JOHN OF ROQUETAILLADE

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I HOPE that the subject of this lecture, which you have so kindly asked me to give in the series commemorating Dr. Walter Seton's devotion to Franciscan history, is not too far remote from those that normally take place here. It is, none the less, a temerarious incursion into a field not usually trodden save by a handful of specialists. Yet medieval history cannot omit the study of *mirabilia*, a comprehensive word covering not only miracle but also many types of scientific discovery. Chemistry in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries almost invariably represented itself as revealing marvels and secrets. Alchemical writers say "Lo, now I show you a great marvel" and proceed to describe what we should regard as an ordinary piece of distillation. Prophesying is similarly a revelation of things hidden. Both chemistry and prophecy may have dangerous consequences, but equally they may be completely respectable. Indeed, prognostication of various kinds was a universal pursuit during the early and later Middle Ages. Beginning with the Sibylline books which had their influence not only with the Greeks and Romans but with early Jews and Christians (especially the fifth Sibylline book), a large and varied body of vaticination descended to the high Middle Age, and was consulted very much as people consulted the stars. From the near and middle East came a number of prognostication books with titles and place names of Arabic origin which were eagerly seized upon and copied in the monasteries, giving an answer (if you used the tables right) to many day-to-day problems that occurred. "Shall I go out of doors (extra domum) today?" "Is this a favourable day to make a business agreement?" "Shall I go

1 The Seton Memorial Lecture given at University College, London, in 1954.
out against my enemy (exire super hostem) today? " " Will it be a boy or a girl? " and so forth. Even Matthew Paris copied and illustrated one such book \(^1\) for the monastery of St. Albans.

The habit of divination was almost like the crossword habit: there was nothing particularly reprehensible about it in an age of astrological medicine, a period when people believed in the inherent qualities or virtues of objects and in the possibility of transmuting one substance into another if the right means were applied. There was a large and legitimate field for conjecture, and if topical day-to-day questions were asked of the prophetic literature, the result might be diverting, at any rate harmless. There was also, as Nicholas of Oresme was careful to point out,\(^2\) an illegitimate field which was the concern of the Inquisition, particularly in the course of the thirteenth century, and it is one from which the clergy had not been entirely exempt. Walter Langton, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield and Keeper of the Wardrobe, then Treasurer, under Edward I, had been accused of consulting demons as well as of murder, adultery and simony.\(^3\) Against Boniface VIII and the Templars of France charges of magic had been employed by Philip IV. The bishop of Troyes, whose real offence seems to have been that he had dared to support Boniface VIII, was accused of poisoning and trying to bewitch members of the French royal family, also of having practised alchemy. In 1304 when the wives of two sons of Philip IV were accused of adultery by their sister-in-law Isabella, wife of Edward II of England, a Dominican was said to have aided them by philtres. The number of such charges at the court of Pope John XXII may be a sign of the prevalence of magical practices and suspicions in society and thought at large. In 1318 John XXII directed the bishop of Fréjus and two other commissioners to investigate and punish the magical activities at the papal court of several clerics, including a physician and the barber of the archbishop of Lille. They were reputed to

\(^1\) Bodleian Library, MS. Ashmole 304.
\(^2\) "Livre de Divinacions" in G. W. Coopland, Nicole Oresme and the Astrologers (1952), pp. 50 f.
\(^3\) Dr. Lynn Thorndike, A History of Magic and Experimental Science, vol. iii (1934), ch. 2, cites a number of instances, some quoted below.
have engaged in necromancy, geomancy and other magic arts of which they possessed books, and to have employed images, mirrors, rings and incantations to invoke evil spirits to learn the future and to benefit or injure or even kill other men. John pronounced all such practices as they were charged with as diabolical. He was not unusually credulous about magic, but so many stories of criminal sorcery were in circulation that it was impossible for him to do nothing. At any rate the famous writer of the *Practica Inquisitionis*, Bernard Guy, had no doubt about the prevalence of such arts, since he included in his book a formula for the abjuration of sorcery, divination and the invocation of demons. The person charged who had admitted his crime and is prepared to do penance is to abjure all baptizing of images, all sorcery performed with the use of the Eucharist, with chrism or sacred oil, all divination or invocation of demons as well as the art of making images of lead or wax, and all condemned sorceries. Dr. Lynn Thorndike thinks it probable that members of the clergy figure so prominently in the magical practices of which John XXII took cognisance because he felt a special responsibility for, and exercised a special jurisdiction over, such cases, and not because clerical practitioners of magic were more numerous than lay offenders.¹ It may, indeed, have been because of the tendency during the struggle with the Mendicants to charge the Pope himself with heretical views and unusual practices. In 1326 or 1327 he had to issue a bull *Super illius specula* in which he grieved to note how many persons are Christians only in name, making a pact with hell, sacrificing to demons and fabricating images, rings, mirrors, phials and other magic devices to summon spirits and receive responses from them. This disease now prevails through the world more than usual and keeps infecting the flocks of Christians increasingly. To resist it the Pope decreed *ipso facto* excommunication against offenders and the legal penalties for heretics except confiscation of property. It may be that he felt that the Inquisition was not dealing effectively with such cases, for in 1330 he withdrew from the inquisitors of Toulouse and Carcassonne certain cases of

¹ *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. iii (1934), ch. 2, "John XXII and the Occult Arts".
magic arts which he had entrusted to them a decade before. John also had something to say to the alchemists who claimed to make artificial gold. The Pope decreed in the extravagant *De crimine falsi* that all who have been found concerned in the production of alchemical gold shall incur infamy and give to the poor in true gold as much as they have made of the false variety. The inquisitor Emeric writing against alchemists during the close of the fourteenth century states that the bull was the outcome of a conference to which John XXII had assembled as many natural scientists and alchemists as he could to determine whether the cult had any basis in nature. The alchemists answered "Yes". The natural scientists "No". Since the alchemists were unable to prove their contention the Pope issued his bull against them.

While looking through a little volume of fourteenth-fifteenth century medical treatises and receipts (e.g. for the *Prykking of the stomach*, for the *Sciatica passio*) contained in All Souls College MS. 81, I came across the diagram which is represented in the adjoining photograph. It was not a discovery, since John of Rupescissa, the author of the treatise in which it occurs, is well known to historians of science and appears in most of the standard histories, though this particular text is, as I shall show, of considerable interest. It was customary to regard John as a Catalan who came from Pertellada or Perelada in the Plain of Ampurdan, province of Gerona, which is today on the line from Perpignan to Barcelona. He himself, however, says that he was *oriundus de Castro Marcesii diocesis sancti Flori in Alvernia Gallicana*. This locates him as a native of Marcolès, a little place a few kilometres south of Aurillac; though if he was not born in a place called Roquetaillade (Lat. Rupescissa), why is this his name? The question has led to a good deal of speculation and theory, discussed by Mme. Bignami-Odier in a recent book.

Writing to her in December 1946 M. Delmas, the head archivist of Cantal, professed to have discovered a village of Roques in

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1 Vatican Library, MS. Rossiano lat. 753, fol. 148v. The discovery is due to Mme. Bignami-Odier.
2 *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade (Johannes de Rupescissa)* (1952) ch., ii, "Légendes sur Jean de Roquetaillade". I am much indebted to this work.
(Reproduced by kind permission of the Warden and Fellows)

All Souls College MS. 81, fol. 133 r.
the commune of Marcolès, which, given its rocky character, may be the origin of the form Roquetaillade, and the identification has been generally accepted. By his own account John was for five years (1315-20) a student of philosophy in the "flourishing academy" of Toulouse, where in 1332 he joined the Franciscan Order, and he spent, he tells us, another five years disputing in pruritu philosophiae and lecturing in the subject, before he saw the light. He does not say if the early years were spent at Aurillac but he was certainly in the Franciscan convent there in 1340, and his revelations and prophesying may well date from that epoch. What we know of him relates almost entirely to his life in prison, and the works he composed there. In December 1344 the minister-general of Aquitaine, William Farmena, had him imprisoned at Figeac. From Figeac he was sent for to Avignon and incarcerated there in the Carcer Soldani by order of Clement VI in 1349. Froissart who had a high opinion of him said that he was put there because he prophesied against the Pope and against princes. He may have been let out for a time, for in the year 1351 the chronicler Henry Rebdorf says that "the Pope caused to be imprisoned a certain brother of the Minorites, a notable clerk (sollempnem clerum) and one well lettered and who prophesied many things to come about the orders of the mendicants and future Roman pontiffs and emperors and many other marvels". That he was released before this date seems possible from one of his treatises copied into Ashmole 1423, the prologue of which states that it was completed on 4 October 1350, and there is no mention of his captivity. But in 1356 he was again in prison at Avignon, not knowing whether he would be condemned to death. In his last two prophetic works he calls himself "pauper incarceratus" and in one says that he had been in prison for twenty years. This may be an exaggeration, though it is not far off the truth. In one section of his Vade mecum in tribulacione he says that he had been publicly foretelling the fearful things that should happen to France at the hands of the English, more than twenty years before the wars (the Anglo-French wars) began, but the people thought him foolish and out of his wits. He was writing then in 1349 but to a medieval Frenchman of that period, the war with
the English would, roughly speaking, appear to have begun with
the Crécy campaign. If this is so, John must have been preach­ing from about 1325 onwards.

This takes one back to the pontificate of John XXII and to the
period of acute controversy between that pontiff and the Fran­ciscan Order over the poverty of Christ. In the Bull Cum inter nonnullos of November 1323 John made it heretical to assert that
Christ and His apostles were not owners of the property which
the scriptures expressly said that they possessed. When the
struggle reached its fiercest stage and John XXII publicly broke
with Michael of Cesena, John of Roquetaillade must have sided,
like William of Ockham, with the humiliated General of the
Order. In the fourteenth section of his Vade mecum John says
that the reason why the tribulations which he foretold were to
fall upon the Franciscan order was "because of the sin of the
transgression of the rule". It was owing to this that God had
permitted the scandal of the attack on evangelical poverty by the
Preachers against the Friars Minor; and "the Friars Minor
were forced to succumb because of the flight of Michael from
the cunning of the Friars Preachers": a reference to the events
of 9 April 1328 when John XXII publicly denounced Michael of
Cesena, General of the Order. In his last works John gives the
reason why, between 1360 and 1365, the religious orders and the
mendicants in particular were to be afflicted by the heretical
Emperor coming from the East and by what he calls the beast
ascending from the sea. The Friars had transgressed the Rule,
and significantly he quotes the words which God is purported to
have said to St. Francis foretelling what would happen in that
contingency. The reference John gives is the Liber XII sociorum
eius qui legenda vetus dicitur. The XII is clearly a mis-copying
by an inaccurate scribe of the number III and the reference here
is to the first part of the Legend of the Three Companions,
which, as Mr. Moorman has shown, is probably earlier than the
first Life of Francis by Thomas of Celano. If this is so, it
puts the sympathies of John of Roquetaillade beyond doubt, if,
indeed, any doubt existed about a man who consistently praises

1 Studies in Franciscan History and Legend (1940), pp. 62-5.
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the zealots of the Order. When he was interrogated on 10 August 1354 by Cardinal Guillaume Court and asked whether certain clerks who had been burnt for heresy in June 1354 were glorious martyrs or heretics condemned to eternal fire, he at first refused to reply, and then answered: “If you have handed them over to the secular arm out of hatred of evangelical poverty, and the decretal Exiit, the section Porro, then they are glorious martyrs in heaven; but if they have mixed themselves up with errors and other heresies, if they have denied the Catholic faith and Holy Scriptures, they are heretics condemned to hell fire.” ¹

John was thus a spiritual, belonging in his early days to the party of Michael of Cesena, and, in general, to those who based themselves upon the letter as well as the spirit of St. Francis’ instructions to the Order. There is therefore no wonder why he was imprisoned. If prophets were dangerous in the thirteenth century at the time of the abbot Joachim, when the wilder zealots of the Order were attaching themselves to the Emperor Frederick II, they were an even greater menace in the days when Louis of Bavaria was threatening the Avignonese papacy, especially if they were Franciscan zealots. As Miss Douie has pointed out, it is doubtful whether the spiritual party could have endured so valiantly the persecutions and ridicule to which they were subjected by their opponents without the certain conviction of the triumph of their ideals and the equally firm belief that they were the Order which would transform the world.² In this they had been sustained in the past by the revelations of Joachimism and by other prophecies: the most common subject of these collections was the character and deeds of the various popes, a visionary element being introduced after the writer had finished describing the events of his own age by speculation upon the fate of Christendom at the time of the expected coming of anti-Christ. It is easy to see the danger of such prognostications to the popes who supported the non-zealots. It was not the alchemy which led John into captivity: it was, as we shall see later, the “prophetic interpretation” of

¹ Bignami-Odier, p. 44.
² The Nature and the Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli (1932), ch. iii, “Angelo da Clareno”, portrays this confidence.
the Holy Scriptures at a time when prophecy might easily become tendentious.

There is a fairly well authenticated tradition that John of Roquetaillade died in 1362. One author of very much later date, Nostradamus, says that he was burnt, but there is no confirmation of this. Considering the length of his prison life, he was not an unfertile author. The alchemical works that have survived are two: the "Book of Light or Mastery of the making of the true Philosopher's Stone", which is also called the "Book of Light and Tribulation"; this seems to have preceded the work for which he is best known, the De consideratione quintae essentialiae. This book on the fifth essence is also confusingly termed De famulatu philosophie ad theologiam. The texts of it, as I shall show, vary considerably; some are with, and some without, the prologue, and later versions expand, sometimes misleadingly, the original as it was written. The prophetic texts are (i) the Visiones seu revelationes, written to Cardinal Guillaume Court, nephew of Benedict XII; (ii) the "Commentary on the oracle of St. Cyril" or alternatively "Commentary upon the prophesy of St. Cyril"; (iii) the Liber secretorum eventuum found only in a few manuscripts but known to Jean de Bel and Froissart. This contains very little that is not already said in the Commentary of St. Cyril, but it is shorter and more easy to read. It was finished 11 November 1349 in the Sultan's prison at Avignon and is also addressed to Cardinal Guillaume Court; (iv) the Ostensor written after 27 December 1356, of which the single manuscript is Vatican Library, Rossiano lat. 753; (v) the Vade mecum in tribulacione of the same year or immediately afterwards, which is found in a number of manuscripts, mostly in the Bibliothèque Nationale or in Munich. I shall omit detailed consideration of the Commentary on the Oracle of St. Cyril which I have not been able to read. There are other works which John himself names, but they seem irrecoverable.

Before Mme. Bignami-Odier wrote, Dr. Lynn Thorndike, who considered John to be a Catalan, had listed the manuscripts

1 Bignami-Odier, pp. 53-112.
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of the Liber Lucis and of the De consideratione quinte essentie. He has made it clear that both of these tracts are undoubtedly the work of Roquetaillade. It is refreshing, when manuscript study has robbed his great Franciscan predecessor Roger Bacon of certain of the treatises formerly ascribed to him, to find it restoring to his successor what was formerly attributed to Bacon, Arnold de Villanova and Ramon Lull. John has therefore returned to his alchemical fame. With certain medieval Catalans, as Kopp has shown, he is in the van of iatro-chemical study: more than a forerunner of Paracelsus, and one of those who used his chemical experiments for a curative purpose.

In the Bibliotheque Nationale MS. 7151 of his tract on the fifth essence he excuses himself from revealing all his medical secrets:

because according to Catholic philosophers I would say in the words of Holy Scripture that to obey is better than sacrifice. Out of reverence for the statutes of our Order I will not reveal the marvellous medicines so highly desired by the world which would not only heal our bodies miraculously from all diseases, but would transmute imperfect metals into gold and silver in the flash of an eye. The truth of which mastery was by God's will revealed to me in the tribulations of prison.

The Paris manuscript continued:

No one can reach the highest points of art unless his mind is deified by contemplation and holy living, so that he not only knows all the interior things of nature but can transmute whatever nature is capable of being transmuted.

This sanctimonious utterance is not in the shorter version of the treatise on Quintessence, as represented by the All Souls College MS. 81, and throughout the treatise on Quintessence it is advisable to go back to the more primitive text which I believe this to represent. Thus in the Paris manuscript John withholds his information about medicines not only because of reverence for the statutes of his Order, but also out of obedience to ecclesiastical prelates. This last phrase is not in the All Souls text and its omission is much more in keeping with the author's independent character.

John’s main concern is the creation of a transmuting agent and universal medicine. This is achieved not by dividing the

1 A History of Magic and Experimental Science, iii, ch. 4, Appendix 22.
2 Dr. Thorndike thinks Bibl. Nat. MS. 7151 '14th rather than 15th century.'
atom, but by separating the elements. Like all alchemists, John starts from the theory of the four elements, earth, air, fire and water. By their association in varied proportions these elements give rise to the various kinds of matter. Earth, water and air typify the solid, liquid and gaseous states of aggregated matter; fire typifies energy. The fire-water opposites are particularly important: for it was assumed that to reconcile them would furnish the Philosopher's Stone. From fire and water sprang the medieval idea of the composition of metals, in which the names sulphur and mercury were abstractions standing for combustibility and fusibility. According to this theory, conjunction of the impure principals, sulphur and mercury, led to the formation of base metals: when of ordinary purity, the principle produced gold and the superfine or quintessentialized principle furnished the Philosopher's Stone, for the stone was of gold of highly exalted purity. Now to procure this highly purified gold it was necessary to make a sublimate of mercury, and the Liber Lucis gives the instructions for this. John advises the use of Roman vitriol or sulphuric acid, but the sulphur which is to be used is not common sulphur, but an invisible spirit to be found in sulphuric acid, which has the property of tincturing things red, yet coagulates mercury in sublimation to the whiteness of snow. John uses it with saltpetre, sometimes also with sal ammoniac. The book shows how to separate and then to fix the elements in a state of high purity by means of certain chemical substances.

John does not claim originality for this part of his chemical work. He writes it "to help the great need and want of God's saints, particularly at the future coming of anti-Christ, and after all what is there so secret about these things? The philosophers keep them entirely dark and will not reveal them even to their children." But why should not he?

The treatise on Quintessence does not describe how to transmute base metals into gold, but concentrates on the finding of an elixir of life. It is in two books. The first consists of canons; the second of remedies. The first gives instructions

\[1\] I have followed here Dr. Thorndike's exposition in A History of Magic and Experimental Science, vol. iii, pp. 34 f.
how to extract *quinta essentia* from all sorts of substances. Quintessence is what cures the distress of old age and can restore the lost vigour of life, and bring back the former powers of the body, but not, he says, in the same degree as of old. It would be absurd to think that these remedies could induce immortality. They can only keep our bodies fit and hale, give us good digestions and healthy complexions.¹ The secret is not an element nor composed of elements; it is a thing that stands in relation to the four qualities as does heaven to the four elements. And just as the heavens are regarded as the fifth essence, superior to the four elements, so it is called *quinta essentia*. It is made from *aqua ardens* (alcohol) through distillation in the alembic shown. The *aqua ardens* is poured in at the top, heated, goes up and comes down through the arms, and this has to happen several times both day and night to get real quintessence. You know it by opening a small sealed up hole and sniffing; if there is "a marvellous smell that draws all that enter by an invisible bond" then it is *quinta essentia*.² If the smell is not so attractive, then the distillation must go on. There are various alternative methods of making it: by putting the alcohol in an amphora and burying in a hot-bed. You can also make *quinta essentia* from human blood, flesh and eggs, and so forth, and instructions are given.

The fourth canon is of a frankly magical kind. "On the secret of the mastery of fixing the sun in our sky so that it shows therein and sheds life and the principle of life on our bodies." But all that is recommended is that we should heat a gold piece or two (if you have not gold, borrow two silver florins), and quench it or them in alcohol or in good white wine. The fifth canon "on fixing all the stars in our sky so that they may exercise their properties there" is a metaphorical way of recommending that all herbs, simples, aromatics and laxatives be stewed for three hours in alcohol, when their effect will be immeasurably

¹ All Souls College MS. 81, fol. 100: sed quia constitutum est omnibus semel mori, fantasticum esset laborare querere in hac vita rem que posset nostrum corpus reddere immortale. Restat ergo querere que circa terminum vite nostre a deo prefixum posset corpus nostrum sine corruptione servare et infirmum curare, deperditum quoque restaurare.

² Ibid. fol. 102.
improved. Then John turns to the methods of extracting the fifth essence from minerals, especially gold, and he discovers that from the concept of alcohol as the fifth essence we have passed to a notion of a fifth essence in each thing. So the fifth essence can be extracted from antimony. A passage that occurs in the All Souls text alone describes the process and the result:

Which blessed liquor keep by itself in a strong glass bottle tightly sealed, because it is a treasure which the whole world cannot equal. Behold a miracle! forsooth the great sweetness of antimony so that it surpasses the sweetness of honey. And I declare by God's love that the human intellect can scarcely believe the virtue and worth of this water of fifth essence of antimony. And Aristotle in the book, Secret of Secrets, says that it is its lead. Believe me that never in nature was there a greater secret. For all men have toiled to sublimate the spirits of minerals and never had the fifth essence of the aforesaid antimony. In short I never would be able to express the half of this discovery. For it takes away pain from wounds and heals marvellously. Its virtue is incorruptible, miraculous, and useful beyond measure. Forty days it needs to putrefy in mud in a sealed bottle, and then it works marvels.¹

I cannot agree with one writer who calls the second book of the Quintessence less interesting. This discusses the application of the new liquid (it can be in powdered form also) to particular ailments, e.g. leprosy, skin diseases and lesions, paralysis, consumption, fantastic possession by demons, fevers—tertian, cotidian or pestilential—spasms, etc. It is clear that John was a doctor as well as a chemist, and some of the things he says reflect interestingly upon the medical practice of the day, e.g. upon purgatives. Two essential points about them are, first, that they must not kill you and, second, that they should penetrate to the most remote parts and elicit the evil humours. He had great belief in strawberry water. "I will tell you a great secret in the cure of leprosy," he says. "Take water made of strawberries and that water has, in the cure of leprosy, a super-celestial virtue, and know that this, along with the quintessence I have named, cures leprosy in a remarkable way." Or it can be cured, if you have not got the fifth essence, by strawberry water in conjunction with alcohol, and he gives particulars how to prepare the water from ripe strawberries: and so forth. In the Bodleian Library MS. Canonici Misc. 37 (fifteenth century)

¹ All Souls College MS. 81, fols. 115, 115v.
of the *De consideratione quintae essentiae*, John is made to declare, in the second book, that there is no remedy against pestilential fevers since the disease is incurable and sent to destroy the people by divine command, against which there is no remedy save through God’s goodness. I cannot discover this pessimistic passage in All Souls College MS. 81, the early text, and believe that this is one of the later insertions. John of Roquetaillade had greater faith in his quintessence than that.

An interesting point is that in some versions of the second book John is made to pay testimony to the kindness of his jailors, through whose help he was able to obtain alcohol from a certain holy man, a friend of God. Again, this is missing from All Souls College MS. 81. This may be another case of the later manipulation of the text; but the care and precision of John’s writing suggests that he was able to do certain experiments and at least to have his notes with him in the Sultan’s prison. He seems to have had no difficulty in communicating his predictions to those who asked him. While he was in prison he was consulted in an amicable manner by cardinals and dignitaries, treated perfectly well and allowed books, one of which seems to have been largely responsible for the form taken by his prognostications. He was also kept fairly well briefed about current events and it is evident that he had friends to visit him. All that was necessary was to keep him from preaching in public, or broadcasting his predictions, and to do that confinement was the only way. He was asked very topical questions. One cardinal consulted him, shortly after the battle of Poitiers, about the course of the Anglo-French war, and about the future of church revenues. He got a reply that cannot have been consoling to a dignitary of the Holy See. In answering him John reproved him for the definiteness of his questions. The list of queries the cardinal sent seemed presumptuous (he called it *maxima blasphemia dei*): the cardinal was asking for particulars which only God could infallibly provide; but those seeking the interpretation of scriptural passages and how they applied to the evils of the time were more to John’s thinking. He regarded himself as having the spirit of interpretation. One work of his to which
he alludes of which no specimen survives is the *De Interpretationibus arcanorum scripture*. He regarded himself as an expounder and the texts he mainly took were from Ezekiel and from the Revelations.

In the *Ostensor* preserved in the unique Vatican MS. (Rossiano lat. 753),¹ John says that he had read in prison (1356) the "book of the monk Sergius". He also speaks of having a "liber Agap". Latin MS. 21597 of the Bibliothèque Nationale contains the double commentary of the pseudo-Joachim and of Sergius Bahira on the celebrated and mysterious oracle of St. Cyril. Bahira was the teacher of Mahomet. In the earliest Islamic biographies of Mahomet there is mention of a Christian monk, sometimes anonymous, sometimes called Sergius, Nestorius, Bahira, whom the Arab prophet met before his mission and in the course of one of his travels from Mecca to Syria: a monk who, following certain indications, recognized in Mahomet the prophet sent by God, whose coming had been announced to him in a revelation. This was, of course, good Arab propaganda. Byzantine sources that give the same story allege that the monk was a heretic and was bribed for making the pronouncement. Later we find the story in this form: a monk, whom Syriac versions call Ishoyahb and Arab versions Murhib or Murhab, having gone to the Arabian desert, meets there an old monk Sergius Bahira, who tells him that having had various encounters with his co-religionaries on the subject of the cult of the Cross, he had gone to Sinai. There an angel had appeared to him who showed him the events which were to come about since the beginning of the kingdom of the Israelites until the last judgement. After Bahira’s death one of his disciples named Hakim recounted to the monk Ishoyahb how his master received the command to betake himself to the Arabian desert near Medina where he received his revelation. A version of the Syrio-Arab apocalypse of Bahira was current in the West during the Middle Ages. It was a product of the Apocalyptic literature which was continually cultivated among the Christians of the East subjected

¹ Described by Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade*, pp. 243-4, who attributes it to the second half of the fourteenth century.
to Muslim domination until a late epoch. It is of the same kind as the apocalypses of Enoch, Esdras, Methodius and several of those which were composed in Egypt since the invasion of the seventh century.¹

John of Roquetaillade reproduces in his Ostensor and his other prophecies (the Visiones and the Vade mecum in tribulacione) features characteristic of this oriental literature: notably the Eastern anti-Christ who is due to come after the Turkish invasions to break the Turkish power. Certain of these features he got from the text of the Erithrean Sibyl ² and from the prophecies of Robert d’Uzès. The king coming from the East clothed in green, is a Christian king. This is the great king of the Tartars (Cambalech). The glittering car denotes the chariot of Ezekiel which is the Roman Church. Most significant is the traditional notion of the coming, after the death of anti-Christ, of a poor king, who will be one of the blessed race of Pepin, King of the West: a king who will reign over the whole world for seven and a half years, who will refuse to be crowned with a golden crown and will give general peace for a thousand years. But after the millennium Gog and Magog will be unchained, the Angel of Wrath will wreak his will upon the human race and a general extermination will follow in which God will gather together his own for salvation in Jerusalem. In all John’s works there is anti-Christ (or anti-Christs), there is the Toynbean Redeemer who will establish peace, and there is the final extermination of all but the saved. These are the common themes upon which he elaborates. Two points seem very important. In all cases the beneficent king is a western king. In one prophecy he is sprung from a Frankish race; in another he is of French stock, which takes the reader back to the De recuperatione terrae sanctae of Pierre Dubois, a treatise that looked forward to the dominance of a pacific French monarch in Europe: a sort of predecessor of Dante’s Monarchia. The second point is the

² Cf. in E. Sackur, Sibyllinische Texte und For schungen (Halle, 1898), pp. 117-18, 125,
increasing particularism of the time structure. In the first treatise the time indication is vague; in the second it is clearly in the fourteenth century and in the third it is all between 1360 and 1372. John has increasingly blended with his Eastern sources detailed information about the state of Europe which he received from visitors and correspondents. It is in the last of these treatises, the *Vade mecum in tribulacione*, that he appears as a prophet of contemporary or near-contemporary events.

In the *Visiones* (another description of the *Liber secretorum eventuum*),¹ addressed to William, archbishop of Arles, the nephew of Benedict XII, one anti-Christ is Louis of Sicily, son of Peter II of Aragon, who succeeded to the kingdom in 1342. There are several others: before him there had been Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, and after Peter will come a horde of cruel tyrants rising against Charles, king elect of the Roman Empire, and this horde will be made up of various tyrants, especially from the dregs of Bavaria and from the malice of the Ghibelline people. The fifth anti-Christ is a false prophet, a pseudo-religious; the sixth a powerful tyrant in the East who will subdue the whole of Asia. But to return to nearer times: as soon as schism between a true and a false prophet breaks out, Louis of Sicily will be chosen Roman Emperor and a part of the Franciscan Order will group themselves at his side. “Whereupon there will arise preaching monks heretically asserting that our Lord Pope John condemned as heretical the decretal of Nicholas III upon angelic poverty (the *Exiit qui seminal*, declaring that the Friars Minor by their renunciation of property were following the example of Christ and His Apostles). But the general church and the Roman curia will hold firm in these schismatic days, the true Pope among these waves of trouble saying that the Lord Nicholas determined in a catholic fashion about evangelical poverty and that the determining by decretal of the Lord Pope John is true and catholic, for Holy Church asserts that his determination is not repugnant to the determination of Nicholas.” This interesting passage quoted *verbatim* is much in the spirit of the conciliatory Bonagrataria of Bergamo, who had written to show that John XXII’s

pronouncements were not a radical attack upon the doctrine of evangelical poverty and that the Pope had at best recognized the especial sanctity of the Franciscan life, as for example by his canonization of St. Louis of Toulouse. John of Roquetaillade is therefore careful not to criticize John XXII. But now when these false assertions by the preachers are being made, John continues, the scandal will reach the ear of the Sicilian emperor, whereupon Augustus Siculus will gather together the princes of the world and with their agreement will expel for good all the clergy. Where they are to go and how this is to be done is left entirely uncertain. The Jews will be told that their new Messiah has arisen, but in France a new family of Maccabees *ex sanguine principum Gallicorum* will arise to hammer the Sicilian. The Christian people thus led will fight the king who will fall in a pitched battle, and will be borne alive to the lower regions; conquered by Holy Church, he will be confounded before the whole age. Before Louis is chosen Emperor, John adds, he will overthrow the Saracens and when opposed by the nobility of Rome will destroy the eternal city for all time. After the death of Louis, whom he identifies with anti-Christ, the Papacy and the Empire will be transferred to Jerusalem where the sabbath of the world will be realized and celebrated. It will be noted that the expulsion of the clergy and the sack of Rome do not seem very permanent events, at any rate in the light of John's later prophecies; but strict consistency cannot be expected from this particular prophet.

Dr. Kampers suggested that John's treatise upon the oracle of St. Cyril of Jerusalem was written before the deaths of Louis of Bavaria and Louis of Sicily: between 1348 and 1355.¹ In this treatise the Sicilian will be fought by a lion of French blood; the lion is not precisely identified, but John suggests that it may represent either the second son of Philip VI (whose name was also Philip) or the Dauphin John, or, more likely, Charles of Bohemia, "who had been elected Emperor by the Pope and Cardinals, who is the brother of the wife of Lord John the eldest

son of the King of France". John's ideas upon imperial election are certainly strange. Now in each of these tracts, the *Vision* and the *Oracle*, the Aragonese Sicilian is fought and conquered by a hero of French origin. This may be a reference to the ambitions of the house of Anjou in the Mediterranean, a sort of come-back after the Sicilian vespers: more important perhaps is the fact that in the treatise on the Oracle, the lion who fights the Sicilian and imposes peace, will, in the Dubois tradition, be ultimately elected Emperor, however that election comes about. Forgetting that he has in the other treatise destroyed Rome, John of Roquetaillade says that the election of the new king-emperor will be carried out publicly there by the Roman senators, who will ask the princes of this world to nominate an emperor from among themselves, that peace may be imposed upon the tumults of the present age. Another possibility, John says, would be for the usual electors to act, but he seems to prefer the election by compromise through "the princes of this world". In any case what they elect is a *Callus*, either a true Frenchman or one with French blood in him. In his consistorial speech which Clement VI made upon hearing of the Emperor Charles IV's election in 1347, the Pope said, "and observe that he is a Catholic, so devoted and so munificent to the Church that he ought not only to have the Empire by succession, as descended from sacred parents and so forth, but the Empire is due to him by his very name, since he is Charles and history shows that no man more devoted and munificent towards the Church than was Charles the Great."

John's best known work is the *Vade mecum in tribulacione*, so called, he says, because a man who has the spirit (i.e. can understand the prophetic scriptures) will, if he is found worthy, be able to shield himself in the day of destruction; and this book shows him their meaning. In the Prologue he claims to have foretold the battle of Poitiers, to have predicted the troubles arising in Spain and, nearer home, to have informed his nephew Anselm, who consulted him on the point, that he would be successful in obtaining the church of the Blessed Mary of Aurillac. He is conscious therefore of a good record in prophesying. His guide is made up of twenty intentions, intentions
meaning the things that are intended or destined to happen, and
the whole period is confined to thirteen years following the date
of writing 1356. Within these years a great persecution against
the clergy is predicted and the conclusion is expressed that only
through fierce probation can the prelates of the Church be
converted from their present way of living. Many of them will
die by the sword, others will be burnt or destroyed by hunger,
plague and various evils; and before 1362 the cardinals will
leave their pleasant retreat (requies), Avignon. Their flight will
take place within the next five and a half years and is the beginning
of the stupendous events that John is about to relate. Between
1360 and 1365 there will be terrible novelties in the world. First
the worms of the earth shall assume such fortitude and hostility
that they shall cruelly devour almost all lions, bears, leopards
and wolves. The birds of the air, not merely rapacious falcons
but songbirds, blackbirds and linnets, shall tear one another.
This is all necessary if the prophecy of Isaiah xxxiii is to be
fulfilled. There shall arise in those five years what John calls
justitia popularis, which means mob justice, to devour tyrants,
traitors and nobles. Popular justice shall consume the riches of
the nobility and those who rob the poor people shall themselves
be plundered. Before 1365 is reached there will publicly appear
an oriental anti-Christ whose discipline will preach around
Jerusalem with false signs. John lays stress on the importance
of understanding the "marrow" of future events, i.e. 1356-9,
since it is during these years that the princes of the Church are
preparing to fly from Avignon. The power of the French king
will not be able to protect churchmen. This period will be one
of conflict: there will be an aggression of the Moslem power
against the Christians, but a Spanish king will be able to wipe
out the Mohammedan power, especially in Africa. When the
'sixties are reached, the world will rise in indignation against rich
clerks: they will be destroyed and stripped and murdered by
secular peoples (per populos seculares) and after the princes of the
Church have seen that they can no longer raise their heads their
affliction shall give them intelligence, so that they may return to
apostolic poverty.

A western anti-Christ is now to arise and persecute the
Church. He will publicly appear in the Roman Empire between 1362 and 1370, but his flagellations will not extend for more than three and a half years. His régime will be followed by the rule of a supreme pontiff, the reparator of the world. He is the man represented in Ezekiel ix clothed in linen, signing his elect with the sign TAU on their foreheads. He is also the angel who has the golden censer and presents upon the altar which is before the eyes of God the prayers of the saints. He is the angel of chapter xx of the Revelations having a great chain for binding Satan. With him is the mystical Elias of whom Christ said in Matthew " that he would come to restore all things "; of whom, says John, I have made many treatises with abundant material in several books. These two figures first take temporal form before 1365 in the persons of two admirable prophets, the duos corde-larios abjectos fratres minores.

The first of these Minorites will be the restorer-pope we have mentioned, the other is to be the person of Elias, the fore-runner, and the signs of their coming is an invasion of the infidels from the East and the flight of the curia from Avignon. The poor friar destined to be the reparator-pope will have a hard battle against infidels and enemies who will rise up and stone him and " there would be great risk were Christ not to provide for his desolate Church and to send two cranes of the redheaded kind to take him up and bear him on their wings and save him from the hands of the enemy ". What contemporary work of art had John in mind? Clement VI had employed Sienese artists to redecorate the papal palace: are these rescuing birds some which John had seen in the papal wardrobe or on other murals?

The Reparator or Redeemer will restore all things. He is to expel the corrupt priests from the temples, depose simoniacs, and restore to episcopal sees the liberty of electing their prelates (highly tendentious predictions). He is to write the " Book of the Reparation of the world " by Christ's art, whose virtue will endure to the end of the age. The king of France who is to come to Rome at the beginning of his pontificate, the Pope will, contrary to the normal Germanic method of election, make Roman emperor, and to him God will subject the whole world. This emperor will be of such sanctity that no emperor nor king
shall be like him from the beginning of the world save only the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This Gallic emperor shall refuse to be crowned with the golden crown, in honour of the crown of thorns that Jesus wore: like Godfrey de Bouillon.

After destroying the power of Mahomet and freeing the Greeks from the Turks, the Pope—and this is an interesting statement—will decide that as long as the world lasts the cardinals shall be drawn from the Greek Church. This Pope will live for nine and a half years, the Emperor for about ten. The said Pope will establish in the kingdom of Sicily a king, who with powerful hand and stretched out arm will acquire the kingdom of Jerusalem, after whose acquisition the Emperor (like St. Louis of Toulouse) will leave the present world and assume the habit and life of a friar minor. He will leave a son who will be king of Lombardy and will die within fifteen years.

Within this strange rigmarole, which some might consider the ravings of a demented prisoner, are certain interesting features that call for notice. John sticks closely to the text of the Apocalypse and most of his intentions bear some reference to the Patmos vision. The Cordeliers pope who becomes the divine reparator, redeemer and restorer, has good precedent in earlier medieval prophecy, but the colleague Elias I have not been able to trace. Once more the king of France appears as Emperor, defying the normal means of election and, it will be noted, appointed by the Redeemer-pope. In this treatise he is nearer than ever to the monarch of Dante's vision. Lastly, the assumption of the cardinals from the Greek Church seems without precedent in western Apocalyptic literature. It displays the influence of the eastern Mediterranean upon prophetic writing as well as the notion of an oikouménē, it is John's way of predicting the unification of the two churches. Most interesting of all is the foretelling of popular revolts, which did, in fact, take place throughout Europe in the thirteen seventies and eighties and were primarily revolts of work-people in the towns or agricultural labourers. There is a mixture of contemporary theory and observation that runs through the allegories which he presents and, to those who consulted him, must have been an alarming and fascinating feature of his work.
It must be obvious, in fine, that John of Roquetaillade is too bizarre a figure to have much influence upon fourteenth-century history or upon the annals of his order; but significant he certainly is, indicative of certain currents in the political and scientific speculation of contemporary Europe, of the break-up of the ordered medieval world and of the changing and divided state of the Franciscans in the middle of that period.