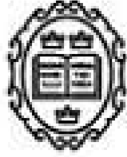

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Source: *The American Historical Review*, Jun., 1981, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Jun., 1981), pp. 533-552

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Historical Association

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The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities

ROBERT E. LERNER

AS THERE IS a "Richter scale" for measuring earthquakes, so there is now a "Foster scale" for measuring disasters. Harold D. Foster, a Canadian geographer, has maintained that disasters ought not to be ranked solely by their toll in lives but also by the physical damage and emotional stress they create. By these standards the Black Death of 1347 to 1350 falls two-tenths of a point short of being the worst disaster in history: on the Foster scale, World War II (11.1) ranks first, the Black Death (10.9) second, and World War I (10.5) third.[1]

Without stopping to quibble about the two-tenths of a point, or to ask whether one can calibrate emotional stress so finely, we might agree that the Black Death was one of the worst disasters on record. Among the numerous vivid illustrations of the horror are a German chronicler's image of ships floating with dead crews aimlessly on the seas and an Italian chronicler's offhand hyperbole that "there was not a dog left pissing on the wall."[2] Granted that the disaster was enormous, the question to be asked here is, how was it placed within the framework of eschatological thought? At a time when people believed seriously in the end of the world and the Last Judgment, how did they place the onslaught of the greatest disaster yet known within their conception of the history of salvation?

Obviously, even during the greatest of disasters, not everybody reacts in the same way. Robert Benchley once remarked that in every news photo of epoch-making events there always seems to be a man in a derby hat looking in the opposite direction from the action: on Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg or assassination day in Sarajevo, a "Johnny-on-the-spot" is always looking up at a clock,

This essay was first conceived as a paper delivered at a conference on the Black Death held by the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies of the State University of New York, Binghamton, October 1977. I have benefited from criticism by Charles M. Radding and from review of my transcriptions by Daniel Williman. Research expenses were generously funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and Northwestern University. Abbreviations used in the footnotes include the following: BL—British Library, London; BN—Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; *MGH*—*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*; and Töpfer, *Reich des Friedens*—Bernhard Töpfer, *Das kommende Reich des Friedens* (Berlin, 1964).

[1] Foster, "Assessing Disaster Magnitude," *Professional Geographer*, 28 (1976): 241–47.

[2] Mathias von Neuenburg, *Chronica*, ed. A. Hofmeister, in *MGH*, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, new ser., 4: *263–64*; and *La Vita di Cola di Rienzo*, ed. A. M. Ghisalberti, bk. 2 (Rome, 1928): chap. 3, as translated in John Wright, *The Life of Cola di Rienzo* (Toronto, 1975), 103.

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picking his teeth, or waving insouciantly at the camera. Quite apart from those who lived in parts of Europe where the Black Death did not strike, there were probably some people in 1348 or 1349 who went about their business or pleasure in the eye of the storm. They may have given no thought to the end of the world or the events that might precede it and would have waved at the camera had there been one to wave at. Hence, I do not mean to argue that everyone in Europe, when confronted by the plague, thought about the history of salvation. (It would be good to know how many did and how many did not, but unfortunately we never can.) What I do mean to argue is that the onslaught of disaster did lead many to wonder about how it fit into God's plan, and the ways in which they did so are of considerable interest to the cultural historian.

Indisputably, many in Western Europe took the plague to be an eschatological sign. The Arabic chronicler as-Sulūk reported that Christians on Cyprus who experienced the Black Death "feared that it was the end of the world."[3] As-Sulūk probably misunderstood their fear somewhat, because no medieval Christian believed that the world would end without certain culminating events—such as the reign of Antichrist—preceding the Last Judgment. But, certainly, many thought that the Black Death signaled God's displeasure and in some way presaged the End. A Franciscan chronicler of Lübeck, for example, wrote that the Black Death was a divine punishment for human evil and a sign of the last days, qualifying this assessment with the assurance that exactly when those days would come God alone knew. Similarly, the Swiss Franciscan, John of Winterthur, claimed that a great earthquake of 1348 and the plague (which had not yet hit his own region) were antecedents of the terrible disasters that the Lord had warned would come before his Second Coming (Matthew 24: 7; Luke 21: 11).[4]

Although helpful to start with, such statements not only leave open the question of how long it would be before the End would arrive—respecting Christ's injunction in Acts 1: 7 that "it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power"—but also say nothing about what might happen between the time of the plague and the Last Judgment. Yet people surely speculated on just that point. What might their thoughts have been?

REMARKABLY LITTLE RESEARCH has been done on this subject, perhaps because scholars have been unaware of evidence that would help them treat it. Hitherto, the only approach has been through the sensational—the macabre processions

[3] As-Sulūk, as quoted in Michael W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, 1977), 290.

[4] *Detmar-Chronik,*, in C. Hegel, ed., *Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis in 16. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, etc., 1862–), 19: 522: ". . . so sint desse stervende, orloghe, vorretnisse unde al de plaghe, de nů scheen, mer de tekene, de Cristus heft ghesproken in den hilgen ewangelien, dat se scholen scheen vor der lesten tiid; wo langhe vore, dat is nicht beschreven, wente Gode is dat alleneghen bekant"; and Johannes Vitoduranus, *Chronica*, ed. F. Baethgen, in *MGH*, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, new ser., 3: 276: "Predicta, scilicet terre motus et pestilencia, precurrencia mala sunt extreme voraginis et tempestatis secundum verbum salvatoris in ewangelio dicentis: 'Erunt terre motus per loca et pestilencia et fames' et cetera." Also see an attack of 1348 against speculations about the birth of Antichrist in the unpublished *Monastica* of Conrad of Megenberg, as quoted in Sabine Krüger, "Krise der Zeit als Ursache der Pest?" in *Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel*, 2 (Göttingen, 1972): 857.

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Figure 1: A flagellant procession at the time of the Black Death. Illustration taken from the *Konstanzer Weltchronik*, third quarter of the fifteenth century, Bavaria; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Cgm 426, f. 42v.

of the flagellants. In the nineteenth century Herman Haupt connected the flagellant processions with eschatological prophecies and maintained that "the flagellants felt called upon to prepare the way for the coming kingdom of God." Dilating on this theme, Norman Cohn has written that the German flagellants of 1349 were "eschatologically inspired hordes" whose activities "ended as a militant and bloody pursuit of the Millennium." Like Cohn, Philip Ziegler stated in a popular book on the Black Death that the German flagellants conceived of their movement ending "only with the redemption of Christendom and the arrival of the Millenium [*sic*]." Similarly, the East German scholar Martin Erbstösser, limiting his argument to the flagellants of Thuringia and Franconia (who he believed were more radical than the others), argued that the flagellants "felt themselves to be the proclaimers of a new time, that of the preparation for the end of the world."[5]

[5] Haupt, "Kirchliche Geisselung und Geisslerbruderschaften," in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 6 (Leipzig, 1899): 437; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957; 3d ed., New York, 1970), 136–39; Ziegler, *The Black Death* (1969; reprint ed., New York, 1971), 92; and Erbstösser, *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1970), 32. Karl Müller had already criticized a first attempt by Haupt to demonstrate flagellant millenarianism; Müller, "Die Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 7 (1885): 113–14.

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The flagellants, then, it is commonly assumed, were millenarians. I also think it likely that they were, but I must concede with Richard A. Kieckhefer that the assumption is based on very slender evidence. Putting aside the later "cryptoflagellants," whose millenarianism is not in doubt, only two sources speak in any way of flagellant millenarianism, and neither of these presents incontrovertible proof.[6] The first and somewhat more detailed of these sources is an increasingly familiar friend of the heresiologist known as the Breslau manuscript. The anonymous author of a theological *questio* in this fifteenth-century manuscript attributed to the flagellants an eschatological song, which stated that in seventeen years after 1349, after many tribulations, the religious orders, particularly the mendicants, would expire, to be replaced by a new one. After that, the old orders would be restored "with great glory" and then the world would end.[7]

One problem with this report is chronological, for the theological *questio* postdates the appearance of the Hussites in the early fifteenth century. As Kieckhefer has noted, even if the author thought he was writing about the flagellants of 1349, he may have confused their ideas with those of the cryptoflagellants or attributed to them a song that they had not sung.[8] That may be hypercritical: perhaps the flagellants of 1349 did sing about great changes coming within seventeen years. But the song in question still does not show them to be the eschatological radicals portrayed by Cohn, Ziegler, and Erbstösser. Cohn in particular appears to have distorted the evidence by interpreting the song as, "of course, . . . a prophecy in the Joachite tradition." According to him, "it is certain that when [the] flagellants talked of a new monastic order of unique holiness they were referring to themselves alone."[9] But, in fact, the flagellants in the song never say this. Moreover, the text does not pose a clear opposition between the old orders and the new one—that is, a "Joachite" opposition between an old and a new dispensation—but instead foretells the ultimate glorious restoration of the old orders. In short, the passage says nothing about a revolutionary role for the flagellants; it merely foresees a time of tribulations followed by one of "great glory" before the End.

[6] Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid-Fourteenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1974): 157–76, at 167–69. Kieckhefer has convincingly argued for the exclusion of other texts that have previously been adduced to demonstrate the alleged millenarianism of the flagellants. Siegfried Hoyer's claim that the flagellants of 1349 "followed the directives of a prophet" rests on a mistranslation of a fifteenth-century Dutch text, as in Paul Fredericq, *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae*, 1 (Ghent, 1899): 197; see Hoyer, "Die thüringsche Kryptoflagellantenbewegung im 15. Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, 2 (1967): 148–74, at 161.

[7] The *questio* from the Breslau manuscript remains unedited, but Erbstösser has published the part concerning the flagellants; *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter*, 27–28 n. 82. The relevant section reads "Item de quadam sua cantilena dicebant quod post 17 annos immediate presentem annum domini 1349 sequentes religiones et precipue mendicantium ordines post multas [Erbstösser: "multis"] tribulationes deficient substituto quodam novo ordine. Postquam etiam priores ordines cum magna gloria resuscitabuntur et tunc mundus certissime finietur. . . ."

[8] Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement," 167–69. Erbstösser speculated that remarks about the Hussites might have been added later but gave no grounds for concluding that they were; *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter*, 27.

[9] Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 137. Erbstösser has called attention to another of Cohn's mistakes—namely, the assumption that, since the *questio* is found in a manuscript now in Breslau, it must have pertained to flagellants who were there; in fact, the manuscript was almost certainly copied in Erfurt; *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter*, 26.

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The other source that seems to contain some evidence of flagellant eschatological hopes is the "heavenly letter" reportedly read aloud during a flagellant sermon in Strassburg. This text, supposedly brought to earth by an angel, tells of Christ's anger with rampant impiety, warns of great punishments, and calls for reform and penance. But it also promises that, if men were to change their ways, Christ's anger would be assuaged and a time of blessedness and fruitfulness for the earth would ensue.[10] Aside from the vagueness of this promise, the difficulty with the passage for assessing flagellant views is that it did not originate with the flagellants. The heavenly letter was a text put forward repeatedly in different versions throughout the Middle Ages, and the part in question is known to have been formulated by about 1200 at the latest.[11] If the flagellants paid any particular attention to it, how central it was to their own beliefs is still impossible to know.

Cohn called the heavenly letter the "manifesto of the flagellant movement." Whether or not there is any truth in this designation, the letter was certainly not a manifesto for revolutionary millenarian action, for the clear and simple message of the text read in its entirety is the call to "repent and be saved."[12] Whatever the flagellants' ideas about the future, there is little question that the driving motivation behind their processions was not to "pursue the millennium" but to do penance in the hope of appeasing God's wrath and thereby warding off the plague. If the flagellants were millenarians (and, as I said, I think they were), they were to that degree not unusual but typical of their age. In my view, most who thought about the significance of the plague were millenarians or chiliasts. Inasmuch as this may be controversial, the rest of this essay will be devoted to explaining and supporting my contention.

ALTHOUGH THE WORD "chiliasm" has taken on for some the connotation of being more extreme than millenarianism, I consider the two words to be synonymous because both have the same etymology—coming respectively from the Greek and Latin for one thousand. In what follows, I use chiliasm instead of millenarianism simply because it is less cumbersome. Along with most scholars, I do not limit chiliasm to belief in a literal thousand-year kingdom ruled over by Christ but define the term more broadly to mean the expectation of imminent, supernaturally inspired, radical betterment on earth before the Last Judgment. Where I differ from some scholars is in my belief that chiliasm does not have to be oriented toward revolutionary action, although it certainly can be. Rather, it

[10] Fritsche Closener, *Strassburgische Chronik*, in Hegel, *Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte*, 8: 114: "So wil ich uber üch dûn minen heiligen segen, so bringet daz ertrich früht mit gnoden und würt alle die welt erfullet mit miner wirdekeit." Kieckhefer has found a lack of millenarianism in the heavenly letter, but he did not deal explicitly with this passage; "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement," 168.

[11] Erbstösser, *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter*, 46, n. 157, citing the research of R. Priebsch. Bernhard Töpfer stated succinctly that the apparently chiliastic passage in this heavenly letter represents "recht unbestimmter Hoffnungen . . . ein ausgeprägt joachimitisches Gepräge zeigen diese Erwartungen allerdings nicht"; Töpfer, *Reich des Friedens*, 282–83.

[12] Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c. 1250–c. 1450*, 2 (New York, 1967): 488–89.

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Figure 2: Antichrist calls up devils to take over the world, and Archangel Michael descends to smite him. Reproduced from *Buch von dem Entkrist*, colored woodcuts, mid-fifteenth century. (Photograph provided by Professor Gerald Strauss, Indiana University.)

can also encourage perseverance in the face of persecution and bring hope in the face of trials.[13]

[13] On the definition of chiliasm (or millenarianism) I follow, among many others, Norman Cohn, "Medieval Millenarism," in Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed., *Millennial Dreams in Action* (New York, 1970), 31; Y. Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," *European Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1966): 200, as cited in Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore, 1975), 1; and Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven, 1974), 18. Earlier scholarship, particularly under Cohn's influence, was primarily interested in finding a chiliasm that expresses "an active desire to speed the inevitable result, often through violent, revolutionary means"; Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium*, 18. In the last few years, however, some scholars have been paying more attention to chiliasm's passive or conservative face. Bryan W. Ball, for example, has emphasized that "a millenarian was not, *ipso facto*, a heretic or even necessarily an extremist"; Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden, 1975), 233. For an excellent bibliographical review that points to a trend away from the preoccupation with revolutionary chiliasm and assumptions of psychopathology, see Hillel Schwartz, "The End of the Beginning: Millenarian Studies, 1969–1975," *Religious Studies Review*, 2, no. 3 (1976): 1–15 (kindly called to my attention by Professor Kieckhefer). Bernard McGinn, in an anthology that appeared after this paper was written, has preferred the word apoca-

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Figure 3: Devils lead Antichrist to Hell, with the representation of fire and brimstone. Reproduced from *Buch von dem Entkrist*, colored woodcuts, mid-fifteenth century. (Photograph provided by Professor Gerald Strauss, Indiana University.)

There were two main varieties of chiliasm in the Middle Ages: the "post-Antichrist" and the "pre-Antichrist" strains.[14] The former was more grounded in tra-

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lypticism to millenarianism or chiliasm but agreed that "beliefs about the coming age . . . were as important for social continuity as they were for social change . . . , as often designed to maintain the political, social, and economic order as to overthrow it"; McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1979), 28–36, at 30.

[14] The terminology is my own. I developed the distinction, expanding on the work of Marjorie Reeves's *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1969), in my "Refreshment of the Saints: The Time after Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought," *Traditio*, 32 (1976): 97–144. Documented support for what I say in this and the following two paragraphs appears in that article. "Post-" and "pre-Antichrist" should not be confused with "post-" and "premillennial," terms that refer to debates among early modern and modern millenarian theologians about whether the second advent of Christ would come after or before the millennium. Medieval "pre-Antichrist" chiliasm did not address itself to the pre- or postmillennial question at all, and medieval "post-Antichrist" theologians differed as to whether the millennium to come after Antichrist would be brought in directly by Christ's second advent or not.

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ditional biblical exegesis than the latter and, therefore, was more often expressed in formal treatises by identifiable writers. Building upon agreement in the standard early medieval biblical commentaries of St. Jerome on Daniel 12: 11–12, the Venerable Bede on Revelation 8: 1, and Haimo of Auxerre on the Pauline epistles (I Thessalonians 5: 3 and II Thessalonians 2: 8) that there would be a period of intermission on earth between the demise of Antichrist and the Last Judgment, numerous twelfth-century writers independently expressed varieties of post-Antichrist chiliasm. Whereas the early medieval authorities abhorred chiliasm and only allowed the idea of a final time on earth because Scripture seemed to offer no alternative, such thoroughly orthodox twelfth-century commentators as Honorius Augustodunensis, Otto of Freising, Hildegard of Bingen, Gerhoch of Reichersberg, and the anonymous author of the *Glossa ordinaria* on Daniel welcomed the idea of a final time after Antichrist and made it serve variously for the "refreshment of the saints," the conversion of the heathen and the Jews, and the reformation and purification of the Church. In Gerhoch of Reichersberg's view, the time after Antichrist would be one of "great joy for the people of God."

The theory of a wondrous time on earth after the death of Antichrist was brought to its first full flowering at the end of the twelfth century in the luxuriantly fertile prophetic writings of the Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore. Joachim granted the last time the dignity of being a full historical age by making it serve concurrently as the seventh age of the Church, the seventh age of the world, and the third "status" of historical progress typified by the unfolding of the Trinity. In addition, Joachim was the first medieval exegete to read the most explicitly chiliastic passage in the Bible, the prediction of the reign of the saints with Christ on earth in Revelation 20, as alluding to the time after Antichrist. Finally, Joachim broadened the positive conception of the final time still wider than did other twelfth-century writers: for him it would be marked not just by profound peace and the conversion of unbelievers but also by the highest possible levels of ecclesiastical organization and human spiritual illumination short of Paradise.

Owing to its firm anchoring in standard biblical exegesis and to the gathering momentum of its elaborations, the idea of a wondrous time on earth after Antichrist became a virtually unquestioned assumption of Western eschatological theology from 1200 until the end of the Middle Ages. To take only one example, a "best-selling" theological handbook designed as a convenient reference work for the use of clerics, Hugh Ripelin's *Compendium theologicae veritatis* (ca. 1265), stated as a certainty that "after Antichrist's death the Lord will not come immediately to judgment" but, rather, that there would be a time of "refreshment of the saints" when "the Jews will be converted to the faith and the Holy Church will peacefully conquer everything up to the ends of the earth." Like several other exponents of post-Antichrist chiliasm, Hugh Ripelin was probably not influenced by Joachim of Fiore. Undoubtedly, many others were. But as long as they affirmed, as almost all did, that the dispensation of the last age would be a renewal and amplification of the Christian dispensation announced in the Gospels rather than a supercession of it, they were not stating anything controversial.

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With theologians agreeing that there would be good times on earth after Antichrist, anyone in the mid-fourteenth century who assumed that Antichrist's open reign would be preceded by heralding disasters could easily incorporate the Black Death into a chiliastic script. Such a script, in fact, exists in John of Rupescissa's still unpublished *Liber secretorum eventuum*, completed in November 1349.[15] Rupescissa, a Franciscan visionary who was then being held in a papal prison in Avignon because of his attacks on the Franciscan and ecclesiastical hierarchies, predicted that Antichrist would triumph and reign openly for three and a half years before 1370 and that, before then, numerous chastisements would precede his arrival. First among these was the famine and plague Rupes-

Figure 4: The triumph of the "holy people of God" on earth after the death of Antichrist. A conception descending from Rupescissa in Telesphorus, *Libellus* . . . , written toward the end of the fourteenth century. The illumination is reproduced from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 313, f. 38v, executed shortly after 1431 in or around Salzburg.

cissa dated to 1347, and second was the piling up of cadavers of the year 1348.[16] Famine and plague would be followed by earthquakes and other disasters, culminating in the reign of Antichrist. But in 1370 Christ would slay Antichrist and ordain a literal millennium—one thousand years of earthly blessedness before the End. During the forty-five years between 1370 and 1415, there would

[15] For the only reliable original survey of Rupescissa's life and prophetic thought, see Jeanne Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade (Johannes de Rupescissa)* (Paris, 1952); and, for the *Liber secretorum eventuum* specifically, see *ibid.*, 113–29. Marjorie Reeves has provided an English summary of Bignami-Odier's work; *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, 225–28, 321–24. Lynn Thorndike has edited the chapter headings of the *Liber secretorum eventuum* as they appear in BN, MS lat. 3598; see Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 3 (New York, 1934): 722–25. For a description of this manuscript, see Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade*, 239–40.

[16] BN, MS lat. 3598, f. 4r–v: "Quarto intellexi multas clades futuras erunt in ianuis et evenire validas tempestates. Primo famem generalem simul cum mortalitate in orbe que facta est anno Domini M°ccc°xlvii° per seculum universum. Secundo multiplicacionem innumerabilium cadaverorum anno Christi M°ccc°xlviii° ubique terrarum multifarie [MS: "multifamine"] dispersorum."

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still be wars resulting in the transference of the Roman Empire to Jerusalem, but then would come a millennium of the greatest possible earthly perfection when men would beat their swords into plowshares and live under the fullness of the Holy Spirit in unprecedented peace and justice. Only toward the end of the millennium would charity begin to grow cold until Gog and Magog would arrive around 2370, presaging the Last Judgment and the end of the world.

Rupescissa's view of the future was obviously shaped by knowledge of post-Antichrist chiliasm in its Joachite cast, but autobiographical passages in his writings display how he was moved to his own formulation of it by personal stress. In December 1344, he had been arrested without any warning by order of the Franciscan Provincial of Aquitaine and dragged from his native convent of Aurillac to imprisonment in the convent of Figeac, where he was held in particularly noisome quarters. In February 1345, he broke his leg and was forced two or three times onto a device to set it, which made him suffer, according to his account, the torments of the martyrs. Then he was left lying on a cot virtually without attendance for three and a half months while so many maggots crawled in his festering wound that they could be gathered by the handful. By the summer Rupescissa had recovered, but he still was in chains, surrounded by stench, and, hence, spent his days in tears, vigils, and prayers, seeking to understand why he had been made to suffer so terribly. Then, all of a sudden, in late July (one can imagine the heat), while he was standing in prayer, he was granted a miraculous flash of insight into the entire course of the present and future. This revelation made it clear that Antichrist would soon triumph and that Rupescissa was suffering as a "witness" against Antichristian forces but that there would soon be millennial rewards for the witnesses and martyrs after Antichrist's destruction.[17]

Rupescissa's revelation of July 1345 could not have included foreknowledge of the Black Death, but he soon learned of that horror very personally. In 1348 he became infected with the plague himself while he was imprisoned in another miserable Franciscan confinement, this time at Rieux, south of Toulouse.[18] Rupescissa escaped with his life but again suffered greatly and saw, whether in reality or delirium, swarms of terrible flies that seemed like apocalyptic locusts.[19] Thus, not surprisingly, he built the plague into his understanding of present and future between 1348 and 1349. God was punishing humanity in numerous ways that would culminate in Antichrist's imminent triumph, but proper understanding of the future offered a beacon of hope and a guide for enduring through tribulation.

[17] For Rupescissa's arrest, imprisonment in Figeac, and revelation of July 1345, see Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade*, 17–18 (drawing upon Rupescissa's *Liber Ostensor* of 1356), 114 (translating from Rupescissa's *Liber secretorum eventuum*). To my knowledge, Rupescissa was the first medieval writer to espouse literal chiliasm or millennialism; I intend to write further on this and other noteworthy themes in Rupescissa's prophecies.

[18] Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade*, 20.

[19] Rupescissa, Commentary on the *Oraculum Cyrilli*, written over several years between 1345 and 1349, BN, MS lat. 2599, f. 167v: "Nota quod a. D. Mcccxlviii, qui est annus pestis magne ire Dei, vidi coram me quoddam genus muscarum. . . ."

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Figure 5: The Holy Spirit raining down on the elect after the death of Antichrist, with a "holy pope" below, from Telesphorus, *Libellus*. . . . This copy was made in 1469 in the Venetian monastery of St. Cyprian; Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, MS Lat. Cl. III, 177 (2176), f. 35r. (Photograph provided by Professor Robert E. Kaske, Cornell University.)

Although Rupescissa's *Liber secretorum eventuum* was meant only for the private reference of Cardinal Guillaume Court, who was then investigating the imprisoned prophet's orthodoxy, the work traveled quickly beyond Avignon and had a very wide circulation. Five surviving Latin copies and one complete Catalan translation are only partial testimonies to its popularity, for the *Liber* became known very rapidly to chroniclers and was frequently excerpted or abbreviated.[20] Quite clearly, it struck upon some responsive chords.

[20] In addition to the three Latin copies and Catalan translation listed by Bignami-Odier (238–42), there are also two hitherto unnoticed Latin copies: Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, MS K^2 IV 13, ff. 137r–67v (mid-fifteenth century); and Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, MS 199, ff. 21v–29r (year 1496). The German chronicler Conrad of Halberstadt presented a resumé of the *Liber secretorum eventuum* sometime before 1353. The *Liber secretorum eventuum* was also known to the author of the *Chronographia regum Francorum* and to Jean le Bel. Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade*, 113, 127 n. 3, 219, 221, 233–34. A complete manuscript abbreviation is in Rouen MS 1355, ff. 90r–91r (ca 1400); and, for extracts, in addition to those in the manuscripts listed by Bignami-Odier, see Basel MS F V 6, f. 130v (ca. 1420) and Tours MS 520, ff. 47v–48r (year 1422). A fifteenth-century marginaliast in the Tours manuscript refers to having another complete parchment

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AS OPPOSED TO POST-ANTICHRIST CHILIASM, the pre-Antichrist variety had virtually no biblical underpinning and, therefore, was seldom espoused openly by theologians. Nonetheless, it appears to have been more "popular" than the post-Antichrist form, in the sense both of having been expressed more frequently and of having had wider currency among nonliterate classes. Ever since the eleventh century, the view that a last great emperor would inaugurate wondrous times on earth before the appearance of Antichrist had enjoyed great favor in Western Europe as a result of its circulation first in the extremely popular prophecies of Pseudo-Methodius and the "Tiburtine Sibyl" and then in numerous adaptations and imitations that often introduced kings or popes in place of the original emperor. Such prophecies were naturally reformulated and recirculated by dynastic and papal propagandists, and they unquestionably found resonance among the masses who longed for right order to be installed by epic heroes. Pre-Antichrist chiliastic prophecies were very often pseudonymous or anonymous, but that by no means impeded their circulation.[21] Indeed, considerable evidence, most of which has hitherto been unstudied, shows that different contemporaries independently fitted the Black Death into the pre-Antichrist chiliastic scheme.

In their discussions of the background for alleged flagellant eschatological radicalism, Haupt, Cohn, and Erbstösser introduced two examples of the second variety of medieval chiliasm, but, for different reasons, these are the least conclusive.[22] One is the oft-cited report by John of Winterthur that around 1348 people "of all sorts" in Germany said that the emperor Frederick II would return to persecute the clergy, reform the Church, redistribute wealth, and reign in justice before resigning his crown on the Mount of Olives. As feverishly intense as these expressions may have been, they cannot be associated directly with the incidence of the Black Death because, as Haupt and others have hesitated to acknowledge, they were current in Germany before the plague struck.[23]

The second example was connected with the Black Death, but, unfortunately, it survives in a form that is barely usable. According to the Würzburg chronicler Michael de Leone, a certain "great astrologer" "predicted" for 1348 the coming of a "great dearth and pestilence." No doubt this was prediction after the fact; Michael himself clearly recognized the pestilence as the Black Death, because in 1349 he commented that such was "already coming true in many parts of Lom-

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copy. (I used a microfilm of Tours MS 520 generously lent to me by the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, Paris.)

[21] For an excellent survey of such prophecies that circulated before the fourteenth century, see Töpfer, *Reich des Friedens*, esp. chaps. 1, 4.

[22] Erbstösser's finding of chiliastic expectations in verses added to the *Chronica S. Petri Erfordensis* is untenable: these do not refer to a "returned Frederick" but merely to the succession of Margrave Friedrich III of Meissen on the death of his father, Margrave Friedrich II; for Erbstösser's remark, see *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter*, 32.

[23] Vitoduranus, *Chronica*, 280–81. For an English translation, see McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 251; for the best of the numerous treatments of this passage, see Töpfer, *Reich des Friedens*, 178–82. John's chronicle stops in 1348, before the Black Death had spread to Germany.

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bardy."[24] The astrologer also "predicted" many other events, but there are doubts about whether Michael de Leone reported them in correct order or whether he abbreviated them excessively. For example, the list of predictions contains a brief statement that the "tyrannous king of France would fall with all of his barons"; this sounds very much like a prophecy after the fact of Philip VI's defeat at Crécy in 1346, but that would make it two years off the mark and, coming after the Black Death, not in proper order. Thus, it is difficult to know how to order the astrologer's predictions of disasters that had apparently not yet come, such as an infestation of insects and poisonous animals, or exactly how to interpret his predictions of the coming of "a single lord" and "the exaltation of the Roman Empire." As best as can be told, however, the last two predictions appear to have been expressions of the perennial imperial prophecies that foretold the coming of a great messianic ruler before the time of Antichrist.[25]

Both John of Winterthur and Michael de Leone were chroniclers who told of prophecies at second hand. Scholarly reliance on them has been typical of a general reliance on chronicle sources as evidence for medieval eschatological ideas. But numerous prophecies that circulated independently of the chronicles help bring us much closer to the original nature and quality of medieval popular eschatology. Just as John of Rupescissa's unpublished *Liber secretorum eventuum* shows how the Black Death was fitted into the post-Antichrist pattern of chiliasm, so several other unnoticed prophecies reveal how the epidemic was fitted into the pre-Antichrist pattern.

The most detailed example is the neglected prophecy of an obscure Frenchman, John of Bassigny.[26] All we know about this prophet, other than that Bas-

[24] Michael de Leone, *Annotata historica* [more properly, *De cronicis temporum modernorum hominum*], ed. J. F. Böhmer, *Fontes rerum Germanicarum*, 1 (1843; reprint ed., Aalen, 1969): 474. For the dating of Michael's history to June 1349, see Stuart Jenks, "The Black Death and Würzburg: Michael de Leone's Reaction in Context" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1976), 37.

[25] Stuart Jenks has observantly noticed that the "great astrologer's" prediction "unus solus erit dominus" echoes Ezekiel 37: 22—"rex unus erit dominus"—which, according to Vitoduranus, *Chronica*, 281, was a prediction cited to express hopes for the return of Frederick II around 1348; Jenks, "Die Prophezeiung von Ps.-Hildegard von Bingen: Eine vernachlässigte Quelle über die Geisslerzüge von 1348/49," *Mainfränkisches Jahrbuch*, 29 (1977): 9–38, at 35 n. 51.

[26] The only prior published treatments, excluding the fanciful nineteenth-century ones (see note 33, page 547, below), are Noël Valois, "Conseils et prédictions adressés à Charles VII, en 1445, par un certain Jean du Bois," *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, 46 (1909): 201–38, at 223–25; and Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 312–15. Valois referred to John only insofar as he is used by the fifteenth-century Jean du Bois; Thorndike treated John's prophecy more extensively but without knowledge of the prophetic tradition within which John worked and without sufficient knowledge of the extant manuscripts. Valois and Thorndike knew two copies of John of Bassigny's prophecy: BN, MS lat. 7352, ff. 2r–4v (fifteenth century); and Tours MS 520, ff. 146r–49v (year 1422). I have relied on Valois's and Thorndike's works for readings from the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript. I have found four more copies that are independent of the late *Mirabilis Liber* printed version (note 33, page 547, below): Kues, Hospitalbibliothek, MS 57, ff. 103vb–04rb (first half of the fifteenth century) (Sara Clark kindly lent me a microfilm of this copy); Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Astr. 4, ff. 155r–57v (first half of the fifteenth century) (f. 157 is bound out of order; it should precede f. 155); BL, MS Cotton, Cleopatra C IV, ff. 81v–85v (late fifteenth century); and BL, MS Lansdowne 762, ff. 54v–57v (early sixteenth century). The last two copies are too corrupt to be of help in establishing readings, but the Kues and Bamberg texts are important witnesses. Unfortunately, the Kues copy breaks off less than halfway through the text; I follow it where I can and use the Bamberg copy for the rest. A complete study and critical edition of the Bassigny prophecy would be a valuable contribution to prophetic and mid-fourteenth-century French history.

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signy was a small territory in Champagne, comes from the text of his prophecy—and that may not be too trustworthy. John claimed to have derived his knowledge of future events not just from studying Holy Scripture and the writings of the prophets, poets, and many learned authorities but also from conversations he held with a Syrian and a "Chaldean" in 1341 while he was traveling in the Holy Land. But this account may not be reliable, because the Eastern place names he gave appear to be bogus.[27] John also claimed to be predicting events from 1343 onward, but his "prophecies" for the years up to about 1361 were clearly made from a knowledge of events that had already occurred.[28]

According to John of Bassigny, a terrible time of trials for the world would begin in 1343 or 1344 with the onset of a devastating plague.[29] This was certainly the Black Death, because John described it tellingly as a "general mortality and pest" that would carry off more than half of the population.[30] Most likely he dated its onset three or four years earlier than the time it first appeared in the West because he was attributing his "prophetic" information to Easterners. John must have assumed that the plague moved from east to west and had no way of knowing when it might have begun in the East. But to leave no doubt in his readers' minds that he was alluding to the Great Plague, he went on to say that it would last for "45 months or more," thereby specifying the actual time of the Black Death's visitation.

In the wake of the plague would follow a succession of horrendous chastisements. Among other things, in 1346, "or a little earlier or later" (a studied vagueness), a great "prince and king of all of the West" would be miserably chased and defeated in battle, and almost all of his knights would be killed—surely a prophecy after the event of the French defeat at Crécy. Similarly, John's "prediction" that "around 1356" the king of France would be captured by his enemies was a prophecy after the event of John the Good's capture by the English at Poitiers. John "predicted" still worse disasters for France for 1358 and 1359, the actual period of the *Jacquerie*, the revolt of Étienne Marcel, and the

[27] In the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript, John claimed to have spoken with a Syrian in "Gadis subtus Quadrum," with a Chaldean in "Bethsedin iuxta Montem Thabcr," and with a Jew in "garda Ademari"; BN, MS lat. 7352, as given by Valois, "Conseils et prédictions adressés à Charles VII," 223 n. 1. So far as I can see, the Kues, Bamberg, and Tours manuscripts all omit reference to the Jew and give, respectively, the following forms for the first two place names: "Gradris subtus Quadum," "Betseladim iuxta Montem Tabor"; "Gadzis subtus Quadrum," "Bethseladum iuxta Montem Thabor"; and "Gadris subtus Cadrum," "Seboch iuxta Montem Thabor." Of all of these names, the only one that appears in Graesse-Benedict's *Orbis Latinus* is Bethsedin—the biblical Bethsaida—which is near, but not immediately next to, Mount Tabor. John may have chosen to mention Bethsaida because Antichrist was expected to be nurtured there; see, for example, Adso Dervensis, *De ortu et tempore Antichristi*, ed. D. Verhelst (Turnhout, 1976), 24.

[28] Compare Valois, "Conseils et prédictions adressés à Charles VII," 223 n. 1: "... prédictions rédigées entre les années 1342 et 1345." Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 314, is properly more skeptical.

[29] Kues, Hospitalbibliothek, MS 57, f. 104ra: "Nam idem ille annus Domini Mccclxiii erit inicium omnium dolorum, quoniam in ipso anno incipiet et eveniet quedam generalis mortalitas et pestis que universum mundum mutabiliter vexabit et affliget, ita quod bene fere plusquam media pars, velut verius dicere due partes, hominum mundi morientur. Et infra quadragesimum quintum mensem, que pestis pro certo xlv menses durabit, vel amplius, licet regnet et vadat modo ibi, modo alibi." The Bamberg manuscript and a marginal note in the Tours manuscript give 1344 for the beginning of the plague; other manuscripts give different dates, but 1343 and 1344 are the only ones that fit with the chronology of the rest of the prophecy.

[30] The term "Black Death" was not a contemporary one; chroniclers usually used the terms "grandis mortalitas" or "grandis pestis"; see Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 5 n. 5.

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ravaging of France by the English. Starting around 1361 or 1362 John introduced real prophecy, predicting, for example, the destruction of Paris before 1362.[31] After that, the Church would be terribly persecuted, and the elements would rage.

So far, all was bad, but John was no unmitigated pessimist. A coming young hero (perhaps meaning the future Charles V) would assume the French crown and dominate the world. He would aid the Irish and Scots in invading England and in annihilating the "sons of Brutus" so that there would thereafter be no memory of them. A holy pope would be crowned by angels and bring the Church back to its pristine state of apostolic sanctity. He would go preaching barefoot everywhere and convert the infidels. Then he would ordain a messianic ruler from the "most noble" French line as emperor, and the two would reform and bring peace to the whole world. Under their sway, there would be "one law, one life, and one faith," and all men would be of one spirit and love each other. This time of peace would last for "many years," but then men would return to evil, and times would grow worse until the coming of Antichrist.[32]

John of Bassigny's prophecy circulated quickly—one copy reached northern England a few years after it was written[33]—and must have satisfied a deep need

[31] The Bibliothèque Nationale copy that Thorndike used has 1382, but I follow the Bamberg manuscript, which consistently presents the most coherent dates.

[32] Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Msc. Astr. 4, f. 156r: "Ordinabit autem Deus secum unum imperatorem sanctissimum qui erit de reliquiis et nobilissimi sanguinis et seminis Francorum regum. Et erit sibi in adiutorium et obediens in omnibus mandatis eius ad reformandum in melius universum orbem. Sub ipsis autem papa et imperatore pacificabitur omnis orbis, quoniam ira Domini quiescet; et sic erit una lex, una vita, et una fides, et erunt homines unanimes, et invicem se amantes, et concordantes. Durabitque pax per annos multos. Postquam autem seculo in melius reformato, iterum multa signa in celo apparebunt qua malicia hominum se evigilabit, et ad mala pristina et malicias pessimas homines revertentur . . . et tunc apparebit Antichristus."

[33] P. Meyvaert, "John Erghome and the *Vaticinium Roberti Bridlington*," *Speculum*, 41 (1966): 656–64, at 658; and Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, 254–56. A bizarre resurrection of the Bassigny prophecy in revolutionary and postrevolutionary France is worth a full study but may be alluded to briefly here. The story begins with the publication of a very corrupt version of the text, ascribed to "Johannes de Vatiguerro," in the *Mirabilis Liber*, a patriotic French prophetic anthology published at least six times in Paris in the 1520s and once in Rome in 1524. (Occasional reference to a Venetian edition of 1514 is clearly a bibliographical error. Dated Parisian editions appeared in 1522, 1523, and 1524, and at least three others were published around the same time in Paris without date "au Pellican," "au Roi David," and "à l'Éléphant." In the undated "au Pellican" edition, the "Vatiguerrus" prophecy appears at folios 55r–58r; in the Rome edition, it is at folios 46r–48v.) Centuries later, in 1795, a French Royalist who read the "Vatiguerrus" prophecy in a copy of the *Mirabilis Liber* he found in Paris in the Bibliothèque Nationale concluded that it applied perfectly to the present tribulations of France and also foretold a Bourbon restoration. The results were that many others flooded the Bibliothèque Nationale to read the notorious prediction, that the police cracked down and imprisoned a librarian for making the *Mirabilis Liber* available, and that copies of the "Vatiguerrus" prophecy circulated clandestinely throughout France in a tendentiously altered version fathered on St. Cesarius of Arles. After the Restoration the prophecy could once more go public, and thus in 1814 and 1815, and then again after the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, numerous editions appeared of either the "Cesarius" text or the unaltered "Vatiguerrus" one, printed in Latin or French or in both languages simultaneously. For an illustrative example, see [Hyacinthe Olivier-Vitalis, ed.] *Prophétie recueillie et transmise par Jean de Vatiguerro; extraite du Liber Mirabilis* (Carpentras, 1814); I have used a copy in Avignon, Bibliothèque Calvet, In-8°24,897. Olivier-Vitalis explained how, as librarian at Carpentras, he had earlier hidden away three copies of the *Mirabilis Liber* to make sure that the police would not confiscate them and how he was now free to bring out the "Vatiguerrus" text publicly in Latin with facing-page French, together with a commentary showing how it accurately predicted, among other things, the death of Louis XVI, the persecution of the Church, and the return of the Bourbons, to be followed by a long reign of peace. For more, but by no means exhaustive, information on the "Vatiguerrus"-"Cesarius" copies, see Abbé Lecanu, *Dictionnaire des prophéties et des miracles*, 2 (Paris, 1852): 54–61, 716; and Jean Harmand, "Une Prophétie du XVIe siècle sur la Révolution," *Revue des études historiques*,

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for comprehending the present within the terms of the future. The one drawback to using it as a source for appraising eschatological reactions to the Black Death is that it was not written under the most immediate impact of the plague, at least not at the time of the first occurrence. But another prophetic text, almost entirely neglected by scholarship, dates from the terrible plague year of 1349 itself.

The Carmelite William of Blofield sent a report of "rumors" from "Roman parts" to an unnamed friar in the Dominican convent of Norwich in 1349. According to these rumors, Antichrist was already ten years old and a boy of incomparable beauty and learning. But another boy who lived "beyond the Tartars" and was instructed in Christianity was already twelve years old. He would destroy "the perfidy of the Saracens," become the greatest among Christians, and rule as pope and emperor. His empire, however, would quickly come to an end by violence and thereafter would arise unprecedented "revolutions" throughout the world, out of which would emerge a "good and just pope" who would create cardinals who feared the Lord. In this pope's time there would be the greatest peace, but afterward Antichrist would reign openly. William of Blofield dismissed these rumors as fictitious, but he was nonetheless sufficiently interested in them to communicate them to a Dominican friend, who in turn preserved them at Norwich. Whatever William thought, his report is evidence that speculations about Christian triumph and wondrous times before Antichrist circulated in Italy during the time of the plague.[34]

Still more evidence shows that similar speculations were circulating very widely at the same time throughout Western Europe. In the Middle Ages prophecies did not always have to be invented to fit new situations; old ones could be resurrected with new dates. One that was resurrected to fit the Black Death was a text beginning "the high Cedar of Lebanon will be felled," which circulated in various forms throughout Europe from about 1240 until deep into the seventeenth century and lay at hand during the plague years for someone to revive for the edification of himself and others. The version of the "Cedar of Lebanon" prophecy he used began by reporting that in 1287 a Cistercian monk in Syrian Tripoli had seen a hand writing a prophetic message during mass on the corporal cloth over the altar. The message foretold that Tripoli and Acre

79 (1913): 523–49. Neither Lecanu nor Harmand knew that the "Vatiguerrus" prophecy was originally written in the fourteenth century by John of Bassigny.

[34] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 404, f. 102; I edit this text in the appendix, page 552, below. Marjorie Reeves edited without comment the first half of this text; *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, 94. On William, see A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge, 1963), 66. Emden has shown that William belonged to the Carmelite convent of Cambridge in 1343. Although the Cambridge text presents some ambiguity, I prefer to think that William sent his report to Norwich from Italy rather than from some place in England. (It is noteworthy that Blofield is only about ten kilometers away from Norwich; the recipient of William's report may have been a relative or local friend.) On the copyist of the Cambridge manuscript, Henry of Kirkestede, who was the librarian of Bury St. Edmunds, see Richard H. Rouse, "Bostonus Buriensis and the Author of the *Catalogus Scriptorum Ecclesiae*," *Speculum*, 41 (1966): 471–99. Henry found William of Blofield's report in Norwich on his bibliographical travels and expressed his own doubts about the rumors by writing in the margin of his copy *mendacium*. My study of the manuscript in connection with the "Cedar of Lebanon" prophecy leads me to believe that Henry's copy dates from between ca. 1365 and ca. 1377; for the "Cedar of Lebanon" prophecy, see note 35, page 549, below.

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would soon fall and that worse disasters would follow: a "people without a head" would come, the "Ship of Peter" would be tossed in the waves, and battles, famines, and plagues would strike everywhere. Then two great rulers, one from the East and the other from the West, would conquer the world and bring peace and "abundance of fruit" for fifteen years. Thereafter would follow a successful crusade, the city of Jerusalem would be "glorified," and the Holy Sepulchre would be visited by all. But in this tranquillity "news would be heard of Antichrist."[35]

The vision of the Cistercian monk was certainly fictitious; much of it was plagiarized from a prophecy of about 1240, and there was not even any Cistercian cloister in Syrian Tripoli.[36] Nonetheless, it took Europe by storm in the last years of the thirteenth century, no doubt because it so accurately "foretold" the fall of Tripoli and Acre (in fact, more prophecy after the event) and placed those events within a larger prophetic context. Around the time of the Black Death it could be found in numerous libraries and obviously appeared to someone to contain accurate predictions of current events—namely, the coming of "plagues in many places," and the coming of a "people without a head," who could be seen as the flagellants ("without a head" because they had no known leader).[37] Since the vision "predicted" the present so well, the unknown reader must have decided that here was a certain guide to the future and therefore decided to circulate it for the benefit of his contemporaries. Instead of recirculating it untouched, however, he rewrote the introduction to state that the Cistercian monk saw his vision in Tripoli in 1347.[38] Surely he did this to make his vision seem more immediate, but he clearly did not give his alteration much careful thought: in 1347 the Holy Land had been lost for more than a half-century, and it was ridiculous to imagine a Cistercian cloister there or a message predicting the fall of cities that had long since fallen.

Still, the version of the "Cedar of Lebanon" prophecy for 1347, which otherwise contained only minor revisions, was an enormous success. There are at least eight surviving manuscript copies, and the textual variants that appear in these copies are so multifarious that there could easily have been more than one hundred copies now lost.[39] Short prophecies sometimes circulated on single sheets

[35] For published editions of versions close to the one used by the mid-fourteenth-century reviser, see *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, 17: 605, and 23: 567–68. I am currently working on an extended study of the "Cedar of Lebanon" prophecy, which will provide editions and more information concerning the various versions.

[36] See my "Medieval Prophecy and Religious Dissent," *Past & Present*, no. 72 (1976): 3–24, at 12.

[37] For an explicit statement that the "people without a head" in the prophecy were the flagellants, see Breslau (Wrocław), University Library, MS IV F 6, f. 100v; for a published edition, see Joseph Klapper, ed., *Exempla aus Handschriften des Mittelalters* (Heidelberg, 1911), 64 (which was kindly called to my attention by Dr. P. Dinzelbacher, Stuttgart). For independent designations of the flagellants as "gens sine capite," also see Erbstösser, *Sozialreligiöse Strömungen im späten Mittelalter*, 27; and Jenks, "Die Prophezeiung von Ps.-Hildegard von Bingen," 20.

[38] For the only published edition of this version, see Jean Leclercq, "Textes et manuscrits cisterciens dans des bibliothèques des États-Unis," *Traditio*, 17 (1961): 163–83, at 166–69. The manuscript that Leclercq used gives the date 1346 for the vision, but I believe this to be a variant from the original revision's 1347. Leclercq's commentary is based on the fallacious assumption that the single copy he used was unique.

[39] The eight medieval copies I know are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 761, f. 184v (Frau Wal-

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that were not subsequently preserved.) The eight copies also bear witness to a very wide geographical distribution, having been copied in places as distant from each other as Yorkshire, Catalonia, the Rhineland, and Lower Austria.[40] Some of the copies were made after the plague subsided, but some circulated while the epidemic was raging: the copy from Lilienfeld, Lower Austria, concludes with a report of the desolation wrought by the plague in Avignon. Like John of Bassigny's prophecy and the rumors reported by William of Blofield, the revised version of the "Cedar of Lebanon" vision must have been conceived in order to relate the woes of the present to the certainties of the future. Despite its chronological absurdities, it circulated widely because it helped many to fathom the otherwise unfathomable.[41]

THE WIDE CIRCULATION of the "Cedar of Lebanon" vision makes it abundantly clear that chiliastic prophecies were not exclusively spread by flagellants, or (if at all) by "fanatics" or heretics who tried to play on the despondency of the dislocated lower classes. None of the copies was accompanied by any call for violent action, and all whose provenance can be determined came from monastic or aristocratic milieux. Similarly, John of Bassigny's prophecy was transmitted and studied by clerics,[42] and William of Blofield said nothing about the rumors he reported having been spread by flagellants, rabble-rousers, or heretics. If we include the prophecy of Michael de Leone's "great astrologer" in the list of chil-

traud Huber kindly called my attention to this copy); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 218, f. 107r; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 27, f. 26r; BN, MS Français 902, f. 96v; Yale University Library, MS Marston 225, ff. 43v–44v (the copy that Leclercq edited); Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 28229, f. 21r; MS Lilienfeld 49, f. 357r (a copy I learned of by means of the incipit list of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn.); and Carpentras MS 336, ff. 75v–76v (a Catalan translation). A seventeenth-century copy of the Fairfax 27 text appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 28, f. iii^{v}.

[40] The Bodleian Fairfax 27 copy is from Bolton, Yorkshire; the Carpentras copy is from Catalonia; the Munich copy is from Speyer on the Rhine (I am grateful to Dr. Alexander Patschovsky for this identification); and the Lilienfeld copy is from Lilienfeld, Lower Austria.

[41] Another prophecy that may have been redated to relate to the Black Death derives from the *De semine scripturarum*. In the original version of this early thirteenth-century work, which is still unedited, the time of the letter "x" (in which the Church was to be cleansed of corruption) was to last from 1215 to 1315, and the time of the letter "y" (one of the conversion of all peoples) from 1315 to 1415. See Töpfer, *Reich des Friedens*, 46; and H. Grundmann, "Ueber die Schriften des Alexander von Roes," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 8 (1950): 162. But in a Würzburg University Library manuscript (M p. mi. f.6, f. 37r), the time of "x" is altered to the years 1248 to 1348, and of "y" to the years 1348 to 1448; see H. Grauert, *Magister Heinrich der Poet in Würzburg und die römische Kurie*, Abhandlungen der königlichen Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philos.-philol. und hist. Klasse, 27, 1–2 (Munich, 1912), 443–44. Also see Jenks, "Die Prophezeiung von Ps.-Hildegard von Bingen," 17, 35 n. 54. Jenks has read the date given for the prophecy of Merlin in the manuscript following the references to *De semine scripturarum* as 1343; but to my mind this dating does not necessarily conflict with Grauert's view that the text was copied around 1350. Since the manuscript was written under the direction of Michael de Leone, it is possible that the redating was done by Michael or someone shortly before him as a way of reconceiving the prophecy in terms of a newly perceived significance found in the plague. Further study of the textual traditions of *De semine scripturarum* might help confirm or disprove this hypothesis.

[42] Both the Augustinian friar John Erghome and the parish priest Guillaume Bauge of Nouans in the diocese of Tours, whose copy was used for the edition in the *Mirabilis Liber*, studied John of Bassigny's prophecy. The copy of Bassigny's prophecy in the Tours manuscript collection was made in the Benedictine monastery of Marmoutier. On John Erghome, see Meyvaert, "John Erghome and the *Vaticinium Roberti Bridlington*," 656–64; and Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, 254–56.

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iastic texts inspired by the plague, we have still another prophecy that traveled in thoroughly respectable and orthodox circles.

All of this should not be surprising since it was obviously not necessary to be aberrant and poor to be upset by the plague, and resort to prophecy was meant to provide edification and comfort, not inspiration for insurrection. Europeans tried to comprehend the fury of the plague with the aid of what might be called a prophetic "deep structure." The prophecies I have introduced were certainly conceived independently, but, aside from variations in details, all foresaw contemporary storms being succeeded by wondrous times of peace and Christian triumph. One might make an analogy to the calm after the storm in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, were it not for the fact that the prophetic calm after the storm was not the finale but was expected to be followed by either the reign of Antichrist or the advent of Gog and Magog, with the Last Judgment to follow in either case thereafter. Peace and tranquillity on earth might be great but earthly attainments could never be perfect or eternal, for Christianity was based on the assumption that perfection could only be found in the hereafter and the beyond.

The reasons for the similarities in the plague prophecies were probably twofold. First, as we have seen, fully developed prophetic traditions lay behind all of the texts. Despite his assertion of sudden illumination, Rupescissa's predictions rested on a long tradition of post-Antichrist eschatological exegesis, and prophecies of coming messianic rulers and times of peace before Antichrist had circulated in Christian Europe before 1347. Within certain limits prophets were free to alter details: they might state that the coming new age would be longer or shorter or that it would have more of one kind of progressive fulfillment than another. But within both the post- and pre-Antichrist alternatives there were basic sequences of events that prophets were virtually obliged to follow.

And, second, just those basic sequences were designed to provide comfort. Present disasters might be tolerated better if they could be viewed in terms of a coherent divine plan. Chastisements might come, but it was surely comforting to know that they would have an end and be followed by "peace and tranquillity." So whenever new disasters struck—the Black Death is by no means the only example[43]—new prophecies were brought forth out of the "deep structure" or old prophecies were retailored to fit new events.

Mentalities, like Mediterranean sailing routes, have their *longues durées*. The Black Death, medieval Europe's greatest disaster, prompted many to think about how the present related to the future and called forth expressions of chiliasm that circulated from Italy to England and from Austria to Catalonia. In their main outlines, these expressions were not new but were manifestations

[43] For three prophecies in addition to the "Cedar of Lebanon" text that seem to have been inspired by the fall of Tripoli and Acre, see my "Medieval Prophecy and Religious Dissent," 14. Numerous examples of other prophecies inspired by other disasters or portents could be adduced. The Black Death itself seems to have inspired fewer prophecies than one might have expected, but as yet this is only an impression; perhaps other prophecies circulated that are still unidentified or lost, and perhaps some older prophecies were applied by contemporaries to the Black Death in ways that are still unknown. A comparison between the number and nature of prophecies inspired by the Black Death and other events that were perceived to be disastrous might be instructive; but at present that project seems too difficult to undertake.

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of a basically unchanging medieval prophetic structure. They were meant to inspire perseverance in faith, hope, and penance, but they were not otherwise meant as calls to action. They intended to give comfort by providing certainties in the face of uncertainty and must have helped frightened Europeans get about their work.[44] In such ways can mentalities, like sailing routes, support life.

[44] Compare M. Dols, "Comparative Communal Responses to the Black Death in Muslim and Christian Societies," *Viator*, 5 (1974): 269–87; and his *Black Death in the Middle East*, 281–302. Dols has emphasized the contemporary Islamic lack of eschatological hopes and consequent resignation and fatalism. Despite Dols's thoughtful work, comparisons between Western Christian and Islamic reactions to the plague must remain highly speculative, owing to the deficiencies of the sources and the complexities of the problem.

Appendix

William of Blofield's Report of Rumors from Roman Parts

I edit the following from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 404, f. 102r–v. For a description of the manuscript, see M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, 2 (Cambridge, 1912): 269–77; and, for further information on the manuscript, see Rouse, "Bostonus Buriensis and the Author of the *Catalogus Scriptorum Ecclesiae*," 475, *passim*; and Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, 539. Reeves edited the first half of the text; *ibid.*, 94. I adhere to the spelling of the manuscript, except in providing "v" for consonantal "u," but I have modernized the punctuation and capitalization.

Subscriptos rumores scripsit frater Willelmus de Blofeld in Anglia, anno Domini m.ccc.xlix, cuidam fratri conventus Fratrum Predicatorum Norwicensis, quod prophete diversi sunt in partibus Romanorum, sed adhuc occulti, qui omnia fictiva predixerunt per annos multos. Et isto anno, videlicet ab incarnacione m.ccc.xlix, predicant Antichristum habere se x annos etatis et puerum esse dilectissimum et doctissimum in omni sciencia, in tantum quod non est aliquis iam vivens qui sibi poterit coequari. Predicant eciam alium puerum ultra Tartaros iam natum xii annorum, qui in fide Christiana est imbutus, et hic est qui perfidiam Saracenorum destruet et maximus est inter Christianos, sed cito finietur eius imperium in adventu Antichristi. Isti eciam prophete de isto papa inter cetera dicunt quod finem violencium faciet. Dicunt eciam quod post mortem istius pape tot revoluciones erunt in mundo quot nunquam fuerunt per aliquod tempus. Sed post hec surget alius papa bonus et iustus, et cardinales creabit dominum timentes, et tempore huius maxime erit pax. Et post eum nullus erit papa, sed Antichristus veniet et se ostendet, etc.

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