

Merlin as a prophet in the manuscripts of the Chroniques des Bretons and Jean de Wavrin's Chroniques d'Angleterre

Article

Published Version

Fabry-Tehranchi, I. (2018) Merlin as a prophet in the manuscripts of the Chroniques des Bretons and Jean de Wavrin's Chroniques d'Angleterre. Reading Medieval Studies, 44. pp. 81-143. ISSN 0950-3129 (ISBN 9780704915824) Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/87900/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Merlin as a prophet in the manuscripts of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques d'Angleterre* (15th c.)¹

Irène Fabry-Tehranchi

British Library

In this paper, I will examine how the *Prophecies of Merlin* by Geoffrey of Monmouth are textually and visually integrated into French prose adaptations of the history of the kings of Britain circulating in Burgundian circles in the 15th century.² I will study their transmission through codicology, philology and iconography, analysing the translation and interpretation of Merlin's prophecies in the illuminated manuscripts of the anonymous *Chroniques des Bretons* and Jean de Wavrin's *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretaigne*, also known as *Chroniques d'Angleterre*. They shed light on the practice of adaptation and historical writing at the court of Burgundy, and on its bibliophile culture. These late-medieval French prose adaptations of Merlin's *Prophecies* show the extraordinary reach of the Galfridian tradition, its vitality over centuries, and the way it crosses linguistic and geographical boundaries.

Jean de Wavrin, son of a Flemish nobleman, Robert, Count of Wavrin, who was the seneschal and chambellan of Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy, fought in the Hundred Years War on the Burgundian and English side. He served Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, compiling and writing a story of Great Britain up to the year 1471. Jean de Wavrin was a book collector and a bibliophile who gave his name to the artist called the Master of Wavrin. The first volume of his *Chroniques d'Angleterre* survives in several manuscripts, three of which were illuminated around 1470-80 by an artist called after this work the "Master of the Chronique d'Angleterre" (see: London, British

Library, MS Royal 15.E.IV; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 74; and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2534). Textually, this section of Jean de Wavrin's chronicles is based on the *Chroniques des Bretons*, an anonymous translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* produced in Burgundian circles at the beginning of the 15th century.³ This text survives in four manuscripts, among which Paris, BnF fr. 2806 is the most fully illustrated.⁴ These chronicles which tell the mythical origins of the kingdom of Britain, translated from Latin into the vernacular, and disseminated through luxury manuscripts, show the wide range of historical writings at the Burgundian court and the lasting authority of Geoffrey of Monmouth. According to Géraldine Veyseyre, the careful production and illumination of these manuscripts and the didactic aspect of the translation suggest that the *Chroniques des Bretons* were the product of a commission aimed at a noble or wealthy audience rather than at scholars.⁵

In the manuscript tradition of *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, while the paratextual apparatus adopted in the French translations remains relatively stable, the adaptor offers a didactic interpretation of Merlin's prophecies whose iconography varies considerably, even in copies illustrated by the same artist. The illumination of those manuscripts sometimes overlaps, but each copy seems to follow a distinct illustrative programme.

Merlin's role in the history of the kings of Britain is that of a prophet and of an enchanter. Merlin was well-known for his role in magically bringing Stonehenge from Ireland to England (HKB, §128-130).⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth was a cleric and a writer who made his career in Oxford. His *Prophetiae Merlini*, written in the early 1130s, before the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, for Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, circulated independently, as a *libellus*, in collections of prophetic works, or integrated in the *Historia* despite important differences in both content and narrative style.⁷ These prophecies, which were used and remodelled in various political and polemical contexts,⁸ became widely popular, up to the 15th century.⁹ They had a huge success, both in England and on the Continent, including Italy and Germany, leading to translations in several vernacular languages. They circulated orally and in written form, in both popular and

ecclesiastical circles,¹⁰ and were generally held as authoritative, even if Merlin's identity as a magician cast a shadow on them.¹¹

Confronted with prophecies, medieval translators could provide a translation which would be as obscure as the original text, or combine the linguistic transposition with an exegesis in order to make the prophecies intelligible.¹² The authors of these fifteenth-century French adaptations decided to include Merlin's prophecies rather than omit them, a recurrent practice among borrowers from Geoffrey. Their writing was informed not only by an interest in the past but also by contemporary concerns with the political situation and the relationships between France, Burgundy and England.

I. Paratextual framing of Merlin's prophecies in the fifteenth-century French prose adaptations of Geoffrey's *Historia*

The *Chroniques des Bretons* are transmitted in two distinct textual families, with BnF fr. 2806 in the first (closer to the original text); and fr. 5621, fr. 16938 and Vatican, Vat. Reg. Lat. 871 in the second (those present many common variants, including a lengthy one towards the end of the *Prophecies*). For G raldine Veyseyre, BnF fr. 2806, the base manuscript for her edition of the prophecies, is the closest to the original, because it presents a *lectio difficilior* in several passages and it does not feature a long interpolation and an aberrant lesson which appear in the other witnesses of the text.¹³ As for the *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, they were based on a witness of the second family of manuscripts of the *Chroniques des Bretons*.

The reception of British history and of Merlin's prophecies was shaped, directed but also demonstrated by multiple elements within the manuscripts which transmitted them. The obscurity of the material could be mitigated by the directions provided by paratextual elements, such as the location and form of rubrics, inserted almost as a gloss at critical points, and which tended to stabilize in the later French prose adaptations.

Location of the Prophecies in the chronicles

Table 1: Comparison of the location of the Prophecies in the *Historia* and its French prose adaptations

<i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i> , Geoffrey of Monmouth	<i>Chroniques des Bretons</i>	<i>Chroniques d'Angleterre</i> , Jean de Wavrin
Description of Britain book 1: From the Fall of Troyes to the settlement of Brutus in Britain [...] book 6: From the departure of the Romans to the reign of Vortigern book 7: Prophecies (§109-117) book 8: Return and reign of the sons of Constantine books 9-10: Reign of Arthur book 11: Arthur against Mordred; End of the British rule.	ch. 1: Description of Britain ch. 2: Origins of the War of Troyes [...] ch. 55-58: Prophecies of Merlin [...] ch. 71-96: Reign of Arthur [...] ch. 112: End of the British rule.	volume 1: book 1 (6 chapters): Albina book 2 (60 chapters): Description of Britain; From the Fall of Troyes to the reign of Vortigern; Prophecies of Merlin (ch. 55-58); Return of the sons of Constant book 3 (53 chapters): Reign of the sons of Constant; Reign of Arthur; End of the British rule.

Both the *Historia* and the *Chroniques des Bretons*, which cover the same time span, focus on the history of Britain from its mythical origins to the British rule, ending with the reign of King Cadwallader, before the advent of the Saxon or English rule. Merlin's prophecies, which constituted book 7 of the *Historia*, are divided into several sections, forming chapters 55 to 58 of the *Chroniques des Bretons* (see Table 1). By contrast, the *Chroniques d'Angleterre* were designed to continue up to the 15th century: they were compiled about 1445 and included sequels up to 1469 and 1471. In Jean de Wavrin's historiographical project, British history, divided between book 2 and book 3 of the first volume, becomes a piece of a general history of England, and an overarching structure is adopted in the compilation.¹⁴ The prophecies of Merlin are given a strategic position because they

are situated at the end of second book of the chronicles. The last sentence of the final chapter, announcing the return of the sons of Constant, reminds the reader of the prophecies' fulfilment.

La tour fut en peu d'heure embrasee, et fu la dedens ars et consummez le roy Vortigier et tous ceulx de sa compaignie, ainssy comme Merlin luy avoit dit par esperit de prophetie. Cy prent fin le second livre du premier volume des Cronicques d'Engleterre, et s'ensieult le tierch (CGB 293).

[The tower ignited quickly, and King Vortigern and all those who accompanied him were burnt and consumed in it, as Merlin had foretold him by spirit of prophecy.

Here ends the second book of the first volume of the Chronicles of England, and follows the third one.]

The death of Vortigern appears as a perfect demonstration of Merlin's foresight and facilitates the transition from the prophetic discourse back into the overarching narrative.

Internal structure of the Prophecies

Merlin's Latin prophecies can be divided in three parts: a preface where Geoffrey introduces his patron, Alexander of Lincoln (a bishop of Anglo-Norman descent who was also the patron of Henry of Huntingdon, author of the *Historia Anglorum*, written in the early 1130s and contemporary with Geoffrey's *Prophecies*); a dedicatory epistle to Alexander; and the prophecies themselves. Most of the *Historia* manuscripts were rubricated, and the prophecies were often signalled by the paratext and / or other visual signs like capital letters or paragraph marks, but the Latin rubrics led to a variety of wording (which allowed Julia Crick to distinguish several groups of manuscripts).¹⁵ This contrasts with the rubrics of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques* of Jean de Wavrin, whose consistent placement and formulation reveal one clear textual line of transmission. The relative stability of these later texts may be related to the fact that they circulated in a much shorter time frame than the *Historia*.

In BnF fr. 2806, 4 rubricated titles structure the section related to Merlin's prophecies. The first one introduces the apology of the author, Geoffrey of Monmouth, highlighting both his own limits and the ambiguity of the prophecies: "Les excusations que pretent l'auteur de ce livre sus les prophecies Merlin traictier en protestant leur ambiguïté et la foiblesce de son engin. L'auteur" (fr. 2806 fol. 39 / CB 90). The Latin versions of the text often marked this passage by a rubricated chapter heading, a *titulus*,¹⁶ highlighting its value as a prologue to the prophecies: "(Incipit) Prologus in Prophetias Merlini" or "Incipit prologus in librum septimum qui continet prophetia Ambrosii Merlini", since it is the beginning of the seventh book of the *Historia* (HKB 143, § 109). A distinct group of *Historia* manuscripts stresses the change of discursive voice around the *Prophecies* through the series of rubrics: "Verba Merlini" (§ 108); "Verba auctoris" (§ 109); "Incipiunt vaticina Merlini coram Vortegirno edita" (§ 111).¹⁷ The *Chroniques des Bretons* translation cannot have been based on the first variant version of the *Historia* as its manuscripts do not contain Geoffrey's prologue or his letter to Alexander.¹⁸

The rubrics from the *Chroniques des Bretons* are consistently reused in Jean de Wavrin's chronicle, including a statement introducing the letter of Geoffrey of Monmouth to Alexander of Lincoln. It is part of the text in BnF fr. 2806 and fr. 16939, but is rubricated in fr. 5621: "Cy après s'ensuit la teneur des lectres" (fol. 99v / CGB 226). The passage, which coincides with a clear discursive change, was already signalled out in a more developed manner in some manuscripts of the *Historia*:

Incipit prologus ad Alexandrum Lincolniensem episcopum.
Epistula magistri Galfridus Monumentensis directa
Alexandro Lincolnensi episcopo.
(Incipit) editio Gaufridi Monemutensis de edictis Merlini
Ambrosii (HKB 143, § 110).

[Here begins the prologue dedicated to Bishop Alexander of Lincoln.

Epistle of Master Geoffrey of Monmouth to Bishop Alexander of Lincoln.

(Here begins) the rendition by Geoffrey of Monmouth of the words of Merlinus Ambrosius.]

In fr. 2806, the letter is followed by the rubric, "Le translateur" (fol. 39v), which introduces the addition of another apology, this time on behalf of the translator, who then explains his methods in translating and explaining Geoffrey's prophecies. This statement is present but not rubricated in manuscripts fr. 5621 and fr. 16939. In the *Chroniques d'Angleterre* manuscripts, fr. 74, Vienna, ONB 2534, and BL, Royal 15.E.IV, the two headings introducing the letter and the words of the translator are rubricated: although they are not numbered as chapter divisions, like the other rubrics, they remain as salient meta-discursive indications.

The second main paratextual element inserted in the *Prophecies* section of the *Chroniques des Bretons* in fr. 2806 is a rubric accompanying an illustration of the marvel of the dragons buried under Vortigern's tower [Figure 2].¹⁹ The rubric focuses on the verbal dimension of the episode, introducing Merlin's prophecies, and his interpretation:

Cy s'ensuivent les merueilleuses et haultes prophecies que denonça Merlin au roy Wortigerius, et parle premierement de la signifiante des dragons qui yssirent des pierres de l'estang expuisié (fr. 2806 fol. 39v / CB 93).

["Here follow the marvellous and high prophecies made by Merlin to King Vortigern, and first is told the significance of the dragons who came out of the stones from the excavated pool".]

Here the paratext of the French adaptation is more developed than the Latin versions, which offer shorter titles like "Prophetiae", "Prophetiae Merlini Britonis" or "Incipit liber .VII. qui continet prophetias Merlini Ambrosii" (HKB 145, § 111).

Even if in the *text* the marvel qualifies the appearance of the dragons ("les merveilles des dragons qui apparoint"... "le roy Wortigerius qui de ceste bataille estoit merueilleusement esbaÿs" fr. 2806 fol. 39v), in the *rubric*, it is Merlin's prophecies which are said to

be "merveilleuses et haultes". The wonder created by the dragons' appearance then gives way to the discussion of its "significance", the development of its meaning and interpretation. In a similar way, in the passage preceding Merlin's prophecies, Vortigern and his companions wonder less at the dragons themselves than at Merlin's foresight.

At the end of the prophecies, Merlin is again an object of wonder in the Latin text:

Ambiguitate verborum suorum astantes in *ammirationem* commovit. Vortegirinus vero praeceteris *ammirans*... Neminem enim praesens aetas produxerat qui ora sua in hunc modum coram ipso soluisset (HKB 161, § 118).²⁰

[His riddling words reduced the bystanders to amazement. Vortigern was the most amazed of all... No man of his time had spoken so wonderfully in his presence].

The French text amplifies again this passage, referring to the "esperit de prophetie" which possesses Merlin. Members of the audience "se commencerent tous a merveiller de [sa] grant sagesse et douteuses paroles". Vortigern recognises the weight, truth and divine origin of Merlin's words: "onques mais n'avoit oï parolles sy substantieuses". He has never met before someone like him "qui si nobles [choses] sceust proferer ne si bien exprimer la verité de toutes choses" (fr. 2806 fol. 51v / CB 131).

Rubrics accompanying the miniatures and *tituli* subdivide the French translation of the prophecies, consolidating the image of Merlin as a seer. In the conclusive statement "et en ce disant termina Merlin la premiere fiction de ses propheties", "fiction" is probably used in a generic way, referring to a first account of the prophecies, without the idea of invention and deception. It is followed by the *titulus* "Cy après s'ensuit la seconde pose des propheties Merlin le prophette", indicating that a second set of prophecies is laid out (fr. 2806 fol. 44v / CB 109).²¹ This break, which precedes the story of the three marvellous fountains of Guintonie (Winchester), also appeared visually in many manuscripts of the *Historia* (HKB 151, § 116) but did not lead to such clear textual and paratextual divisions.

The last *titulus* of the *Chroniques des Bretons* referring to the prophecies, though actually placed after the end of the prophecies proper, focuses on forthcoming events directly related to the fate of Vortigern and Merlin, and formulated entirely in the past historic. By contrast, the present tense which dominated the previous *tituli* implied a more meta-textual perspective. The *titulus* serves as a transition back into the main narrative of the history of the kings of Britain:

Comment Merlin prophetiza au roy Vortigier l'advenement
des deux filz du roy Constans et la fin de sa miserable vie et
la mort de Henguist et la destruction de ses Saxons (fr. 2806
ffol. 51-51v / CB 131).

[How Merlin prophesied to King Vortigern the advent of the
two sons of King Constans, and the end of his miserable life,
and the death of Hengist, and the destruction of his Saxons.]

The *titulus* announces the demise of Vortigern, the return of Constant's son and the struggle and victory against the Saxon Hengist. In the Latin text, it coincided with the beginning of a new section, "Liber VIII". Some manuscripts signal at that point the end of the chapter dedicated to the prophecies: "Expliciunt prophetie Merlini" (HKB 161 § 118). The suggestion of a threshold also appears in the French translation, when the adaptor ends the prophecies by praying God to spare humanity, despite its corruption. Even if the prophecies section formally ends here, another reference to Merlin's prophecies is made in the following *titulus*: Constant's sons "assiègerent Vortigier et l'ardirent en sa tour, si comme Merlin l'avoit diviné par avant" (fr. 2806 fol. 52 / CGB 290).

The similarities between the manuscripts of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and of Jean de Wavrin's chronicles are both textual and paratextual. This paratextual framing of the prophecies, which appeared in the Latin manuscripts, but with more variations, is developed in their later French translation, where it becomes a more stable element of their textual transmission. The paratext points to the fact that Merlin's voice is transmitted through the subtle Latin rhetoric of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the French words of the adaptor. The French adaptations of the prophecies highlight their overall structure

and guide their interpretation by expanding or commenting on them and suggesting specific meanings introduced by the translator and shaped by his concerns.

II. From translation to interpretation of Merlin's prophecies

The translation of Geoffrey's work can be related to the development and practice of translation in literary court culture under Charles V in the 14th century and at the court of Burgundy in the 15th century.²² Their literary activity flourished both through the translation of Latin works into the vernacular (in fields such as history, philosophy and politics) and through the "mise en prose" movement, with the prose rewritings and modernisation of earlier versified works, from romances to "chansons de geste".²³

The examination of the layout and structure of the French translations of the prophecies will now lead to an analysis of the scope of adaptations also conceived as explanations and interpretations of very challenging source material grappling with religious and political issues. The fifteenth-century adaptations of Merlin's prophecies at the court of Burgundy show the increased interest in British history in the context of the Hundred Years War, and are as concerned with this past as they are in the contemporary state of affairs between France, England and Burgundy. The adaptor thus shifted the often obscure original historical meaning of the prophecies to comment on the social and political situation of his own time in a critical way.

The effort, care and attention given by the adaptor to Merlin's prophecies (which dealt with history, politics and religion) are significant because they were potentially a dangerous and controversial type of literature.²⁴ They could easily lead to accusations of charlatanism or even heresy.²⁵ This suspicion, attached to Merlin's prophecies and associated with Geoffrey's undertaking of the translation process (expressed after a similar deprecation of the adaptor's "embellishment" of Arthurian fictions), probably played a large part in the reception and rejection of Merlin's prophecies, from the 12th century onwards. In his French verse adaptation, Wace, who adapted the Galfridian material for a courtly audience, had explicitly left aside the translation of prophecies, which he acknowledged

already circulated orally, because of the problem posed by their interpretation.²⁶ The commentaries on the prophecies were maybe aimed at a different, learned audience.²⁷ If the later Middle Ages saw a wider social circulation of vernacular historiography, compilations and translations, including the Anglo-Norman and English prose *Bruts*,²⁸ neither of these texts usually included Geoffrey's *Prophecies*.²⁹ While the ideological content of the *Prophecies* could be an issue, translating them was also a real challenge, which may explain why they were omitted from the prose *Bruts*.³⁰ In an interesting development, these chronicles were associated with a different prophetic text, the *Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow John*.³¹ But several fifteenth-century French adaptors, puzzled by the obscurity and discouraged by the difficulty of Geoffrey's prophecies, did not try to translate them.³²

The fifteenth-century French adaptations of Merlin's prophecies show another perspective: they draw attention to the fundamental problems and possibilities posed by the process of translation in medieval literary culture. The adaptor, lacking historical context and grappling with the overwhelming obscurity of Merlin's prophecies, still chose to include them but did not hide the difficulties and challenges raised by his source, and provided the reader with both a translation and an interpretation of this text.

The translation of the letter of Geoffrey of Monmouth to Alexander of Lincoln, and the preface that the French adaptor wrote to his own translation of the prophecies, highlight his conception of his role as a translator, walking in the footsteps of a revered author. Within the *Historia*, the Prophecies offer a unique opportunity for the translator to support his didactic purpose by introducing linguistic, geographical, historical, mythological and moral considerations, like other adaptors of texts intended for teaching or edification. The French adaptation of the Prophecies is primarily concerned with historical and moral issues, and if the translator does not aim at systematically explaining all the obscurities of the prophecies, especially their eschatological meaning, he seems drawn to social and political criticism.

Geoffrey's letter to Alexander of Lincoln

In his letter to Alexander of Lincoln, Geoffrey of Monmouth was disparaging his own ability to compose elegant Latin, as opposed to the craft of the "doctiores" that his patron had the means to employ. In the French prose text, the adaptor develops the poetical talents attributed to the more learned clerks of the bishop's entourage:

Maiz maintenant oultre mesure me meut a esmerveiller ce que ceste chose tant haulte as daigné conmettre a moy comme serf paupertule, hee, sire, comme je saiche que la verge de ta juridicion et puissance coherce tant et tant de trop plus inbucs et endoctrinez en divines sciences et historialles disciplines, trop plus riches et plus fors que moy, ton petit sergent, lesquelz, trop plus eslevez en scienticale meditacion et fictions poëtiques coulourees de l'armonie tullienne, par dittiez melodieux et mesurez de consonante musique adoulceroient les oreilles et exiteroient a delectacion de ta minerve, c'est a dire de ta sapience (fr. 2806 ffol. 39-39v / CB 90-91)

[But now, I am drawn to marvel extensively that you deigned to entrust such a high task to me, a poor serf, O Lord, since I know that the rod of your jurisdiction and power coerces so many, who are much more informed and knowledgeable in divine sciences and historical disciplines, much more well-rounded and established than myself, your little sergeant. These men are much more elevated in scientific meditations and poetical fictions coloured with Tullian harmony. Through melodious compositions accompanied by consonant music, they would soften the ears and foster delight in your knowledge, that is your wisdom.]

In the letter, the adaptor of the *Chroniques des Bretons* focuses less on the process of translation in which Geoffrey also engaged, as stated in the prologue ("translater les merlines prophecies en latin de l'ydrome britonique") than on Geoffrey's denigration of his insufficient

Latin skills, "inepte latinité" and rustic literary style, "plebeienne modulacion" (fr. 2806 fol. 39 / CB 90).³³

The representation of the patron's *curia* as a place of scholarly erudition and cultural endeavour is not restricted to Alexander. The model and appeal of an intellectual and learned circle gathered around religious and / or political leaders, men of power and influence, can reflect the cultural context of production and diffusion of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques d'Angleterre*.³⁴

The translator's preface and his methodology

The topos of false modesty brings together Geoffrey and his translator, even when the latter compares himself unfavourably with his predecessor. In the apology that follows the letter, the French translator uses the same technique by contrasting his own intellectual limitations ("moy, inbecille et abonbri en l'offucacion de ma char, qui [...] hebeste la rudesce de mon peresceux et povret engin"), with the dazzling sophistication of Geoffrey's Ciceronian rhetoric:

Cestui treshault latinier, de qui l'entendement reluist par les couleurs d'armonialles consonances et par les parolles dorees de resplandisseur tullienne, les pretend la ou sa excellense rethorique fait mon sens aussi comme le ray solaire retrogarder et couvrir de ses palpebres par ambiguë extasie (fr. 2806 fol. 39v / CB 91).

[This great Latin interpreter, whose intelligence shines with the colours of harmonious consonances and the golden words of Tullian splendour, dispenses them in places where his excellent rhetoric seems, just like the sunbeam, to make my mind retreat and close its eyelids in a blurred ecstasy.]

The translator's native tongue, characterised by its roughness ("la rudesce de mon natil langage") becomes in the second family of *Chroniques* manuscripts a specific variety of French, "bourbonnois", an interesting reference to the duchy of Bourbon, in central France. For Geraldine Veyseyre this precision, which does not feature in BnF fr. 2806, but appears in the three other manuscript witnesses, might be

an addition of a copyist rather than a statement from the original translator.³⁵

The adaptor's preface introduces a two-fold strategy which consists in amplifying Merlin's obscure prophecies and clearly exposing their hidden meaning:

... suivra a son pouoir la sentence de l'auteur en le declairant la ou son entencion est obscure plus largement que ses dis ne se souffissent estendre, et meismement en cestes prophecies de Merlin ou les sentences sont couvertes d'une nue methaforique: jouxte la dilatacion de la faculté de mon entendement je exposeray ycelles en françois legier et intelligible par exposicion evidente. (fr. 2806 fol. 39v / CB 91-92)

[I] will follow as [I] can the thoughts of the author, exposing them, when his intention is obscure, using more words when they are insufficiently understandable and using a similar method for the prophecies of Merlin where sentences are covered by a cloud of metaphors. By expanding my faculty of understanding, I will expose these sentences in light French, understandable by a clear exposition.]

Indeed, facing the challenge posed by the complexity of the prophecies, the adaptor implements this programme in a developed account and interpretation of Merlin's vaticinations. The aim of clarity justifies amplification through long-winded sentences and complex syntactic articulation of propositions developed by the adaptor. The "lightness" paradoxically associated with the use of French might be contrasted with the density and complexity of Latin prose for a non-scholarly readership, more likely to find its "delight" in the vernacular.³⁶

In the *Prophecies* proper, Geoffrey directly transcribed Merlin's words, introduced dramatically by the portrait of the prophet seized by inspiration: "Mox ille, in fetum erumpens, spiritum hausit prophetiae et ait..." (HKB 145), a passage translated by "se esleva par l'esperit de prophecie [40a] a grant effusion de larmes..." (CB 93). The French translation adds to the original by weaving two distinct discourses: Merlin's words alternate with interventions of the adaptor attempting

to interpret and elucidate the prophecies. The text is thus structured by formulaic segments introducing Merlin's speech with expressions such as: "Et apres / puis dist Merlin", "Et c'est la sentence de Merlin ou texte quy s'ensieult", often followed by explanatory sections starting with: "C'est a dire que..." or "Merlin veult dire que", "par quoy Merlin entent"... From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the *Prophecies* led to many glosses and commentaries, a rare phenomenon for a non-religious text.³⁷ In the fifteenth-century *Chroniques des Bretons*, the translator took upon himself to try to explain and elucidate the *Prophecies*, as had been the case previously in another independent translation of Geoffrey's work, the thirteenth-century *Estoire de Brutus*.³⁸ But, as shown by Géraldine Veyssere, while in the earlier text, as in many Latin commentaries, the short explanations become scarcer and scarcer and focus on the first quarter of the prophecies, in the *Chroniques des Bretons* the glosses become longer and longer, increasing with the obscurity of the base text.³⁹ The translator of the *Chroniques des Bretons* grappled with this difficulty by providing different types of commentary, ranging from historical and moral interpretations to social and political criticism.

Historical interpretations

Among his exegetic practices, and following the example set by Merlin himself, the adaptor identifies images and allegorical figures with older or more recent kings and princes ("le dragon rouge - c'est a dire Cadvalle, Brianth et les autres Bretons chaciez de leur paÿs"... fr. 2806 fol. 40 / CB 94); "le prince de chevalerie - c'est a dire le roy Cadwaladreth"... fr. 2806 fol. 41 / CB 96). The end of the British rule and the figure of Cadwalader appear on several occasions within the prophecies. Geoffrey used three kinds of prophecy: some narrate events predating 689 (placed within the chronological frame of the *Historia*, they were designed to reinforce the credibility of the text); some refer to twelfth-century events (contemporaneous with their composition, they evoke both past events - those predating 1135 - and the near future in a more allusive manner); and some engage in a more remote apocalyptic future.⁴⁰ The fifteenth-century adaptation explains the prophecies in the light of more recent history:

Et puis dit Merlin: « Et succedera le lion ou liepart de liesce, par qui rongement les tours galliques et les barons des isles trambleront. » Je croy que ce fut le prince de Galles, autrement dit Pié de Plonc. Les tours galliques, ce sont les grans seigneurs de France, lesquelz il fist tous trambler, tel foiz fu, et par especial quant il desconfist le roy Jehan et le print en belle bataille a Poitiers, car certainement il n'eust adont en tout le royaume de France prince ne baron, chastiau, cité, tour, ville ne forteresse qui n'en tramblast si comme j'ay oÿ maintes fois dire (fr. 2806 fol. 41v / CB 98).

[Then Merlin said: "The lion will succeed the leopard of joy, whose gnawing will cause Gallic towers and insular barons to tremble". I think this was the Prince of Wales, also called Leadfoot. The Gallic towers are the great lords of France, all of whom he made tremble; it occurred in particular when he defeated King John and captured him in a great battle at Poitiers, because then, for certain, in the whole kingdom of France, all princes, barons, castles, cities, towers, towns and fortresses trembled, as I heard said many times.]

While the insular exegetic tradition associated the lion with Henry I, the French adaptor here intervenes to offer a specific reference to the battle of Poitiers in 1356, and to the defeat of King John II (the Good) by the Black Prince, Edward of Woodstock. He updates the historical application of the prophecies, in a continental perspective. The translator of the *Chroniques des Bretons* deals with the difficulty of the prophecies by providing selective but developed comments. He probably wrote at the end of the fourteenth or rather at the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the renewed conflict with England reactivated the memory of the French defeat.⁴¹ At the end of the passage, the reference to oral testimonies suggests that the translator, whose knowledge of the battle of Poitiers is only indirect, considers it as an historical rather than a contemporary event. The adaptor is thus eager to demonstrate the historical fulfilment of the prophecies but also to include their moral scope.

Moral interpretations

The translator of the *Chroniques de Bretons* can use moral interpretations as a means of circumventing his difficulty in grasping the underlying historical references of the prophecies. In some instances, detaching them from their original context (twelfth-century England) led him to develop a general meaning accessible to a wider audience.

Et puis dit Merlin: « Et si seront les chas du lion transformez en maritains poissons. » Par les chas qui sont malignes bestes plaines d'astucies predictoires, car ilz festient leurs maistres de la queue et leur groussent des dens, sont entendus les flateurs traiteurs, qui tousjours evoquent par blandissemens predictoires le cuer du lion a mal faire. Si seront muez en poissons marins, car par leurs vices ilz seront exilliez de leur païs et devendront excumeurs de mer, c'est a dire larrons de mer. Si seront prins et gettez en la mer, et la seront devorez des poissons qui les mengeront (fr. 2806 fol. 42 / CB 99).

[Then Merlin said: "Then the lion cubs will be transformed into maritime fish". The cubs which are maleficent beasts full of disloyal tricks, since they greet their masters with their tail but growl at them with their teeth, refer to the flattering traitors whose disloyal blandishments always incite the lion's heart to wrongdoing. They will be changed into marine fish: because of their vices, they will be exiled from their country and become freebooters, that is to say sea pirates. They will be captured and thrown into the sea, where fish will devour and eat them.]

Earlier medieval commentators were able to decipher Geoffrey's reference to the tragedy which affected the English royal dynasty in 1120, when Henry I, the lion of justice, lost his heir, William. Henry's illegitimate son, Richard of Lincoln, also drowned in the wreck of the White Ship. By contrast, the fifteenth-century translator used moral interpretations, here targeting treacherous hypocrites,

condemned to exile and horrible deaths, to compensate for his lack of knowledge of English history.¹²

The didactic and religious interests of the adaptor are particularly visible in the second part of the prophecies, for example in his long exegesis of the meaning of the three fountains of Winchester / Guintonie:

Par cestes III fontaines veult entendre Merlin trois manieres de vivre en cestui mortel monde. La premiere si est la vie contemplative des bons crestiens catholiques, qui par la grace de nostre Seigneur vivent vertueusement en sainte religion; et ceulz cy jamaiz n'auront mal ne langueur de maladie, car par la grace du Saint Esperit ilz usent contemplativement des joies pardurables... (fr. 2806 fol. 45 / CB 109).

[By these three fountains, Merlin means three ways of living in this mortal world. The first is the contemplative life of good catholic Christians, who, by the grace of Our Lord, live virtuously in holy religion; these will never suffer from languor or malady, because, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, they experience through contemplation everlasting joys...]

In this passage, the doubtful background of potentially pagan marvels is not taken literally but allows the translator to develop the didactic and Christian meaning of the fountains. Moral interpretations can thus reach an audience sharing the same values, appealing to and fostering a sense of religious community. However, they are not incompatible with more specific interests. Among the readers of these prophecies, Louis of Bruges, lord of Gruuthuse, who owned the complete deluxe set of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, BnF fr. 74-85, and who was given the title of Earl of Winchester by Edward IV in 1472 (after hosting him while he was in exile, during the Wars of the Roses), must have found a particular interest in a legend related to the earldom he recently acquired. The adaptor's moral and religious perspective also appears in the interpretations he provides for astrological and eschatological references.

Astrological and eschatological references

In the translation and interpretation of the astrological developments at the end of Merlin's prophecies, the adaptor acknowledges the difficulty of his source text, but does not give up on looking for their theological meaning:

Et puis dist Merlin: « Car en cellui temps la resplendeur du soleil et l'esleu de Mercure si languira, et Stillon d'Archadie si muera son escu, et le heaume de Mars si appellera la luxure, Venus. Et adonc forgera le heaume de Mars l'ombre [...] » Cestui texte est moult difficile et obscur a moy; toutesvoies il m'est advis que Merlin veult dire que la ou les volentés des mortelz auront delaissié la congnoissance de Dieu et de son digne service et mescongnoistront les vertus et puissances du Ciel et se joindront en l'amour des choses terriennes, mortelles et muables... (fr. 2806 fol. 50 / CB 126).

[Then Merlin said: "At that time, the brightness of the sun and the chosen of Mercury will languish, and Stilbon of Acadia will move his shield, and the helm of Mars will call Luxury, Venus. And then, the helm of Mars will shape the shadow...". I find this text very difficult and obscure, however, I think that Merlin means to say that where the wills of mortals will have given up the knowledge of God and his divine service and when they will misjudge the virtues and celestial powers and join in the love of terrestrial, mortal and mutable things...]

The development of the religious commentary condemning the attraction of earthly rather than spiritual goods eventually seems to overcome the obscurity of the original prophecies' astrological references. However, the length and elaboration of the interpretation becomes a new challenge in itself. Later in the text, the translator gives up the explanation of how Merlin's astrological statements relate to the signs foreboding the End of the world and the Last Judgement:

Par ceste prophecie, qui bien la voudroit *epeluchier*, on pourroit clerement entendre et noter la fin de cestui monde

et les signes qui avendront devant le grant jour du Jugement, mais je m'en passe a present pour cause de *brieffté*, car trop *longue* chose seroit a bien declairer toutes les particulieres parties; si y mettray ung autre plus *brief* entendement. Car il m'est advis que... (fr. 2806 fol. 50v-51 / CB 128).

[Those who are willing to peel this prophecy might be able to understand clearly and take note of the end of this world and of the signs which will come before the great Judgment Day, but for now I will skip it, for the sake of brevity, because it would be too long to expose all its specific parts. I will provide another, shorter explanation, because in my opinion...]

This apology highlights the potential for different levels of complexity and elaboration in the interpretation of the prophecies. Systematically removing the veil covering and obscuring the prophecy, another metaphor used by the adaptor in his preface, would allow the clarification of its apocalyptic meaning. The translator seems to favour a shorter and synthetic rather than analytic explanation, but it does not prevent him from developing an astrological and moral commentary on the meaning of Saturn and Venus, associating the twelve zodiac signs with the five senses, the five virtues, and the two aspects of reading (will and understanding), and linking the seven planets to the seven capital sins.

The adaptor ends his commentary with an additional apologetic statement, but even if the conclusion of the passage suggests his inability to provide an exhaustive astrological explanation, it seems to strike a more optimistic note, stressing the capacity for those who have "sain et vray entendement" (CBv 155) to understand and extract the truth of Merlin's words:

Qui vouldroit plus haultement carculer la sentence de ceste prophecie, on trouveroit qu'elle aprouche moult a la lumiere du grant jour du Jugement que tendra le glorieux resplandant soleil de justice en distribuant a ung chascun selon son merite et deserte après la resurrection des mors si comme j'ay touchié devant. Mais ad ce convendroit descripre la plus

grant partie d'astrologie, et pour ce que mon entendement ne pourroit bonnement venir ne declairer si haulte speculation, je m'en passe et la laisse a ceulx qui plus cler y voient que moy; mais il me semble que l'effect des parolles Merlin en grant douleur au jour d'uy sortissent leur efficace verité (fr. 2806 fol. 51 / CB 129).

[Those who would like to examine the higher meaning of this prophecy would find that it is very close to the light of the great Day of Judgement, which will be held by the glorious and shining Sun of justice, when he will give to each according to his merit and due, after the Resurrection of the Dead, as I mentioned earlier. But in order to do that, one would need to describe the most part of astrology, which I will dispense with, because my understanding would not be able to provide a good explanation for such a high speculation, and I leave it to those who can see clearer than I do. But it seems to me that today, with a lot of pain, the result of Merlin's words reveals their efficient truth.]

Despite his acknowledged limitations in the scholarly discipline of astrology, the adaptor's generic gloss of the prophecies of Merlin and eschatological references to the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead allows him to unfold their "true meaning" in developing a moral discourse and a criticism of the corruption of his own time.

Social and political criticism

Prophecies are often politically charged, and though polemical and critical discourse is topical in this genre, in the *Chroniques des Bretons*, it points to burning concerns at the time of its writing, especially through the additions provided by the variants of the second family of the text.⁴³ Merlin's prophecies offer the adaptor the opportunity to target the political elites and members of the French royal council, in charge of the administration of the kingdom:

Helas, quant je regarde en cestui trescrestien noble royaume
de France les cuers des nobles barons et chevaliers estre

obfusquez en tenebres par leurs vices [...] car il appert clerement a tout le monde que on ne veult faire ne ouvrir la voie de justice a ceulx qui la requierent [...] le cuer m'en fremist et souspire par griefs gemissemens! [...] Et maintenant, on dit que la fontaine de droit et justice est tarie et estainte en France, et s'en moquent les estranges naciones. Mais en verité je croy que les ames de ceulx du conseil de France qui maintenant regnent, tant seculiers comme clerics, qui se taisent et sont mus nonobstant les grans inconveniens qui tous les jours en viennent devant leurs yeulx, en seront pardurablement condampnees au parfont puis d'Enfer avec les deables infernaulx qui pardurablement les tourmenteront (CBv 155-156).

[Alas! When I see in this very Christian noble kingdom of France the hearts of noble barons and knights blinded in darkness by their vices... because it appears clearly to everyone that one cannot provide or open the path of justice to those who request it... my heart shivers and sighs with painful wails... And now the fountain of right and justice is said to be waterless and dry in France and the foreign nations deride it. But in truth I believe that the souls of those of the council of France currently in power, both lay people and clerics, who remain silent and mute despite the great inconvenience which ensues every day before their eyes, will be perpetually condemned in the deep well of Hell, with the infernal devils who will torment them for eternity.]

This criticism of the royal council is a topos in political writings and could be applied to courtly rivalries and changes in the mode of government in the late 14th and early 15th century. At the beginning of the reign of Charles VI, after the regency of Philip the Bold, the king called back as his counsellors the "Marmousets", a group of men who had been advisors to his father Charles V, whose influence was resented and opposed by the different groups competing for power. The king's madness in the late 14th and early 15th century accentuated the rivalry between members of the new regency council: the king's

wife, Isabeau of Bavaria, his uncle, Philip the Bold, and his brother, Louis of Orléans. This factionalism in the royal council took a new course with the formal outbreak of the war between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians. In the *Chroniques des Bretons'* prophecies, the attack on the council of France exposes foreign nations' contempt for the drying out of the Fountain of Right and Justice in France, a metaphor which could hide a strong criticism of the loss of power of the royal figure. It could be more specifically related to the periods when the dukes of Burgundy were out of the French royal government in the context of the French Civil War, between 1407 and 1435.⁴⁴ This time frame may be a clue helping to narrow the date of composition of the *Chroniques de Bretons* which must have been completed before the production of manuscript fr. 2806, dated from the first quarter of the 15th century.

From a broader perspective, the expression of emotion and indignation in the face of injustice shapes the ethos of the narrator and commentator of Merlin's prophecies and aims at rallying the reader's confidence, giving strength to his condemnation. The adaptor's interest in contemporary France in the context of European politics leads him to add another prophecy to Merlin's vaticinations:

Hé, Dieux, nous avons une prophécie qui dit que le royaume de France en vigour durera tant comme raison et justice y regnera; et quant elle y fauldra, le regne a neant devendra; laquelle chose je prie a Dieu que ja n'aviengne ja soit ce que nous en avons bon commencement, car ja la perniciose sedition et division civile est entre nous, car nous sommes maintenant tous Guerfes et Guibelins comme les Lombars, et tout vient par deffault de justice (CBv 156)

[O God, we have a prophecy which says that the current kingdom of France will last as long as reason and justice will reign here, and when it will fail, this reign will turn to nothingness, something I pray God that shall never happen, though we already have well started in this direction, because the pernicious sedition and civil division are between us, and we are now all Guelphs and Ghibellines like the Lombards, and all this ensues from a lack of justice.]

The relevance of Merlin's prophecies for contemporary events is highlighted by the reference to the Civil War between Armagnacs and Burgundians, which raged in France at the beginning of the 15th century. If the adaptor of the *Chroniques des Bretons* or his copyist was originally from Bourbonnais,⁴⁵ he may have witnessed the damage caused by the war against the English and followed closely the political trajectory of the Dukes of Bourbon and their own political oscillations during the Civil War⁴⁶.

However, the amplification which follows covers Roman history and classical examples, giving a wider perspective to his speech. While concerned with French affairs, the commentator also introduces a reference to Italian politics, with the long-lasting struggle opposing Guelphs (supporting the pope and the independence of Italian cities) and Ghibellines (partisans of the emperor, especially under the reign of Frederick II) from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century and beyond.⁴⁷ In this conflict, Merlin's prophecies, in Latin or in French, were widely used as a political and polemical tool.⁴⁸ It is in Venice that the late thirteenth-century French *Prophesies de Merlin*, distinct from Geoffrey of Monmouth's and attributed to the pseudo Richard of Ireland, originated.⁴⁹ In an Italian context, Merlin's prophecies in their different forms circulated alongside those attributed to the Sybil and to the controversial figure of the twelfth-century Cistercian monk, Joachim de Fiore. Merlin's prophecies cross linguistic, temporal and geographical boundaries, involving different aspects of European politics, as they encompass English, French and Italian matters.

Earlier in his commentary on Merlin's prophecies, the adaptor already seemed eager to highlight social injustice, an issue presented as very dear to him, as it led him to a pathetic exhortation:

Et puis dist Merlin: « Et de la du premier au quart et du quart au tiers et du tiers au second sera le poulse rolé en huile », c'est a dire que leurs poulse et leurs mains, qui tousdiz auront rapiné et extorqué la substance des innocens, seront reformez et oings de l'uille de raison et de misericorde. O, beau sire Dieux, se les poulse des seigneurs terriens et de leurs officiers plains de rapine et de larrecins, se je l'osoie dire, fussent maintenant arousez de cestui huile

misericordiex, je croy sans plus dire que tout en alast mieulx!
On pourroit cy assez dire et gloser qui vouldroit, maiz je
m'en passe pour cause de briefté (fr. 2806 fol. 42v / CB 101).

[Then Merlin said: "And from the first to the fourth, from the fourth to the third, and from the third to the second, the thumb will be rubbed in oil". It means that their thumbs and hands which for ever have stolen and extorted the possessions of the innocents will be reformed and anointed with the oil of reason and mercy. O, great Lord God, if the thumbs of the terrestrial lords and their officers, full of theft and robbery, if I may say so, were now to be anointed with this merciful oil, I believe, without saying more, that everything would fare better! Those who might wish to could say here much more and gloss over it, but I pass over for the sake of brevity.]

This political criticism and call for change and mercy on behalf of the powerful lords and their agents contrasts by way of metaphor the corrupt oil of the bribery in which they indulge with the blessed oil of reason and mercy which could redeem them. It is reformulated in the conclusion of the second section of the prophecies, where the adaptor gives a warning to his audience, showing how Merlin's prophecies can apply to the contemporary world. Only an appeal to divine mercy can prevent men's wickedness, greed and injustice from attracting apocalyptic calamities:

Mais certes, moult fait a doubter ce que Merlin subjoinct en sa derreniere clause, c'est assavoir que la terre injustement desolee, la divine puissance a cause de *noz pechiez* ne sueffre les vens horribles ne les tonnoirres tempestueux esmouvoir et eslever *contre nous* par merveilleux son a *nostre finale execution* (CBv 158).

Mais *je prie* a la benoite Trinité, ung Dieu en trois personnes, Pere, Filz et Saint Esperit, qui *par amour de nous* vult prendre char humaine et souffrir mort et passion, que, nonobstant *nos vices*, de sa piteuse misericorde vueille reunir

et arouser les cuers des princes terriens, par especial en cestui regne, en telle maniere que le povre peuple puisse vivre en paix soubz leur seignourie, laquelle paix *nous* ottroit le Pere, le Filz et le Saint Esperit (fr. 2806 fol. 51 / CB 129-130).

[But indeed, is to be greatly dreaded what Merlin the prophet adds to his last clause, which is that since the earth has been unjustly wasted, because of our sins, the divine power shall allow horrible winds and tempestuous thunders to move and rise against us, with a wonderful sound, for our final execution.

But I pray the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who for the love of us was willing to take human flesh and suffer death and passion, that despite our vices, he may gather and flood with his forgiving mercy the hearts of terrestrial princes, especially in this realm, so that the poor people may live in peace under their lordship. May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit grant us this peace.]

In the translator's final prayer, Merlin's prophecies thus become a moral and political tool to encourage the community of writer and readers to convert and repent, specifically targeting the powerful in contemporary France and appealing to their Christian spirit while reminding them of their duties and responsibility regarding their subjects. The moral discourse of the political prophecies implies and creates a collective moral responsibility for the state of the nation.³⁰

The anxiety regarding the fate of the common people and the preservation of peace reflects the trauma caused by the difficult political situation of France in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, through the Hundred Years War, the madness of Charles VI, and the Civil War. The recurring use of the first person, both singular and plural, in the adaptor's commentaries shows how Merlin's prophecies, detached from strictly English references, enable him to switch the focus onto French and Continental matters. They support a

discourse on contemporary politics, engaging a community involving the writer, the lords of the land and the people which is anchored in the kingdom of France but also aware of broader moral and social issues as well as political contexts.

If the adaptor thus shapes and transforms the meaning of Merlin's prophecies, their reading is also influenced and determined by the context of their manuscript circulation. While the text of the translation remains relatively stable, individual illuminated copies show different iconographic choices in the staging of Merlin and his prophecies.

III. Visual representation of Merlin's role in the history of the kings of Britain

Adaptors, scribes, and miniaturists were readers and mediators, responding to the enigma of a fundamentally obscure text by inscribing meaning in multiple ways. In the manuscript transmission of Merlin's prophecies, textual and visual elements (including rubrics and miniatures) guide the reader towards new interpretations and understandings of the text. Only one *Chroniques des Bretons* manuscript is illuminated throughout, and in the copies of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, varying iconographic programmes open up new paths for textual interpretations.

Textually, the translations of the *Historia* insist on the distinction between the divine inspiration through which Merlin prophesies, and the evil which guides the magicians first consulted by Vortigern.

Merlinum super omnia ammirabatur. Ammirabantur etiam
cuncti qui astabant tantam in eo sapientiam, existimantes
numen esse in illo (HKB 141).

[(The king was) full of wonder at Merlin. All the bystanders
too were filled with wonder at his wisdom, thinking that he
was inspired.]

The "numen" mentioned in the *Historia* is Christianised and given more specificity through the angelical reference in the French adaptations.

In the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, the valorising qualification of Merlin's character inverts the idea of his demonic conception to turn him into an angelic creature:

Lors le roy et tous ceulx qui la estoient furent esmerveillez
durement de la sapience divine de Merlin Ambroise:
disoient que il estoit ung nume, c'est a dire une nature
angelique qui divinité a en lui pour sa perfection (fr. 2806 fol.
39a / CGB 226).

[Then the king and all those who were in attendance
marvelled greatly at the divine wisdom of Merlin Ambrose:
they said he was a *nume*, that is to say a creature of angelical
nature which was divinely inhabited for its perfection];

Vortigern is in awe of the prodigy child:

En son cuer estimoit que voix d'ange par la voullenté de Dieu
parlast par la bouche de Merlin [...]. Il rendoit graces a
Nostre Seigneur de ce qu'il lui avoit envoié celui enfant,
lequel il cuidoit certainement dedens son cuer estre ung ange
de Paradis (fr. 2806 fol. 51v / CB 131).

[In his heart he thought that, by God's will, an angelical voice
was speaking through Merlin's mouth [...]. He gave thanks to
Our Lord for having sent him this child in whose heart he
believed for certain there was an angel from Paradise].

Merlin's role as a prophet is contrasted with the untrustworthiness of Vortigern's "enchanteurs" and "devineurs", as they are called in a previous rubric: "Comment le roy Wortigerius prinst conseil a ses devineurs sus sa misere et de la tour qu'ilz lui conseillierent edifier" (fr. 2806 fol. 37v / CGB 219). The enchanters are also called "sortisseurs", "magitiens" and "nigromanciens", and Merlin himself uses strongly pejorative words against them: "sorchiers", "ignorans et fallacieux hommes qui les pensees humaines decevez par supersticions ignominieuses", "fantasticques demoniacques" and "seducteurs diaboliques plains des pernicieux besins d'asulation" (fr. 2806 ffol. 38v-

39 / CGB 224-25). At the end of the prophecies, Vortigern himself realises the untruthfulness of his magicians and condemns them:

Ces meschans enchanteurs nigromanciens, qui oncques ne me notifient une seule verité fors que favelles et mençonges qu'ilz trouvoient par leurs fallaces et fictions couvertes (fr. 2806 fol. 51v / CB 131).

[These malicious necromantic enchanters who never told me a single truth but only deceits and lies that they found through their tricks and covert fictions].

Unlike Merlin, whose angelic voice is directly inspired by God, Vortigern's magicians use devilish deceptions. The visual representations of Merlin have to be examined in the light of these textual depictions.

BnF fr. 2806, made in the first quarter of the 15th century, is a manuscript of the *Chroniques des Bretons* illuminated mostly with one-column miniatures. Its artist has not been identified, but his style suggests that he was based in Paris and is reminiscent of the Mazarine Master⁵¹, an artist who, according to François Avril, worked mainly for a pro-Burgundian audience⁵². The three other copies of this text, all belonging to the second textual family, which was the version used as the source of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, only contain a frontispiece miniature and were all illuminated by the same artist. The iconographic programme of the manuscripts transmitting the first part of Jean de Wavrin's chronicles is thus distinct and independent from that of BnF fr. 2806 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Representations of Merlin in illuminated manuscripts of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques* of Jean de Wavrin

<i>Chroniques des Bretons</i>	<i>Chroniques d'Angleterre</i> , Jean de Wavrin, vol. 1			
BnF fr. 2806 1 st quarter 15 th c. 41 x 29 cm 96 folios, 57 min	BnF fr. 74 c.1475 45 x 33 cm 181 folios, 27 min	Vienna ONB 2534 c.1475 52 x 37 cm 213 folios, 24 min	BL Royal. 15.E.IV c.1475 45 x 35 cm 191 folios, 19 min	Text ⁵³
		[fol. 101v Construction of Vortigern's tower]	[fol. 93 Vortigern and his magicians]	219
fol. 38 Merlin playing and Vortigern's messengers	fol. 73 Merlin and his mother in front of Vortigern			226
fol. 39v Merlin and the dragons of Vortigern's tower				229
	fol. 83v Merlin and Vortigern	fol. 114 Merlin and Vortigern		251
	fol. 98 Merlin and Vortigern			286
	[...]			
	fol. 107v Merlin and Aurelian			307

The *Chroniques des Bretons*: Merlin as a prodigy child in BnF fr. 2806

The *Chroniques des Bretons* manuscript, BnF fr. 2806, studied by G. Veyseyre, dates from the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Three-columns-wide, it measures 41 x 29 cm and its 96 folios were copied throughout by one scribe.⁵⁴ It includes 57 miniatures, all single-column wide apart from the frontispiece image, which occupies the full width of the written space and is divided into four compartments on two levels. Fr. 2806 contains numerous medieval annotations, which suggests a careful reading of the text, focusing on dates, places and proper names, proverbs and gnomic sentences, and references to the sources or interventions of the narrator. Nothing is known about its original provenance, apart from a sentence written on one of the front leaves: "D. Ranconetus hoc volumen regi Francorum Francisco dedit". It suggests that the book was offered to King Francis I (†1547) by "D. Ranconetus", who may be identified as his councillor, Aymar De Ranconet (†1559),⁵⁵ a bibliophile who possessed mainly legal and Classical texts, mainly in Latin, but also owned a *Romance of the Rose* manuscript (BnF fr. 800).⁵⁶ Fr. 2806 was then a luxurious manuscript deemed fit for the French king and it probably circulated earlier in royal or princely circles, as was the case for fr. 74, owned by Louis de Gruuthuse, officer of the dukes of Burgundy, and BL, Royal 15.E.IV, dedicated to the British king Edward IV.

In BnF fr. 2806, the character of Merlin appears in two miniatures and features as a prodigy child, divinely inspired. The images are complex and their interpretation necessitates a close attention to the narrative thread, even if the rubric can help in deciphering them. The first illustration contains two pairs of characters. On the left hand side, it shows Merlin as a boy [Figure 1], playing with a ball and engaging in a fight with another child. The altercation and resulting insults allow Vortigern's messengers to identify him as the fatherless child who shall be sacrificed to secure the construction of the tower⁵⁷. On the right hand side, one of the messengers, represented as a clerk holding a roll, possibly carrying Vortigern's order and royal warrant for the arrest of the fatherless child, turns to his companion, maybe a local burgher able to confirm

Merlin's identity, to discuss the scene they are witnessing. This miniature contrasts the couple formed by the children playing with that of the adults talking about them. Since Merlin only appears as a child, his wondrous identity is hidden in the miniature as it is in the story: only the marvel of Vortigern's crumbling tower and the subsequent quest for the fatherless child lead him to be taken out of his hometown and anonymity, and eventually reveal the extent of his supernatural gifts.

Though the second miniature also presents Merlin as child, it shows a change in his status as it positions him among adults and gives him a leading position among them. The rubric on folio 38v already announced Merlin's role in the episode of the crumbling tower, and the second miniature on folio 39v [Figure 2] illustrates the wonder of the dragons buried under Vortigern's tower. The red dragon is presented on the left of the image and the white one, of a greyish colour, on the right. The image highlights the causal relation between the broken tower and the open ground revealing the two dragons, observed by Merlin, Vortigern and a clerk, placed on the right side of the illustration.⁵⁸ Vortigern seems to point at the wonder of the dragons with his finger, while the young Merlin's gesture, open hand turned downwards, suggests more understanding and possibly control of the situation. While Merlin is placed on the right-hand side among the observers of the double marvel of the crumbling tower and the dragons, he is also their interpreter in the guise of the wise child. His explanation of the marvel of the tower is proved right and the discovery of the marvellous dragons demonstrates his own supernatural knowledge.

In this manuscript, the visual focus on Merlin's childhood emphasises the wonder of the "fatherless" child, a "puer senex", both wise and innocent, who was awarded by God the gift of prophecy, and whose person and behaviour implicitly contrast with those of the scheming and incompetent magicians and necromancers surrounding King Vortigern.

Wavrin's *Chroniques d'Angleterre*

The three most illustrated manuscripts containing the beginning of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre* were all illuminated between 1470 and 1480 by an artist who came to be known as the "Maître de la *Chronique d'Angleterre*", and who illustrated many other manuscripts written in French for the court of Burgundy, especially chronicles.⁵⁹ This artist, who looked for expressivity rather than realism, even if he also used illusionistic techniques (including the tiled floor of the royal chamber), liked dramatic elements, using side scenes with an anecdotal or a burlesque slant, and he often played on the bipartition of scenes with an indoor / outdoor contrast. In BnF fr. 74, the only page-wide miniature featuring Merlin is on folio 98: its borders feature beautiful birds, whose sophisticated songs could echo the praises of the courtiers, but at the centre of the lower border is a curious creature, a hybrid goblin with the shell of a snail. This unexpected, whimsical, sight may be a reminder of the abnormality of Merlin's birth and of his wondrous otherness. The Master of the *Chronique d'Angleterre* reconciled a faithful rendering of contemporary costume and architecture and an idealised representation of the natural world.⁶⁰

Interestingly, the manuscripts of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre* do not follow a similar iconographic programme but show an important degree of variation in the choice of episodes to be illustrated, and to some extent in the compositions used for this purpose. As a consequence, they highlight different aspects of Merlin's role, shifting the emphasis on the prodigy child to his significance as a prophet and counsellor of the King of Britain and exploring in different ways his particular relationship to King Vortigern.

Merlin, Prophet of the British in BnF fr. 74

BnF fr. 74, made in Bruges around 1475, and measuring 45 x 33 cm, is the most luxurious manuscript of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre*. It is the first part of a set of 6 volumes, later divided into 12 volumes (BnF fr. 74-85), which contains more than 2000 folios and 130 illustrations in total.⁶¹ Each chapter starts with an impressive page-wide frontispiece miniature, with a sophisticated floral and vegetal border. This set of the *Chroniques* of Jean de Wavrin was made for Louis de

Gruuthuse, a well-known Flemish bibliophile, officer for Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, and knight of the Golden Fleece.

In fr. 74, which contains 181 folios and 27 page-wide or column-wide illustrations, 2 miniatures illustrate the passage relating Merlin's prophecies. They are situated at the beginning of the second part of Merlin's prophecies and after the end of the actual prophecies, before the passage when Merlin announces the return of Constant's sons to Britain. Although the first miniature, fol. 83v, is a single-column image [Figure 3], both illustrations use the same composition, despite a reversed orientation.

The page-wide format of the second miniature, fol. 98 [Figure 4] allows for the addition of an exterior scene which opens the perspective to the outside landscape but does not add any narrative element: the main action happens indoors, in the dialogue between Merlin and Vortigern. In both cases, Merlin is standing facing the king, enthroned under a canopy, and the prophet's gestures show that he is talking and explaining things to Vortigern, in front of his counsellors and courtiers. The interaction of the prophet and the king is reminiscent of the typical iconography of presentation miniatures, even if in this case, Merlin is not offering a book but his prophetic words.⁶² In both cases, the representation of a man stepping into the image, next to the king, on the foreground, lends dynamism to the scene.

In fr. 74, the effect of visual duplication and the use of variations on the same composition reinforce the importance and stature of Merlin as a prophet for the king. By contrast with BnF fr. 2806, which highlighted the wonder of the prophetic child [Figures 1 and 2], BnF fr. 74 always represents Merlin as a sleek young man whose long blue clothing, fit to the role of a wise man, matches that of the king's entourage. The king himself is dressed in blue in three of the four miniatures, as on folio 98 [Figure 4], where the dense blue of Merlin's robe directly reflects the colour of the king's own garb. Given the complexity of the prophecies themselves, the illustration focuses not on their content but on the context of their enunciation, at court, in the interaction between Merlin and the king. A group of courtiers invariably features in the background and around the royal figure: they are witnesses to dialogue between the king and Merlin. As they stand

on the side, sometimes turning their back to the viewer, in the long dress of the wise counsellor or the more fashionable short pourpoint, it is hard to say if they are, like the discredited wise men consulted by Vortigern, hostile to a newcomer, an outsider, whose relationship with the king could weaken their own influence on the sovereign.

Merlin appears in two other images in BnF fr. 74, but in this manuscript, the abundance of his visual representations favours repetition of the same setting over variation in the ways he is depicted. The recurring use of the same compositional pattern tends to build and reinforce Merlin's role and identity as a prophet and counsellor engaged in a discussion with the royal figure. At his first meeting with Vortigern, Merlin is accompanied by his mother, who stands in front of him and explains how she was seduced by "un esperit en espece d'un joveceau" [Figure 5]. She is a princess, the daughter of the king of Demetia and is depicted wearing a dress and a conical hennin: the image does not show her in religious clothing, despite the fact that she has become a nun at saint Peter's monastery, maybe absorbing her in the courtly environment in which she appears alongside her prodigy son. Merlin himself is already featured as a young man in long blue dress, but is a step backward, his hands in his sleeves, and though the rubric refers to the strength of his word against the false prognostics of the king's seers, he then seems to be addressed by the king rather than talking to him.

In a later miniature [Figure 6], Merlin is represented talking to King Aurelien, who unlike Vortigern is not enthroned but standing and facing Merlin. Even if the royal crown is still visible, this less formal setting suggests a closer relationship between the new king and Merlin who becomes not only his prophet but his counsellor. Merlin, who has gained credibility and authority at the royal court, will transfer Stonehenge to mount Ambrith to honour the memory of the British barons treacherously murdered by Hengist. In this miniature, which highlights a new degree of proximity between Merlin and Aurelien, a courtier turns his back to the viewer but also the king and the prophet. This adversarial stance could once more suggest within the court disapproval, hostility or jealousy regarding the new intimacy established between the sovereign and Merlin.

In all four miniatures of BnF fr. 74 depicting Merlin, the character is not represented next to the wonders to which he is associated, whether the dragons of Vortigern's tower, a popular scene in other illuminated manuscripts, or Stonehenge, much more rarely depicted. Although BnF fr. 74 is overall less illustrated than BnF fr. 2806, it places more emphasis on the figure of Merlin, featuring in four miniatures, always at court, in dialogue with the kings of Britain, in the role of a prophet and advisor. His power lies in his understanding of the future and is visually embodied by his speech and connection to royal figures.

Merlin and Vortigern in Vienna, ONB 2534

A second exceptional copy of Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques* illuminated by the same artist (apart from its frontispiece miniature, painted by the Master of Anthony of Burgundy) is Vienna, ONB 2534. This manuscript, even larger than fr. 74, measuring 52 x 37 cm, contains 397 folios and 45 miniatures in total, page-wide or column-wide, with 213 folios and 24 illustrations in the section up to Cadwalader's reign.⁶³ Despite this level of luxury, we do not know who commissioned it or first owned it. Like fr. 74, Vienna, ONB 2534 shows Merlin, wearing on folio 114 a red robe with a white fur collar and talking to Vortigern, in a miniature introducing the second part of the prophecies [Figure 7].⁶⁴ On a page where the space left for armorial devices has not been completed, as in the rest of the manuscript, Vortigern is enthroned under a canopy and surrounded by an assembly of courtiers and counsellors.

The bipartition of the scene is reminiscent of that used in fr. 74 fol. 98 [Figure 4], but in this case, nature only plays a small part in the background of the outdoor scene, behind the depiction of a second building and of outside walls. The courtyard and the path leading to the reception room feature secondary characters: the royal court is represented as a busy hub with people constantly coming and going. The architectural structure of the building which hosts Vortigern's assembly, characterised by a crow-stepped gable reminiscent of Flemish houses, is more visible than in BnF fr. 74. If Merlin takes the lead by addressing the king in the main scene, one might wonder

about the identity of the man standing in the foreground on the right hand side. His rough stick, green hat and yellow collar, with negative connotations, may suggest that he is one of the magicians called in by Vortigern but discredited by Merlin who reveals their secret plots and inability to solve the mystery of the crumbling tower.

Although Vienna, ONB 2534 has a number of illustrations similar to BnF fr. 74 in the British part of the chronicle, it only contains one miniature staging Merlin, showing him in the process of delivering his prophecies. The strategy of iconographic repetition used in fr. 74 gives way to the deliberate selection of a single representative depiction. Like fr. 2806, Vienna, ONB 2534 does include a single-column miniature related to the episode of Vortigern's tower, folio 101v [Figure 8]. Vortigern, wearing a blue dress with ominous yellow sleeves, is talking to a messenger holding his hat in his hand, while in the background an army of workers is busy building the tower, carving, carrying and lifting stones through a pulley. By contrast with fr. 2806, this illustration shows the king and his building work before the intervention of Merlin and the discovery of the dragons, when the magicians wrongly persuade the king that building the tower will ensure his protection.

Merlin's absence in the illustration of BL, Royal 15.E.IV

The last copy of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre* illuminated by the same artist, Royal 15.E.IV, currently bound in two volumes, was probably compiled around 1475, after the death of Jean de Wavrin, whose name is removed from the text. Royal 15.E.IV was supposed to be part of a set of seven volumes, but it may be the case that the other volumes have never been executed.⁶⁵ The manuscript, which measures 45 x 35 cm, with 350 folios and 29 miniatures, or 191 folios and 19 images up to the reign of Cadwalader,⁶⁶ is characterised by the use of a prologue dedicated to Edward IV (instead of Waleran de Wavrin, Jean de Wavrin's nephew).⁶⁷ It resolutely takes an English perspective, calling Edward "roy de France et d'Angleterre" (fol. 14), and featuring the royal coat of arms in its margins. Prologue and table of contents were written by a different scribe than the rest of the text and are considered a later addition, probably a "product of commercial

piracy".⁶⁸ The presentation miniature shows Edward IV as an adult king wearing the chain of the Golden Fleece.⁶⁹ In 1470-71, Edward IV, in exile in Flanders, was hosted by Louis of Gruuthuse and had the opportunity to develop his bibliophile tastes through direct contact with the court of Burgundy. For Alison Allan, Galfridian prophecies were part of a larger group of "bible stories, ancient history and legends of early Britain" which "[were] to form the core of a significant body of [Yorkist] propaganda in the years after 1461". In particular, the fight of the two dragons buried under Vortigern's tower was interpreted by Yorkist as the victory of Edward IV (the red dragon) against the Lancastrians, descendant of the Saxons.⁷⁰

However, by contrast with the other two manuscripts illuminated by the same artist, Royal 15.E.IV contains no representation of Merlin, and if one miniature refers to the episode of Vortigern's tower, it does not show the marvel of the dragons [Figure 9]. In this case, the illustration focuses on the discussion between Vortigern and his "devineurs", represented on the left hand of the miniature, while the construction of a fortress appears in the background in the opposite corner of the miniature, with builders at work around scaffoldings and pulleys. The image is structured by a cross made of two diagonal lines which seem to divide the landscape composed of several hills and a central lake or river, separating Vortigern and his advisers from the building work. Although Vortigern is facing the viewer, the position of the protagonists on the extreme left of the miniature conveys a pejorative impression, notably regarding the enchanters, who are represented in profile and from the back. Vortigern and his magicians seem marginalised, far away from his people and the workers building the fortress, and their position on the edge of a path leading to the mountains suggests that the seers are about to desert the king. They wear distinctive pointy hats and their clothes stand out by their gaudy contrasting colours, especially the yellow, associated with treason, felony and treachery.⁷¹ This poor choice of counsellors highlights the isolation and weakness of Vortigern's power, despite his attempts at establishing strong buildings and defences.

In a way, the visual absence of Merlin in Royal 15.E.IV highlights the mistake made by the usurper in his choice of advisers and announces both the failure of his building project and the downfall of

his power. In this manuscript, slightly less illustrated than the two others, the prologue and dedication to contemporary kings of England are a later addition. The omission of Merlin in the illustration may be deliberate and related to remaining concerns about the character of Merlin and the polemical potential of his prophecies, despite their textual importance in the adaptation and the efforts to redeem the seer and present him in a positive, Christian light.

These manuscripts of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and of Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques* produced and illuminated in Burgundian circles throughout the fifteenth century are of an exceptional wealth, and their association with royal (Edward IV, dedicatee of Royal 15.E.IV) and aristocratic figures (Waleran de Wavrin, nephew of Jean de Wavrin and patron of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, and Louis de Gruuthuse, owner of BnF fr. 74-85) suggests a genuine interest in the past and present history of Great Britain among the highest circles, both in England and on the Continent.⁷² Although the three *Chroniques d'Angleterre* manuscripts were all produced in Bruges around the same time and illuminated by the same artist, they are not identical copies but present individual characteristics and different iconographic choices, placing a variable visual emphasis on the character of Merlin, prodigy child and prophet, in his relationship with Vortigern and the kings of Britain.

Conclusion

The examination of the transmission of Merlin's prophecies is crucial to our understanding of the reception of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* in late medieval France. The *Chroniques des Bretons* offer a relatively faithful translation of Geoffrey's Latin *Historia* and combine a variety of sources, but an exceptional amount of rewriting and glossing is at work in the adaptation of the *Prophecies*.⁷³ The importance of this section can be grasped in its careful layout: the organisation of Geoffrey's narrative is kept, and the paratextual apparatus becomes more formalised. This structure is transmitted in the manuscript tradition of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques d'Angleterre*.

The French translation and rewriting of Merlin's Latin prophecies highlights the craft of an adaptor who used different techniques to face the challenges raised by this difficult text. The translator engaged with his material by disclosing to the reader his design and methodology in the process of literary adaptation and interpretation. His glosses and commentaries show an interest in deciphering the imagery of the prophecies by providing well-known and expected historical references, but also creatively generating new meanings and correspondences adapted to a new context when faced with the obscurity of his twelfth-century source. In practice, he is not always brief nor very clear.

The translator's ambivalence towards astrological and eschatological prophecies may relate to the potentially dangerous nature of a material which could easily be drawn into polemics and heresy. He managed to infuse Merlin's prophecies with moral, didactic and historical meanings, using their complexity as an opportunity, rather than an obstacle. He tried to elucidate Merlin's words, whether in relation to past British history, or to more recent events including fourteenth-century overlapping insular (English) and continental (French and Burgundian) history.⁷⁴ The use of a cryptic imagery offered the adaptor the opportunity to comment on the political and social situation of his time in the kingdom of France by criticising the abuse and injustice committed by the powerful from a moral and religious standpoint. He lamented the corruption and divisions, imploring those in power to show more consideration and compassion for the fate of the population. This was also a way to deal with the increasing obscurity of the text and the difficulty in identifying specific historical references.

The adaptors and artists involved in the production of the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques d'Angleterre* manuscripts demonstrate a strong interest in Merlin's prophecies. In those texts, the inclusion of the prophecies builds up the character of the Prophet of the British, whose authority is consolidated by the demonstration of the historical accomplishment of his prognostications. Merlin and his prophecies play a central role in luxurious illuminated copies, with the exception of Royal 15 E IV. The illustrations, which were very sparse in the manuscript transmission of the *Historia*, give a rare insight into

Merlin's prophecies and act as textual divisions and markers both helping and guiding the interpretation of the text. Merlin, represented as a prodigy child in the *Chroniques des Bretons* manuscript (BnF fr. 2806), or as a courtly prophet in Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques* (BnF fr. 74 and Vienna, ONB, 2534) was both an authoritative and a problematic figure, which might account for his visual absence in BL, Royal 15.E.IV.

Although Geoffrey's *Historia* had a wide diffusion, it was mainly considered as a historical and scholarly text. In both the *Chroniques des Bretons* and Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques*, the interest of Burgundian writers and courtiers for British and English history, including Geoffrey's legendary account of the origins of Britain, was probably fed less by a purely erudite interest than by a desire to complement literary knowledge of prose Arthurian romances in a pleasant and attractive way. This relates to the popularity of romance and historical material at the court of Burgundy, demonstrating its particular taste for beautifully crafted deluxe books and art objects. From a continental perspective, English history was perhaps more easily considered as a fictional subject matter that lent itself to playful rewriting and adaptations. The willingness to engage with and exploit, rather than be wary of, Merlin's prophecies, may have been facilitated by cultural, historical and geographical distance, allowing translators from Burgundian circles a greater freedom of interpretation in their treatment of the historical dimensions of the Matter of Britain. Within the *Chroniques des Bretons* and *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, the fifteenth-century adaptations of Merlin's prophecies at the court of Burgundy, with their didactic stance and rhetorical flourishing, tell us about new expectations regarding the writing of history.⁷⁵

However, the production and circulation of late-medieval translations and adaptations of Geoffrey of Monmouth may have also responded to a specific interest in the history of England in relation to contemporary politics on the Continent: it is anchored in contemporary debates. The adaptations of Merlin's prophecies address concerns of the time and place of their formulation more directly than do the histories in which they are inserted. The adaptor of the *Chroniques des Bretons* used the English prophetic tradition to formulate stinging criticisms of French government and politics.

During the Hundred Years War, the rewriting of the prophecies by a copyist from Bourbonnais who was probably composing his lament on the state of French affairs from a clearer anti-English perspective shows the wider potential for a continental application of the prophecies.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, Jean de Wavrin gave a new life to the *Chroniques des Bretons*, showing how history-writing during the reign of Philip the Good benefited from the liveliness of a previous local historiographical tradition. He inserted the *Chroniques* into a compilation which aimed at offering an encompassing view of British history, from its mythical origins to his own time, including Merlin's prophecies, in the perspective of contemporary French, English and Burgundian relations. The third quarter of the fifteenth century was period of profound political turmoil afflicting a former, and always potential, ally. The prophecies and their interpretation could appeal to high-ranking figures, both politically and culturally active at the Burgundian court. The audience of the prophecies' translations encompassed not only bibliophiles, but also key players directly engaged in the fate of a Lancastrian or Yorkist England.

Illustrations



Figure 1: *Chroniques des Bretons*, BnF fr. 2806 fol. 38

Merlin playing and the messengers of Vortigern

Comment les legas du roy trouverent Merlin, l'enfant sans pere, et des choses qu'il dist au roy pourquoy sa tour ne pouoit estre estable au grant opprobre de ses enchanteurs. LIII



Figure 2: *Chroniques des Bretons*, BnF fr. 2806 fol. 39v

Merlin and Vortigern and the dragons of the tower

Cy s'ensuivent les merueilleuses et haultes prophesies que denonça Merlin au roy Wortigerius, et parle premierement de la signifiace des dragons qui yssirent des pierres de l'estang expuisié. LVI



Figure 3: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin
BnF fr. 74 fol. 83v, Merlin and Vortigern (1)
Cy après s'ensieult la seconde cause des propheties Merlin le
prophete.

Figure 4: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin

BnF fr. 74 fol. 98, Merlin and Vortigern (2)

Comment Merlin prophetiza au roy Vortigier l'advenement des deux filz du roy Constant et de sa miserable vye et aussy la mort de Englist le Saxon.



Figure 5: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin
BnF fr. 74 fol. 73, Merlin, his mother and Vortigern
*Comment les messages du roy Vortigier emmenèrent Merlin qu'on
disoit l'enfant sans pere et des choses qu'il dist au roy Vortigier au
grant reproche de ses devineurs de l'establiete des fondemens de sa
tour.*

Figure 6: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin

BnF fr. 74 fol. 107v, Merlin and Aurelien

Comment le roy Aurelien reforma son royaume en bonnes meurs et fist rediffier les eglises, cités, villes et forteresses destruites par les Saxons et de la cause pour laquelle il tramyst querre Merlin et du conseil que ledit Merlin le prophete luy donna sur sa demande.



Figure 7: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin
 Vienna, ONB 2534 fol. 114, Merlin and Vortigern
Cy après s'ensieut la seconde cause des propheties Merlin le prophete.
.LVII.e



Figure 8: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin
 Vienna, ONB 2534 fol. 101v, The tower of Vortigern
 Comment le roy Wortigier prinst conseil a ses divineurs de sa
 miserable vye, et de la tour qu'ilz lui conseillerent a ediffier pour soy
 saulver, disant que [101v] ceste tour estoit son saulvement. Le chapitre
 .LIII.e.

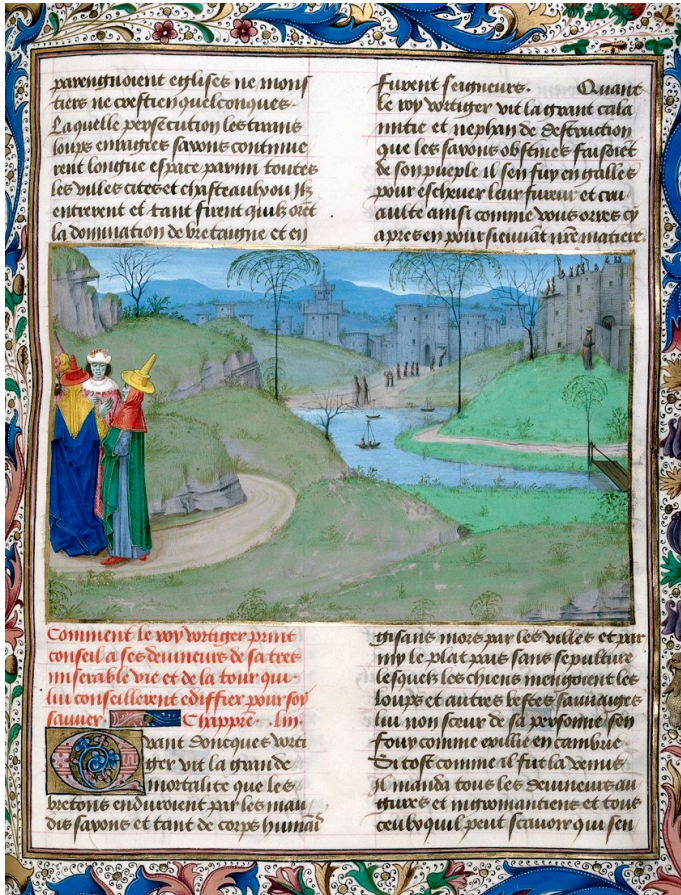


Figure 9: *Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Jean de Wavrin
 BL, Royal 15.E.IV fol. 93 © The British Library Board

Vortigern and his magicians

*Comment le roy Vortiger print conseil a ses devineurs de sa tres
 miserable vie et de la tour qui lui conseillerent edifier pour soy
 sauver. Chapitre. LIII.*

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Graeme Small and Géraldine Veyseyre for their kind comments and discussions regarding this paper.
- 2 The first French prose translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and of Merlin's prophecies appears in the *Estoire de Brutus* manuscript, Paris, BnF, fr. 17177, copied in the last quarter of the 13th c. See *L'Estoire de Brutus: la plus ancienne traduction en prose française de l'Historia regum Britannie de Geoffroy de Monmouth*, ed. Géraldine Veyseyre (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 292-303.
- 3 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain, De Gestis Britonum*, ed. Michael D. Reeve; trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007). [=HKB]; See Géraldine Veyseyre, *Translator Geoffroy de Monmouth: trois traductions en prose française de l'Historia regum Britannie: XIII-XV siècles* (Thèse: Paris 4, dir. Gilles Roussineau, 2002), t. III and t. V.
- 4 There are four remaining manuscripts of the *Chroniques des Bretons*: BnF fr. 2806, (first quarter of the 15th c.), BnF fr. 5621 (1st half of the 15th c.), BnF fr. 16939 (Bruges, 3rd quarter of the 15th c., illuminated by Loyset Liédet -the manuscript also contains the *Grande Chronique de Normandie*) and Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Regius Latinus 871 (15th c.). See Veyseyre, *Translator Geoffroy*, t. III.
- 5 The *Chroniques des Bretons* have not been edited independently, except as the first part of Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques*. See Jehan de Wavrin, *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne, a Present Nomme [sic] Engleterre*, ed. William Hardy (London: Longman, Roberts and Green, 1864-91), vol. 1. [=CGB]. Victor Jante, PhD candidate at the Université de Strasbourg, is preparing a new critical edition and commentary of books 4 to 6 of the first volume of Jean de Wavrin's *Chronicles*.
- 6 Irène Fabry-Tehranchi, "Écrire l'histoire de Stonehenge. Narration historique et fiction romanesque (xiie-xve s.)", *L'Écriture de l'histoire au Moyen Âge - Contraintes génériques, contraintes documentaires*, dir. Étienne Anheim, Pierre Chastang, Francine Mora-Lebrun and Anne Rochebouet (Paris, Garnier, 2015), 131-148.
- 7 Caroline D. Eckhardt, "The *Prophetia Merlini* of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Latin Manuscript Copies," *Manuscripta* 26 (1982): 167-176.
- 8 Catherine Daniel, "Les prophéties de Merlin: une arme de propagande des XII^e-XIII^e siècles", *Convaincre et persuader: communication et propagande aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, dir. Martin Aurell (Poitiers:

-
- CESCM, 2007), 211-234 and Catherine Daniel, *Les prophéties de Merlin et la culture politique (XII-XVI siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).
- 9 If the Modern period saw a decline in the popularity of Galfridian prophecies, related to the increasing scepticism concerning Arthurian history, this happened gradually, varied geographically, and did not affect all kinds of prophecies. See Tim Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics, and the People in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006).
 - 10 Catherine Daniel, "L'audience des prophéties de Merlin: entre rumeurs populaires et textes savants", *Médiévales* 57 (2009): 33-52.
 - 11 On the significant impact of the prophecies and the variety of reactions they raised, see Laura Keeler, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Late Latin Chroniclers, 1300-1500*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946.
 - 12 Richard Trachsler, "Des *Prophetiae Merlini* aux *Prophecies Merlin* ou comment traduire les vaticinations de Merlin", *Perspectives Médiévales* 26, *Translation Médiévale* (2000): 105-24. Medieval translators did not pursue a word-for-word translation. Focusing on the meaning ("sen") of a text allowed them to make choices, additions and transformations, thus reinforcing the instructive dimension of their work. Claude Buridant, "Translatio medievalis. Théorie et pratique de la traduction médiévale", *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature*, 21/1 (1983): 81-136. Most biblical translations merged the biblical text with exegetic material, whether the glosses were already present in the original manuscript, or whether they were added and compiled by the translator himself. These commentaries, facilitating the interpretation of the text, were probably expected and welcomed by the audience of the French translations. Clive R. Sneddon, "The Bible du XIII^e Siècle: Its Medieval Public in the Light of its Manuscript Tradition", *The Bible and Medieval Culture* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 127-140. It is only in the Renaissance that translations started to distinguish between the text and its commentary.
 - 13 Veyseyre, *Translator Geoffroy*, t. III, 1-3. Her edition of the prophecy section of the *Chroniques des Bretons* is based on BnF fr. 2806 folios 39-52 (=CB) and includes the variants present in the three other manuscripts, which belong to the second textual family (BnF fr. 5621=CBv).
 - 14 Only BnF fr. 74-85 provides the full compilation. According to the remaining copies, in most cases, different volumes of the *Chroniques d'Angleterre* circulated separately or in smaller gatherings.
 - 15 Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie*. 4, 121-157.
 - 16 Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), vol. 1, 195, n. 83.

-
- 17 Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie*. 4, 129.
 - 18 The manuscript tradition of the *Historia* is large and complex. See *ibid.*; M. D. Reeve, "The transmission of the *Historia regum Britanniae*", *Journal of Medieval Latin* 1 (1991): 73-117; HKB; the single-manuscript edition based on an important early witness: *The Historia Regum Britannie. 1. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988). The first variant version contains "additional material, sometimes drawn from other sources, a fondness for biblical phraseology; some speeches abbreviated or omitted, or, conversely, paraphrased or completely altered... and a tendency to tone down or omit unpleasant details" (xi), "The variant version was not Geoffrey's source nor was it written by Geoffrey himself; it is a redaction of the vulgate text made by an unknown contemporary of Geoffrey at some time between 1138... and the early 1150s" (lxx), *The Historia Regum Britannie. 2, The First Variant Version*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988).
 - 19 For illustrations of the episode in the French prose *Merlin* manuscripts, see Irène Fabry-Tehranchi. *Texte et images des manuscrits du Merlin et de la Suite Vulgate (XIIIe-XVe siècle). L'Estoire de Merlin ou les Premiers faits du roi Arthur* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 114-117.
 - 20 All emphasis mine.
 - 21 The rubric of BnF fr. 74 fol. 83v states "Cy après s'ensieult la seconde cause des propheties"; in this instance, the prophecies are presented as an organised speech governed by rhetorical rules.
 - 22 See *Sciences et Savoirs sous Charles V*, dir. Olivier Bertrand (Paris: Champion, 2014) and *Traduire au XIV^e siècle: Evrart de Conty et la vie intellectuelle à la cour de Charles V*, ed. Joëlle Ducos and Michèle Goyens (Paris: Champion, 2015); Georges Doutrepoint, *La littérature française à la cour des ducs de Bourgogne: Philippe le Hardi, Jean sans Peur, Philippe le Bon, Charles le Téméraire* (Paris: Champion, 1909); *La Librairie des Ducs de Bourgogne: Manuscrits Conservés à la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique*, ed. Bernard Bousmanne and Céline Van Hoorebeeck (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000-2009), 4 vol., and Lefèvre, « Les acteurs de la traduction », vol. 1, 147-206.
 - 23 Georges Doutrepoint, *Les mises en prose des épopées et des romans chevaleresques du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle* (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1939); *Mettre en prose aux XIV^e-XVI^e siècles*, dir. Maria Colombo Timelli, Barbara Ferrari and Anne Schoysman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); *Pour un nouveau répertoire des mises en prose: roman, chanson de geste, autres genres*, dir. Maria Colombo Timelli, Barbara Ferrari and Anne Schoysman (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014) and *Nouveau*

-
- répertoire de mises en prose (XIV^e-XVI^e siècle)*, dir. Maria Colombo Timelli, Barbara Ferrari, Anne Schoysman and François Suard (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014).
- 24 Political prophecy "gave stature and anonymity to criticisms and protests in a very dangerous area where criticism could be construed as treason", Lesley A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), 238 and Sharon L. Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 18.
 - 25 At the end of the 12th c., William of Newburgh, from Bridlington, in Yorkshire, wrote in his *Historia regum anglicarum*: "Qui etiam majori ausu cujusdam Merlini divinationes fallacissimas, quibus utique de proprio plurimum adjecit, dum eas in Latinam transfunderet, tanquam authenticas et immobili veritate subnixas prophetias vulgavit" [More audaciously still, [Geoffrey] has taken the most deceitful predictions of a certain Merlin which he has very greatly augmented on his own account, and in translating them into Latin he has published them as though they were authentic prophecies resting on unshakeable truth]. William of Newburgh. *The History of English Affairs. Book 1*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988, 28-29 and Siân Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 78.
 - 26 "Dunc dist Merlin les prophecies / Que vus avez, ço crei, oïes, / Des reis ki a venir estoient, / Ki la terre tenir devient. / Ne vail sun livre translater / Quant jo nel sai interpreter" ll. 7535-40. Wace's *Brut* circulates in about 30 manuscripts and in some cases, French verse translations of the prophecies were added to his text. See Jean Blacker, "Ne vail sun livre translater". Wace's omission of Merlin's prophecies from the *Roman de Brut*, *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ed. Ian Short (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1993), 49-59.
 - 27 There are 8 remaining fragments of French verse translations, ranging from the end of the 12th century to the beginning of the 14th century, half of which are transmitted with Anglo-Norman manuscripts of the octosyllabic *Brut*. The verse translations of the prophecies are mainly in decasyllabic rhyming couplets or in dodecasyllabic laisses, whereas the octosyllable was the preferred meter for the translation of the rest of the *Historia*. Jean Blacker, "Where Wace Feared to Tread: Latin Commentaries on Merlin's Prophecies in the Reign of Henry II", *Arthuriana*, 6 (1) (1996): 45-46 and *Anglo-Norman Verse Prophecies of Merlin*, ed. and trans. Jean Blacker, *Arthuriana*, 15 (1) (2005). *Geste des*

-
- Bretuns en Alexandrins ou Harley Brut*, ed. Beatrice Barbieri (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015).
- 28 Written towards the end of the 13th century, and based on Geoffrey's narrative, the *Brut* was widely disseminated in Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Latin, up to the 15th century. See Lister Matheson, *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998).
 - 29 In the large manuscript tradition of the *Historia*, some copies omit the prologue to the *Prophecies* or remove them from their usual position in Geoffrey's narrative, so that in a few cases they were copied after the *Historia*, at the same time or at a later period. It also happens that they are entirely missing. Julia Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie*. 4, 102-103.
 - 30 In some cases, the Latin prophecies were re-inserted in vernacular chronicles. This is the case in the chronicle of England written in French transmitted in the 15th c. manuscript, Paris, BnF, fr. 5622; in Pierre of Langtoft's metrical chronicle, London, BL, Cotto Julius A V; and in the deluxe copy of the Middle English prose *Brut* illuminated by a Flemish artist, Lambeth Palace 6 (c. 1480), which like BL, Harley 53 (1450s), ranges up to 1436. The switch to Latin in the middle of the vernacular text sets the prophecies apart from the rest of the chronicle and suggests a bilingual readership. See Matheson, *The Prose Brut*, 296-301 and Richard Trachsler, "Du *libellus Merlini* au *livret Merlin*. Les traductions françaises des *Prophetiae Merlini* dans leurs manuscrits", *Les manuscrits médiévaux témoins de lectures*, dir. Catherine Croizy-Naquet, Laurence Harf-Lancner and Michelle Szkilnik (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015), 67-87.
 - 31 Written in the first half of the 14th century, it was incorporated at the beginning of the reign of Arthur into the Long Version of the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut*, which was the source of the Middle English *Brut*. See *The Brut, or the Chronicles of England, Edited from Ms. Rawl. B 171, Bodleian Library*, ed. Friedrich W. D. Brie (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, Early English Text Society, 131, 1906), part 1, 72-76 and T. M. Smallwood, "The Prophecy of the Six Kings", *Speculum*, 60 (3) (1985): 571-592.
 - 32 Sebastien Mamerot, author of the *Neuf Preux*, found them "moult longues et fortes a entendre", and Jean Vaillant de Poitiers, argued of constraints of "briefté" and "hastivieté" to skip the prophecies, qualified as "obstinees et de trouble et douteux entendement". See Trachsler, « Des *Prophetiae Merlini* », 112-113.

-
- 33 The vulgate version of the *Historia*, generally followed by the *Chroniques des Bretons*, indicates: "ignotum tibi interpretatus sum sermonem" (HKB 143), translated by "j'ay interprété la chose a toy ygnorante par sermon bien ordonné" (CGB 227). In the body of the letter, the idea of the translation from a language (Breton) into another (Latin) is clearer in the version provided by manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlison C. 152 (O) of the *Historia*: "prophetias [...] de Brittanico in Latinum transtuli" and "quod in Brittanico Merlinus dulciter et metri cececinit, ut cumque potui licet immodulate tamen Latine persono" (HKB 143). The translation provided by the *Chroniques des Bretons* often uses both Wace's *Roman de Brut* and the *Historia*, exclusively in its Vulgate version. On the sources of the *Chroniques* and the relationship between the Latin and the vernacular source, see Veysseyre, *Translator Geoffroy*, t. III, Annexe 2, 161-170 and t. V, 112-144.
- 34 Voir Sylvie Lefèvre, « Les acteurs de la traduction : commanditaires et destinataires. Milieux de production et de diffusion », *Translations médiévales. Cinq siècles de traductions en français au Moyen Âge (XI-XV siècles), Étude et répertoire, I^e partie : De la « translatio studii » à l'étude de la « translatio »*, dir. Claudio Galderisi (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 182-183.
- 35 Veysseyre, *Translator Geoffroy*, t. III, 1 and 138.
- 36 In the prologue to his *Story of England*, dated 1338, which offers a Middle English verse adaptation of the *Historia* mediated by Wace's *Brut*, the monk and writer Robert Mannyng claims that he translated his French and Latin sources into English, "in symple speche as I couth / þat is *lightest* in mannes mouth" (l. 73-74), also referring to "light ryme" (l. 118) and "light lange" (l. 125). He thus distinguishes two kinds and uses of English, contrasting this with "strange Inglis" (ll. 78, 79, 116), "strange ryme" (l. 112) and "strange speche" (l. 114), characterised by their obscurity and paradoxical foreignness. See Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *The Story of England, Edited from Mss. at Lambeth Palace and the Inner Temple by Frederick J. Furnivall* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 2 vols. The claim to lightness is problematic in that Robert Mannyng's own text develops a "tangled syntax" with "many lexical and prosodic experiments". As shown by J. Coleman, the author seems to deplore the incapacity of local performers to correctly convey complex French-inspired rhyming patterns, trying to adapt his own poetical work to the needs and level of an audience (probably local Anglo-Norman Lincolnshire gentry) which valued lightness and simplicity while showing an interest in English language and history. Joyce Coleman, "Strange

-
- Rhyme: Prosody and Nationhood in Robert Mannyng's *Story of England*", *Speculum*, 78 (4) (2003): 1214-1238.
- 37 The most developed of these commentaries, known through several manuscripts and later printed editions, was written by Alanus ab Insulis (Alain de Lille) between 1174 and 1179. See Géraldine Veyseyre and Clara Wille, « Les commentaires latins et français aux *Prophetie Merlini* de Geoffroy de Monmouth (xii^e-xv^e siècle) », *Médiévales*, 55 (2008): 93-114 and *Prophetie und Politik: die Explanatio in prophetia Merlini Ambrosii des Alanus Flandrensis*, ed. and trans. Clara Wille (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 2 vols.
- 38 *L'Estoire de Brutus*, ed. Veyseyre.
- 39 Veyseyre, Géraldine. « "Metre en roman" les prophéties de Merlin: voies et détours de l'interprétation dans trois traductions de l'*Historia Regum Britannie* », *Moult obscures paroles*, *Etudes sur la prophétie médiévale*, dir. Richard Trachsler (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007), 112.
- 40 Trachsler, « Des *Prophetiae Merlini* », 111; Clara Wille, « Le dossier des commentaires latins des "Prophetie Merlini" », *Moult obscures paroles*, dir. Richard Trachsler, 167-84, and Trachsler, « Du *libellus Merlini* », 74-77.
- 41 See Veyseyre, "Metre en roman", 156. The text must have been written before 1415, since the defeat of Agincourt is not mentioned.
- 42 Veyseyre, "Metre en roman", 140-141; 152, n. 235; 160.
- 43 "The subject of political prophecy is king, people and nation". "Because political prophecy is concerned with recent and contemporary events", it "react[s] creatively to altered circumstances", a "flexibility" which allows it to "survive for generations". Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs*, 14.
- 44 The Burgundians suffered a great political and financial blow with the death of Philip the Bold (uncle of Charles VII and Charles of Orléans, and brother of John of Berry) in 1404. They only recovered a major influence in the French royal council after the assassination of Charles of Orléans by John the Fearless in 1407. From 1413, after the failure of the Cabochien revolt, initially supported by John the Fearless, the Burgundians' position in the French government was weakened. They were in open conflict with the Orléans up to the assassination of John at Montereau in 1419 (despite the peace treaty made at Pouilly shortly before). The Anglo-Burgundian alliance, based on commercial and strategic interests, and the successful campaigns of Henry V, from Agincourt onwards, were crowned with the treaty of Troyes, which led to his wedding with Catherine of Valois and made him heir to Charles VI, in

-
1420. See Bertrand Schnerb, *Les Armagnacs et les Bourguignons: la maudite guerre* (Paris: Perrin, 1988).
- 45 See page 93.
- 46 In the second part of the 14th century, the Bourbonnais greatly suffered from the pillage and disorder caused by the "routiers", mercenaries of the free companies. In the second quarter of the 15th century, the government of the duchy was profoundly affected by the capture of John I, Duke of Bourbon (1381-1434), at the battle of Agincourt (1415). The dukes of Bourbon were vassals of the kings of France, holding the duchy as an apanage, but they also paid homage to the dukes of Burgundy for some of their eastern territories, and their political interest could contradict the centralising tendencies of the French monarchy. While John I had distanced himself from John the Fearless after the assassination of Louis of Orléans in 1407, his heir, Charles I of Bourbon (1401-56), though married to Agnès of Burgundy, daughter of John the Fearless, was instrumental in severing the Anglo-Burgundian alliance, through the negotiation of a peace between Charles VII and Philip the Good at the Congress of Arras in 1435. See Leguai, André. *Les ducs de Bourbon pendant la crise monarchique du XV^e siècle: contribution à l'étude des apanages* (Paris: les Belles Lettres, 1962) and *De la seigneurie à l'état: Le Bourbonnais pendant la guerre de Cent Ans* (Moulins: Imprimeries Réunies, 1969).
- 47 See E. Voltmer, « Gibelins » et « Guelfes », *Dictionnaire historique de la Papauté*, dir. Philippe Levillain (Paris, Fayard, 1994), 726-729 et 773-775.
- 48 Rupert Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1911; Paul Zumthor, *Merlin le prophète: un thème de la littérature polémique de l'historiographie et des romans* (Lausanne: Imprimeries réunies, 1943), 97-113; Daniel, *Les prophéties de Merlin*, 275-285.
- 49 They mixed political prophecies, sermons on contemporary corruption and romance episodes. Written as a dialogue between Merlin and Antoine then Blaise, they increased Merlin's religious credentials. *Les Prophecies de Merlin*, ed. Lucy Paton (New York; London, 1926), 2 vol.; *Les Prophesies de Merlin (Cod. Bodmer 116)*, ed. Anne Berthelot (Cologny-Genève: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1992); Nathalie Koble, *Les Prophesies de Merlin, roman en prose du XIII^e siècle: édition critique et commentaire littéraire* (Paris: Thèse de l'École nationale des chartes, dir. Françoise Vieliard, 1997); Nathalie Koble, « Un univers romanesque en expansion. Les "Prophecies de Merlin" en prose du pseudo-Richard d'Irlande », *Moult obscures paroles*, 185-217 and Nathalie Koble, *Les*

-
- « *Prophéties de Merlin* » en prose. *Le roman arthurien en éclats* (Paris: Champion, 2009).
- 50 Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs*, 16.
- 51 The artist, named after the illustration of the Book of Hours Paris, Bibl. Mazarine 469, produced about 1410-1415, collaborated with the Boucicaut Master (named after Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, 2, the Book of Hours made about 1410-1415 for Jean II Le Meingre Boucicaut, Marshal of France), who also worked in Paris in the first third of the 15th century. In BnF fr. 2806, as in BnF fr. 2810 (made for John the Fearless c. 1410-1412, and offered to John of Berry in 1413), "most of the miniatures were painted thinly, [...] the brushworks is rapid and open, [...] the palette is restricted and the colours pale, most frequently green, rose, tan, below the blue-violet sky". See Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry. The Boucicaut Master* (London: Phaidon 1968), 38. François Avril mentions the use of *grisaille* and « des vêtements blancs, modelés de teintes variées », in the Boucicaut workshop, but the absence of detailed landscapes in the background points to the work of the Mazarine Master, « Le Livre des Merveilles », *Marco Polo, 'Le Livre des Merveilles', Manuscrit Français 2810 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Tournai: La Renaissance du Livre, 1999), 197-223 (207; 209). *Paris 1400: les arts sous Charles VI (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 22 mars-12 juillet 2004)* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), cat. 43, 175 and 185. A list of manuscripts illuminated by the Mazarine Master features in Gabriele Bartz, *Der Boucicaut-Meister: ein unbekanntes Stundenbuch* (Rotthalmünster: Heribert Tenschert, 1999), 119-123.
- 52 By contrast, the Boucicaut Master seemed to work mainly for members of the Armagnac party (the maréchal de Boucicaut was on their side, despite old associations with the house of Burgundy), Avril, « Le Livre des Merveilles », 210-211.
- 53 Jehan de Wavrin, *Recueil des Croniques*, ed. William Hardy, vol. 1.
- 54 At the time, this feature was rather rare (the other manuscripts discussed are copied in two columns) but could be found in long and scholarly works such as Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum* and its translations. This layout may highlight the seriousness and erudition of this historical work, although the abundance of miniatures would also have appealed to a lay, aristocratic audience.
- 55 Aimar De Ranconet, native of Bordeaux, counsellor and president of the Parliament of Paris, was appointed by King Francis I to the Great Council in 1539. De Ranconet was a philologist and a bibliophile; his name is associated with the *Dictionarium historicum, geographicum, poeticum*

- (1553) of Charles Estienne and with the *Thresor de la langue francoyse* (1606) of Jean Nicot. See Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, "Un grand homme oublié, le président de Ranconnet, humaniste du XVI^e siècle", *Revue des questions historiques* (1871): 230-245 and Terence Russon Wooldridge, *Les débuts de la lexicographie française: Estienne, Nicot et le Thresor de la langue françoise (1606)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 36-42.
- 56 See the inscription on folio 116: "Ce Romant de la Roze a esté achapté de l'inventaire de feu maistre Jehan Brinon, seigneur de Villennes, par moy. De Ranconnet" (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>, 01/12/2015). I would like to thank Géraldine Veyseyre for this reference.
- 57 See Irène Fabry, "Construction impossible et défense improbable: la tour du roi Vertigier dans l'*Historia Brittonum* de Nennius, l'*Historia Regum Britanniae* de Geoffroy de Monmouth, le *Brut* de Wace et le *Merlin* de Robert de Boron", *Rêves de pierre et de bois: Imaginer la construction au Moyen Age*, dir. Clotilde Dauphant and Vanessa Obry (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Sorbonne, 2009), 93-112.
- 58 The sharp edges of the hole in the ground echo the dramatic cliffs and landscapes represented in the manuscript of the *Livre des merveilles*, BnF fr. 2810. The Egerton Master, who favoured the depiction of rocks with sharp slating peaks, often collaborated with the Mazarine Master, as he did in BnF fr. 2810. Avril, « Le Livre des Merveilles », 214-215.
- 59 *La Légende du roi Arthur*, dir. Thierry Delcourt (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France: Seuil, 2009), 140-141.
- 60 *Manuscrits enluminés des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2009), 183-184.
- 61 *Miniatures flamandes, 1404-1482*, dir. Bernard Bousmanne and Thierry Delcourt (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2011), 323-325.
- 62 The frontispiece miniatures of BnF fr. 74 fol. 1 and Vienna, ONB 2534 fol. 17 represent the feast organised at the court of Diodicias and the wedding of his daughters. Only BL Royal 15.E.IV fol. 14 contains a presentation miniature accompanying the prologue, with the author kneeling and offering his book to Edward IV, sitting on a throne and wearing the chain of the Golden Fleece, in a blue robe adorned with heraldic golden lions and lilies. The margins include the royal arms, *Quarterly, 1st and 4th, France moderne, 2nd and 3rd England*, adopted by Henry IV from 1406 onwards, and the motto for the Order of the Garter, founded by Edward III in 1348: "Honny soit qui mal y pense".
- 63 Otto Pächt and Dagmar Thoss, *Die Illumiinierten Handschriften und Inkunabeln der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*.

-
- Flämische Schule, II* (Vienna: Nationalbibliothek, 1990), t. 1, 39. The miniature of folio 198v is missing from the list of illustrations.
- 64 The manuscript Vienna, ONB 2534 has been digitised by the Austrian National Library, see <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/AC13951572> (01/10/2018)
- 65 Edward IV's library also contained a copy of volume III of Jean de Wavrin's chronicle, Royal 14.E.IV, but this book was acquired independently from Royal 15.E.IV. This copy was probably transcribed by Jean Du Quesne of Lille in the early 1470s before being illuminated by Bruges artists in the 1480s for Edward IV. Scot McKendrick and Kathleen Doyle, *Royal Manuscripts: the Genius of Illumination (Exhibition, London, The British Library, 2011-12)* (London: The British Library, 2011), 196-197.
- 66 Janet Backhouse, *The Illuminated Page: Ten Centuries of Manuscript Painting in the British Library* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 195-196; *Illuminating the Renaissance: the Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, dir. Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick (Los Angeles: Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 278-280.
- 67 In fact the king is mentioned twice as Edward V, in the opening rubric and the prologue, but it is probably an error of the Flemish copyist. See *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 280, note 1.
- 68 McKendrick, and Doyle, *Royal Manuscripts*, 194-195.
- 69 Margaret Kekewich, "Edward IV, William Caxton, and Literary Patronage in Yorkist England", *The Modern Language Review*, 66 (3) (1971): 481-487.
- 70 Genealogies and prophecies thus "provide a background of historical and semi-learned argument through which the more thoughtful might realise and acknowledge the undeniable superiority of Edward IV's title to the throne". Alison Allan, "Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, prophecy and the 'British History' in the Reign of Edward IV", *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1979), 172, 182 and 188-189.
- 71 Michel Pastoureau, "Rouge, jaune et gaucher: note sur l'iconographie médiévale de Judas", *Couleurs, images, symboles: études d'histoire et d'anthropologie* (Paris: Léopard d'or, 1989), 69-84.
- 72 On the political importance of prophetic discourse in England at that time, see Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs*, ch. 6.
- 73 The section of Merlin's prophecies, with its textual complexity, offers a unique insight into the translator's work, his literary project and its accomplishment. It can provide clues regarding the Latin copy used by the translator. Veyseyre, "Metre en roman", 111.

-
- 74 Since the beginning of the Hundred Years War, in the first half of the 14th century, English kings saw themselves as legitimate kings of both England and France, but for the dukes of Burgundy, engaged in the political and cultural construction of a Burgundian state, French history was part of their own history, as Valois princes and main actors in French politics throughout the 15th century. See *La Cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe: le rayonnement et les limites d'un modèle culturel*, dir. Werner Paravicini (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2013).
- 75 See *Le Moyen Age*, CXII, 2006 (3-4), *Littérature et Culture Historiques à la Cour de Bourgogne* and *La Librairie des Ducs de Bourgogne: Manuscrits Conservés à la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique*, ed. Bernard Bousmanne and Céline Van Hoorebeeck (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), vol. 4, *Textes historiques*, 11-23.