corporeal').

66. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I, p. 88, 'Matthew, so far from being adverse to repeating himself, seems to positively delight in the practice'. On the use of emphasis in the first century, see Jason A. Whitlock, "'Here We Do Not Have a City that Remains": A Figured Critique of Roman Imperial Propaganda in Hebrews 13:14', *JBL* 131 (2012), pp. 161-79, (164-66).

67. Stanley E. Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), pp. 141-42; Casey W. Davis, 'Oral Biblical Criticism: Raw Data in Philippians', in Stanley

repetition with variation had three elements: (1) an abrupt beginning, (2) repetition with variation creating ambiguity and (3) a surprising, profoundly revealing, ironic meaning in the last repetition.<sup>68</sup> Thus, first, an important but entirely new word, phrase or concept is abruptly introduced (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.12, 1412b, 1413b–1414a). This violates the norm (absent use of stereotype) of progressive, gradual, plot and character development, which surprises readers/hearers, esoterically alerting them to expect a surprise ironic meaning in the last repetition.

Thus, there has been no prior mention of Jesus' blood or the blood of the covenant before the Last Supper when abruptly Jesus introduces it. Next, to create ambiguity, 'blood' is rapidly repeated six times, by six different actors/characters, producing six different meanings:

- (1) 'blood of the covenant' by Jesus (26.28) meaning blood kinship
- (2) 'innocent blood' by Judas (27.4) meaning bloodguilt
- (3) 'price of blood' by the priests (27.6) meaning either tainted money or *wergild*
- (4) 'field of blood' by the narrator (27.8) meaning an etiology or a cemetery
- (5) 'this blood' by Pilate (27.24) implicitly, but not explicitly, meaning bloodguilt
- (6) 'His blood' by the people (27.25) meaning either blood kinship or bloodguilt.

Judas and Pilate's meanings of innocent blood do not oppose Jesus' contrary meaning of 'two against one' because Pilate's words are a mere reverse repetition of Judas'.<sup>69</sup> And in both we find the identical Latinism, 'See to it (yourself)', *tu vedis*, which, alluding to Rome, is a negative

E. Porter and D.A. Carson (eds.), *Linguistics and the New Testament: Critical Junctions* (JSNTSup, 168; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 96-124 (112-19).

68. Matthew Wright, 'Comedy and the Trojan War', *CIQ* 57 (2007), pp. 412-31 (419-20 and n. 36); P.E. Pickering, 'Did the Greek Ear Detect "Careless" Verbal Repetitions?', *CIQ* 53 (2003), pp. 490-99 (especially 493, 496); W.B. Stanford, 'Sound, Sense and Music in Greek Poetry', *GR* 28 (1981), pp. 127-40 (135); Easterling, 'Repetition', pp. 19-20 ('shift in meaning of repeated word'; 'lyric echo'); Francis, 'Oedipus Achaemenides', p. 351 ('different sense').

69. Hamilton, *Death*, p. 34.

commentary. Moreover, we, the readers/hearers, are supposed to regard Jesus' words as 'good' and instructive, and Judas's and Pilate's that contradict Jesus' as not. Hence, Pilate's and Judas's meaning that Jesus' blood is innocent blood is represented as incorrect, not as a viable alternative to Jesus' correct meaning. Moreover, having been present when Jesus announced that his blood was the blood of the covenant, Judas should have known better. In an interaction between Pilate/Rome and the Jews, after all these repetitions, the last time we hear of Jesus' blood, from the Jewish people no less, the meaning we must be left with must be Jesus' patriotically Jewish meaning—the blood of the covenant.

### *The People Answer Jesus, Not Pilate*

M's surprise ending is that the people accept Jesus' offer and not Pilate's. Three reasons suggest this. First, as a matter of legal form, Pilate literally asks for an agreement about himself that he, Pilate, is innocent—his guilt is removed and assumed by the people. But the people's answer says nothing whatever about Pilate. Their oath concerns themselves and 'him', Jesus, not Pilate, and conforms legally to Jesus' offer, not Pilate's.

Second, even though M's literary style is Greek, M's *Zeitgeist* is rabbinic.<sup>70</sup> And in rabbinic Judaism (Mishnah, Tosefta and both Talmuds) the Deut. 21.1-9 ritual was conjoined with its matching opposite, the Num. 5.11-31 *sotah* ordeal of the suspected adulteress. (In a legal *cause célèbre* these two rituals ceased mid-first century.) Thus, referring to rabbinic tradition, depicting Pilate as performing the Deut. 21.1-9 ritual subsequently projects Pilate's counterpart, the Jewish people, as *sotah*, Jesus' wife in a test of marital/covenantal fidelity (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 14.19). The *sotah*'s oath is made in regard to her husband and her marriage. Thus, in the *sotah* metaphor the people's oath is made regarding Jesus, her husband. Likewise, the *sotah*'s oath is related to the covenant oath (*b. Šebu.* 35a4 n. 39, 35b4-36a2).<sup>71</sup>

70. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I, p. 133; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (trans. Wilhelm C. Linss; ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 78, 80-81, 94. Compare Ezekiel's *Exagogue*.

71. However, the *sotah*'s oath read by the priest to which she said, 'Amen, Amen' (Num. 5.22) does not seem a sufficient predicate for the people's oath.

Third, in a culturally Jewish and linguistically Semitic feature, M's narrative is constructed as a lengthy sequence of (Rube Goldberg-like) indirect causation in which 'A' causes 'B', 'B' causes 'C', 'C' causes 'D' and so on. The result is that in an agency-based causal chain, a remote cause produces a distant effect with undiminished force, so that 'A' causes 'D'.<sup>72</sup> For this to happen, the movement is unremittingly forward, from one actor to the next, never interactively with prior actors. Thus, the sequence is: (A) from God in the dream to Pilate's wife, (B) from Pilate's wife to her messenger, (C) from her messenger to Pilate, (D) from Pilate to the crowd and finally, (E) from the people to Jesus. (The incorrect reading would be: God to wife, wife to messenger, messenger to Pilate, Pilate to the crowd, and then backwards, the people to Pilate.) This progression leads to the conclusion that the people's oath came from God. God's message for Pilate to have no involvement with Jesus produces in the people a commitment of total involvement with Jesus. And since God is its impetus/'author', we know that the people's oath must be salutary.

In addition, we know the dream came from God because M uniquely makes considerable use of divine dream stories using the word 'night-dream' six times. No other New Testament texts share in this use of 'night-dream'. M's four other divine dream stories appear at the beginning of the Gospel—revealing to Joseph Mary's immaculate conception and that Jesus will be the savior of his people (1.20), warning the Magi about Herod (2.12), warning Joseph about Herod (2.13) and warning Joseph when returning from Egypt (2.23). These dreams are straightforward and require no

72. On Semitic causatives, Edward Lipinski, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (OLA, 80; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), pp. 345, 355, 387-401 (they ate by means of bread); Chaim Saiman, 'Legal Theology: The Turn to Conceptualism in Nineteenth Century Jewish Law', *Journal of Law and Religion* 21 (2006), pp. 39-100 (62); David Daube, 'Causation', in Calum Carmichael (ed.), *The Deed and the Doer: Gifford Lectures of David Daube* (2 vols.; West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), I, pp. 3-30 (20-24); Lucian, *Tyr.*; Antonella Vecciato, *Events in the Grammar of Direct and Indirect Causation* (PhD diss.; University of Southern California, 2011), *passim*.

interpretation. These dreams are decidedly Greco-Roman,<sup>73</sup> as dreams were out of fashion in first-century Jewish circles.<sup>74</sup>

*M, Statius, Mannerism and a Profusion of Doubles*

M's style in several respects resembles Statius's. Statius, who originated from Naples and was the son of a Greek teacher (*Sivae* 3.5), has been called a mannerist for his dense, elaborate, overwrought style that elevates in importance details and parts.<sup>75</sup> Thus, for example, M gives bigger parts to supporting actors, such as Peter and Judas. In M, Jesus remarks in advance both on the one's denial and the other's betrayal (26.25). And like M, Statius uses deliberate ambiguity,<sup>76</sup> and in great profusion repetitions<sup>77</sup> and doubles.<sup>78</sup> Doubles were considered fashionable in this stream of literature. Luke begins with a double: annunciations, first to Elizabeth then Mary. But like Statius, M is riotous with them.

M sharpens Mark's double of the choice between Jesus and Barabbas to 'which of the two?'. 'Jesus Barabbas' (27:17) is itself another double. Additionally, M adds a second choice between Jesus' offer and Pilate's. In M, Pilate and Rome are defeated twice. First, by the crowd rejecting Pilate's candidate of whom to free, and again by the people accepting Jesus' offer, not Pilate's. Second, in a further double, in addition to Pilate, the chief

73. Derek S. Dodson, *Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew* (PhD diss.; Baylor University, 2006), pp. 273-78. See also Moses' dream and its interpretation in Ezekiel's *Exagogue*.

74. Solomon Zeitlin, 'Dreams and their Interpretation from the Biblical Period to Tannaitic Times: An Historical Study', *JQR* 66 (1975), pp. 1-18.

75. Kathleen M. Coleman, 'Recent Scholarship on the *Silvae* and their Context: An Overview', in Statius, *Silvae* (ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. xix-xxv.

76. Martha Malamud, 'A Spectacular Feast: *Silvae* 4.2', *Arethusa* 40 (2007), pp. 223-44 (223, 230).

77. Jean-Michel Hulls, 'What's in a Name? Repetition of Names in Statius' *Thebaid*', *Bulletin of International Classical Studies* 49 (2006), pp. 131-44.

78. Braund, 'A Tale of Two Cities', p. 270. Among the classics, Euripides' *Bacchae* is famous for doubles: city/country, safe/insecure, men/women, rational/emotional, Greek/Asian, skepticism/piety.

priests and elders are also defeated because the people's oath accepts rather than rejects Jesus.

For two linguistic doubles, M repeats the studiously ambiguous 'You say so' twice (26.25, Jesus to Judas; 27.11, Jesus to Pilate) and also twice the Roman idiom 'You see to it' (27.7, chief priests to Judas; 27.24, Pilate to the crowd). M has two deaths (of Judas and Jesus), two burial places (Judas's potter's field and Jesus' rock hewn tomb), two payments of silver (to Judas and to the guards at the tomb, 28.12, 15), two matching two-part oaths, and two husband-and-wife figures: Pilate and his wife, and Jesus and his wife—the Jewish people, in the *sotah* metaphor (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 14.19). In a double: an entirely self-absorbed Pilate swears his own innocence, while, possessing the same flaw as her husband, a self-absorbed Pilate's wife complains *she* has suffered greatly, from of a dream.<sup>79</sup>

M can be pictured as a split-screen presentation of two simultaneous messages. The interruption occasioned by the delivery of Pilate's wife's message gives the chief priests the opportunity to deliver their own message to the crowd. Hence, while Pilate listens to his wife's message, the crowd listens to the priests' message, the contents of which are implied. As a *dramatis persona*, the crowd has repeatedly demonstrated its like or love for Jesus, such as at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Pilate is sensible in assuming the crowd will free Jesus. However, if the crowd learns that Pilate wants to free Jesus, it will realize that, by condemning Jesus, it can spite Pilate. Historically Jews despised Pilate (Philo, *Leg. Gai.* 299-305; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.55-62).<sup>81</sup> Jerusalem Passover crowds were famously boisterously hostile (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.5.106-12; *idem*, *War* 1.4.88,

79. Among M's other memorable doubles: wheat and chaff, 3.12; weeds and wheat, 3.24-30; two demoniacs, 8.28-32; two blind men, 9.27-29 repeated in 20.29; good and bad fish, 13.47-52; Peter also tries to walk on water, 14.24-32; the forgiving master and unforgiving servant, 18.22-35; early and late vineyard workers, 20.1-16; ass and colt, 21.2-7; contrary sons, 21.28-32; wise and foolish virgins, 25.1-13; sheep and goats, 25.31-46.

80. J.C.R. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTSup, 102; Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 1-27; Simmonds, 'Sub Rosa', p. 754 n. 108.

81. Brian C. McGing, 'Pontius Pilate and the Sources', *CBQ* 53 (1991), pp. 416-38; Joan E. Taylor, 'Pontius Pilate and the Imperial Cult in Roman Judaea', *NTS* 52 (2006), pp. 555-82.

2.12.224). Thus, *sub rosa*, the crowd's condemnation of Pilate's favorite, Jesus, evinces Jewish hatred of Rome.

So long as the crowd does not learn that Pilate wants to free Jesus, Pilate's plan will work. The crowd will free Jesus. However, having been present when Pilate interrogated Jesus, the priests *know* and implicitly tell the crowd that Pilate wants to free Jesus. This is the literary technique of shared or unshared compartmentalized knowledge. Pilate knows the contents of his wife's message, the crowd does not; the crowd knows the priests' message, Pilate does not.

After receiving his wife's message, Pilate has a choice whether to follow her advice or continue with his prearranged plan. Like Julius Caesar, Pilate does the latter. Hence, after the interruption, in a double, Pilate repeats verbatim for a second time the same question he asked before the interruption: whom to free. In an inverse double, just as Pilate ignores his wife's warning and then tries to heed it, the Jewish crowd follows the priest's message to destroy Jesus, but when Pilate asks the crowd to agree he is innocent, the people ignore the priest's message, and acclaim Jesus.

### *Incest*

Matthew is highly intertextual with Mark, its most important source.<sup>82</sup> Thus, M's scene of Pilate and the crowd is modeled after Mark's parallel. In Mark, in the style of Roman mime, Pilate and the crowd mime/imitate the foremost cultural identifier of Rome: the scene of Caesar and the crowd at games in the subliminal moment of Caesar asking the crowd what *he* should do, whether to condemn or set free.<sup>83</sup> In this way, on the surface, Mark tentatively exculpates Rome and inculpates Jews. But in 'figured speech' that says one thing but means another (Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.1.14; 9.2.64-75),<sup>84</sup> presenting the scene as quintessentially Roman, Mark emphasizes Rome's role and minimizes the Jews' role, which inculpates Rome and exculpates

82. Ulrich Luz, 'Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew', *HTR* 97 (2004), pp. 119-37.

83. Simmonds, '*Sub Rosa*', pp. 745-46; Miller, 'Social Logic', pp. 380-81; Philo, *Leg. Gai.* 359, 368 (more like a circus than a legal proceeding).

84. Frederick Ahl, 'The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJP* 105 (1984), pp. 174-208.

Jews. Mark's pro-Roman, anti-Jewish *Tendenz* disguises its inner pro-Jewish anti-Roman reverse-*Tendenz*.

M further develops Mark's imagery of Pilate as Caesar by modeling Pilate's wife after Caesar's wife in the famous story of Caesar's wife's fateful dream and warning that her husband failed to heed.<sup>85</sup> In the motif of Caesar at the games, the figure of Caesar's wife intervening in the fate of a gladiator conveys meretricious innuendo (Cassius Dio, *Hist. rom.* 60.28.2, Messalina). But as M tries to improve upon Mark,<sup>86</sup> M makes Pilate not just Caesar, were that not opprobrium enough, but Oedipus, a mother fornicator. Representing unsurpassable opprobrium, mother-son incest was a horror *nec plus ultra/par excellence* (Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 18.3.13-14, 17; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.274-75; *b. Sanh.* 103b3). In the context of ancient literature, there is nothing unusual in M suggesting Pilate practiced mother-son incest. It was quite common among Greeks and Romans to accuse unpopular figures, especially powerful political figures, of incest.<sup>87</sup> For example, Cicero accused and was accused of incest.

Mother-son incest in particular was associated with unrestrained, self-indulgent, oriental-style tyrannical despotism and Persians (for example, Lucan, *Phars.* 8.406-12; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3.3.13-18; Catullus, *Carm.* 90; Strabo, *Geo.* 15.3.20; Tertullian, *Apol.* 9.16 and *Nat.* 1.16.4-5; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 28; Origen, *Cels.* 5.27, 6.80; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 31.3; Athenaeus, *Diep.* 5.220) with several authors associating Persian incest with Oedipus.<sup>88</sup> However, 'Persian' was often a stand in for 'Roman'.<sup>89</sup>

The association of maternal incest with Romans and their emperors was perhaps due in part to their reputation for sexual depravity (as recorded

85. Pauline Ripat, 'Roman Omens, Roman Audiences, and Roman History', *GR* 53 (2006), pp. 155-74. Told by, among others, Nicolaus of Damascus.

86. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I, p. 103.

87. Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), pp. 17-19, 109. Alcibiades supposedly lay with mother, sister and daughter (Athenaeus, *Diep.* 5.200a.)

88. Joan M. Bigwood, 'Incestuous Marriage in Achaemenid Iran: Myths and Realities', *Klio* 91 (2009), pp. 311-41.

89. Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 66, cf. 70; Eran Almagor, 'Plutarch and the Persians', *Electrum* 24 (2017), pp. 123-70 (127-29) (Greek authors explicitly describe Persians but in figured speech discretely allude to Romans).

particularly in Tacitus and Suetonius, for whom pornography was a form of privileged political criticism) and the Roman military's tactical use of rape.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps, unusually extreme vulgarity was a tone-from-the-top from Roman literature. Whatever the case, vulgarity was far more common and appropriate in oral traditions than written.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps pre-moderns were more bawdy than us.

In a Jewish reading of Genesis 36, Esau's Edomite (Roman) descendants congenitally practice mother-son incest.<sup>92</sup> Also, in the Bible, Ammonites and Moabites are said to have been the products of incest. The (Jewish) *Sib. Or.* 5.390-394 condemn the Romans for permitting mother-son incest.<sup>93</sup> Pagan persecutors charged Christians in hyperbolic stereotype with 'Oedipodean intercourse and Thyestan banquets'.<sup>94</sup>

90. Julia Watts Belser, 'Sex in the Shadow of Rome: Sexual Violence and Theological Lament in Talmudic Disaster Tales', *JFSR* 30 (2014), pp. 5-24 (185); Simon Hornblower, 'Hellenistic Tragedy and Satyr-Drama: Lycophron's *Alexandra*', in Vayos Liapis and Antonis K. Petrides (eds.), *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century: A Survey from ca. 400 BC to ca. AD 400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 90-124 (92, 113); S.P. Oakley, 'Single Combat in the Roman Republic', *CIQ* 35 (1985), pp. 392-410 (406). Roman poets such as Horace and Juvenal, not to mention Catullus, were occasionally stunningly pornographic.

91. Alex Scobie, 'Storytellers, Storytelling, and the Novel in Graeco-Roman Antiquity', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 122 (1979), pp. 229-59.

92. Moreover, it was associated with hidden meanings. *b. B. Bat.* 115b-116a; *b. Men.* 65a3-65b1 and n. 36; *b. Pesah.* 54a4-5 (by expounders of sealed verses) and nn. 70-76; *b. Ber.* 24a5 and n. 50 ('knots', deeply concealed 'pearls'); *b. Hul.* 134b5 and n. 45; *Gen. Rab.* 82.16.2; Richard Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 151-52, 171-72, 242 n. 15, 248 n. 83. On dating of Romans as Edomites to first century, see Louis H. Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Jacob', *JQR* 79.2-3 (1988-1989), pp. 101-51, esp. 122, 130-32; Heb. 11.20 (Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau). On dating of hatred of Edomites, see *Sir* 50.25-26. On dating the legal dispute, see *t. Yad.* 2.20.

93. Paul Hartog, "'Not Even Among the Pagans'" (1 Cor 5:11): Paul and Seneca on Incest', in John Fotopoulos (ed.), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (NovTSup, 122; Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 51-64 (54).

94. Bart Wagemakers, 'Incest, Infanticide, and Cannibalism: Anti-Christian Imputations in the Roman Empire', *GR* 57 (2010), pp. 337-54.

Josephus, *Ant.* 18.42-43 adds an Italian ingredient to ‘Persian’ maternal incest reporting that Julius Caesar gave the Parthian/Persian king an Italian beauty, who had the king’s sons sent to Rome as hostages, advancing to the throne her own son, with whom she committed incest. Curiously, this story appears immediately before a lengthy and highly negative disquisition about Pilate (18.55-89). Purportedly, Julius Caesar on the night before he crossed the Rubicon dreamt he slept with his mother (probably alluding to Rome).<sup>95</sup> Caesar wrote an *Oedipus*, but Augustus forbade its dissemination (Suetonius, *Jul.* 56). In Ovid, by allusion to Callimachus,<sup>96</sup> Daphne is modeled after Apollo’s mother.<sup>97</sup> Hence, since Apollo represents Augustus, Ovid represents Augustus (Apollo) attempting to rape his mother.

Coins from the reign of Tiberius, including series minted by Pilate and his predecessor, honored Caesar together with his mother!<sup>98</sup> Pilate’s *simpulum* and *lituus* (ladle and wand, Roman/Etruscan religious utensils) coin designs were likely controversial. Moreover, the coins minted by the Jewish rebels heralding ‘Israel year 1’ and continued issuances for the duration of the conflict evidence the importance of numismatic media. Caligula put his three sisters with him on coins (it was rumored he committed incest with them). Purportedly, Caligula asserted his mother was the incestuous offspring of Augustus and Augustus’s daughter (Suetonius, *Cal.* 23). Jewish royalty Berenice and her brother Agrippa were widely rumored as

95. Edward Champlin, ‘Nero Reconsidered’, *New England Review* 19 (1998), pp. 97-108 (101).

96. Callimachus’s influence was enormous. Anne Gosling, ‘Political Apollo: From Callimachus to the Augustans’, *Mnemosyne* 45 (1992), pp. 501-12. Callimachus wrote in an overwrought Greek style disguising underlying allusions to xenophobic Egyptian mythology. Daniel L. Selden, ‘Alibis’, *CA* 17 (1998), pp. 289-412.

97. Jeffrey Wills, ‘Callimachean Models for Ovid’s “Apollo-Daphne”’, *Materiali e discussioni per l’analisi dei testi classici* 24 (1990), pp. 143-56 (147-49).

98. Called Julia this is the immensely powerful Livia. Helen K. Bond, ‘The Coins of Pontius Pilate: Part of an Attempt to Provoke the People or to Integrate Them into the Empire?’, *JSJ* 27 (1996), pp. 241-62 (especially 245, 250); Fred Strickert, ‘The First Woman to be Portrayed on a Jewish Coin: Julia Sebaste’, *JSJ* 33 (2002), pp. 65-91.

incestuous. Suggestive coins show Nero and his mother facing in profile nose to nose.

Seneca's *Oedipus*, contrary to Sophocles, depicts Nero not as an unwitting mother fornicator, but intentional.<sup>99</sup> In Seneca, blind seer Tiresias seeks answers from the entrails of sacrifices (having a blind person examine entrails ridicules the stereotypically Roman practice). Not finding answers there, blind Tiresias travels to the land where the one-eyed is king to interview Laius. Wisely for Seneca, Laius condemns his wife (representing Nero's mother) more than their son, Oedipus (representing Nero). Nonetheless, for his part, Nero reveled in performing as, and being seen in life as, Oedipus. After he had his mother murdered, he flaunted a concubine look-alike of her.<sup>100</sup>

Caracalla's mother had issued many series of coins with her image. Purportedly, the people of Alexandria chanted 'Jocasta' after her.<sup>101</sup> *Historia Augusta* 10.1-4 comically excuses Caracalla for having acted, like Sophocles' Oedipus, unwittingly—believing she was merely his stepmother and, as she said, as emperor he could do with her whatever he wished.

Furthermore, the Near East was a leading center for writing and speaking using the Greco-Roman literary devices M uses. Thus, at Smyrna,<sup>102</sup> at the time a leading center of Christianity and the leading center of the Second

99. J. David Bishop, 'Seneca's "*Oedipus*": Opposition Literature', *CJ* 73 (1978), pp. 289-301; A.J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 101-102 ('rewritten Sophocles to present a Roman world'). Posthumously shunned by pagans, Seneca became a great favorite of Christians. Harry M. Hine, 'Seneca and Paul: The First Two Thousand Years', in Joseph R. Dodson and David E. Briones (eds.), *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue* (Ancient Philosophy and Religion, 2; Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 22-48 (25-26).

100. Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 145, 101, 152-53; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.64.

101. Robert J. Penella, 'Caracalla and His Mother in the "*Historia Augusta*"', *Historia* 29 (1980), pp. 382-84; Barbara Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 88, 98-99.

102. Matthijs den Dulk and Andrew Langford, 'Polycarp and Polemo: Christianity at the Center of the Second Sophistic', in Thomas R. Blanton, Robert Matthew Calhoun and Clare K. Rothschild (eds.), *Hans Dieter Betz: The History of Religions School Today: Essays on the New Testament and Related Ancient Mediterranean Texts* (WUNT, 340; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), pp. 211-40.

Sophistic,<sup>103</sup> Scopelian, the greatest sophist of his generation (contemporaneous with M), famously excelled in the literary devices M uses: covert<sup>104</sup> allusion, ambiguous language, repetition, antithetical parallels,<sup>105</sup> allusions to classical tragedy and paradox (Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 21.514-21).<sup>106</sup> Scopelion was one of the last great so-called Asian stylists. Asian style was derided as virtuosic, florid, bombastic, emotional *legerdemain*, lacking in stolid intellectual deliberation, logical exposition and dignified manners (Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.10.1, 12-16, 42, 58-72, 181-182; Cicero, *Or.* 214, 275; *idem*, *Brut.* 280, 310, 350-352).<sup>107</sup> Yet, at that time, Asian style was the most popular, entertaining and effective. (In the second century, the more dignified, affected Attic style that showed off a formal education by using archaic Greek words and phrases gained ascendancy.) Hence, even Cicero was not above employing Asian style (when representing himself the stakes demanded, *Domo*).

#### *Privileged Political Criticism*

M's alluding to *Oedipus* is a classical allusion characteristic of early Second Sophistic archaizing/antiquarianism. Classical allusions refer to the uniquely revered works of Greece's golden age, in tragic theater by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Beginning when Greece lost her liberty to Macedonia,<sup>108</sup> by convention classical allusions could covertly convey a yearning

103. Dulk and Langford, 'Polycarp and Polemo', pp. 211-40.

104. Veiled, oblique, figured, hidden, covered, elliptical. Benjamin Fiore, "'Covert Allusion" in 1 Corinthians 1-4', *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 85-102.

105. Parallelism is more pronounced in Matthew than Mark or Luke. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I, p. 94.

106. Lawrence Kim, 'Atticism and Asianism', in Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 41-66 (47, 54-60).

107. Asian orators were accused of singing. In the Greek euphonic tradition, the tintinnabulation *ten timen tou tetimemenou hon etimesanto*, 'the price of him who was priced, on whom they set a price', the sons of Israel (27.9), suggests a *highly positive* meaning. Stanford, 'Sound', pp. 127-40.

108. Anne Duncan and Vayos Liapis, 'Theater Performance after the Fifth Century', in Vayos Liapis and Antonis K. Petrides (eds.), *Greek Tragedy after the*

for liberty,<sup>109</sup> which in the first century meant liberty from Rome. Writers/performers could not make their anti-Roman allusions too arcane (like Lycophron's *Alexandra*) lest they hardly be understood.<sup>110</sup> The prevalence of informants blunted the effectiveness of thinly veiled disguise, and plain-spoken communication was unreasonably dangerous; hence, the use of safe covert speech categories. Classical allusions were a relative safe haven. Given the cultural prestige of fifth-century Athens, had imperial Rome discouraged classical allusions, it would have seemed uncultured.<sup>111</sup>

There was a further subset of privileged criticism by classical allusion known as Theban material.<sup>112</sup> Theban material was privileged principally because it was seen as alluding to and condemning the unbridled political ambition that led to the traumatic fratricidal Italian social and civil wars (Ovid, *Metam.* 3-4 and Lucan, *Phars.* 1.551-2, for example).<sup>113</sup> Theban material included prominently Euripides' *Phoenissae*, which was the most revered classical tragedy in the Greco-Roman formal educational curriculum.<sup>114</sup> For example, in private correspondence, Cicero decries Julius Caesar's ascendant despotism quoting from *Phoenissae*.<sup>115</sup> Philo sets the two

*Fifth Century: A Survey from ca. 400 BC to ca. AD 400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 180-203 (181, 189-90).

109. Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, pp. 8-9, 66-67; Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 239-44; Ewen L. Bowie, 'Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic', *Past & Present* 46 (1970), pp. 3-41; B.A. Van Groningen, 'General Literary Tendencies in the Second Century A.D.', *Mnemosyne* NS 18 (1965), pp. 41-56; Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: Social Perspectives* (Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 1 The Near and Middle East, 46; Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 182 n. 154.

110. Simon Hornblower, 'Hellenistic Tragedy and Satyr-Drama; Lycophron's *Alexandra*', in Vayos Liapis and Antonis K. Petrides (eds.), *Greek Tragedy after the Fifth Century: A Survey from ca. 400 BC to ca. AD 400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 90-124.

111. Amram Tropper, 'The Fate of Jewish Historiography after the Bible: A New Interpretation', *HistTh* 43 (2004), pp. 179-97 (179-84).

112. Braund, 'A Tale of Two Cities', pp. 264-70.

113. Phillip Hardie, 'Ovid's Theban History: The First Anti-Aeneid', *CIQ* 40 (1990), pp. 224-35 (230).

114. Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, pp. 198-99.

115. Braund, 'A Tale of Two Cities', p. 266.

Oedipus traditions side-by-side, the Sophoclean (unwitting agreements) and Euripidean (fratricidal sons/brothers) (*Spec. leg.* 3.3.18).

Domitian greeting guests for dinner is analogized to blinded Oedipus emerging like a cyclops from its cave to eat (*Theb.* 8.240-55).<sup>116</sup> Statius compares Domitian's marriage to the union of Jupiter and Juno and Gany-mede (*Sivae* 3.4).<sup>117</sup> In *Thebaid*, Jupiter (Domitian) is a wholly inconsiderate tyrant toward the other Olympians, who are outmatched by the chthonic deities, and who cares nothing for human wellbeing.

### *Theban Allusions in Jesus' Passion*

According to Friesen, Christ's passion provides a natural point of contact with Greek tragedy,<sup>118</sup> and 'affinities between Christ's passion and classical tragedy have long been recognized'.<sup>119</sup> In particular, Friesen references Euripides' *Bacchae*. (Like *Oedipus*, *Bacchae* is quintessentially Theban.) In the mid-second century, Celsus related Pilate's interrogation of Jesus to Pentheus's interrogation of Dionysus in *Bacchae* (Origen, *Cels.* 2.33-34). In both, the interrogator fails to recognize the divinity of the person interrogated. Celsus's observation evidently derives from Jn 18.33-38 and 19.7-16 where Jesus and Pilate address each other in a clever back-and-forth reminiscent of Pentheus and Dionysos, not from Mark and Matthew where Jesus' silence amazes Pilate (Mk 15.5; Mt. 27.14; Origen, *Cels.* Preface).<sup>120</sup> But elsewhere in the story of Jesus' arrest (26.53-54), M does refer to *Bacchae*—Jesus paraphrases the most famous line of *Bacchae* (that Celsus

116. Malamud, 'A Spectacular Feast', p. 241. Refer for context to Tiberius's cave at Sperlonga.

117. Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 31-32.

118. Courtney J.P. Friesen, *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, and Christians* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), p. 38.

119. Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, p. 253.

120. Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, pp. 21-22. John also evokes Dionysian motifs in Jesus' turning of water into wine and the discussion of the true vine. Parenthetically, notice that Caiaphas's speech in Jn 11.49-52, 18.14 is stunningly similar to Juturna's speech in *Aeneid* 12.224-35.

quotes and John amends to ‘my kingdom is not of this world’), ‘the divinity will free me whenever I wish’ (498).

In a trap, Celsus’s argument suggested that, on account of Rome having killed Jesus, Christians were hostile and disloyal toward Rome. Celsus argued that, if Jesus really was a god or demi-god, Pilate/Rome would have been punished by God/Jesus as in *Bacchae*, when Pentheus was punished by Dionysos. (Celsus’ argument is fallacious because it ethnocentrically assumes that the constant, merciful Jewish/Christian God would react like the anthropomorphic, fickle, vengeful Greek gods.) But Origen was stuck to a degree with the allusion being apt on account of John. Therefore, Origen could not very well answer Celsus that, *de rigueur* for their time and intended audience, Mark’s and Matthew’s sentiments were indeed anti-Roman. Instead, Origen partially accepted Celsus’s premise that Jesus would have acted like Dionysos and that God/Jesus, like Dionysos, would have punished Jesus’ killer(s), who were not Pilate and Rome, but the Jews punished by Rome. To overcome Roman involvement in Jesus’ death, Origen relied on M claiming that Pilate was saved from responsibility by his wife’s dream and warning (Origen, *Cels.* 2.34) (notwithstanding that Pilate failed to follow it until too late).

Notice, however, that Origen analogized Jesus’ passion not just to *Bacchae*—but also to *Oedipus*. Thus, Origen analogized Oedipus’s preordained killing of Laius to Judas’s preordained betrayal of Jesus (Origen, *Cels.* 2.20), which implied that, like Oedipus, Judas had acted unwittingly, and thus could be saved/redeemed/forgiven. Origen’s detractors denounced him for teaching *apokatastasis*, universal reconciliation.<sup>121</sup>

In medieval folk legend, the Oedipus story became a part of the story of Jesus in the famous legends of Judas as Oedipus such as in the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine. These legends were written down first in Latin and eventually translated into nearly every European language from Italy to Scandinavia, Spain to Russia, beginning in the twelfth century and

121. Samuel Laeuchli, ‘Origen’s Interpretation of Judas Iscariot’, *CH* 22 (1953), pp. 253-68; John A. McGuckin, ‘The Life of Origen’, in John Anthony McGucken (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 1-24. Medieval Judas/Oedipus legends are in the general genre of stories of saints who overcome extraordinary sinfulness. Archibald, *Incest*, pp. 107-109.

continuing through the nineteenth.<sup>122</sup> In them, though Judas, not Pilate, is Oedipus, nonetheless, Pilate is a principal actor. Leaving his adoptive home, traveling to Jerusalem, becoming Pilate's steward, Pilate tells Oedipus to steal for him some fruit. In a dispute, Oedipus kills its owner (his father). Pilate helps Judas acquire the murdered man's wife (his mother) and property. But, from the injuries to his feet, Judas's/Oedipus's wife discovers him to be her son. At her suggestion, Judas seeks forgiveness from Jesus, becoming his apostle.

### *Conclusion*

Carrying overwhelming weight, Jesus' offered blood is best understood as the blood of the covenant. Judas's and Pilate's assumption that Jesus' blood is profane innocent blood is erroneous and not theologically instructive. Ironically, Jesus' Jewish people accept Jesus' offer of his blood, producing a properly concluded covenant. Moses concluded his covenant by putting the blood of the covenant on the people, and M does the same for Jesus' covenant (Exod. 24.8; Mt. 27.25; Heb. 9.18-22; 12.24; 13.12).

Once one appreciates that the people's oath is of blood kinship with Jesus, not bloodguilt, it becomes evident that the oaths of both Pilate and the people have similar or the same formulae as the oaths in *Oedipus*, only reversed. The surroundings are also the same. A foreign tyrant and domestic community meet and orate outdoors as two matching *dramatis personae*, individual and community, making matching opposite two-part oaths of complete non-involvement and complete involvement. These similarities are so striking that, *prima facie*, M seems to allude to *Oedipus*.

But, to play devil's advocate, surely a canonical Christian Gospel may not contain a bawdy allusion of the crudest kind to maternal incest. However, Scripture can certainly contain crude episodes that reflect poorly on the persons so represented but not on the Bible. Incest by villains like Pilate (or Judas) does not reflect negatively on Jesus. By the standards of the day, insinuations of incest were commonplace for denoting consummate villainy.

122. Paull Franklin Baum, 'The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot', *PMLA* 31 (1916), pp. 481-632 (528-30, 597, 609), 616 (Origen seems to associate Judas with incest), 631 (legend revived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries); Archibald, *Incest*, pp. 107-108.

Historically critically, given Philo's and Josephus's portrayals of Pilate, associating Pilate with incest would have gained the gospel popularity.

In that last decade of the first century, the Near East was a leading center both of Christianity and of the Second Sophistic, whose leading practitioner Scopelian used the same literary devices as M. M seems to have aspired to a lofty style advocated by Aristotle, who taught *peripeteia* is the greatest literary device and Oedipus's involvement oath the greatest line in all literature. By contemporary standards, M's use of classical allusion and Theban material was high art. Moreover, if *Oedipus* were so wholly inappropriate for a canonical Gospel, we probably would not find Sophocles' *Oedipus* story linked to Jesus in so many Christian legends, so widespread, over so many hundreds of years. And it occurred not only in folk tales, as the highly educated Origen observed similarities between *Oedipus* and Jesus' passion. Using a favorite device of the time, figured speech, M seems tendentiously anti-Jewish and apologetically pro-Roman. But that is disguise for M's true pro-Jewish, anti-Roman reverse-*Tendenz*.