

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

Alexander Corrigan

PAX



INFESTA
malis.

AMOR



PACIS
alumnus

A PLAINE DIS-

covery of the whole Reue-
lation of Saint IOHN : set
downe in two treatises : The
one searching and prouing the
true interpretation thereof: The o-
ther applying the same paraphrasti-
cally and Historically to the text.

SET FOORTH BY
JOHN NAPEIR L. of
Marchistoun younger.

WHEREVNTO ARE
annexed certaine Oracles
of SIBYLLA, agreeing with
the Reuelation and other places
of Scripture.

EDINBURGH

PRINTED BY RO-
bert Walde-graue, prin-
ter to the Kings Ma-
jestie. 1593.

Cum Privilegio Regali.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

DESCRIPTION AND KEY FEATURES OF THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

JOHAN Napier's *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of St John* was first published in 1593/4, when Napier was 42 or 43 years of age and the edition reproduced in this volume appeared in 1611.¹ Napier's life, personality, worldview and mathematical achievements cannot be understood fully unless one understands something of this, his first published work. In the early modern period, Christianity provided people in Europe and the British Isles with a framework for understanding oneself, the rest of humanity, the universe, and everything in it. Christian faith was the most dominant force in the majority of people's lives and governed every intellectual pursuit, including those that might now be classified as 'the sciences', driving people to make discoveries about the natural world to attain a closer relationship with its creator. The *Plaine Discovery* is an important text for anyone with an interest in Napier and his works because it explains the faith that governed his intellectual, public and private lives. His hopes and fears, and those of his audiences, were reflected in the book, and the first shoots of his interest in mathematics that blossomed two decades later in the logarithms may be seen.

Napier must have been aware of his prodigious talent for mathematics many years before he published the logarithms. The *Plaine Discovery* was

Facing page. *Title page of A Plaine Discovery, 1593, courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.*

¹ The title page of the first edition provided 1593 as the year of publication but Napier's *Epistle Dedicatorie* (see below pp. 945–947) to James VI carried the more specific date, 'the 29. Daye of Ianuar. 1593.' When Napier wrote that first edition Scotland began each new year on 25th March, only adopting 1st January as New Years Day in 1600. As far as he was concerned, 1593 began on 25th March 1593 in the new style (N.S.) and what he called 'January 1593' occurred nine months after that. Therefore, Napier's 29th January 1593 (O.S.) corresponds to January 1594 (N.S.). Later in 1594 a version was published by John Norton in London, which contained minor corrections. In 1611 two further versions were published, again in Edinburgh and London respectively. These editions were more extensively revised, especially in terms of type-setting, the addition of marginal scriptural references in the first treatise and an additional treatise addressing criticisms of the earlier editions. See Macdonald, W. R., pp. 109–28 & 166–7 for a list of the various editions.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

distinguished from the many texts that influenced it by the prominence of mathematics in Napier's understanding of the meaning of prophecies from the Book of Revelation, the most challenging book of the Christian canon. He believed his calculations gave his chronological system more gravitas and precision than those that preceded it. The invention of logarithms may be Napier's most famous achievement but the *Plaine Discovery* must not be overlooked. It provides the best source of information about Napier the man and his attitudes to the world in which he lived, as well as the beliefs that provided a foundation for his later achievements.

The greatest part of the *Plaine Discovery* was a commentary on the Book of Revelation, the final text of the Christian Bible. Napier saw the events foretold in the Revelation as occurring in chronological order and explaining key events throughout the history of Christianity from the baptism of Christ to the end of the world. Other sixteenth century writers had constructed 'chronologies of salvation history' and John Bale had even based a chronology on the Revelation in his seminal *The Image of Both Churches* of 1545.² However, Napier's chronology was unlike anything that had gone before because of its explicit and detailed nature, and the prominent role it played in his polemic. For Napier, a sense of chronological development was a defining characteristic of the Revelation and was vital to his work because of his emphasis on predictions about the future. His belief that the world would end around a century into the future was an important reason for this, as events at the end of the chronology represented the fulfilment of humanity's relationship with God. He also predicted that the final battle between good and evil foretold in the Revelation would soon occur and would include a great war between Protestants and Roman Catholics. He portrayed everything through which he and other Christians had lived and were experiencing as leading up to these events and his chronology was intended to show the progression of humanity towards their collective destiny.

The *Plaine Discovery* was comprised primarily of two treatises. The first contained 36 'Propositions', or introductory claims that were intended to support and provide evidence for assertions made in the second treatise, Napier's

² Bale, J., *The image of bothe churches after reulacion of saynt Iohan the euangelyst*, S. Mierdman (Antwerp, 1545). Bale's work was ground-breaking and was the first of its kind in English but it was influenced by earlier works such as Robert Barnes' *Uitae Romanorum Pontificum* (Basileae, 1535). Since the Reformation, several works had discussed Christian history in such a way as to bolster the image of the Protestant Churches and present Roman Catholicism as corrupt, evil and oppressive, including the seminal *Magdeburg Centuries*. Napier's work would have been influenced by a variety of such sources, often indirectly through scholars like Bale. However, Napier does not appear to have been influenced by John Foxe's famous *Actes and Monuments* and the *Plaine Discovery* was distinguished from earlier works by the mathematical precision of its chronology.

detailed commentary on the Revelation. The introductory propositions had several important aims. They explained the mathematical bases of Napier's system of dating the age of the world and his predictions about the date of the apocalypse. Some of these issues were complex and Napier could not have given them adequate attention had he attempted to incorporate them into his second treatise, the tabular format of which demanded brevity. Napier was not simply explaining his methods; he was also attempting to justify them. He was the first Protestant writer in English to attempt to date the Second Coming and end of the world and he knew that doing so was controversial. Consequently, he had to demonstrate that his conclusions were in line with proper Christian faith and practice. As was *de rigueur* amongst sixteenth century polemicists, Napier used frequent references to scripture to achieve this end. This was even more pronounced in the 1611 editions, to which Napier added numerous references to biblical verses in the margins of his first treatise.³ The 'propositions' were also intended to provide a framework for the polemical claims in the second treatise. For example, the idea that the pope was Antichrist was a central feature of Napier's worldview and the chronology that formed the basis of his commentary. Accordingly, his 26th proposition, which sought to demonstrate the papacy's role as the representative of Satan on the earth, was his longest. This structure, where evidence for Napier's polemical claims was presented at the beginning of the book meant that those assertions could be treated as proven facts in the commentary on the Book of Revelation.

That second treatise was primarily organised into between two and four columns on each page. The first column was Napier's own version of the Book of Revelation, derived from the 1560 Geneva translation and the Vulgate. The second was a 'paraphrase' of the scriptural text and the third was Napier's historical application of prophecies in the Revelation to events in world history. A fourth, narrow column was occasionally included to identify the period of time, associated with the prophecies from the Revelation, in which the events being described belonged. In the sixteenth century, humanist scholars began to prioritise ease of use over aesthetics in their published works. The placement of analytical comments beside the biblical text meant that most of the information the author wished the reader to consider was before their eyes, on the same page, so that leafing back and forth between biblical text and commentary was no longer necessary. Napier wanted the *Plaine Discovery* to appeal to the widest audience possible, claiming to have published the work in English, as opposed to Latin, so that, "the simple of this *Iland* may be instructed."⁴

³ See below, pp. 106–82. All quotations from that work are taken from the edition of the *Plaine Discovery* reproduced in full below, henceforth *PD* in footnotes.

⁴ *PD*, p. 101.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

He determined “not to follow the particular ornat tearmes, of neither Scottes nor Englishmen”, so as not to alienate English readers, or those in his home country, and translated most of the Latin quotations into English for the benefit of those who could only read their native language.⁵

However, the system of tables that Napier employed was not only intended to assist the reader; it also suited Napier’s polemical and rhetorical aims. The third column, Napier’s ‘historical application’ of the biblical prophecies, will probably be of greatest interest to modern scholars. This was where the most dramatic polemical claims were made and where Napier’s mathematical skills were brought to bear. However, that column could not have been so effective if the second column had not existed; Napier’s paraphrase of the scriptural text allowed him to subtly manipulate its meaning before making dramatic claims about historical or contemporary figures in his third column. In short, the columns allowed Napier gradually to impose layers of meaning onto the biblical text, which made his interpretation appear less controversial or surprising. For example, Napier’s assertion that ‘Babylon’ in the Revelation referred to Rome might seem something of a logical leap.⁶ However, in his ‘paraphrase’, Napier explained that the text did not literally mean Babylon but its successor as, “the mother of al fpiritual whoredome, and abominable idolatrie of the world.”⁷

The *Plaine Discovery* was first published by Robert Waldegrave, printer to James VI, who published many works that James patronised and those he authored personally. The first edition was dedicated to King James, but the dedicatory epistle was absent in the 1611 editions. The book was relatively small; both the 1593 and 1611 editions were in octavo format and consequently it was lightweight and portable, and could easily have been carried around or read from one’s hands. It utilised several technical innovations from humanist scholarship that had become popular in the sixteenth century. The tabular form of the second treatise reflected the most up-to-date humanist scholarly techniques that existed at the time. Petrus Ramus had popularised the technique during the mid-sixteenth century and it was employed in the 1560 Geneva Bible, on which Napier based his translation of the Revelation and which influenced the *Plaine Discovery* in numerous ways. Also like the

⁵ *PD*, p. 101. In fact, the finished work was written in language far closer to English than Scots, reflecting Napier’s anglophile tendencies. Also on p. 95, in the epistle to the reader of the 1611 version Napier discussed ‘our English or Scottifh tongue’, implying he regarded them as two dialects of the same language.

⁶ The idea that ‘Babylon’ meant ‘Rome’ had been expressed by many Protestants before Napier and would have been familiar to some of Napier’s readers. However, he explained and defended the interpretation in unusual detail.

⁷ *PD*, p. 298, Rev. 17:5.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

version of the bible, the *Plaine Discovery* was printed in Roman font, distinguishing it from many contemporary works which were published in the more ornate Blackletter. Napier summarised the Book of Revelation and his interpretation of it in tables and a poem. This made the work highly accessible and they may have been included to win favour with James VI, who frequently patronised poets and wrote a good deal of verse himself.⁸

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

EXILE, REFORMATION AND CIVIL WAR

The *Plaine Discovery* was a response to events in the British Isles and on the continent through which Napier and his contemporaries and forebears had lived. In a matter of decades, the discovery of the Americas, the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the Protestant Reformation and the accompanying erosion of the Holy Roman Empire and Spain's dominance in Western Europe changed European's philosophical, geographical and political understanding of the world forever. So dramatic were these events that the world seemed to be coming to an end. In turn, that increasingly prevalent apocalyptic worldview shaped how individuals and groups viewed events relating to and effecting them more directly. In July 1553 the young Protestant king of England, Edward VI died and his Catholic half-sister Mary Tudor succeeded to the throne. In the months that followed she began to persecute leading Protestants and reverse the reforming legislation enacted during the reigns of her brother and father, Henry VIII, restoring Roman Catholicism as the state religion of England. In 1554 many English Protestants fled to the continent where they viewed the apostasy of England and the burning of their co-religionists by Mary within an eschatological framework.⁹

In November 1554 John Knox arrived in Frankfurt after being invited to minister to the city's English congregation of Protestant 'Marian exiles'. That congregation soon divided into two factions, comprising those who were willing to use the 1552 English Book of Common Prayer and those, like

⁸ See Graigie, J. (ed.), *The Poems of James VI of Scotland*, Vol. II, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh, 1958).

⁹ Eschatology is a concern with 'end times' or 'end things' and is a facet of all major religions. However, it has played an especially prominent role in Christianity, especially during times of trauma.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

Knox, who were not. During this time, modern Germany lay within the Holy Roman Empire, and Frankfurt, despite being a free city that had embraced the Protestant Reformation in 1533, had to maintain good relations with the Emperor. Knox's opponents in the city worried that his fiery denunciations of Catholic monarchs would encourage them to move against Frankfurt and that Mary's vengeance would include increased persecutions of Protestants in England. Knox was asked to leave the city after controversially comparing Charles V to the often-demonized Roman Emperor Nero. He, along with some of the English exiles who desired a more 'Reformed' form of worship than the Book of Common Prayer, travelled to Geneva, which was governed according to the uncompromising religious policies of John Calvin.¹⁰

At Geneva Knox and his good friend Christopher Goodman ministered to a congregation that was hard-line in its reforming agenda. They had fled England rather than recant their faith and even rejected the standard liturgical text of their home country under the last Protestant monarch, Edward VI. They would have absorbed and contributed to the atmosphere of a city that housed some of the most ambitious Protestant Reformers of the time and was a hotbed of religious scholarship. They worked on a new form of worship, a metrical psalter and a bible, hoping to one day use these texts as the bedrock of a new, Reformed Church in England.

In Scotland, political and religious tensions were also on the rise and 1558 was a pivotal year for Anglo-Scottish relations and Protestants in and from the British Isles. On 24th April Mary, Queen of Scots was married to Francis, Dauphin of France, sparking fear among many Scots that their country would come under total French rule. On 17th November Mary Tudor died and the Protestant Elizabeth I was immediately named as her successor. The Marian exiles celebrated by dedicating what became known as the Geneva Bible to the new queen whilst Protestants in Scotland were emboldened and hoped for a political alliance with their neighbour to the south.

John Knox returned from the continent the following year and began preaching inflammatory sermons, sparking iconoclastic riots, the first and most famous of which was at Perth. Mary was in France and her mother, Mary of Guise, acting as regent, unleashed a swift and brutal military response, which helped turn public opinion against her and in favour of the Protestant Lords of the Congregation. These Protestant nobles, with Knox as their chief mouthpiece and political agitator, fought to overthrow the Guise regime and make Protestantism the new state religion. In January 1560, an English fleet landed in the Firth of Forth, north of Edinburgh, and reinforced

¹⁰ See Dawson, J. E. A., *John Knox*, Yale University Press (New Haven, 2015), Chapter 7, for the best account of Knox's 'troubles' at Frankfurt.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

the Protestant Party, thereby securing their military victory. In February, the Lords of the Congregation and the Duke of Norfolk, acting as Elizabeth I's representative, signed the Treaty of Berwick, which promised English support to protect the new regime from French interference. From 10th July, what has become known as the 'Reformation Parliament' enacted legislation that made Scotland a Protestant country and declared the influence of the papacy over the country's church to be over.¹¹

Although England had been restored to a Protestant country under Elizabeth I, to her royal court the word 'Geneva' itself suggested seditious extremism. Knox was never accepted by Elizabeth because of his poorly-timed tract *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, which employed scripture to argue that female monarchy was against the natural, divinely mandated order.¹² The text was aimed primarily at Mary Tudor, but Knox's mistake was to attack the legitimacy of all female rulers. Nor was the Geneva Bible officially recognised in England. Despite these problems, Knox's prominent role in Scotland's Reformation gave him influence over the new church and he introduced a form of worship in line with the Genevan model. The Presbyterian structure of the new Kirk was also based on Calvin's. Napier's devotional life from an early age was formed within this context.

However, the impact of the exile and its legacy on the *Plaine Discovery* was even more direct. The single greatest influence on that work was the 1560 Geneva Bible, the first Bible to be printed in Scotland. In 1579, an act of parliament decreed that all families of adequate wealth must own a copy and it was therefore the standard religious text of Napier's life.¹³ Although he claimed to have used the Vulgate to produce his commentary, there is no doubt that Napier primarily employed the Genevan translation.¹⁴ It is also certain that Napier's apocalyptic thinking was heavily influenced by the marginal notes of that Bible, which were polemically charged and revealed their authors' preoccupation with eschatological themes.¹⁵ Furthermore, it was Knox's close friend, the English exile Christopher Goodman, whom Napier personally credited with firing his fascination with the Book of Revelation:

¹¹ For a more detailed explanation of these events see, Dawson, J. E. A., *Scotland Reformed: 1488–1587*, Edinburgh University Press (Edinburgh, 2007), Chs. 8 & 9.

¹² Laing, D. (ed.), *The Works of John Knox*, Vol. 4, Woodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1846), pp. 349–422.

¹³ Brown, K. M. et al. (eds.), *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707* (St Andrews, 2007–2014), 1579/10/25 (accessed 12/04/2013).

¹⁴ *PD*, p. 103.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the Geneva Bible's influence on Napier, see Corrigan, A., *John Napier of Merchiston's Plaine Discovery: A Challenge to the Sixteenth Century Apocalyptic Tradition*, University of Edinburgh Doctoral Thesis (Edinburgh, 2014), Ch. 9.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

in my tender yeares and barneage in Sainct-Androes at the Schooles, hauing on the one parte contracted a louing familiaritie with a certaine Gentleman, &c. a Papift: And on the other pairt, being attentiu to the Sermons of that worthie man of God, *Maister Chriftopher Goodman*, teaching vpon the Apoc-
alyps, I was so mooued in admiration, againft the blindnes of Papifts, that could not moft evidently fee their feuen hilled citie Rome, painted out there so liuely by Saint Iohn, as the mother of all fpirituell whoredome, that not onely burfted I out in continual reafoning againft my faid familiar, but alfo from thenceforth I determined with my felfe (by the afsiftance of Gods fpirit) to employ my studie and diligence to fearch out the remanent myfteries of that holy booke: as to this houre (praifed be the Lorde) I haue bin doing at all fuch times, as conveniently I might haue occafion¹⁶

Goodman's views had been shaped, to a great extent, by his experiences as a Marian Exile and Napier's life and work might have been very different had it not been for that sermon. Men like Goodman and Knox saw themselves as prophets and Napier's claim that his unlocking of scriptural secrets with 'the afsiftance of God'spirit' is another example of how he followed their model in many aspects of his life. Despite never feeling the call to ministry that dominated their lives he believed he was a prophet and that the *Plaine Discovery* was, at least in part, divinely inspired.

Scotland's Reformation had been facilitated to a great extent by armed conflict including the ousting of a ruling Catholic regent by force, which coloured Napier's view of religion and especially his view of the 'end times'. Moreover, the break with France and new political alliance with Protestant England, led to a conception that the British Isles were united in politics and religion for the first time, creating a sense of shared destiny. This, combined with the countries' geographical separation from the Roman Catholic countries of mainland Europe, fostered an atmosphere of both confidence in the island nations' favoured status with God and fear of foreign Catholic influence, which would be enhanced in subsequent decades.

Mary of Guise died in June 1560 and Francis II of France died in December. The widowed Mary, Queen of Scots returned to rule her native country. Despite her devotion to Roman Catholicism, she tolerated the new Protestant parliament and Kirk, and was granted religious concessions including a private Roman Catholic Mass at the Palace of Holyrood. However, the peculiar conditions of a Catholic queen ruling over a Protestant nation led to political and religious tension. On 29th July 1565, Mary married her cousin Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, who also had a claim to the English throne. This obvious attempt to secure the succession displeased Elizabeth and relations with

¹⁶ *PD*, p. 100.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

England deteriorated. Mary's attempts to re-catholicise the nobility and her new husband's brash personality did not help in Scotland. Darnley openly boasted of personally reinstating the mass and of his award of the order of St Michael, conferred upon him by a visiting French delegation. Fear that France would soon conquer Scotland with the cooperation of the monarchy spread. In the Protestant backlash that followed, one of Mary's servants was murdered and Darnley met a similar fate eighteen months later on 9th February 1567 (N.S.).

Mary failed to conform to the expectations of a grieving widow, attending a wedding of one of her servants. Soon after she married the Earl of Bothwell, who had been accused of orchestrating Darnley's murder, and suspicion fell on her. Once again, Scotland was split into two camps: those loyal to the queen, and those who demanded her removal. The latter side commanded more military might and forced Mary to abdicate on 24th July 1567. Her son was one year old at his coronation as James VI of Scotland on 29th July, in a ceremony performed by Napier's maternal uncle, Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney. During the early years of James' minority, the country was ruled by a Protestant regent, Mary's illegitimate half-brother, James Stewart, Earl of Moray. Sporadic fighting occurred in the intervening years following Mary's escape from Lochleven Castle in 1568, especially after Moray's assassination in 1570, and what happened next directly affected the Napier family.

In 1571 the country was in the grip of a civil war that was increasingly concentrated around the capital, Edinburgh, which during the early modern period had emerged as the legal and administrative centre of Scotland. The queen's supporters had garrisoned the city and the regent's troops attempted to starve them out and force a surrender. Merchiston was important because it lay on the main route into the city from the south, and could be used by the queen's party to supply the town, or by English troops to approach from the south in support of the regent. The regent's troops acted first, occupying the Napiers' home in that year. On 18th July John Napier's father, Archibald, was summoned to Edinburgh Castle by his cousin, William Kirkcaldy of Grange, who bombarded Merchiston with cannon fire in an attempt to capture the tower. Archibald tried to avoid committing to either side and may have taken his children to stay at the family's holdings in the Menteith or with John at his marital home for their safety.¹⁷ Further skirmishes took place at Merchiston over the summer of 1572, although the Regent's supporters continued to hold it until their ultimate victory in this civil war and Archibald ultimately aligned himself with the victorious side.

Modern research has shown that religious devotion did not necessarily

¹⁷ Napier, M., pp. 110 & 135.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

decide affiliation with either the queen's or regent's side but accounts in subsequent years tended to portray the King's supporters victory as a triumph of Protestantism over Catholicism.¹⁸ Thus, the religion to which Napier subscribed and the Church to which he belonged were coloured by warfare and political intrigue.¹⁹ These events in Napier's youth shaped his experience of religion and current affairs and it is no surprise that his theological work reflected this. The rise and decline of earthly empires and kingdoms were central to his chronological system and the final battle between good and evil foretold in the Revelation was not metaphorical or to occur only in heaven but would include a real war between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

CONTEMPORARY CRISES

During the early modern period, fears about warfare and foreign powers were often expressed in the kind of apocalyptic language that typified the *Plaine Discovery*. However, in the years closely preceding the publication of the work, two key events occurred that would raise the intensity of these pre-occupations to new heights. Napier's early religious influences like Adam Bothwell may have been religious moderates but by the late 1580s he was closely associated with more ambitious, uncompromising thinkers whose political and religious beliefs were unified under the banner of Presbyterianism. In 1588, the Spanish Armada failed to land an invasion force against England. The fact that many Spanish ships were wrecked by storms on the coasts of Scotland and Ireland enabled English observers to portray their victory as the result of divine providence. Protestants in the British Isles became even more convinced that God was on their side. However, the size of the Spanish fleet and rumours of further invasion attempts also created fear, which was exacerbated by the isolation of Britain from the European mainland. In December 1592, in this atmosphere of fear and tension, tempered with confidence in the perfect truth of Protestantism, the Spanish Blanks Affair came to light. A group of Roman Catholic nobles had attempted to smuggle blank parchments, which they had undersigned, out of Scotland, to be filled in by Jesuits, which

¹⁸ Donaldson, G., *All the Queen's Men: Power and Politics in Mary Stewart's Scotland*, Batsford (London, 1983) showed that many factors determined allegiance to either side, and that many people changed sides during the civil war.

¹⁹ For more on the role and place of Merchiston in the civil war, see Napier, M., *Memoirs of John Napier of Merchiston: His lineage, life, and times, with a History of the Invention of Logarithms*, pp. 131–40, & Pollock M. S., reproduced in Thomson, T., *A diurnal of remarkable occurrents that have passed within the country of Scotland since the death of King James the fourth till the year M.D.LXXV*, The Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1833).

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

amounted to a *carte blanche* for a Spanish invasion of Scotland.

Napier discussed the Armada several times in the *Plaine Discovery*, integrating it into his chronology as evidence for the waning power of Antichrist and imminence of Protestantism's final victory over Roman Catholicism. He perceived the Armada as a watershed in the history of the British Isles, and portrayed the Spanish Blanks and proselytizing activities of Jesuits as a continuation of the precedent set in 1588:

this new infolencie of Papifits arifing about the 1588 year of God, and dayly increfing within this *Iland* doth fo pitie our heartes, feeing them put more truft in Iefuites and feminarie Priests, then in the true fcriptures of God, and in the Pope and king of *Spaine*, then in the King of Kings²⁰

Napier repeatedly called Britain an 'iland'. Like many of his contemporaries, he was presenting the Atlantic Archipelago's isolation from Europe as evidence that God wanted Scotland and England to unite as allies under a single church. The united countries would provide a beacon of hope to the oppressed Protestants of the continent and help defeat the Antichrist in the impending final battle.²¹ Nowhere were Napier's views on the consequences of these events and his views on the political future of the British Isles made clearer than in the *Epistle Dedicatorie* to James VI, in the first edition of the *Plaine Discovery*.

That text was a direct correspondence with his king that revealed Napier's views on monarchy and the events that had recently transpired. In the dedication, Napier tasked James with safeguarding the spiritual and temporal future of Scotland, believing that kings and the political establishment were best-suited to lead reform, and that their subjects would follow their example. He implied that there was special meaning in the Book of Revelation and his commentary for all kings and urged James, "to begin at your M. owne houe, familie and court, and purge the fame of all fufpicion of papifits, and Atheifits or Newtrals".²² He combined rebuke with flattery, appealing to an elevated image of kingship by comparing James to King David. He also integrated James into his chronology, casting him as one of the ten horns of the beast in Revela-

²⁰ *PD*, p. 101. See MacDonald, A. R., 'James VI and the general Assembly, 1586–1618' in Goodare, J. & Lynch, M. (eds.), *The Reign of James VI*, John Donald (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 170–85, for a brief discussion of the fear created by the Counter-Reformation in Scotland.

²¹ Dawson, J. E. A., 'Anglo-Scottish Protestant culture and integration in sixteenth-century Britain' in Ellis, S. & Barber, S. (eds.), *Conquest and Union: Forging a Multi-National British State*, Longman (London, 1995), pp. 87–114, p. 104.

²² 1593 edition, see below page 946.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

tion 17, which represented ten kings, who originally sided with the Antichrist but ultimately followed Christ and helped destroy the whore of Babylon.²³

This combination of flattery and remonstrance is unsurprising, given the events that preceded the composition of the Epistle, which was dated 29th January, 1593 but was almost certainly written in 1594 according to the modern system of dating.²⁴ The epistle reflected the Presbyterian party's desire for James to act decisively against the Catholic nobility in Scotland, meting out harsh punishments to the Spanish Blanks conspirators. In the months following the discovery of the 'blanks' ministers and general assembly members urged the king to act and, on 25th September 1593, the General Assembly impatiently excommunicated the plotters, who included Napier's father-in-law from his second marriage, Sir James Chisholm of Cromlix. The fact that Napier sat on the delegation that excommunicated the plotters, in his capacity as the Presbytery of Edinburgh's Commissioner to the General Assembly, reveals a commitment to the Reformed Protestant cause that transcended familial loyalties. The king was furious that the conspirators had been excommunicated without his consent and complained that "the ministers were cruell, and as they sought blood they should have it."²⁵ The broader issue of royal authority was at stake; James wanted to exercise greater control over excommunication in particular and the Kirk in general. Napier's standing amongst his colleagues in the Kirk is highlighted by the fact that he was commissioned, along with James Melville and Patrick Galloway, with meeting with James and petitioning for his support for harsh punishments for the plotters. However, their pleas were unsuccessful. James was personal friends with one of the Plotters, the Earl of Huntly, and tended to pursue policies of appeasement. In late 1593 he effectively pardoned the conspirators, on the proviso that they never engage in seditious activities again.²⁶

Napier's subsequent epistle to James VI was something of a desperate final attempt to encourage James to submit to the Kirk's demands and act decisively against the perceived Roman Catholic threat in Scotland, especially among the nobility. It reveals Napier's attitudes and those of his fellow Presbyterians and shows that the Spanish Blanks Affair had hit close to home for both Napier and his king. The scandal seemed to prove that the Roman Catholic threat to Scotland was real and imminent and this was reflected in the

²³ 1593 edition, see below p. 946. Napier appealed to the royal couple as a unit by casting Denmark, the home-country of James' bride, as another horn.

²⁴ See above, fn. 1.

²⁵ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 5, p. 269 & Napier, M. p. 162.

²⁶ James' attitudes and motivations are a highly complex issue. For more information see Macdonald, A. R., *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567–1625: Sovereignty, Polity and Liturgy*, Ashgate (Aldershot, 1998), p. 39.

urgent language used in Napier's epistle. That short text was therefore well-suited to open the *Plaine Discovery* because the book was distinguished by its sense of apocalyptic urgency that was unprecedented in the English language. However, Napier's epistle failed to persuade James to punish the Catholic nobility and it was absent from subsequent editions of the work.

CONTENT OF THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

NAPIER ON ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Denunciation and vilification of the papacy and its church were the most dominant themes of the *Plaine Discovery*. Every part of the work was loaded with anti-Catholic language and imagery, from the dedicatory and introductory epistles, to the tables that summarised the Revelation and the poems included by Napier. He employed Roman Catholicism as a foil for Protestantism, attempting to remind Protestant readers of the evils of the alternative to remaining constant in their faith and urging Catholics to repent immediately. He was seeking to provide his audience with a scapegoat, on which to focus all of their fears and hatred. However, demonization of Roman Catholicism was not merely a key *raison d'être* of the *Plaine Discovery*, Napier portrayed it as the reason for the Book of Revelation itself, which Napier understood as a divine warning to humanity that they might identify and understand their enemy in the last age of human history. The destruction of Rome was presented as an essential part of the apocalyptic narrative he claimed was unfolding and he believed Protestants in the British Isles and their king might soon have to literally take up arms against the forces of Antichrist, led by the pope. This conflict would follow the precedent of the Spanish Armada, in which foreign tyrants were simply puppets of the papacy, which was cast as the supreme leader of all Roman Catholics:

These mightie marriners with their great Galliaffes, Venetians, Spanifhes, & other of that Antichristian flote, who hitherto, and lateft of all in this 1588. yeare of God, haue bene fo readie at euery nod of their Apoftatik ftep-mother, Rome, to haue overwhelmed vs poore and true 'Chriftiā profeffors.²⁷

Napier employed arguments that would have been familiar to his domestic audience. He attacked Roman Catholic traditions and doctrine as evil black

²⁷ *PD*, p. 314. 'Apoftatik' referred to the apostasy, rejection of religious faith, with which Napier charged Rome.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

magic and connected every evil figure in the Revelation in some way to Rome. A detailed analysis of all his arguments could not be accommodated in a work of this size. Instead, this chapter considers as an example Napier's presentation of the papacy as Antichrist.²⁸

Portraying the papacy as Antichrist was not new. Martin Luther had made the claim as early as 1520 and pre-Reformation scholars like John Wycliffe (1320–84) had also made the connection. There were a number of Protestant works that did so in English, including the 1560 Geneva Bible and John Bale's *Image of Both Churches*, from which Napier derived his idea of a false Church of Antichrist, pitted against the real Church of God, which was often hidden from view. However, Napier brought his own unique style to his arguments, which were unusually detailed and set out to prove beyond all doubt that the papacy was the Man of Sin and Antichrist, foretold in 2 Thessalonians and Revelation respectively.

Napier's explanation of the papacy as Antichrist was unusually thorough compared to the works that influenced it, and this was consistent with the detailed and systematic approach taken in the *Plaine Discovery* in general. Not only did it provide an enemy on which to focus, it answered an important question. If God was on the Protestants' side and they were his true church, why was so much of the world opposed to them? One answer was that God had ordained that his chosen people must endure persecution and minority status in the Old Testament, when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and kept in captivity in Babylon. These examples showed that this suffering was temporary because God had ultimately delivered the Israelites from oppression. Napier's reading of the Revelation was intended to reinforce this image and refine it for a new era. The scriptural text showed that Antichrist's dominance over the world was a predestined but temporary part of God's plan, culminating in eternal rewards for his chosen and eternal punishment for their enemies.

In Napier's commentary, the idea of the papacy as Antichrist was treated as an accepted fact that provided a foundation and evidence for some of his more controversial and novel conclusions. However, he first went about 'proving' the papacy's nature in the longest of his introductory propositions: "The Pope is that only Antichrift, prophecied of, in particular."²⁹ He argued that there are many things that oppose Christ's teachings and example and are therefore 'antichrist' but that there is one that leads and unifies them all. Napier referred to 2 Thessalonians, which foretold the coming of a Man of Sin who would seek to pervert the teachings of Christianity. He argued the text meant that this

²⁸ See Corrigan, 2014, Ch. 4 for a detailed analysis of these themes.

²⁹ *PD*, pp. 149–59.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

Man of Sin was also the Antichrist and must emerge from within the Church and could not be an external aggressor: “he needs be a latent, and not a patent enemie, that the Spirit of God fo carefully points out: and fo no *Turke*, *Jew* nor *Pagan*, yea, no *plaine Wolfe* muft hee be: but a Wolfe in Lambs skin, euen an Antichrift vnder the name of a Chrftian.”³⁰ He identified false miracles used by the Roman Catholic Church and claimed these were tools of Antichrist, designed to trick good Christians into worshipping him. These false miracles were widely denounced by Protestants and much of Napier’s audience would have been predisposed to this type of thinking.

Another of his arguments appears highly dubious to the modern observer, but probably had more currency in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This was a list of 17 examples of the ways in which the papacy supposedly did the opposite of Christ, making it ‘antichrist’. For example, “Christ fhed his blood once, that we may reign spirituallie. The Pope fheddeth our blood daylie, that he may reigne temporallie”.³¹ This section seems unplanned and rambling, which sets it apart from the rest of the book, which suggests fervour on Napier’s part. He evidently believed what he was writing and his words seem emotionally charged.

Napier’s analysis of 1 John 2:22 appeared more thoughtful. Here he displayed his talent for anticipating possible criticism. The scriptural text had: “Who is a lyer, but he that denyeth that Iesus is Christ? the same is the Antichrist that denyeth the Father and the Sonne.”³² Clearly though, the pope does not deny Christ but Napier argued,

there be two denials, the one in mouth and profefcion plainely, and that way the Pope feemeth a Christian . . . The other deniall is in heart and deede tacitly . . . the Pope denieth Chrft, in that he eftablifheth other mediators . . . Wherefore, in effect the Pope denieth the Sonne, and confequently both the Father & the Sonne.³³

Again, the idea that Christ is the only mediator between humanity and God, and that saints served no such function was central to Protestant doctrine and Napier would have expected his audience to be receptive to such an argument.

³⁰ *PD*, p. 160.

³¹ *PD*, p. 156.

³² Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations outwith the Book of Revelation are taken from the 1560 Geneva Bible: Whittingham, W. et al., *The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated according to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languges. With moste profitable annotations vpon all the hard places, and other things of great importance as may appeare in the epistle to the reader*, Rouland Hall (Geneva, 1560), STC/1019:06. That was the translation upon which Napier primarily relied and would have used for study and devotion.

³³ *PD*, pp. 157–8.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

Napier's assertions about the papacy were typified by his uncompromising polemical style that differentiated the *Plaine Discovery* from works that preceded it. For example, John Bale used the word 'antichrists' to denounce a wide range of people and religious practices.³⁴ However, by using the word as a proper noun exclusively to describe the papacy, Napier increased its impact immeasurably. In the *Plaine Discovery*, he portrayed the papacy as an almost supernatural, monolithic institution that embodied absolute evil and whose rise and ultimate destruction were predicted in scripture.³⁵

THE CHRONOLOGY

Napier's chronology of salvation history was more detailed and was more integral to its author's polemical arguments, especially those directed at Roman Catholicism, than any that had been devised previously. It reflected Napier's interest in mathematics, and his skills were employed in its unusually rigid and precise structure. It identified events, in chronological order, as fulfilments of the prophecies of the Book of Revelation. The prophecies most emphasised in the chronology were typically regarded as allegories for events that would occur in the physical world. To Napier, the structure of the Revelation itself suggested a fixed pattern within which those prophecies would be fulfilled incrementally. Revelation Chapters 6 to 8 described the opening of seven seals that bound up the scroll of God's Revelation to John being opened one by one. In Chapters 8 to 11 seven angels blew trumpets to announce key events in the unfolding apocalyptic narrative. Chapter 16 was concerned with the pouring out of seven vials, or in some translations bowls, representing the wrath of God against the followers of antichrist. Finally, Revelation 14 related the appearance of angels, which made important announcements. These prophecies and Napier's interpretation of historical and contemporary events that fulfilled them formed the basis of his chronological scheme.

The chronology began with the opening of the first seal, which Napier claimed occurred in 29 A.D., which he identified with the baptism of Christ, and continued to his predicted date of the Second Coming, Day of Judgement and destruction of the world between 1688 and 1700. The concept of time passing was vitally important throughout the work, but Napier presented these final occurrences as different aspects of the same event and abandoned his

³⁴ See Corrigan, 2014, Chapter 7.

³⁵ This elevated conception of the papacy's power was common among sixteenth century Protestants. See Weiner, C. Z., 'The beleaguered isle: a study of Elizabethan and early Jacobean anti-Catholicism', *Past & Present* 51, 1971, pp. 27–62.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

chronology after the Second Coming. Near the end of Chapter 20 he wrote,

And we are fure that then the fecond and laft refurrection should bee, wherein generallie all men fmall and great, that euer died, shall rife againe, and appeare before that iustice feat of God, and the regifter bookes of all mens confciences bee opened vp³⁶

Then, at the very beginning of Chapter 21 he wrote,

Then I forefaw that the heauens and the earth should be renewed to their vttermoft perfection: for this imperfect eftate of the heauens & the earth that now is, fhall diffolue and melt away, and there fhall be no fea, or raging inundations of worldly troubles.³⁷

Thus, when Napier employed one term like ‘second cōming’ or ‘day of judgement’ he intended his audience to think generally about the ‘end times’ when Christ would return, judge humanity, punish the wicked, save the elect and the world would be destroyed and renewed, all within a very short space of time.

The events that fulfilled the prophecies of the seven seals, trumpets and vials, and four ‘thundering angels jubilees’ occurred at uniform intervals of seven, 245 and 49 years. These figures were built upon the method of interpreting ‘days’ in prophetic texts as ‘years’ and the concept of *Shmita*. This was a sabbatical interpretation of years, in which every seventh year was seen as a Sabbath, just as every seventh day was a Sabbath.³⁸ Napier began explaining the system in his first Proposition, which illustrates its importance to his work. He used Numbers 14:34 to justify substituting days for years: “After the number of fourtie daies, in which ye searched out the land, the yeare fhall be counted for a day”.³⁹ However, he went even further than using scripture to defend his methods. He asserted that the 70 weeks described in Daniel 9:24 represented 490 years and that this prophecy accurately predicted the birth of Christ.⁴⁰ Damnation awaited any who dared deny his system because to do so was to deny Christ:

vpón necefsitie of faluation, all chriftians muft confeffe, in the feuentie weekes of DANIEL, a day to be taken for a yeare, extending in the whole to 490. yeares; otherwife, that prophecie of the Mefsias comming would not fall vpón the iuft time of Chrifts comming, as neceffarily it ought to doe.⁴¹

³⁶ *PD*, p. 325.

³⁷ *PD*, p. 331–2.

³⁸ See Genesis 2:2–3, Exodus 23:12 & Deuteronomy 5:13–14.

³⁹ *PD*, p. 107. Napier’s translation of the Vulgate.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 70 weeks × 7 days = 490 days, interpreted as years.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

NAPIER'S CHRONOLOGY OF SALVATION HISTORY

Event in the Revelation	Scriptural Reference	Napier's Date	Page in <i>Plaine Discovery</i>	Napier's Historical Interpretation
1 st Seal	Rev 6:1	29 A.D.	p. 216	Baptism of Christ. Gospel of Matthew written.
2 nd Seal	Rev 6:3	36 A.D.	p. 217	Christians persecuted. Gospel of Mark written.
3 rd Seal	Rev 6:5	43 A.D.	p. 217	Global famine. Gospel of Luke written.
4 th Seal	Rev 6:7	50 A.D.	p. 218	Gospel of John written.
5 th Seal	Rev 6:9	57 A.D.	pp. 218–9	Nero's temporal power increased.
6 th Seal	Rev 6:12	64 A.D.	p. 219	Nero persecuted Christians, committed incest & murder.
7 th Seal	Rev 8:1	71 A.D.	pp. 227–8	Persecution of Christians suspended under Flavian Dynasty.
1 st Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 8:7/ 16:2	71 A.D.	pp. 229/ 287–8	Effeminate & tyrannical Roman Emperors.
2 nd Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 8:8–9/ 16:3	316 A.D.	pp. 229–30/ 288	Constantine shifted imperial seat from Rome to Constantinople.
3 rd Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 8:10–11/ 16:4–7	561 A.D.	pp 230/ 288–9	Rise of Islam & apostasy of Christians in the Near East.
4 th Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 8:12/ 16:8–9	806 A.D.	pp.230–1/ 289–90	Church corrupted by Islam in the East & Papacy in the West. Charlemagne divided Holy Roman Empire between his sons.
5 th Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 9:1/ 16:10–11	1051	pp. 233/ 290	Rising power of Islam.
6 th Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 9:13/ 16:12–13	1296	pp. 236/ 290–1	Unification of formerly disparate Islamic peoples.
7 th Trumpet/ Vial	Rev 11:15/ 16:17–21	1541	pp. 251–2/ 291–3	Protestant Reformers active & successful.
1 st Jubilee	Rev 14:6	1541	p. 276	Protestant reformers bringing truth of Gospels to light.
2 nd Jubilee	Rev 14:8	1590	pp. 276–7	Fall of Rome as new Babylon. Military successes of Protestant against Catholic states.
3 rd Jubilee	Rev 14:9–10	1639	p. 277	Final defeat of Rome.
4 th Jubilee	Rev 14:14	1688–1700	p. 278	Second Coming of Christ, God's Judgement, Destruction of World, Creation of New Heaven and New Earth.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

Exodus 23:10–11 decreed that, just as every seven days was to be a Sabbath, every seventh year was to be a year of rest, when fields were to lie fallow and the poor could gather any unharvested crops. Leviticus 25:8 commanded that every seventh Sabbath, or every 49th year, was to be a celebratory Jubilee year, which is why Napier's 'thundering angels' jubilees' were every 49 years. These periods formed the basis of Napier's scheme and had already been used for centuries by scholars to calculate the age of the world, by counting backwards through the Old Testament. This supposed mathematical precision allowed Napier to portray his scheme as perfectly accurate and probably impressed his contemporaries in an age when historical data were not easily verified. However, to the modern observer, this chronological precision is the *Plaine Discovery*'s greatest failing because its fixed pattern of dating forced Napier to falsify when many events occurred, and also to include certain dates that correlated to nothing in particular.

SEVEN SEALS

And they fung a new fong, faying, Thou art worthie to take the Booke, and to open the feals thereof, becaus thou was killed, & haft redeemed vs to God, by thy blood out of every kinred, and tongue, & people and nation.

Revelation 5:9

After, I beheld when the Lamb had opened one of the feales, and I heard one of the four beaftes fay, as it were the noife of thunder, Come and fee.

Revelation 6:1

In Napier's commentary, the seven seals in Revelation 6 and 8 were interpreted as being opened every seven years, from the Baptism of Christ to the end of the persecutions of Christians under the Roman Emperor Vespasian in 71 A.D.⁴² Napier's basis for the Baptism of Christ occurring in 29 A.D. derived from Luke 3:1–2:

Now in the fifteenth yere of the reigne of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governour of Iudea, and Herode being tetrarch of Galile, and his brother Philippe tetrarch of Iturea and the countrey of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilina, (When Annas and Caiphas were the high Priests) the worde of God came vnto John, the sonne of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

⁴² *PD*, Christ's baptism at p. 228 seventh seal at pp. 233–4.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

Augustus Caesar died in 12 A.D., which may be regarded as the first year of his successor's reign. The first four seals also coincided with the writing of the four Gospels, though modern scholarship has disproved this and tends to date Mark as the earliest, whereas Napier identified Matthew as the earliest.⁴³ The precision of Napier's system is emphasised by a comparison to Bale's *Image*. For example, in Bale's chronology, one may infer that the fourth seal was opened at some point in or around the fourth century A.D.⁴⁴ In Napier's scheme it was stated explicitly as opening in 50 A.D.

Napier celebrated the church at this time as uncorrupted by the evils that he believed typified the Roman Catholic church. He presented the opening of the seals, and associated writing of the gospels, as acts of divine mercy, intended to comfort the persecuted Christians of the Roman Empire. This was consistent with Protestant humanist philosophy, which regarded the early church as an ideal, uncorrupted by invented traditions, to which Christianity should return. Even at this early stage in his chronology, he emphasised the supposed evils of Roman Catholicism, in relation to this position:

the deuill was so ready, that how soon the true word of God was fowen by the primitiue Church, incontinently he raifed vp the papifticall antichrift to deuour & confound the fame with falfe gloffes, & finifter interpretations.⁴⁵

The fifth and sixth seals were identified with Nero. Although 57 and 64 A.D. correlated to no specific event by which Napier could prove that emperor's evil nature, Napier was bound to these years by his system and connected them to the start of his reign, which was actually 54 A.D., and his persecution of Christians. However, Napier was skilled at wording his arguments to make them fit with the biblical text and he interpreted Revelation 6:12, "And I beheld when he had opened the fixt feale, & loe, there was a great earthquake, and the funne was as black as sack-cloth of haire, and the Moone was like bloode", as meaning that Nero had, "vtterly darkened and extinguished the light of the Gofpel".⁴⁶ Similarly, the seventh seal was accompanied by, "filence in heauen about halfe an houre", and Napier interpreted this as a temporary suspension of persecution of Christians during the Flavian Dynasty.⁴⁷

⁴³ *PD*, p. 216 & Barclay, W., *The Gospel of Mark*, Saint Andrew Press (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 1: "it is agreed by nearly everyone that it [the Gospel of Mark] is the earliest of all the gospels".

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 78v-r.

⁴⁵ *PD*, p. 258.

⁴⁶ *PD*, p. 219.

⁴⁷ *PD*, p. 228.

SEVEN TRUMPETS & VIALS

And I saw the seven Angels which stood before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

Revelation 8:2

So the first Angel blew the trumpet, and there was hail and fire mingled with blood, & they were cast into the earth, and the third part of the trees was burnt, and all green grass was burnt.

Revelation 8:7

And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven Angels, seven golden vials, full of the wrath of God, which lieth for evermore.

Revelation 15:7

And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth, and there fell a noyful and a grievous sore upon the men, which had the mark of the beast, & upon them which worshipped his image.

Revelation 16:1

Napier believed that the seven vials in Revelation 16 and 18 simply reinforced the trumpets in Chapters 8, 9 and 11. This idea of ‘recapitulation’ had been used to varying degrees in many earlier works on the Revelation since its initial usage by Victorinus of Pettau in the third century.⁴⁸ It was employed by John Bale and, in the case of the *Plaine Discovery*, meant that the chronology in Chapters 16 and 18 repeated that in Chapters 8, 9 and 11. From this point on, the word ‘trumpets’ will be used to mean both trumpets and vials.

Like the seals, the trumpets occurred at regular intervals, in this case every 245 years. This was half of the 70 weeks of Daniel, or 490 years, which Napier presented as the period for which God allows earthly institutions and kingdoms to remain dominant. Napier derived his interpretation of these ‘Great mutations of Empires’ from a work called *Carion’s Chronicle*, though that book did not explain the system in nearly as thorough or systematic a way as the *Plaine Discovery*.⁴⁹ The period denoted by the trumpets was the longest in Christian history and was concerned primarily with corruption of the Church and growing dominance of the papacy as Antichrist, ending with the new hope that came in the form of the Protestant Reformations.

⁴⁸ Backus I., *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich and Wittenburg*, OUP (Oxford, 2000), pp. 135 & xiii.

⁴⁹ Funke, J. (ed.) & Lynne, W. [A Wouter van Lin] (trans.), *The three books of Chronicles, whiche John Carion (a man singularly well sene in the Mathematycall sciences) Gathered with great diligence of the beste Authours that haue written in Hebrue, Greke or Latine*, Mierdman (London, 1550), STC 4626, f. ciiiir on Constantine and the papacy. The book of Daniel contained prophecies about kingdoms, and refers to a time during the Babylonian Captivity, hence the connection between the text and empires.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

Again, many of the dates were approximate or incorrect. For example, Constantine's transfer of his imperial seat from Rome to Constantinople was a gradual process that took place from around 306 to 330 A.D. when the city was consecrated. However, Napier claimed that Constantine transferred his imperial seat in 316 A.D. because this was 245 years after his previous date of 71 A.D.⁵⁰ 316 was critically important to Napier's system because it represented a major step forward in the temporal power of the papacy, which, over the centuries, increased its authority and cruelly oppressed Christendom.⁵¹ Similarly, the fourth trumpet in 806 highlighted the rise of the Holy Roman Empire, which Napier portrayed as the beast whose wound was healed in Revelation 13:3.⁵² Again, this was vital to his demonization of the Roman Catholic Church. In his reading of history, the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne and his descendants was not a new empire, but the same idolatrous, Roman Empire that had killed Christ, represented in the Book of Revelation by a monstrous beast. When the beast was wounded, the Western Roman Empire fell but the Holy Roman Empire was simply the same beast, healed and restored to temporal dominance. However, Napier was also careful to portray these emperors, along with all Roman Catholic secular leaders, as puppets of the papacy. They were not just tyrants, but agents of Satan on the earth, led by the Antichrist whose throne was in Rome.

The fifth and sixth trumpets reflected the other great source of fear among Protestants in Napier's lifetime, the Islamic World. Napier asserted that the power of Islam was increasing in 1051 and that four races of Islamic peoples, '*Turks, Tartarians, Saracens, and Arabians*' united after 1296.⁵³ Although these dates were rather vague in terms of how they related to world events, the Ottoman Empire did emerge around the turn of the fourteenth century. The view that Revelation 9:14, "loose the 4 Angels, which are bound in the great riuer Euphrates", referred to four Islamic groups was fairly common and Napier had derived his interpretation from the 1560 Geneva Bible.⁵⁴ He cast Muslims as Gog, to the papacy's Magog, two opposing but evil forces described in Revelation 20:7–10 whose warfare and oppression threatened the true church but whose destruction was assured as part of God's predestined plan for humanity.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *PD*, p. 239–40.

⁵¹ Napier's stance on the so-called 'Donation of Constantine' is a highly complex issue, see Corrigan, 2014, pp. 130–2, 155–6 & 193–6.

⁵² *PD*, pp. 146 & 266–7.

⁵³ *PD*, pp. 110 & 236.

⁵⁴ Indeed, the Geneva Bible named the same groups as Napier. See Geneva Bible, Rev. 9:14, note *a*.

⁵⁵ *PD*, pp. 323–4.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

Finally, the seventh trumpet heralded the Protestant Reformation which, for Napier, was one of the most important turning points in human history. God's true Church was no longer hidden and oppressed by the visible Roman Church, but active and forceful and the balance of power began to shift away from the forces of Antichrist in favour of the elect. Unfortunately for Napier, he could not identify an important event that occurred in 1541, the year dictated by his system, and he simply claimed that, by this point, the Reformation and some of its key players were active and confident.⁵⁶

THUNDERING ANGEL'S JUBILEES

Then I saw another Angel flie in the middes of heauen, hauing an euerlasting Gospel, to preach vnto them that dwel on the earth & to euerie nation and kinred & tongue, and people. Saying with a loud voice, fear God, and giue glorie to him: for the houre of his iudgemēt is come, and worshippe him that made heauen and earth, and the sfea, and the fountaines of water.

Revelation 14:6-7

The period of the four Jubilees, occurring every 49 years, was special for Napier's scheme because it represented a shift from allegorical interpretations about historical and contemporary events, to predictions about the future. It was the most positive period for Napier because it included the victory of God's true church over the church of Antichrist. He reiterated the importance of reformers around 1541, including Luther, Calvin and Melancthon, linking their efforts to ostensibly bring the truth of scripture to light, to Revelation 14:6: "Then I saw another Angel flie in the middes of heauen, hauing an euerlasting Gospel, to preach vnto them, that dwel on the earth, and to euerie nation, and kinred and tongue & people."⁵⁷ The second Jubilee heralded the fall of Babylon, interpreted by Napier as meaning Rome and he claimed it had occurred in 1590, a mere three years before the *Plaine Discovery* was published. This speaks volumes about Napier's view of the age in which he lived. He believed that the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the succession of France's first Protestant king in the following year, which ended the dominance of the house of Guise, were the result of divine providence demonstrating God's favour towards English and Scottish Protestants.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁶ *PD*, p. 276.

⁵⁷ *PD*, p. 276.

⁵⁸ Henry of Navarre actually converted to Roman Catholicism in 1593. Napier had clearly heard about this by 1611 and changed his description of the king from 'a Proteftant' to 'one named a proteftant' in the editions of that year. See *PD*, pp. 276–7.

Guise dynasty had controlled not only France, but Scotland under the Regent Mary of Guise. Thus, domestic affairs, including the Scottish Reformation that had occurred with the ousting of Mary were presented as important on a cosmic scale, reassuring the reader that everything they had experienced mattered and was part of God's plan. The events seemed to confirm that the final defeat of the Roman church and the institutions that supported it, by the Protestant nations of Europe was at hand. If that were true, it was inevitable that Protestants would soon receive their eternal reward for embracing true religion and suffering under the oppression of tyrannical Catholic forces.

The fall of Babylon was one of the last occurrences before the Second Coming and Napier moved to predicting dates in the future. He saw the Armada as evidence that the balance of temporal and spiritual power was shifting in favour of Protestants and predicted the ultimate destruction of Rome in 1639. Napier used violent and horrific imagery to encourage Protestants to remain constant and Roman Catholics to convert. Those who continued to worship the beast would, "be tormented eternallie in the bitter sulphurous fire of hell, in the prefence of Christ and all his holie Angels."⁵⁹ The final 'angel' which appeared 49 years later was Christ appearing to reap humanity and gather the elect, before the reprobate were cast into hell.⁶⁰ The Bible does not cast this figure as an angel, but Christ, or one, 'like vnto the Son of man'.⁶¹ Napier probably did so to bring the total of angels listed in the Revelation to the mystical number seven which, through his preoccupation with Sabbaths and Jubilees, formed the basis of his chronology.

THE MILLENNIUM OF SATAN'S BINDING AND ANTICHRIST'S REIGN

Two other important numbers in the *Plaine Discovery* were 1260 and 1000. These referred to the number of years for which the Antichrist was permitted to reign and the millennium for which Satan was bound. The idea that these things would occur at the same time may seem illogical but Napier argued that God had displayed his mercy by binding Satan during the reign of his representative on earth, "leaft on both sides, Gods Church were vtterly extinguished".⁶² Napier believed that, when Revelation 20:3 stated that Satan was bound "that he should deceiue the people no more," he was being prevented from harming

⁵⁹ *PD*, p. 277.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

⁶¹ *PD*, p. 278.

⁶² *PD*, p. 177.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

only the outward, visible church of Antichrist and not the true, hidden Church of God, “which euer he troubleth”.⁶³

The number 1260 occurred many times in the Books of Daniel and Revelation, the two most important prophetic texts of the Christian canon, which usually referred to a period of days. Napier interpreted these as years and cited Revelation 12:6 as evidence of the true church being forced into hiding by the church of Antichrist: “And the womā fled into the wilderneffe, where flhee hath a place prepared of God, that there they should feed her there a thousand, two hundreth and threefcore daies.”⁶⁴ In Napier’s *Chronology*, this period lasted from the so-called ‘Donation of Constantine’, “as is alleged betwixt the yeare of Chrif 300. & 316. to the year of God 1560. which time the notable decay of his kingdome began.”⁶⁵ These dates were a clever selection. The first was connected to the rise to dominance of the papacy in the Western Roman Empire and Napier saw it as a hugely significant historical turning point. The period of Antichrist’s reign saw gradual corruption spread throughout Christendom via the use of idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church until the Protestant Reformation. Napier’s usage of 1560 as the end of Antichrist’s reign elevated the Scottish Reformation to universal significance, again appealing to his domestic audience.

Similarly, the binding of Satan occurred around the year 300, when Constantine ended the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. Constantine and his successors, “(except a few of fhort reign) maintained Christianifme to the abolifhing of Sathans publike kingdome: and therefore, faye wee, this yeare Sathan is bound.”⁶⁶ Thus, Napier’s view of this emperor was ambivalent; his actions were connected both with the binding of Satan and the beginning of Antichrist’s reign. Satan was released after the sixth trumpet was blown in around 1296 and this coincided with the release of Gog and Magog. However, something monumentally evil had to have coincided with the release of Satan and Napier selected something that supported his conclusions perfectly. He claimed that Boniface VIII’s introduction of Jubilees to encourage pilgrimage to Rome coincided with the release of Satan. This underscored Napier’s hatred of Roman Catholic doctrine because the purpose of these pilgrimages was to achieve remittance of one’s sins. The idea that no human actions could affect one’s salvation and that one was saved by faith alone is one of the central aspects of Protestant belief that differentiates it from

⁶³ *PD*, pp. 322 & 176.

⁶⁴ *PD*, pp. 258–9. For other scriptural references to 1260, see Rev. 11:2–3; Dan. 7:25 & Dan. 12:7.

⁶⁵ *PD*, p. 152.

⁶⁶ *PD*, p. 174.

Roman Catholicism. In fact, Martin Luther's objection to the selling of indulgences, which supposedly allowed people to spend less time in Purgatory, was generally considered the first act of the Reformation. However, Napier was not only presenting himself in the tradition of Luther and emphasising his doctrinal differences to the papacy, he was also attempting to avoid any allegations that the Jubilees that formed the basis of his entire system were connected to the hated doctrine of Purgatory.

However, the *Plaine Discovery* did not emphasise the millennium described in Revelation 20:6, when "the Priestes of God and of Chrift . . . fhall reigne with him a thouſād year."⁶⁷ Napier interpreted this number figuratively, as meaning, "for euer, and euer", after the apocalypse.⁶⁸ This belief in a figurative millennium was called 'Amillennialism' and was opposed to 'Pre-millennialism', or Chiliasm, which posited that the millennium would occur on earth in the future and 'Postmillennialism', which identified it in the past. This stance was necessary for a number of reasons. Napier predicted that the world would end in around a century and a millennium of temporal bliss could not therefore exist in the future. Nor could the millennium have occurred in the past because Napier's view of history was so negative. Since Christ's ascension, the Church had been typified by a steady decline into tyranny and corruption. Logically then, the millennium would have to occur in the next world. However, the most important reason was probably that Chiliasm had been tainted by the Anabaptist Revolt at Münster in 1535–5. This Protestant sect had seized Münster and declared the city the New Jerusalem, believing that Christ would return and rule the world from this city for 1000 years, with the community by his side. The city was besieged by a force led by the expelled Prince-Bishop Franz von Waldeck and the ensuing panic, violence and bloodshed shocked Europe. For decades, Protestants had to distance themselves from these beliefs due, if nothing else, to political expediency.

NAPIER'S CALCULATIONS ON THE END OF THE WORLD

Napier's fascination with mathematics found an outlet in his calculations of the approximate date of the end of the world, based on numbers and various books of the Bible and the Talmudic Prophecy of Elias. This prophecy stated that the world would endure for a total of 6000 years: 2000 before the law or under the law of nature, 2000 under Mosaic Law and 2000 under the law of

⁶⁷ *PD*, p. 323.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

Christ.⁶⁹ This was combined with Matthew 24:22: “And except those dayes shulde be shortened, there shulde no flesh be sauēd: but for the electes sake those dayes shalbe shortened.”⁷⁰ This told Napier that God’s predestined plan for humanity was to spare the suffering of the elect by bringing about the end of the world before the year 2000. He then produced two possible years during which the second coming would occur, conceding that it might have happened at any time between them. He calculated the earliest date in this range by reaffirming that the first ‘Thundering Angel’s Jubilee’ had occurred in 1541 and adding three more jubilees at intervals of 49 years, which made the final year 1688.⁷¹

His calculations that provided the later date of 1700 were more complex. Daniel 12:11–12 read:

And from the time that the dayly sacrifice shal cease, & the abhominacion put to desolation shal be 1290 daies. Blessed is he that waiteth and commeth to the thousand, thre hundreth and fiue and thirtie dayes.

Again, Napier interpreted these 1335 days as years and argued that the abomination and sacrifice prophesied meant the attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem under the Emperor Julian in 365 A.D.⁷² They were brought to desolation when an earthquake destroyed the partially restored building and 1335 years after this date was 1700. Again though, Napier’s dates were incorrect. The building works were abandoned in the year of Julian’s death, 363 A.D. Finally, he interpreted Revelation 14:20 as also referring to a number of years: “blood came out of the Wine-press vnto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and fixe hundreth ftades or courses.”⁷³ He claimed that the Revelation was written between 97 and 99 A.D and 1600 years after this also provided an approximate date around the end of the seventeenth century.

Napier’s discussion of this issue is intriguing for what it reveals about his interest in mathematics but it also reveals something of his perception of the religious context in which he lived. The *Plaine Discovery* was written in forceful language and Napier’s conclusions were presented as incontrovertible facts. However, he knew how controversial dating the apocalypse would be and he went to great lengths to justify his actions regarding this issue. His main justification was that he was only attempting to predict the approximate

⁶⁹ Napier’s usage of Elias was inspired by *Carion’s Chronicle*.

⁷⁰ Geneva Bible & *PD*, p. 117. Mark 13:20 has similar content.

⁷¹ *PD*, p. 120. $1541 + 49 + 49 + 49 = 1688$.

⁷² *PD*, p. 126.

⁷³ *PD*, p. 127. A ‘stade’ or ‘stadium’ is equal to a ‘furlong’, which Napier had in the 1593 edition.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

age of the end, and not the exact date, which he conceded was forbidden by scripture. Mark 13:32 had: “But that day and houre knoweth no man, no, not the Angels which are in heauen, nether the Sonne him self, saue the Father.” However, Napier believed that this simply meant that Christ did not know the exact date as opposed to the approximate time. After all, Revelation 12:12 stated that the Devil knows his time is short, and it would be blasphemous to argue, “that Chrif t fhall be ignorant of that, which the Deuill doeth know.”⁷⁴ He claimed that the Bible contained so many clues about the end that God must have wanted his Church to know when it was approaching:

he giues vs diuers indices & foretokēs, which he could not, nor would not have forewarned, if hee had bene vtterly ignorant of the time thereof, or yet minded that we fhould neuer haue fore-knowne the age, and appearant yeares thereof, although the precife day and houre be only knowne to God.⁷⁵

Napier believed that because he was living in the last age, the rules that had previously governed prophecy no longer applied. He read Acts 1:7 literally. When Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times, or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his owne power”, he was referring only to the disciples and did not necessarily mean all of humanity. So desperate was Napier to justify his prefiguring of the end that he went so far as taking liberties with the Biblical text. Although Napier primarily employed the Geneva translation, when justifying his attempts to predict the end he employed the Vulgate’s version of Daniel 12:4, which suited his polemical agenda: “Seale the booke till the appointed time, manie fhall goe to & fro, and knowledge fhall be encreafed.”⁷⁶ The Geneva Bible had, “seale the boke til the end of the time”. Napier was determined to express his views and was not afraid to challenge the *status quo*. The officially recognised Bible in Scotland, which was the most authoritative book in his lifetime had forbidden prophesying the end of the world and had expressly forbidden the use of the Prophecy of Elias and making predictions about the future.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ PD, p. 123.

⁷⁵ PD, p. 121.

⁷⁶ PD, p. 123.

⁷⁷ A marginal note to 1 Thessalonians 5:1 had, “beware of all dreames & fantasies of men which wearie themselves & others in searching out curiously the time that the Lord shal appeare, alledging for them selues a vaine prophecie, and moste falsely ascribed to Elias that 2000 yere before the lawe, 2000 vnder the Lawe and 2000 after the law the worlde shal endure.” An annotation to 1 Thessalonians 5:20 ‘Despise not prephesying’ defined this prophesying as preaching and not predictions about the future, which by implication were to be despised. Annotations in 2 Thessalonians condemned predictions concerning the date of the Second Coming as the work of false prophets.

FINDING NAPIER IN THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

John Napier is a mysterious figure because so few of his personal papers have survived and his reputation has been dominated by rumour and innuendo. However, the *Plaine Discovery* offers an insight into its author, not least because it expressed his religious views, which were such a dominant force in people's lives in the sixteenth century. Napier's condemnation of 'Neutrals' in the *Epistle Dedicatorie* was in keeping with an attitude that prevailed in the sixteenth century and that was especially pronounced in the works of Knox and the Marian exiles.⁷⁸ They believed that absolute good was pitted against absolute evil in every aspect of human activity and expression so that a compromise or neutral position on spiritual matters was impossible. The language of absolutes was present throughout the *Plaine Discovery* and illustrates Napier's view of his fellow Protestants and anybody he felt was a threat to the spiritual welfare and political stability of the British Isles. Moreover, it reveals his self-perception as a messenger of God's revealed truth.

In the preface, *To the Godly and Christian Reader*, Napier explained something of his religious experiences as a youth in St Andrews, revealing that Christopher Goodman's sermons had made a significant impact on him. The work also reveals his Reformed doctrinal views, which emphasised justification by faith alone, election and predestination in God's providential relationship with humanity. He also repeatedly argued against the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation by arguing that Christ's body could not be in the host because it was with the Father in heaven.⁷⁹ This argument is definitely Calvinist as opposed to Lutheran, which supposed that Christ was omnipresent and therefore in the communal bread as much as anywhere else.

The *Plaine Discovery* betrays a concern with the world in which its author lived and he used fear sparked by international events to achieve his polemical ends. Demonization of Roman Catholicism was the central aim of the work and Napier was willing to go to great lengths to this end. His use of evidence was not judicial and he included every piece of material he could find to support his arguments, even when this meant he contradicted himself.⁸⁰ He was convinced of his prophetic status and that his work was not an interpretation but simply reported the truth. To dispute him was to dispute God and be damned. These facets of his personality emerged most markedly in the short

⁷⁸ See above, fn. 24

⁷⁹ *PD*, pp. 190–1

⁸⁰ For example, Napier deliberately used the Greek letters 'stigma', Ϛ and the similar looking 'final sigma', ϛ interchangeably when calculating the meaning of the Number of the beast, but elsewhere tacitly admitted that they were not the same. See *PD* pp. 168–9 & Corrigan, 2014, pp. 170–3.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

treatise he added to the 1611 edition, *A Resolution of Certaine Doubts*.⁸¹

By 1611 Napier was feeling more defensive than he had been in 1593. Unlike the first edition, the 1611 version was not dedicated to James VI, who had been crowned James I of England in 1603, nor was it published by the royal printer. Not only had James steadfastly refused to deal with the Catholic lords in the years following the Spanish Blanks Affair in a way that satisfied Napier, his religious policies had marginalised the Presbyterian radicals with whom Napier was aligned. James had also written works that denounced Scotland's Protestant Reformation as the result of sedition and advocated a greater degree of royal authority over the ecclesiastical arena than Napier would have supported.⁸² In his additional treatise Napier responded to criticisms that had been made against the first edition but did so in a way that merely reiterated his positions and denounced those that would question him.

At first glance the *Resolution* appears to address Napier's critics in a cordial tone. He wrote that he had written the piece because, "there are certaine well-affected brethren, who not in the spirit of arrogancie and contention, but in all fobrietic and meekenes, haue craved of me the refolution of some doubts".⁸³ However, he also implied that there were critics with whom he was refusing to engage: "As to the contentious and arrogant reasoners, I leaue them to the mercie of the Lord."⁸⁴ This leaves no evidence about what criticisms might have been voiced, or by whom. Instead, it simply dismissed his critics as evil and implied that God's judgement against them would be harsh. Once more, this reflected his dualistic analysis of people, their thoughts and deeds as either absolutely good or absolutely evil.

His responses, or *Resolutions*, were generally effective, serving to explain points about which people had been confused. However, the sixth stands out as revealing Napier's intransigence, even when his critics had made a good case. In Napier's *Chronology*, the Donation of Constantine, a document in which the emperor allegedly transferred control of the Western Roman Empire to the papacy, was a major turning point. It represented the beginning of the papacy's dominance over the temporal, as well as the spiritual arenas and secured its status as Antichrist. However, since Lorenzo Valla's *On the Donation of Constantine* was published in 1517, the document had been widely considered a forgery. Although some disputed Valla's claims, they were so popular that

⁸¹ *PD*, pp. 351–82.

⁸² James VI, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, Robert Waldegrave (Edinburgh, 1598) & *Basilikon Doron*, Robert Waldegrave (Edinburgh, 1599).

⁸³ *PD*, p. 356.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

it is impossible that Napier would not have known that the provenance of the *Donation* had been called into question and his failure to acknowledge this in his first edition was a glaring omission. Protestants had widely celebrated Valla's work because it called into question the centuries-old claim of the papacy to command the secular and ecclesiastical arenas. However, it played such an important role in his chronology that Napier could not bear to concede any of Valla's critiques. For example, he argued that Valla's claim that the Latin of the Donation was anachronistic meant nothing, as Valla might have been analysing a later copy.⁸⁵ However, the most telling of his arguments was that his chronology proved that the Revelation had foretold the usurping of temporal power by the church, which led to its corruption. Referring to Revelation 17:17 he wrote:

*For God hath put in their [hearts] to fulfil his wil, and to doe with one consent, for to giue their kingdome vnto the beaſte, vntil the words of God be fulfilled. Ye ſee then that Chriſtian kings muſt giue their kingdomes to the beaſt, Shall we then thinke that the Emperour ſhal be free from this decree of God?*⁸⁶

Napier believed that he was a prophet and that his commentary on the Revelation was, at least in part, divinely inspired. Describing his attempts to uncover the mysteries of the Revelation he wrote:

And ſo, when after a long time ſpent, with little knowledge, I (juſtlie diſpairing of mine owne habilitie) became truly forowfull and humble in heart then it pleaſed God, (to whome be the only glory) to giue me that grace to eſpy in ſhorte time, that wonderfull ouerture which in long time before I could not confider.⁸⁷

God had revealed the meaning of the text to Napier and to dispute his interpretations was to dispute God.

LEGACY

The *Plaine Discovery* did not spark a wave of interest in predicting the date of the Second Coming in Napier's own country. However, the work was popular and appears to have been widely discussed and disseminated in the years immediately following its publication. The fact that it was printed in England in 1594, so soon after the first edition, suggests it was instantly popular.

⁸⁵ *PD*, p. 374.

⁸⁶ *PD*, p. 375.

⁸⁷ *PD*, p. 100.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

Even Bishop William Cowper, whose views on ecclesiastical polity differed immensely from Napier's, described him as, "worthily renowned, as peerelesse indeed, and specially for his great pains taken vpon this Booke, out of rare learning, and singular Ingene", in his commentary on the Revelation.⁸⁸ By the time the 1611 edition appeared in print, the work had been translated into French and Dutch, while the first German edition was published in that year. In subsequent decades, several editions were produced in these languages. Napier's original plan to produce a Latin version never came to fruition because the popularity of the English versions and translation into several European languages rendered it unnecessary.⁸⁹

The greatest impact of the *Plaine Discovery* in the seventeenth century was probably felt in England. Joseph Mede's *Clauis Apocalyptica* of 1627 contained complex diagrams and calculations that displayed a significant debt to Napier's mathematical method of interpreting prophecy.⁹⁰ The idea that the world would end between 1688 and 1700 found new currency in the 1640s during the English Civil Wars and another English edition of the *Plaine Discovery* was published in 1645. These conflicts were deeply traumatic and, once again, people reacted by believing that the world was coming to an end and that they were engaged in a prelude to the final battle between good and evil predicted in the Revelation. Napier's prophetic statements were also condensed and combined with astrological predictions about the coming year in annual pamphlets known as the *Bloody Almanack*.⁹¹ Of course, when Napier's predictions failed to come true, the *Plaine Discovery* fell from favour, and enlightenment scholars like Baden Powell denounced the work for bringing Christianity into

⁸⁸ Williamson, A. H., 'Number and national consciousness: the Edinburgh mathematicians and Scottish Political culture at the union of the crowns' in Mason, R. A., (ed.), *Scots and Britons: Scottish political thought and the union of 1603*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 187–212, p. 198 & Cowper, W., *The workes of Mr William Cowper late Bishop of Galloway: Now newly collected into one volume. Whereunto is added a comentary on the Reuelation neuer before published. Also an alphabetically table for the finding out the principall heads contained in euery booke*, Iohn Budge (London, 1623), p. 822.

⁸⁹ *PD*, p. 101.

⁹⁰ For Napier's probable influence on Thomas Brightman's *Apocalypsis apocalypseos*, (Frankfurt, 1609), see Williamson, A., 'Empire and Anti-Empire: Andrew Melville and British Political Ideology, 1589–1605' in Mason, R. A. & Reid, S. J. (eds.), *Andrew Melville (1545–1622): Writings, Reception, and Reputation*, Ashgate (Farnham, 2014), pp. 75–99, p. 80 & Cogley, R. W., "'The Most Vile and Barbarous Nation of all the World': Giles Fletcher the Elder's *The Tartars Or, Ten Tribes* (ca. 1610)", *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (2005), pp. 781–814, p. 789.

⁹¹ For example, see *A bloody almanack: foretelling many certaine predictions which shall come to passe this present yeare 1647. With a calculation concerning the time of the day of judgement, drawn out and published by that famous astrologer. The Lord Napier of Marcheston*, I. Coe (London, 1647), Thomason/59:E.371[3].

REVEALING THE *PLAINE DISCOVERY*

disrepute.⁹² The twentieth century saw many scholars downplay the importance of the theological and metaphysical works of early modern scholars like Isaac Newton and Napier in an attempt to cast them as wholly rational, scientific thinkers. However, since the 1980s scholars have increasingly valued such texts for what they reveal about their authors and the world in which they lived.

CONCLUSION

On first inspection, the *Plaine Discovery* may appear to many modern observers to be a standard sixteenth century polemical text. The majority of the arguments and imagery Napier employed would have been familiar to his audience. Indeed, many of his ideas, such as the pope being Antichrist, would have been shared by his audience before they ever picked up the book. However, certain aspects of the work were ground-breaking and would have had a dramatic impact on the reader. For example, the imposing of dates, even approximate, onto predictions about the Second Coming was virtually unheard of and remained highly controversial after the *Plaine Discovery* was published.⁹³

Furthermore, the very nature of the chronology, the fact that it strove for mathematical precision and formed the basis of the entire work set it apart from works like Bale's *Image*, and every other chronological work that had gone before, in which dates were approximate and could only be inferred. The emphasis on mathematics in a theological work demonstrates that the kind of hard and fast divisions between intellectual pursuits that are now taken for granted simply did not exist in the minds of early modern intellectuals. Napier felt at ease using his mathematical talents to illuminate the hidden secrets of scripture, just as men like Isaac Newton employed theology along with

⁹² Powell, B., *An Historical View of the Progress of the physical and mathematical Sciences, from the earliest ages to the present time*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman (London, 1834), pp. 190–5 cit. Napier, M. p. 181, n. Baden Powell's assessment of Napier is discussed in Almond, p. 56.

⁹³ Even Napier's close friend Robert Pont demurred from predicting the end of the world in his tract which borrowed heavily from Napier and recommended the reader to the *Plaine Discovery*. See *A newe treatise of the right reckoning of yeares*, R. Waldegrave (Edinburgh, 1599), STC/349:07. Robert Rollock actively condemned the attempt in his *Lectures vpon the first and second Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians: preached by that faithfull seruant of God M. Robert Rollock, sometyme minister of the Euangell of Iesus Christ, and rector of the Colledge in Edinburgh*, Robert Charteris (Edinburgh, 1606), STC/21281. See Corrigan, 2014, Part IV.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN NAPIER

alchemy and natural philosophy to reveal the secrets of creation. Napier used every and all means at his disposal to achieve the polemical ends for which he was striving. The several editions of the *Plaine Discovery* and Napier's return to and defence of his contentions in the 1611 editions illustrates the lifelong prominence of theological and, more specifically, eschatological concerns in his mind. Those concerns never faded as his mathematical works increasingly consumed his spare time. The fact that the *Plaine Discovery* was notable for its emphasis on mathematical calculations shows how remarkable an intellect Napier must have had. His interest in mathematics as a tool for making the world a better place and understanding God's creation more perfectly could be seen throughout all of his published works.

<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-53281-3>

The Life and Works of John Napier

Rice, B.; Gonzalez-Velasco, E.; Corrigan, A.

2017, XVIII, 994 p. 119 illus., 21 illus. in color.,

Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-53281-3