While the combination of astrology and prophecy had been debated by many and attempted by some for centuries, Johannes Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio of 1488 was the first successful combination of both traditions in print. The secret of Lichtenberger’s success lay in the adaptation of prophecy and prognostication to the medium of print and, above all, in the creation of a new kind of prophetic author.

The Prognosticatio, published in Latin first and in German translation shortly thereafter, brings astrological prognostication and various prophetic authorities to bear on questions of German politics and foreign relations, the fortunes of ecclesiastical leaders and clerical reform, the depredations of Muslim invaders, failures of public and private morality, and the advent of a false prophet, and it also makes a number of predictions concerning the years from 1488 to 1567. The impetus for its appearance was the conjunction of Saturn and Mars in the year 1484, which the astrologer Paul of Middelburg had treated at some length in his twenty-year prognostication for 1484–1504. Rather than rendering his own judgment on the conjunction, Lichtenberger copied extensively from Middelburg’s work as well as from a comet tract printed in 1474 and other prophetic compilations. While Lichtenberger cited numerous prophetic authorities, he identified none of his actual sources.

The first woodcut in the Prognosticatio is simultaneously a visual statement of authority, an encapsulation of the work’s contents and editorial
program, and a recapitulation of the preceding four decades of print history (see figure 3). On the left, Ptolemy and Aristotle represent the inheritance of classical antiquity in astrology and astronomy, while Birgitta of Sweden and Brother Reinhart, depicted as a hermit with cowled robe and rosary beads, mediate Christian visionary prophecy in the tradition of Joachim of Fiore. Between them stands the Sibyl, both a pre-Christian observer of the heavens, like Ptolemy and Aristotle, and a foreteller of Christian salvation, like her religious colleagues. (The Sibyl’s dual role is apparent in versions of this woodcut in later editions, where the group is divided in two, placing the Sibyl together with Aristotle and Ptolemy in some cases, with Birgitta and Reinhart in others.) All five figures are illuminated in equal measure by divine emanations from above. The figures in the woodcut represent both Lichtenberger’s sources and also traditions that had become established in print since Gutenberg and his associates had printed the Sibyl’s Prophecy.

Astrology and prophecy share a halting early history in print. After the editions printed by Gutenberg and his associates, the first known broadside almanac was printed around 1462, and the first annual practicas began to appear in the 1470s. The broadside prognostication of “Theobertus of England,” which appeared in 1470, combined weather predictions along with disasters and political changes at the highest level in a manner reminiscent of the “Toledo Letter” and similar astrologically themed prophecies of the Middle Ages. While the potential complementarity of prophecy and astrology is apparent in the prognostication of “Theobertus” and in the earliest printing at Mainz, the combination of the two had long been a topic of debate. The cardinal and scholar Pierre d’Ailly (1350–1420), who anticipated the advent of the Antichrist in the year 1789, had combined astrological inquiry with the prophetic witness of Hildegard of Bingen, Joachim of Fiore, and pseudo-Methodius in several treatises written during and shortly after the Great Schism. Tracts by d’Ailly were first printed around 1480, while Erhard Ratdolt published d’Ailly’s Concordance of Astronomy with Theology along with two other of his astrological treatises in 1490. Other early printed works were less theoretical. Johannes von Lübeck’s Prognosticon concerning the Advent of the Antichrist and the Jews’ Messiah, known from a single edition of ca. 1474, appealed to astrology and medieval authorities, including the Sibyls, in predicting that the Antichrist would be at the height of his power in 1530. In On the Future Triumph of the Christians against the Saracens, or A Gloss on the Apocalypse, Johannes Annius (Giovanni Nanni)
Fig. 3. The first woodcut in the *Prognosticatio*, in which Lichtenberger’s five astrological and prophetic authorities receive inspiration. (Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)
of Viterbo (1432–1502) argued for the identification of the Antichrist not with a future being but with Mohammed and the rise of Islam. The first two sections in Annius’s work engage primarily in interpretation of Revelation, but the third and final section foretells the fate of the Turks according to astrological reasoning, which Annius claimed to repeat from a tract he had first read eight years previously in Genoa. Whether this earlier tract ever existed as such is uncertain, considering Annius’s reputation as a purveyor of forgeries, but Annius’s work proved popular and was published nine times between 1480 and 1507.\(^3\)

The combination of astrology and prophecy met resistance, however. University theologians protested that astrological calculations of the Antichrist’s advent, such as that of Johannes von Lübeck, infringed on divine privilege. In *Determination of the Time of the Antichrist’s Advent* in ca. 1478, the Dominican Michael Francisci de Insulis, a doctor of theology in Cologne at the time, argued that knowledge about the Antichrist could come not via natural reason but only through scripture and the doctors of the church. In *Settled Question against the Triple Error concerning the Revelation of the Antichrist*, which appeared in two editions of ca. 1486, the Erfurt Augustinian hermit Johannes von Paltz assailed attempts to calculate the Last Day and, in the second *quaestio*, specifically criticized the work of Annius as a “certain printed tract” that claimed the Antichrist would not appear personally but was, rather, a reference to Mohammed.\(^4\) The dim view taken by university theologians of combining eschatological speculation and astrology suggests that printing and distributing prognostic works required careful consideration of both popular tastes and official concerns and that negotiating the tension between them was a precarious undertaking.

Like other works that supplemented prophecy with astrology, Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* was also condemned, by the theologians of Cologne in 1492, but without any detectable consequence for the work’s enduring popularity.\(^5\) The clearest, if not the only, measure of success for an early modern printed book is the number of times it was reprinted. A book that sold well provided readers with material that matched their interests and provided competing publishers with a formula for success in terms of text selection, paper size, book format, graphic layout, and target audience. In the absence of legal protections and with several printers exploiting a proven success, a popular work could appear in many editions in various cities in a single year or over the course of several years, with little if any benefit accruing to the author or the first printer. In the context of the late
fifteenth century, we can recognize Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* as a popular work by the eleven editions that appeared between 1488 and 1501 in Germany, not to mention a half-dozen editions in Italy.

The first editions appeared in pairs. Heinrich Knoblochtzer printed the first Latin edition in 1488 and a German translation around 1490 using the same woodcuts. In June and July 1492, Jakob Meydenbach of Mainz issued a Latin and German edition that reused the woodcuts from Knoblochtzer’s editions. Bartholomäus Kistler of Strasbourg then issued German editions in 1497, 1500, and 1501 and two Latin editions in 1500. Kistler’s editions used a smaller format and competed with reprintings in 1501 from his fellow Strasbourg printer Matthias Hupfuff and from Hans Schobser in Munich. In addition, a booklet of extracts from the *Prognosticatio* and other sources, *An Extract from Various Prophecies*, went through twenty-one editions between 1516 and 1540. In 1521, Wolfgang Stöckel printed the first full edition of the *Prognosticatio* in Germany since 1501 (an edition not previously recognized as Lichtenberger’s work), which was followed by another sixteen editions of the full *Prognosticatio* by 1535, including a new German translation with a foreword by Martin Luther that was printed in Wittenberg and then Erfurt in 1527. In 1528, Heinrich Steiner, Peter Quentel, and Peter Schöffer printed a total of seven editions in one year. Three further editions followed before the mid-1540s, when the *Prognosticatio* began appearing in combination with other prognostic works or as part of prophetic collections.

As a popular compilation of prophecies in combination with astrology, Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* had no equal. Not only the several early editions but, particularly, the many later editions, retranslations, and recombinations with other works made the *Prognosticatio* the most successful prophetic compilation and the most influential combination of astrology and prophecy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But in a period that had discovered both mass media and official censorship, the question is not just why the *Prognosticatio* was popular but, rather, what kind of authorial identity made it printable.

**Johannes Lichtenberger:**

**CONSTRUCTING THE AUTHOR-PROPHET**

As a historically attested human being, Lichtenberger remains a murky figure, and the contemporary evidence of his life already shows signs of spin and posturing. Thanks to the work of Dietrich Kurze, we know that
Lichtenberger was born as Johannes Grümbach around the year 1440 near the town of Baumholder in southwestern Germany. All that is known of his education is what can be deduced from his astrological-eschatological writings and from his role as parish priest during the last decades of his life. There is no record of how he gained his training or his qualification for office. The high point of Lichtenberger’s personal status appears to have come in the 1470s, a period in which he wrote horoscopes for several important noblemen. His first known work, written in 1468 while he was in Speyer, was a prognostication based on the observation of a comet, while the next was a horoscope for Duke Ludwig the Rich of Landshut-Bavaria in 1471. The publication in 1474 or 1475 of his astrological judgment on a conjunction of Saturn and Mars made Lichtenberger one of the earliest astrologers to appear in print, and a folk song dated to the 1470s described Lichtenberger as known throughout Germany. Lichtenberger’s later manuscript prognostications of the 1470s address the geopolitical affairs of leading German cities and the fortunes of princes and kings. Twice in them, Lichtenberger describes himself as court astrologer to Emperor Frederick III. No contemporary source apart from his own self-description identifies Lichtenberger as the imperial court astrologer, however, at a time when the presence of other astrologers at court is well documented, and by the middle of the 1480s, another figure, Johannes Canter, was referring to himself as the imperial astrologer. In 1481, the wife of Pfalzgraf Ludwig of Veldenz convinced her husband to install Lichtenberger as parish priest in Brambach, where he remained until his death in 1503. Lichtenberger wrote that there were those who “know that I have truly foretold to many spiteful people every single one of the great calamities that have come to pass in German lands for twenty years,” which may accurately reflect his declining fortunes, as the twenty years between Lichtenberger’s first known astrological writing and the publication of the Prognosticatio correspond to the reduction in his circumstances from an astrological consultant to the nobility to a simple parish priest.

How the work’s publication affected Lichtenberger remains unknown, but the Prognosticatio did bring Lichtenberger lasting fame and influence on later writers. Wolfgang Ayttinger cited Lichtenberger in the 1490s as a “certain learned mathematician” who had rendered his judgment on the 1484 conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. A few sixteenth-century astrologers identified themselves as Lichtenberger’s disciples, but only decades after his death, including Johannes de Indagine in 1522. Peter
Creutzer implausibly referred to Lichtenberger with the academic title *magister* in 1525 and later; and in 1545, he called Lichtenberger an “astronomer famed far and wide.”

Yet Wolfgang Panzer’s 1788 annals of German literature describe Lichtenberger not as a learned astrologer but as a hermit from Alsace. Already in 1689, Wilhelm Tentzel had written that the title woodcut of one edition portrayed the author so much like a hermit that one could believe Lichtenberger had been a hermit rather than a priest. How did the former astrological consultant to German nobility turned parish priest come to be known as a holy man living in sylvan seclusion? The refashioning of Lichtenberger’s authorial identity from royal astrologer to prophetic hermit began already in the first edition of the *Prognosticatio* and was all but complete by the years 1515–21, but the primary shaper of the authorial identity that made the *Prognosticatio* printable was not Johannes Lichtenberger.

A printed book is less the expression of an author’s intentions than a commercial product made through a rational division of labor, in which the author provides only one of the inputs and in which the author’s interests are far from paramount. The original Latin text, the German translation, the woodcut images, and the paratexts (including the title page, image captions, and colophon) were most likely the responsibility of at least four different people. The author, corrector, translator, artist, and compositor who produced each of these four parts of the printed book could say very different things about what kind of person the author was. We may tentatively identify the Latin text with the author Johannes Lichtenberger, although even the text may suffer from editorial intervention. The other three planes of representation were, in most cases, entirely outside the author’s control.

The text of the *Prognosticatio* depicts its author as a prophet in its own way. There are three ways to predict the future, Lichtenberger explains in his introduction: through long experience with the world and its ways; by the stars and the influence of the upper planets on the lower spheres; and by divine revelation through dreams, visions, or angels. Lichtenberger states that he will draw on all three possibilities in order to raise a voice of warning to his readers. Lichtenberger’s claim to astrological and experiential authority was certainly plausible, but Lichtenberger also claimed to be the conduit of divine revelation by virtue of his compilation of prophetic writings. Although Lichtenberger sought to cover his tracks regarding the immediate sources from which he copied, he is quite straightforward about
his philological method. He writes in his conclusion that he would not trust himself to put three letters of the alphabet in a row were it not for his confidence in the wisdom and kindness of all good learned men; and in the introduction, he compares himself to Ruth, gleaning the fields of Boaz for remaining kernels of wisdom following the rich harvests of previous wise men and astrologers.\textsuperscript{17} In this allusion to the double sense of Latin \textit{legere} (shared by German \textit{lesen}), which can refer both to reading and to harvesting, Lichtenberger acknowledges his method of compilation: what he has written consists of what he has read. Yet Lichtenberger claims for the philological compiler, no less than for the voice of aged wisdom or the learned astrologer, the title \textit{prophet}. The introduction closes with the author’s prayer to God (in fact, borrowed almost verbatim from Middelburg): “I call unto you and humbly reach out my folded hands to you, reverently asking that you might reveal unto your servant Ruth with your mighty help the qualities, judgments, and influences of your stars, to illuminate his reason with the glory of your eternal clarity, and to guide him in the path of truth. Awaken my reason and move my tongue and show me the correct way to predict future things.”\textsuperscript{18} Although the desired mode of inspiration is based on reason and astrological interpretation, Lichtenberger asks to be a prophet of the spoken word (“move my tongue”) no less than biblical prophets like Ezekiel or Jeremiah. Lichtenberger describes both scholarship and revelation as paths to wisdom via the same spirit and states that any true prediction, whether through experience or through reading the stars or through revelation, must come from the Holy Spirit, who teaches all knowledge. Thus, according to Lichtenberger, the astrologer draws on no lesser source than the biblical and medieval prophets did.\textsuperscript{19}

The model of the philologist compiler, as a mode of prophecy that did not require the explicit invocation of visionary experience, was a useful model of authorship for later writers. In Sebastian Brant’s prognostic broadsides, Brant proposed to bring to light hidden meanings through a combination of philological expertise and experience, while also appealing to biblical prophetic figures. “Beneath the mantle of the prophet hides the poet and learned historian,” Jan-Dirk Müller summarizes.\textsuperscript{20} The influence of Lichtenberger’s prophetic self-construction can be seen also in the work of Johannes Virdung, prince of the German astrologers, whose fifty-year career was just beginning when the \textit{Prognosticatio} was published in 1488. In anticipation of the next conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 1504, Virdung composed a prognostic booklet concerning the advent of a false prophet
similar to the mouthpiece of the Antichrist foreseen in Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio*. The text of Virdung’s work, printed in two editions of 1503, incorporated both eschatological themes and astrological reasoning like the *Prognosticatio*, and the woodcuts included both astrological diagrams and images based on the illustration program of the *Prognosticatio*. Virdung, like Lichtenberger, presented himself as a prophet of both the written and the spoken word. The close of Virdung’s dedicatory epistle to Pfalzgraf Phillip is reminiscent of Lichtenberger’s prefatory prayer in its appeal to God, “whom,” Virdung says, “I implore daily on bended knees with fervent prayer that he might inflame the coldness of my heart with the fire of his love and illuminate my blindness with the clarity of his presence and reveal to me the correct path in this art [of astrology].”

On the verso following Virdung’s dedicatory epistle, a woodcut depicts the author as a prophet kneeling and gazing upward to God among the heavens in precisely the same manner as that found in Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* fifteen years earlier. Virdung also embraced the role of editorial compiler. His judgment of the comet of 1506, for example, defends his gloomy predictions by affirming that they were simply that which he had learned and compiled from masters of natural learning. In these works of the early sixteenth century, Virdung’s authorial identity continued Lichtenberger’s combination of astrologer, editor, and prophet. Although Virdung’s other works are principally astrological, Virdung and Lichtenberger experienced a posthumous intersection decades later. Virdung’s forty-year prognostication for 1524–63 was popular when it first appeared in the early 1520s, but it achieved a new burst of popularity twenty years later, when it appeared as the *Great Practica* together with a condensed version of Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* in five editions of 1543–45.

The closest imitator of the prophetic role created by Lichtenberger, however, was Joseph Grünpeck (1473–1532). Grünpeck was a humanist and scholar of diverse talents and interests whose early published works included a collection of Latin comedies, an astrological prognostication that quoted extensively from Lichtenberger, and a popular tract on the origins and treatment of syphilis that went through seven editions before the end of the fifteenth century. Grünpeck experienced the peak of his social advancement as court chaplain and secretary to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519), for whom he wrote historical chronicles and provided astrological advice, but Grünpeck’s own infection with syphilis preceded his fall from grace and loss of position in 1501. After a second syphilis tract
in 1503, Grünpeck’s later work adopted a consistently prophetic voice to warn against moral decay and catastrophes to come. Beginning with a pamphlet interpreting recent prodigies, including monstrous births, a comet, and a rain of crosses that appeared in 1507, Grünpeck enjoyed nearly three decades of considerable success in print as the author of prophetic tracts. For Grünpeck and for Lichtenberger before him, experience, in the form of knowledge of history and how the world works, is an essential complement to astrology and prophecy in plotting the course of the future. Grünpeck’s most influential prophetic work, the _Speculum naturalis caelestis et propheticae visionis omnium calamitatum_ (Mirror of the Natural Heavens and Prophetic Visions of All Calamities), was published in Latin and German translation in 1508, followed by later German editions around 1510 and two more in 1522. Although the _Speculum_ did not borrow extensively from Lichtenberger, Grünpeck attributed the prediction of disorder in the church to a “pious, just, and wise man,” whom he does not name but by whom Lichtenberger was clearly meant, for Grünpeck followed Lichtenberger’s manner of predicting the future.

While Grünpeck focused on the reformation of personal morality rather than on politics, his preface to the _Speculum_ ascribes prophetic knowledge to the same three sources used by Lichtenberger: experience of history and current affairs; expertise in astrology; and compilation of divine revelation, which, for Grünpeck, included biblical and contemporary prophets. What Grünpeck drew from Lichtenberger, in other words, was his self-construction as prophet.

Grünpeck and Lichtenberger became unwitting collaborators through the publication of a pamphlet, likely compiled in 1515 but with the earliest known edition in 1516, that included extracts from the _Prognosticatio_ and Grünpeck’s _Speculum_. Just as Lichtenberger prepared his compilation without acknowledging his sources, the tract made no mention of Lichtenberger or Grünpeck and instead described itself as “an extract of various practicas and prophecies of Sibyl, Birgitta, Cyril, the Abbot Joachim, Methodius and Brother Reinhart, which will last several years yet and tells of wonderful things.” Some ten editions appeared in the years 1516–18. Twelve further editions followed, including one in almost every year between 1523 and 1529 and two final editions in 1540. In 1530, the _Extract of Various Prophecies_ began to appear in combination with other prognostic works, first of all with an astrological prognostication by Johann Carion, much to the astrologer’s dismay. Beginning in 1532, it appeared with the sibylline and prophetic collections of the printer Christian Egenolff of
Frankfurt. For the 1532 compilation, Egenolff expanded the list of prophetic contributors on the title page to include Lichtenberger, suggesting that he attributed the *Extract of Various Prophecies* to Lichtenberger. He did not list Grünpeck as a prophetic contributor until 1537.

**FROM PROPHETIC COMPILER TO FOREST HERMIT**

Although Lichtenberger described his role as that of a compiler, the title page of the first edition of the *Prognosticatio* emphasized the work’s novelty. While Lichtenberger stated that he would draw on experience and prophetic visions as well as astrology, the title mentions only eclipses and conjunctions. In calling the work a “rare and never before heard prognostication that sets forth and declares many influences and the tendency of certain constellations of the great conjunction and eclipse that have occurred in these years, and what they portend for this world for good or evil at this time and in the future, and which shall last for many years,” the title formulation narrows Lichtenberger’s prophetic function, misrepresents his work’s content, and distorts his methods and his relationship to the text.

But after the title page, the images and paratextual presentation of the *Prognosticatio* take the opposite approach. Where Lichtenberger had alluded to himself as a prophet, the printers, translators, and artists who ultimately controlled the work’s presentation depicted the author much more directly as a forest hermit similar to Brother Reinhart. The cowled robe, walking stick, and rosary borne by Reinhart in the first woodcut of the *Prognosticatio* belonged already to a stock figure known in contemporary sources as the Waldbuder, the Lollard, or the Nollhart, a prophetic forest hermit warning of impending catastrophe and admonishing repentance, who was embodied by living examples into the seventeenth century. Following the first woodcut showing five of the work’s prophetic sources receiving divine wisdom, the second woodcut depicts the author of the *Prognosticatio* as a monk in immediate dialogue with God (see figure 4). The image’s title, originally intended as instructions to an artist or compositor but retained in the printed text, states: “The praying man with bended knees and clasped hands should be located here and pray as follows.” The author is shown with his eyes lifted to the same God that had inspired the five prophetic authorities in the previous woodcut. Rather than a mere scene of prayer to correspond to the author’s textual plea for divine inspiration, the artist created a scene of dialogic revelation.
Fig. 4. The author of the *Prognosticatio* engaged in divine dialogue. (Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)
The final woodcut in a Strasbourg edition of the Prognosticatio depicts Lichtenberger as the central figure in the complete sequence of prophetic communication. In it, a man is seated at a writing desk with his hands on an open book, but he looks back over his shoulder up to God in heaven. He listens while God raises his hands and points in the manner of speaking. Behind the writing desk, three men stand ready to receive the divine message from the prophet. The woodcut leaves ambiguous whether the man is writing his revelations into the book or receiving revelation through his reading of the book and whether the audience is expecting the prophet to tell them what he has heard or to give them the book he is writing.

Where Lichtenberger’s Latin text had compared the author to Ruth in rure, “in the countryside,” the German translation places him in der wiltnüß, “in the wilderness.” After the author’s conclusion, the printer’s colophon refers to the author as “the pilgrim Ruth hidden in the forests, whose eyes have grown dark and whose stylus trembles under the weight of old age,” giving Lichtenberger both a woodland location and a religious calling. The translator intervened even more directly in forming the author’s image by removing Lichtenberger’s name from the text entirely. In German versions until 1527, the author of the Prognosticatio appears solely as the “pilgrim Ruth,” with all connections to the historical Johannes Lichtenberger severed.

Lichtenberger’s vague gestures and the printer’s more direct measures tying him to the figure of a prophetic forest hermit had a lasting effect on Lichtenberger’s reputation. Around the same time that the first edition of the Extract of Various Prophecies appeared, the printer and dramatist Pamphilus Gengenbach of Basel wrote a Shrovetide play entitled Der Nollhart, which, according to the title page, was performed in Basel in 1515 and printed by Gengenbach himself in two 1517 editions. Gengenbach’s primary sources were Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio and Aytinger’s tract on Methodius, and the play is staged as a series of confrontations between the cast of prophetic authorities known from Lichtenberger and a series of political leaders and threats to perceived order, including Turks, Jews, and Swiss separatists. After Gengenbach’s two editions of his own work in 1517, three further editions in Augsburg and Erfurt followed by 1525, and Jakob Cammerlander published two more editions of a revised version known as The Old and New Brother Nollhart in 1544–45. While Gengenbach is a significant figure for Reformation drama, Karl Goedeke saw Der Nollhart as a heavy burden for any estimation of Gengenbach’s artistic achievement,
and he felt himself ill prepared to comment on it. In Gengenbach’s play, Nollhart is not only a figure in several dialogues but also speaks the opening monologue, next to which a woodcut depicts him as an aged man wearing a robe and holding a walking stick and rosary beads, much as Reinhart appeared in the Prognosticatio woodcuts. The woodcut illustrations of Nollhart’s confrontations later in the play add a cowl to his robe and a book to his iconic possessions. In the prologue, Nollhart mentions eclipses and the art of astronomy, decries the confusion of social order, and complains that his prophetic book of 1488 has been ignored. The reference to 1488 removes any doubt that Gengenbach identified Lichtenberger, as the author of the Prognosticatio, with Nollhart and Reinhart, the forest hermit.

Alexander Seitz’s 1521 Warning of a Deluge, a tract that figured prominently in the controversy surrounding predicted flooding for 1524, cites “Brother Nollhart” as a credible witness of oncoming catastrophe. In addition, an uncataloged prophetic tract of the early 1520s, a reworking of a prophecy dating to the 1460s, calls itself a revelation given to the “pious priest and hermit Gigebaldus in a forest.” These references to forest hermits attest the continued prominence of a stock figure to which the text and presentation of the Prognosticatio connected Lichtenberger. The culmination of the depiction of Lichtenberger as a forest hermit can be seen in the title woodcut of the 1521 edition of the Prognosticatio, in which the five prophetic authorities of all earlier and later editions are here joined by a sixth, a beardless man who shares the hooded cloak of the hermit Reinhart but who points to signs in the heavens in the typical astronomer’s pose. There can be little doubt that this is Lichtenberger himself, at last given a place in the pantheon of his own prophetic authorities.

In the conclusion of the Prognosticatio, Lichtenberger takes his leave by excusing his inadequacies and asking for his readers’ goodwill, and he urges them to recognize the impending events so that they might be avoided or else so that readers might take the opportunity for humble repentance if disaster nevertheless befalls them. The following paragraph is the colophon, and the voice that describes the author in the third person as “the pilgrim Ruth who lies hidden in the forests” no longer belongs to the author. That this section was understood as the printer’s colophon rather than an authorial text seems apparent in the related 1500–1501 editions from Bartholomaeus Kistler, Matthias Hupfuff, and Hans Schobser, which all replaced it with a table of contents or the later printer’s own colophon. The tension between the author and the printed presentation of his work is par-
particularly noticeable in two pages that followed the colophon in the first editions. The first page presents a version of the oak gall prophecy and a corresponding woodcut. According to this widespread prophecy, here attributed to an aptly named Silvanus, if one opens an oak gall (on a particular day of the year, in some versions) and finds a spider, mosquito, or worm, one can expect death, war, or a rich harvest, respectively.38 Lichtenberger’s text had limited itself to compiling the work of the learned and the inspired, and nowhere did it suggest that readers should attempt to predict the future for themselves. Practical prognostic rules are found nowhere else in the Prognosticatio except on this page, and reading the future in oak galls bears little resemblance to Lichtenberger’s astrological and eschatological material.39 Barbara Baert comments that Lichtenberger’s “prognosis for the layman ends on a playful note,”40 but it had, in fact, already ended on the previous page. Talkenberger suggests that Lichtenberger claimed to have learned the prognostic rules from a forester named Silvanus,41 but Lichtenberger was making no claims at all in these last few pages of the Prognosticatio, which follow the author’s closing statement. The compiler of the Prognosticatio had already said his final word, and the printer has taken over.

The oak gall prophecy is not the last word in the Prognosticatio. On the next page, one of Lichtenberger’s prophetic authorities returns. A woodcut shows Reinhart the Lollard in a hooded robe holding a rosary in his right hand, as in the illustration of prophetic authorities, while extending his left hand to two women, who are giving him coins. The Latin verse (recorded elsewhere as early as 1458) compares the Lollard’s dealings with women to Reinhard the Fox’s stalking of birds, while the German text states in verse: “Brother Lolhart is my name / among women I spread my fame. / To lighten their burden of money / is why I flatter with a voice of honey.”42 Talkenberger, who notes that the discrepancy between the deceitful Lollard of the woodcut and the trusted prophetic authority earlier in the Prognosticatio could have been perceived to undermine the authority of Lichtenberger himself (as most later editions omit it or replace it with images that reinforced, rather than undermined, the work’s authority), suggests that the final Lollard page was meant as a warning against devious wandering preachers.43

But the woodcut does not owe its presence to Lichtenberger, whose text had already concluded. What we find on the last page of the Prognosticatio is yet another printer’s addition, an unsurprising one. What brought the oak gall prognostic and the Lollard verse into association with the Prognos-
Prognosticatio is the similarity of their author figures. The colophon had called Lichtenberger the “pilgrim Ruth, hidden in the forest,” and the German oak gall verse attributes it specifically to a forester, making explicit the woodland associations of the name Silvanus found in the Latin verse, just as the Brother Reinhart or Nollhart figure was associated with religious forest hermits. The similar woodland associations of all three presumptive authors motivated the association of the texts but makes it even more improbable that Lichtenberger was the instigator of their association, as mocking the Lollard as a defrauder of women undermined not just one of his sources but the one whose prophetic identity was nearest to his own.

Kurze and Talkenberger view the woodcut captions throughout the Prognosticatio as the instructions of Johannes Lichtenberger to the illustrator, but woodcuts were usually the responsibility of the printer or publisher, not the author. The two final woodcuts are preceded by captions given in the form of instructions, like other captions in the Prognosticatio: “Here should stand the branch of an oak with leaves and upon the leaves oak apples”; “A Lollard should stand here and speak these words.” If the deceitful Lollard undermined the authority of Lichtenberger’s sources or his own credibility, it is unlikely that these or any other woodcuts or captions reflected Lichtenberger’s instructions.

Undermining Lichtenberger’s authority did serve the printer’s interests, however. While the mixing of astrology and prophecy was the actual attraction of the Prognosticatio, it was also the source of greatest anxiety. Therefore it is striking that the opening and closing thresholds of the Prognosticatio minimize the association: the title emphasized only astrology, while the Lollard woodcut undermined popular prophecy. These two key places by which readers—including censors—might enter the text attempted to forestall official concerns, while the internal presentation exaggerated Lichtenberger’s prophetic identity, apparently with success: the 1492 condemnation of the Prognosticatio by the faculty of theology in Cologne had no apparent effect on the work’s popularity. While Lichtenberger had no reason to undermine the authority of his sources, the printer, with a much greater economic stake in avoiding censorship, had means, motive, and opportunity for ending the Prognosticatio with a weakening of the work’s message.

Lichtenberger compiled a text that was conveyed into the hands of a printer. Everything else in the Prognosticatio, including the title, woodcuts, captions, and colophon, is the creative contribution of someone primarily concerned not with writing but with printing and selling. The author-
Prophets and Paratexts: Johann Carion

The construction of prophetic authorship takes place, to a large degree, through paratexts. Early modern authors could choose their words, and if they had particular good fortune, their words might be set on the printed page more or less accurately. What was largely outside their control, however, was whether or not a printer chose to present the author as a visionary, a scholar, a scoundrel, or a fool. A particularly interesting case among early modern astrologer-prophets is Johann Carion (1499–1537), who at one time or another was regarded as all of these. His posthumous scholarly reputation rested on his historical chronicle, which was revised and extended by Philipp Melanchthon and others, while his contemporaries knew Carion primarily as an astrologer. Hermann Wilken repeated in 1597 the charge of necromancy that Carion’s rival Andreas Perlach had first lodged in the 1530s, while Theodor Simitz’s prognostication for 1563–66 lauded Carion for having accurately predicted the Peasants’ War and all that happened from 1536 until 1554. But later centuries remembered Carion mainly as the author of a prophetic vision. Johann Carion was moreover acutely aware of how title pages, dedicatory epistles, and association with other tracts affected the reception of his work, and his comments illustrate the relationship between texts and paratexts in the first half of the sixteenth century.

The dedicatory epistle of Carion’s first astrological practica, published in 1518 when he was not yet twenty, concedes that he could “barely be called a schoolboy in the art” of astrology, but the title page describes him already as an academic magister and astrologer for Prince-elector Joachim of Brandenburg. The structure of Carion’s first practica follows contemporary models in every respect, and Carion’s manner of prediction is scholarly and reserved. Carion’s next publication, his contribution to the controversy over the ominous conjunction of 1524, is an altogether different kind of work. It was both popular, with at least five editions in 1521–22, and controversial, attacking his fellow astrologer Alexander Seitz by name. Carion’s Prognostication and Explanation of the Great Precipitation and Other Shocking Consequences is also explicitly prophetic. The work begins with eighty lines of German verse that allegorize the conjunctions of 1524 as a lord going hunt-
ing and visiting various houses or people, following which Carion explains the obscure meanings to his readers. Carion foresaw storms and flooding, although not the second deluge some had feared, but he also predicts insurrection, disunity, and persecution, eventually followed by secular and religious reformation. Carion furthermore embraced the prophetic tropes of a righteous and victorious emperor symbolized as an eagle and, citing Pierre d’Ailly, anticipated the birth of the Antichrist in 1693 and uproar and revolution in 1789. Carion cited prophetic authorities in support of his predictions, including Methodius, Joachim of Fiore, and Hildegard of Bingen.

Carion’s next appearance in print came in 1526 with the Interpretation and Revelation of True Heavenly Influences, whose various editions exemplify printers’ ability to rapidly exploit the market opportunities of a popular work. Carion’s prognostication for the years 1527–40 became the most frequently reprinted astrological tract of the second quarter of the sixteenth century, with nearly thirty independent editions before 1550 and five further editions in which Carion’s work was combined with the prognostication of Salomon von Roermond. The earliest editions contain predictions for the years until 1540, while editions printed after 1530 extend the predictions to 1550.

In the Interpretation and Revelation, Carion appears to return to a scientific astrology based only on the observation of eclipses and planetary conjunctions, and he emphasized that any trained astrologer can confirm his predictions by repeating the observations. Carion opened his dedicatory epistle to Christoffel Rygler, a priest and relative, by surveying the state of astrological prognostication and publishing, in which Carion finds much amiss.

Reverent and worthy sir, in this our time, prophecies and predictions constantly appear everywhere, now by one author and then by another. Some are based on the intuition of the writer or prophet, while others are based on a theoretical foundation, but few of these have been seen up until now. Therefore I suppose that the printers themselves invent practicas, cast them among the people as new works, extol the prophecies, and give them such a striking and provocative title that the reader cannot hold back; he must buy one as soon as he sees it. But when he comes to the actual material, it is sealed by fresh curds, and often the prologue is longer than the whole work that the title applies to. Therefore, reverent sir, I am impelled to cast a prognostication according to true and fundamental heavenly influences lasting for several following years until one writes the year 1540 after the birth of Christ.
Carion’s complaint assailed amateur astrologers who lacked a systematic understanding of the art, but it even more vehemently attacked publishers’ abuse of paratextual devices. The title pages of their booklets proclaimed the novelty of the material (even when this was not justified, as with Lichtenberger) and promised to reveal upcoming catastrophes, but their actual content was far more restrained. The substantive contributions of astrology were suffering, according to Carion, because printers could dispense with expertise grounded in a coherent theory of astrological prognostication and yet continue to sell their wares based on inflammatory title pages. In the tension between texts and their presentation, the paratexts seemed to be gaining the upper hand.

Following the dedication of the Interpretation and Revelation, Carion included a short excursus on the calling of biblical prophets, many of whose prophecies, according to Carion, were even then being fulfilled. Carion provided lengthy excerpts from the first two chapters of Habakkuk (with explicit comparison of the Babylonian king to the Turkish emperor) and the ninth chapter of Daniel, before closing the prefatory material with a call for unity directed at the nobility. This closing paragraph addressed to the “heads of Christendom” is difficult to reconcile with Carion’s earlier request to Christoffel Rygler, his dedicatee, not to publish the work but, rather, to keep it for his own use, as well as with Carion’s later complaint that the first editions of the Interpretation and Revelation had appeared without his permission.

Carion seems to have been especially aggravate by a 1530 reprint of his Interpretation and Revelation by Georg Rhau of Wittenberg, who printed Carion’s astrological work together with the Extract of Various Prophecies, drawn from Grünpeck and Lichtenberger. Following Carion’s work and opposite a woodcut of Lichtenberger’s prophetic authorities, the standard title formulation of the Extract identifies only prophetic sources: Birgitta, Joachim of Fiore, the Sibyl, Cyril, and Methodius. The following year, Carion published the extended version of the Interpretation and Revelation with prognostications until 1550. In his dedication to Joachim, prince-elector of Brandenburg, Carion made clear his displeasure over Rhau’s edition—but the dedication also shows that authorship in the world of early printing is not nearly as simple as it may appear.

Illustrious, noble-born Lord and Prince, with my entire submissive obedience and dutiful service toward Your Princely Grace ever offered at all times. Your Grace, I refer to the general proverb “He who carries off his
own goods causes no loss to another; but he who hides art and does not share it (like that which comes from the uppermost influences and tendencies to every person) is unjust to many.” I often observe and see that prophecies and practicas are published almost daily now in our time almost everywhere, first from one person and then from some other, and the majority (as I note) based only on the intuition of those soothsayers or would-be astronomers. There are also some based on a theoretical foundation, of which very few have been seen up until now, however. Therefore I believe that perhaps the printers or other people lacking experience in this art invent them on their own (as they maintain no proper order or method and they misuse technical terms) and cast them among the common people as new works, and they give these prophecies such a striking and provocative title that the reader cannot resist when he sees them; he must buy one. But when one then comes to the actual material (the master’s hammer) it is sealed (with what I don’t know). Therefore, My Grace, I was impelled again for Your Princely Grace’s honor and for the common good [to revise] my Prognostication that I made around four years ago (which nevertheless was published without my consent) and that now again has been printed behind my back with the attachment of various loose scraps from Lolhart, Birgitta, Methodius and so on, whom I have abhorred my whole life. And they take this step for no reason. I could have tolerated it if they had wanted to print my practica, if only they had left it with my own words, but they had no leave to add the dreams of monks, Lollards [Nolbrüder], or nuns. In order to refute all of this, I was motivated to improve and lengthen it until one will write the year 1550 after the birth of Christ. Whoever is living then may extend it further.\textsuperscript{51}

The incongruities here are numerous. This is, first of all, only a slightly expanded version of the same dedication that had appeared in the earlier editions, but it is now addressed to an electoral prince rather than to a mere priest. The dedication further claims that the first editions (presumably including all twelve editions before 1531) were unauthorized. Carion objects to the inclusion of the \textit{Extract of Various Prophecies}, based partly on Lichtenberger’s \textit{Prognosticatio}, and yet Carion begins the dedication with a proverb comparing hiding treasure and hiding books, which Lichtenberger had also applied to prognostication in the opening sentence of the \textit{Prognosticatio}.\textsuperscript{52} Carion claims to have always been hostile toward the dreaming of monks and nuns like Birgitta and Methodius, yet his own 1521 \textit{Prognostica-
tion and Explanation of the Great Precipitation had cited Hildegard of Bingen, Joachim of Fiore, and Methodius himself. Carion’s historical chronicle, also written in the early 1530s, regards some of the Sibyls as preachers of true patristic teachings (where others mixed Christian and heathen ideas or revealed diabolical inspiration), and he concludes with a note that affirms the connection of history, astrological prognostication, and the end times, just as it had appeared in his prognostication for 1524: “Let me remind the reader of Elijah’s words, touched on earlier, that the world shall remain for 6,000 years. Now this year after the birth of Christ 1532 is 5,474 years since the beginning of the world. Hopefully, therefore, we are not far from the end. One should note that we should be all the more cautious when we hear that the Last Day is here, for all writings, and even heaven itself, with terrible signs, eclipses, and conjunctions, warn that at the Last Day great disension of the Christian Church and all governments will come.” In later editions, Carion added additional borrowings from prophetic tracts, including a prophecy attributed to an old book found in Magdeburg that had first appeared in a prophetic compilation attributed to Jakob Pflaum. Far from always having opposed prophecy or even having turned away from it, Carion’s work continued, until the end of his career, to combine astrological reasoning with apocalyptic chronology and a prophet’s warning voice.

Perhaps Carion’s complaint about the combination of his work with the Extract of Various Prophecies was heard, however, as publishers of his Interpretation and Revelation after 1531 did not again reprint his astrological prognostications together with extracts from late medieval prophets. Between 1539 and 1543, the title pages of Carion’s extended prognostications for the years 1540–50 (a total of eleven editions) explicitly disavow the inclusion of any extraneous material in their titles (“without any foreign addition or appendix”), even though publishers faced a yearly reduction in the work’s relevance, for which easy compensatory measures vanished following Carion’s untimely death in 1537.

If Carion objected to the association of his astrological work with discreditable prophecies, then his expanded version becomes all the more curious for closing with a short prophecy (referred to on title pages in 1531 and afterward as a “Hidden Prophecy”), the work that would come to define Carion’s reputation. The prophecy opens, “A sad eagle flew in much toil and trouble for a long time and set the nest for his young on a golden tower,” and it presents an allegory of the internal affairs and foreign relations of the Holy Roman Emperors beginning with Maximilian I. The identities of the
various figures are revealed by heraldic allusions, which Johann Christoph Adelung held to represent historical reality until 1529 (and thus reveal the time of the prophecy’s composition). The eagle had been a stock character in prophetic and apocalyptic writing already in biblical apocrypha, and contemporary prophetic texts include allegorical eagles without comment. Even Carion’s specific variety, a “sad eagle,” is already found in Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio and attributed to Brother Reinhart.

The use of symbolic language similar to prophetic works that Carion claimed to despise is not the only incongruity concerning the “Hidden Prophecy.” Carion stated in his dedicatory introduction that he had extended the earlier version with prognostications for the years 1541–50, but he says nothing of adding a hidden prophecy, and the chronological horizons of the two sections differ. Carion assumed that those still living in 1550 would extend his work to later years, but the introduction to the “Hidden Prophecy” foresees events reaching to 1560. After Carion’s first-person astrological prognostication for 1550 closes with a prayer for eternal peace and a final “Amen,” a third-person editorial voice intrudes to introduce the “Hidden Prophecy” as a work of “Master Johann Carion of Bütigeim,” so that one can question whether Carion intended the two works to circulate together. Yet Carion never disavowed the prophecy during his lifetime, despite opportunities to do so, so it cannot be dismissed as a false attribution.

Carion states in the introduction to the “Hidden Prophecy” that he had long desired to write something to warn the pious and frighten scoundrels but that he had not been able to do so adequately. Nevertheless, at the end of the Interpretation and Revelation, Carion wanted to “append a little until I eventually become less busy and explain it more clearly in its own booklet.” The “Hidden Prophecy” was included in Carion’s Interpretation and Revelation from 1531 onward and was printed as an independent tract with an anonymous interpretation ten times from 1546 to 1548 and four more times in the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1542, Johannes Virdung’s prognostication for 1524–63 was reprinted four times with Carion’s “Hidden Prophecy” added as a concluding appendix. Five Strasbourg editions of 1543–49 combine the more openly apocalyptic prognostication of Salomon of Roermond with Carion’s Interpretation and Revelation and “Hidden Prophecy” as well as the prophecies of a Brother Raimund. The “Hidden Prophecy” was also included in numerous prophetic collections of the later sixteenth, seventeenth, and even eighteenth centuries; Adelung refers in 1787 to contemporary editions. The “Hidden Prophecy” proved
to be Carion’s most enduring prognostic work, but it ensured him a place among the prophets that he so vigorously rejected. Editions of Carion’s *Interpretation and Revelation* grew progressively thinner as they dropped the predictions for each passing year, but in each case, they closed with the “Hidden Prophecy.” Soon it was all that remained of the *Interpretation and Revelation*. When Christian Egenolff began printing prophetic compilations in Frankfurt, the only contribution from the astrologer Johann Carion was the “Hidden Prophecy.” The appendix had outlived the text.

Just as the authorial identity of Johannes Lichtenberger in the text, in the paratextual presentation of the *Prognosticatio*, and from the known facts of the author’s biography are often contradictory, so it is with Carion and his work, with the added complication that Carion’s attitude toward prophecy is at odds with itself. Despite the appearance created in the dedicatory epistle to the electoral prince of Brandenburg in the expanded edition of his *Interpretation and Revelation*, Carion is not simply a proponent of a scientific astrology untainted by superstitious prophecy. He cannot even be regarded as a penitent ruing his prior dalliances with monks and nuns, for intersections with the prophetic continue in the *Interpretation and Revelation*. The “Hidden Prophecy” added to later editions underscores that the *Interpretation and Revelation* represents not a break with Carion’s earlier prophetic tone but a continuation of it by other means.