Printing and Prophecy

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What do illustrations do? For those in late medieval and early modern printed books, Edgar Bierende identifies three basic functions: to delight, to teach in parallel to the text, and to help structure the reader’s memory of the text. In addition, Bierende finds a new ambiguity in images around the year 1500 where visual puzzles require textual interpretation, which formed the roots of the baroque emblem. Prophecy, where vision and visuality have a particular significance, offers examples of all of these but also additional functions for printed images that complement and contradict assumptions about images and their functions.

From its first edition in 1488, Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio had a distinctive graphic identity. Later publishers treated its illustrations as an essential element of the work in a way that was not true of other printed prophetic works. Only one of the four editions of Grünpeck’s Speculum after 1508 included the full image cycle, for example, rather than using very different motifs or no illustrations at all, and the woodcuts did not earn the Speculum a place in the prophetic retrospective printed by Egenolff forty years later. In contrast, nearly all editions of Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio through the mid-sixteenth century and beyond reproduced most or all images found in the first editions, even though acquiring the woodblocks represented an additional expense. The titles of some later editions of the Prog-
nasticatio make special note of the illustrations, including Peter Schöffer’s 1528 edition (“printed again with its very unusual images”) and the 1550–55 editions of Hermann Gülfferich (“presented with fine illustrations”). Although Martin Luther saw little of value in the astrologer’s art, he conceded in his preface to the 1527 edition that Lichtenberger’s predictions had partially come to pass: “He hit the mark in several things, and came especially near with the pictures and images, much more so than with the words.”

**TEXTUAL AND PARATEXTUAL FUNCTIONS**

*Images as indices.* One might distinguish between an image’s textual and paratextual functions: where the first aims to visually render the text’s content, paratextual illustrations graphically represent the text’s structure. As we have seen, the Prognosticatio’s woodcut of the medieval tripartite class structure consisting of nobility, clergy, and peasants corresponds to the three sections of the text, which treat the affairs of and were ostensibly addressed to the clergy, the nobility, and the laity. The woodcut of society thus functions as a visual table of contents for Lichtenberger’s treatment of each estate’s affairs in succession, and the stereotyped images of cardinals, kings, and serfs that introduce each of the three sections serve as visual reminders of the work’s internal structure.

*Images as microcosm.* The Prognosticatio does not foresee any exceptions to its model of society, no matter how anachronistic it might be. It addresses clergy, nobility, and laity, “and thus no one is left out.” In the clear subservience of the peasants who represent the laity and in the visual reminiscence of Christ’s rainbow throne to the concentric cosmic spheres, the woodcut of the three estates also illustrates how higher things rule over lower things by divine decree. The structure of the Prognosticatio attempted to accommodate the cognitive requirements of its readers by letting its structure mirror the social order, which, in turn, reflects the order of the cosmos, making the Prognosticatio a microcosm in the full sense of the term. Lichtenberger, his printers, and the illustrators all emphasized the same point: that higher things rule over lower things applies equally to the structure of texts, society, and the universe.

Mediation between various micro- and macrocosmic planes is also a function of the schematic astrological squares, which depict the twelve signs of the zodiac and the conjunctions of planets within them as a series of twelve triangles arranged around the four edges of a square. One of the
earliest uses in print of this image, which already had a long history in manuscript, was in Lichtenberger’s *Conjunction of Saturn and Mars*, printed around 1475, and it appears within several practicas of the 1480s before appearing on title pages in the 1490s. In the practicas and other prognostications, astrological square woodcuts represent not just the configuration of the stars but also the fortunes of various segments of human society. Here again, an image composed of ink on paper represents the nexus of society and the stars.

**Authority and source.** The depictions of Lichtenberger’s prophetic sources, including its author, function somewhat like visual footnotes, or a graphic representation of the textual history of the *Prognosticatio*. The first two woodcuts, which depict the five prophetic authorities receiving divine inspiration and the author engaged in prophetic dialogue (see figures 3 and 4, in chapter 2), are supplemented by later images of Birgitta holding a book, a Sibyl observing a star, and an abbot receiving an inscribed tablet from an angel. Paul of Middelburg complained bitterly in his 1492 *Invective* that Lichtenberger’s wholesale borrowing from his work without even once mentioning his name was scarcely to be borne, and he particularly saw the images as the modus operandi of Lichtenberger’s intellectual theft: “He also added foolish pictures of women in labor, members of religious orders fighting and beating upon one another, crowing roosters, the Antichrist teaching, the emperor devastating Rome, and various other pictures of kings and princes, so that, having changed its appearance, he could usurp to himself our work and not appear to have only recited it.”

By obscuring the textual history of the *Prognosticatio*, the images help present Lichtenberger as a prophet equal to his sources.

A more direct appeal to authority via images can be found in the astrological squares. The practicas of Johannes Seger, known for the years 1512–18, regularly featured astrological squares on their title pages. In the preface to his practica for 1513, Seger referred to the woodcut of the astrological square as a proof of veracity, stating that he had placed the figure at the beginning of his work so that those who were educated in astrology and other arts would receive his opinion more willingly and not consider it a baseless fiction. The astrological square became the preferred title woodcut for Carion’s *Interpretation and Revelation*, where it appeared in eleven editions from 1526 to 1534—that is, in all editions featuring title woodcuts after the first edition—usually with a scene of combat between two armies of pikemen at the center of the astrological diagram. A passage from Car-
ion’s preface points to the significance of this image. It is not necessary to explicate every interpretation entirely, wrote Carion, but only to give the precise moment that each year begins: “On the basis of this, every halfway experienced astronomer can cast his diagram and see that my interpretations are not without justification.”

Carion had sharply criticized prognostications that lacked a theoretical basis, and the astrological square woodcut on the title page of his Interpretation and Revelation was a visual assertion that his prognostications were based on a foundation of reason and evidence.

GUIDES TO RECEPTION AND EMOTIONAL DAMPENING

The combination of printing, prophecy, and images was a particular focus of anxiety. As we have seen, Johann Carion was concerned that booklets with alarming images on the title page proved irresistible for many readers. Georg Tannstetter also criticized the combination of prognostication, booklet or broadside format, and images: “For in these times, one has circulated several large sheets and little booklets with many incredible and foolish pictures and predictions for 1524, which I do not regard as the work of a righteous learned man but, rather, as the fiction of a printer or vagabond.” At the end of the sixteenth century, Hermann Wilken (who condemned Carion as a necromancer) assailed printed images as a source of unrest among the common people. He argued that “one finds in these days masters who publish books with figures and images” of witches riding through the air or consorting with one another and that putting “such abominable and ugly dreams and lies before the eyes of the ignorant common man” resulted in popular agitation against addled women and aid to the devil’s murderous work. While printed words could lead to unrest among the common people, printed images were often regarded as many times more potent.

Anxiety over images and prognostication in print and the careful balancing of the demands of rulers, readers, and printers resulted in woodcut illustrations in Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio that obscure, redirect, and dampen the emotional impact of its statements. While the Prognosticatio dramatically represents the perilous state of the church in woodcut form as the “Little Ship of St. Peter” tossed about on the waves, Lichtenberger’s criticism of clerical wantonness, greed, and luxury is paired with a woodcut that displaces the targets of his lament from the ecclesiastic hierarchy to a
shamefaced Adam and Eve, who hold a miniature church while clutching bundles of fig leaves. Bemoaning clerical and papal offenses was hardly unknown in the fifteenth century, and neither were calls for reform, yet the Prognosticatio shrinks from expressing that sentiment directly in illustration. In the Latin edition, the woodcut and its explanation are on facing pages, but the German edition distances the author’s clerical criticism even further from its visual expression by pushing nearly all of the text onto the verso. In addition, the German text is broken midway through into a second paragraph, introducing further ambiguity about clerical reform. The criticism of the clergy foretells the removal of an unworthy pope based on planetary conjunctions, but the new paragraph break in the German translation foregrounds the prophecies of Jeremiah and Birgitta of Sweden instead. As the leaf opposite the broken paragraph is dominated by a woodcut of Birgitta whose caption appears already at the bottom of the preceding page, the paratextual presentation helps push papal dethronement or clerical reform out of the astrological present and into the prophetic past. The other scene of clerical reform is a purely internal matter, as one monk disciplines another with a rod in the presence of three others. The monastic misbehavior itself is not shown. Here, as in later sections, the most dramatic material (clerical licentiousness or the removal of a wicked pope) does not find expression in the woodcuts.

The avoidance of incendiary images even encompasses those whom the text demonizes. Although the Prognosticatio condemns Turks, Jews, and the French, these enemies of the Holy Roman Empire do not appear in the woodcuts except symbolically; Jews do not appear at all. Consistent with a foreseen mode of reading that aims for individual and interior reflection rather than external or communal action, the anti-Semitic, anti-Turkish, and anti-French sentiments of the text are not emphasized or even directly expressed in the woodcut images. The woodcuts of the Prognosticatio do not enhance but, rather, blunt the emotional impact of the texts they illustrate. Rather than aiding the efforts of unskilled readers to understand the text’s meaning, the woodcuts often obscure it. The illustrations seem to evince an awareness of and wariness toward what Michael Curschmann has called the “ability of the visual medium to appeal directly to the emotions.” It is as if the excitement of the popular imagination through images was feared even more than whatever threats Jews, Turks, and the French may have posed. In the Prognosticatio, it is the false prophet who amplifies passions and confirms the common people’s disruptive impulses.
through his predictions. The woodcuts that illustrate Lichtenberger’s text aim for the reverse effect.

The Prognosticatio regards women and the laity as particularly susceptible to the influences of the planets, and it appears, similarly, to share Luther’s view of the common people’s receptivity to images. 17 Certainly, the woodcut illustrations use considerable caution in depicting the lower classes. Although the first Prognosticatio editions had forty-five woodcuts, only three images are found in the section addressed to the common people. Of these three woodcuts, two reinforce gender-specific social roles. The first image, which functions as the visual section heading, shows two peasants working in a field or orchard, consistent with their charge to provide nourishment to the other social estates. The second woodcut depicts three pregnant women in apparent but unspecified discomfort. The text lauds women as “those upon whom society pins all its joy and the entire ornament of the house and whose faces God has adorned with the greatest joy like shining stars,” but following the pattern of juxtaposing traditional stereotypes with scenes of society-threatening disorder, the Prognosticatio warns of impending stillbirths and infant mortality. 18 Although the third section on the fates of the laity is filled with dire prophecies of moral decay, the woodcut that illustrates the rise of lustful depravity shows a nun who has fled her cloister but who looks back upon it with visible regret (see figure 8). Not only is this a lukewarm representation of depravity compared to the alternatives, but it is also, by definition, an act that laymen and laywomen could not emulate. 19

Although the third section of the Prognosticatio foretells catastrophe and disruption, the image of peasants in the field is part of a concluding woodcut sequence in which the order of society is restored. Whether directly or symbolically, many of the preceding illustrations foretell disturbances to the current order, including disunity in the church, conflict between bishops or noblemen, and threats from the French and the Turks. The culmination of these woes is the advent of the false prophet who exerts diabolical influence over bishops and cardinals. But the woodcuts immediately following on the next five pages depict a restoration of order: lay and religious life is reformed, so that game boards and dice are burned, long hair is trimmed, and long points on shoes and other fashion excesses are done away with; Joachim of Fiore and Cyrillus (in the corresponding woodcut, the two are generalized as an abbot and a priest) receive silver tablets containing the whole of church history from an angel; the German
Fig. 8. A nun looking back at the cloister she has fled. (Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)
emperor marches on Rome “with an armored hand” against token resistance, and the corrupt religious flee the city; a new, righteous pope preaches to the people; and then the peasants peaceably sow their fields and prune their vineyards. While the text supplies a narrative with more troubling elements, the woodcuts emphasize the return of a righteous clergy, a militarily potent emperor, and a complaisant agricultural peasantry. The final two woodcuts, of pregnant women in distress and a nun hovering between flight from her cloister and return to it, suggest that the stability of social structure (here with respect to gender in particular) can be reclaimed but remains under threat.

FROM ILLUSTRATION TO INTERPRETATION

Illustration and distillation. If we classify images according to their function in the reception of a printed work, some are clearly graphical representations of the text, with minimal interpretive demands placed on the reader. These woodcuts depict events that have occurred or will occur, letting readers see what prophets have seen. The future preaching of an Angelic Pope in the Prognosticatio, for example, is represented with a woodcut of a preaching pope, with little interpretation permitted or required. While Lichtenberger may not have known that his text would appear together with illustrations and does not mention woodcuts in his preface, later authors and editors of prophetic works do record their thoughts on the function of images, and some describe illustrations as providing a visual equivalent of the text.

Sebastian Brant, whose Narrenschiff was perhaps the most influential compilation of word and image at the close of the fifteenth century, was closely involved in publishing an illustrated edition of the revelations of pseudo-Methodius, ostensibly a third-century bishop of Olympus. The revelations were, in fact, written in the eighth century in response to the rise of Islam and Arab expansion; the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 gave them new relevance, and a first printed edition appeared in 1477. This edition placed the revelations between two monastic tracts attributed to St. Bonaventura, hardly the setting to appeal to widespread anxiety about the threat of Islam, and no further edition followed for almost two decades. Hans Froschauer of Augsburg printed a new edition in 1496 along with marginal commentary and an explanatory tract by Wolfgang Aytinger. While the revelations of pseudo-Methodius had circulated
throughout the Middle Ages, the challenge of selling them to early modern readers was ultimately mastered by a Basel printer, Michael Furter, who retained the marginalia and Aytinger’s commentary while adding numerous woodcut illustrations and an introduction from Sebastian Brant to six editions between 1498 and 1516.22 The right packaging was able to turn an antiquarian curiosity into a minor best seller.

Brant’s preface to the work of Methodius opens with a note about images and audience. It describes the function of images, as in the Narrenschiff, with recourse to the famous dictum of Pope Gregory the Great that images were the book of the illiterate.

Dearest father [Johannes Meder, an observant Franciscan of Basel], you exhort me frequently and ask with incessant interruptions, how long I will refuse to compile the drawings, which are called revelations, of Methodius, the most holy prelate of Euboea, and of the blessed virgin Hildegard. Perhaps moved by reading the decree of Gregory (which records that a picture of deeds is necessary, for what scripture is to readers, the picture presents to discerning uneducated people, because the unlearned see in it what they ought to follow; in the picture, those who do not know letters are able to read; thus especially for the unlearned, a picture stands in place of reading) and by your request, O father beloved to God, and by your own persuasion of this which you see before you, I enter into the popular sphere. I have arranged for engraved pictures, so that this prediction by the spirit of prophecy might more easily become known to many.23

Like Isidore’s statement that we hear God’s voice when we read, the notion of illiterate reading via pictures made sense in Gregory’s time and context, but it can be misunderstood today, and it was already anachronistic in 1498. In our present understanding, reading is a process by which we acquire information, but for Gregory’s contemporaries and during most of the Middle Ages, reading was fundamentally a matter of memory: written texts remind readers of what they have already heard. Thus it was possible for a medieval illiterate to read an image as a literate would read a text, as both were thereby reminded of things they had heard many times before. But in the case of a text like the Revelations of pseudo-Methodius, published after nine centuries of intellectual, educational, and technical innovations since the time of Gregory, there was little chance that an illiterate reader who had not already committed the revelations to memory could glean much from
the images alone. Moreover, the market for printed books expanded precisely because it offered readers novelties, texts that they had never seen before.

A decade after Brant’s preface to pseudo-Methodius appeared, Joseph Grünpeck published his *Speculum*, his most significant prophetic work. The first, Latin edition concluded with seven articles on the nature of prophecy that were omitted in the following, German editions. The final paragraph of Grünpeck’s appendix ends with a note about the function of the images that appear in his *Speculum*.

Although the pictures will perhaps vex some people, who might say that it is deserving of scorn and entirely unworthy of a serious man and priest, and that it indulges trivial and childish delights, I would readily respond that all studies of good arts have been reduced to such a despised state, so that not even clerics, enchained by luxury, greed, and drunkenness, grasp that which is lying before their feet; therefore unless it is so, who would read and reread such a long series of drawn-out words? It is worthwhile that the general tenor of the writings be expressed in the forms and figures of pictures, with which the mind tends to become occupied when it reads briefly so as to avoid fatigue. For if careless reading, whether from tedium or from negligence, bears scant fruit, then pictures protect from danger.⁹⁴

Grünpeck here regards images not as aids for inexperienced readers but, rather, as an accommodation to the reading habits of the learned classes of his time. For Grünpeck, images helped readers to grasp the main point of the text by reinforcing it visually and by lending structure to otherwise unbroken passages. While Brant described images as equivalents of the text for the unlearned, Grünpeck described them as useful complements to the text for learned readers at a time which Grünpeck considered to be in a state of intellectual decay. The illustrations to Grünpeck’s *Speculum* and pseudo-Methodius share a basic conception of the image as a companion to the text for the benefit of readers with deficient literacy. They also share a relatively short life span as integral image cycles, each lasting no more than two decades. Other ways to access images were already competing for readers’ attention.

**Visual interpretation.** While some woodcuts in Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* and most images in pseudo-Methodius and in Grünpeck’s *Speculum* permit the reader to see what a prophet has seen, other images ask readers
to see as prophets see. This second type of image presents visual symbols that can be interpreted, inviting the reader to participate in the act of prophetic interpretation. While readers could also study the text, not all points of interpretation were to be found there. Other aspects were left up to the reader’s own judgment. In the Prognosticatio, future political affairs were encoded in a manner requiring not just familiarity with iconography but also considerable visual imagination. A woodcut depicting a set of legs standing on a column, for example, illustrates neither past nor future events but, instead, a prophetic symbol from the vision that Daniel interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar. Readers do not behold in it the sense of the prophecy (namely, that contention will arise between the Holy Roman Empire and the heathen Turks) but, rather, are asked to repeat a process of prophetic visual interpretation. The prophetic-visionary woodcuts present readers with riddles on which imagination can work until, in the scanning of the following text, the answer is revealed. Rather than, for example, either showing Reinhart the Lollard in the moment of inspiration or directly depicting the warfare and conflict he predicts, the Prognosticatio shows the reader a standoff between a wolf and two eagles, letting the reader participate in visionary inspiration via visual interpretation. Readers first see an eagle hovering over three forests and lions that are either visible, half hidden, or entirely hidden. That the lion represents the king of Bavaria is made clear on the next page, while the differences in visibility are left uninterpreted. The image of sylvan lions itself represents the interpretation of an eclipse, whose awful portents for kings and princes the narrator calls almost too shocking for him to interpret. Whereas Lichtenberger’s text discouraged inexpert readers from judging matters of which they were ignorant, particularly astrological concerns such as eclipses, the woodcut images allowed readers access to interpretation and permitted them to resolve textual ambiguities within certain boundaries. The Prognosticatio woodcuts offered readers a private and individual participation in the prophetic vision, which helped preserve the image sequence in later editions.

A contemporary witness of the role of images in prophetic communication and prophetic reading can be found in the Brother Claus tract, printed three times in the late 1480s. The tract presents an encounter between its author, an otherwise anonymous “honorable pilgrim” (now identified as Heinrich Gundelfingen), and the Swiss hermit Nikolaus von Flüe, as a series of dialogues between the two. In the fourth dialogue, the hermit says, “If it is not aggravating to you, I would like to let you see my book, in which I
learn and seek the art of this doctrine.” The “book” that the illiterate holy man brings forward is, in fact, a drawing of a wheel with six spokes, as a following woodcut depicts, for which Brother Claus then provides an interpretation. The unlettered hermit’s reading of the image is an act not of memory but of perception and imagination, and the illiterate visuality is, if anything, superior to the pilgrim’s literate textual competency. The hermit’s own interpretation is not the final word, however. The second and longer section of the tract consists of the visiting pilgrim’s own interpretation of the same image, beginning with a graphic elaboration of the schematic wheel with scenes from the life of Christ and signets for the four evangelists, as well as a series of woodcuts depicting a charitable work for each spoke of the wheel. In actual fact, the original meditative image was the more complex form, and the schematic wheel represents a simplification. In the model of prophetic reading presented in the *Brother Claus* tract, however, seeing what the hermit has seen is only the first step toward the reader’s own visual interpretation.

**Image as Prophecy: From Lichtenberger to Paracelsus**

The use of images as illustrations, as graphic alternatives to the text for the sake of deficient readers, faced competition of a second type as well. Thirty years after Brant’s invocation of Gregory the Great and twenty years after Grünpeck defended the use of woodcuts, another illustrated prophetic work, this time with the intent of overturning the papacy, took Gregory’s dictum about images and stood it on its head. Since the late thirteenth century, a series of papal images and interpretations sometimes attributed to Joachim of Fiore and known as the *Vaticinia de summis pontificibus* had circulated in manuscript, and the first Italian editions were printed in the early sixteenth century. In 1527, the Reformation clergyman Andreas Osiander and Hans Sachs collaborated on a German version, with Osiander providing a preface and prose interpretations of the images and Sachs contributing barbed verse summaries (see figure 9). The *Remarkable Prophecy about the Papacy* of Osiander and Sachs ultimately went through four editions. The Nuremberg city council confiscated unsold copies of the first edition as a threat to public order but at least reimbursed the printer, Hans Guldenmund, for his expenses.

Like Luther at the same time, Osiander was disturbed that his Catholic opponents were taking comfort in Lichtenberger’s prophecies. The travail of the clergy had long been foretold, the worst was over, and now the forces of the
Fig. 9. The *Remarkable Prophecy about the Papacy* of Osiander and Sachs. (Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)
Antichrist and his false prophet Martin Luther would now be defeated, they reasoned. To disabuse them of that notion, Luther contributed to an edition of Lichtenberger in 1527, and Osiander brought about the first edition of *A Remarkable Prophecy about the Papacy.*

Marshaling older orthodox work for the sake of Reformation polemic was not, in itself, new. Osiander had already provided a preface for a booklet known as *Saint Hildegard’s Prophecy about the Papists and the So-called Clergy,* which saw three editions in 1527. The *Remarkable Prophecy about the Papacy* of Sachs and Osiander does mark a new moment in the relationship between word and image, however; the text is secondary, and allegorical images become synonymous with prophecy itself. Osiander wrote in the preface to the work,

As Peter says, this prophecy is not in word but only in image and made without all words, and it shows clearly and understandably how it will go with the papacy from the time that it became a tyranny until the end of the world. So that no one should think that this is a new invention, I let it be known to all that I have had two of these books, one from the Carthusian monastery and the other from the library of my lords of the worthy senate here in Nuremberg. Of these two, neither is so new, so that anyone who sees it must agree that it is around a hundred years old as far as the images and writing are concerned, as anyone who does not want to believe me can experience on this very day. In addition, it is shown in the same books how the original from which they were copied was made 250 years ago, in the year 1278. But few people have understood until now that it is the manner of all prophecies that they remain obscure until they take effect; therefore one person guessed and wrote down one thing, and another person something else. But as it is clear that the writing is newer than the illustrations and that the older part remained without any writing, I have omitted it, as it undoubtedly does not belong here. But an interpretation has been added for the sake of simple people, for intelligent people will certainly see what it is without any interpretation. And so I leave it to each one to accept the interpretation or to supply a better one for it, if he can.

The traditional roles of word and image are here reversed: it is the unlearned who need the text to aid their understanding, while intelligent people, according to Osiander, will comprehend the images immediately. The images are, moreover, not reminders of textual prophecies or sum-
maries of their important points. Instead, the woodcuts themselves comprise the prophecies, while the text is suspect and dispensable. Martin Luther, in his nearly contemporary preface to Revelation, regarded prophecies consisting only of images as the most obscure and prone to misuse, as long as no interpretation was offered. Osiander, however, expressed a much different attitude toward prophetic images. Whereas the allegorical, prophetic-visionary woodcuts in Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* had given readers opportunity to participate in visual interpretation while pointing them into the text, Osiander held that the ideal reader of the *Remarkable Prophecy about the Papacy* would experience the prophetic moment in the viewing of the images alone.

The papal prophetic images were reprinted again around 1535, in two editions by Jakob Cammerlander in Strasbourg that also incorporated the Hildegardian prophecy published by Osiander, again in the service of antipapal polemic. After a chronicle of papal usurpation and transgression, the Strasbourg editions repeat fifteen images from the *Vaticinia de summis pontificibus* series in somewhat smaller format, to which additional polemical details have been added. There is thus more space for Jakob Vielfeld’s textual explication of the images, which, on the whole, lacks Osiander’s wit and even such generosity as he could muster. While the sectarian outlook in Cammerlander’s editions may be antiorthodox, the attitude toward images is quite traditional, as the papal prophetic woodcuts are added for the sake of “those who otherwise cannot read very well.” Just as the functional use of images does not know confessional boundaries, the appeal to Lichtenberger, Hildegard, or the prophetic papal images by both Lutheran and Catholic writers serves as a reminder that the Reformation is not a caesura in early modern prophecy. While both sides attempted to enlist prophecy for their cause or attacked prognostic practices at various times, the Catholic and Protestant divide does not form a boundary in the creation or reception of prophetic and prognostic works, and there is a continuity of edition history both before and after the Reformation.

Engagement with the images of Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* and polemical editions of the papal prophetic images influenced the visual-prophetic work of one of the most original and influential minds of the time, Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus (1493–1541). Paracelsus left behind a massive body of work in manuscript, most of which did not appear in print until decades after his death. The works that were printed during his lifetime consist primarily of prognostic
and prophetic works, however (twenty-one of twenty-seven total editions before his death, compared to six printed medical works). In or around 1530, Paracelsus’s engagement with Lichtenberger’s woodcuts and the papal image cycle published by Osiander led to two extensive treatises, but these works remained unpublished until decades after his death. As with Osiander before him, Paracelsus treated the woodcuts as authentic truths whose meaning was (to him) self-evident, while the text could be cast aside. The same kind of engagement with prophetic images is evident in his Prognostication for Twenty-four Years, first published in German and in the Latin translation of Marcus Tatius in 1536. This work consists of thirty-two single-page articles consisting of a woodcut followed by a textual response. The texts are not an interpretation of the image into tangible terms but, rather, an allusive judgment without explicit relationship to future events. So, for example, the foreground of one woodcut consists of several torn sheets, scrolls, and books, while the background landscape is marred by a dismembered head (see figure 10). The text underneath declares, “When a schoolchild comes to maturity, it is ashamed of its childish work and destroys it. The same will happen to you. If you write in such a form, your own work will be nothing. That will cause much labor to be done in vain and for naught, for time teaches and gives recognition that not everything that is advertised as a pearl is actually a pearl. Therefore a hand will fall over you that will tear you asunder like a scrap of cloth.” While the relation between the destroyed writings and body of the text and woodcut is clear, the referent for “you” is never revealed, nor is it explained what this text and image might mean in the context of prognostication.

Although some of the woodcuts appear to show recognizable figures or to make use of familiar allegorical symbols, Paracelsus wrote nothing about the source of the thirty-two pictures, and there is little agreement as to whether Paracelsus invented both the text and images, composed a text based on preexisting images, or provided only a text for which an artist provided illustrations. A further complication for any iconographic analysis is that Paracelsus did not describe his interpretive methods in any of his prognostic writings, although he sharply criticized the astrological reasoning of his time. In the Prognostication for Twenty-four Years, he offered his own concept of magica as the basis of interpretation. A later disciple defined Paracelsus’s magic as the “natural and lawful mother of true medicine and the hidden wisdom of nature, ever concealed and obscured in the center, with which if you apply only human reason you will find nothing
Fig. 10. Woodcut from the *Prognostication for Twenty-four Years* of Paracelsus.
(Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.)
but pure folly. It is truly the gift of God, with which he grants us knowledge of natural and supernatural things.”

Benzenhöfer sees magica in the context of the Prognostication for Twenty-four Years as the “personified act of signifying” that can be found not only in nature but also in human beings and in human works. What might contemporary readers, promised a prognostication for the years 1536–60 similar to the multiyear prognostications of Carion and Virdung, have found in the Prognostication for Twenty-four Years? Perhaps the Prognostication for Twenty-four Years offered readers the consistent implementation of an idea first seen in Osiander’s edition of the Remarkable Prophecy about the Papacy: the identification of the prophetic moment with the act of visual interpretation. The Prognostication for Twenty-four Years combined obscurely symbolic images with an allusive textual subscription. Readers met this text-image convolute and participated in its resolution to their own satisfaction (permitting, for example, at least one contemporary reader to read the work as an anti-Lutheran prophecy).

Benzenhöfer concludes that the “text (and thus also the text-image ensemble) will continue to present puzzles” for scholars, but that seems very close to its original purpose for contemporary readers, to whom it represented an opportunity to participate in prophetic visual interpretation. Paracelsus’s concluding “Explanation of the Prognostication” states only that each of the thirty-two articles is so profound as to require its own book for full explication and that a complete interpretation would cause much sorrow; so much is written in the hidden sense that it cannot easily be explained. “Others must comprehend it better than I, and understand to whom it applies,” Paracelsus wrote in the preface. Paracelsus thus provided his readers an open text, with images as its entrance. Regarding the Prognostication for Twenty-four Years as an invitation to visual interpretation is at least consonant with the wish of Paracelsus that “every Christian might become an astronomer, view the signs in the heavens that God himself has made, consider that Christ has inscribed the sign, and seek the interpretation in the same place as his word, and then each one will find it in himself.”

OLD BOOKS REDISCOVERED: CHRISTIAN EGENOLFF AND THE PROPHETIC CANON

This study limits its chronological focus to the first century following Gutenberg, although prognostic and prophetic works continued to be
printed and reprinted well after 1550. Yet the boundary is not entirely arbitrary. In the late 1540s, the Frankfurt printer Christian Egenolff published a prophetic compilation that contained many of the popular prophetic works of the prior hundred years and that pointed the way to a new attitude toward printed texts. Egenolff had begun his career in Strasbourg in 1528 but moved his workshop to Frankfurt in 1530, where, as the city’s first printer (apart from the brief and limited operation of Beatus Murner in 1511–12), Egenolff published as many as five hundred editions over the next twenty-five years. Egenolff’s compilation provides a concise list of prophetic authorities in the mid-sixteenth century in Lichtenberger’s wake, and it substantially contributed to the formation of a prophetic canon by providing the means by which several later writers rediscovered the prophetic works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Egenolff had reprinted the *Prophecies of the Twelve Sibyls*, expanded to include a thirteenth Sibyl, for the first time in 1531. The next year, he printed a version without woodcuts but including the well-traveled excerpts from Lichtenberger and Grünpeck in the *Extract of Various Prophecies*, as well as Josephus’s apocryphal testimony of Christ, a short Antichrist tract, and the signs of the Last Day. The association of Josephus with the Sibyls is not surprising, as they all were regarded as non-Christian witnesses from classical antiquity for the truth of the Christian message, and the extract from Josephus already appeared alongside the Sibyls in Jakob Köbel’s edition of the Latin sibylline collection of Philippus de Barberiis around 1517. The association of Antichrist legends and signs of the Last Day is also to be expected, and both appeared already in the manuscript tradition of the *Sibyl’s Prophecy*. Egenolff’s 1532 collection provided thirty-six signs of the Last Day, and similar lists with varying numbers of items are known from the same period. This version of Egenolff’s compilation, still primarily a sibylline collection with some brief additions, was reprinted in 1575, and additional reprints of the same configuration appeared in ca. 1620, 1637, 1676, and 1700.

Egenolff expanded the collection in 1537 to include a tract by Filippo Cattaneo, cast as a prognostication for four years but principally a recounting of the tropes of an Angelic Pope and Last Emperor, and a work of the recently deceased Joseph Grünpeck. The work is not Grünpeck’s *Speculum* of 1508, however, or even the recent *Prognosticum* for 1532–40. It is, rather, a work otherwise unknown, “The Book of Master Joseph Grünpeck on the Reformation of Christendom and the Church,” which is missing from most
lists of Grünpeck’s works. After describing the turmoil to arise following the death of Frederick III (which had occurred in 1493), Grünpeck’s “Reformation” cites the motif of an “emperor of chaste countenance” who awakens from a deathly sleep. The “Reformation” narrates a series of scenes involving the emperor: “The prince is awakened from his sleep by the heavenly portents”; “Shocked by the variety of such miracles, he will arise to meet them”; and so on until he defeats all enemies and reforms Christendom. Each scene consists of similar mottoes followed by brief explanations, suggesting an illustrated work for which the illustrations were omitted in Egenolff’s collection. As Grünpeck had penned a number of illustrated panegyrics to Frederick III and Maximilian I in the guise of imperial history, the attribution to Grünpeck of an illustrated panegyric in the guise of prophecy seems entirely plausible.

Egenolff’s final and most extensive expansion of his prophetic compilation came in the late 1540s, when he replaced Cattaneo’s tract with Carion’s “Hidden Prophecy” following Grünpeck’s “Reformation” and added as the first two works in the collection the Prognostication for Twenty-four Years of Paracelsus and Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio, both illustrated with woodblocks acquired from Heinrich Steiner of Augsburg. The text of Lichtenberger’s Prognosticatio followed the older translation for the first thirty-seven leaves (most likely using the 1526 edition of Peter Schöffer, whose title page it shares) before adopting the modernized translation of Stephan Rodt, which had first appeared in the Wittenberg edition of 1527 (perhaps transmitted via one of Heinrich Steiner’s Augsburg editions of Rodt’s translation). As Rodt’s translation numbered the chapters consecutively throughout rather than for each of the three sections, the fourth chapter of the Prognosticatio in Egenolff’s compilation is followed by the eighth.

The 1548 title page, which emphasized that Egenolff’s collection was illustrated, bears the identification “prophecies and predictions of past, present, and future things, histories and fortunes of all estates, to admonish and comfort the pious and to frighten and warn the evil, proclaiming until the end,” after which follows a list of the principal contents, arranged by author. Barnes notes that Egenolff’s compilation was part of a resurgence of interest in prophecy following Luther’s death, but his description of most items in Egenolff’s compilation as “clearly anti-Roman in tone” seems wide of the mark, considering the generally anti-Lutheran stance of Paracelsus and the origin of most remaining sections of the compilation before 1517.

What principle of selection informed Egenolff’s last prophetic compila-
tion? There are numerous works that he could have chosen to include but did not. While the works of Birgitta of Sweden and pseudo-Methodius had appeared in fifteen and eleven editions, respectively, between 1475 and 1525, none of their works appear in Egenolff’s collection. Why did Egenolff include Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* in its entirety but not Birgitta’s *Burden of the World*? The guiding principle of Egenolff’s collection seems to be grounded less in the characteristics of the prophetic texts than in a particularly visual approach to prophecy that made some works and their woodcut cycles indispensable and others less so. Paracelsus’s *Prognostication for Twenty-four Years*, the first work in the collection and the most prominently mentioned on the title page, is the ultimate expression of the notion of prophecy as visual interpretation that had first appeared in Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio*. Grünpeck’s *Speculum* and its textual-illustrative woodcuts were less amenable to the kind of symbolic interpretation and visual participation found in other works, and so Grünpeck is represented, instead, by the “Reformation of Christendom and the Churches.” While this short work lacked illustrations, it did not lack for visuality, as the interplay of scenic descriptions and their interpretation re-creates as text the process of visual interpretation, just as some editions of Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* retained the captions but omitted the woodcuts. For the purposes of Egenolff’s collection, a textual description of interpretable images was apparently superior to the actual but usually illustrative woodcuts found in the *Speculum*. In the same way, Carion’s “Hidden Prophecy” offered vivid, if stereotyped, prophetic imagery in a way that his *Interpretation and Revelation* did not. In addition to canonizing early modern prophets and prophetic works, Egenolff’s compilations established visual interpretation, rather than textual production, as the path for individual participation in prophecy.

The midcentury collections of Egenolff were instrumental in transmitting Lichtenberger and other elements of the prophetic canon from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth. In 1618, Wilhelm Neuheuser commented in a Lutheran polemical tract that “many prophecies and predictions of wise people are now being published and printed,” and the early years of the Thirty Years’ War did see another resurgence of interest in prophetic works, including a new edition of Birgitta’s *Burden of the World* in 1625 and, in 1620, a new edition of the *Onus ecclesiae* attributed to Berthold Pürstinger, bishop of Chiemsee from 1508–26. (This compilation, first printed in eleven editions in 1524–31, included prophecies drawn from Birgitta, Hilde-
gard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, pseudo-Vincent Ferrer, pseudo-
Methodius and Aytinger’s commentary on it, and, above all, *Abbas Joachim
magnus propheta*, an edition of the prophecies of Telesphorus of Costenza
and other Joachimite prophecies, printed in 1516 by Lazzaro Soardi in
Venice. Neuheuser identified ten recently published prophetic works, and
the first three point to the influence of Egenolff’s collection: they are Grün-
peck’s “Reformation,” found only there; Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio*; and
the commentaries of Paracelsus on Lichtenberger and the prophectic papal
images. In 1620, a new edition of Lichtenberger and other works appeared,
and its title page, contents, and preface leave no doubt that it is a reprinting
of Egenolff’s collection, although without the work of Paracelsus. The first
title identifies it as the *Affliction of the Entire World and Change of All Sover-
eignty and Government*, while the next page specifies the contents as
“prophecies and predictions of present and future things, histories and oc-
currences until the end of the world, namely: Johannes Lichtenberger, Jo-
hann Carion, Joseph Grünpeck, the Sibyls, and many others.” A nearly
identical edition appeared in the same year. If there was any need of
confirmation that these editions were based on Egenolff’s collection, the
preface to the *Prognosticatio* removes all doubt: the printer calls it an “ex-
traject from the practica of Master Johann Lichtenberger, which was printed
without naming of the location in 1549,” just as Egenolff’s collection printed
in that year had mentioned neither his own name nor the city of Frankfurt,
but only the date of printing. This 1620 edition was, according to the title
page, “faithfully reprinted from old copies.” This was to be the only reprint-
ing of a work by Grünpeck in the seventeenth century, as three later edi-
tions in 1633 and one more in 1664 preserve the title *Affliction of the Entire
World* but include with it only the extracts from Lichtenberger.

The claims of seventeenth-century editions to faithfully represent six-
teenth-century books suggest that a new stage had been reached in attitudes
toward antiquity and authenticity. The claim that a prophecy had been
found in an old book was so common in the first half of the sixteenth cen-
tury that Johannes Virdung mocked it in his practica for 1537, complaining
that many practicas were being published, “one made long before the birth
of Christ and found in an old book, another made long before the birth of
Christ and found in a stone column in Rome, the third revealed through the
unknown voice of an invisible spirit, and similar foolish practicas, which
are made only for the profit of printers and contrary to true astronomy.”
During the transition from the unique manuscript to the limitless copy
and distributed printed book, reference to the older medium or to the specificity of a given place attested a printed work’s authenticity. The massive authoritative collections of Birgitta’s revelations are careful to distance themselves from contemporary editions of the *Burden of the World* not only through the affidavits of ecclesiastical worthies but also by claiming a manuscript in the saint’s own cloister as their exemplar; any revelation claiming to be Birgitta’s but not found in the collection, they assert, should be rejected as inauthentic. The same kind of claim could be made by less credible texts, of course. Some claimed to be “verses found in an old wall in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem” or “found in a certain old book in Rome,” precisely in the manner that Virdung had derided. Others merely claimed to have been discovered in old books, with no attempt to locate their source. For some prophetic tracts that assert antiquity, their claim rests on the specific physicality of writing by hand, such as Osiander’s claim that anyone who saw the exemplar of his papal prophecies would agree that the illustrations and writing were a hundred years old. The anonymous *Prophecy and Secret of Old Hidden Writings* described its sources as an old text, “written with old letters.” Other prophecies appealed to linguistic authenticity, such as a “prophecy found in Magdeburg truly written several hundred years ago in Latin”; the *Tract against the Turks* of 1486 cited a prophecy concerning the fall of Islam found in a book written in Arabic.

The prophetic tract attributed to Jakob Pflaum was first printed around 1522, but it claimed to have been originally made in 1500. The source to which it obliquely refers for its veneer of authenticity is a scientific work, the astronomical almanac of Johannes Stöffler and (the authentic) Jakob Pflaum, which had been printed in 1499. A reprint of the “Jakob Pflaum” booklet in 1532 adds a preface that states explicitly that the alleged original had been printed in 1500. While the prophetic tract’s (admittedly spurious) claim to authority is based more on scientific respectability than on antiquity, the tract of “Jakob Pflaum” does represent a case where prophetic authenticity rests on fidelity not to an old manuscript but to a printed book.

The prophetic compilations of Christian Egenolff represent a new status accorded to printed media. Egenolff’s canonization entails not just an enshrinement of particular authors but also a new attitude toward the integrity of their works. In the compilations of Egenolff, the prophetic work was no longer only a source of authoritative text to be cited and extracted, as it had been for Lichtenberger; for the *Burden of the World*, *Onus ecclesiae*, and *Extract of Various Prophecies*; or in such contemporary collections as
Wolfgang Lazius’s *Prophetic Fragments*, published in 1547 in Vienna, or Melchior Ambach’s *On the End of the World and the Coming of the Antichrist*. Rather than citing texts, Egenolff’s compilations anthologized entire prophetic works, including their illustrations. As elements incorporated into Egenolff’s collection, books were not containers for text but integral units that could not so easily be divided. Lichtenberger’s *Prognosticatio* retained a distinct title page even as the second item in the collection. Sixty years after the first edition of Lichtenberger, Egenolff’s collections helped establish a canon that was based not on the prophetic word but on the prophetic work. Egenolff’s collection was in this way a precursor to the prophetic compilations published by Adam Walasser in Dillingen in 1569 and 1573, where each tract retained its own title page. Unlike earlier discoverers of old prophecies, the linguistic proof of antiquity in Walasser’s collection is not the use of Latin but the use of an opaque and archaic German. Where the invention of print had once accentuated the contrasts between the old manuscript and the new book, printed books a century after Gutenberg had become capable of acquiring prophetic antiquity.