Prophetie, Prognose und Politik

Prophecy, Prognosis, and Politics

Personengeschichtliche Perspektiven zwischen Antike und Neuzeit

Perspectives from the History of Persons from Antiquity to the Modern Age

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Voices of Destruction

Prophecy, Punishment and Prodigies in Early Medieval Hispania (Fifth to Eighth Centuries)

Portenta autem et ostenta, monstra, atque prodigia ideo nuncupatur, quod portendere, atque ostendere, monstrare ac praedicare aliqua futura videntur[1]

Introduction

From ancient Greece to the Middle Ages, poets, kings and prophets held sway over the construction of the past, present and future of historiographical narrative. Following the Christian transition in late antiquity, only saints, bishops and abbots were destined to retain this dominion over prophecy and the coming of the last judgement, and their fight against pagan diviners formed something of a legacy within a new Christian historiographical narrative that encompassed all humanity and the known world. The legitimacy of prophecy was based on the divine *lex* expressed in history, law and prophecy, as in the Old Testament.[2] Thus, as rulers of the written word, the creators of historical narrative converted the past into a perpetual reminder that the past would be repeated in the future, shaping attitudes in the present. Prediction became a means to govern the present through control of *expectation*.[3] Domination of the future was exerted not only through law and history but also through prophecy, which in late antiquity and the Middle Ages acquired particular prominence. During this period, a transition in the models of reception

1 Isidorus Hispalensis, De portentis, *Etimologiarum*, XI,3, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al., The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville, Cambridge 2006, pp. 243f.

2 José Carlos Bermejo Barrera, Genealogía de la Historia. Ensayos de historia teórica III, Madrid 1999, pp. 172–206. It was Isidore of Seville who established that *lex diuvina in tribus distinguitur partibus, id est in historia, in praeceptis et in prophetis*, which corresponded to the three triple mode – historical, tropological and mystical – that he formulated: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiae*, I,18,11–12, ed. Pierre Cazier, Isidorus Hispalensis Sententiae, (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina CXI), Turnhout 1998, p. 64.

3 Reprising an Augustinian categorisation of time as a form of dominion over time. Cf. Jean-Claude Schmitt, Appropriating the Future, in: Medieval Futures. Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages, ed. Ian P. Wei and John A. Burrough, Woodbridge 2000, pp. 3–17, here: p. 4.

and interpretation of prophecy occurred, legitimised by biblical emulation.[4] Shaped by a paradigm shift in early medieval Europe, this transition witnessed conflict not only between paganism and Christianity but also between the various Christian dogmas (orthodoxy/heresy), complicating an authorial landscape that was struggling to impose its own character on civil and imperial rule; hence the importance of the lives of the authors of prophecies that reflected vital and political interests in Roman and Visigothic Hispania and Suebian Gallaecia. In these cases, disguised as an authorial and political reaffirmation, Old Testament emulation became part of the new ecclesiastical history.[5]

1. Pagan and Christian Owners of the End in Fourth-Century Hispania and Gaul

Roman historiography has bequeathed us the first mention of prodigies that occurred in the Hispanic world, principally involving Hispano-Roman emperors and the earlier Roman or Carthaginian generals who fought in the Punic Wars. For example, Titus Livy[6] recounts the flame that shone from Lucius Marcius when he was making a speech following the death of the Scipios in Hispania[7] and tritons and sea nymphs (as in the Gulf of Cadiz) were said to have accompanied Tiberius' delegation to Lisbon[8]. The relationship between the emperor of Hispanic origin and the *omina* (signs, prodigies and omens) that foretold his triumph or failure in his birthplace is of particular importance because of its political significance. Such omens could inspire a collective fear among soldiers that might even lead to military defeat, as in the case of Sertorius, although the latter decided that the sudden appearance of splatters of blood on his men's shields and the horses' chests was auspicious.[9]

4 Christel Meier, Nova verba prophetae. Evaluation und Reproduktion der prophetischen Rede der Bibel im Mittelalter. Eine Skizze, in: Prophetie und Autorschaft. Charisma, Heilsversprechen und Gefährdung, ed. Christel Meier/Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, Berlin 2014, pp. 71–104.

5 Christian Bratu, »Je, auteur de ce livre« L'affirmation de soi chez les historiens, de l'Antiquité à la fin du Moyen Age, (Late Medieval Europe, vol. 20) Leiden/Boston 2019, pp. 126–179.

6 Livy, XXV, 39,16–17, ed. Frank Gardner Moore, Livy With an English Translation in Fourteen Volumes, Books XXIII–XXV (The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 355), London/Cambridge 1984, p. 493.

7 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, II, CXI, 241, ed. H. Rackham, Pliny. Natural History, vol. 1 (The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 330), Cambridge (MA) 1938, p. 367.

8 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, IX,II,4, ed. H. Rackham, Pliny. Natural History, vol. 3, (The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 353), Cambridge (MA) 1940, p. 169.

9 The account is given by Sextus Julius Frontinus in a section entitled »on dispelling the fears inspired in soldiers by

Galba constitutes a special case in the interpretation of such signs as warnings of failure in that the omens related to him were considered to foretell not only an end to his empire but also his rapid fall and murder.[10] In order to evaluate elements of syncretism with biblical prophetic legacy and its prodigious manifestations, any elucidation of the Christianisation of historical narrative should also consider the legacy of these imperial prodigia in Hispania,[11] particularly with regard to regal and episcopal sovereignty.

The Gospel according to Luke describes the signs of the end prophesied by Christ in the following terms: *Tunc dicebat illis: Surget gens contra gentem, et regnum adversus regnum; et terrae motus magni et per loca fames et pestilentiae erunt, terroresque et de caelo signa magna erunt.*[12] Religious change and gradual institutional consolidation in the fourth century spurred the first semantic shift in the meaning of prodigies, which was towards Christianity and away from traditional pagan beliefs. A notable example of this transition is the life of Firmicus Maternus, who authored a book on astrology, *Matheseos libri octo*, but also a Christian apologetics after his conversion, *De errore profanarum religionum*. In the *Matheseos*, the relationship between punishment and astronomical prodigies is clear in certain astral positions: the rise in prison detention, capital punishment and judicial violence.[13] However, such prodigies were not without pagan connotations. During the Constantinian transition, one of the great voices of the fourth century, Lactancius, warned that prodigies were diabolical *simulacra* that had existed in the past, but, alongside oracles, were created to terrorise men.[14]

adverse omens«, ed. Mary B. McElwain, Frontinus. The Stratagems and the Aqueducts of Rome (The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 174), London/Cambridge (MA) 1961, p. 81.

10 *Magna et asidua monstra iam inde a principium exitum ei, qualis evenit, portenderant.* Suetonius, De vita Caesarum, Galba, 18,1, ed. David Shotter, Suetonius. Lives of Galba, Otho & Vitellius, Warminster 1993, pp. 58f.

11 Miraculous events foretelling the destruction of the world order were not unusual in the exegetical and New Testament tradition, in which the prodigies that occurred during the death of Christ paralleled the Imperial Roman *omina mortis*. For example, as Christ was dying, darkness fell on the land, darkening the sun and rending the veil of the temple, Matt 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44–45. In addition, the earth quaked and some of the dead were resurrected, Matt 27:51–54, Mark 15:38.

12 Luke 21:10–11.

13 Jean Rhys Bram, Ancient Astrology. Theory and Practice. Matheseos Libri VIII by Firmicus Maternus, Park Ridge 1975, pp. 85, 130, 152. On prison as a result of astrology, see in particular Julia Hillner, Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity, New York 2015, p. 137.

14 [...] *obstupefacti homines fidem commodent simulacris divinitatis ac numinis*, Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, II,XVI,10, ed. Pierre Monat, Lactance. Institutions Divines, libre II (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 337), Paris 1987, pp. 198–204.

The condemnatory attitude of some Christian clerics and converts reflects not only an execration of the pagan past of prophesies, but also an attempt to neutralise the threat of this legacy, since »prophecy and prodigy could help provide an ideological foundation for open rebellion against Rome, and they could play a role in fomenting civil unrest«.[15] The prophetic tradition and signs were also granted new meaning by Hispanic authors such as Prudentius Clemens from Tarraconensis. In his book of hymns and his book on martyrs, he used two repetitive forms of time – the domestic or daily and the commemoration of the martyrs – to convey collective fears of the eclipse, the prophetic capacity of the author and the end of the world.[16]

If we consider the Hispano-Roman fourth-century writer, Egeria, she too makes a reference to the end of the world. Unfortunately, it has not survived in the corresponding Italian manuscript; however, two centuries later, Valerius of Bierzo, a hermit, made mention of it and instructed his disciples in her example.[17] Possibly soon after Egeria, an indoctrinating letter to a sinful monk, Bachiarius, who was associated with Galician Priscillianism, also mentions that *Ecce in saeculi fine consistimus*,[18] demonstrating a close relationship with Egeria's sentiments concerning the end of the world. Around the same time, Sulpicius Severus, a relevant writer and historian from Gaul, used the voice of Martin of Tours to convey anxiety about the birth of the Antichrist and report the presence in Hispania of a pseudo-prophet claiming to be Elijah.[19] In his Life of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius, in addition to denouncing false

15 David Potter, Prophets and Emperors. Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius (Revealing Antiquity, vol. 7), Cambridge (MA)/London 1994, p. 171.

16 Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, *Cathemerinon*, IX,81; *Peristephanon*, II,477–483 and X,537–541, ed. H. J. Thompson, Prudentius, vol. 1 (The Loeb Classical Library), London/Cambridge (MA) 1949, p. 80 and Prudentius, vol. 2 (The Loeb Classical Library), London/Cambridge (MA) 1953, pp. 98–346.

17 *Hec adventum Domini post finem seculi expectans velut presentem adtendens ad montem sanctum Syna – unde eum speramus in nubibus celi tempore suo advenire, Epistola beatissime Egerie laude conscripta fratrum bergindensium monachorum a Valerio conlata*, ed. Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, Égérie. Journal de Voyage (Itinéraire) et Lettre sur la Bᵉ Égérie (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 296), Paris 1996, p. 340.

18 Bachiarius Monachus, *De reparatione lapsi 6*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, vol. 20, Turnhout 1846, col. 1042. We thank Professor Crespo Losada for the referral to this author. On Bachiarius and problems with his biography, see Carmen Codoñer, La Hispania visigótica y mozárabe. Dos épocas en su literatura (Obras de referencia, vol. 28), Salamanca 2010, pp. 18–23.

19 *Animadversum est tamen, eodem fere tempore fuisse in Hispania iuvenem, qui cum sibi multis signis auctoritatem paravisset, eo usque elatus est, ut se Heliam profiteretur.* Jacques Fontaine, Sulpice Sévère. Vie de Saint Martin (Sources Chretiennes, vol. 133), Paris 1967, p. 306.

prophets, extolled the power of prophecy over future events[20] by using the constant threat of a world destroyed by cleansing violence,[21] thus legitimising the prophesies of St. Martin.[22] This capacity for prophecy eventually affected the turbulent life of the empire at the time, consolidating the saint as a prophet capable of foretelling imperial defeats and victories in the late fourth century and the violent destiny of the Roman emperor of Hispanic origin, Maximus.[23]

2. *Extremus Plagae*: Hydatius and Orosius on Divine Violence at the End of the World (Fourth and Fifth Centuries)

In one of his letters to Braulius of Zaragoza, Fructuosus of Braga described his distress at living in *Gallaecia*, abandoned in the shadowy western lands (*Occidentis tenebrosa plaga*). In his response, Braulius lost no time in dismissing this lament, citing several great writers who, 100 years earlier, had lived through the Suebian and Gothic invasions while writing to and studying with Augustine of Hippo or Jerome of Stridon, travelling from one end of the civilised world to the other.[24] Priscilian, Egeria, Orosius, Hydatius and, later, Valerius had been born or educated in the northwest of Hispania or had governed a diocese there.

From Gaul to Gallaecia, attitudes to prophecy and prodigies foretelling the end converged.[25] Paulus Orosius and Hydatius of Chaves, who led parallel

20 GHISLAINE DE SENNEVILLE-GRAVE, Sulpice Sévère. Chroniques (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 441), Paris 1999, pp. 228f. CLARE STANCLIFFE, St. Martin and his Hagiographer. History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus, Oxford 1983, pp. 205–249.

21 Sulpicius Severus attributes prophecies about the coming end of the world and Nero's return as the Antichrist to Martin of Tours: *Ceterum, cum ab eo de fine saeculi quareremus, ait nobis Neronem et Antichristum prius esse venturos*, JACQUES FONTAINE, Sulpice Sévère. Gallus. Dialogues sur les vertus de Saint Martin (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 510), Paris 2006, p. 280.

22 The prophecy is presented as a revelation that he conveyed to his spiritual brothers: *si quotiens accidisent, longe antea praeuidebat aut sibi nuntiat fratribus indicabat.* FONTAINE, Sulpice Sévère. Gallus (see n. 2), p. 300.

23 *Eidemque Maximo longe ante praedixit futurum*, FONTAINE, Sulpice Sévère. Vie (see n. 21), p. 298. On the apocalyptic nature of Sulpicius Severus, VERONIKA WIESER, Die Weltchronik des Sulpicius Severus. Fragmente einer Sprache der Endzeit im ausgeheden 4. Jahrhundert, in: Abendländische Apokalyptik. Kompendium einer Genealogie der Endzeit, ed. EAD. et al., Berlin 2013, pp. 661–693.

24 In his response, Braulius cited a short list of authors from the province: *Orosium presbiterum, Turibium episcopum, Idatium et Carterium.* RUTH MIGUEL FRANCO/JOSÉ CARLOS MARTÍN IGLESIAS, Braulionis Caesaraugustani Epistulae et Isidori Hispalensis Epistulae ad bravlionem (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, CXIVB), Turnhout 2018, p. 116, 130.

25 In Gaul, later chronicles by ecclesiastical authors such as Prosper of Aquitaine and Marcellinus Comes continued to

lives, each held a considerably different view of events during the Suebian invasion of Gallaecia because their personal experiences influenced the narratives they constructed. Thus, Paulus Orosius decided to flee the situation in Hispania, going into exile in Jerusalem and Carthage, and constructed a tempered narrative of events. However, Hydatius of Aquae Flaviae experienced all the events at first hand, mediated politically between the Suebi and the *Gallaeci*, and was even held captive by King Frumarius for 3 months as a result,[26] although not before he had received doctrinal training in Jerusalem. Hence, accounts of prodigies and *omina* in his historiographical narrative are significantly different. Hydatius constructed a chronicle that followed the sequence given by Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome of Stridon,[27] whereas Orosius constructed one of the first universal histories in which contemporary events are trivial in relation to the overall narrative. However, the difference does not lie solely in the times depicted but also in the meta-narrative of the Germanic invasions of the Iberian Peninsula. Hydatius was more pessimistic and sombre than Orosius, whereas the latter, embracing Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and optimistic about the future of the Roman world, opted to curb his mention of prodigies, considering them the pagan legacy of Livy and Julius Obsequens.[28] Thus, Orosius applied a Christian perspective to change the meaning of ancient prodigies, emulating the example of Augustus with messianic prophecies of his empire. Orosius mentioned only a few prodigies associated with his times, such as the divine bolts of lightning that levelled buildings after Alaric's sack of Rome, thus inserting this latter into the historical theology of violence and thereby legitimising the Goth leader's action.

Meanwhile, Hydatius employed all kinds of eclipses, comets, earthquakes and astrological and biological anomalies to foretell the arrival of the barbarians, destroyers of altars and ravagers of the land. Following the arrival of the

make heavy use of portents. Cf. S. Prosperi Aquitani Chronicum Integrum, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, vol. 51, Turnhout 1846, cols. 587f., 596, 605, 919–935.

26 These circumstances exerted a profound influence on Hydatius, spurring him to narrate the events he experienced in Gallaecia when held captive by King Frumarius for three months: Chronicle, 201 and 207, ed. Alain Tranoy, Hydace Cronique, vol. 1 (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 218), Paris 1974, pp. 164. On historical problems related to Hydatius and his work, see Pablo C. Díaz, El reino suevo (411–585), Madrid 2011, and for an examination of his arguments from silence, Rosa Sanz, El »silencio« de Hidacio de Chaves. Las transformaciones religiosas en la Hispania del siglo V, in: Gerión. Revista de Historia Antigua 35 (2017), pp. 645–666.

27 This is what he states in his dedication *sicut in capite istius voluminis praefatio prima declarat, cognomine Eusebio*, and is shown in the genealogy he established with Jerome of Stridon. Cf. Tranoy, Hydace (see n. 26), pp. 98, 100.

28 Peter Lebrecht Schmidt, Iulius Obsequens und das Problem des Livius-Epitome. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der lateinischen Prodigienliteratur, Mainz 1968.

barbarians in 409, pestilence, famine, wild beasts and war fulfilled the apocalyptic predictions.[29] In the same year as the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, the eastern side of the moon fell into darkness and comets appeared in the sky over Gaul, as described by Euphronius, Bishop of Autun, in a letter to Count Agrippinus.[30]

This indicates that Hydatius was interested not only in abnormal events within his own province but also in similar events elsewhere that would endow his chronicle with universal legitimacy, and he sought information about these via his epistolary and diplomatic contacts with other bishops in Gaul.[31] Such information is particularly useful as it sheds light on communication channels and episcopal interests in the transmission of news, particularly concerning anomalous events. The information also illustrates the creation of an attitude shared by the bishops involved, the communities they ruled and secular officials, such as counts.

Despite having studied in his youth with Jerome in Jerusalem, Hydatius differed from the latter in his use of Old Testament prophecy interpreted in light of contemporary events. Although Jerome condemned the millennialism of commentaries on Daniel or Isaiah as *fabula*,[32] Hydatius used Daniel twice to refer to Alaric's unsuccessful marriage to Galla Placidia and to denounce violence against Catholic churches[33] as a fulfilment of prophecy rather than as a simple simile.

For both, the turbulence of the times was written in the stars, in the waters, in miraculous births and rains of blood, so much so that Hydatius concluded his work in a minor key, using a prodigious coda as the climax of his accounts of a time he had personally experienced. One might even say that proto-apocalyptic rhetoric[34] suffused Hydatius' prose, almost certainly written in his old

29 Tranoy, Hydace (see n. 26), p. 116.

30 Ibid., p. 146.

31 The first mention concerns Paulinus of Nola, in the region of Beziers, and an ambiguous reference to some terrifying events around the year 420: *Paulini episcopi eiusdem civitatis epistola enarrat ubique directa.* In the second case, the prodigy is a comet that appeared in 451, mentioned in the letter Euphronius of Autun sent to Count Agrippinus: Chronicle, 73 and 151, ed. Tranoy, Hydace (see n. 26), pp. 124, 146.

32 Jerome, *Commentarii in Danielem* 2.7.17. Cf. Jossef Lössl, »Apocalypse? No«. The Power of Millennialism and its Transformation in Late Antique Christianity, in: The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity, ed. Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski, Farnham/Burlington 2009, p. 39.

33 [...] *profetia Danihelis putatur inpleta, ut ait filiam regis austri sociandam regi aquilonis; Gaisericus, elatus inpie, episcopum clerumque Carthaginis depellit ex ea et, iuxta prophetiam Danihelis*, Tranoy, Hydace (see n. 26), pp. 120, 136.

34 Veronika Wieser, A Historical Guidebook to the Last Days of the Western Roman Empire, in: Apocalypse and Reform from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, ed. Matthew Gabriele and James T. Palmer, Abingdon/New York 2019, pp. 11–31.

age, recalling events that had affected his town, bishopric and *conventum*: the rain of cereal, the miraculous haul on the Minho River of fish bearing Greek, Latin and Hebrew numbers and letters inscribed on their skin *et multa alia ostenta.*[35] The quantitative and qualitative location of these prodigies at the end of his work suggests an intention to conclude with prodigies that foretell inauspicious events, thereby endowing the narrative with the suspense of unresolved harmony.

3. Bishops, Prophets, Kings and Jews: the Blood Moon and reused signs (Sixth and Seventh centuries)

From the time of Hydatius' *Chronicle*, the bishops continued to consolidate their position in all spheres until achieving stability with Martin of Braga in the Suebian kingdom and, above all, following King Reccared's conversion to the Nicene Creed in 589, during the Visigothic period. The bishops' relationship with the Crown was constructed through identification with biblical kings and prophets, notably those such as Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar from the Old Testament. Just as the Assyrian king had needed the Hebrew prophets' interpretation of his dream because he found those of the Chaldeans unsatisfactory, so too had the Goth monarchs prior to Leovigild had a problematic relationship with each other due to a difference in creeds. However, even monarchs such as Leovigild, whom the Visigothic prelates considered heretical and the paradigm of the Arian persecutor of Catholics, are portrayed as executors of divine vengeance in Braulius of Zaragoza's *Vita Sancti Aemiliani*:

During Lent in the same year the doom of Cantabria was revealed to him. Therefore, he sent a messenger and instructed the senate to meet him on Easter Day. When they gathered at the appointed time, he told them what he had seen, and reproved them for their crimes: murder, theft, incest, violence and other sins, and told them to make penance for all of these. Although they all listened to him reverently [...] *a certain Abundantius said that he had gone senile in his old age. But Aemilian told him what he in person was going to suffer. And events bore him out, for he was cut down by the avenging sword of Leovigild. He attacked the rest too in equal measure for their perju-*

35 These events corresponded to 469, Tranoy, Hydace (see n. 26), pp. 178. They recall other miraculous events in the Bible related to fish such as Tobit and the angel (Book of Tobit 6:1–5) and Peter's tribute (Matt 17:24–27). See also the interpretation by César Candelas-Colodrón, Una hipótesis para la interpretación del Prodigium de la pesca del Miño en el Cronicón de Hidacio, in: Actas III Congreso Hispánico de Latín Medieval vol. 2, León 2002, pp. 759–764.

ry and treachery, predicting the coming wrath of God since they did not repent of their former works, and was anointed with their blood.[36]

This is the case of the prophecy that the saint pronounces regarding the Cantabrians and their imminent punishment at the hands of the king.[37] The king emerges as the recipient of prophecies and predictions, but does not know how to interpret them. He thus indirectly works according to the divine plan, but sovereignty over the prophecy and its legitimacy rests, once magicians and soothsayers – perpetrators of *maleficium* – had been condemned, in the hands of bishops and prelates such as Saint Aemilian or Braulius.[38] Accounts such as the one concerning Leovigild reveal the legislative reality that, following the decree issued at the 8th Council of Toledo in 653, the king was elected by the councils and bishops, which endowed them with power over the Crown in the seventh century.[39]

Isidore of Seville and Gregory of Tours used *omina, prodigia* and omens in their historiographical and theological narratives, reaffirming the miraculous nature of these in a Christian context.[40] However, a naive reading of their

36 Translated from Latin in Andrew Fear, Lives of the Visigothic Fathers (Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 26), Liverpool 2011, pp. 39f.

37 Luis Vázquez de Parga, Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopi. Vita Sancti Emiliani, Madrid 1943, p. 34.

38 Since the late imperial period, *maleficium* had become increasingly viewed as synonymous with *crimen laesa maiestas*, and the penalty for both was capital punishment. It was prohibited by the Hispano-Roman councils initially presided over by the Suebian kings and subsequently by the Visigothic kings. This prohibition was the legacy of those promulgated by Constans in 356 (*Codex Theodosianus* IX,16,4) and later by Alaric in his *Breviarum* (VIII,13,2). Cf. Maria Victoria Escribano Paño, Heretical Texts and *Maleficium* in the *Codex Theodosianus* (CTH. 16.5.34), in: Magical Practice in the Latin West, ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón, Leiden/Boston 2010, pp. 105–141; Eleonora Dell'Elicine, ¿Pervivencia o reconfiguración de saberes? Prácticas adivinatorias, idolatría y producción jurídica en el reino visigodo de Toledo (589–711), in: En la España Medieval 41 (2018), pp. 155–169.

39 José Vives, Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos (España cristiana, vol. 1), Madrid/Barcelona 1963, p. 283. The bishops' measures sought to consolidate the power of the church and curb the action of kings such as Chindaswinth, in a struggle between Crown and church for sovereignty. Cf. Carlos de Ayala Martínez, Sacerdocio y reino en la España altomedieval, Madrid 2008, pp. 51–55.

40 Prodigies and *omina* formed part of a new order, functioning as cultural markers of the approaching doomsday and the appearance of the Antichrist, which should worry the crown and prompt a quest for true signs and miracles as opposed to demonic artifices, as Isidore established in his *De Antichristo et eius signis* in *Sententiae*, I,XXV. Likewise, the ancient practice of dream interpretation was legitimised as a form of prophesy. Cf. Cazier, Isidorus (see n. 2), pp. 79f., 219, and since Lactantius, emperors' dreams about imminent peril had been defined as *simulati numinis*. Cf. Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, II,VIII,1, ed. Monat, Lactance (see n. 14), pp. 104f.

knowledge of astronomy should be avoided.[41] Both Isidore in his *De Natura Rerum* (prefaced by King Sisebut with his *Carmen de Luna*)[42] and Gregory of Tours in his *De cursu stellarum*[43] demonstrated that they were well acquainted with the astronomical/astrological tradition of these phenomena. However, a different usage of signs and symbols was necessary because, in late antiquity, observation of the stars would have been condemned if it had represented a continuity of pagan divination, but not if it represented a practical and necessary means to compute liturgical time.[44]

In the poetics of chronicles and hagiographies, the use made of anomalous natural phenomena was far from a discourse based on empirical observation, which sifts prophetic evidence until all that remains is the skeleton of the metaphor.[45] Continuing in the Roman and particularly Theodosian tradition, Visigothic councils and ordinances fought against this possession of the future through magical divination in all its forms. Consequently, in his *Carmen*, Sisebut eliminated the dire connotation of the eclipse, whereas Isidore retained it as a poetic resource, a model of the dialogue between sovereign and courtier, bishop and king, sun and moon; in short, of the balance of Visigothic powers

41 It is not within the scope of the present study to confirm or refute some of the astronomical or palaeoclimatic observations reported as prodigies in the accounts of Hispanic authors. Rather, our aim is to demonstrate the use of these in their theological and political context. However, studies such as the one directed by Michael McCormick appear to evidence a worsening climate from the mid-sixth century until the late seventh century, in part supporting authors such as Procopius. Cf. Ulf Büntgen/Michael McCormick/Vladimir S. Myglan, Cooling and Societal Change During the Late Antique Little Ice Age From 536 to Around 660 AD, in: Nature Geoscience 9 (2016), pp. 231–236.

42 Jacques Fontaine, Isidore de Séville: Traité de la nature; suivi de l'Épître en vers du roi Sisebut à Isidore (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Hispaniques, vol. 28), Bordeaux 1960, pp. 328–335. Isidore's work and King Sisebut's poem documents a somewhat cold reaction to the two eclipses in 611 that portended misfortune, indicating that their response was a means to reinterpret a clearly apocalyptic or ominous symbol. Cf. Andrew Fear, Putting the Pieces Back Together, in: Isidore of Seville and His Reception in the Early Middle Ages: Transmitting and Transforming Knowledge, ed. Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia, vol. 2), Amsterdam 2016, pp. 75–92, here: p. 80.

43 Frid. Haase, Gregorio Turonensis Episcopi. De Cursu Stellarum, Vratislava 1853.

44 Henri de la Ville de Mirmont, L'astrologie chez les gallo-romaines, in: Revue des Études Anciennes 11 (1909), pp. 301–346.

45 The heavens could also be interpreted empirically, as Ildefonsus of Toledo showed in his *De viris illustribus*, defining his predecessor, the poet Eugenius of Toledo, as an expert in observing the sky, and in particular, the moon. Cf. Carmen Codoñer Merino, El »De Viris Illustribus« de Ildefonso de Toledo, Salamanca 1972, pp. 132f. Eugenius' own work also reveals this enthusiasm for lunar observation. Cf. *Dracontii Librorum Recognitio, Liber Primus*, 733–742, ed. Alberto Farmhouse, Eugenii Toletani Opera Omnia (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, CXIV), Turnhout 2005, p. 373.

in which the eclipse preserved some of its adverse overtones in relation to the sun and its mutations.[46] Similarly, Gregory of Tours used prodigies (such as eclipses) and astronomical observation in his works, albeit distinguishing between them through a practical use of the liturgy in which observation of the stars (and of eclipses) served to establish liturgical and political cycles.[47] These and other Visigothic authors drew on a widespread textual tradition dating back to pagan times, such as the sibyl,[48] endowing their Christianised oracles with a multitude of symbols to exploit: fire descending from the sky, the rise of false prophets, condemnation of ancient astrology, rains of blood and, above all, warnings of punishment for earthly tyrants and kings at the end of the world.[49] The debate between King Sisebut and Isidore of Seville regarding lunar phenomena serves as an example. Isidore explained the blood moon metaphorically, saying that the moon at night was the same as the early martyrs because it was bloody when it appeared on the horizon but became whiter and brighter as it rose – a symbol of the triumph of the Church. This was a poetic but not political interpretation, since his explanation of the lunar prodigy was metaphorical.[50] Meanwhile, in his life of St. Desiderius of Vienne (*Vita Desiderii*), King Sisebut clearly indicated the consequences of prodigies as manifestations of political instability and the errors of the Crown, even when these were due not to dogmatic reasons but to episcopal and local powers. When Desiderius was deposed, a series of calamities, pestilences and hardships assailed the diocese, dire prodigies that ceased when he was reinstated before being martyred by stoning.[51] In this case, it should be noted that Sisebut was

46 Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos Libri* VIII,4,5,1, ed. Rhys Bram, Ancient Astrology (see n. 13), p. 121.

47 In the case of the eclipse, its appearance was a portent of catastrophe and especially of adversity for the kings: *Non omni tempore, set maxime aut in obitu regis aut in excidio apparet regiones.* Haase, Gregorio (see n. 43), p. 24.

48 Since Lactantius, the sibyl was considered the pagan predecessor of the messianic messenger. Cf. Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, 4,VI,4, ed. Pierre Monat, Lactance. Institutions Divines, libre IV (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 377), Paris 1992, pp. 64f. Cf. Potter, Prophets (see n. 15), pp. 88–93.

49 Especially books VIII and XII of the sibylline compilations, Emilio Suárez de la Torre, Oraculos Sibilinos, in: Apócrifos del Antiguo Testamento, vol. 3, ed. Alejandro Díez Macho, Madrid 1982, pp. 239–396. A Hispanic connection with knowledge of the sibylline oracles can be established in *Versus Sibyllae de extremo judicio* (Paris, BnF, Latin 8093, fol. 35v–36r) within the poetic Hispanic anthologies copied in Gaul together with Hispanic and North African authors, Manuela Vendrell Peñaranda, Las Antologías poéticas hispanas. Contribución al estudio de la vida literaria de los siglos VI–IX, Santiago de Compostela 1976.

50 *De Natura Rerum*, 21,3, ed. Vincenzo Recchia, Lettera e profezia nell'esegesi di Gregorio Magno, Bari 2003, p. 143.

51 *Vita Desiderii*, 11, ed. Juan Gil, Miscellanea Wisigothica, Seville 1991, p. 60.

tactful enough to portray this misguided episcopal policy beyond the borders of his kingdom.

As constructors of the official history of bishops and courtiers, Isidore of Seville and Julian of Toledo repeated and combined some of the prodigies and prophecies reported by Hydatius. This is apparent in the case of Isidore concerning the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy regarding the marriage of Alaric and Galla Placidia or in response to the violence unleashed by the Vandals.[52] The historic Isidore considered prophecy a unique route to knowledge, and he devoted a chapter in his *Etimologiarum* to describing each of the biblical prophets. He explained that the prophets »were ›pre-speakers‹ [*praefator*], because indeed they speak [*fari*, ppl. *fatus*] and make true predictions about the future«. He stated that prophets were known in the Old Testament as seers, »Those whom we call prophets were called ›seers‹ [*videns*] in the Old Testament, because they saw [*videre*] things that others did not see, and would foresee things that were hidden in mystery«.[53] Thus, he presented the settlement of the Goths and the misfortunes of their kings, for example at the Battle of Vouillé in 507, as a succession of fulfilled prophecies.[54] The bishop, Julian of Toledo, took a similar approach when he claimed biblical prophecies existed that had foretold the failure of the *dux* Paul of Narbonne's defection and rebellion against King Wamba was due to divine wrath, indicating that Wamba's entire reign had been predestined before he had even ascended to the throne.[55]

The tense relationship between the episcopal authorities and the Visigothic kings during the seventh century also adversely affected Jewish communities. Invoking doomsday, or the elements that would trigger it, was related to the forced conversion of the Jews not only as a form of apocalyptic policy[56] but also as a means to eliminate any attempt at crypto-Judaic messianism.[57] At

52 *De origine gothorum*, 19 and *Historia Wandalarum*, 72, ed. Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso, Las historias de godos, vándalos y suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla, León 1975, pp. 202, 296.

53 *Etimologiarum*, De prophetis, VII,8, ed. Barney et al. (see n. 1), p. 166.

54 *De origine gothorum*, 26; *Historia gothorum*, 35; *Historia Wandalorum*, 72, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, Las historias, (see n. 52), pp. 212, 229, 290.

55 On Paul's rebellion and the prophecies that foretold its failure, see *Historia Wamba regis*, 25 e *Incipit insultatio uilis storici in tyrannidem Galliae*, 1 and 4. In relation to Wamba's predestined reign and events at his coronation, see *Historia Wambae Regis*, 4, ed. Jocelyn Nigel Hillgarth, Sancti Iuliani Toletanae Sedis Episcopi Opera, Pars I (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, CXV), Turnhout 1976, pp. 239, 245, 246, 220 respectively.

56 The conversion of the Jewish community was viewed as one of the signs of an approaching doomsday and forced conversion as an eschatological acceleration, Juan Gil, Cristianos y judíos en la Hispania del siglo VII, in: Hispania Sacra 30 (1977), pp. 42–47.

57 One possible example of this messianic threat is illustrated by the rise of Serenus around 721. Cf. *Chronica Muzarabica*, 60a, ed. Juan Gil, Chronica Hispana saeculi VIII et IX (Corpus Christianorum, Con-

stake was the supposed unity of the kingdom under the one faith established by Reccared; furthermore, the widespread and complete conversion of the Jews represented a kind of prophecy concerning the final revelation, one that could not be forced by the Crown's policy of persecution in breach of the principle of voluntary conversion. The policy of forced conversion prompted authors such as Julian of Toledo, doctrinally troubled about possession of the future, to express concern about the end of the kingdom (and the world) linked to anti-Judaism; for example, in his *Prognosticum futuri saeculi*[58] and *De comprobatione sextae aetatis contra iudaeos.*[59] The most famous account of a miracle related to Jewish conversion and the appearance of prodigies was recounted by Severus of Minorca in his letter about conversion in the early fifth century, more than two centuries before Julian of Toledo.

Here, violent conflict within the Jewish community of Magona was accompanied by Old Testament miracles such as the appearance of manna, a pillar of fire, sudden rain and the appearance of fire balls over churches and was interpreted as a new exodus towards the promised land (conversion).[60] According to Scott Bradbury, this represents an example of apocalypticism related to the mass conversion of the Jews.[61]

In contrast, Isidore of Seville also confirmed the contemporary nature of the sixth age. However, as with Augustine of Hippo, Isidore refrained from any verdict regarding its proximity;[62] concluding his treatise on dividing the history of the world into six ages, he commented, »How much time is left before this sixth age, only God knows«, rejecting the possibility of apocalyptic prophecy in the present and the future. He also closed the apocalyptic question in what became known as the *fermeture eschatologique agustinniene*,[63]

tinuatio Medievalis, LXV), Turnhout 2018, p. 361. This deep fear of crypto-Judaism was related to the disproportionate punishments proposed in the *Liber Iudicum*, XII,2,11 and XII,2,17, such as burning and stoning since the times of Recceswinth and Chindaswinth. Cf. KARL ZEUMER, Leges Visigothorum (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Leges Nationum Germanicarum, vol. 1), Hannover/Leipzig 1902, p. 426.

58 HILLGARTH, Sancti Iuliani (see n. 55), pp. 10–82.

59 HILLGARTH, Sancti Iuliani (see n. 55), pp. 143–212. Julian of Toledo followed in the footsteps of Eugenius of Toledo and his work on the creation. Cf. *Dracontii Librorum Recognitio, Monosticha*, 25–35, ed. FARMHOUSE, Eugenii Toletani (see n. 45), p. 390.

60 *Epistula Severi*, 20, 24 and 25, ed. SCOTT BRADBURY, Severus of Minorca. Letters on the Conversion of the Jews, Oxford 1996, pp. 111, 113, 119.

61 Ibid., pp. 43–48.

62 *Residuum saeculi tempus humanae investigationis incertum est.* THEODOR MOMMSEN, Chronica Minora saec. IV–VII, vol. 2 (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. 11), Berlin 1894, p. 481.

63 *De fine saeculi*, Ep. 199, ed. PATRICK HENRIET, L'espace et le temps hispaniques vus et construits par les clercs (IX^{e}–XIII^{e} siècle), in: A la recherche de légitimités chrétiennes. Représentations de l'espace

despite the somewhat veiled references to apocalyptic actors in the Gothic genealogies.[64] However, as with Pope Gregory I, with whom he was close in terms of both age and dogma, he continued to use warnings about the proximity of doomsday and signs as expressions of domestic apocalypse in his writings. Thus, despite Augustine's refusal to define the time remaining until the apocalypse, a controlled form of regulating signs of the end emerged. Events that portended it were not necessarily universal, but prodigies in regions and new kingdoms were immediate warnings of its inception,[65] and those unworthy to either perform or believe such prodigies would fall into the hands of the Antichrist, seduced before their punishment.[66]

4. Reverberating Voices. The Heritage of Prophecy in Medieval Iberia (Eighth to Eleventh Centuries)

The events of 711 and the Islamic invasion brought the reign of the Visigoths to an end and launched a new temporal sequence that also affected the interpretation of prophecies and prodigies. Between the eighth and twelfth centuries, the survival, memory and posterity of the accounts described here left a mark that, interpreted in a prophetic key, was supported by the events that transpired at the end of the kingdom. The political conquest of a corner of the empire was viewed and interpreted by bishops and ecclesiastical writers as part of the providential plan. As with the barbarian invasion, the Islamic invasion was accompanied by a series of prophecies and divine signs. Bishops and ecclesiastical writers from the preceding period, such as Isidore of Seville, became voices prophesying the end of the Goths in the early Middle Ages, introducing the concept of sin as a trigger of misfortune.[67] The arrival of the Arabs was inserted into a clear

et du temps dans l'Espagne médiévale, ed. Patrick Henriet, Lyon 2003, pp. 81–127, here: p. 88.

64 Isidore of Seville related them to Magog. Cf. *De origine gothorum*, 1 and *Recapitulatio gothorum*, ed. Rodríguez Alonso, Las historias (see n. 52), pp. 173, 282. Apringius Pacensis, *Tractatus*, 20,10, ed. Roger Gryson, Variorum Auctorum. Commentaria minora in apocalypsin Johannis (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CVII), Turnhout 2003, pp. 81f.

65 *Et quid in aliis mundo partibus agatur ignoro, nam hac in terra, in qua vivimos, finem suum mundus non iam nuntiat, sed ostendit.* Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogorum*, III,38,3, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé/Paul Antin, Grégoire le Grand. Dialogues, vol. 2 (Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 260), Paris 1979, pp. 430f. On the problem of prophecies in relation to the Hispanic case, see Recchia, Lettera e profezia (see n. 50).

66 [...] *his portentis mendacibus seducendi sunt omnes, qui crediderunt Antichristum, ut accipiant caracterem inimici.* Apringius Pacensis, *Tractatus*, 19,20, ed. Gryson, Variorum Auctorum (see n. 64), p. 75.

67 Juan Luis Carmazo Rubio, Isidoro de Sevilla, spiritu prophetiae clarus, in: En la España Medieval 26 (2003), pp. 5–34.

succession of sin, punishment and purification. All natural phenomena of the time were provided with a prophetic interpretation typical of »historiographical monotheism«, according to which all events represented a culmination of history in which Christianity acted as a purifying element.[68]

The Mozarabic Chronicle of 754 recounts the history of the Iberian Peninsula from Sisebut to the governor Yūsuf ibn 'Abd ar-Rahmān al-Fihrī (747–756). Until the twentieth century, this chronicle was attributed to a supposed bishop of Lusitania, Isidorus Pacensis, about whom nothing was known other than that provided by the chronicle itself. Recently however, further attempts have been made to uncover the identity of the author, who was possibly a *dhimmi* (a protected Christian or Jew) living under Islamic rule. More specifically, the author may have been a cleric in the episcopal sphere – from Cordoba according to some, Murcia according to others – whose text, based on oral sources, described the disputed provenance of the Islamic conquest.

The Arabic invasion is not described in the chronicle from the standpoint of providentialism and divine punishment, but rather in terms of a political analysis of the Visigothic Kingdom's situation. Although the text avoids a providentialist narrative, it uses *prodigia* in its description of events that were indeed preludes to misfortune: an eclipse of the sun around 647 and the sight of stars at noon preceded an invasion by the Basques; the reign of Erwig witnessed a famine that lasted 7 years, while an epidemic swept through the land during the reign of Egica. In 720, there was an eclipse of the sun; one Sunday in April 750, »The inhabitants of Cordoba saw three suns which shone in a wonderful way and paled as if preceded by a sickle of fire and emerald«, a vision that portended a terrible famine brought by the angels of God. However, the chronicle does not depict disaster or the loss of territories as being caused by the sins of the rulers and the people, a classical interpretation in other early medieval chronicles. In later chronicles, a providentialist vision and the concatenation of sin, punishment and purification was employed throughout eighth century accounts of the conquest written in other countries and, from the ninth century onwards, by chroniclers inspired by Isidore of Seville in the Asturleonese kingdom. Suitably reworked, this provided the basis for the prophetic cycle of Hispania linked to a national vision of destruction and Neogothic restoration established in Alfonso III's three chronicles. For example, the account known as the *Prophetic Chronicle* alters Isidore's text, which presents Ezekiel announcing the entry of Ishmael – identified with the Muslims – into the land of Gog (land of the Goths) and his dominion over

68 Garth Fowden, Before and After Muhammad. The First Millennium Refocused, Princeton 2014, pp. 78f.

this people for one hundred and seventy weeks, according to the narrative of the Book of Daniel. After this period, Gog would reverse the situation, dominating Ishmael. The author of the chronicle, undoubtedly a Christian in al-Andalus, transmitted the desire of the clergy and political elites of the time to overthrow Islamic rule, using biblical prophecy to aid the restoration of the ancient kingdom of the Goths under the authority of Alfonso III in 883. According to the text, constant signs in the sky led the Saracens to interpret prodigies and signs in the stars as indicating their end was nigh.[69] Isidore of Seville's remains were moved to Leon in 1063, triggering a stream of hagiography extolling his prophetic capacity. By the time of Lucas of Tuy's thirteenth century chronicle, for example, he was considered a *spiritu prophetia clarus*.[70]

It was not only Isidore's prophecies that influenced subsequent political constructions; something similar occurred before with Braulius of Zaragoza's text, the *Vita Sancti Aemiliani* (ca. 640). In this text, the saint appeared announcing Leovigild's conquest of Cantabria to the noble Abundantius in Amaya,[71] where the saint had retired to practice his miracles. In this case, Bishop Braulius uses prophecy in order to extend the cult of Aemilian to the upper bason of the Ebro River, the miracles and the prophecy serving the political purposes of the diocese of Saragossa.[72]

Between 1053 and 1063, Saint Aemilian's relics were transferred to the monastery of Yuso. This is according to the *Chronica Naierensis*, a twelfth century text that narrates the translation within a context of prodigies and miracles to explain the foundation of the new monastery. In the mid-eleventh century, King García Sánchez ordered the monastery of Santa Maria la Real to be built in Nájera. The king, the bishop and the nobles all thought that Saint Aemilian's body should be transferred to Nájera. However, while his remains were being transported in a cart pulled by oxen, the animals stopped upon reaching the valley and it became impossible to make them go forwards or backwards. Realising that the animals' behaviour was a sign from God, the king ordered the construction of a monastery in that place,[73] and the saint's relics were deposited there in a rectangular ivory chest with a pyramidal lid decorated with images inspired by the earlier reliquary. According to the chronicle, the saint's

69 Juan Gil/Jose L. Moralejo/Juan I. Ruiz de la Peña, Crónicas Asturianas, Oviedo, 1983, pp. 36f., 262.

70 Carmazo Rubio, Isidoro de Sevilla (see n. 67), p. 10.

71 Luis Vazquez de Parga, Sancti Braulionis Caesaraugustani Episcopus, Vita Sancti Aemiliani, Madrid, 1943, p. 134.

72 Santiago Castellanos, La capitalización del culto a los santos y su trasfondo social: Braulio de Zaragoza, in: Studia Histórica. Historia antigua 12 (1994), pp. 169–178.

73 Juan Antonio Estévez Sola, Chronica Hispana saeculi XII, Pars II: Chronica Naierensis (Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis, LXXI A), Turnhout 1995, p. 152.

prophetic capacity remained undiminished after death, applying his powers to irrational beings as a mediator of the will of God and legitimising the new monastic foundation. The shrine served as propaganda testifying to the effectiveness of the saint's miracles and spreading his worship among the pilgrims who visited the monastery and made large donations that swelled the monastery's coffers.[74]

Prodigies and prophecies were granted new meaning and were transmitted from Eusebius of Caesarea to Hydatius, to Isidore, and finally to the authors of the early medieval Latin chronicles.[75] They acquired different meanings to suit the changing political contexts of those constructing the narratives. In each case, the misfortune, famine, war and persecution provoked by the invasion of barbarians in the late Roman period and the Muslims in the early Middle Ages reflected local or domestic visions of the end that were interpreted as signs of the apocalypse. The new powers echoed biblical prophecies such as Gog and Magog, blending old and new prophecies in light of contemporary political and social events.

Nevertheless, these new prophets (often bishops or high prelates) collaborated as courtiers and counsellors with Suebian, Visigothic or Early Medieval Iberian monarchs. At times, they were also biological family of sovereigns, as Egeria likely was with Theodosius, or merely dependants capable of influencing legislative decisions on how to preserve power. At the same time, they, as counsellors and churchmen, were historians and administrators of royal power, properties and discourses. When, seduced by non-Christian prophets, the kings tried to execute their power, they likely died, punished by God. The author of *Chronica Gothorum Pseudo-Isidoriana* offers, as evidence, how a Roman general was assured of certain victory over the Visigoths by his astrologers and magicians. The general fell, and the barbarians succeeded on the battleground. The times had changed. The Roman general was punished for his superstitious adherence to ancient omens and the counsels of astrologers, and a ruler could nevermore trust the pagan prophets without suffering the revenge of the Christian God.

74 JULIE A. HARRIS, Culto y narrativa en los marfiles de San Millán de la Cogolla, in: Boletín del Museo Arqueológico Nacional 9 (1991), pp. 69–85.

75 One example of the construction of new texts based on the works of Hydatius, Isidore and Gregory of Tours is the historiographical work by Bishop Pelagius of Oviedo (died ca. 1153). Cf. ENRIQUE JEREZ, Arte compilatoria pelagiana: la formación del *Liber Cronicorum*, in: Poétique de la Cronique. L'écriture des textes historiographiques au Moyen Âge (pêninsule Ibérique et France), ed. AMAIA ARIZALETA, Toulouse-Le Mirail/Paris 2008, pp. 53, 70.