



# ‘The King and I’ Prophecies right or wrong, and their Consequences: From Joachim of Fiore to John Dee

Julia Eva Wannemacher, Bern/Erlangen

## 1. Kings and Prophets in the Old Testament and Medieval Legend

What is a prophet? A prophet is a man – or a woman, for that matter – who, by the grace of God, or gifted with a supernatural power, or on godly errand and told by God to do so, tells people what to do, or what will happen, or what will happen if they do or don’t do this or that.

A prophet, therefore, foretells the future ... but does he? Or does he not rather create the future, by foretelling it?

A king or emperor creates the future by profession. Kings and emperors make laws and give orders, have cities built or destroyed, and let their armies fight or make peace. No one but a king or emperor has a more vital interest in power over the

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future. And no one can make better use of a prophet.

The Bible and history until recent times provide many examples of the both intimate and versatile relations between prophets and kings. The benefit for a king is clear. If the prophet tells him what to do, and succeeds, the king is of course much better off than he would have been without the prophet. But even if the prophet fails, the assignment of the prophet may turn out most useful for the king: if he fails, following the prophet's advice, it is the prophet who is to blame for the failure, not the king. A thoughtful colleague of ours once mused that this might be the true *raison d'être* for the council of Wise Men commissioned by the German government even in 2016<sup>1</sup> – because although their prognoses mostly fail, they give grounds for the government to act on the basis of these prognoses, and the failure of the prognoses excuses the failure of the government much more easily than if the members of the government had to be responsible for it themselves. Blaming the prophet is as easy today as it was in biblical times and the Middle Ages, though prophets have never been so well paid as today, and have never cost, if not the government proper, at least the tax-payer so dearly.

Kings and their prophets have not always been on friendly terms, as the example of King David and the prophet Nathan shows. Like no other man in Israel, Nathan dared to reproach the king, and even school him, and King David did not protest even when Nathan pronounced the most severe penalty against him, the death of his first-born son with the wife he

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sachverstaendigenrat-wirtschaft.de/ziele.html> (viewed 22. February 2016).

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had just taken from another man. But was David the worse for this penalty? Or was it not rather a most clever strategy, which served King David to reconcile his people to the wanton death and abduction of the wife of one of their best soldiers?<sup>2</sup> King David, the handsome shepherd whom God loved, had committed a deed for which there was no excuse, for which the God of his fathers could have no mercy. But God's prophet offered an easy way out of this dilemma, a way whereby David could keep his abducted wife, and his throne, as well as the goodwill of both God and his people, while the due penance, as so oft in the life of King David, had to be paid by an innocent; in this case, the new-born son of David and his abducted wife.<sup>3</sup>

Without the services of the prophet, whose face seems so severe, David would have remained shamefaced and unrepentant in face of his people, but having paid the penalty of the life of his baby son, he was reconciled with God, had accepted his punishment and received God's forgiveness at the hands of the prophet – so how could God's people be more severe than God himself, as avowed by His prophet? King David and his prophet are an excellent example of how even a punitive prophet can serve the purpose of the king, and help him to retain or even strengthen his powers.

A completely different situation is the case of the prophet Elijah and King Ahab.<sup>4</sup> Here, the prophet does not come to his own sovereign, but to a king who does not acknowledge God,

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2 2 Sam 11:1-27.

3 2 Sam 12:1-25.

4 1 Kgs 18 – 2 Kgs 2.

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or the authenticity of the message of God's own prophet, nor even the prophet himself. Accordingly, he does not obey the words of the prophet, and has to face the dire consequences of his disobedience. While the words of the prophet come true, the falseness of the king's decision not to obey him becomes clearer day by day, and while the threatened punishment comes upon king and country, all of the king's and his own prophets' authority diminishes. A hostile prophet may easily endanger, or even destroy, a king's power, no matter how many prophets he called his own. For a king, a convincing prophet of his own was a worthwhile purchase.

For a prophet, kings and emperors may prove difficult clientele – for obvious reasons. Prophets came to kings, either on God's errands, or their own, or at request of kings. A famous case of a prophet who was summoned by a king is the prophet Merlin,<sup>5</sup> who was summoned by the Saxon king, Vortigern. Vortigern, however, intended to make a different kind of use of the prophet, which would have led to Merlin's death, but Merlin not only knew of the king's plans but also had a better idea about how to solve the king's problem: in the end, through his prophecies of the red and the black dragon deep in the ground below Vortigern's castle, he astounded the king and his court with his unexpected knowledge not of the future but of the underworld. He foretold the king that his tower would collapse,

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5 On Merlin as a Prophet, see e.g. Christopher Dean: *A Study of Merlin in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present Day: The Devil's Son*, Lewiston 1992; on Merlin in the Wake of Joachite prophecies, see Matthias Kaup: *Merlin, ein politischer Prophet: Genese, Funktion und Auslegung merlinischer Prophetie im Spiegel zweier unedierter Kommentare des 12. und 13. Jahrhundert*, *Cristianesimo nella storia* vol. 20 (1999) 545-578.

as would his kingdom. The lesson which Vortigern could have learned was never to underestimate a prophet because, while Merlin had foreseen Vortigern's end, he helped his successor Uther Pendragon not only to his throne, but also to his wife and child, the future King Arthur. In this legend, Merlin the prophet practically acted as kingmaker, though not in the name of a Christian God.

With these biblical and mythical prophets, the stage for medieval and early modern prophets was set. What was the perspective of the medieval prophet?

### 2. Medieval Political Prophecy: Who but Joachim of Fiore?

Few of them entered this stage personally: A majority of medieval prophets are anonymous writers, who hide behind the authority of the great names of ancient saints and prophetesses like the medieval Sibyls, and give their credentials by backdating their writings and making them seem true prophecies by prophesying partly *ex eventu*, such as, for example, the prophecies of Pseudo-Methodius from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Naturally, their authority cannot be validated by a personal appearance before a king's court but, in fact, they do not intend to make prophecies for, or influence, an actual king or emperor. Their intention, though still limited to space and time, is meant to inform and influence a reading or listening public, to encourage them – as in the case of Pseudo-Methodius –, to edify the faithful – like the Tiburtine Sibyl<sup>6</sup> –, or to inform them about the wickedness of a king –

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<sup>6</sup> On the Tiburtine Sibyl, see Ernst Sackur: *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen*, Halle 1898, repr. Turin 1963, and more recently, evaluating and outdating prior studies, Anke Holdenried: *The Sibyl and her Scribes: Manuscripts and Interpretation of the Latin c. 1050-1500*, Aldershot 2006.

like the Eritrean Sibyl.<sup>7</sup>

While the anonymous or pseudepigraphical prophecies gained authority through the weight of the mythical origin, old age or venerable names, medieval prophets who appeared in person were presented with the problem of how to be acknowledged by the kings and their court. And if this obstacle were to be cleared, how then would the prophet's career succeed when confronted with the king and his requests?

If the prophet foresaw great victories which came true, all was well. But what if he either foresaw trouble and defeat, or if a promised victory was replaced by an all but victorious outcome? All of these cases are known to have happened, with varying results for the prophet. Prophets from Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) to the times of Nostradamus or John Dee in the 16th century prove to be striking examples and offer interesting perspectives for comparison.

Like no other medieval prophet, Joachim of Fiore was an expert political counselor of kings and emperors. He was so not only for one king, but even for those who were enemies. Still, he met kings not always in his role as prophet. When he met King Tancred of Sicily, he did so only as head of a group of hermits, not as a prophet. Before he met Tancred, Joachim met Tancred's opponent, the Staufian Emperor Henry VI on his campaign to Southern Italy in May 1191 near Naples.

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<sup>7</sup> On the Erythrean Sibyl, see Christian Jostmann: *Sibilla Erithea Babilonica. Papsttum und Prophetie im 13. Jahrhundert*, Hanover 2006. A detailed review of both studies is at <http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-8686> (viewed 22. February 2016).

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After he had been crowned by Pope Celestine III in Rome, Henry VI conquered Naples and other cities in central Italy. Joachim, who, according to his biographers, foresaw the future, summoned the emperor, criticized him for his cruelty and threatened him with God's wrath. If he continued with his campaign, this would mean imminent death for the emperor and his company, but if he followed Joachim's words, the Sicilian kingdom would be his without any means of force and within three years. The Emperor was impressed, though his henchman were not, and had Joachim escorted safely back to Salerno, and he did as Joachim had told him because, after a series of defeats, and a serious outbreak of illness among his troops, he saw the truth of Joachim's prophecies. He was so impressed by Joachim that he endorsed his newfound order with many bestowals and privileges, though the uncontested victory Joachim had prophesied to him had not yet taken place.

The Emperor's benevolence toward Joachim and his order continued when they met again in October 1194. By then, the Emperor's campaigns had in fact been successful, and he must have been more than willing to ascribe the success of his plans to God's will, and his obedience to it, incarnate in the figure of Joachim of Fiore. Probably, the privileges and bestowals were but a cheap price to pay for God's appraisal of Henry's campaigns and sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed evaluation of Henry's relationship to Joachim, see Thomas Foerster: *Der Prophet und der Kaiser: Staufische Herrschaftsvorstellungen am Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Staufisches Kaisertum im 12. Jahrhundert: Konzepte – Netzwerke – Politische Praxis*, ed. Stefan Burkhardt, Thomas Metz, Bernd Schneidmüller and

In another case, Joachim's foretelling was less accurate, to tell the least. When, in winter 1190/91, the English king, Richard II, paused in Messina, waiting for the French king, Philip II Augustus, to join him on the crusade, he asked for Joachim to be sent to him. What follows has been observed and reported by the king's courtiers, and is preserved in at least three different versions. In each of these, the king asks Joachim about the outcome of his enterprise: the planned conquest of Jerusalem, and the desired victory over Saladin. What differs is Joachim's answer.<sup>9</sup> Joachim interprets Rev. 12:1-6 as a prophecy of the king's future enterprise – the third crusade, his attempt to conquer Jerusalem and win over Saladin.

In what we suppose to be the earliest version, Joachim prophesied to the King that his enterprise would prove a complete success, that he, King Richard, would be the cause of Sultan Saladin's imminent death, that his campaign would bring the Holy Land back under Christian government by himself, Richard I, the glorious victor, through whom God would be glorified. We can easily imagine that the Lionheart was pleased at hearing this, and encouraged by Joachim's glorious vision of his heroic campaign.<sup>10</sup>

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Stefan Weinfurter, Regensburg 2010, 253-76.

<sup>9</sup> John Gillingham: *Richard Coeur de Lion. Kingship, Chivalry and War in the Twelfth Century*, London – Rio Grande 1994, 141–153; on the manuscript tradition and dating, see Christoph Egger: *Joachim of Fiore and the Influence of Inspiration. Essays in Memory of Marjorie E. Reeves (1905-2003)*, ed. Julia Eva Wannemacher, Farnham 2013, 145-179.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict of Peterborough, *re vera Roger of Howden*: 'Quod ide Joachium interpretatur dicens: „... et unus [sc. rex] est, scilicet Saladinus, qui in presenti opprimit ecclesia Dei, et eam cum sepulcro Domini, et sancta civitate Jerusalem, et cum terra in qua steterunt pedes Domini, in servitumem



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In a second version, written by the same author, who was actually a member of King Richard's court, Joachim prophesied that Sultan Saladin would die only seven years after the conquest of Jerusalem, i.e. much later than the present crusade. And when the king, disappointedly, and perhaps not without irony, asked why then his crusade would be necessary, Joachim replied that the crusade would secure him a victory over all his enemies, and glorify his name above all kings of the earth.<sup>11</sup>

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redigit; et ipse in proximo amittet regnum Jerosolimitanum et interficietur ....“ Et conversus ad regem Angliae ait: „Haec omnia reservavit Dominus et per te fieri permittet, Qui dabit tibi de inimicis tuis victoriam, et Ipse nomen tuum glorificabit in aeternum, et tu Ipsum glorificabis, et in te Ipse glorificabitur, si in opere coepto perseveraveris”, Gesta Regis Ricardi, vol. II, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, London 1867, 152-153. On both texts of Roger of Howden, see David Corner: *The Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi and Chronica of Roger, Parson of Howden*, Bulletin of the Institute of Historical research, 56 (1983), and John Gillingham: *Roger of Howden on Crusade*, in *Richard Cœur de Lion* (as above).

11 Roger of Howden: 'Eodem anno Ricardus rex Angliae, audiens per communem famam, et multorum relationem, quod quidam vir religiosus erat in Calabria, dictus Johachim, abbas de Curacio, de ordine Cistrensi [sic], habens spiritum prophetocum, et ventura populo praedicabat, misit pro eo, et libenter audiebat verba prophetiae illius, et sapientiam et doctrinam. Eru-ditus enim erat in Divinis scripturis et interpretabatur visiones Beati Johannis Evangelistae, quas ipse Johannes narrat in Apocalypsi ... Erat autem haec visio Beati Johannis Evangelistae: "Reges septem sunt, quinque ceciderunt, et unus est, et unus nondum venit." ... Quod idem Johachim ita exponit; ... Ex his quinque ceciderunt, scilicet Herodes, Nero, Constantius, Maumet, Melsemutus; et unus est, scilicet Saladinus, qui in presenti opprimit ecclesiam, et eam cum sepulcro Domini, occupatam detinet; sed ipse in proximo perdet illam. Tunc interrogavit eum rex Angliae: "Quando erit hoc?" Cui Johachim respondit, "Quando septem anni elapsi erunt a die captionis Jerusalem." Tunc ait rex Angliae, "Ergo quare venimus huc tam cito?" Cui Johachim respondit; "Adventus tuus valde necessarius est, quia

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The third report, written by a Premonstratensian chronicler, presents a completely different account. He prophesied to King Richard that he and King Philip II Augustus would travel overseas, but to no avail; their campaign would accomplish little or nothing, because the time for the deliverance of Jerusalem and the Holy Land had not yet arrived.<sup>12</sup>

How can the difference between these three reports be explained? Only the last of the three, written by the Premonstratensian, presents Joachim's prophecy with reference to the actual outcome, namely that the occidental kings would neither defeat nor kill Saladin, nor would they set Jerusalem or the Holy Land free. It is more than likely that Joachim in this situation did not prophecy to the king a complete failure, but rather encouraged him to fight for the freedom of Jerusalem. The first and oldest report might have been written before news arrived of the complete failure of the campaign, and its author had a vivid interest in the success of King Richard's enterprises, and their godly patronage. In his *Chronicon*, the same author modified the message that Joachim gave to the King, because by now it had turned out, and all the world knew, that Richard had done nothing like defeating Saladin, and that Saladin lived until 1193, probably the date after which this re-

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Dominus dabit tibi victoriam de inimicis Suis, et exaltabit nomen tuum super omnes principes terrae", *Chronica*, vol. III, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, London 1870, 75-78.

12 Robert of Auxerre: 'Venit ad eos [i.e. Richard and King Philip Augustus of France] abbas Joachim, de suo evocatus monasterio in Calabria constituto, qui ab eis de futuris sciscitatus respondit, quod mare transitori forent, sed aut nichil aut parum proficerent, necdum adesse tempora, quibus liberanda foret Iherusalem et regio', *Chronicon*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 26, Hanover 1882, 255.

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port must have been written, which could represent Roger's attempt to avoid disgracing either the prophet for telling lies or the king for failing completely.

What Joachim had told the king must have been the very message that he wanted to hear; an encouraging one, full of hope and promise. Though Joachim kept on the safe side in doing so, knowing that the King would be on his way to the Holy Land sooner or later, and might not meet him again to confront him with an eventual failure, it is assuming too much to say that Joachim prophesied only at the king's will. His negative prophecy to Henry VI, which was still accepted friendly enough, is a valid example to show that Joachim did not hesitate to prophesy imminent failures, even at high personal risk. His prophecies were true – certainly for him, and with the kings he addressed, he was more than lucky.

In effect, Joachim proved to be one of the most successful prophets of the Middle Ages, and it is no surprise that the later written prophecies, beginning with the influential *Super Ieremiam* and by far not ending with the Pseudo-Joachite commentaries on the Sibyls and Merlin, used the name of Joachim to suggest their authenticity, and their exclusivity, to their faithful audience. Ironically enough, Joachim himself energetically denied being a prophet, and did so in a reliable source, with an author about whose expertise there could be no doubt. In a famous conversation with a fellow abbot of the Cistercian order, from which Joachim's own foundation had derived, the abbot in question, Adam of Perseigne, asked Joachim whether his predictions were made by means of prophecy, conjecture, or revelation – each of which Joachim denies. In the report of this interview, which is preserved in a

chronicle written by yet another Cistercian abbot, the English chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall, Joachim provides precise definitions of what he regards as prophecy, conjecture, and revelation, and explains precisely why his own gift constitutes none of these. From the tone of the interview, it is clear that we are witnessing a conversation between experts, both of whom know exactly what they are talking about, and are in perfect concordance about what the terms in questions mean.<sup>13</sup> Joachim names his own gift in line with that of the prophets, himself in a line with them, but clearly states that their time – *olim* – lies in a distant past, while the gift he enjoys, the ability to understand the secrets of the scriptures, is still at work, and will continue to be so.

Later prophets, however, were less fortunate. I don't like to mention how sadly Thomas Müntzer erred, who had relied so firmly on what he had read in none other than Pseudo-Joachim's works, and felt himself to be one of the spiritual men in whose hands Pseudo-Joachim had laid the faith of Christianity. When he stood up before the princes and expected them to obey his words, it is astounding, nay breathtaking how brave, how self-convinced, and how naive this well-read, intelligent, hot-tempered young man must have been, and how

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<sup>13</sup> Ralph of Coggeshall: 'Hic Rome interrogatus a uiro uenerabili et in Dei uerbo facundissimo et eque religioso abbate Persenne, quonam ausu talia prediceret, an ex prophetia an coniectura seu reuelatione, respondit se neque prophetiam neque coniecturam neque reuelationem de his habere. "Sed Deus", inquit, "qui olim dediti prophetis spiritum prophetie, mihi dedit spiritum intelligentie, ut in Dei spiritu omnia misteria sacre scripture clarissime intelligam, sicut sancti prophete intellexerunt, qui eam olim in Dei spiritu ediderunt"', *Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, Rolls Series, London 1875, repr. Cambridge 2012, 67-69.

little it takes a prophet to see how his attempt to convince the princes could only have ended in failure. It merely adds an extra touch of bitterness to his story that Müntzer, ironically enough, never read a word of what is known to be authentically Joachim, but only Pseudo-Joachim's *Super Ieremiam* with its fiery, political, completely worldly prophecies of future spiritual men. Would Müntzer have acted differently, had he known how purely spiritual Joachim's own conception of the Third Age had been? – But this is not the topic of this paper. Rather, I would like to talk about other prophets from the Renaissance period, and their prophecies regarding kings.

### 3. God, the Prophet and the State in Renaissance Italy: Girolamo Savonarola and Florence

Whether he was an epigone of the dark medieval centuries or, at most, a forerunner of later Renaissance prophets, who acted in their own right, or the first and greatest of the Renaissance prophets remains uncertain; he was a monk, with medieval monastic ideals, firmly believing in visions and fiercely preaching penitence but, with his humanist education, he was a member of a humanist elite of high rank both in his order and among the citizens of Florence: the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola (1499-1498), the 'preaching prophet'.<sup>14</sup> His theocratic ideal, which he had designed in great detail for the future city of Florence, is surprising both for its precise instructions, like the prescribed construction of the town council, and

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<sup>14</sup> On Savonarola as prophet see Donald Weinstein: *Savonarola. The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, New Haven 2011; on Savonarola's thought see: *Inter omnes Plato et Aristoteles. Gli appunti filosofici di Girolamo Savonarola. Introduzione, edizione critica e commento a cura di Lorenza Tromboni*, Porto 2012 .

also its remarkably modern, democratic traits of character, whereby, for example, magistrates should qualify for election not due to their rank or wealth or high age, but rather their personal and moral character, and, above all, their personal abilities and qualities to fill the magistrate's position.

Savonarola explicitly introduced himself as a prophet, and when the people of Florence expected miracles, he tried to dissuade them from making comparisons with the prophets of old like Moses or Elijah, suggesting rather that they compare him with the minor prophets, who were qualified as prophets not by the miracles they effected, but by the fact that their prophecies against the people of Israel were soon fulfilled – like his own, Savonarola's.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, like some of the Old Testament prophets, Savonarola, the political prophet, finally died in the turmoil he had prophesied – though this was certainly not an end he had foreseen for himself, however much of the potential conflicts between the prophet of God and his addressees have been foreshadowed in the chronicles of the Old Testament. Compared with him, later prophets in the Renaissance were lucky, no matter if their prophecies came true or not; at least they were spared their lives, although, in one case, perhaps only just.

#### 4. The Man Who Saw Tomorrow: Nostradamus and the Dead King

When King Henry II of France died on July 10, 1559, after having received a fatal wound in a tournament, which was part of the celebrations for his daughter, ten days prior to his

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<sup>15</sup> See Amos Edelheit, Ficino, Pico and Savonarola. *The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2 – 1498*, Leiden – Boston 2008, 439-442.

death, the people in the streets of Paris recalled a verse they had read in 1555. In this verse, the astrologer Michel de Notre Dame (1503-1566), or Nostradamus, seemed to have prophesied the king's death through this very accident.<sup>16</sup> After his prophecy came true, when the King of the French had died just like Notre Dame had foretold, the people of Paris created straw effigies in the form of Notre Dame and burned them, as punishment for killing their king, according to what Notre Dame's son, Cesar de Notre Dame, later wrote. In his interpretation, the prophet was not blamed for prophesying the king's death, but rather for causing the king's death by his prophecies – so great, in the eyes of the people in 1559, was the power of prophecy!

This is not the place to speculate about the changes to the text which Cesar de Notre Dame might have made after his father's death, in order to increase the commercial success of the Almanac. It is important to realize that the power of prophecy, in the eyes of the people, enabled the prophet not just to foresee future events, but also to make them happen, and that therefore the power of prophecy could effect good or bad fate. Seen from this perspective, Michel de Notre Dame had not only foreseen, but also caused the king's death. Such high esteem of their powers was not always (at least if we are to believe the words of Cesar de Notre Dame) for the benefit of the prophets, if we imagine they might have burnt Michel de Notre Dame himself and not his straw effigies, but it cer-

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**16** Michel de Notre Dame: «Le lyon jeune le vieux surmontera / En champ bellique par singulier duelle: / Dans cage d'or les yeux luy crevera, / Deux classes une, puis mourir, mort cruelle», Centurie I, Quatrain XXXV, Lyon 1555.

tainly worked for the benefit of his reputation, and for those who gained from it.

In the case of Notre Dame, it is no longer the king or emperor who employs the prophet. With Michel de Notre Dame, a new genre of prophets has entered the stage. They are no longer the servants of princes, on whose good fortune their fate depends, but they act in their own right, as citizens in a society with humanist ideals, though not always with humanist education.

#### 5. A Prophecy of the Renaissance, or a Renaissance of Prophecy: John Dee

Another example of such a prophet as entrepreneur is none other than the famous Dr John Dee (1527-1608). He is, to an even greater extent than Nostradamus, a striking example of how closely linked magic, alchemy and the natural sciences were, even in the early modern period. He was a much sought-after-astrologer, a maniac collector of books and widely-traveled scholar, who served both Mary Queen of Scots, and her sister, Queen Elizabeth. When, after the Dissolution, books and manuscripts in England were threatened with being lost forever, he designed a plan to save, collect and systematize all books and knowledge, as the first national library in history, and presented it to the Queen. This was only one of many ideas in which Dee was ahead of his time, and perhaps one of many more which never materialized, or at least not in his lifetime.

His overall intention was to acquire as much knowledge and wisdom as possible, not only by traditional scholarly means, but also by studying the Kabbalah, the Jewish mysticism re-



lated to numbers. As a disciple of the Kabbalah, he was not unique in his time; the Florentine humanist Pico della Mirandola, or, north of the Alps, the physician, Paulus Ritus, and the theologians Johannes Reuchlin and Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim had been devoted disciples of the Kabbalist tradition long before him,<sup>17</sup> but the plurality of his scholarly interests, and the thoroughness and innovative creativity of Dee was incomparable and unique. Still, this, and perhaps his restless character, whose aims were an ever-increasing spiritual and intellectual enlightenment rather than increasing income or high rank, brought him into an economic position which was, to say the least, uncertain and with little or no prospects in England.

Together with his collaborator and medium, Edward Kelley, John Dee travelled to Poland and Prague, trying to install themselves as court astrologers at the courts of either Stephen of Poland or Rudolph II of Prague. A change had taken place: As children of the age of discoveries, though with a firm belief in God, and as faithful sons and daughters of either the Roman Catholic, Protestant or Anglican churches, princes did not simply employ prophets to foretell their future fate, at least officially. Rather they relied on scientist' prognoses, which in their time meant not wise men but astrologers and their prognoses, a profession which both Copernicus and Kepler had practiced, as did John Dee, who desired to speak not only with angels, but displayed no small self-confidence when he was admitted to an audience before King Rudolph II (1552-1612) in Prague:

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<sup>17</sup> On this tradition, see Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Geschichte der christlichen Kabbalah Band 1-3*, Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt 2012-2013.

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'It pleased God to send me his Light; and his holy Angels, for these two years and a half, have used to inform me: yea, they have brought me a Stone of that value that no earthly Kingdom is of that worthiness as to be compared to the virtue and dignity thereof ... The Angel of the Lord hath appeared to me, and rebuketh you for your sins. If you will hear me, and believe me, you shall triumph; if you will not hear me, The Lord, the God that made Heaven and Earth, putteth his foot against your breast, and will throw you headlong down from your seat. ... If you will forsake your wickedness, and turn unto him, your Seat shall be the greatest that ever was, and the Devil shall become your prisoner. Which Devil, I did conjecture, to be the Great Turk. This my Commission, is from God.'

Otherwise a political counselor of no little grace and knowledge, Dee, for once, met with little success. Scholars disagree about the true motives behind Dee's tactically clumsy behavior at Rudolph's court: Didn't he know better than to introduce himself with such a speech? Or is his own account of the event tainted by later attempts to cover up other, more personal reasons for his failure, which, made known, might have disgraced him and his reputation as a successful political counsellor? But the result, in any case, is obvious. It has been said that, after this, Rudolph II never wanted to see him again, and certainly made him leave the Habsburg lands. Probably, the reason was less his scepticism about astrology than his displeasure with Dee's authoritative way of speaking – if the latter's account is to be believed –, which was undiplomatic and unconvincing. Clearly, Dee's attempts to impress King Rudolph must have failed.

What can we learn from these examples, about the ways in

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which political prophecies work, or fail? The relations between kings and prophets are seldom without tension. Both have a lot to gain, and even more to lose by its outcome. No firm rules exist, as we can see from Nostradamus, whose prophecy was fulfilled, and placed his life in danger, or as Dee's example shows, who was greatly esteemed by the Queen of the British, at least compared to Rudolph's utter disinterest. As Joachim's example shows, neither true nor false prophecies have a predestined outcome, or consequence for the prophet; both correct and incorrect prophecies can be useful to a prince, and become political tools in his hands. Prophecy is diplomacy. It is politics, and not even a continuation of it by other means.<sup>18</sup> And it never ceases.

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**18** Other than war, which is according to the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) the continuation of politics, only with other means („Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln“, Vom Kriege I, 1, 24).