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# **THE APENNINE SIBYL**

A MYSTERY AND A LEGEND

SIBILLINI MOUNTAIN RANGE, THE CHTHONIAN LEGEND<sup>1</sup>



## **PART 1**

### *1. Unveiling the true origin of the myth*

Italy, the Apennines. The Sibillini Mountain Range, a portion of the long mountainous chain which extends across the entire peninsula. Mount Sibyl and a Cave on its mountaintop. Mount Vettore and a Lake nested in the great mountain's glacial cirque. Two legendary tales, the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate. Centuries and centuries of visits, literary narratives and explorations.

The time has come now to address the most important, most critical issue connected to the fastnesses of sheer rock which raise at the center of Italy,

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between the provinces of Umbria and Marche. An issue that concerns the origin of the legends which inhabit the Sibillini Mountain Range.

We are about to unveil an astounding, unprecedented conjecture which will foster a new and ground-breaking understanding of the legendary structure which established itself in the very middle of these mountainous ridges, and gave origin to the myths of the Apennine Sibyl and the burial place of Pontius Pilate, which were subsequently included and elaborated in the fifteenth-century works written by Andrea da Barberino and Antoine de la Sale: *Guerrino the Wretch* and *The Paradise of Queen Sibyl*.

The momentous result we are going to illustrate in the present work is the outcome of a long research effort which has lasted more than two years. The first papers on the Sibillini Mountain Range's legendary heritage (*The cave of the Apennine Sibyl: what we know*, *World of the Sibyl: the Italian Apennines and the Sibillini Mountain Range*, *Apennine Sibyl: the bright side and the dark side*) were released in the last quarter of 2017. With the subsequent papers (*The Knights of the Sibyl - Guerrino and his forefathers: Huon of Bordeaux*, *The Knights of the Sibyl - Guerrino and his forefathers: Huon d'Auvergne*, *St. Patrick's Purgatory, a source for Guerrino and Antoine de La Sale*), we began to investigate the first clues which appeared to point to the potential sources for various themes and topics which are contained in Andrea da Barberino's romance and Antoine de la Sale's account.

Then we identified two specific items which were patently drawn from earlier legendary traditions: the 'test bridge', as detailed in a further paper (*Antoine de La Sale and the magical bridge concealed beneath Mount Sibyl*) and the ever-slamming magical doors, whose lineage was traced in a subsequent article (*The literary truth about the magical doors in 'The Paradise of Queen Sibyl'*).

From then on, the way was open to a new approach to the philological research into the whole legendary heritage which inhabited the Sibillini Mountain Range. It was becoming clear that the place was marked by an ancient necromantic hue (*Pope Pius II Piccolomini's original letter on the Sibyl's cave published*, *The Lake of Pilatus in an antique manuscript: Pierre Bersuire*), and that no tradition dating to classical antiquity had ever established any connection between one of the ancient Sibyls and the more

recent Apennine Sibyl (*A mysterious quote from «Bishop Primus Cambilunensis» unveiled, A Sibyl called Cimmerian: exploring the potential link to the Apennine Sibyl, The Apennine Sibyl: a journey into history in search of the oracle*).

But the chasm was finally filled up in the course of the year 2019. With two landmark papers (*Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection* and *A legend for a Roman prefect: the Lakes of Pontius Pilate*) we showed that the Apennine Sibyl was a descendant of two literary characters which belonged to the Matter of Britain and the Arthurian cycle: Morgan le Fay and her necromantic companion Sebile, who both appear in many chivalric romances and poems, written well ahead of the fifteenth century; in addition to that, we fully retraced the legendary tale concerning the fate of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect who plays a major part in the Gospels, and we proved that the myth that narrates of his many burial places, scattered across various sites in Europe, has never had nothing to do with the Sibillini Mountain Range.

Following the identification of the listed additional legendary layers, in a further paper (*Sibillini Mountain Range: the legend before the legends*) we were able to focus on the original traits that, according to the available sources, mark the tales of the Sibyl's Cave and Pilate's Lake: both legends feature a number of common aspects, including the performance of necromantic rituals, the presence of legendary fiendish beings, and devastations arising from both sites.

But a fourth shared aspect could be highlighted, too: that was a common otherwordly character, which we investigated in detail in the paper we recently published (*Sibillini Mountain Range, a cave and lake to the Otherworld*). In this article, we pointed to the presence of specific narrative elements that are usually found in literary works that depict visionary travels to otherwordly regions. We then retraced the main literary instances of the visionary narratives on the Otherworld in the Western culture, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Vergil's *Aeneid* and then from Pope St. Gregory the Great to the visionary dreams originated in medieval Ireland, and up to the legend of the Purgatory of St. Patrick.

In that same paper, we highlighted the strong literary links which can be retrieved between the legendary tales of the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of

Pilate, in the Sibillini Mountain Range, and two most famous and successful narratives which depict two specific journeys to otherworldly regions: the legend of the Cumaean Sibyl, with the Lake of Avernus and the gloomy cave providing an access to the realm of the dead, and the legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory, featuring another lake, Lough Derg, and another sinister cave. We noted that recurrent contaminations of narrative themes are present, which link the three different, and substantially unrelated, legends, in the form of a visible transfer of narrative topics and situations from the illustrious and widely-known Cumaean and Irish tales, to an Italian tale which appears to feature some narrative and geographical traits in common, though in a different setting and despite its total independence from the legendary narratives of Lough Derg and Cumae.

The resulting, far-reaching assumption which arised from that research work was that a legendary passageway to some sort of Otherworld might have been possibly situated, by an antique tradition that left some faint traces in the known literature, among the peaks of the central Apennines. And the landmarks to this mythical entryway would be associated, just like in Cumae and Lough Derg, to the same kind of landforms, a lake and a cave: they both would mark a sort of legendary 'hot spot' on the surface of Earth, where the mythical passageway would be located.

In this promising research framework, a number of questions were still left unanswered: why should this Apennine site have been considered as a further entryway to the Otherworld? If our assumption was true, what kind of Otherworld was this? What sort of dreadful dreams did men conceive by the Lake and Cave set on the mountains of the Apennines, in central Italy?

What legend did live in this area before the medieval legendary tales about a Sibyl and Pontius Pilate settled themselves there?

In the present, conclusive research paper, we are going to outline the character of the Otherworld that, according to our literary, philological and scientific investigation, was possibly believed to exist beneath the elevated ridges of the Sibillini Mountain Range.

We want to strongly stress the fact that the conjecture we are about to state on the legendary tale concerning the Sibillini Mountain Range is to be considered as a supposition founded on scientific considerations and based

on as fully scientific approach, as it is not tainted by any whimsical, exotic assumptions (like aliens from outer space, Templar conspiracies, esoterism, astrology, alchemy, star alignments, geomagnetics, rhabdomancy and other arcane and/or pseudoscientific concepts).

Nonetheless, the hypothesis we are going to set down in the present research paper is basically a conjecture, scientific as it claims to be: it is to be considered as a proposed solution to the legendary riddle connected to the presence of amazing myths set amid the Sibillini Mountain Range. As such, our conjecture can certainly be the subject of critical analysis for a thorough evaluation of its reasonableness and plausibility, and should undergo a further, qualified assessment on its actual validity, an assessment to be carried out by interested scholars and researchers.

So let's start to build our solution to the riddle: a legendary Otherworld imagined by men in antiquity, a chthonian realm housed beneath the fastnesses of the Sibillini Mountain Range, in central Italy.



Fig. 1 - Italy and the Sibillini Mountain Range, a portion of the Apennine ridge

However, before illustrating our conclusions, we want to present the reader with a summary of the conjectures that have been elaborated, across more than one hundred fifty years, by philologists, researchers and even novelists and essayists on the potential origin of the legendary tales connected to the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate. We will see that we will be going

through the most variegated hypotheses, speculations and surmises, in a deliberate and somewhat frantic effort to unveil the true reason for the peculiar character that these mountains seem to manifest across the centuries, with a remarkable presence of astounding legendary narratives whose origin seems to shun all attempts at gaining any further understanding of them.

An understanding that we will finally reach by setting down our own conjecture on the presence of a legendary Otherworld.

But first, let's start our travel into the many suppositions that have already been proposed in the past centuries and decades.

## *2. The long hunt for the truth*

### *2.1 Nineteenth-century scholars in search of the origin of the myth*

After the French Revolution and with the advent of an era of technical and scientific advancement, the Sibillini Mountain Range and its weird legends were not at the centre of any widespread attention anymore. Yet, despite the scarce renown of both the remote Italian mountains and the bizarre tales which lived in them, a handful of academics and scholars, especially of Italian origin or established in Italy, still retained an interest for these curious narratives.

The earliest attempt at confronting with the possible origin of the legendary tale about the Sibyl's Cave on philological grounds was made by a German diplomat and scholar, Alfred von Reumont, Secretary of the Prussian Legation in Florence and Rome at the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1880 he published his *Essays on history and literature*, written in Italian (*Saggi di storia e letteratura*), in which he reported the text of a speech delivered in Florence nine years earlier, whose title was *The Mount of Venus in Italy (Il Monte di Venere in Italia)*. For the first time, after more than two centuries of neglect, the Apennine Sibyl was the subject of a scientifically-oriented analysis:

«The valley of the river Nera, whose main settlement is Norcia, lies on the northern portion of the plateau where Rieti is found [...] To no avail one may ask from where this necromantic fame, still partly alive, was attached to this remote town hidden amid these remote mountains. [...] Neither can I find the origin of the name of Mount Sibyl [...] The locations portrayed by Vergil [...] have nothing to do with these places».

[In the original Italian text: «La Valle della Nera, il cui capoluogo è Norcia, giace a settentrione dell'altopiano reatino [...] Invano si chiede donde a quel paese solitario e tra' monti nascosto [...] sia venuta questa fama di negromanzia, nemmeno oggi spenta. [...] Non trovo nemmeno donde derivi il nome di Monte della Sibilla [...] I luoghi di Virgilio [...] non hanno a che fare con queste località»].

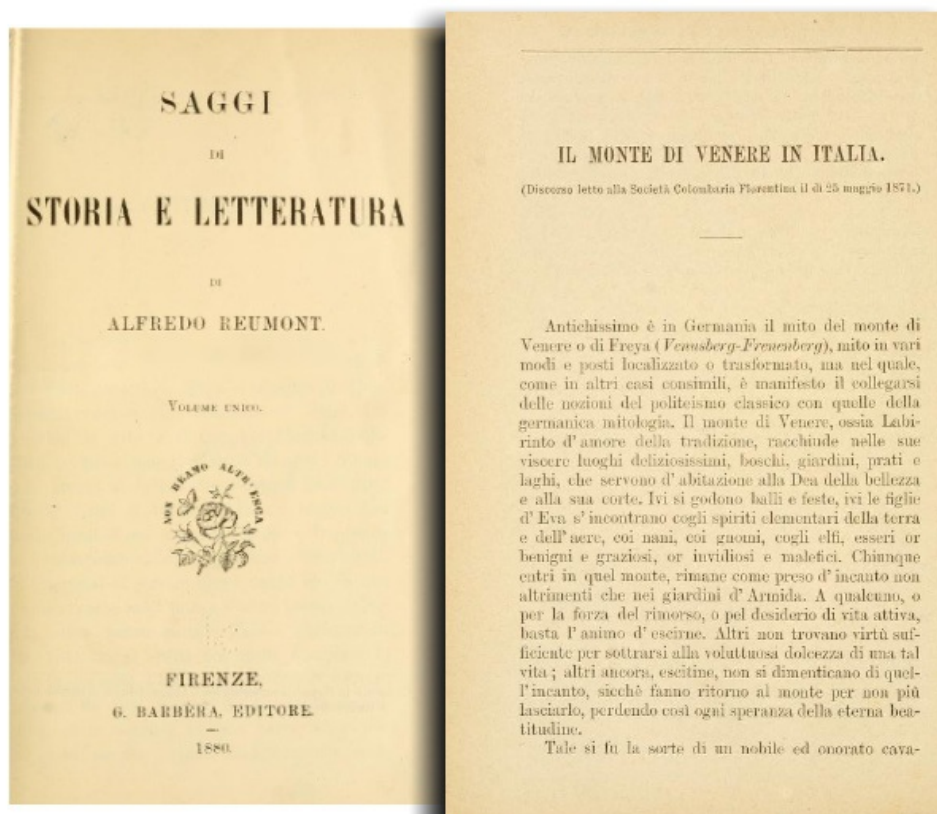


Fig. 2 - Alfred von Reumont's essay on Mount Sibyl, from his volume *Saggi di storia e letteratura* (Florence, 1880), p. 378-394

Reumont adds that in the territory of Norcia also lies a Lake, which «the local people names after Pilate. It is believe to be bottomless, thus providing an access to the netherworld» («presso il popolo gli è rimasto il



nome di Pilato, e la credenza di non aver fondo, ma di dar adito al mondo sotterraneo»): a first hint to the chthonian and otherwordly character of the Lake, a topic that we are addressing in this very paper.

But German-born Reumont, who in his article did not miss to mention the many literary references to the Sibyl's Cave and the Pilate's Lake, including in his list *Guerrino the Wretch*, Antoine de la Sale, Leandro Alberti, Arnold of Harff and many others we already know, could not but conclude his speech with a warm exhortation addressed to all scholars of Italy:

«I now end my brief remarks. I will be glad if my words will prove capable to invite an Italian scholar to confront with this topic, which still needs a thorough insight of the local lore and traditions».

[In the original Italian text: «Con questo pongo fine ai presenti cenni. Sarò lieto se ad essi toccherà la sorte d'invitare un erudito Italiano ad occuparsi di un argomento, il quale non si potrà pienamente illustrare se non col diligente confronto delle tradizioni locali»].

More than twenty years later, his invitation will be finally accepted. In 1893, Arturo Graf, an Italian man of letters and professor at the University of Turin, published his *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del medioevo* (*Myths, legends and superstitions of Middle Ages*), in which he included an essay on *A mountain of Pilate in Italy*.

What does Arturo Graf say about the Sibillini Mountain Range? In his article, he briefly recounts the legendary setting which enshrouded that portion of the Apennines; however, he cannot but state his inability to propose any reasonable conjecture about the origin for the two almost-forgotten legends:

«The mounts and the lake of Norcia had an ancient fiendish and magical reputation known throughout Italy. Here was a Sibyl's cave, which gave rise to legends that are very similar to those originated in Germany about the Mount of Venus; in addition to that, here also arrived the legend of Pilate [...] When the legend of Pilate in Norcia was born, I cannot tell; neither would I affirm that some elements or suggestions may have come from beyond the Alps. This legend has now lost all of its former renown, and only scarce remnants of it can be traced among the local people [...]



Very few men now know of the presence of a mount and lake of Pilate set amid the Apennines, in the very heart of Italy».

[In the original Italian text: «I monti e il lago di Norcia avevano un'antica riputazione diabolica e magica diffusa per tutta l'Italia. Quivi ponevasi un antro della Sibilla, che diè luogo a leggende molto simili a quelle sorte in Germania intorno al Monte di Venere; quivi ancora si raccolse la leggenda di Pilato [...] Quando la leggenda norcina di Pilato sia nata io non so, né vorrei affermare che qualche concorso di elementi o qualche suggestione non le sieno venuti d'oltr'alpe. Essa ha perduto ormai ogni celebrità, e appena ne rimase qualche vestigio tra il popolo di quella provincia [...] sono ben pochi coloro che conoscano l'esistenza di un monte e di un lago di Pilato fra gli Apennini, nel cuore d'Italia»].

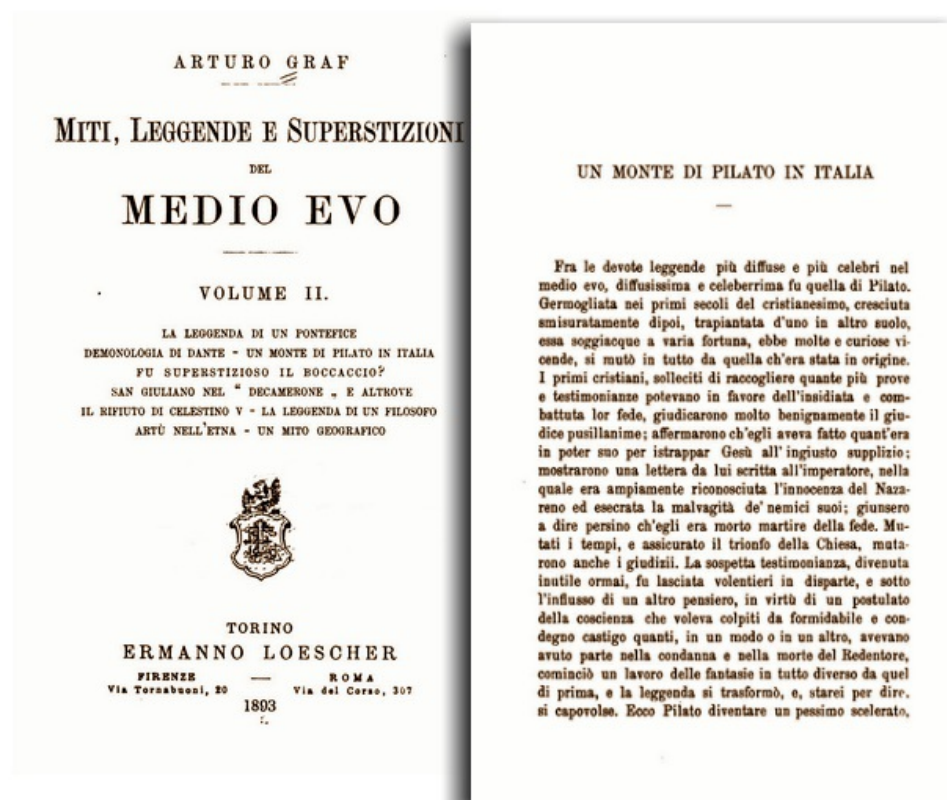


Fig. 3 - Arturo Graf's article on the Lake of Pilate, from his book *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del medioevo* (Turin, 1893), p. 143-166

Arturo Graf cannot but register the fact that the legends concerning the presence of Pontius Pilate and a Sibyl in this mountainous region of Italy are just a pale shadow of what they used to be in past centuries. In the

additional notes to his article, he reports the words written to him in a letter by Vincenzo Ghinassi, a local scholar and teacher at the Regio Liceo in Spolegium:

«The fanciful and sinister legends of ancient times are losing their colors and vividness, they are progressively being forgotten by the populace, and they are leaving their ultimate abode, which used to be in the most secluded valleys [...] Amid the people the recollection of the ancient legend has gone lost, and as an explanation to that name [Pilate] a new fancy arose, though rather awkward in my opinion».

[In the original Italian text: «Le immaginose e paurose leggende di altri tempi si vanno scolorando, attenuando e perdendo anche tra i volghi, e nelle più recondite vallate, loro ultimo asilo [...] Tra il popolo s'è perduto il ricordo della leggenda antica, e che a spiegar quel nome un'altra immaginazione si produsse, assai poco acconcia, a dire vero»].

1865, p. 593. Da una lettera, con cui il prof. Vincenzo Ghinassi del R. Liceo di Spoleto gentilmente rispondeva ad alcune mie domande, rilevo che un picciolo stagno presso Norcia serba ancora il nome di Lago di Pilato, ma che tra il popolo s'è perduto il ricordo della leggenda antica, e che a spiegar quel nome un'altra immaginazione si produsse, assai poco acconcia, a dir vero. " Quando accadde in Giudea „, così il prof. Ghinassi, " il grande avvenimento della crocifissione di Cristo, i montanari che passavano per quel luogo vedevano deserta la grotta della Sibilla, l'acqua del lago rosseggiante come per sangue, ed inoltre intorno al laghetto, da allora in poi, germogliò una pianticella, le cui foglie hanno sembianza di due mani riunite per il dosso, laonde la fantasia del volgo vede raffigurate in esse le mani del Redentore, congiunte insieme

Fig. 4 - The information provided by a local scholar on the faint traces of the legend which were still present amid the populace at the end of the nineteenth century, as reported by Arturo Graf in his *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del medioevo* (Turin, 1893), p. 165

Ghinassi, as quoted by Arturo Graf, reports that the simple minds of the inhabitants of that region were just naively impressed by a number of evocative factors: the deserted Cave of the Sibyl; the reddish waters of the Lake at sunset; the presence of an unspecified weed in the form of human hands, like the nailed hands of Jesus Christ; and the Lake itself being inhabited by «fish of an odd shape» («pesci di forme stranissime»),

possibly an early observation of the famous *Chirocephalus Marchesonii*, the tiny shrimp that lives in it, «a faint recollection of the antique demons» («una reminiscenza affievolita degli antichi demonii»).

So the first efforts carried out by a handful of scholars to explain the origin of the legends inhabiting the Sibillini Mountain Range could only lead to a tentative, preliminary conclusion: nothing was known about those myths, because no scientific study had ever addressed this once-known and now-neglected legendary topics.

A new research effort was needed, and based on a new scientific methodology. Time had come for illustrious, celebrated philologists to climb the sheer slopes of Mount Vettore and Mount Sibyl, in the Sibillini Mountain Range.

## *2.2 Two prominent philologists amid the Apennines*

«One of the peaks of the central Apennines still today is called Mount Sibyl, and the whole massif encircling it received the name of Sibillini Mountain Range [...] Not far from there you also find the 'Lake of Pilate'».

[In the original French text: «On appelle encore aujourd'hui Monte della Sibilla un des sommets de l'Apennin central, et tout le petit groupe qui l'entoure [...] en a reçu le nom de Monti Sibillini. [...] Non loin de là se trouve également le 'lac de Pilate'...»].

This is the opening of the essay *The Paradise of Queen Sibyl* (*Le Paradis de la Reine Sibylle*) which is contained in the volume *Legends of the Middle Ages* (*Légendes du Moyen Age*) published in 1903 by a great French philologist, Bruno Paulin Gaston Paris, a professor of German and Romance philology, a prominent researcher in medieval studies, and an outstanding member of the Académie Française.

In his article, Gaston Paris analysed the life and work of Antoine de la Sale, with specific reference to his fifteenth-century description of the Sibyl's realm set beneath a cave on Mount Sibyl.

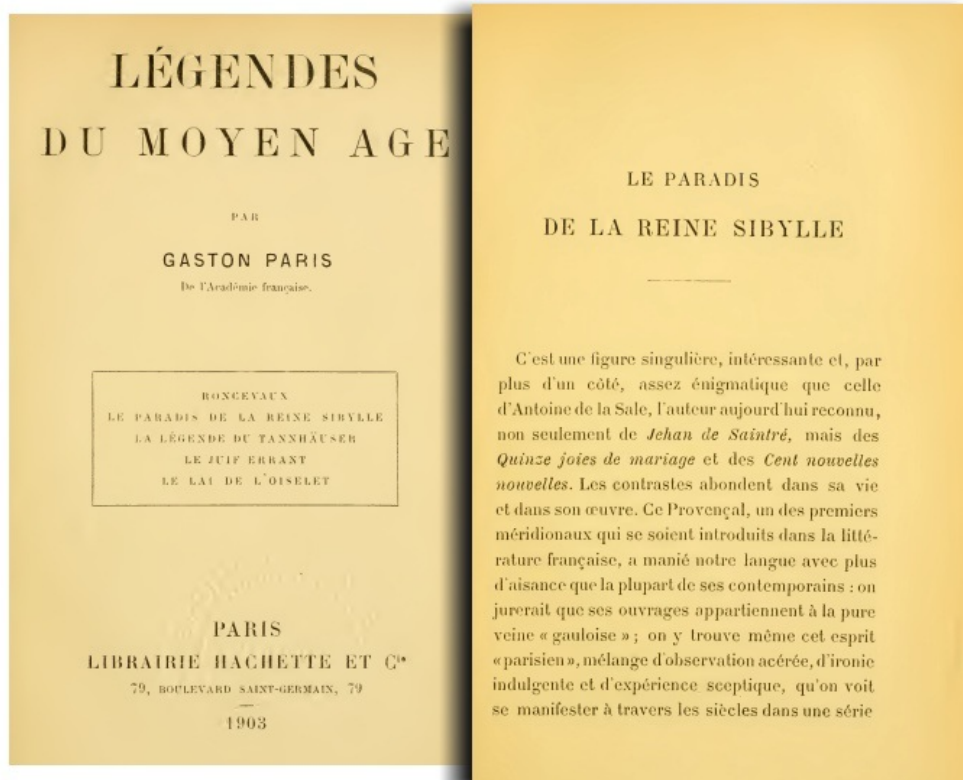


Fig. 5 - The article written by Gaston Paris on Mount Sibyl included in his volume *Légendes du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1903), p. 79-109

Was the work of Gaston Paris just a dispassionate philological study of a manuscripted account which reported on a curious journey to central Italy carried out during the late Middle Ages? Not at all.

Because thirty years earlier a young Gaston Paris had already been captured by the magical spell of the Apennine Sibyl. And, just before the turn of the century, he had the chance to make his dream come true: he personally travelled to Italy to explore the places in which Antoine de la Sale had set his wondrous tale:

«Actually the Sibyl has recently greeted a few pilgrims. [...] I had promised to myself since that time that I would visit that mysterious cave [...] I carried out my project in June 1897; but, unfortunately, [...] I was [...] 'rebuffed by the wind'. The Sibyl, certainly fearing too nosy an investigation, enshrouded herself in mist and covered herself with icy gusts».

[In the original French text: «La Sibylle a pourtant récemment revu des pèlerins. [...] Je m'étais promis dès lors d'aller visiter la grotte mystérieuse [...] J'ai réalisé ce projet en juin 1897; mais, hélas! [...] j'ai été [...] 'repoussé par le vent'. La Sibylle, craignant sans doute une investigation indiscreète, s'est enveloppée de brume et s'est défendue par un souffle glacé»].

In his venturesome journey, he was accompanied by another renowned Italian philologist, Pio Rajna, whom we will soon come to know. Gaston Paris, the older member of the scholarly party, could not reach the Sibyl's mountaintop; however, his presence in central Italy, amid remote peaks of the central Apennines, is a witness to an upcoming era of renewed attention and fame that the legends of the Sibillini Mountain Range were about to experience.

However, in this occurrence Gaston Paris could not identify any specific reason as to the presence of such legend in that isolated portion of Italy. Only naive tales about fairies and fairy dances were reported to him by the poor inhabitants of Castelluccio di Norcia:

«Often [...] they could see the fairies dancing on the grasslands, and such magical sights, charming as they were, cast in their soul an indefinite terror [...] Sometimes - but this is not certain at all - they had seen the fairies join the country dances that the villagers used to stage in the evening with the accompaniment of bagpipes. [...] This fable is all I could gather in the land that may bring to mind the antique legend, and, as everybody can see, only scantily: the tale is rather connected to the ancient traditions on dancing nymphs, and we can find it, almost identical, in many other countries where no lore on subterranean paradises is known».

[In the original French text: «Souvent [...] on voyait les fées danser sur les prairies, et ces apparitions, toutes gracieuses qu'elles fussent, jetaient dans l'âme une vague terreur [...] Parfois même - mais cela était douteux - on avait vu les fées se mêler aux salterelli que les villageois des montagnes mènent le soir aux sons des 'zampogne'. [...] Cette croyance est tout ce que j'ai recueilli dans le pays qui puisse rappeler l'ancienne légende, et, comme on voit, elle ne la rappelle que de très loin: elle se rattache plutôt aux traditions antiques sur les danses des nymphes et se retrouve telle quelle

dans beaucoup de pays où l'on ne connaît pas d'histoire de paradis souterrain»].

fées de sortir. Souvent, en effet, surtout par les belles matinées ou soirées d'été, quand le soleil levant ou la lune éclairent dans les vallons les vapeurs légères et mouvantes, on voyait les fées danser sur les prairies, et ces apparitions, toutes gracieuses qu'elles fussent, jetaient dans l'âme

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une vague terreur ; parfois même, — mais cela était douteux, — on avait vu les fées se mêler aux *salterelli* que les villageois des montagnes mènent le soir aux sons des *zampogne*. On avait donc

Fig. 6 - The passage on the dancing fairies from the essay written by Gaston Paris (p. 104 and 105)

Gaston Paris died in 1903, only six years after his visit to the Sibillini Mountain Range. So it was his Italian friend and colleague, Pio Rajna, who took in charge the fascinating quest that the French philologist had begun.

Pio Rajna, born in northern Italy, was an eminent philologist and scholar, a professor at the Universities of Milan and Florence, a member of the illustrious Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and a senator of the Kingdom of Italy. He was a proficient mountain climber, too, a skill he had acquired during his long treks amid his native Alps. So, on 23 June 1897, while his friend Gaston Paris was waiting in Castelluccio, Pio Rajna faced an arduous and unsuccessful climb to the peak of Mount Sibyl, immersed in a cloudy fog which almost blinded him and his local guide. A second, easier ascent was effected by Rajna on August, 13th, starting from the hamlet of Montemonaco. This climb was followed by other journeys, that same year and in the subsequent year 1898.



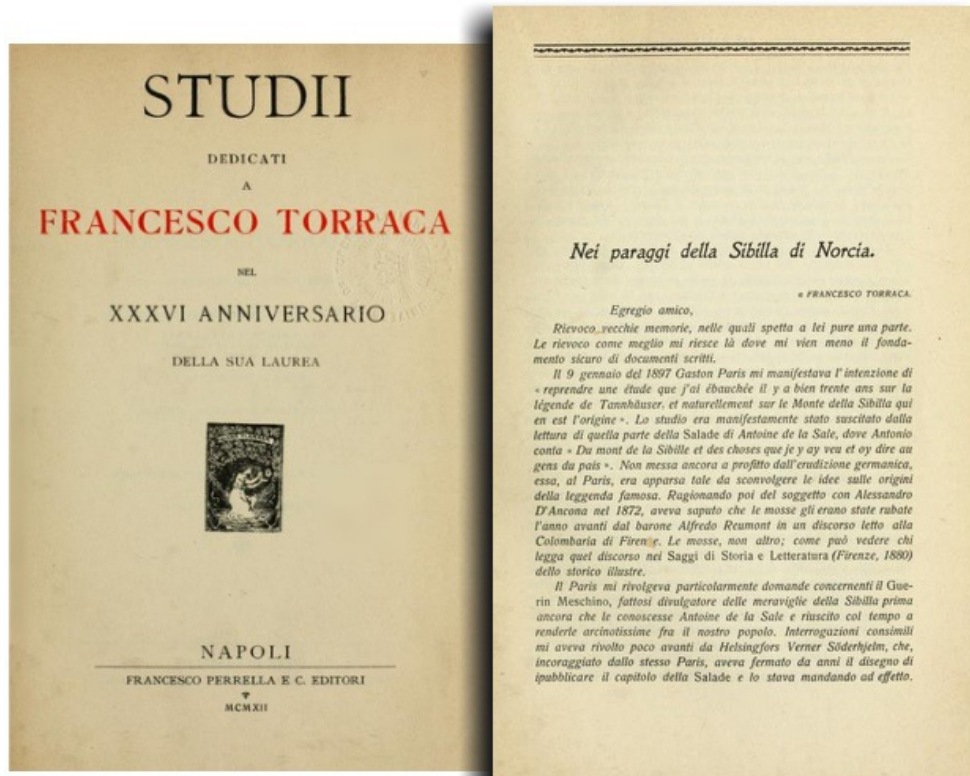


Fig. 7 - Pio Rajna's account of his journey to the Sibillini Mountain Range as reported in *Studii dedicati a Francesco Torraca nel XXXVI anniversario della sua laurea* (Napoli, 1912), p. 233-253

Of the exciting adventure experienced by Pio Rajna in that remote region of the Apennines, he himself left a lively, most fascinating account in *In the territory of the Sibyl of Norcia* (*Nei paraggi della Sibilla di Norcia*), an article that was included in the volume *Studii dedicati a Francesco Torraca nel XXXVI anniversario della sua laurea* (1912). But the passionate philologist, in search of a truth that unfortunately had already gone lost many centuries earlier, could only retrieve the same useless, naive tales that Gaston Paris, too, had heard among the local villagers:

«In Pretara [a small hamlet set beneath Mount Vettore], they believe that at the time of their ancestors the fairies, pouring out from the cave, came amid the residents to dance with them; they could not be recognised but from one aspect: their knees creaked, like those of goats. [...] In St. Leonard [a ruined hermitage] they say that the fairies used to come and do their laundry. [...] When Pilate appears, he washes his hands in the lake's waters».



[In the original Italian text: «A Pretara [...] si crede che al tempo dei vecchi le fate, uscite dalla grotta, venissero tra gli abitanti a ballare, non distinguibili da altro segno, che per uno scricchiolare delle ginocchia, pari a quello delle capre. [...] Di S. Leonardo si dice che le fate ci venissero a stendere i panni. [...] Pilato nelle sue apparizioni al lago si lava le mani nel lago stesso»].

The ghosts of the Sibillini Mountain Range haunted Pio Rajna until he died in 1930, when he still was in touch with Domenico Falzetti, Fernand Desonay and Giuseppe Moretti, all involved in new excavation activities on the Sibyl's mountaintop. He was also writing a «troublesome book dedicated to the Sibyl» («un problematico libro sulla Sibilla»), a work that he never completed.

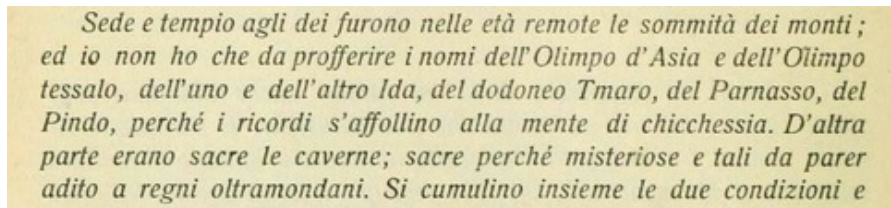
What could Rajna retrieve or fancy about the possible origin of the legend of the Sibyl's Cave?

Unfortunately, his investigation was unproductive. However, Pio Rajna, fully captured by the enchantment of the place and by its legends, wrote words that are not so far from the truth we are going to put down, though in the form of a conjecture, in the present paper:

«See and shrine to the gods were considered the mountaintops since time immemorial [...] On the other hand, hallowed were the caverns, too; they were hallowed because they were mysterious, and seemed to hint to a possible entrance to otherworldly realms. If you add up the two occurrences, you cannot fail to spot promising potential outcomes. [...] The Sibyl's cave is peculiarly set on the very mountaintop. And that peak, at an elevation of more than six thousand five hundred feet, is marked by an aspect which is even more significant: it is encircled by a crown, a most significant symbol in the history of mankind. And you can also see in it a priestly sash, a token of holiness».

[In the original Italian text: «Sede e tempio agli dèi furono nelle età remote le sommità dei monti [...] D'altra parte erano sacre le caverne; sacre perché misteriose e tali da parer adito a regni oltramondani. Si cumulino insieme le due condizioni e si veda che cosa abbia da risultarne. [...] La grotta della Sibilla ha la prerogativa singolarissima d'essere situata propriamente alla cima. E quella cima, rispettabile già per l'altezza sua di oltre due migliaia di

metri, ha la caratteristica ancor più singolare di parer cinta da una corona, ossia da un simbolo significativo in grado sommo in tutta la storia dell'umanità. Ed anche una benda sacerdotale, un simbolo di santità, ben si poteva vedere nella fascia di roccia»].

The image shows a rectangular section of a handwritten manuscript. The text is written in a cursive script on aged, slightly yellowed paper. The ink is dark, and the handwriting is clear but elegant. The text is a single paragraph in Italian, discussing the origins of the legend of Mount Sibyl.

*Sede e tempio agli dei furono nelle età remote le sommità dei monti ; ed io non ho che da profferire i nomi dell'Olimpo d'Asia e dell'Olimpo tessalo, dell'uno e dell'altro Ida, del dodoneo Tmaro, del Parnasso, del Pindo, perché i ricordi s'affollino alla mente di chicchessia. D'altra parte erano sacre le caverne; sacre perché misteriose e tali da parer adito a regni oltramondani. Si cumulino insieme le due condizioni e*

Fig. 8 - The excerpt on the potential origin of the legend of Mount Sibyl from the article written by Pio Rajna (p. 252)

An entryway to otherworldly realms. A passage to an Otherworld. Pio Rajna, though unlucky in his investigation, begins to catch a glimpse of a possible solution to the riddle which inhabits the Sibillini Mountain Range. Because, he adds, he cannot avoid to hold in his heart «the idea that the Sibyl's cave may have been a site of worship well before Rome established its rule over that region» («il pensiero che la caverna della Sibilla sia stata un luogo di culto ben prima che Roma distendesse su quella regione il suo dominio»).

In this important excerpt, the Italian philologist never mentions Pontius Pilate and his Lake. Still, in the minds of both Gaston Paris and Pio Rajna the Lake of Pilate seems to be just a sort of anomaly, a bizarre and unconnected tale overshadowed by the presence of the most illustrious sibilline narrative, as it clearly appears from the words written by Gaston Paris:

«The name of this lake [Pilate's] is connected to an odd legend, yet utterly unrelated to the one I am addressing here [...] Neither Pilat nor the necromancers have nothing to do with their neighbour, the Sibyl. It is of her only that I want to write here».

[In the original French text: «Le nom de ce lac se rattache aussi à une légende curieuse, mais entièrement étrangère à celle dont je m'occupe ici. [...] Ni Pilate ni les nécromants n'ont rien à faire avec leur voisine la Sibylle. C'est d'elle seule que je veux présentement parler»].

So the two philologists still miss an important point, linked to the manifest otherworldly character of the Lake of Pilate, not different from the same character which is featured by the Cave.

Nonetheless, at the end of the nineteenth century the two scientists, with their daring visit to the Sibillini Mountain Range, opened the way to a fresh new interest towards the legendary tales which inhabited that remote territory.

«Time will tell» («Chi vivrà vedrà»), wrote Pio Rajna in concluding his article.

And the time has now actually come.

But our travel into the studies and researches conducted in the past on the origin the Sibillini Mountain Range's legendary tale is not over.

Because other scholars were at work, in that same period, on Mount Sibyl and its cave. They wanted to investigate another link. And the link's name was 'Tannhäuser'.

### *2.3 A passionate quarrel over Tannhäuser*

In that same year 1897, while Gaston Paris and Pio Rajna were jointly exploring the Sibillini Mountain Range in search of an ancient legend, that secluded portion of the Apennines, after a long period of neglect, was being made the object of further attention. An attention which was turning into a sort of scholarly quarrel. And at the very center of the quarrel was an ancient German knight: Tannhäuser.

The legend of Tannhäuser, with its knights imprisoned within the magic realm of 'Venusberg', the mountain of Venus, showed manifest similarities to the narrative of a sensual Apennine Sibyl concealed beneath a peak in central Italy. That year Werner Söderhjelm, a Finnish linguist, published an article on this very subject, *Antoine de La Sale et la légende de Tannhäuser*. The northern-European scholar intended to highlight the common literary

themes present in both narratives, so patent but also so overlooked, as they «have not been signalled but incidentally in literary studies» («mais qui n'a encore été signalée qu'en passant dans la littérature»), a reference to the works of Alfred von Reumont and Arturo Graf.

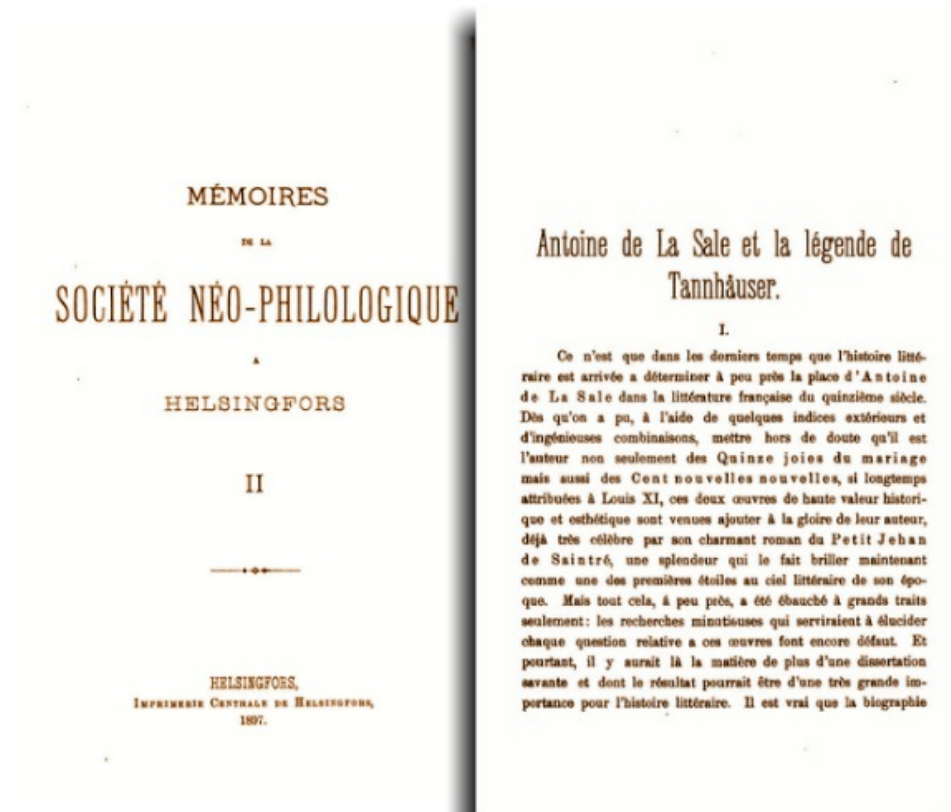


Fig. 9 - The article written by Werner Söderhjelm on Mount Sibyl and Tannhäuser included in *Mémoires de la Société Néo-philologique à Helsingfors* (Helsingfors, 1897), Vol. II, p. 101-167

After a close scrutiny of the two legends, partly based on the article published four years earlier by Arturo Graf, Söderhjelm concluded that Antoine de la Sale's description of knights visiting the Sibyl in Italy «contains elements which are not found in any Italian version [of the legend] and are, on the other hand, typically found in the German legend» («contient des choses qui ne se retrouvent dans aucune version italienne mais qui sont, au contraire, caractéristiques de la légende allemande»).

So, in Söderhjelm's view, the Apennine Sibyl, Mount Sibyl and the largest portion of the Italian legend were of German derivation, with Tannhäuser as the main source.

We know today, from the detailed analysis conducted in our previous paper *Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection*, that the literary theme of a hidden realm ruled by a sensual queen originates from chivalric elements contained in the Matter of Britain and the Arthurian cycle, with Morgan le Fay and Sebile as main characters: in this framework, we may assume that both Mount Sibyl and Tannhäuser's Venusberg received in their respective narratives the same basic elements, from a common source which is to be identified with the Matter of Britain, with a subsequent mix-up of the tales concerning the two different mountains. They were so similar because they arose from a same legendary stem.

But at the end of the nineteenth century, the controversy about a sort of supremacy between an Italian legend and a German myth was arousing a series of scholarly disputes. And Mount Sibyl could place itself at the very center of a quarrelsome attention involving many illustrious scholars.

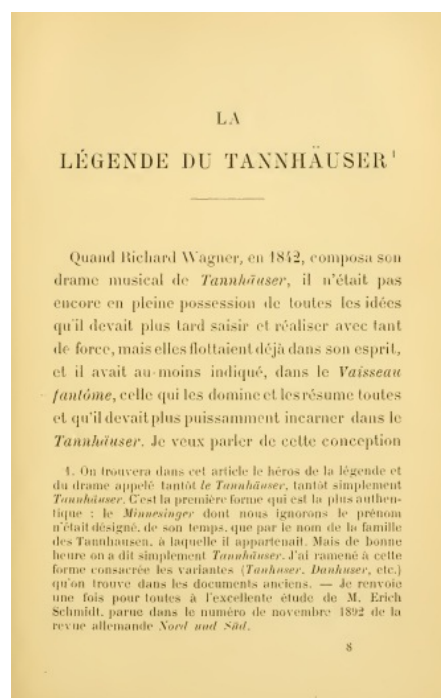


Fig. 10 - The article written by Gaston Paris on Tannhäuser, from *Légendes du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1903), p. 113-145

Gaston Paris replied to Söderhjelm's position with an article, *La légende du Tannhäuser*, included in his *Legends of the Middle Ages* published in 1903. In his paper, the French philologist supported the opposite idea that the tale of Tannhäuser was a German adaptation of the Italian sibilline legend, as the reverse vision proposed by the Finnish scholar «raised many difficulties» («cette hypothèse soulève de grandes difficultés»):

«So the Tannhäuser's legend, as it appeared in Germany during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is not of German origin; its roots are linked to the legend of 'Mount Sibyl', which dates to a remoter age».

[In the original French text: «La légende de Tannhäuser, telle qu'elle apparaît en Allemagne au quinzième et au seizième siècles, n'est donc pas d'origine allemande; elle remonte à la légende du 'Monte della Sibilla', dont nous pouvons constater l'existence à une époque bien plus ancienne»].

The philological scene was heating up. Another scholar entered the arena, Heinrich Dübi, a Swiss philologist and mountain climber. In 1907 he writes a long paper on *Three legends of the High Middle Ages in their journey from Italy to Germany through Switzerland* (*Drei spätmittelalterliche Legenden in ihrer Wanderung aus Italien durch die Schweiz nach Deutschland*). And, incredibly enough, two out of the three legendary tales addressed by Dübi are linked to the Sibillini Mountain Range.

In the first section of his article, *From prefect Pilate (Vom Landpfleger Pilatus)*, Dübi retraces the medieval legend connected with the many burial places of the cursed corpse of Pontius Pilate, including a comprehensive mention of the Lake of Pilate in the Sibillini Mountain Range, with a full reference to Mount Sibyl and the tale reported by Antoine de la Sale, often quoting from the article written by Arturo Graf in 1893.

The third section of Dübi's article is dedicated, once more, to Mount Sibyl and its connection to the legend of Tannhäuser. As a most significant and unprecedented observation, he quotes from a most famous excerpt written by a Swiss cleric, Felix Hemmerlin, who in his work *De Nobilitate et Rusticitate Dialogus*, written in 1444, established a direct, unmistakable link between Mount Sibyl and the German Venusberg, claiming that the information was acquired during his stay in Italy:

«I begin with the cleric from Zurich, Felix Hemmerlin, also known as 'Malleolus', his words the most ancient, as he hints clearly to the link between the two legends. Actually [...] he refers [...], in his dialogue between a nobleman and a peasant, to the similarities with the Venusberg. The passage he wrote is as follows: 'Not far from the town of Norcia and the castle of Montefortino lies Mount Sibyl' [...] As Hemmerlin could ascertain from the words referred to him by those who knew the region, those cliffs are riddled with hollows and caves, which pierce the rock deep into the hidden core of the mountains through impracticable passages. this mount is known as Venusberg, because Venus, Vulcan's wife, makes it conjoined to fire. These subterranean chambers harbour evil beings, fiendish spirits and demons, taking the shape of graceful maidens who beguile the men coming from foreign lands».

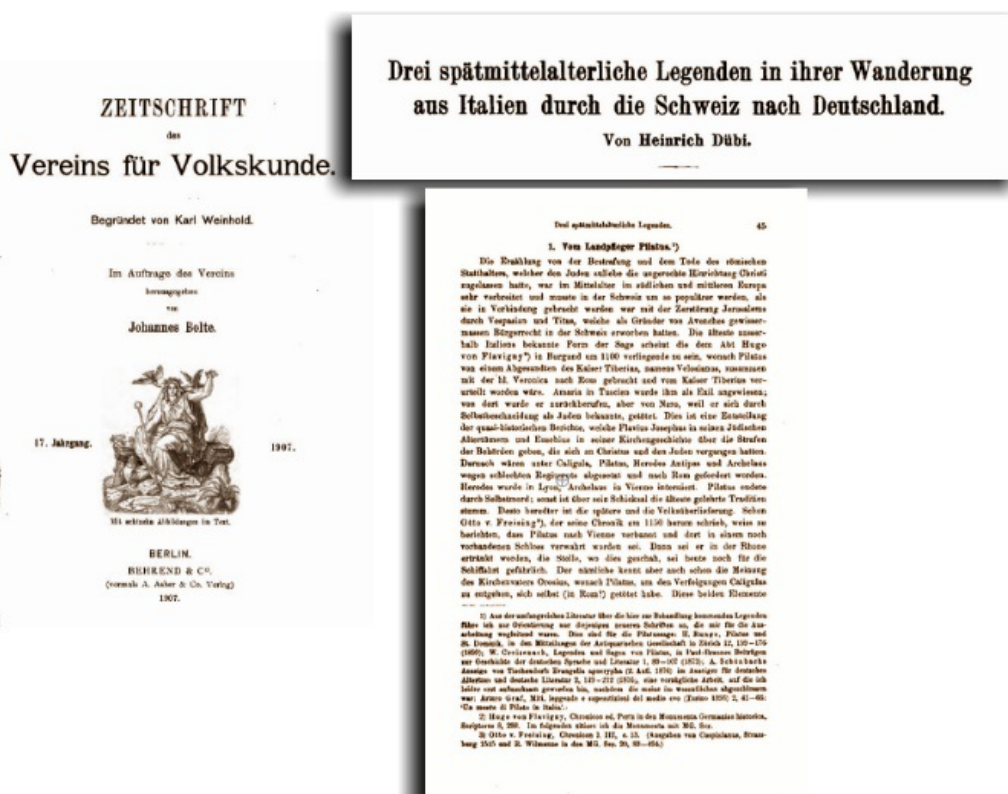


Fig. 11 - Heinrich Dübi's article *Vom Landpfleger Pilatus* from his essay *Drei spätmittelalterliche Legenden in ihrer Wanderung aus Italien durch die Schweiz nach Deutschland* included in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* (Berlin, 1907), p. 42 and 45-65



[In the original German text: «Ich beginne mit dem Züricher Chorherrn Felix Hemmerlin oder Malleolus, weil sein Zeugnis das älteste ist und er am deutlichsten den Zusammenhang beider Sagen zu ahnen scheint. In der Tat verweist [...] seines Dialogs zwischen dem Edelmann und dem Bauern über die ähnlichen Erscheinungen am Venusberg berichtet habe. Dieser in ziemlich barbarischem Latein abgefasste Bericht lautet in Kürze folgendermassen: 'Nahe bei der Stadt Norcia und dem Kastell 'Montifortino' liegt der Sibyllenberg. [...] Wie Hemmerlin deutlich gesehen und von Ortskundigen erfahren hat, sind diese Berge voll von Höhlen und Grotten, die bis ins Innere des Berges reichen, und unpassierbaren Gängen. Der Berg heisst gemeiniglich Venusberg, weil Venus, die Gattin des Vulcan, hier ihr vom Feuer unzertrennliches Wesen treibt. In diesen Grotten sind dämonische Wesen, Incubi und Succubi, in der Gestalt schöner Weiber, die von irgendwoher gekommene Männer betören»].

### **Drei spätmittelalterliche Legenden in ihrer Wanderung aus Italien durch die Schweiz nach Deutschland.**

Von Heinrich Dübi.

(Vgl. S. 42—65. 143—160.)

#### **3. Frau Vrene und der Tannhäuser.<sup>1)</sup>**

Man nimmt gewöhnlich an, dass die durch Wagners Oper so bekannt gewordene Legende von dem Ritter, der im Venusberge gewesen war und dafür vom Papste verflucht wurde, wie sie an einen deutschen Namen anknüpft, so auch deutschen Ursprunges und an irgend einem Berg in deutschen Landen einheimisch sei. Der Hørselberg in Thüringen freilich

Fig. 12 - Heinrich Dübi's article *Frau Vrene und der Tannhäuser* from his essay *Drei spätmittelalterliche Legenden in ihrer Wanderung aus Italien durch die Schweiz nach Deutschland* included in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* (Berlin, 1907), p. 249-264

With this passage in his essay, Dübi enrolls the less-known legendary tradition of Mount Sibyl in the most famous, illustrious poetical lore concerning the German legend of Tannhäuser. But he goes even further, as the Swiss philologist chooses to endorse the theory of an Italian origin for the German tale:

«I think that this passage, almost neglected up to now and dating to the years 1410-13, may show in a very clear way that the legend of Tannhäuser

in the Venusberg [...] was developed in Italy at the beginning of the fourteenth century and, from there and through Switzerland, it came to Germany».

[In the original German text: «Diese bisher fast unbeachtete Erzählung, welche auf die Jahre 1410 - 13 zurückgeht, scheint mir auf das allerdeutlichste zu beweisen, dass die Sage von Tannhäuser im Venusberg [...] um die Wende des 14. Jahrhunderts in Italien ausgebildet war und von dort durch Vermittlung der Schweiz nach Deutschland gelangte»].

Now the Apennine Sibyl and her Italian mountain are fully at the center of a literary debate involving scholars from all over Europe.

In 1908, it is the turn of Friedrich Kluge, another philologist, this time from Germany. In his essay *Der Venusberg* he firmly rejects the assumption of a possible Italian origin for the Tannhäuser's legend:

## BUNTE BLÄTTER

Kulturgeschichtliche  
Vorträge und Aufsätze

von

FRIEDRICH KLUGE



Freiburg (Baden)  
J. Bielefelds Verlag  
1908

### Der Venusberg\*.

Der sagenberühmte Venusberg, der das Zauberreich der Göttin der Liebe birgt, hat nicht bloß im deutschen Volksglauben des ausgehenden Mittelalters gelebt, wir wissen auch von manchen Besuchern desselben, die Kunde von dem Liebesleben in der Venusgrotte oder wenigstens von der Lage und Gestalt des Berges und von seinen Höhlen verbreitet haben. Und der Fabeln vom Venusberg war kein Ende. Oft führt uns unsere Literatur an ihn heran, aber nirgends ist sein Zauber in reizvollerem Dämmerlicht, sein Sinnenglück bestrickender angedeutet und berührt, als in dem alten Volkslied vom Tannhäuser. Es gehört zu dem kunstvollsten, was der Liederschatz unseres Volkes durch das 16. Jahrhundert besessen hat. Es war zugleich eines der verbreitetsten und beliebtesten Volkslieder. Aber das 17. Jahrhundert hat ihm wie so vielen altdeutschen Sagenstoffen und Volksliedern einen argen Stoß versetzt: die modische Kunstdichtung verdrängte im Interessenbereich der Literaturfreunde das wunderbare Lied, drängte es in entlegene Täler und Berge zurück. In der Schweiz und in Tirol und Oberösterreich hat man es noch durch das 19. Jahrhundert hindurch erklingen hören, nachdem zuvor 'Des

\* Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung 1898 Nr. 66/67. Dieser Aufsatz knüpft an die bahnbrechenden Untersuchungen an, die Prof. Gaston Paris 1897 in der 'Revue de Paris' S. 763 ff. (Le Paradis de la Reine Sibylle) und Prof. Söderhjelm in den 'Mémoires de la Société Néo-Philologique à Helsingfors' (1897) II 101 ff. veröffentlicht haben. Der Aufsatz des berühmten französischen Romanisten (gest. 1902) ist mittlerweile neu gedruckt in den 'Légendes du Moyen Age', Paris 1904. Unserm obigen Aufsatz ist eine orientierende Karte am Schluß des Buches beigegeben.

Fig. 13 - Friedrich Kluge's essay *Der Venusberg*, from his work *Bunte blätter* (Freiburg, 1908), p. 28-60

«The legendary tale that we got to know in the romance of Guerino and in the work by Antoine de la Sale was not originated in Montemonaco, where this tale was told. German travellers during their visits to the famed Mount of the Sibyl have carried thither the German Tannhäuser legend. And thanks to the repeated investigations which Germans made in those parts our Tannhäuser legend gradually, although temporarily, became there established. What La Sale heard related there in May 1420 was the German legend, as it actually tells the tale of a knight from Germany».

[In the original German text: «Die Sagengestalt, die wir im Guerino-Roman und in la Sales Werk kennen gelernt haben, ist nicht autochthon in Montemonaco, wo man sie erzählte. Deutsche Reisende haben bei ihren Besuchen auf dem sagenberühmten Monte della Sibilla die deutsche Tannhäusersage dorthin getragen. Und bei den wiederholten Nachforschungen, die Deutsche dort anstellten, bürgerte sich allmählich, wenn auch vorübergehend, unsere Tannhäusersage dort ein. Was la Sale dort im Mai 1420 erzählen hörte, war die deutsche Sage, wie sie ja auch von einem deutschen Ritter handelt»].

But other scholars, too, take their chance and enter the Italy vs. Germany debate. In 1913 Arthur F. J. Remy, a German-born scholar at the Columbia University in New York, published an article which intended to illustrate the state of the art for the whole matter, with the following meaningful title: *The origin of the Tannhäuser-Legend - The present state of the question*. And he strongly embraces the position of a German origin for the Italian legend:

«Surely Kluge was right, when, in view of this evidence, he asserted the German origin of the Tannhäuser legend against Gaston Paris, and claimed that the account in the 'Salade' was but an echo of the German story. [...] From the evidence thus far presented I infer that the legend of Venus and her fabled mountain arose in Germany thru a fusion of the Celtic conception of the amorous fairy-queen with the German traditions of dwarf-kingdoms and imperial courts in the interior of mountains. In Germany faerie would most naturally assume the shape of a hollow-hill paradise. The fay was called Venus because the heathen goddess was thoroughly familiar from the poetry of the Minnesingers and the Goliards. [...] We are therefore perfectly justified in regarding the legend of Tannhäuser as a German legend».

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Remy

## THE ORIGIN OF THE TANNHAUSER-LEGEND \*

### THE PRESENT STATE OF THE QUESTION

Since the appearance in 1897 and 1898 of two notable essays by Gaston Paris in the *Revue de Paris*<sup>1</sup> the origin and development of the *Tannhäuser*-legend has been the subject of frequent discussion. A legend, the German character of which has been unquestioned since the days of the Romantics and Wagner, was now claimed to be of Italian origin and to have its starting-point in a tradition connected with a mountain-peak in the central Apennine range. The distinctively German features of the story, the name of the hero and the *Venusberg*, were explained as later changes or additions introduced into the legend after it had come to Germany by way of Switzerland. The ultimate source of the legend itself was to be found in Celtic literature, whence the material came to Italy with the rest of the matter of Britain thru French mediation, tho in this case, it had to be admitted, no French version is known.

These views of Gaston Paris gave rise to a fruitful discussion. The *Venusberg* in particular was made the subject of an essay by Friedrich Kluge.<sup>2</sup> He conceded the Italian provenience for the unholy paradise, but denied it for the other features of the legend, which he regarded as of German development and to have been carried to Italy by German travellers. Erich Schmidt<sup>3</sup> is inclined to agree with Kluge and upholds the identification of the legendary *Tannhäuser* with the historical Minnesinger of that name. Rousehel<sup>4</sup> suggests that

\* Victor Junk's book, entitled *Tannhäuser in Sage und Dichtung* (Munich 1912), was not available when this article was sent to press.

<sup>1</sup> *Le Paradis de la Reine Sibylle* Sept. 1897 and *La Légende du Tannhäuser* March 1898; reprinted in *Légendes du Moyen Âge*, Paris 1903, pp. 65-109, 111-145.

<sup>2</sup> In *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung* vom 25. und 26. März 1898. Reprinted with some omissions in *Bunte Blätter*, Freiburg, 1910 pp. 28-46.

<sup>3</sup> In *Charakteristiken* Berlin 1901, pp. 24-45.

<sup>4</sup> *Die Tannhäuser-Sage in Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur*, 1904, pp. 653-667.

Fig. 14 - Arthur F. J. Remy's *The origin of the Tannhäuser-Legend - The present state of the question*, in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (Illinois, 1913), Vol. XII, no. 1, p. 32-77

A tentatively final effort to settle the matter is carried out in 1916 by Philip Stephan Barto, an American scholar, with his complete book *Tannhäuser and the mountain of Venus - A study in the legend of the Germanic paradise*. Barto, too, supports a German origin for the legend of Mount Sibyl:

«The German legend of an amorous Sibyl dwelling within a hollow mountain in a court the splendors of which were maintained by some miraculous agency is the source which the Italian Barbarino used, even at second hand perhaps, in describing the love grotto near Norcia. The *Venusberg* is of German origin and is but a later appellation for the ancient Germanic paradise to which the first name to be attached was that of the 'Gral'».

From Finland to France. From Switzerland to Germany, and then to the United States of America. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the whole world seems to have become aware that a mount in central Italy, a

peak lost in the middle of the almost-unknown Sibillini Mountain Range, was marked by a powerful mythical charge, with strong and undeniable connections with most famous myths, like the German legend of Tannhäuser and the cycle of King Arthur.

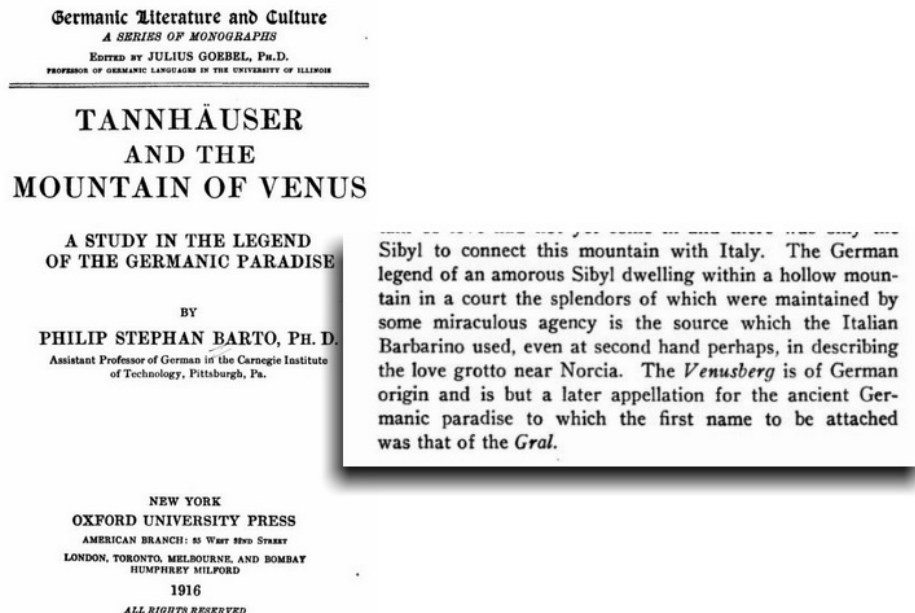


Fig. 15 - Philip Stephan Barto's *Tannhäuser and the mountain of Venus - A study in the legend of the Germanic paradise* (New York, 1916)

Mount Sibyl with its Cave and its nearby Lake of Pilate were, again, at the center of the scene, after centuries of substantial neglect.

However, though involved in a lengthy quarrel over the true origin of the Tannhäuser's legend, no scholar was truly addressing the fundamental problem concerning the origin of the legends of the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate.

Because the problem was not whether Tannhäuser came before Mount Sibyl, or the other way round.

The real problem, which we are going to solve in the present research paper, was: why did the Sibillini Mountain Range happen to act as a

mythical landmark, an 'hot spot' for all this legendary fuss? The answer will be proposed in the next paragraphs.

And yet, before we start addressing this fascinating topic, we still have to continue with our history of the efforts to study and analyse the legendary narratives which inhabited the central Apennines.

We are getting into the twentieth century, and a few scholars, not directly involved in the Tannhäuser - Mount Sibyl unproductive quarrel, will begin to tread, though with hesitant steps, the path that will lead to the most exciting findings as to those fascinating legends.

#### *2.4 Scholars on the right track*

In that same beginning of the twentieth century, there are scholars who are not taking part in the somewhat unprofitable debate on where the origin of the legend on an enchanted mount of love may lay, whether in Germany or Italy.

Instead, they attack the legend from a different side.

In 1903, Lucy Ann Paton, a scholar at the Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, publishes her *Studies in the fairy mythology of Arthurian romance*, in which a specific lineage for the Apennine Sibyl begins to be spotted, though only incidentally in Paton's elaboration, within the Matter of Britain and the literary characters of Morgan le Fay and her companion 'Sebile':

«[In the Arthurian cycle] Sebile has no individual history in the romances that we can trace [...] but as a rule she is merely a shadow of Morgain. There is little question that she is descended from the Sibyl. Antoine de la Sale in 'La Salade' repeats a popular legend that he had learned in a visit to the Mont de la Sibylle, one of the peaks of the Apennines near Norcia. [...] The connection between the Sibyl and the queen Sibylle is shown more clearly by Andrea da Barberino, who in 'Guerrino il Meschino' tells substantially the same story, evidently derived from a common source with the legend reported by Antoine de la Sale. [...] The two sources supplement



each other, Antoine's representing purer Celtic material, Andrea's preserving more distinctly the Sibylline character of the fay [...] Both sources show tendencies that are often displayed in mediaeval fairy lore [...] with] the merging of Celtic and classical tradition in popular story».

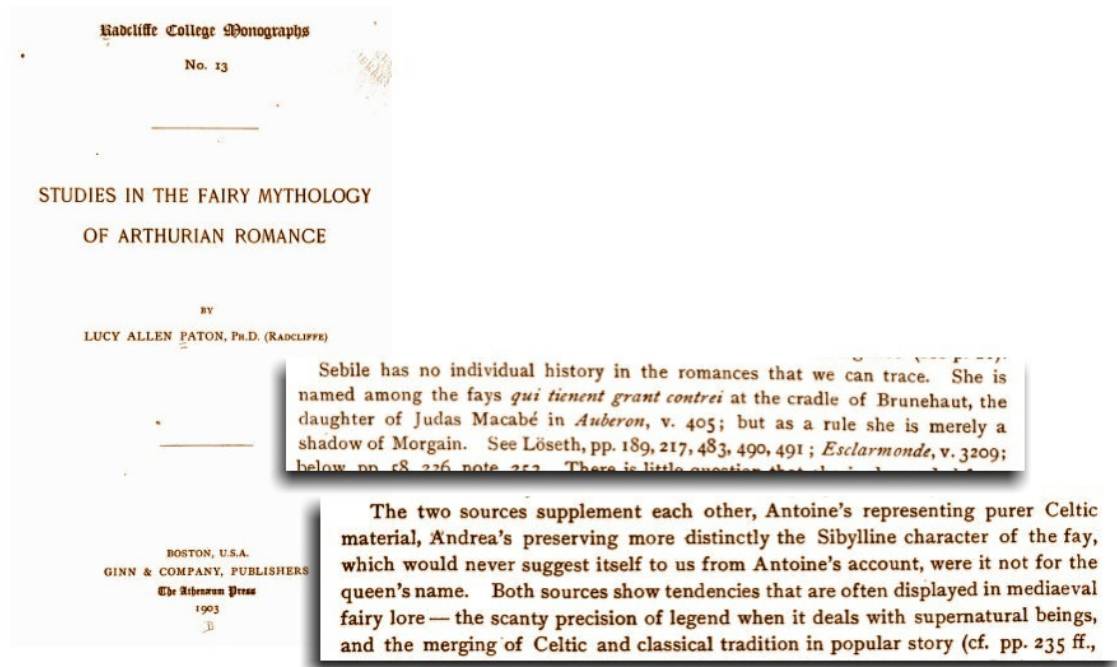


Fig. 16 - Lucy Ann Paton's passage on Sebile contained in *Studies in the fairy mythology of Arthurian romance*, Boston, 1903 (pages 52 and 53, footnote no. 2)

This is the line of research we developed in our previous article *Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection*: a first, mandatory step in the investigation of the true origin of the legends of the Sibillini Mountain Range, as it identifies a narrative overlay, of foreign origin, that is to be necessarily removed if we want to unveil the inner, original core of the legend.

Thus, Lucy Ann Paton makes a first move, even though Arthur F. J. Remy, from whom we already quoted, fully involved in the Tannhäuser's philological quarrel as he was, will not agree with Paton's view.

Nonetheless, the way is now open to a new vision of the sibilline lore. The Italian scholar Ferdinando Neri, in his *The Italian traditions of the Sibyl* (*Le tradizioni italiane della Sibilla*, 1913), writes the following word:



«The Sibyl's paradise must be linked to the enchanted lands [...] In chivalric poems, this is the land of fairies, the realm of Morgan, Avalon [...] Sibyl: that was a name of a fairy, always mentioned in conjunction with Morgan [in other chivalric works]».

[In the original Italian text: «Il paradiso della Sibilla deve allora porsi a riscontro delle terre incantate [...] Nella poesia cavalleresca è la terra di féerie, il regno di Morgana, Avalon [...] Sibilla: questo era un nome di fata, e sempre insieme con Morgana appare [in varie opere cavalleresche]»].

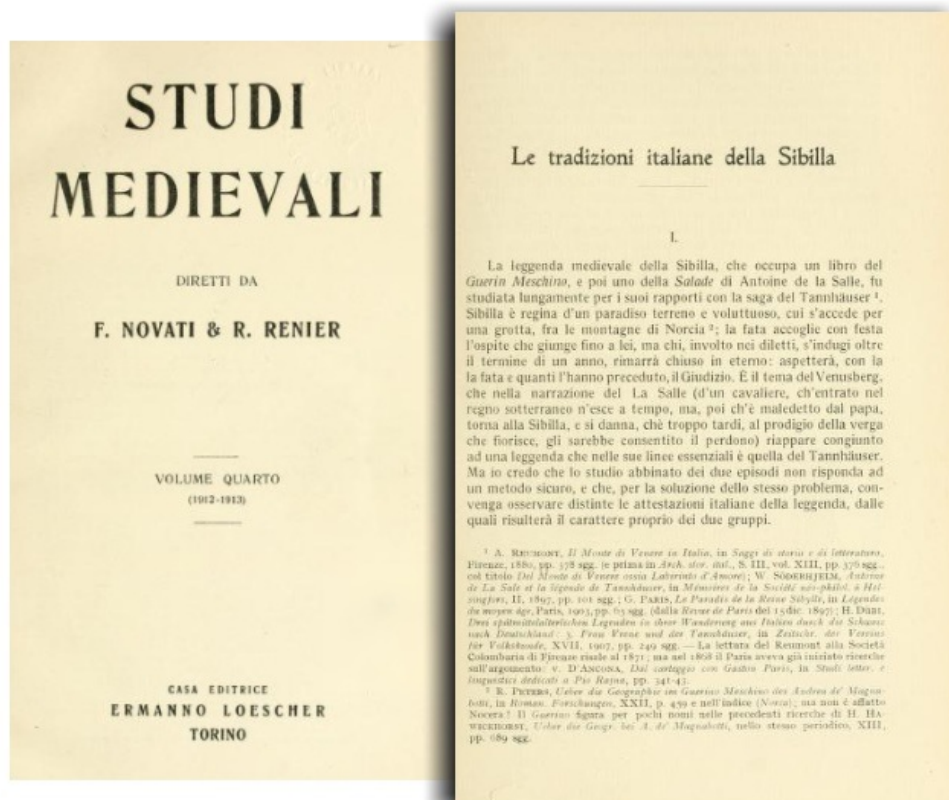


Fig. 17 - The article written by Ferdinando Neri on the popular lore about the Sibyls, included in *Studi Medievali*, Vol. IV (1913), p. 213-230

And to Ferdinando Neri the author of the present research paper also owes a very special expression of gratitude, out of a smart, fundamental hint that the Italian scholar mentions a few lines ahead in his work:

«We may proceed further in the comparison process and note that the traditions of Norcia, portrayed in the *Guerrino*, *la Salade*, [...] are connected to a class of known, popular fairy tales through the topic of the 'netherworld' [...]: the ever-slamming metal doors, guarded by lions or monsters...»].

[In the original Italian text: «Si può procedere nel confronto, ed osservare che le tradizioni di Norcia, seguite nel *Guerino*, *la Salade*, [...] si collegano con un gruppo di fiabe note nel folk-lore per i temi del 'mondo sotterra' [...]: le porte di metallo, che battono continuamente, vigilate da leoni, o da mostri...»].

Si può procedere nel confronto, ed osservare che le tradizioni di Norcia, seguite nel *Guerino*, *la Salade*, *l'Italia liberata da' Goti*, come ripetono la credenza della periodica metamorfosi delle fate in serpi <sup>5</sup>, così, in altri particolari, si collegano con un gruppo di fiabe note nel folk-lore per i temi del «mondo sotterra» <sup>6</sup> e della «bella dei sette «veli» <sup>7</sup>: le porte di metallo, che battono continuamente, vigilate

da leoni, o da mostri <sup>1</sup>; i cibi rituali che l'eroe deve porgere nel viaggio <sup>2</sup>, senza voltarsi... Il nome stesso della fata riappare in alcune di queste fiabe: «U cunto d'a bella Sibilla» <sup>3</sup>, «Il canto e 'l sono «della Sara Sibilla» <sup>4</sup>. Ma per questa via si profonda nelle antichità

Fig. 18 - The excerpt on the ever-slamming metal doors written by Ferdinando Neri in his essay (p. 229-230)

This is the very first clue which, connected to the presence of the odd slamming metal doors in Antoine de la Sale's description of the Sibyl's Cave, led the author of this series of articles to the investigation of the magical ever-slamming devices, included in many chivalric romances and poems and featuring an illustrious lineage back to Vergil's *Aeneid* and the Greek myth of the Symplegades, in a setting which is typically linked to descriptions of Otherworlds and magical subterranean realms.

The hypothesis of a lineage of the Apennine Sibyl in Italy from the Matter of Britain was also highlighted by Walter Pabst in his *Venus und die missverstandene Dido: Literarische Ursprünge des Sibyllen- und des Venusberges* (1955). The German philologist conjectured a passage of Arthurian topics and themes to Italy, following the invasion of Sicily by the Normans in the eleventh century and noting the presence of an Arthurian

poem set in southern Italy, a literary occurrence that we fully described in our previous article *Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection*:

«The Arthur-Morgan complex, which was transplanted to Sicily under Norman rule, has partly turned its fairytale features there into the devilish. [...] So it is also certain that it was not Italians but Nordic exoticists who transplanted the 'saga' of Morgan to Sicily. In the old French poem 'Floriant el Florete', Etna is [...] referred to as the residence of Morgan, and the 'matière de Bretagne' is transferred to the southern volcano together with King Arthur's sister».

WALTER PABST

VENUS UND  
DIE MISSVERSTANDENE DIDO

LITERARISCHE URSPRUNGE  
DES SIBYLLEN- UND DES VENUSBERGES

Der unter normannischer Herrschaft nach Sizilien verpflanzte Artus-Morgana-Komplex hat seine märchenhaften Züge dort teilweise ins Teuflische verkehrt; an der Straße von Messina erfand die Fata Morgana die Fata Morgana.



KOMMISSIONSVERLAG: CRAM, DE GRUYTER & CO.  
HAMBURG 1955

Fig. 19 - Walter Pabst's *Venus und die missverstandene Dido: Literarische Ursprünge des Sibyllen- und des Venusberges* (Hamburg, 1955), with a quote from p. 82

[In the original German text: «Der unter normannischer Herrschaft nach Sizilien verpflanzte Artus-Morgana-Komplex hat seine märchenhaften Züge dort teilweise ins Teuflische verkehrt. [...] So ist es auch sicher, daß nicht Italiener, sondern nordische Exotisten die 'Sage' der Morgana nach Sizilien verpflanzten. In dem altfranzösischen Gedicht 'Floriant el Florete' ist [...] der Ätna als Wohnsitz der Morgana bezeichnet, und mit König Arthurs Schwester wird die 'matière de Bretagne' auf den südlichen Vulkan versetzt»].

However Walter Pabst, as other scholars up to now, missed the fundamental point connected to the presence of a further, powerful legend only a few miles away from the Sibyl's Cave. The myth concerning the Lake of Pilate is dismissed as a secondary, basically unimportant issue:

«Neither the origin of the necromancers, nor that of the Pilate's legend will be examined».

[In the original German text: «Hier können weder die Ursprünge der Nekromanten- noch die der Pilatuslegende untersucht werden»].

Nonetheless, this new, promising line of approach to the Italian Sibyl's Cave, in the framework of the Matter of Britain, though without considering the legendary tale on Pilate's Lake, will be finally summarised by a great scholar and illustrious professor, one of the most prominent authorities in the literary tradition of Middle Ages, the Matter of Britain and the Arthurian cycle: Roger Sherman Loomis, a famed, celebrated member of the Columbia University.

In 1959, as we already detailed in our previous paper *Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection*, Roger S. Loomis wrote a fundamental essay, *Morgain la Fée in oral tradition*, in which the illustrious scholar totally supports the vision of a literary transplant of the legend of Morgan le Fay, and the enchantress Sebile, into a specific Italian setting, that of the Sibillini Mountain Range:

«The extraordinary account given early in the fifteenth century by Andrea da Barberino of the visit of Guerino il Meschino to the abode of the fay Alcina [the name replacing the Sibyl in the 1689 edition - editor's note] [...] was actually an elaboration of a visit to the abode of Morgain la Fée. [...] Though the geographical setting on a mountain near Norcia in the central Apennines was described with accuracy, the main theme must have been taken from some version of the visit to Morgain's enchanted palace. [...] In spite of the obvious changes and literary embellishments, the account of Guerino's visit to the Sibyl's sensual Paradise is manifestly derived from some version of Morgain's faery Paradise [...] Alcina's nature is best explained, then, as uniting characteristic features of Morgain and the Sibyl».

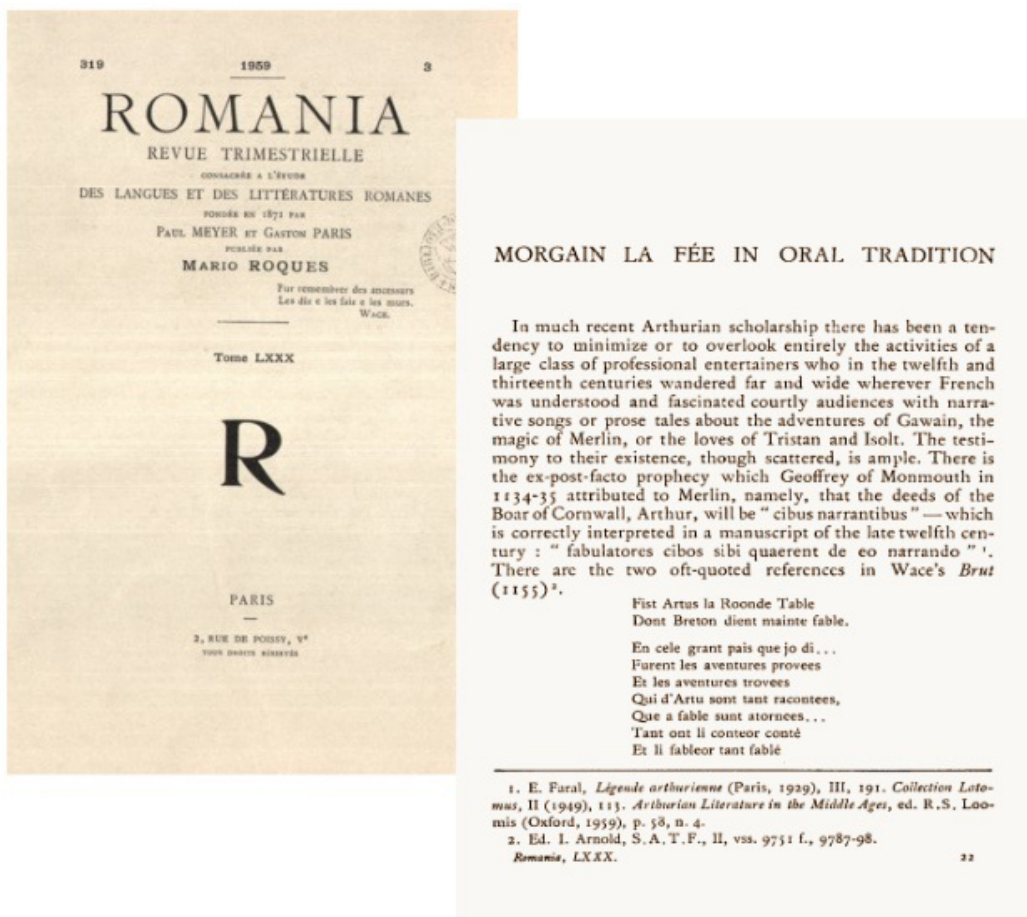


Fig. 20 - Roger S. Loomis' paper on *Morgain la Fée in oral tradition* (from *Romania*, tome LXXX, no. 319, Paris, 1959, pages 337-367)

This key article, a true milestone in research, has remained substantially unknown to the various Italian researchers who have been investigating into the myth of the Apennine Sibyl in the subsequent decades, as it is almost never quoted in the books and papers issued in Italy on the subject since its first date of publication, until it was taken into new consideration by the author of the present paper in the year 2019.

However, before we get to so recent a time, we still have to illustrate the further contributions to the investigation of the sibilline lore as proposed by further passionate researchers at the middle of the twentieth century: a philologist, Fernand Desonay, and a musician and director from Norcia, Domenico Falzetti.

They will try to get to the inner core of the legend. Unfortunately they both will miss their target, because their efforts will lead them on a wrong track. A dead end, after which the research on the Sibillini Mountain Range will get stuck on a same sterile ground for many decades.

### *2.5 Goddess Cybele, a fallacious trail: Fernand Desonay*

It is during the 1920s that the efforts to understand the mystery of the Sibillini Mountain Range turned into a real physical exertion, with the aim to gain a new access to the Sibyl's Cave, whose entranceway was long obstructed and impracticable.

An exertion which proved to be only partially fruitful, with the hard layers of solid rock substantially repelling all attempts to break into the hollows which are possibly lying beneath the ground. It was an exertion that did not involve any activity at the Lake of Pilate, which was considered as a totally different, less fascinating mythical context: an erroneous assumption, fostered by an insufficient analysis of the meaning and internal connections of the whole legendary tradition inhabiting the Sibillini Mountain Range.

Even though it is out of the scope of the present article to retrace the excavation campaigns carried out across that period, we must remember that, in the wake of a renewed attention towards the Sibyl's Cave and its antique enigma, diggers were present on the Sibyl's mountaintop in the years 1920, 1926, 1930, 1945, 1946, 1953, not to mention the many illegal diggers and treasure hunters that plagued the site throughout the same years, and beyond.

Amid the key figures who promoted most of the listed endeavours, we find Fernand Desonay and Domenico Falzetti.

Fernand Desonay was an eminent philologist and professor at the University of Liège, in Belgium. He was an illustrious member the Academie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Françaises de Belgique, and, most of all, he was the leading translator of the critical editions of the fifteenth-century literary works written by Antoine de la Sale. In his passionate fascination for the sibilline myth, he had visited the Sibyl's peak



for the first time in 1929, and had subsequently taken part to digging expeditions in 1930 and 1953, with further visits in 1948 and 1956, nurturing his own dream about a sibilline realm hidden beneath an Italian mountain as described by his beloved medieval author.

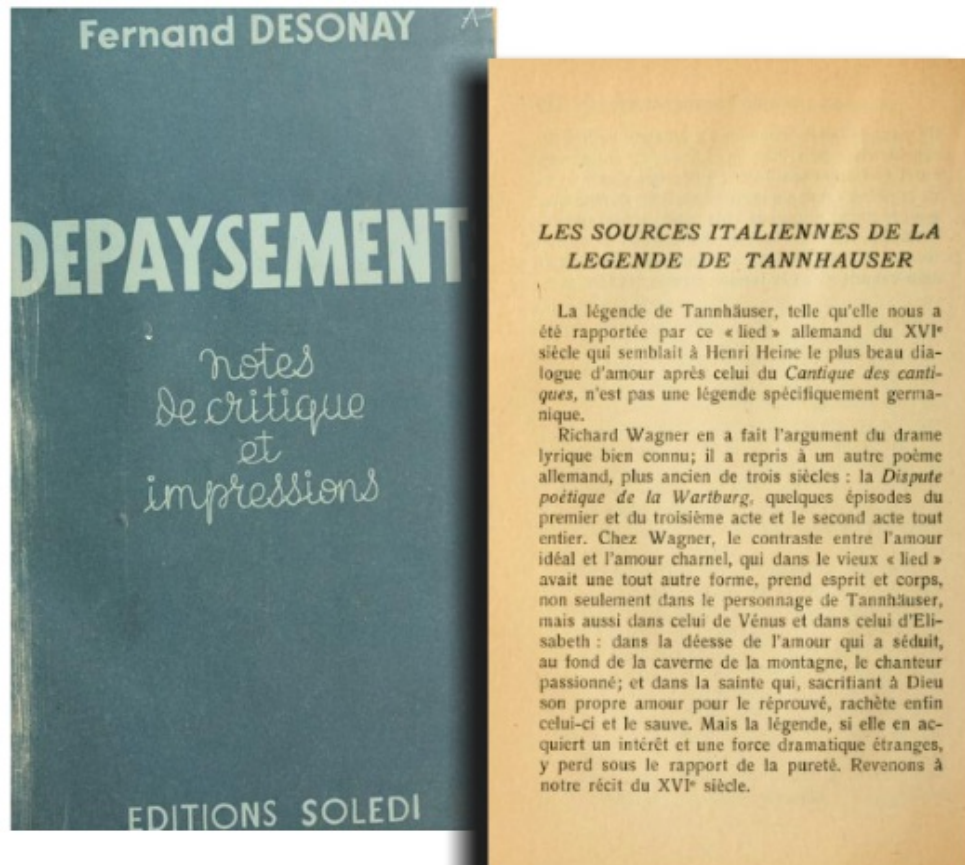


Fig. 21 - Fernand Desonay's article on Mount Sibyl included in his *Depaysement - Notes de critique et impressions* (Liège, 1945), p. 120-146)

Of course, Desonay did not subscribe in the least to the theory of a German origin for the legend of Tannhäuser. In his article *The Italian sources to the Tannhäuser's legend* (*Les sources italiennes de la légende de Tannhäuser*, 1945), after retracing the previous papers released on the subject by Gaston Paris, Heinrich Dübi and Philip Stephan Barto, he proposes his own conjecture on the birth of the mysterious legend of an Apennine Sibyl:

«Taking advantage of the results of my two journeys and the excavations at the cave, I am so bold as to present a new tentative solution. According to



me, the myth of the Sibyl must be traced back to the pagan cult of Cybele, the 'Magna Mater' of ancient Romans, goddess of the mountains, lakes, and fountains, revered through an erotic cult within the ritual cave, under the mountain's symbolic crown».

[In the original French text: «M'aidant des résultats de mon double voyage et des fouilles dans la grotte, je me permets de présenter un essai de solution neuve. A mon sentiment, le mythe de la Sibylle doit remonter au cult païen de Cybèle, la 'Magna Mater' des Romains, déesse des montagnes, des lacs, des fontaines, honorée d'un culte érotique à l'intérieur de la grotte rituelle, sous la couronne symbolique»].

Desonay's position is an evolution of the conjecture already expressed by Pio Rajna in 1912. And actually the Belgian philologist uses, in the subsequent sentences, the very same words used more than thirty years earlier by the Italian scholar and mountain climber.

In Desonay's vision, Cybele represents a good candidate to justify the presence of a possible site of worship at the Cave on the mountain-top:

«The cult of Cybele, introduced from Phrygia to Rome in 204 B.C., had experienced, across the imperial age, a great diffusion through the mountainous regions of the Apennines, and especially at the foot of the Sibillini Mountain Range. [...] Cybele is a crowned deity: Cybele 'with a tower' or 'bearing a tower' [...] Now we know that the Sibyl's cave lies beneath the mountain's 'crown'. Cybele is celebrated as the goddess of the waters, lakes and fountains. Now we know that a lake, which is called 'the lake of Queen Sibyl' in the Chantilly [Antoine de la Sale's] manuscript, lies on the mountain, not far from the cave. [...] In my opinion, the equation is manifest: Cybele is equal to the Sibyl».

[In the original French text: «Le culte de Cybèle, introduit de Phrygie à Rome en l'année 204 avant Jésus-Christ, avait pris, à l'époque impériale, une grande diffusion à travers les régions montagneuses de l'Apennin, et tout particulièrement au pied des Mons Sibyllins. [...] Cybèle est une déesse couronnée: Cybele 'turrita' ou 'turrigera' [...] Or nous savons que la Grotte de la Sibylle s'ouvre sous la 'couronne' de la montagne. Cybèle est honorée comme la déesse des eaux, des lacs et des fontaines. Or nous savons qu'un lac, dit 'le lac de la royne Sibile' dans le manuscrit de Chantilly, dort sur la

montagne, non loin de la grotte. [...] A mon sentiment, l'équation apparaît évidente: Cybèle égale la Sibylle»].

Subsequently, on this original cult and site a further legendary layer would have established an additional narrative, concerning a visit to a sensual realm:

«The medieval legends were mostly born amid the populations who most love fantastic tales, living amid the fogs as they do, on the shores of Scotland, Ireland or Brittany. [...] It is highly plausible that the Sibyl's legend, too, has a Celtic origin. In the original version, it must have been about the stay of a rejoicing mortal in a goddess' abode, initially on a permanent basis and subsequently temporarily. [...] Such is the form of the legend, which has possibly passed from France to Italy, together with the Matter of Britain».

[In the original French text: «Les légendes médiévales sont nées, pour la plupart, chez les peuples qui aiment davantage le fantastique, habitués qu'ils sont à vivre parmi les brouillards, sur les côtes d'Ecosse, d'Irlande ou de Bretagne. [...] Il est hautement probable que la légende de la Sibylle, elle aussi, a une origine celtique. Dans la version originelle, il doit s'agir du séjour, définitif d'abord, transitoire ensuite, d'un mortel trop heureux chez une déesse. [...] Telle est la forme de la légende, qui aura passé de France en Italie, en même temps que la matière de Bretagne»].

Subsequently, Desonay's conjecture was further developed by René Herval, a French historian, in his paper *From Mount Sibyl in Italy to the German Venusberg (Du Mont italien de la Sibylle au Vénusberg allemand, 1962)*, with the establishment of a link between the Lake of Pilate and the legendary lore on Cybele:

«It is known that, where the cult of Cybele existed, it was celebrated along with that of Attis, her young lover [...] Attis was portrayed with a Phrygian cap on his head, a 'pileus'. So he was called [...] 'pileatus'. From 'pileatus' to 'Pilatus' the difference is but a single word [...] We similarly find traces of the ancient cult in the legend which depicts the body of the alleged Pilate being dragged up to the lake at Mount Vettore by oxen. In Rome [...] a solemn procession accompanied, in a chariot drawn by the same animals, the statue of Cybele to the river Almo, a tributary to the Tiber. When the

procession arrived there, the priest cast the statue into the water and proceeded to the 'lavatio' or purification [...] It is possible that the statue of the 'pileatus' god may have undergone a similar 'lavatio' into the lake at Mount Vettore. Attis and Cybele, respectively turned into Pilate et Sibyl...».

[In the original French text: «On sait que, là où existait le culte de Cybèle, était célébré parallèlement celui d'Attis, son jeune amant [...] Attis était représenté coiffé du bonnet phrygien ou 'pileus'. On disait donc de lui [...] qu'il était 'pileatus'. De 'pileatus' à 'Pilatus' la différence n'est que d'une seule lettre [...] On retrouve également des réminiscences de l'ancien culte dans la légende qui nous montre le corps du prétendu Pilate trainé jusqu'au lac du Vettore par des boeufs. A Rome [...] une procession solennelle conduisait dans un char attelé de ces animaux la statue de Cybèle jusqu'aux rives de la rivière Almo, affluent du Tibre. Lorsque le cortège était parvenu en cet endroit, l'archigalle plongeait cette statue dans l'eau et procédait à la 'lavatio' ou purification [...] il est possible que la statue du dieu 'pileatus' ait subi une 'lavatio' analogue dans le lac du Mont Vettore. Attis et Cybèle, transformés en Pilate et en Sibylle...»].

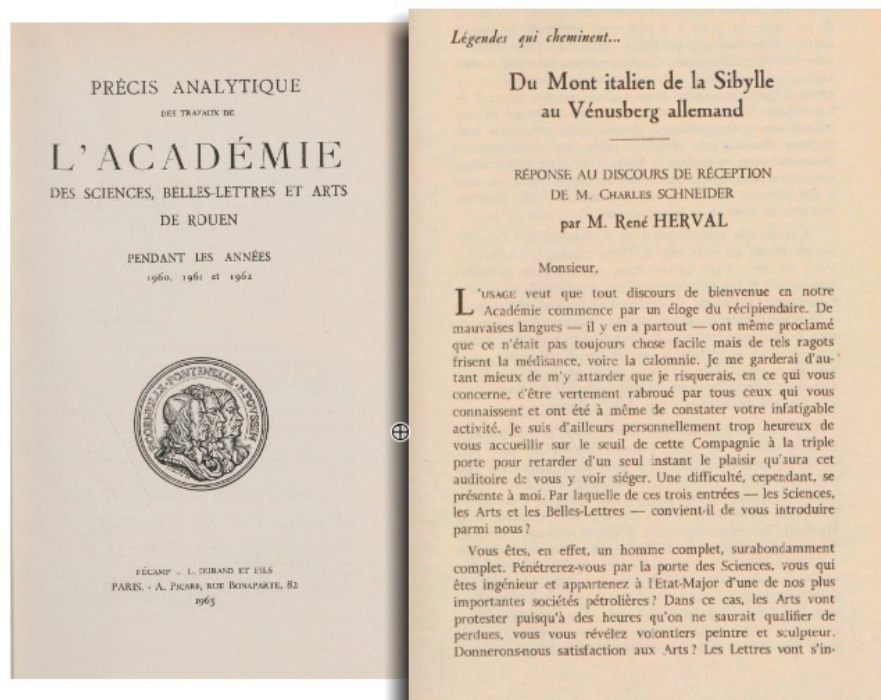


Fig. 22 - The contribution by René Herval on the Sibyl's legend included in *Précis analytique des travaux de l'Académie des Sciences, Belle-Lettres et Arts de Rouen - 1960 1961 1962* (Fécamp, 1962), p. 163-181

Strange enough, Fernand Desonay seems to utterly reject the line of investigation which brings from Antoine de la Sale and *Guerrino the Wretch* back to earlier chivalric romances, as correctly noted by Walter Pabst and Roger S. Loomis, and fully confirmed by the author of the present article in a previous paper (*Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection*). In a later Italian revised edition of his *Les sources italiennes de la légende de Tannhäuser* (*Le fonti italiane della leggenda del Tannhäuser*, 1963), he will write explicitly:

«In his [Pabst's] opinion, the tale narrated by Andrea da Barberino must be considered as a mere fable originated from various literary sources: Vergil, Ovid and the entire sibilline tradition of the High Middle Ages [...] I am not convinced of that».

[In the original Italian text: «A parer suo [di Pabst], il racconto di Andrea da Barberino deve essere considerato come una pura finzione derivata da diverse fonti letterarie: Virgilio, Ovidio e tutta la tradizione medioevale delle Sibille [...] Io non sono convinto»].



Fig. 23 - *Le fonti italiane della leggenda del Tannhäuser*, Desonay's article included in *Il Paradiso della Regina Sibilla*, a book edited by Fernand Desonay and Domenico Falzetti on the legend of Mount Sibyl (Norcia, 1963), p. 16-58

Why Fernand Desonay is so unwilling to take into consideration a chivalric origin for the tale narrated in the fifteenth century by his beloved author Antoine de la Sale? And why does he jump straight to goddess Cybele, with a leap which is truly awkward?

As we could see in our previous papers, *Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection* and *A legend for a Roman prefect: the Lakes of Pontius Pilate*, the presence of a medieval legendary layer enshrouding the narratives about the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate just cannot be denied: the touch of the characters belonging to the Matter of Britain, Morgan le Fay and Sebile, is manifest on the Sibyl's hidden realm; and, in a same way, the main elements of Pontius Pilate's medieval tale are patently visible.

But Fernand Desonay wants the account written by Antoine de la Sale to be true.

The Sibyl concealed amid the Apennines has turned into his personal dream, a fancy so magical and enthralling as to push his steps up to that far-away mountain for many times across many decades. He is known to local peasants and guides in Norcia and Montemonaco. He is a dreamer. And he wrote the most precious, perfectly beautiful words about his dream in his *Les sources italiennes de la légende de Tannhäuser*:

«I am dreaming of the Sibyl... My eyes travel up and further up... My gaze climbs the crests, jumps across the ravines... Beneath the crown of stone, there I see the goddess - there she is! - she, who inspires my longing for the most ravishing among human dreams...».

[In the original French text: «Je songe à la Sibylle. Mon regard va, va... Il escalade les rampes des montagnes, franchit les précipices... Sous la couronne de rochers, voici la déesse, - c'est elle! - inspiratrice nostalgique du plus beau des songes humains...»].

In the soul of Fernand Desonay, that dream had to be true. He would never concede, in this following the most whimsical recesses of his own heart, that Antoine de la Sale's account might be considered as a mere copy of some foreign fairy tale arrived from Germany or France, which perched

there on a barren peak, devoid of any original, enchanting mythical charge.  
A vain narrative for dupes.

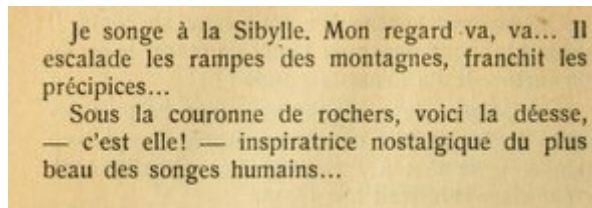


Fig. 24 - The poetical words written by Fernand Desonay on the Apennine Sibyl in his *Depaysement - Notes de critique et impressions* (Liège, 1945)

So he preferred to deny the very evidence of a patent medieval lineage for his Sibyl, and made an attempt at introducing a more illustrious ancestry, dating back to classical antiquity: Cybele, for whom no trace or mention of any shrine or cult has ever been found in connection to the Sibyl's Cave, in the known literature and at the very site. And with the introduction of a further clumsy explanation proposed by René Herval and involving Attis, Pilate, a phrygian cap and a Roman celebration with oxen, in a unmanageable effort to force Cybele into our Lake, too.

We will see that there is no need to force Cybele into the hollows of the Sibyl's Cave or the waters of the Lake of Pilate to make Desonay's dream come true.

The mythical charge that the Belgian philologist was looking for, and of which he feared the possible absence, is actually present at both sites in the Apennines, the Lake and the Cave. We will see that this mythical charge is to be linked to the presence of a legendary Otherworld, of a type that Fernand Desonay could not imagine, owing to a lack of a full understanding of the peculiar, terrifying nature of that stretch of mountainous land.

Thus, the 'Cybele connection' is to be considered as a fallacious trail: a conjecture that was introduced with the aim to confer a hue of antique 'holiness' to the site of the Sibyl's Cave, but for which no evidence is available. Even though some sort of 'holiness' may actually be assumed for the place, but on a different basis, as we will see later in this same research paper.

However, Cybele is not the only fallacious trail we encounter at the Sibyl's abode. Other trails, even more audacious and unfounded, were proposed by Domenico Falzetti during the same years.

As a passionate and enamoured investigator into the sibilline mystery, like his friend Fernand Desonay, Falzetti will propose his own conjectures as to the gods or goddesses whose names were to be invoked to make the Sibyl's Cave an ancient shrine.

## *2.6 More gods and more fallacious trails: Domenico Falzetti*

«To us it seems we are unlocking a wide-open gate when we say that the remotest origin of the legends of the Sibillini Mountain Range is to be found in the age in which the men of central Italy lived in caverns; and that the basic, fundamental themes of the various legends are derived in turn from naturalism, animistic beliefs, divination, and the rituals of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman religions; such rites had a magical, sinister hue. On the other hand, subordinate themes, typical of the Middle Ages, came from Christianity, the Lombards and the heretical movements active between the provinces of Umbria and Marche in the fourteenth century».

[In the original Italian text: «A noi par di aprire unuscio spalancato dicendo che l'origine più remota delle leggende dei Monti Sibillini va ricercata proprio nel periodo in cui l'uomo del Centro-Italia viveva nelle caverne; e che i temi primari ed essenziali delle varie leggende sono derivati via via dal naturalismo, dall'animismo, dalla divinazione, e dai riti delle religioni greca, etrusca e romana; i quali riti avevano appunto un aspetto deprecatorio e magico. Mentre i temi secondari e prettamente medievali derivano dal cristianesimo, dai Longobardi, e dagli eretici umbro-marchigiani del sec. XIV»].

These are the words written by Domenico Falzetti in his article *How the legends of the Sibillini Mountain Range were born (Come nacquero le leggende dei Monti Sibillini)*, contained in the book *The Paradise of Queen Sibyl* (1963) which also includes a contribution by Fernand Desonay, his friend and fellow-investigator into the sibilline enigma.



Domenico Falzetti was no scholar. In the 1950s he was a celebrated musician, the conductor in Italy of a famous *The One-Thousand-Little-Singer Choir* featuring one-thousand children. He was born in Norcia and, beside music, he housed in his heart another ardent passion: that for the legend of the Apennine Sibyl.

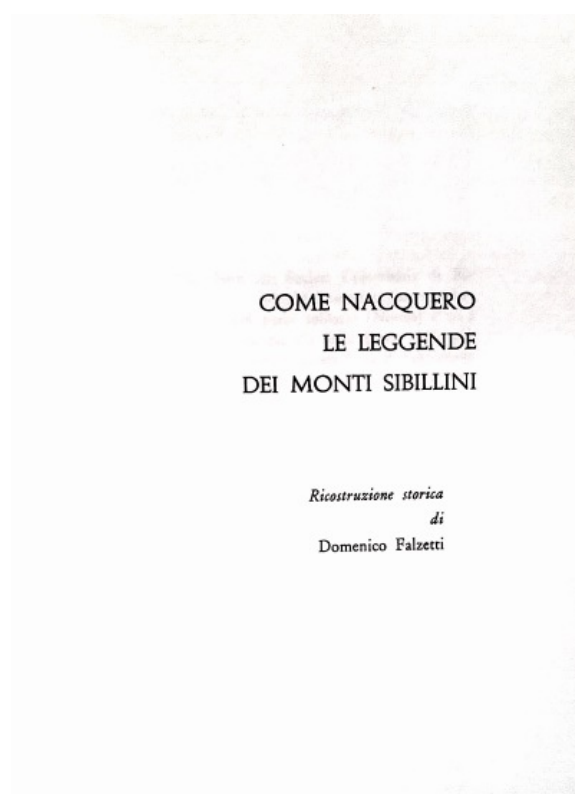


Fig. 25 - *Come nacquero le leggende dei Monti Sibillini*, Domenico Falzetti's article included in *Il Paradiso della Regina Sibilla*, a book edited by Fernand Desonay and Domenico Falzetti on the legend of Mount Sibyl (Norcia, 1963), p. 59-121

Falzetti will ascend the cliff of that mountain, up to its secretive cave, as a member of a number of different digging expeditions: the first time in 1920, then again in 1925 and 1926; subsequently in August 1930, with Fernand Desonay; and finally in 1953, again with the Belgian philologist.

With the volume published in 1963, Domenico Falzetti intended to summarise decades of personal investigations into the legend of the Sibyl's Cave. He felt that that mountain-top, housing so powerful a legend, had a consecrated character, which a remote antiquity had bequeathed to the

Middle Ages: a position to which we fully adhere, as we actually do in the present research paper. However, the methodology applied by Falzetti to justify his point cannot be agreed upon, as he often resorts to unproven allegations and arbitrary, though fascinating, inferences.

Falzetti chooses to tread an impervious path, as he does not subscribe to Fernand Desonay's natural assumption concerning the possible presence, on the Sibyl's cliff, of a shrine dedicated to the goddess Cybele, the most obvious candidate to a divine seat on that mountaintop:

«Our most beloved friend, Professor Fernand Desonay, [...] in proposing substantial, comprehensive details, supports the assumption that the Oracle of the Apennines [...] was possibly dedicated to Cybele, the 'Magna Mater'. [...] Out of the reasons proposed by Desonay, Rajna and others, this is certainly a most valid and fascinating conjecture; but we, drawing from the local sources [...] and history, we are convinced that our own theory will prove closer to actual reality».

[In the original Italian text: «L'amico carissimo il Prof. Fernando Desonay, [...] adducendo ampi e documentati particolari, sostiene la tesi secondo cui l'Oracolo dell'Appennino [...] doveva essere dedicato alla Magna Mater Cibeles. [...] Per le ragioni portate dal Desonay, dal Rajna e da altri studiosi, è da ritenere una tesi validissima e piena di fascino; ma noi, traendo spunto dalle fonti locali [...] e dalla storia, riteniamo che sia più vicina alla realtà la nostra teoria»].

And Falzetti really draws from the legendary history of Norcia when he puts forward a series of ancient deities which, according to the scarce archeological evidence available to us, were revered in the area of the Sibillini Mountain Range:

«Nemesis, the greek goddess, presided over the morality of human beings and chastised their faults. [...] An antique find of remarkable significance for our argument, and which proves an established tradition for Nemesis, is a small statue of the goddess that was unearthed at the ancient burial ground of Forca di Ancarano (Norcia). [...] The Etruscan goddess Nortia [...] was revered mainly in Bolsena [...]. In our opinion we can suppose that the bronze figure found at the burial ground in Ancarano and identified by Guardabassi as Nemesis, should be considered instead as Nortia. [...] The

transfer from Nemesis to Nortia must have taken place in the age when the Etruscans increased their strength, perhaps at the time when their commerce spread in the direction of the territory of the Picenes [...], that is in the seventh century B.C.».

[In the original Italian text: «Nemesi, divinità greca, vegliava su la vita morale degli uomini e ne puniva le colpe. [...] Un reperto arcaico di notevole importanza per il nostro argomento e che dimostra la fondata tradizione su Nemesi, è una statuetta della dea rinvenuta nella necropoli di Forca di Ancarano (Norcia). [...] La dea etrusca Nortia [...] era principalmente onorata a Bolsena [...]. A noi sembra logico ritenere che la figura in bronzo trovata nella necropoli di Ancarano e dal Guardabassi descritta come Nemesi, debba ritenersi per Nortia. [...] Il passaggio da Nemesi a Nortia si è dovuto verificare nel tempo in cui gli Etruschi vieppiù fecero sentire la loro possanza, e forse nel tempo in cui con i loro commerci dilagarono verso il Piceno [...] e cioè nel VII sec. a. C.»].

Nemesis, Nortia, and the Etruscans, with their reach across the territory of Norcia. Much of this fragmentary information is drawn by Falzetti from Feliciano Patrizi-Forti, a nineteenth-century local historian from Norcia who wrote *Historical Chronicles of Norcia* (*Memorie Storiche di Norcia*). In turn, Patrizi-Forti was taking his notes from earlier seventeenth- and sixteenth-century authors, such as Father Fortunato Ciucci and Tommaso Guerrieri.

But almost nothing of what Falzetti wrote can be retrieved in any author who lived during the age of classical antiquity.

Despite the inherent uncertainty of the listed information, Falzetti's theoretical model gets even more complex than that, as he proceeds further in his elaboration:

«Fortuna, for the Romans, was the goddess of fate [...]. So it seems natural to us to assume that the priests of the Oracle of Norcia [...], seeing that the traits and powers of the goddess Nortia were all in all the same as Fortuna, decided, with a new transformation, to assimilate Nortia to Fortuna, also creating a new title: 'Nortia the goddess of Fortune'».

[In the original Italian text: «Fortuna, presso i Romani, era la dea del destino [...]. Ci par quindi naturale supporre che i sacerdoti dell'Oracolo di Nortia [...], constatando che gli attributi e i poteri della dea Nortia erano pressoché gli stessi di quelli della dea Fortuna, abbiano nuovamente concluso convenir loro di assimilare Nortia a Fortuna coniando, per titolo, la frase: 'Nortia dea della Fortuna'»].

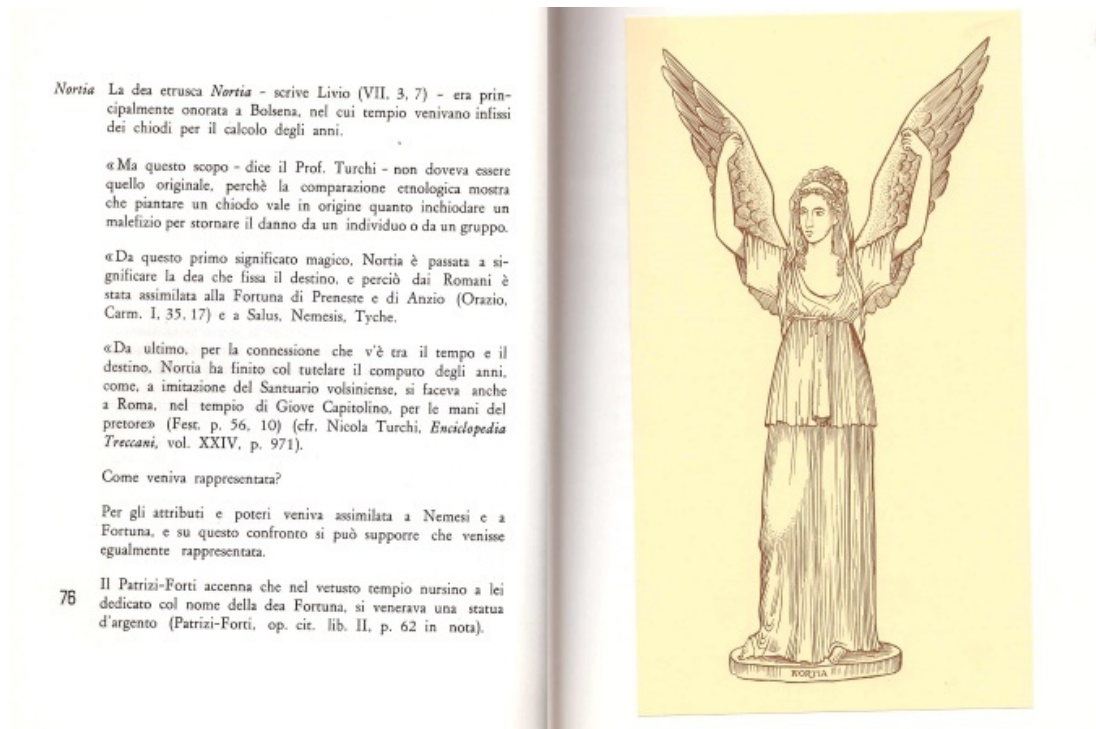


Fig. 26 - A drawing of goddess Nortia as presented in Domenico Falzetti's article *Come nacquero le leggende dei Monti Sibillini*, included in *Il Paradiso della Regina Sibilla*, a book edited by Fernand Desonay and Domenico Falzetti on the legend of Mount Sibyl (Norcia, 1963), p. 76-77

Finally, with an extensive interpretation of an excerpt drawn from the Latin author Trebellio Pollio, which mentions a visit of Emperor Claudius II Gothicus to an undetermined oracle set in the Apennines in the year 268 A.D., Falzetti infers that the Nortia / Fortuna oracle is to be identified with that same 'Oracle of the Apennines'.

The passionate researcher continues with further waves of indemonstrable assumptions, involving the Jewish diaspora and their arrival in central Italy, the clash between paganism and new Christian devotees, the arrival of the

Goths and the Lombards, heretical movements of the Middle Ages with a specific demonic penchant.

However, the whole dissertation is intertwined with numerous paralogsms based on mere suppositions, in the absence of any specific historical support and in the lack of documents which may help to prove the proposed points. Here are a few instances of unproven allegations which are only sustained by the author's intense wish to corroborate his assumptions:

«From the above situation it is easy to understand how unstable had become the reverence towards the cult of the Oracle of Nortia [...] In the countryside and on the Sibillini Mountain Range paganism resisted more than elsewhere owing to the presence of the Oracle on Mount Sibyl [...] A rumour spread (certainly in the course of the fights we described above) that the Cumaean Sibyl, who had left her Cave in Cumae, had moved to the Cave on Mount Sibyl [...] As a consequence we can assume that many of the medieval legendary themes inhabiting the Sibillini Mountain Range, like the love affairs, the handsome maidens, etc., may date to that age, and were inspired by French necromancers».

[In the original Italian text: «Da questo stato di cose è facile capire come fluttuante fosse divenuto l'omaggio al culto dell'Oracolo di Nortia [...] Nella campagna e sui Monti Sibillini il paganesimo resisteva più che altrove per la presenza dell'Oracolo del Monte della Sibilla [...] Si sparse a un tratto la voce (e certamente durante le lotte di cui abbiamo detto sopra) che la Sibilla Cumana, scomparsa dalla Grotta di Cuma, si fosse trasferita nella Grotta del Monte Sibilla [...] Viene quindi di conseguenza supporre che molti temi delle leggende medievali dei Monti Sibillini, quali gli amori, le belle donne, ecc., siano di quel tempo, e ispirate dai negromanti francesi».

The result of this uncertain methodology is a sort of tentative time schedule, which Falzetti sets down to mark the various stages that the Sibyl's Cave would have experienced across the millennia:

«From 3000 to 1500 B.C. [...] the valley of Norcia, the Sibillini Mountain Range and the Cave, too, were inhabited by a population whose name is still unknown, subsequently overruled by the 'Sicilians'. In this period the Cave was the see of a 'Tribal chief' or priest [...] In 1497 B.C., the local

population and the Pelasgians, in an effort to protect themselves from a possible return of the Sicilians, founded the settlement that in later times was called Nortia = Norza = Norsa = Nursia = Norcia [...] The decline of the Etruscans and the development of divination in Rome, particularly in the period which precedes the Empire, were the factors that led to a neglect of the oracle in Norcia [...] Towards the year 500 the Oracle of Norcia, goddess of Fortune, declined; and, following allegations by the Jews and Christians, the old priestly oracle was turned into a sibilline oracle [...] The Lombards added their own rituals, markedly heathenish and based on a stronger cult of natural elements [...] In the period 1320-1330, heretics and rebels active in the provinces of Umbria and Marche [...] brought in the territory of the Sibillini Mountain Range many of the worst arts of French magic».

[In the original Italian text: «Dal 3000 al 1500 a.C. [...] la conca di Norcia, i Monti Sibillini e quindi anche la grotta, furono abitati da una popolazione il cui nome non è ancora noto, e che fu sottomessa dai 'Siculi'. In detto periodo la Grotta fu sede di un 'Capotribù' o sacerdote [...] nel 1497, indigeni e Pelasgi, per difendersi da un eventuale ritorno dei Siculi, fondarono quella città che più tardi fu chiamata Nortia = Norza = Norsa = Nursia = Norcia [...] La decadenza degli Etruschi e il fiorire della divinazione in Roma, specialmente nel periodo che precede l'Impero, furono i fattori che fecero obliare l'oracolo di Norcia [...] Verso il 500 d.C. l'Oracolo di Nortia dea della Fortuna decadde; e su insinuazioni di Ebrei e di cristiani, il vecchio oracolo sacerdotale fu sostituito con un oracolo sibillino [...] I Longobardi vi aggiunsero i loro riti, determinati da un paganesimo basato sul naturalismo più accentuato [...] Nel periodo 1320-1330 d.C., gli eretici e i ribelli umbro-marchigiani [...] importarono nella zona dei Monti Sibillini gran parte delle più trite arti della magia francese»].

Where should we go from here?

Actually we go nowhere.

The whole elaboration set down by Domenico Falzetti, though utterly fascinating, is flawed by the lack of any substantial historical and scientific base, in the almost total absence of archeological evidences and supporting documents dating to the early Middle Ages and classical antiquity.

The idea of a cult which might have been possibly present on the peak of Mount Sibyl is not to be totally dismissed, as we will see later in this very research paper. But any conjecture involving Cybele, Nemesis, Nortia, Fortuna, or any other god or goddess proves to be a mere exercise in nomenclature, if not supported by any evidence, or, in the lack thereof, by any specific reason to assume the presence of a particular divine cult in that definite spot: the Sibyl's Cave, or the Lake of Pilate.

So the enthusiastic essay written by Domenico Falzetti is not to be considered as a scientific contribution to the comprehension of the legendary enigma of the Sibillini Mountain Range; his work is rather to be read as a sincere, unconditional profession of love for the myth of the Apennine Sibyl, a dearly-treasured portion of his very soul. Julia, his daughter, wrote the following tender words about his father:

«A mysterious fascination, an appeal which I have never fully understood nor examined urged my father, Domenico Falzetti, to 'climb the lofty peak of Mount Sibyl more than once' and turn that mount, and the legends which have made it so widely known, into the main object of his work, and entire life».

So, in our opinion, Falzetti's path was following another fallacious trail, not so different from the track that Fernand Desonay had been treading in the direction of another goddess, Cybele.

Are there other fallacious trails we can spot in this long quest for the truth about the Apennine Sibyl?

Yes, there are. Because we are now going to confront with another perplexing interpretation of the myth of the Sibillini Mountain Range. And this time it is about matriarchy, and female empowerment.

### *2.7 Unfounded theories: a feminist Sibyl*

In the history of cultural heritages, there are always occurrences in which a historical fact, element or phenomenon, an offspring of his own age, is read



by later interpreters as they would like it to be: in the light of their own life, time and credences, regardless of a honest scientific approach and despite any common sense.

This is also the case for the legend of the Apennine Sibyl, too, which, during the second half of the twentieth century, had its own chance to undergo such an objectionable mutation process.

The most patent instance of a misrepresented interpretation of the mythical lore which inhabits the Sibillini Mountain Range is provided by the cultural operation carried out by Gioconda Beatrice Salvadori Paleotti, an Italian writer, poet and insurgent fighter against the Nazi troops during World War II, better known as Joyce Lussu.

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to illustrate the heroic, multifaceted figure of Joyce Lussu, who throughout the twentieth century was a protagonist of a long, passionate struggle, conducted in Italy and abroad, to free oppressed populations, like the Kurds, and for women's liberation and empowerment.

Fascinating as her figure may be, Joyce Lussu, whose family originated from the Italian province of Marche, ventured into a questionable cultural manipulation when she happened to confront with the legend of the Apennine Sibyl, a topic she addressed in her late years.

In her *Book of Witches - Twelve stories of extraordinary women: enchantresses, witches and sibyls* (*Il Libro delle Streghe - Dodici storie di donne straordinarie: maghe, streghe e sibille*, 1990), Lussu put forward her personal vision of what a 'sibyl' is, so casting a peculiar hue on the Sibyl's legend as well:

«The sibyl is the icon of a wise, amicable woman, who loves life and people, and collects and keeps knowledge so that everybody can pick the flowers and fruits of it; she has no need to make a secret of her science, and turn her mastery into a stronghold to be guarded by weaponry. She is the token of a different choice of advancement and coexistence, the firm memory of a warless society, in which no servants enslaved by terror are present».

[In the original Italian text: «La sibilla è l'immagine di una donna saggia e serena, che ama la vita e la gente, che raccoglie e custodisce la conoscenza affinché tutti possano maturarne i fiori e i frutti, che non ha bisogno di fare della sua scienza un segreto e della sua autorità una fortezza da difendere con le armi, è il simbolo di una scelta diversa di civiltà e di convivenza, memoria tenace di una società senza guerre e senza servi dominati col terrore»].



Fig. 27 - Joyce Lussu's *Il Libro delle Streghe* - *Dodici storie di donne straordinarie: maghe, streghe e sibille* (Ancona, 1990)

Is this gentle, fanciful, idealized description of a 'sibyl' to be associated to the legendary Sibyl of the Apennines, too? The answer is yes, as the Italian writer openly specifies:

«I live in the countryside, in the southern portion of Marche, in the valley of a river whose name is Tenna [...]; its source is found at Mount Sibyl, not far from the cave in which, as is narrated, a most wise and knowledgeable woman used to dwell, generation after generation; she knew the present and the past, and she made reliable conjectures about the future. In actual reality the cave, refreshed by a subterranean stream and hidden by the snow

for many months throughout the year, was only used for food storage; and the Sibyl, as all her sisters used to do everywhere, lived in a normal house»].

[In the original Italian text: «Io vivo in campagna, nelle Marche meridionali, nella valle di un fiume che si chiama Tenna [...]; le sue sorgenti si trovano sul monte Sibilla, non lontano dalla grotta dove si dice abitasse, generazione dopo generazione, una donna molto saggia e molto colta, che conosceva il presente e il passato e faceva ipotesi attendibili sul futuro. In realtà la grotta, arieggiata da un torrente sotterraneo e coperta di neve per molti mesi, serviva solo come deposito per la conservazione delle scorte, e la Sibilla, come ovunque le sue consorelle, viveva in una casa normale»].

And, in another book (*Il libro perogno - Su donne, streghe e sibille*, 1982), she further explains:

«Each settlement, following the revolution that happened in the Neolithic, had its own sibyl [... with] the task to avoid oblivion, so as to pass on the heritage of peaceful communities being crashed by the effectiveness of weapons; they were secretly waiting for an increased consciousness, on a general, collective basis».

[In the original Italian text: «Ogni insediamento, dopo la rivoluzione del Neolitico, aveva la sua sibilla [... con] il compito di non dimenticare, di tramandare la cultura di comunità pacifiche schiacciate dall'efficienza delle armi; clandestinamente in attesa di più mature prese di coscienza generali e collettive»].

What is real in Lussu's vision about her womanly Sibyl? Is there any match between this Sibyl, with her alleged sisterhood of 'sibyls' scattered among the Neolithic villages, and the philological studies on the Sibyl of the Apennines, as she emerges from Antoine de la Sale, Andrea da Barberino and the manuscripted witnesses that tell of a chivalric lineage from the enchantresses Morgan and Sebile? And is there any connection between this Sibyl and the necromantic descriptions of the Apennine Sibyl which we found in Leandro Alberti, Martino Delrio, Crespetus and others?

No, there is no match at all between Lussu's Sibyl and the documented tradition which narrates of a Sibyl inhabiting the Sibillini Mountain Range.



Fig. 28 - Joyce Lussu's *Il libro perogno - Su donne, streghe e sibille* (Ancona, 1982)

As we illustrated in many preceding articles (*Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection, Sibillini Mountain Range: the legend before the legends, Sibillini Mountain Range, a cave and lake to the Otherworld*), the legendary figure of the Apennine Sibyl, and the sites where the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate lie, are all marked, since the earliest literary witnesses available to us, by a fully dark hue, with a demonic presence at both places, necromancy being carried out by the Cave and Lake, and a blood-curdling otherwordly character for the two geographical features which are the landmarks for the legend.

In addition to that, in a further paper (*Apennine Sibyl: the bright side and the dark side*) we saw that this sinister renown has crossed many centuries, and has never been replaced by any joyful image of a friendly, pacifist Sibyl dispensing wise counsels to local women.

Joyce Lussu's notion of the Apennine Sibyl, a specific legend with its own literary history, though belonging to her own territory, is remarkably distorted by the social and political inclination of the writer and activist, who devoted herself to manifold battles for women's empowerment and against the destructive culture of war. In Lussu's vision, the Apennine Sibyl becomes a iconic model for all women to achieve their own liberation in a male-dominated world:

«Women have always been deprived of something: self-determination, power, identity. They bear the marks of forced alterations, sacrifice of portions of themselves, centuries of abasement, harrowing disfigurement, and violence; all that generates fear, lies, misery».

[In the original Italian text: «Alle donne hanno sempre tolto qualche cosa: autonomia, autorità, identità. Portano i segni di adattamenti forzosi, di rinunzia a una parte di se stesse, di mortificazioni secolari, di mutilazioni profonde, di violenze subite che generano paure, inganni, meschinità»].

The vision presented by Joyce Lussu is set in the path defined by Marija Gimbutas, the Lithuanian archaeologist and anthropologist, who in her book *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991) proposed a controversial theory on the alleged, unproven existence of a primigenial gynocentric society, ruled by women and opposed to war, subsequently defeated and replaced throughout Europe by a male-dominated, warlike culture after 3.500 B.C.

But what has all this to do with the legends which inhabit the Sibillini Mountain Range?

The answer is: almost nothing. The documentary tradition which is available to us does not provide the least support to the interpretation of an Apennine Sibyl as a sort of womanly herald of a long-gone era of prosperity and peace. An era whose legendary existence is only supported by Marija Gimbutas, while historians are convinced that in a far past human societies were just as warlike as today, in a usual framework of fights for the appropriation of limited available resources against competing human groups.

Beside Joyce Lussu, other contemporary scholars and authors appear to have more or less intentionally neglected or thoroughly disregarded the demonic marks of the sibilline myth. However, the positive, matriarchal character of a wise Sibyl, in her capacity as a queen and a seer and a teacher of crafts to local communities of women, has never existed.

The Apennine Sibyl has never been a sort of implausible, ahead-of-her-time forerunner of modern feminist instances: such a trait is definitely not retrievable in any of the ancient sources concerning the Sibyl of the Apennines, and has no known philological background nor the least scientific evidence.

Cybele, Nortia, Nemesis, Fortuna, and now a sibilline, almost feminist goddess: all of them are wrong tracks, fallacious trails that actually lead nowhere, providing no sound clue as to what the Apennine Sibyl was.

To tread firmer grounds, we have to address an amazing scholarly figure who, in his early life and by a single, concise research paper, dating to the year 1947, impressed the right direction to the complex investigation concerning the origins of the legendary tale of the Apennine Sibyl.

An utterly outstanding contribution, which we will see in the next paragraph.

### *2.8 Being on the right track: the amazing lesson of Luigi Paolucci*

In 1947, a 22-years-old student from Montemonaco, a small hamlet sitting before the crowned cliff of Mount Sibyl, in the central Italian Apennines, presented his graduation thesis at the Department of Literature of the University of Rome *La Sapienza*. His mentor was Paolo Toschi, an eminent philologist who, in turn, had been a pupil of Pio Rajna.

The young man was Luigi Paolucci. The title of his dissertation was *The Apennine Sibyl (La Sibilla Appenninica)*. And, young as he was, by his brilliant contribution he immediately steered the discussion from a plethora of whimsical assumptions to logical reasoning, and towards the most appropriate, most productive direction:

«What is of interest for us is the fact that the said [classical] Sibyls have no relation at all with our case, and that certainly in antiquity the renowned cave set amid the Apennines was not the abode of any Sibyl. This inference is fully motivated by total lack of any relevant reference [...] Pilate has certainly nothing to do with our mountains».

[In the original Italian text: «Quel che a noi importa considerare è che le suddette Sibille [classiche] non hanno relazione alcuna col nostro caso e che nell'epoca pagana la grotta famosa degli Appennini non è stata assolutamente recesso di una Sibilla. Tale è la deduzione autorizzata dall'assenza completa di qualsiasi testimonianza in proposito [...] Pilato non ha certo nulla a che fare con i nostri monti»].

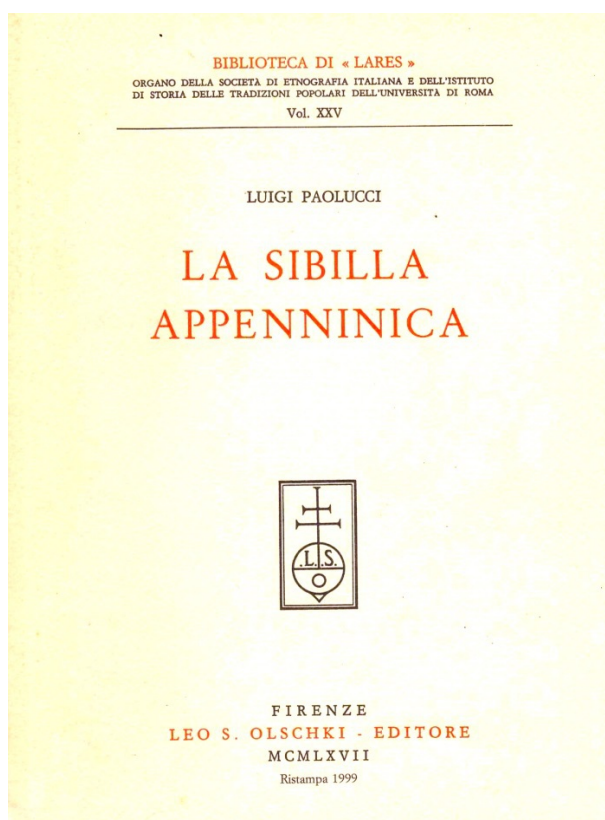


Fig. 29 - Luigi Paolucci's *La Sibilla Appenninica* (Firenze, 1967)

With a few words, a young student dealing with the presentation of his graduation thesis effectively dismantles many illusory beliefs that are held still today by the most passionate lovers of this legend: a task that we



ourselves completed in our previous articles *The Apennine Sibyl: a journey into history in search of the oracle* and *A legend for a Roman prefect: the Lakes of Pontius Pilate* by employing more than 200 pages of elucubrations.

But the talented student went even farther, as he did not flinch from a thorough criticism of the daring conjectures expressed by the most illustrious philologists of his time, like Fernand Desonay and Pio Rajna:

«We briefly note that Desonay, basing on a hasty, cursory analysis of the most ancient local traditions, and under the influence of an obstinate notion he himself had [...] pushes himself as far as to prove the existence, in antiquity, of a cult dedicated to Cybele in the cave. We clarify in advance that we totally disagree with the conjecture proposed by Desonay, even because amid the many arguments he puts forward [...] we repute that no one of them can substantially imply the existence of such a cult».

[In the original Italian text: «Diremo in breve che il Desonay da uno studio sommario e superficiale delle più antiche tradizioni locali, seguendo una sua idea fissa [...] si spinge alla dimostrazione dell'antica esistenza nella grotta di un culto dedicato a Cibebe. Premettiamo che dal canto nostro non accettiamo le idee del Desonay, anche perché fra tutti gli argomenti addotti [...] nessuno ci sembra tale da impegnare seriamente l'esistenza di un simile culto»].

Neat and clear. Again, Luigi Paolucci highlights all the inconsistencies and paralogisms that affect the reasoning of Fernand Desonay, Pio Rajna and Domenico Falzetti, all of them so enamoured of the legendary tale of an Apennine Sibyl that they seem to forget the need to constantly rely on historical data and common sense, as we ourselves noted in previous paragraphs in this same research paper.

And when other scholars, supporting the idea of the presence of the ancient goddess, and fancifully claiming that the word 'Cybele' possibly underwent a transformation into the assonant word 'Sibyl', Paolucci replies harshly:

«We briefly remind [...] that the letter 'C' in 'Cybele' is marked by a hard sound, in Latin as well as in Greek [...] so that the said event could never occur».

[In the original Italian text: «ricordiamo brevemente [...] che il C di Cibeles è duro in latino come lo è in greco [...] e che mai può essersi verificato il fenomeno suddetto»].

But Paolucci does not intend to confine the Apennine Sibyl into a mere realm of illusory dreams. He is convinced that the mythical power of the place, nurtured by centuries of popular elaboration, may hide some actual truth, and a possible actual cult, even though Cybele is not the right answer:

«The reader who followed our line of criticism of the conjecture proposed by Desonay, may have noted that we did not mean to condemn his intention to retrace ancient ages and cults, on which more recent myths and legends may have found a support. In our opinion, too, the approach that Pio Rajna handed down to the Belgian philologist is triggered by a deep penetration into the matter. If all scholars agree that legends are commonly the products of earlier traditions, we only want that when the past is retraced, this operation is carried out on a gradual basis and in a subsequent time: in the first place, a preliminary assessment on the legends and traditions of the Middle Ages is needed».

centi, ci sia parsa condannabile. L'indirizzo che il Belga ha ereditato da Pio Rajna anche per noi risponde ad una intuizione profonda.

Noi vogliamo soltanto, se è comune convinzione che qualsiasi leggenda sia sotto qualche aspetto prodotto di una precedente tradizione, vogliamo che, questo risalire al passato, avvenga gradualmente e in un secondo tempo, dopo l'esame preliminare delle leggende e delle tradizioni medievali.

Noi siamo sicuri della fama antica del monte, dove Si-

Fig. 30 - A methodological excerpt contained in Luigi Paolucci's *La Sibilla Appenninica* (Firenze, 1967), p. 15

[In the original Italian text: «Chi ci ha seguito nella breve critica, fatta alla ipotesi del Desonay, avrà notato come non la sua intenzione di risalire ad epoche e culti remoti, su cui fondare miti e leggende più recenti, ci sia parsa condannabile. L'indirizzo che il Belga ha ereditato da Pio Rajna anche per noi risponde ad una intuizione profonda. Noi vogliamo soltanto,

se è comune convinzione che qualsiasi leggenda sia sotto qualche aspetto prodotto di una precedente tradizione, vogliamo che, questo risalire al passato, avvenga gradualmente e in un secondo tempo, dopo l'esame preliminare delle leggende e delle tradizioni medievali»].

Again, in two or three sentences Luigi Paolucci summarises his brilliant vision of a comprehensive research process, the way it should be: first of all, the medieval legendary layers must be determined and analysed; only afterwards the researchers are authorised to address the lower, more antique layer of the legends of the Sibyl's Cave and Pilate's Lake. And this is exactly what we have been doing in the past two years with our previous articles *Antoine de La Sale and the magical bridge concealed beneath Mount Sibyl*, *The literary truth about the magical doors in 'The Paradise of Queen Sibyl'*, *Birth of a Sibyl: the medieval connection* and *A legend for a Roman prefect: the Lakes of Pontius Pilate*; and, then, with the subsequent articles *Sibillini Mountain Range: the legend before the legends* and *Sibillini Mountain Range, a cave and lake to the Otherworld*.

So Paolucci outlines the right track which a truly scientific investigation into the sibilline enigma must follow. The medieval tradition, the more recent layer, connected to the appearance of the name of the Sibyl, must be studied first, without searching for random candidates marked by a divine nature amid the darkness of antiquity:

«We expect the research method to confront with the earliest traditions, as it must be founded mainly on them. Because if the reverse path is trodden, we would stumble into an inconsistency in the reconstructed model, which must necessarily proceed from the present back into the past, from what is certain today to the uncertainty of the past, as we are only provided with [literary] witnesses that are very recent. As a result we would face an inability to ascertain the link between what happened before and what occurred later: precisely what happened to Desonay, who vainly attempted to connect Cybele to the Sibyl».

[In the original Italian text: «Pretendiamo che il metodo di ricerca non prescinda ma si basi anzitutto sullo studio delle tradizioni più recenti, poiché in caso contrario a parte l'incongruenza della ricostruzione che deve svolgersi necessariamente dal presente al passato, dal certo all'incerto dato che le uniche testimonianze sono quelli di tempi recenti; in caso contrario

correremmo il pericolo di non saper più trovare il nesso tra il prima e il poi, precisamente come è accaduto al Desonay che invano ha cercato di ricollegare Cibeles alla Sibilla»].

Clearer words have never been written on the subject. Paolucci's astounding intuition was that the key to the solution of the enigma of the Sibillini Mountain Range lies in the careful disentanglement of a «complex of foreign, layered legendary themes» («complesso di motivi estranei e sovrapposti»). A disentanglement process that must start from the additional layers of medieval origin which narrate of a Sibyl and a Roman prefect, and then go back in time, to the true core of the legend.

A true core, as Paolo Toschi wrote in the introductory words to the printed edition of Paolucci's essay, that will provide a final answer to the most fundamental questions of all:

«Why were these very places, and not different ones, inhabited by the Sibyl, and why did necromancers use to come here to consecrate their spellbooks? We are led, almost unintentionally, to go back to the original source, to the birth of the myth».

[In the original Italian text: «Ma perché proprio in questi determinati luoghi e non in altri abitava la Sibilla, e i maghi vengono a consacrare il libro del Comandante? Si è portati così quasi insensibilmente, a risalire al problema della fonte prima, alle origini del mito»].

*Ma perché proprio in questi determinati luoghi e non in altri abitava la Sibilla, e i maghi vengono a consacrare il libro del Comandante? Si è portati così quasi insensibilmente, a risalire al problema della fonte prima, alle origini del mito.*

Fig. 31 - The central question in the analysis of the legendary tales of the Sibillini Mountain Range as stated by Paolo Toschi in Luigi Paolucci's *La Sibilla Appenninica* (Firenze, 1967), p. XV

Unfortunately, Luigi Paolucci did not progress further into the amazing path he himself had traced. He decided to tread a different professional track, until he passed away when he was still a young man. It was the year 1959.

It is an honor, for us, to continue his work by following an intuition which is exactly similar to the penetrating vision he expressed at the middle of the twentieth century. An intuition that we drew, as we explained in a preceding paragraph, from an article of Ferdinando Neri, with his hint to the «ever-slamming metal door» («porte di metallo, che battono continuamente») found in ancient fairy tales concerning the netherworld, which opened the way to a fruitful research into the medieval layer of the legendary tales of the Sibillini Mountain Range; and yet an intuition that Luigi Paolucci had as well, by following a same rationale and fully logical *modus operandi*.

And we repute that we are now ready to make a significant attempt at concluding his unfinished work.

## *2.9 Twenty-first century, a substantial void in research*

When we leave the twentieth century and jump right into the twenty-first, do we find any further investigations or updated researches into the mystery of the legendary tales which live amid the Sibillini Mountain Range?

We find only a small number of research contributions. The limited presence of significant books and papers is blatant. And this scanty presence is only found in Italy, with no scientific production being released by contributors from other countries.

Only a handful of scientific, university-level, research-grade books and papers has been published in recent years, and only in Italy. None of them investigates the origins of the legends of the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate, a topic which is only addressed by the series of articles *The Apennine Sibyl - A Mystery and a Legend*, released by the author of the present paper since 2017.

In Italy, Sonia Maura Barillari, a philologist and professor at the University of Genoa, has been in recent years one of the few experienced scholars to confront rewardingly with the legends of the Sibillini Mountain Range, in a masterly philological framework. With her article *Town of dames: female chthonian rule between Ireland and the Sibillini Mountain Range* (*La città delle dame: la sovranità ctonia declinata al femminile fra l'Irlanda e i*

Monti Sibillini, 2009), Barillari identifies the otherworldly setting in which the narratives written by Andrea da Barberino and Antoine de la Sale must be read by the interpreter. A comparative analysis between *Guerrino the Wretch* and the earlier poem *Huon of Bordeaux* is presented. And the common characters that connect the sibilline tale to the legendary tradition of the Purgatory of St. Patrick are addressed and highlighted. We also mention Barillari's interesting article *Il 'problematico libro sulla sibilla': uno scritto inedito di Pio Rajna e le carte autografe preliminari alla sua ultimazione* (2010) on Pio Rajna and his relation with the sibilline enigma.



Fig. 32 - Sonia Maura Barillari's article *La città delle dame: la sovranità ctonia declinata al femminile fra l'Irlanda e i Monti Sibillini*, included in *L'Immagine Riflessa - Testi, società, culture*, special issue on *Medioevo folklorico. Intersezioni di testi e culture*, XVIII (Alessandria, 2009), p. 87-121

Barillari is possibly the only existing scholarly bridge, in Italy and abroad, spanning across either traditions, i.e. the Italian tradition of the Apennine Sibyl and its northern-European literary links, which point to the Matter of Britain and the Purgatory of St. Patrick: without this sort of bridge, the gap between the two cultural traditions cannot be crossed, and the Sibyl of the Apennines seems to stand out in a void that is only caused by the



substantial lack of expertise, in Italy, on topics such as the chivalric romances and the visionary tradition about the Otherworld, typically addressed by scholars from other countries, who, in turn, are not used to cope with the Italian themes connected to the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate.

With *The last Sibyl* (*L'ultima Sibilla*, 2012), Maria Luciana Buseghin, an Italian cultural anthropologist, has provided the most complete reference book on the literary tradition connected to the Apennine Sibyl: the only comprehensive guide published in Italy in the last decades on a topic so fascinating and rich of interdisciplinary and intertextual links.



Fig. 33 - Maria Luciana Buseghin's *L'ultima Sibilla* (Pescara, 2012)

Among the most significant books, we mention *Il Paradiso della Regina Sibilla* (2001), a critical edition of the text of Antoine de la Sale as taken from the manuscript preserved in Chantilly, a useful, high-quality work by the Swiss scholar Patrizia Romagnoli; and *Andrea da Barberino, Il Guerrin Meschino, edizione critica secondo l'antica vulgata fiorentina* (2005), a fundamental work elaborated by Mauro Cursietti on the existing

manuscripts, though his conjecture about a localisation of the sibilline mountains in Lucera, in the southern-Italian province of Puglia, cannot be agreed upon out of an entire illustrious literary history which definitely places the Apennine Sibyl in Norcia, and owing to the additional fact that Lucera lies on a plain with no significant elevations in its vicinity.

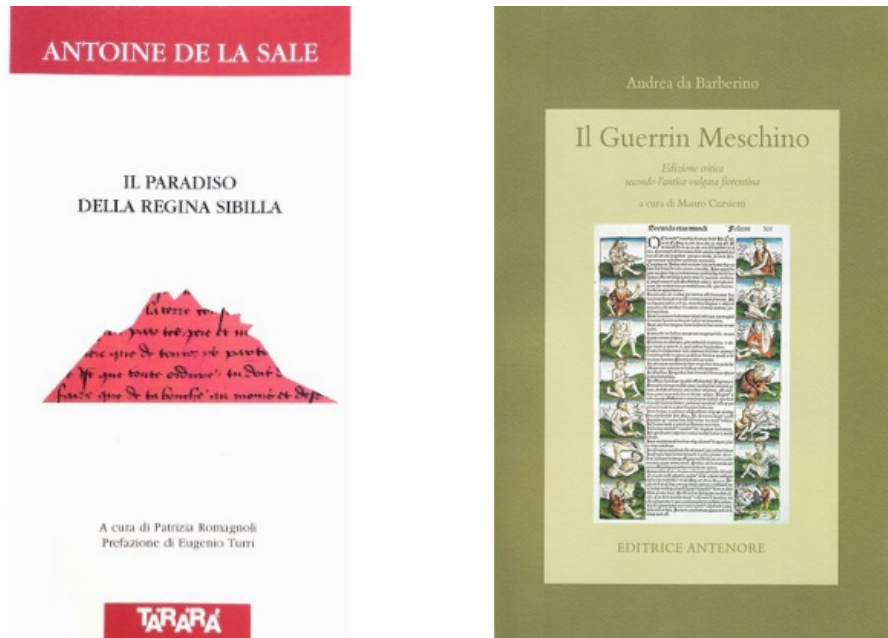


Fig. 34 - Patrizia Romagnoli's *Il Paradiso della Regina Sibilla* (Verbania, 2001) and Mauro Cursietti's *Andrea da Barberino, Il Guerrin Meschino, edizione critica secondo l'antica vulgata fiorentina* (Roma-Padova, 2005)

We also mention the remarkable article released by D. Aringoli, B. Gentili, G. Pambianchi of the University of Macerata and Anna Maria Piscitelli on *The contribution of the 'Sibilla Appenninica' legend to karst knowledge in the Sibillini Mountains* (2007), a scientific account of the geological survey conducted on the peak of Mount Sibyl in the year 2000.

In 2015 Tea Fonzi, a scholar at the University of Macerata, released a significant article on *La Sibilla dell'Appennino: una risorsa dimenticata*, in which the Sibyl of the Apennines is noted as a «forgotten resource» that should undergo a wave of renewed interest in the light of its potential in terms of cultural heritage and touristic attraction.

In this wide-open territory, not still guarded enough by the official research, much space is available for unreliable, nonscientific contributors to publish a series of dubious theories, conjectures and inferences on the origin of the myth of the Apennine Sibyl.

Many local writers and experts have proposed their own views, in fictional books and pseudoscientific essays, on the fascinating legends which live amid the crests of the Sibillini Mountain Range. Giuliana Poli, with her *L'Antro della Sibilla e le sue Sette Sorelle* (2008) sets down a fanciful scheme involving a number of small, ancient churches lying in that territory, in a cosmic liaison with the Sibyl and the constellation of Virgo. Enrico Tassetti begins a travel which starts from the paintings of Guercino, Guido Reni and Nicolas Poussin in search of the Apennine Sibyl in his novel *Il segreto della Sibilla Pastora* (2015). Alessandro Menghini, a professor at the University of Perugia, in his *L'enigma del monte della Sibilla* (2008), retraces the physical steps of Guerrin Meschino and Antoine de la Sale along the very trails allegedly trodden by the fictional hero and the French courtier. Americo Marconi, with *La Sibilla*, carried out a journey of the soul across his own memories of the Sibillini Mountain Range. Giovanni Rocchi, a prolific local author, with his *La Sibilla e i Piceni* (1998) claims that the Apennine Sibyl is to be traced back to the ancient population of Picenes, who lived in antiquity between the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea. Massimo Spagnoli declares his preplexity about the whole myth and its supporters in his *La Sibylla Appenninica - Mitologia e mitomania*, correctly noting that this legend is not original from the place, and many literary links can be spotted.



Fig. 35 - Novels and nonprofessional essays on the Apennine Sibyl

Finally, last but not least, in 2010 the author of the present research paper published a novel, *The Eleventh Sibyl*, in which some of the themes that

have been developed in the research series *The Apennine Sibyl - A Mystery and a Legend* were already referenced at an early stage, with an otherworldly character for the Sibyl and a connection to the peculiar nature of the Sibillini Mountain Range.

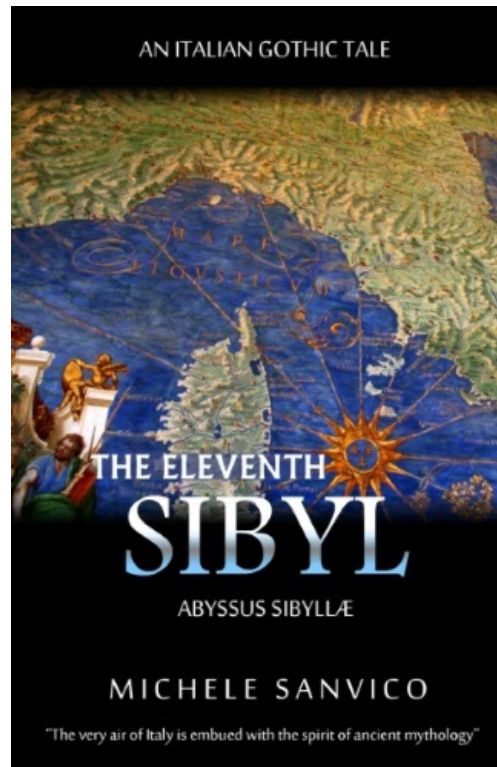


Fig. 36 - Michele Sanvico's novel *The Eleventh Sibyl*

For the sake of human compassion, we will not mention here the babbles spread around by the silly lovers of magical arts or even the friends and foes of the fiendish presences that some still think might inhabit the Sibillini Mountain Range, as if the Middle Ages still weren't over.

So where do we go from here?

We go right ahead. Ahead into the very heart of an antique enigma. The way is now open.

There is nothing left for us to do before we make our final effort to cast light on the true origin of the legendary tales which live amid the Sibillini Mountain Range.

So let's start this ultimate and conclusive travel into the inner core of the mystery of the Apennine Sibyl and the Lake of Pilate.

### *3. Into the true core of the myth*

Finally we got to the very verge of the mystery of the Sibillini Mountain Range.

With *The Apennine Sibyl - A Mystery and a Legend*, we have released a series of research papers since 2017 and throughout the subsequent years. We ascertained the subsistence of medieval legendary overlays which concealed the true mythical nature of the Sibyl's Cave and the Lake of Pilate, with their spurious Sibyl and Roman prefect, both originating from foreign narratives coming from northern Europe. Subsequently, we determined the common, original traits which marked both the Lake and the Cave, with their demons, necromancers, and tempests.

Then, we understood that the Lake and the Cave may have been considered, in antiquity, as entryways to some sort of Otherworld, in the framework of a series of most remarkable visionary tales which are part of the most ancient culture of Western Europe, including Homer's Cimmerians and Vergil's Cumaean Avernus, with numerous medieval offsprings, especially originated in Ireland, among which was the legend of knight Owein and the Purgatory of St. Patrick.

As we wrote in the conclusion to our previous paper *Sibillini Mountain Range, a cave and lake to the Otherworld*, all the clues seem to indicate that in this specific location of Europe, amid the Sibillini Mountain Range, by a Lake and a Cave, mortal beings like Aeneas, like Owein, may have made actual attempts to access a different world, normally forbidden to the living: a realm of dead souls, a kingdom which was set under the rule of non-human entities, apparently of a divine, terrifying nature. A chthonian, subterranean Otherworld.

A passageway to some sort of supposed demonic presence. An access that was to be unlocked by means of necromantic rituals. A point of contact



with a subterranean Otherworld. A 'hot spot', a crevice drilled into the mountains to establish an appalling communication with the chthonian powers beneath. A break in the continuum of our ordinary world.

We are now about to answer two fundamental, hair-raising questions. The hunt for the answers to these questions has lasted many centuries, from the time of Antoine de la Sale up to Fernand Desonay and Luigi Paolucci.

And the questions are:

- 1) why this Apennine site was possibly considered as an entryway to the Otherworld?
- 2) if our assumptions are true, what sort of Otherworld was this? What sort of dreadful dream did men conceive at the Lake and Cave set amid the mountains of the central Apennines?



Fig. 37 - Mount Vettore and the Sibillini Mountain Range flooded by the slant rays of sunset

As we stated at the very beginning of the present article, the hypothesis we are going to set down in the following paragraphs is basically a conjecture, scientific as it claims to be: it is to be considered as a proposed solution to the legendary riddle connected to the presence of amazing myths that live amid the Sibillini Mountain Range. As such, our conjecture can certainly be

the subject of critical analysis for a thorough evaluation of its reasonableness and plausibility. It should certainly undergo a further, qualified assessment on its actual validity, an assessment to be carried out by interested scholars and researchers.

So let's start our final journey into the shaping of a conjecture which concerns the potential reason for which a Lake and a Cave set amid the Sibillini Mountain Range, in Italy, were turned by men in antiquity into a possible, legendary passageway to the Otherworld.

As we wrote in the previous paper we mentioned above, we believe that the conjectured legendary credence concerning an entryway to a mythical Otherworld in central Italy was possibly one of a most terrific, dreadful fabric.

An entryway, a crevice in our world, opened in the mountainous ridges out of sheer terror. Terror for one own's life. Terror for the fate of one's family. Terror for the ruin of one's land.

Because, in our opinion, the nature of this sibilline Otherworld is closely linked to the very nature of this Apennine territory, and to a very specific, blood-curdling word. A word which unchains the deepest fears of human soul.

And this word is earthquake.

#### *4. The land of earthquakes*

##### *4.1 A ghastly unheralded visitor*

The sky may be clear or cloudy. It may be snowing, or raining, or a warm sun may shine over the land. It may happen during the day, or in the middle of the night, or just before dawn.

You never know when it comes. Yet, one day, it comes.



First, the roar comes. A baleful, fiendish noise, which proceeds from the abysses underneath, growing louder and louder beneath your feet, as an evil titan who announces its terrifying visit.

Then, the shock arrives. The world begins to move, slowly at first, with a dull oscillating motion, up and down, up and down again, so that you cannot keep an upright position anymore, as the roar deepens and turns into a fiendish bellow.

Now the ground starts to sway from right to left, and next from left to right, and once again from right to left, as the first thick fragments of plaster begins to detach from the walls, and frenzied cattle, raising loud, terror-stricken calls, rush about frantically, as if they were bewildered corpses brought back abruptly to life from the realm of the dead.

And, at last, the very surface of the earth surges. The beast screams with enraged might; like a shroud, now its thundering voice covers the horrified wails raised by the human beings. The world is blown up from the inside; the walls open up; the roofs collapse, madly shaken; wrecked stones, broken shingles, ruined beams of wood are all crashing to the ground, burying and crushing flesh and blood and wreckage, while for long, interminable seconds the shock goes on, smashing steadfastly, banging men and earth as a hammer being wielded by the crazy hands of a madman.

Afterwards, all lies still in death, destruction, and silence.

The beast has come and gone. Once again it has drowsed into its dreamful sleep; and many years will elapse before it awakens anew.

But you know, everybody knows that one day, or one night, it will come back again. Right there.

There. In the Sibillini Mountain Range.

Because the Sibillini Mountain Range are a land of earthquakes. From the remotest antiquity. Since time immemorial.

It is in the very area of the Sibillini Mountain Range, in central Italy, that earthquakes are very frequent. And very destructive.

This fact has turned into a manifest evidence on the fateful days of August, 24th and October, 30th 2016. On the first day, at 3.36 in the night, while the whole land was sleeping, a powerful earthquake, totally unheralded, struck the Sibillini Mountain Range from its southern borders. The towns of Amatrice, Accumoli and Arquata were annihilated, and Castelluccio di Norcia, set on a hill in the middle of the mountainous ridge, was partially demolished. Three hundred lives were claimed that night by the mighty power beneath.



Fig. 38 - The town of Arquata, on the southern edge of the Sibillini Mountain Range, demolished by the earthquakes in 2016

Two months later, after a series of subsequent shocks which originated from the northern side of the massif, a second, giant blow hit the whole region, the epicenter laying in the vicinity of the town of Norcia: Castelluccio was entirely wiped out, and Norcia itself was damaged, though substantially spared out of a thorough, far-sighted reconstruction

conducted by Mayor Alberto Novelli more than three decades earlier, following a previous earthquake.



Fig. 39 - The hamlet of Castelluccio di Norcia sitting on hill before Mount Vettore, wrecked by the earthquakes in 2016

Because on September, 19th 1979 another earthquake had struck the eastern side of the Sibillini Mountain Range. And in 1971 other seismic waves hit the same area. In addition to that, if we proceed further backwards in time, we get to the devastating earthquake which occurred on August, 22nd 1859, again in the mountainous ridges set between Mount Vettore and Norcia. That time, the monster underneath claimed nearly a hundred lives:

«The heat was intense and suffocating; the sky was encumbered with large clouds, murky and hideous, agitated and amassed horizontally towards the southwestern horizon [...] A powerful, vigorous bumping shake, accompanied by a deep grave roar, not different from the rumble of a great

thunder [...] preceded six further wavering, horizontal shakes, which ended, as it seems, in the space of six or seven seconds».

[In the original Italian text: «Il calore era stemperato e soffocante: il cielo presentavasi ingombro di nuvoloni bruttamente torbidi, scomposti, ed accampati in aria, segnatamente verso Sud-Ovest, in senso orizzontale. [...] Una validissima e veementissima scossa sussultoria accompagnata da cupo e profondo rombo simile al bombire di un gran tuono [...] precedé altre sei terribili scosse ondulatorie, or orizzontali, compiutesi, come pare, nello spazio di sei, o sette minuti secondi»].

**RELAZIONE**  
**DEL TERREMOTO**  
**CHE DESOLÒ NORCIA**  
**IL GIORNO 22 AGOSTO 1859**  
**E DI UN INCENDIO**  
**AVVENUTO IL 6 SETTEMBRE**  
**DELLO STESSO ANNO**  
 SCRITTA  
**DALL' ABB. LEOPOLDO MANNOCCHI**

**ROMA**  
 TIPOGRAFIA DI ANGELO PLACIDI  
 Via Sant' Elena N. 71.  
 1860

Sorse finalmente l'inafastissimo 22 Agosto, giorno di Lunedì del volgente anno 1859 che segnava la totale distruzione di Norcia. Il calore era stemperato e soffocante: il cielo presentavasi ingombro di nuvoloni bruttamente torbidi, scomposti, ed accampati in aria, segnatamente verso Sud-ovest, in senso orizzontale. Nell'atto dunque che batteva un' ora e un quarto

Ma il sermo della cosa è che una validissima e veementissima scossa sussultoria accompagnata da cupo e profondo rombo simile al bombire di un gran tuono, la quale atterrò di colpo molti coloni sparsi per le circostanti campagne, e non pochi cittadini seduti a mensa, precedé altre sei terribili scosse ondulatorie, od orizzontali, compiutesi, come pare, nello spazio di sei, o sette minuti secondi. Tutto questo

Fig. 40 - The earthquake of August, 22nd 1859 from *Relazione del terremoto che desolò Norcia...* written by Abbot Leopoldo Mannocchi (Roma, 1860), p. 9 and 11

Let's travel further back in time, until we meet another ruinous earthquake which devastated Norcia and the Sibillini Mountain Range. It was May, 12th 1730 and the seismic waves caused the death of many hundreds:



«On May, 12th, at 10 in the evening, in Rome a fierce earthquake was perceived which lasted some 6 minutes [...] it demolished almost all the buildings in the small town of Norcia, where many people were buried by the collapsing walls [...] In Norcia there were three shocks, of which the last was so savage that all the buildings in town were disrupted to their roofs»].

[In the original French text: «Le 12. Mai, vers les 10. heures du soir, on sentit à Rome une secousse de tremblement de terre assez violente qui dura environ 6 minutes [...] elle a abbatu presque toutes les Maisons de la petite Ville de Norcia, où plusieurs personnes ont été ensevelies sous les ruines [...] Il y a eu à Norcia trois secousses, dont la dernière a été si violente, que toutes les Maisons de la Ville ont été renversées de fond en comble»].

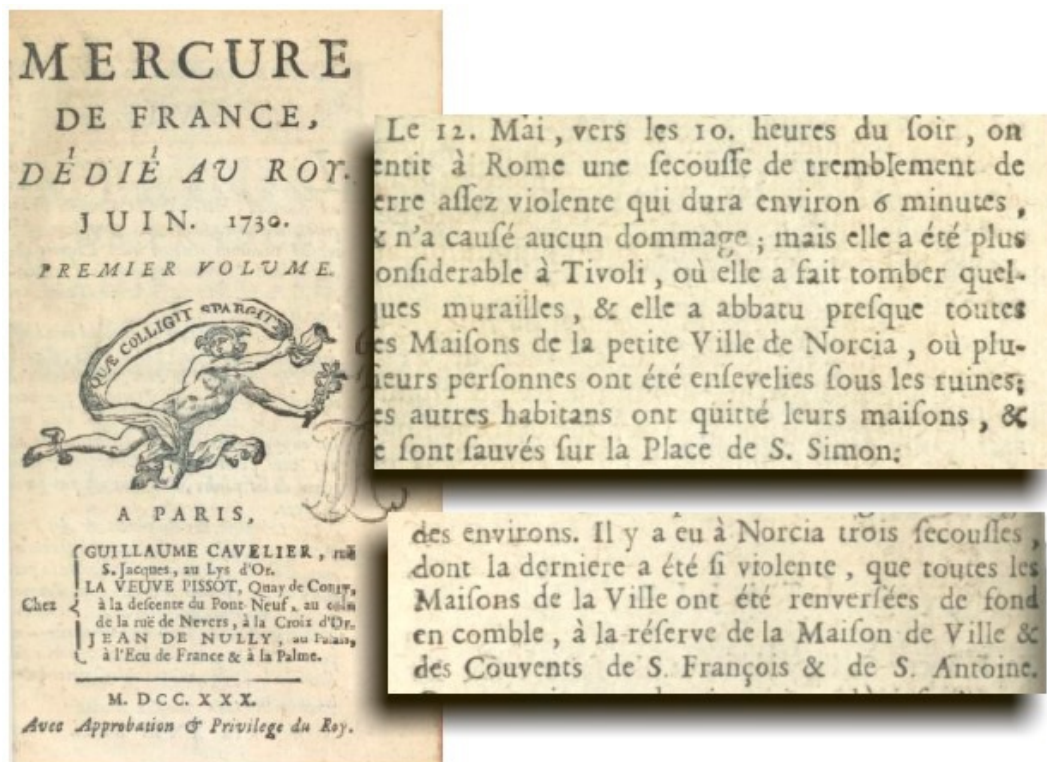


Fig. 41 - A report on the 1730 earthquake which appeared in the *Mercure de France*, Vol. I, June 1730 (Paris, 1730), p. 1223 and 1224

Further back we go, and our journey extends only a handful of decades backwards before we find the most brutal earthquake that ever hit the

Sibillini Mountain Range in recent centuries. On January 14th, 1703 a tremendous event smashed the whole land:

«In the evening of the following 14 January, at 1:45 in the night, while the sky was cloudy and rainy, so frightful an earthquake came that in a single moment Norcia, Cascia, Preci and a number of other neighbouring hamlets were totally destroyed, and more than 800 people died beneath the ruined buildings [...] Many shocks had announced it, so to speak, that had hit a portion of the province of Umbria».

[In the original French text: «Le soir du 14. Janvier suivant, environ à une heure et trois quarts de nuit, par un temps couvert et pluvieux, il survint un Tremblement de Terre si épouvantable, qu'en un moment, Norcia, Cascia, le Preci, et quantité d'autres liex du voisinage, en furent entierement renversez, et plus de 800 personnes y perirent sous les ruines. [...] Il avoit été annoncé, pour ainsi dire, par diverses secousses, qui avoient agité une partie de l'Ombrie»].

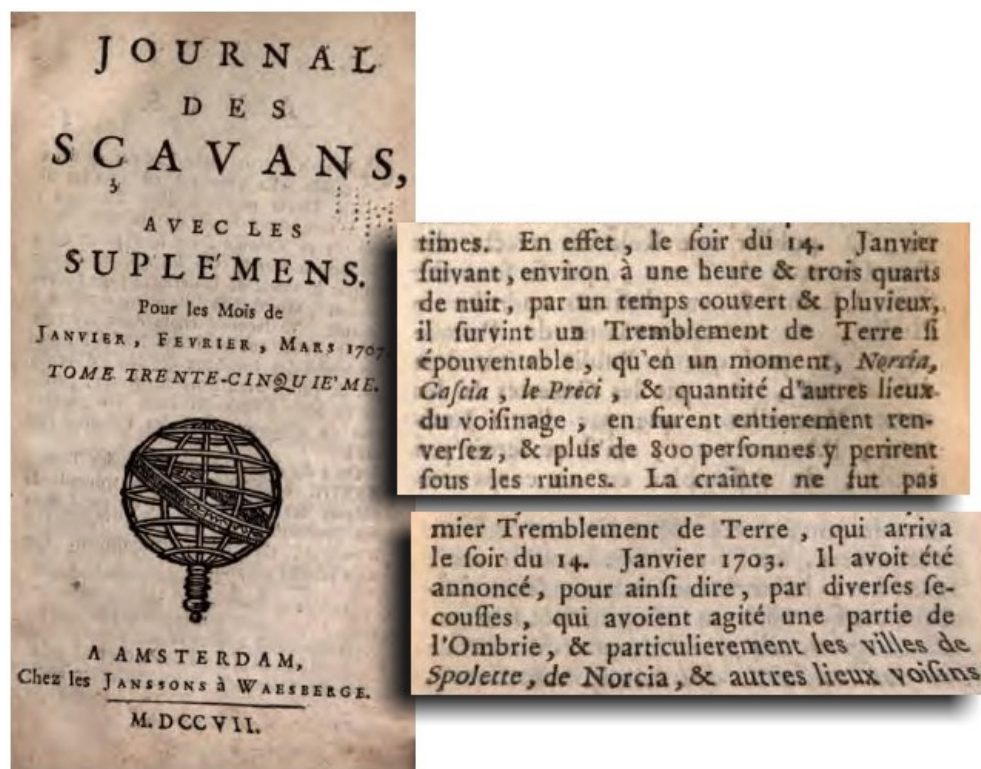
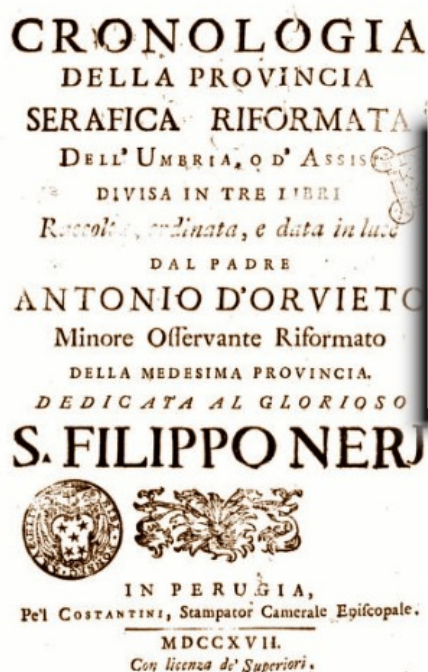


Fig. 42 - The 1703 earthquake described in the *Journal des Sçavans*, Vol. XXXV (Amsterdam 1707), p. 250 and 249

It was a cataclysmic earthquake, as another chronicler noted with appalling words:

«But the most grievous earthquake, which for its extended reach troubled the largest portion of Italy, occurred in 1703. Following a terrifying and ceaseless surge of the earth, in the evening of January, 14th, at 1:45 in the night, not only the whole Province of the Mountain was ruined but it also occurred the utter destruction of half of the wretched town of Norcia, with the remaining, upper part, though not entirely smashed down, which showed its collapsing buildings, all marked by frightful cracks as if they were ghastly mouths, threatening the lives of their miserable inhabitants».



non poco numerosi singolarmente in quel tempo . Ma il più lagrimevole, e che per la sua grand' estensione pose in grandissima costernazione tutta quasi l' Italia , fu nel 1703. al cui spaventoso, e lungo traballar della terra , la sera delli 14. di Gennajo , ad un' ora , e quasi tre quarti di notte , alle rovine di tutta la Provincia della Montagna s' unì la total' everfione della metà della sua povera Norcia, restando l' altra parte superiore , se non interamente atterrata, così maltrattata ne' suoi Edifizj, che tutti aprendosi in orribili bocche di spaventose fiffure , minacciavano l' imminente pericolo della vita agli Abitatori infelici; sicchè quel , che meritavano di salvarsi in quel gran

Fig. 43 - The 1703 earthquake from *Cronologia della provincia serafica riformata dell'Umbria, o d'Assisi divisa in tre libri raccolta, ordinata, e data in luce dal padre Antonio d'Orvieto* (Perugia, 1717), p. 269

[In the original Italian text: «Ma il più lagrimevole, e che per la sua grand'estensione pose in grandissima costernazione tutta quasi l'Italia, fu nel 1703, al cui spaventoso, e lungo traballar della terra, la sera delli 14. di Gennaio, ad un'ora, e quasi tre quarti di notte, alle rovine di tutta la Provincia della Montagna s'unì la total everfione della metà della sua



povera Norcia, restando l'altra parte superiore, se non interamente atterrata, così maltrattata ne' suoi Edifizj, che tutti aprendosi in orribili bocche di spaventose fisure, minacciavano l'imminente pericolo di vita agli Abitatori infelici»].

If we proceed further backwards, we reach December, 1st 1328, when another terrifying earthquake came upon the land:

«In the said year 1328, in the first day of December, many earthquakes occurred in the province of Marche, in the territory of Norcia, so that the largest part of the said town of Norcia collapsed, and the town walls, and the towers, houses, buildings, churches ruined because of that ruin, and that night more than five thousand people lost their lives».

[In the original Italian text: «Nel detto anno M.cccxxviii. all'entrante di Dicembre furono diversi tremuoti nella Marca, nelle contrade di Norcia, per modo che quasi la maggiore parte della detta città di Norcia subissò, et caddono le mura della città, et le torri, et case, et palazi, et chiese, et della detta rovina perché fue subita, et di notte morirono più di cinque mila persone»].



Fig. 44 - An earthquake occurred in 1328 described by Giovanni Villani in his *Croniche* (Venezia, 1537), p. 196

If we push ourselves back as far as the Roman Age, we find that in the year 268 B.C., when Roman troops were engaging in a war the ancient population of Picenes near the town of Asculum, on the eastern borders of the Sibillini Mountain Range, in the midst of the battle a frightful earthquake occurred («tremente inter proelium campo»), as reported by second-century Latin writer Lucius Annaeus Florus in his *Epitomae de Tito Livio*.



Fig. 45 - The excerpt on an earthquake near Asculum as drawn from Lucius Annaeus Florus' *Epitomae de Tito Livio* (ninth-century manuscript Pal. Lat. 894 preserved at the Universitätsbibliothek in Heidelberg), opening folium and folium 12v

And even farther back, indistinctly perceived through the mists of time, we can have a glimpse of the devastation that ravaged ancient Norcia, its temples being crushed down, «Nursiae aedes sacra terremotu disiecta», as Julius Obsequens, a Latin author, reports in his very short, quite elusive account in the *Prodigiorum Liber*. It was the year 99 B.C., feebly outlined against the fathomless abysses of time.

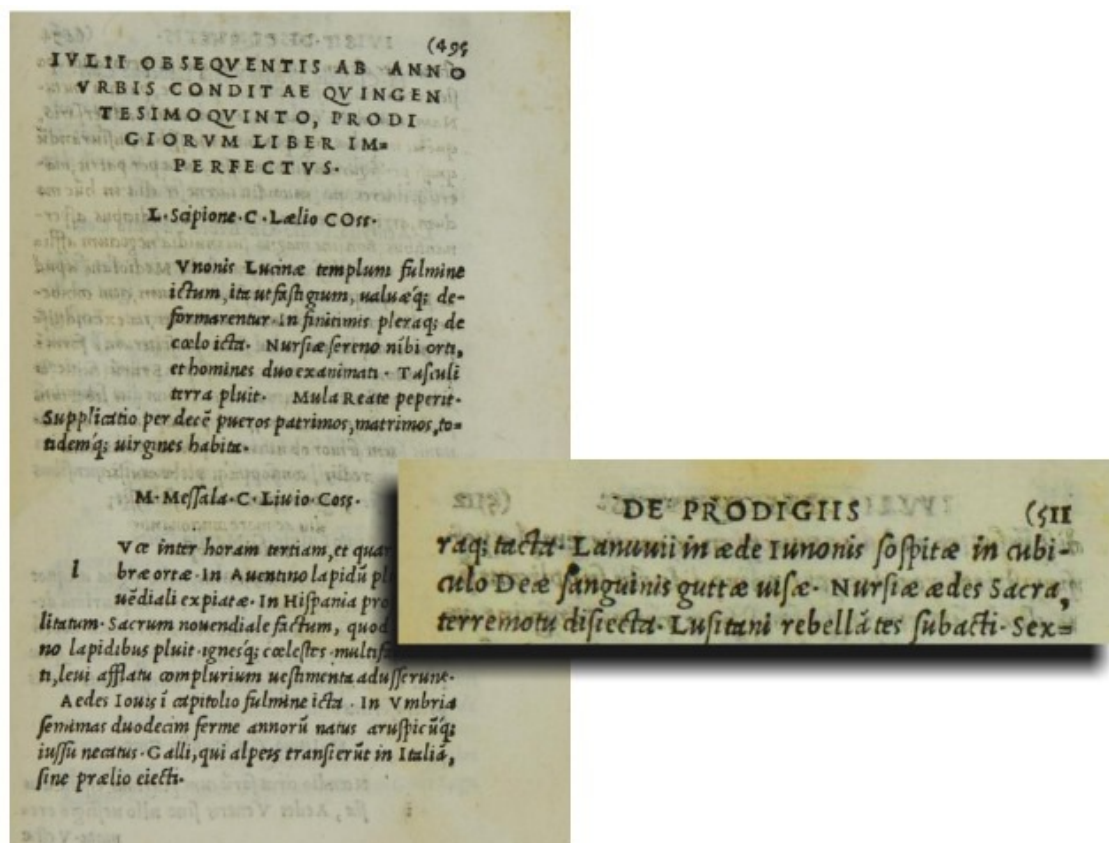


Fig. 46 - The mention of an ancient earthquake in Norcia from Julius Obsequens' *Prodigiorum Liber* (in a precious edition printed in 1508 by Aldus Pius Manutius), p. 495 and 511

Back and back we can go, into a history that is now almost lost, but not completely: by using paleosismology and trench excavations, which were dug near the town of Norcia (Paolo Galli et al., *Holocene paleoseismology of the Norcia fault system (Central Italy)*, 2018; Fabrizio Galadini et al., *Paleoseismology of silent faults in the Central Apennines (Italy): the Mt. Vettore and Laga Mts. Faults*, 2003), we can explore the fault lines that are concealed beneath the ground. And what we find is appalling: frightful seismic events can be retrieved, frozen in the displaced strata of material, with the marks of earthquakes of formidable intensity dating around the second century B.C., and to some interval of time set between the seventh and the fifth century B.C., with signs of further events near the ninth century B.C. and even thousands of year earlier, in 1600 B.C. and 4/5.000 B.C.



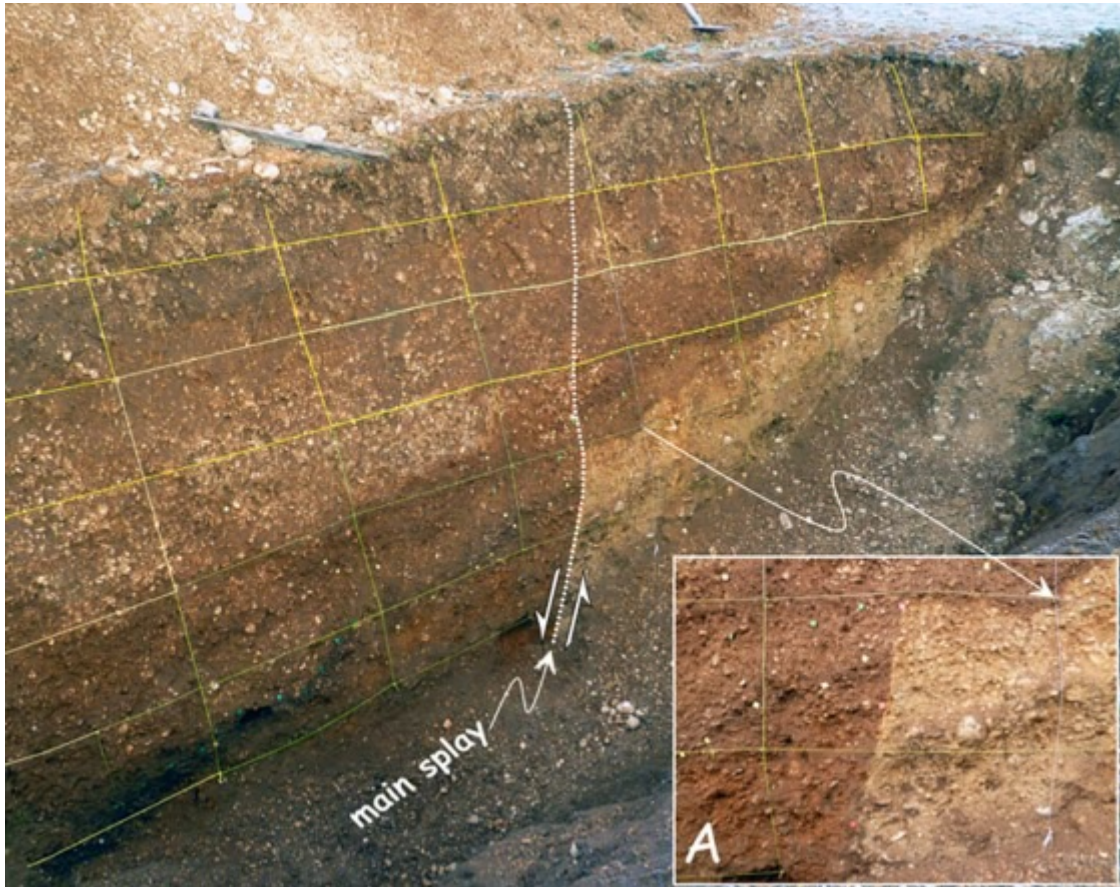


Fig. 47 - A trench dug for paleoseismic investigation north of Norcia showing the effects of earthquakes on the fault line concealed beneath the surface sediments; the displacement shown in the figure was dated by researchers to the eighth century B.C. (Paolo Galli et al., *Holocene paleoseismology of the Norcia fault system (Central Italy)*, in *Tectonophysics*, Vol. 745, 2018, p. 166)

Earthquakes. Seismic waves which repeatedly hit Norcia and the whole massif of the Sibillini Mountain Range. Across many millennia. And the focus, the originating point of those sudden, most destructive shakings of the earth, very often lies right beneath the same mountainous chain. Some six miles underneath.

Because the Sibillini Mountain Range, as the whole Apennine chain in Italy, but with a specific, recurrent susceptibility, is one of the points of fracture between two titanic geological structures.

As we will see in the next paragraph.

#### 4.2 Fractures in the earth from a titanic strain

Seismic Zone 1: this is the ranking of the western side of the Sibillini Mountain Range in the Seismic Classification Chart elaborated by the Department of Civil Protection of Italy. It implies a maximum level of risk owing to high probability of earthquake occurrence, with a medium-to-maximum risk on the eastern versant.

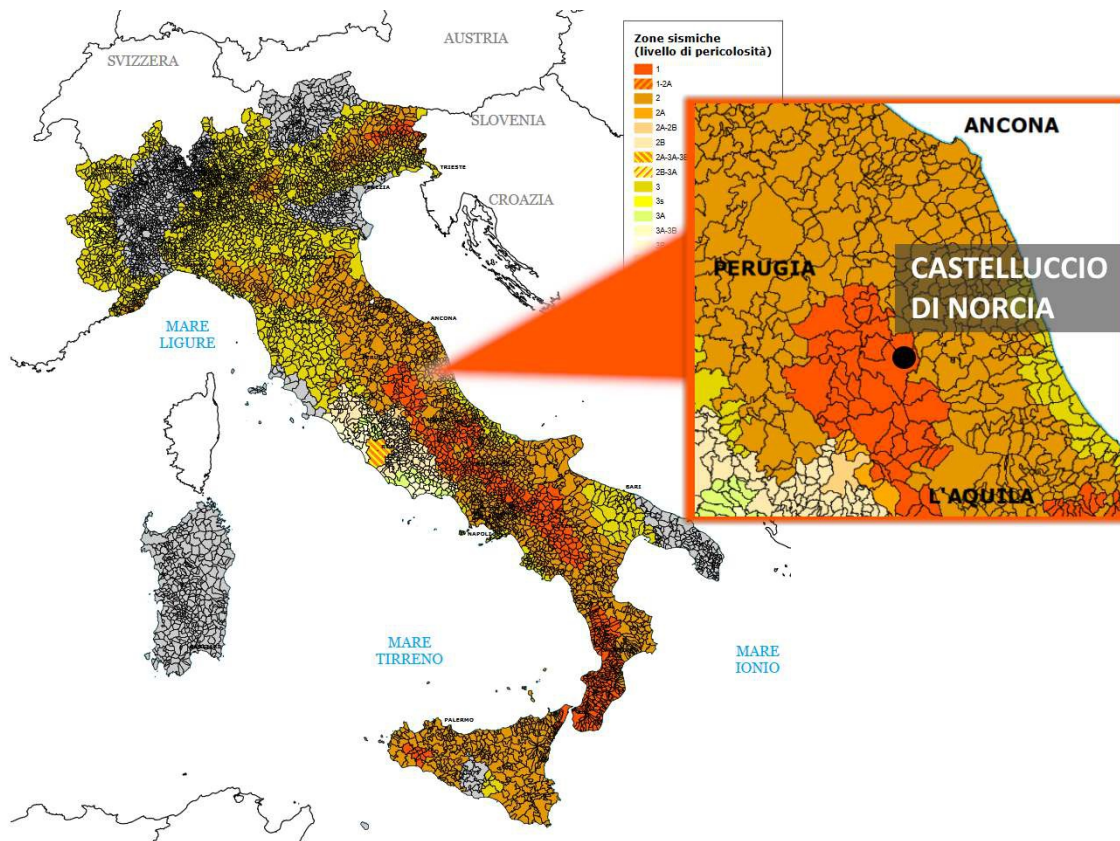


Fig. 48 - Seismic Classification Chart elaborated by the Department of Civil Protection of Italy

The whole of the Apennine chain, in its central and southern sections, is ranked as Zone 1. But the Sibillini Mountain Range is a very special portion of this high-risk ridge: it is positioned at the very northern end of the risk chart; and it is at this specific point that giant faults are hidden beneath the cliffs, with a powerful ability to unleash catastrophic events of

the highest seismic intensity. An intensity which can potentially reach a magnitude of 7.0, the maximum within the entire Italian peninsula.

The Italian peninsula is at the center of a titanic strive between two giant portions of the Earth's crust: the Eurasian and the African plates, which are mutually colliding at a speed of 6 millimeters per year (Paolo Galli et al., *The awakening of the dormant Mount Vettore Fault*, 2018).

But their collision is not an open, face-to-face combat. They challenge each other through the interposition of a third, smaller plate, or an advanced section of the African plate according to some: it is the Adria plate, an elongated portion of crust which lies beneath the Adriatic Sea, with edges which run along the Apennine chain and the coastline of Croatia (Nicola D'Agostino et al., *Active tectonics of the Adriatic region from GPS and earthquake slip vectors*, 2008).



Fig. 49 - An artist's impression of the boundaries between the African and Eurasian plates, with the Adria subplate highlighted

The Adria plate: with its counterclockwise-rotating motion, it produces a reverse effect on the interaction between the two main plates in the Apennine line, the Eurasian and African: the two giant structures, along the Italian mountainous ridge, tend to move away from one another, at an



extension rate estimated between 3 and 5 millimeters per year (Christian Bignami et al., *Volume unbalance on the 2016 Amatrice - Norcia (Central Italy) seismic sequence and insights on normal fault earthquake mechanism*, 2019).

The extension process, which started possibly as early as in late Pliocene, 3 million years ago, takes place along a northeastern-southwestern direction, perpendicular to the Apennine chain. As a result of the mighty strain, the crust cracked and fractured: long faults, parallel to the Apennines, opened in the rock beneath, as if a titanic accordion was pulled by giant hands from both sides, expanding its bellows to the point of rupture.

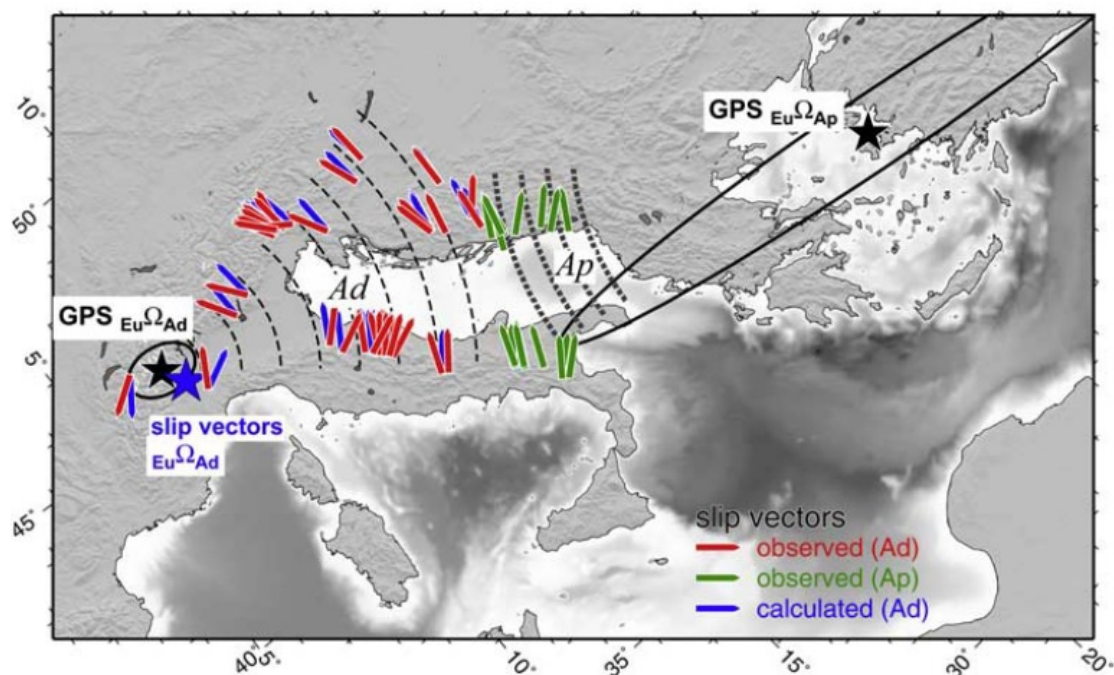


Fig. 50 - Earthquake displacements of the Adria subplate (red arrows) as it moves away from the African plate (on the bottom side of the picture) ( (Nicola D'Agostino et al., *Active tectonics of the Adriatic region from GPS and earthquake slip vectors*), in *Journal of Geophysical Research*, Vol. 113, 2008)

The titanic strain acting on the Apennine ridge has led to the opening of huge intermontane basins (Paolo Galli et al., op. cit.). As the two confronting plates exert their pull towards opposite sides, the Apennine tend to subside, and large plateaus and valleys are created in the available space. This is what happened on the western side of the Sibillini Mountain Range, with the presence of two extended expanses of flat land set amid the



impervious ridges: the Plain of Santa Scolastica, where the town of Norcia lies, and the Great Plain (Pian Grande) at the very foot of Mount Vettore.

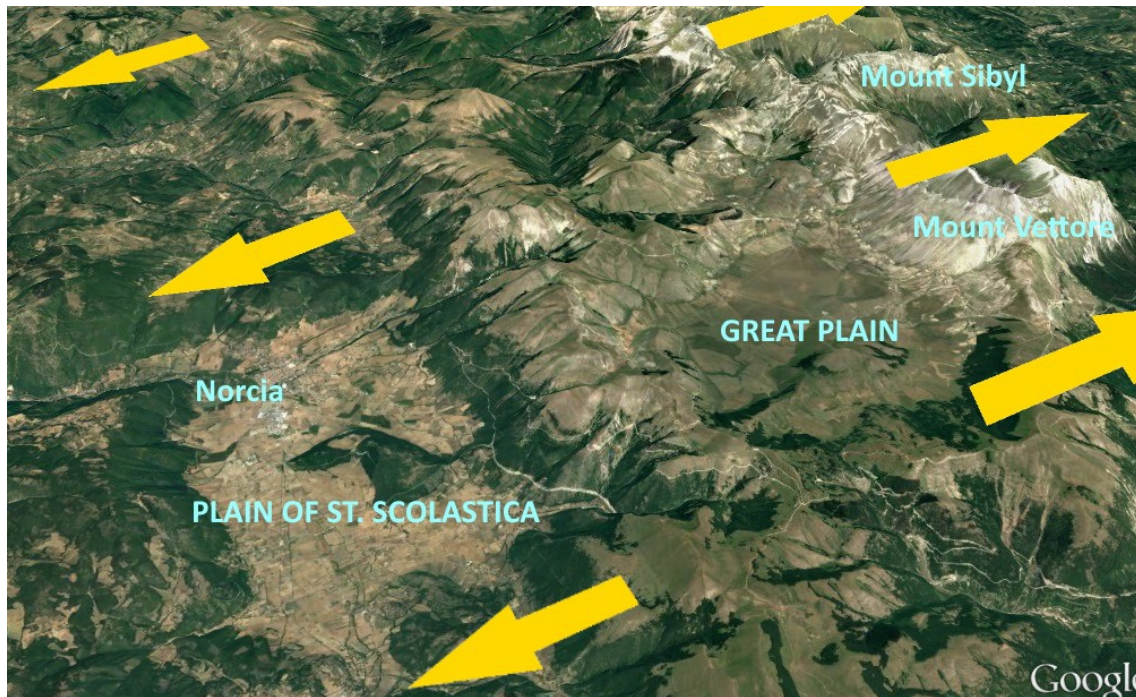


Fig. 51 - The two intermontane basins set on the western side of the Sibillini Mountain Range, with the yellow arrows representing the giant strain exerted by the tectonic plates moving away from each other in the region

Vast, arable, productive plains hidden amid lofty mountains: a sort of unexpected bounty for the ancient inhabitants of this most beautiful region, as well as for contemporary residents.

A bounty. But also a doom, and a curse.

Because the whole area is ceaselessly subject to the mighty strain produced by the clash between the African and Adria plates, as they move away from one another.

For, in that most fertile, apparently welcoming area, the whole land is fractured.

In the Sibillini Mountain Range area, on the western side of Mount Vettore, several fault lines are present. They are arranged in 'en echelon' ranks, each

fracture 1-3 kilometers long, with a whole length for the fault system of 30 kilometers. According to researchers, this range of fault lengths usually develops enough energy to generate earthquakes of magnitude up to 7.0.

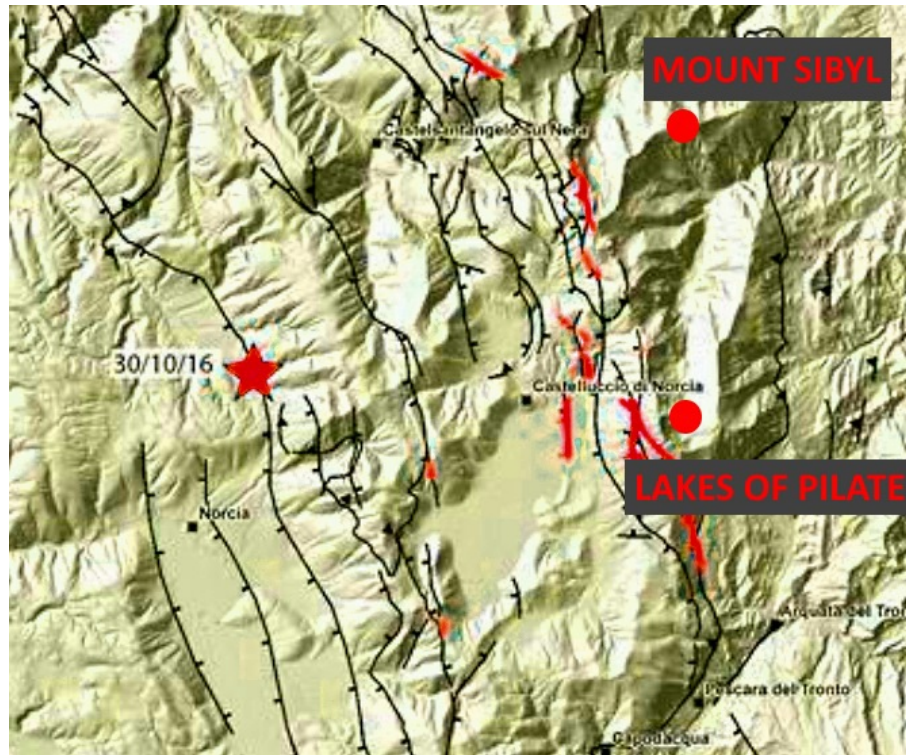


Fig. 52 - The known active fault lines in the area lying on the eastern side of the Sibillini Mountain Range, with in red colour the fault lines involved in the earthquake which occurred on October 30th, 2016 (image processing on a picture included in *Rapporto di sintesi sul terremoto in Centro Italia magnitudo 6.5 del 30 ottobre 2016* released by the National Institute of Geophysics and Vulcanology - Italy (INGV))

And when the faults break, the land above collapses.

#### 4.3 The scar on the mountain's face

A collapse. This is exactly what happened on October, 30th 2016, with a destructive earthquake of magnitude 6.5, and possibly happened in previous earthquakes as well (Bignami et al., op. cit.). During the event, the Pian Grande subsided, with a displacement of one meter with respect to its previous position. The whole plain, and half of Mount Vettore with it, went down as the crust collapsed to a new stable condition.



All this happened many, many times, as a recurrent event, across many millennia. The trenches excavated in Norcia and before Mount Vettore in search of paleoseismic displacements, buried deep into the ground, show the actual truth of all that.

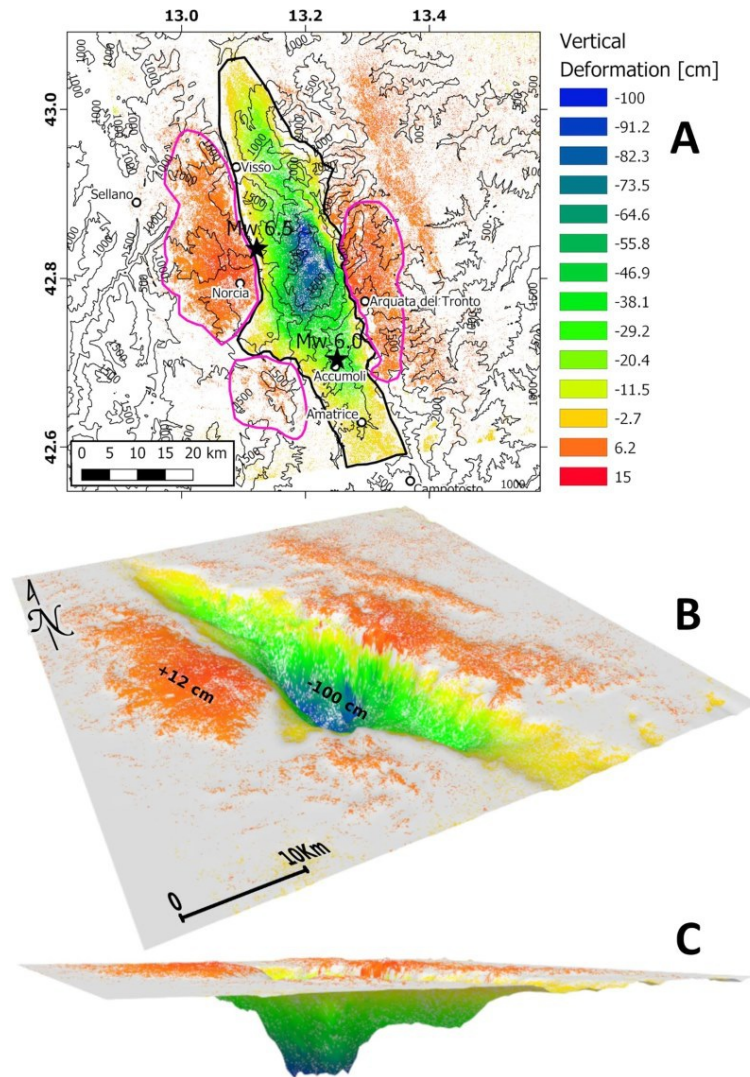


Fig. 53 - The displacement experienced by the western side of the Sibillini Mountain Range following the seismic sequence occurred in 2016, when the Pian Grande subsided and went down for 1 meter (blue zone in the picture) (Christian Bignami et al., *Volume unbalance on the 2016 Amatrice - Norcia (Central Italy) seismic sequence and insights on normal fault earthquake mechanism*, in *Nature - Scientific Reports*, 9:4250, 2019).

But a most appalling, most patent evidence of this same phenomenon is just before everybody's sight.

You just have to stand in the middle of the Pian Grande, and raise your eyes.

When you look towards Mount Vettore, you can see a great streak which marks its western side. A streak of bare rock. Up to 25 meters high at some points.



Fig. 54 - The western side of Mount Vettore with the great fault line called 'Road of Fairies'

The silly populace calls it the 'Road of Fairies' ('Strada delle Fate') and the dumb tale locally connected to it is reported by Paolo Toschi in his foreword to Luigi Paolucci's *The Apennine Sibyl*, which we mentioned in a preceding paragraph:

«One certain evening the fairies, whose queen was the Sibyl, asked for the permission to attend the night dances that were to be held at the Infernaccio (the valley beneath Mount Sibyl, editor's note). You may as well go - the Sibyl said - but do not forget to come back into the cave before sunrise comes [...] Suddenly, the horizon began to gleam with the first glow of dawn. Startled, dismayed and overwhelmed by apprehension and fear, they

rushed into a frantic run towards the cave. [...] They ran desperately [...] with their goat-like feet [...] A whole streak on the mountain, along the side of Mount Vettore, was so trampled with the frenzied hurry of the fairies, that the trail they followed is still visible today. And when the mountain-side stands out in the blue sky, at a certain elevation a brighter strip is easily seen. The local peasants point at it as the 'trail of the fairies'».

[In the original Italian text: «Una sera le fate, di cui la Sibilla era regina, chiesero il permesso di andare al ballo notturno che si teneva all'Infernaccio. Andate pure - disse la Sibilla - ma ricordatevi di ritornare dentro la grotta prima dell'alba [...] Mossero liete le fate alla danza. [...] Ad un tratto, all'orizzonte, s'accenna il primo luore dell'alba. Sorprese, sbigottite, colte dall'ansia e dallo spavento, s'affrettano le fate in folle corsa verso la grotta. [...] Esse corrono disperatamente [...] con i loro] piedi di capra [...] Tutta una striscia della montagna, lungo la costa del Vettore, fu così pesticiata dall'affannoso correre delle fate, che la traccia ne è rimasta tuttora. E quando il dorso montuoso campeggia netto nell'azzurro, a una certa altezza, una striscia più chiara ben si distingue. I contadini del luogo se l'additano: è il cammino delle fate»].

This is the naive tale which is still known amid the residents.

But the true nature of that streak is different altogether. And utterly hair-raising.

Because that streak, running across the side of Mount Vettore at an altitude of some two thousand meters, is the mark of something we know.

Earthquakes. Earthquakes of fiendish might.

The 'Road of Fairies' is no road of no fairies. It is an impressive, gigantic fault line. A fracture, the rupture of the very mountain under the vicious rage of the most devastating seismic waves.

Earthquake after earthquake, across the millennia, the extension pull which affects that portion of the Apennines lowered the entire expanse of the Pian Grande. And the great Mount Vettore, which raises its cliffs in the middle of the fault, was pulled down with it and fractured in the process. Its

western portion followed the Plain in its subsidence; the cliffs and the eastern side held on, striving to maintain their position and elevation.



Fig. 55 - The giant fault line which runs across Mount Vettore

And the mountain, the entire mountain, from north to south, just split. Along the fault line which is known under the silly, picturesque name of 'Road of Fairies'.

Such are the mighty forces that operate within the Sibillini Mountain Range.

And, in the next paragraph, we are about to see more of the extraordinary, superhuman effects of these subterranean forces, carved on the lofty, titanic cliffs of the mountains.

#### *4.4 Fists of an enraged titan*

The 'Road of Fairies' is not the only mark left by the terrific might of the earthquakes on the rocky flesh of the Sibillini Mountain Range.

After all large earthquakes, the people inhabiting this mountainous area, be they eighteenth-century shepherds with their cattle or Roman veterans with their assigned fields, could behold the effects of the fist of a titan on the



surrounding mountains. And, certainly, they were awe-stricken. As we are today.

We can imagine that their feeling was not so different from the sensation which contemporary men may experience today in their heart when contemplating the titanic wounds inflicted to the rocky walls and precipices and crests by the seismic waves which smashed the Sibillini Mountain Range first on August, 24th 2016, then on October, 30th 2016.



Fig. 56 - The new fault line which opened on the side of Mount Vettore below the 'Road of Fairies' in 2016

On the first day, on the mountain-side of Mount Vettore, just below the 'Road of Fairies', a brand new crack appeared: miles and miles of a freshly-generated fissure, ancillary to the main fault running at a higher elevation on the same versant. The second earthquake extended and enlarged the fissure, which is still extant on the mountain's slope.

Under the unbelievable force of one of the most powerful earthquakes in the last three centuries, Mount Vettore was ruptured again. And, in a few seconds, miles of solid rock slid against other adjacent miles of rock. They



slid for up to two meters. In a few terrorizing seconds, the entire mountain moved.



Fig. 57 - Fault displacement on Mount Vettore as a result of the seismic sequence occurred in 2016: left, a section of the fault line before the earthquakes; right, the subsidence of the versant as seen at the same spot after the earthquakes (image processing on pictures by A. Notaro and P. Galli)

The 'Road of Fairies', the giant fault line which runs across Mount Vettore, was affected, too: its lower edge subsided as well, with a further crack which is clearly visible on the versant, just above the fresh new rift.



Fig. 58 - The subsidence of the 'Road of Fairies' on Mount Vettore (adapted from Paolo Galli et al., *The awakening of the dormant Mount Vettore Fault*, in *Tectonics*, 38, 2018)

The impression left in the eyes of the beholders living their lives in the twenty-first century by so huge, so catastrophic an event was enormous: a force rising from underneath had split the mountain for its entire length.

The fist of the titan had stricken the Sibillini Mountain Range with its utmost potency. And further appalling effects were visible. From the very peaks of the mountainous ridge to the lower plateaus.

During the seismic sequence of 2016, the arched cliffs of Mount Vettore had engaged a godlike strive with the imperative forces that were dragging the Pian Grande down to a lower level of stability. In the fight, and as a result of the mighty pressures applied to the terminating rocks of the mountain, the cliffs themselves were torn apart, with large fissures cracked in the solid rock of the surmounting ridges: a sign of the might of the inhuman forces at work during the most powerful earthquakes.



Fig. 59 - The crests which surmount the glacial cirque of Mount Vettore ruptured by the thrusts exerted by the earthquakes in 2016

On the Pian Grande, the amazing sea of grassland encircled by the mountains, a great round hole opened in the middle of the green expanse: a black mouth, normally hidden beneath the turf, a sinkhole caused by the sudden collapse of a subterranean cavity carved in the bedrock by the rainfalls. A vision on an underground world concealed beneath the unaware steps trodden by human beings.

And then, a series of frightful marks left by the earthquake on the whole territory of the Sibillini Mountain Range: landslides, disrupted roads, astounding changes in the flow rates of springs and the circulation of subterranean waters.

And, finally, the most abominable effect of all: destruction, and death.

This is what the men and women of our contemporary age could see and experience in the year 2016, in an epoch in which people know what earthquakes are, and science can provide comprehensive answers on their origin and mechanisms, though still it cannot formulate forecasts on their occurrence.



Fig. 60 - The hole in the Pian Grande produced by a collapse of the underlying rock as a result of the action of the seismic waves in 2016

But what about the men and women of the past ages, when no scientific knowledge on the earthquake's nature was available and terror struck with the utmost effectiveness on the souls of the people who lived in the Sibillini Mountain Range?

Before we address this fascinating topic, we need to go deeper into the character of earthquakes as they manifest themselves in this specific area.

As we saw in the present paragraph, earthquakes in the Sibillini Range are a most tangible reality. They can be seen. They can be touched. And they can also be heard.

A blood-curdling voice from Hell. As we will see in the next paragraph.

#### *4.5 The beast which lurks in the abyss*

Living in the Sibillini Mountain Range, today as in the Middle Ages or in Roman times, may be an experience of the extraordinary, and the preternatural. A sinister experience.

The natural setting is simply gorgeous and of an astounding beauty. Whether you live on the western side of the mountainous chain, not far from the huge, imposing mass of Mount Vettore, a gigantic ship which emerges from the ocean of grass of the Pian Grande plateau; or, your days are marked by the clouds which rapidly drift over the crowned peak of Mount Sibyl, on the eastern versants, the Sibillini Mountain Range seems to be enshrouded in a spell of quiet, vibrant expectation.

Because you know that it is always there. Sleeping. Waiting. Ready for a new awakening.

In the Sibillini Mountain Range, you can always hear its voice. Coming from all around you, and sometimes right from underneath.

In summer nights or winter evenings, you can feel it first with your body. The sound comes unheralded, striking a deep note, a faint roar, almost



indiscernible at first, but which gradually swells until you can hear it, though it still remains faint enough so as unaccustomed visitors and guests are totally unaware of it. But you know it, and you know that what has just happened, that soft rumble which seems to come from everywhere, across the surrounding countryside, is a slight, soft shock of earthquake.

As a personal experience sensed by the author of the present research paper, who had the chance to live in Norcia for extended periods of time, when your house is silent and the night is still, you can hear the ominous deep, rolling sound of earthquakes as low as magnitude 1.3. They are usually sensed only by seismographic instruments. But a known fault line ran exactly under the area where the house was, and that night it was that very fault line that had signalled its presence.

In addition to that, there are times in the middle of the night when you are sleeping in your bed. You wake up, because the rumble announces its arrival. In a few moments, it is there with you, and your bed begins to quiver, for one second or maybe two. You stand still, as frozen as a statue of salt, asking yourself whether the waves are about to swell to their mightiest potency, or it is just a little shake, a mere warning of things to come. Then, it leaves your bed and your house. Silence returns, and you can have a try at having some sleep again. This was something between magnitude 2 and 3.

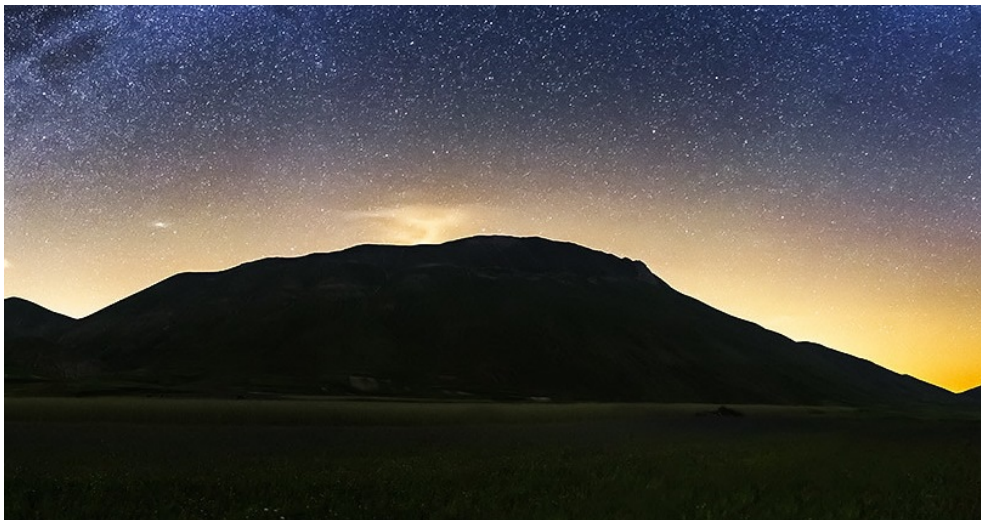


Fig. 61 - The profile of Mount Vettore stands out in the night in apparent stillness, though the geological strain on it secretively continues its work without interruptions

The earthquake, the monster underneath, is always present. Small tremors hit the Sibillini Mountain Range ceaselessly, throughout the year. Their epicentres lie in the western towns and villages, like Norcia or Preci; or on the eastern side, in Montegallo or Montemonaco; or in Arquata del Tronto, on the southern borders of the massif; or in the area set to the north, in Visso or Ussita. Or even right in the Pian Grande, by the hamlet of Castelluccio, or on the very core of the mountainous ridge, which runs from Mount Vettore to Mount Sibyl.

Wherever the epicentres may lie, the extension process which affects this portion of the Apennines goes on and on, day after day and year after year, producing its ceaseless straining effects on the fault lines which streak the whole territory, along a northwestern-southeastern alignment.

The voice of this process can frequently be heard, often subdued and low-toned. Since time immemorial, since the age of the Romans and even earlier, this voice accompanies the lives of the people who inhabit the Sibillini Mountain Range.

Data e Ora (Italia) 📅 ⌚	Magnitudo 📊	Zona 📍	Profondità 📏	Latitudine	Longitudine
2019-09-18 23:53:41	ML 1.2	2 km NE Norcia (PG)	10	42.81	13
2019-09-18 23:17:21	ML 1.9	8 km SE Norcia (PG)	11	42.74	13.
2019-09-18 23:10:04	ML 1.3	8 km SE Norcia (PG)	10	42.74	13.1
2019-09-18 22:57:21	ML 1.6	3 km E Norcia (PG)	10	42.80	13.1
2019-09-18 22:56:24	ML 1.9	3 km E Norcia (PG)	10	42.80	13.14
2019-09-18 22:20:16	ML 0.7	2 km NE Norcia (PG)	11	42.80	13.11
2019-09-18 22:04:13	ML 1.2	3 km E Norcia (PG)	11	42.80	13.13
2019-09-18 22:02:31	ML 0.7	3 km E Norcia (PG)	10	42.81	13.13
2019-09-18 21:55:37	ML 0.8	3 km NE Norcia (PG)	11	42.81	13.12
2019-09-18 21:54:55	ML 0.9	3 km NE Norcia (PG)	10	42.81	13.11
2019-09-18 21:46:15	ML 0.7	3 km NE Norcia (PG)	10	42.81	13.14
2019-09-18 21:44:16	ML 1.1	4 km E Norcia (PG)	10	42.80	13.13
2019-09-18 21:42:00	ML 0.7	3 km E Norcia (PG)	11	42.80	13.14
2019-09-18 21:40:31	ML 1.3	4 km E Norcia (PG)	11	42.81	13.14
2019-09-18 21:39:26	ML 1.2	4 km E Norcia (PG)	11	42.81	13.14

Fig. 62 - A portion of the subdued, ominous seismic sequence which hit the Sibillini Mountain Range and Norcia on September 18th, 2019

A beast is always lurking in the abyss, and the local residents know it well. They can often hear it as it sleeps its uneasy, troubled sleep miles beneath.

As it happened, for instance, on September 18th, 2019, when a short, sinister sequence made up by around 60 small seismic shakes went on for the whole day, at an average rate of one faint, almost imperceptible shock every twenty minutes. Almost imperceptible. Yet it was there. And both your ears and body could sense it.

And people waited, in apprehension and anxiety.

Because they know that, sometimes, this voice turns into a savage, fiendish yell. As we will see in the next paragraph.

#### *4.6 The yell of the monster*

There is a peculiar experience which the men and women who have been inhabiting the Sibillini Mountain Range, in central Italy, have made across the centuries and the millennia.

We are not referring to the harrowing experience of feeling the ground beneath your feet being madly shaken by multiple seismic waves marked by a magnitude of 6.5, like on the fateful date of October, 30th 2016: initially, the primary waves, which come straight from an earthquake focus set 6 miles below, hit the earth's surface with a vertical compression/extension motion, so casting a human body frenzily up and down as if it were flying; and, a few moments later, with the arrival of the secondary, slower waves, men and women and buildings undergo a lateral, horizontal oscillation, which is totally overpowering and compelling, resulting in a total inability to maintain an upright position and flee from one's collapsing house through a door which frantically swings and rolls in all directions around its normal position.



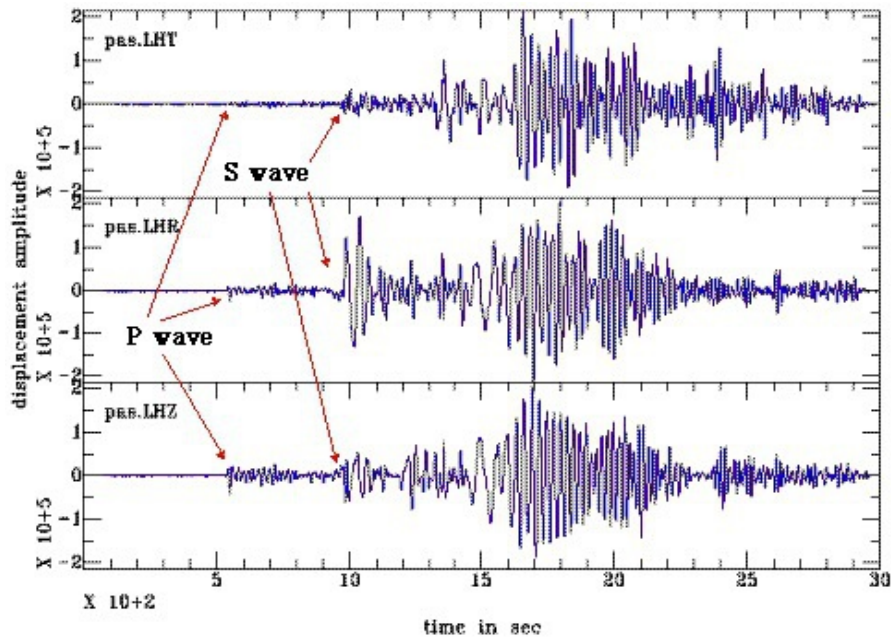


Fig. 63 - A diagram showing the early arrival of the primary waves, closely followed by more powerful secondary waves (source: <https://geol105.sitehost.iu.edu/>)

Furthermore, we are not making a reference to the long, enervating sequence of aftershocks which always follow that first excruciating strike. After the initial main blow, the earthquake continues to discharge the energy accumulated within the subterranean layers of rocks, by sending out shocks after shocks, in a seemingly endless series of events, both small and large, with epicentres which are dispersed all over the land. A phenomenon that was also registered by Leopoldo Mannocchi in 1859 with the words «the ceaseless bellowing and wavering of the ground» («il continuo mugghiare e scuoter della terra», in Italian), and Pietro De Carolis in 1703, who wrote that «for the entire period of my stay here, the shocks of the earthquake could be sensed all the time, and savage» («In tutto il tempo, che mi sono trattenuto in queste parti, le scosse de Terremoti continuamente si sono fatte sentire frequenti, e con violenza»).

But we are not referring to all that, appalling as it all may be, and actually is.

We are considering a different, though thoroughly related, hair-raising experience. Some call it the 'yell of the mountain'.

Because the mountain yells. A blood-curdling scream, which is heard at the very apex of the most powerful earthquakes:

«I rushed out of my house, everything was being shaken awfully, I saw the lawn writhing as if it were an agitated sea; and I heard the yell coming out from the mountains»; «as the house was wavering I looked out of the windows where the versant was, and I could heard the mountain scream».

The listed accounts were rendered to the author of the present article by two women who experienced the earthquake in 2016: the first woman was caught by the seismic waves in Montefortino, on the eastern side of the Sibillini Mountain Range; the second was reached by the quake in Norcia, on the western side. But the two accounts are almost identical.

The mountains scream. The mountains yell. As if they were alive. They seem to yell in pain and rage.

What is the scientific reason for the ghastly sound which is heard by people during the largest earthquakes?

Perhaps, the main trigger does not lie in the primary seismic waves, which generate low-frequency ground motion from the bowels of the earth to the vertically-located epicentre on the surface, making the very land above a sort of giant loudspeaker, which projects the sound upward into the air (Patrizia Tosi, *Earthquake sound perception*, 2012). The resulting noise is a roaring rumble, which is often heard just before the shaking begins, and then acting as a powerful accompaniment across the whole duration of the event.

But the yell, that's another story. When the secondary waves reach the earth's surface and penetrate, with their mighty oscillating thrust, into the mountainous reliefs overhead, the mounts themselves begin to vibrate, with low-frequency quivers and further, additional lower-period interactions with the layers of rock being crossed during their propagation.

The resulting sound is a deep, fiendish roar accompanied by a sort of prolonged, inhuman scream, which seems to arise from the excruciated versants of the mountains.

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EARTHQUAKE SOUNDS\*

By CHARLES DAVISON

IN MY STUDIES of British earthquakes during the years 1889-1916, special attention was paid to the sounds that accompanied the shocks. The materials collected were given in answer to the following questions: (a) Was any unusual sound heard at the time of the shock, and, if so, what did it resemble? (b) Did the beginning of the sound precede, coincide with, or follow, the beginning of the shock, and by how many seconds? (c) Did the end of the sound precede, coincide with, or follow, the end of the shock, and by how many seconds? (d) Did the sound become gradually louder, and then die away, and, if so, did the instant when the sound was loudest precede, coincide with, or follow, the instant when the shock was strongest, and by how many seconds? (e) Did the nature of the sound change, and in what way, at or about the time when the shock was strongest?

TYPES OF EARTHQUAKE SOUNDS

The following scale of sound types is based on about twenty thousand records of earthquakes, for the most part of British origin.

1. Wagons, carriages, motor vehicles, steam rollers, traction engines, or trains, passing, as a rule very rapidly, on hard ground or a rough road, over a bridge or through a tunnel; the dragging of heavy boxes or furniture over the floor.

2. Thunder, a loud clap or heavy peal, but very often distant thunder.

\* Manuscript received for publication April 25, 1938.

<sup>1</sup> *Geol. Mag.*, 9:208-218 (1892); *Phil. Mag.*, 40:31-70 (1900); *Beitr. Geophys.*, 12:485-527 (1913) *History of British Earthquakes*, pp. 377-382 (1924).

[147]

Fig. 64 - A historical scientific paper by Charles Davison on the sounds of earthquakes (1938)

This is what the people inhabiting the Sibillini Mountain Range heard on October, 30th 2016 and January 14th, 1703 and December, 1st 1328, and again and again backwards into a far, forgotten past, deep into the history of the central Apennines.

The Sibillini Mountain Range. Mountains which move. Mountains that scream. Mountains that cast terror, destruction and death over the whole land and its terrified inhabitants.

Mountains which seem to be alive. Or, seemingly inhabited by some thing which is alive.

A ghastly framework. In which dreams of a forbidden intercourse may have been nurtured by men. In a remote past.

Michele Sanvico

# **END OF PART 1**

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**Please refer to Part 2  
for the continuation of this research paper**