

The Old Made New: Medieval Repurposing of Prophecies

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In the Middle Ages there was intense interest in predictions about the future. This is not merely because there is a natural human desire to know what is going to happen next, so one can prepare for it. In the medieval period, ideas about the future were framed within a specifically Christian context that believed history would culminate in Judgement Day. One of the peculiarities of medieval thinking about the future is therefore that it was conceived as a time which was simultaneously ‘unknown’, because it was yet to come, and ‘known’, because its endpoint at the Second Coming of Christ was foretold in the Bible.

Here I focus on the fact that many of the predictions popular in the Middle Ages were not novel creations but in fact had previously appeared in a different form in older texts but were then recycled into a new context. This reuse of ‘past’ prophecy necessarily involved the reinterpretation of existing material. In short, it required the repurposing of this material. This repurposing can be observed across many different genres, from free-floating texts predicting the future to the books

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of the Bible. It applied regardless of whether such texts were written predominantly in predictive mode or with a more historical orientation.

In this essay I examine the ways in which prophecy was repurposed, chiefly in the period ca. 1050–1200 on the basis of a case study. I argue that the reinterpretation of older prophetic texts was not just about keeping them current. Instead, my paper treats their reuse as a window onto medieval approaches to time. The reception of both biblical and non-biblical prophetic texts required a particular type of reinterpretation: readers had to move narratives from one temporal context into another. In each case, as they repurposed their materials, readers had to find ways to connect anew with the future set out therein. How did they do this? This question is at the heart of the present discussion.

We must begin by defining some terms and concepts. Every period and culture has its own way of understanding the relationship between the past, the present, and the future, that is, between historical time, current time, and times yet to occur. In modern historiography, the relationship among these three categories (or levels) of time is often called a ‘temporality’. The way a society approaches this relationship is then referred to as a ‘regime of temporality’. Although this latter phrase has been much deployed recently in studies of time, unhelpfully, there does not seem to be a single agreed definition of it.¹ Here I follow Jordheim, who has reviewed current usages of the term and conceives it as a “set way of understanding and dealing with time according to which the relationship between the past, present, and future, and thus the direction, speed, and rhythm of history, can be defined” (2014: 501).² That is, regimes of temporality are ways of understanding time.

While I find Jordheim’s definition helpful, it is an umbrella term. Other scholars have offered their own particular examples of regimes of temporality tailored to the material they discuss. Unfortunately none of the regimes of temporality in the existing historiography fully captures the issues considered in this paper. For present purposes therefore

¹The term ‘regime of temporality’ (or, often, synonymously the term ‘temporal regime’) developed around Francois Hartog’s notion of the ‘regime of historicity’. Hartog uses that phrase in his reflections on how history is experienced, conceived of, and written down in different periods, see Hartog (2015: 8–9 and 106). For further discussion of the term ‘regime of temporality’, see Jordheim (2014: 498–518); see also n. 3, below.

²See also Jordheim (2014: 499–501 and 509).

I propose two other regimes to which I shall refer as the *chronological* regime of temporality and the *synchronous* regime of temporality.

In the chronological regime, events are understood to have occurred in the past, are now completed, and have no further ongoing significance. By contrast, the synchronous regime considers that past events may still be significant as symbols, metaphors, allegories, or the prefiguration of later events. Under the synchronous regime, therefore, the significance of past events survives the passage of time; this contrasts with the chronological regime of temporality. Both regimes (and the distinction between them) are rooted in their approach to the reading and interpretation of texts. I say more about this later. I have adopted these terms—the synchronous and the chronological—to emphasise the attitude of medieval readers to the temporal context of the events, persons, gestures, etc. they consider.

As a way of discussing these regimes of temporality, in the following I explore the repurposing of two distinct types of material not normally considered together: first, Old Testament narratives about the Jewish prophets, and second, the anonymous Prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl, a prediction with roots in late antiquity. In this essay, I juxtapose their reception in a common intellectual environment. The nature of that environment will emerge below.³

My approach offers a new way of examining free-floating predictive narratives: my primary concern is not so much with how predictive texts function as a vehicle to express social, political, and religious crises as with the broader conceptual toolkit with which medieval people approached free-floating prophecy. In particular, I want to explore the role illustrated by the “set ways of understanding time” (that is, the ‘regimes of temporality’) that had formed in readers’ minds as a result of reading and interpreting scripture in other contexts.

Erich Auerbach was among the first scholars to emphasise that the techniques of reading and interpreting scripture were so culturally pervasive that they “often enter[ed] into the medieval view of everyday

³This approach also departs from current studies of medieval reworkings of the Tiburtina (and its extensive manuscript transmission), which, although they acknowledge the impact of the liturgy, concentrate not on regimes of temporality but on the role of memory in shaping medieval approaches to the text, see Holdenried (2006: 111–126).

reality” (1984: 61).⁴ He did much to clarify the cultural influence of exegesis in his seminal paper “Figura” (ibid.).⁵ Yet, despite this work’s immense contribution to our understanding of Judeo-Christian temporal concepts and structures, regrettably, it is often absent from the bibliographies of subsequent studies devoted to ‘Time’.⁶ It has much to tell us, however, about foundational epistemological experiences with prophecy in the medieval world, because Auerbach stressed in particular the technique of reading the Old Testament *figuratively*, that is, as a foretelling of real people and events in the Gospel. For example, he stated that “the naming of Joshua-Jesus is a *Realprophetie* or ‘phenomenal prophecy’ or prefiguration of the future saviour” (Auerbach 1984: 29).⁷ In using the term *Realprophetie* Auerbach talks about the figural realism of the Old Testament whereby a real (i.e. historical) event, person, object, or gesture in it prefigures another, later one that is also a historical reality. This approach rested on the belief that all history was merely a component part of the greater history of salvation.

This belief made it difficult for the Bible’s interpreters to distinguish its phases by applying the categories of ‘past’, ‘present’, and ‘future’ to scripture. As Auerbach noted, Bible hermeneutics reflects this: according to its rules, events and people in the Bible could be read either literally (as historical occurrences), or allegorically. The allegorical approach treats the whole Bible as a kind of hyper-extended metaphor (or collection of metaphors) whose placement along the chronological continuum

⁴Originally published in German in 1938, also reprinted in Auerbach, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (1967): 55–92. In this essay I cite the English translation by Ralph Mannheim (see Auerbach 1984: 61). For “Figura’s” continued importance, see Balke and Engelmeier (2016) and Auerbach (2014), with an introduction by James I. Porter.

⁵For an appreciation of Auerbach’s impact, see Lerer (1996).

⁶See, for example, Hunt (2008), Munn (1992) (with “Notes on the Future” on pages 112–116), and Burke (2004). Auerbach’s work is absent, too, from Koselleck’s seminal study of the history of time in which the analysis of language alongside that of philological and hermeneutical paradigms and practices plays a key part, see Koselleck (2004), first published in German as Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik Geschichtlicher Zeiten* (1979).

⁷Auerbach’s translator, Ralph Mannheim, translated the German word *Realprophetie* as ‘phenomenal prophecy’, a somewhat curious choice. I assume that it is not meant in the sense of ‘remarkable, outstanding’, but is related to the term ‘phenomenon’, that is, meaning ‘fact’ or ‘occurrence’ (and perhaps to the philosophical term ‘phenomenological’), see Auerbach (1984: 29–34).

was not important per se because everything referred either back or forward to something else. In terms purely of exegetical technique, the allegorical approach in turn could be subdivided further, so Old Testament events could be viewed typologically (as prefigurations of other events and people, typically those to appear in the New Testament) or by allegorising them further (to give them some other spiritual sense). A scriptural passage, therefore, might be given either a literal reading, as a straightforward narrative of an event that had occurred in the past but that had no further significance (placing it in my terms in the chronological regime of temporality), or a typological/allegorical reading, giving the episode some continuing contemporary or future meaning (in my terms, putting it in the synchronous regime of temporality). Note that, in medieval terminology, this allegorical or metaphorical approach was called a ‘spiritual understanding’ of scripture.⁸ For the purposes of this paper, allegorical, typological, and figural exegetical approaches are treated the same. There are differences between these approaches and in other circumstances they may have different meanings and be applied in different ways, but not in the context of my argument here.⁹

For now, I merely note that the Old Testament pre-figurings, which Auerbach called “*figurae*” or “types,” found later fulfilment and hence meaning in the Gospel. Nevertheless, this new meaning was only provisional: as Auerbach reminds the reader ultimately ‘figures’ are “tentative forms of something eternal and timeless” (1984: 59). In this sense, they demand a metaphorical, allegorical, or figural/typological rather than a literal interpretation. Consequently, these modes of interpretation embody a flexible attitude to the temporal concepts ‘past’, ‘present’, and ‘future’, since for the purposes of textual interpretation all can be understood as being simultaneously significant (in my terms, putting them in the synchronous regime of temporality).

⁸See, for example, “per mysterium spiritalis intellectus” and “per spiritalem intelligentiam”, n. 15, below.

⁹In this essay I use either the conjoined form *typological/allegorical* or *figural/typological* because “in figural interpretation one thing stands for another, since one thing represents and signifies the other, [so] figural interpretation is ‘allegorical’ in the widest sense” (Auerbach 1984: 53–54). However, Auerbach also observes that sometimes typology and allegory can be treated as different, for while typology is anchored in concrete events, allegories are often ethical or mythical interpretations which may not be historical and are not historically anchored in concrete events (whether past, present, or future).

This attitude first arose within the narrow confines of Bible study but soon became a widely applicable habit of mind. It also, as Auerbach noted, “provide[d] the medieval interpretation of history with its general foundation” (ibid., 60–61). Other scholars have considered this relationship between figural/typological interpretation and forms of history writing in the Middle Ages.¹⁰ Here I shall consider the pervasive cultural influence of exegesis in relation to a different genre, that of non-scriptural prophecy. I shall do this by asking how patterns in reader responses to one example of this genre (the Sibylla Tiburtina) map onto the regimes of temporality connected to biblical exegesis. My particular interest lies here with the chronological and synchronous regimes associated with the interpretation of Auerbach’s *Realprophetie* (that is, with the Old Testament: it provided the vast majority of *Realprophetie* in the Bible).¹¹

In order to approach the reception and repurposing of biblical texts I begin with a letter of spiritual advice written by Peter Damian in 1069.¹² Since later I shall turn to the Sibyl, note that this letter is almost contemporary with the earliest surviving manuscript of the Prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl, dated 1047.¹³ In the letter Peter Damian presents an allegorical treatment of the Old Testament Exodus narrative, that is, of the journey of the Hebrew people out of Egypt led by Moses and Aaron. Peter’s focus is on the people’s 42 rest-stops in the desert, which he allegorises as so many stages in the interior transformation of a monk striving towards spiritual perfection.¹⁴

Peter championed the view that Exodus had an ongoing significance, giving us an excellent example of the repurposing of scripture based on the belief that it represented a *Realprophetie*, that is, he took an allegorical approach. He looked upon the Exodus narrative as

¹⁰See, for example, Boynton (2006) and Spiegel (2016). See also (in this volume) Hoffarth and Kraft. On a different albeit related note Wiegandt (in this volume) illustrates allegory’s continuing importance in the modern period for articulating the relationship between different categories of time.

¹¹Other important strands in the study of time in the medieval period cannot be considered here, for example, ‘social time’: Adam (2004), Burke (2004), ‘measuring time’: Borst (1993), Stern (2003), ‘time and creation’: Dales (1990).

¹²Peter Damian (2005: 103–130 [Letter 160]) (translated into English by Owen J. Blum and Irvn M. Resnick). For the Latin text, see Reindel (1993: 100–134).

¹³See Holdenried (2016).

¹⁴See Ex 12:35–17:2; the 42 rest-stops have their source in Nm 33:3–48. Peter’s exegesis of them relies on Jerome, “Letter 78” (see Peter Damian 2005: 110, n. 32).

totally fulfilled for us through the mystery that underlies our spiritual understanding. For whatever then occurred visibly, is adapted to our need by *allegorical interpretation*, as the age long past is made to serve us at the present time. ... We too came forth from the ordeal of Egyptian servitude, and strive to enter the promised land by many stages, that is, by varied advancement in virtue. (Peter Damian 2005: 107 [9] [my emphasis])¹⁵

Peter's statement that Old Testament events are 'made to serve us at the present time' implies that even as time passed events remained significant (at least at the metaphorical level); they remained 'in play', that is, they could have a *current* meaning regardless of when they occurred in the past. Events such as the Flood, Exodus, the Babylonian Exile, etc. were all equally current:¹⁶ that is, although separated from each other and from the moment Peter wrote by periods of time of varying length, from his perspective all were now simultaneously significant regardless of when they occurred in the past. For this reason, I have dubbed this approach the synchronous regime of temporality: all these events, people, objects, and so forth had (and continued to have) simultaneous significance.

There was good authority for Peter's view: the Apostle Paul said the events of the Exodus befell the Jews "as figures" so that Christians should not lust after evil things (Cor 10:6) (Vulgate).¹⁷ But Peter Damian was also well aware that not everyone shared his view of the story of the Jews in the desert. Elsewhere in his letter, he mentions "querulous person[s],"

¹⁵Translated by Blum, who renders the two very similar phrases *spiritalis intellectus* and *spiritalem intelligentiam* by two very different English phrases ('spiritual understanding' and 'allegorical interpretation'). On this point, I agree with the translator because application of *spiritalis intelligentia* involves allegory; see van Liere (2014: 114–115). Cf. Reindel (1993: 104–105 [my emphasis]): "[Notandum autem quoniam omnis ille discursus et quicquid illic gestum hystorialiter legitur,] totum in nobis *per mysterium spiritualis intellectus* impletur. Quod enim tunc visibiliter gestum est, nobis *per spiritalem intelligentiam* congruit, nostro tempore vetus illud saeculum militavit. Haec enim, ut ait apostolus, 'in figura contingebant illis'. Nos enim de fornace Aegyptiacae servitutis egredimur, et terram repositionis ingredi per plurima mansionum loca, hoc est per per diversa virtutum incrementa conamur".

¹⁶Cf. András in this volume, pp. 71–74.

¹⁷... "haec autem in figura facta sunt nostri ut non simus concupiscentes malorum sicut et illi concupierunt." This passage had also been noted in Peter's source: Jerome's "Letter 78," see n. 18, below.

as well as “some people who are ignorant of God’s plan.” Peter does not identify them (*Letters* 2005: 107 [8]).¹⁸ Whoever they were, however, regarding their views, Peter expresses the concern that

[the] people who are ignorant of God’s plan argue that it is frivolous and superfluous to read the account of these rest stops in the church [i.e. the Exodus account of the wandering in the desert]. For they are of the opinion that knowing or reading about this matter serves no useful purpose whatsoever, thinking that [Old Testament] history narrated only what has happened, and that this event has now passed away with age, and that today it should have no further interest for us. (Peter Damian 2005: 106 [7])¹⁹

Peter Damian here reports an instance in which the past was perceived in terms of separateness and discontinuity. In Peter’s letter this particular perception of the past as a time cut off from the present implies the use of the technique of literal exegesis whose purpose is to recover the historical meaning of the text (the “Old Testament ... narrates what has happened”²⁰). We cannot say with certainty whether the perception came first (so that the choice of exegetical technique reflects it) or vice versa (that is, that the application of literal exegesis resulted in a sense of discontinuity and separateness from the past). Whatever the case, together this perception of separateness from the past and the literal exegetical technique fit into what I referred to earlier as the ‘chronological’ regime of temporality.

¹⁸Cf. Reindel (1993): “Agrediar ergo, frater mi, si tibi onerosum non est, mansionum illarum figuras summatim ac succincte perstringere, et quod ex dictis patrum indagare potuerim, compendiosis verbis breviter annotare, ut *querulosus* quispiam ex gustu micarum labentium colligat, quam nectareis dapibus pleni ferculi mensa redundat” (p. 104 [my emphasis]). On those who are ignorant of God’s plan, see n. 19, below. Note that Peter’s source (Jerome, “Letter 78”) makes no mention of such querulous persons, nor of their approach to the Old Testament, so this must be Peter Damian’s observation about his own time, see Jerome, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, ed. Hilberg (1970: ep. 78).

¹⁹Cf. Reindel (1993: 103): “... cum nonnulli divinae rationis ignari frivolum conquerantur atque superfluum, ut in aeclesia legatur istarum descriptio mansionum. Arbitrantur enim haec scire vel legere nil penitus utilitatis afferre, putantes quod rem tantummodo gestam narret hystoria, et hanc cum ipsa tunc vetustate transisse, neque nunc ad nostram aliquatinus notitiam pertinere”.

²⁰See n. 19, above.

Ironically, to clarify my understanding of the chronological regime of temporality I can only offer a metaphorical explanation of the term, although in my defence, I note that Lynn Hunt has commented:

Time ... requires metaphor. It flows like a river, accelerates like an engine, flies like a winged chariot, freezes like instant ice, stands still like a heart between beats. ... Without the metaphors ... the fourth dimension would be exceedingly difficult to grasp. Linguists have noted that it is virtually impossible to talk about time without invoking motion (wiggling skirts, engines, chariots, arrows) and spatial content (short, long). (2008: 1)

So perhaps the addition of another metaphor to the stock may be of value. When I refer to the ‘chronological’ regime of temporality I have in mind a particular linear conception of time, defined by its forward-looking direction of gaze. In other words, this regime requires that time is imagined as a river, or, as I prefer to think of it, similar to the mechanism of a ratchet (a tool that can be turned in only one direction but not the other).²¹

By analogy, in the ‘chronological’ regime of temporality, the ‘present’ is seen as one click in a continuous series of clicks on time’s ratchet, which is capable of moving only forward towards the future, with no possibility of a backward motion. This ‘ratchet’ view characterises the chronological regime of temporality: it implies that both ‘present’ and ‘future’ time are sharply separated from the ‘past’. This view of time is that taken by the querulous persons to whom Peter Damian refers; he castigates their position as “insane” and “nonsense.”²²

This criticism of the chronological regime of temporality, and hence of the literal exegetical technique, necessarily implies a passionate endorsement of its opposite, the typological/allegorical mode of interpretation and hence of the synchronous regime of temporality. This is no surprise because modern scholarship generally considers this mode

²¹Both images (river and ratchet) imply forward motion, but the image of the flowing waters of a river makes it harder to isolate and locate specific moments, i.e., to pinpoint the ‘present’.

²²Cf. Reindel (1993: 103–104): “Sed si suptiliter ipsa scripturae verba perpendimus, quam extremae dementiae sit hoc dicere, luce clarius invenimus. ... Et quis hoc audeat dicere, immo quis temerario praesumat ore garrere, ut quod Domino iubente conscribitur, nil utilitatis, nulla conferat emolumenta salutis?”.

to have been culturally pervasive in the Middle Ages; indeed, the synchronous regime of temporality that flows from the allegorical mode (and which blurs the distinction between the temporal categories of ‘past’, ‘present’, and ‘future’ because the significance of past events survives) is seen as the default setting of medieval culture. Peter Damian’s observations, however, remind us that although he preferred the synchronous regime of temporality there was another one, which he rejected, the chronological regime of temporality. As an aside, note that Peter’s letter also shows that medieval individuals clearly possessed the mental tools to think in a manner that contemporary scholars have labelled as ‘modern’ but which medieval scholars simply called “ignorant.”²³ This note challenges the way ‘modern’ temporalities are conceived and labelled. However, further discussion of this lies outside the scope of this essay. Returning to the issue at hand, recall that although he disapproved of it, Peter did at least recognise the existence of alternative ways of interpreting the Exodus narrative with different temporal perspectives on past events.

I now turn from the repurposing of a scriptural text considered to be prophetic (Exodus) to approaches to a non-scriptural predictive text. Often the very *raison d’être* of such texts (that is, to illuminate the future) depended on how they used the temporal spectrum of past, present, and future. This concept is certainly true in the case of a Christian eschatological narrative we know today as the Sibylla Tiburtina (henceforth Tiburtina). Before I attend to the temporal structures embedded in this work, some summary comments on its dissemination and evolution are required. Anyone seeking to understand this has to unravel roughly five centuries of textual history to unpick its fourth-century core from the medieval text preserved in the earliest eleventh-century manuscript, a time span providing ample opportunity for the deposition of different layers of amendments.²⁴ For example, at least four Latin versions

²³See Peter Damian, cited above, n. 19. The sharp separation of the present from the past which characterises the chronological regime of temporality is often regarded as the defining feature that marks a distinctively ‘modern’ understanding of time; see, for example, Koselleck (2004). For further discussion of the label ‘modern’ in relationship to temporality, see Spiegel (2016) and Jordheim (2014): especially p. 506.

²⁴See Holdenried (2006: 131–146) and, for a specialist discussion of the Tiburtina’s pre-manuscript history (c. 400–1000), see id. 2014. See Holdenried (2006: 231) for a full bibliography of printed editions of the Sibylla Tiburtina.

survive, showing that the reuse of prophecy was not merely—in the worst sense—mechanistic recopying. Rather, as the text migrated from the Eastern part of the Empire to the medieval West, ‘the future’ which it describes was reinterpreted to apply to other people and other situations. In the Tiburtina’s literary history between ca. 400 and 1050 we can, therefore, observe a constant repurposing of the prophecy by anonymous redactors.²⁵ This observation in turn requires the application of regimes of temporality, that is, of the set ways of understanding and contending with time that served to define the direction of history and the relationship between the past, the present, and future.

To better understand the relationship between medieval regimes of temporalities and the Tiburtina, let us first consider the text’s temporal structure. As one of its framing devices, the narrative is structured as a world chronicle presenting a narration of historical events spread over the course of nine ages, or, in the text’s own terminology, *generationes*.²⁶ This historical narration starts with events in ancient Rome, includes an account of the birth and passion of Christ, then narrates (more or less chronologically) the deeds of various kings and emperors, and finally ends with a description of Judgement Day at the End of the World when Christ returns. Summarily, the historical narration included in the Tiburtina mentions secular and sacred events in ancient Rome, the rulers of Egypt, the *rex grecorum*, and Lombard, Carolingian, Ottonian, and Hohenstaufen rulers; and also, still within historical time (albeit a historical time yet to come), a last ruler who will defend mankind against the Antichrist before abdicating at Christ’s second coming.

In the Tiburtina, then, time is understood as a series of real, concrete events occurring across the temporal trajectory of past, present, and future. The text also describes a universal future for all mankind, culminating in Christ’s return and the End of the World. On a meta-level this narrative thus expresses the dominant idea of the medieval period, that the flow of time was identical with the history of salvation which would come to an end with Judgement Day. The text’s location within this meta-timeframe is reinforced by the associations of the very striking and memorable acrostic poem that concludes the Tiburtina’s narrative.

²⁵This reframing took various forms, some of which we can only reconstruct hypothetically because the surviving manuscript evidence is all post-1047, see Holdenried (2014).

²⁶The Tiburtina’s terminology here also mimics genealogical ways of ordering time, see, for example, Gallois (2007: 110–121).

The acrostic depicts Judgement Day, a subject matter which puts the poem into the meta-timeframe because it describes the culmination of salvation history. However, this was not the poem's only context, because these acrostic verses also had a life separate from the rest of the Tiburtina as part of the readings from the Christmas liturgy. I return to this below.

For now, let us note that the temporal interpretation of the Tiburtina was not static. As the Tiburtina circulated it had to be constantly interpreted afresh because the events it 'predicted' consistently failed to occur. As mentioned, this reinterpretation was expressed by amendments to the text itself. These revisions give an insight into this process of reinterpretation. For current purposes, this is best illustrated by the Tiburtina's regnal list, a sequence of rulers that culminated in the Last Emperor, destined to fight the Antichrist. Earlier scholars often assumed that the text's king list was constantly updated so as to suggest that the Tiburtina's prophecies were always on the verge of fulfilment. However, to judge by the text's surviving textual variations (including headings and marginalia), many of its scribes and readers were ambivalent whether to regard the prophecy as being about the past, about the present, or about the future. In particular, reactions to the text were very seldom shaped by the expectation that a current ruler would fulfil the role of a last Emperor as predicted in the Tiburtina. I have found little evidence that anticipation of this particular part of the events of the future generated changes to the narrative. However, the king list virtually ceased to be updated in manuscripts after the twelfth century. From that point on it seems that the text was no longer read as if the text's expectation of a last ruler would be realised imminently in the 'now.'²⁷

Indeed, somewhat surprisingly, given that we are working with a seemingly predictive narrative, my study of the Tiburtina and its medieval audience has revealed the impact of *memory* on the interpretation of the work. Rather than taking it as a cue to think about the role a secular ruler would play in the future (as modern scholars have often wrongly assumed) (Holdenried 2006: 13–30), the Tiburtina's medieval scribes and readers repeatedly recalled that the acrostic poem which concludes its narrative was the *Vos inquam* homily from the Christmas liturgy.

²⁷As is all too rarely acknowledged, a future application (i.e. updating of the regnal list) is also rare in the period *before* 1200, see Holdenried (2006: 20–22 and 41–52).

The significance of this from a temporal perspective is that *Vos inquam* was not about the future: it is an excerpt from a sermon that adduces evidence from Jewish and pagan prophets that Christ really was the Messiah. In other words, it provides non-Christian authority about the authenticity of the Incarnation, a historical event.²⁸ Thus, a backward-looking approach to the Tiburtina was at least as common as a forward-looking ‘prophetic’ attitude.

In this regard, it is striking that the text continued to be copied frequently into the fifteenth century, long after the regnal list fossilised around 1200. If, as seems likely, during this last part of its life, the text was still being given some sort of future-facing interpretation, that interpretation cannot have understood the work as a political prophecy because the rulers indicated in the king list as potential Last Emperors were all now long dead. Indeed, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, post-1200, if not before, the surviving manuscript evidence suggests the prophecy had a different forward-looking interpretation (at least sometimes). This second future-oriented interpretation maintained the text’s expectation of a Last Judgement but transformed its eschatological message from a universal one into an essentially personal meaning that did not require contemporary political relevance (Holdenried 2006: 93–108).

In the terms I have been discussing in this chapter we can therefore observe a change in the way the text was used, away from a literal interpretation of its historico-prophetic content (the Last Emperor narrative) towards an approach shaped by the broader cultural tradition of reading biblical *Realprophetie* allegorically. In the following, I view this change through the prism of medieval regimes of temporality to explore how this shift may have been influenced by mental habits for handling time that were the natural by-products of the application of certain techniques of exegesis.

There were two chief means for the Tiburtina’s audience to come to understand the rules of scriptural interpretation: one was direct study of the Bible, and the other was to learn exegetical techniques from the liturgy. During the Divine Office, extracts from scripture are recited

²⁸This connection left a significant impact on the text’s manuscript tradition in the form of marginal annotations and amendments to the text, see Holdenried (2006: esp. 111–130).

or sung, together with commentaries, that is, with extracts from actual works of exegesis (Boynton 2006: 64–65). Commenting specifically on the lessons of Matins, it has been noted that they

represent the forms of biblical commentary and theological discourse that monks heard and read most frequently and at greatest length. While hagiographical lessons offered models of behavior for the monks to contemplate and emulate, exegetical lessons provided examples of interpretation and homiletic techniques. (ibid., 67)

In short, those participating in the Divine Office could learn from the liturgy how to approach the interpretation of text and also as a result, for current purposes, how to understand time. Note, too, that the foregoing quotation is about the lessons of Matins, and that the acrostic poem from the Tiburtina was itself one of those very lessons. It would seem natural for participants in the liturgy to associate such a text with the exegetical lessons that also accompanied it in the rest of the Divine Office.

Thus, in addition to study of the Bible, the liturgy could be another important conduit for the transmission of regimes of temporality based on exegetical techniques, in our case the literal/historical technique and the typological/allegorical technique previously discussed with reference to Peter Damian's letter.²⁹ In the liturgy, the typological/allegorical technique was particularly prominent because the Divine Office presents the faithful with interpretations of the broader meaning of Christ's life and of other sacred events within the history of salvation. As noted earlier, a typological/allegorical reading of a scriptural passage gave an episode some continuing contemporary or future meaning: this produced a multi-layered sense of time which "blur[red] the distinction between the distant past ... and the present experience of liturgical time and commemoration" (Boynton 2006: 37). Different categories of time (past, present, future) thus coexisted in the liturgy without being perceived as necessarily separate or distinct from one another. As noted,

²⁹Note that here I only consider the liturgy's role in transmitting exegetical works and techniques (and their attendant regimes of temporality). Of course, the liturgy was also itself the subject of exegetical works about the divine office, which thus developed ideas about time. This point lies outside the scope of the present discussion, but see, for example, Czock (2016).

this perception of time is the key ingredient of the synchronous regime of temporality and was not limited to the confines of the Divine Office. As Boynton has illustrated with reference to Gregory of Catino (ca. 1060–1135), a monastic historian and near-contemporary of Peter Damian (d. 1072), these temporal structures of the liturgy (which rested on exegetical techniques) could shape an individual's thinking. This idea opens up new avenues for thinking about the post-1200 phase in the history of the Tiburtina's repurposing. As mentioned, in this phase the regnal list was no longer updated to include contemporary rulers, implying that the Tiburtina's scribes were no longer much interested in this part of the text; the text had ceased to relate to the political future.

How does the emergence of such seeming indifference to the prophecy fit the chronological and synchronous regimes of temporality of the medieval period? A sideways glance at Peter Damian's letter is instructive here. Peter Damian reports a reading of the events in the Old Testament as having "passed away with age" and as serving "no useful purpose whatsoever"; he blames this on ignorance of the rules of allegorical Bible interpretation. Without allegory, there is a sense of discontinuity between past and present. The Tiburtina, of course, is not a scriptural narrative. It is also a descriptive, not allusive, narrative. On no front does it therefore invite an allegorising approach: if anything, it discourages it. The text's only figurative element, the dream of the nine suns which become progressively more bloodstained, is already presented together with its interpretation; that is, the text states that the nine suns represent the nine *generationes* of mankind, cutting short any attempts to discover hidden meanings. The text positively demands a historical/literal approach. Yet this was not how it was approached, at least after about 1200.

Perhaps, as Peter Damian's letter suggests, the literal/historical approach brings with it a sense of discontinuity from the past, or as he puts it, the sense "that this event has now passed away with age, and that today it should have no further interest for us." Conceivably it was this sense of discontinuity that weakened the impulse among the Tiburtina's scribes to connect the past with the present and the future, that is, it weakened the very impulse needed to keep the list of rulers in the Tiburtina up to date. As the surviving Tiburtina manuscripts show, this impulse faded drastically towards the end of the twelfth century.

Why did this happen at that time? One can only speculate, but it is striking that from the late eleventh century there had been a marked resurgence of interest in literal readings of the Bible, and by the mid-twelfth

century the practice had been taken up by the Paris schools.³⁰ Allowing for a small time lag so these new ideas could percolate down to local scribes, this is just the moment when the Tiburtina's regnal list ceased to be updated. The fact that the fossilisation of the regnal list and new departures in exegesis occurred very roughly at the same time has never been noted before. Whether this change in exegetical preference did indeed spill over into approaches to the Tiburtina remains unknowable, but the possibility that it may have done so is well worth considering and might explain this, one of the most noteworthy changes in the text's development.

The Tiburtina's textual link with the liturgy also embedded it in another temporal structure. As Boynton explains, "the structure of the liturgy ... links widely separate events ..., constructing a perception of time as multilayered simultaneity rather than linear progression" (2006: 36). In short, we have here the synchronous regime of temporality with its blurring of the boundaries between past, present, and future. This framework permitted readers to connect, as present-day individuals, to the now distant events of Christ's life and His resurrection, which the Tiburtina describes; it invited readers to reflect on the significance of these events (especially of Christ's death) for their own salvation. Again, the Tiburtina's surviving manuscript evidence suggests that readers adopted precisely such a reading repeatedly over the course of its literary life. They recognised in the Tiburtina the Gospel story of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection and then, on the basis of habits of mind fostered by the liturgy's commemoration of Christ, in reading it these readers reflected on their own chances of salvation on Judgement Day, dramatically depicted by the Tiburtina's concluding acrostic (Holdenried 2006: 93–108).

Quite naturally when doing this they adopted the synchronous regime of temporality, and read the Tiburtina on the basis that, as Peter Damian expressed it in another context, "whatever then occurred visibly, is adapted to our need by allegorical interpretation, as the age long past is made to serve us at the present time."

In sum, the way the Tiburtina's prediction of the future was received by its audience (mostly monastic/clerical) reveals the operation of two different regimes of temporality, the chronological and the synchronous

³⁰This point in time involved, for example, scholars such as Andrew of St. Victor (d. 1175), see van Liere (2014: 130–139).

regimes: both were rooted in the hermeneutic rules of scriptural exegesis but could also be applied to the genre of non-scriptural prophecy. This point is important because Peter Damian's letter is a discussion *about* Old Testament texts whereas the changes to the non-scriptural Sibylla Tiburtina are changes *to the text itself*. Despite this difference, both sets of reactions represent reader responses, albeit in different forms, and show readers applying the same two regimes of temporality (synchronous and chronological) across different types of prophetic material.

This response is significant because in the Middle Ages reading any prophecy involved using a complex set of ideas about the organisation of three levels of time (past, present, and future) and their position in relationship to each other. The material discussed in this chapter suggests that the way these relationships were understood might vary from reader to reader, but only within limited parameters; this is because the normative rules for understanding time in the Middle Ages arose from the exegetical techniques adopted by readers when interpreting a text. Readers thus had only a limited set of options from which to choose. If they chose to adopt the synchronous regime, the prophecy was repurposed by treating it as a metaphor and thus rendering it atemporal, that is, timelessly applicable across past, present, and future. If they chose the chronological regime, on the other hand, then, like the ratchet, they repurposed the prophecy by shunting it forward in time to keep it current, lest, as Peter Damian's querulous persons said, it became redundant. Note that although I refer here to a reader's 'choice', that may not have always been a conscious decision, but rather part of an almost unthinking approach to textual interpretation and everything that flowed from that.³¹

Last, note that the consequence of a reader's choice of regime of temporality sometimes has surprising effects. For example, as I have argued, the chronological regime could render the past separate and detached from the present, deserving only indifference from the reader: this is often considered a 'modern' perspective. Somewhat ironically then, it was precisely the regime of temporality with the most obvious connection to the act of updating prophecy that may have also discouraged such a response.

³¹As an example of this, see Fleming (2013: 82).

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