

= Nostradamus =

Michel de Nostredame (depending on the source , 14 or 21 December 1503 ? 2 July 1566) , usually Latinised as Nostradamus , was a French apothecary and reputed seer who published collections of prophecies that have since become widely famous . He is best known for his book *Les Propheties* , the first edition of which appeared in 1555 . Since the publication of this book , which has rarely been out of print since his death , Nostradamus has attracted a following that , along with much of the popular press , credits him with predicting many major world events . Most academic sources maintain that the associations made between world events and Nostradamus 's quatrains are largely the result of misinterpretations or mistranslations (sometimes deliberate) or else are so tenuous as to render them useless as evidence of any genuine predictive power .

= = Biography = =

= = = Childhood = = =

Born on either 14 or 21 December 1503 in Saint @-@ Rémy @-@ de @-@ Provence , Provence (Occitania) , France , where his claimed birthplace still exists , Michel de Nostredame was one of at least nine children of notary Jaume (or Jacques) de Nostredame and Reynière , granddaughter of Pierre de Saint @-@ Rémy who worked as a physician in Saint @-@ Rémy . Jaume 's family had originally been Jewish , but his father , Cresquas , a grain and money dealer , based in Avignon , had converted to Catholicism around 1459 @-@ 60 , taking the Christian name " Pierre " and the surname " Nostredame " (Our Lady) , the saint on whose day his conversion was solemnised . The earliest ancestor who can be identified on the paternal side is Astruge of Carcassonne , who died about 1420 . Michel 's known siblings included Delphine , Jean (c . 1507 ? 77) , Pierre , Hector , Louis , Bertrand , Jean II (born 1522) and Antoine (born 1523) . Little else is known about his childhood , although there is a persistent tradition that he was educated by his maternal great @-@ grandfather Jean de St. Rémy ? a tradition which is somewhat undermined by the fact that the latter disappears from the historical record after 1504 , when the child was only one year old .

= = = Student years = = =

At the age of 15 Nostredame entered the University of Avignon to study for his baccalaureate . After little more than a year (when he would have studied the regular trivium of grammar , rhetoric and logic , rather than the later quadrivium of geometry , arithmetic , music and astronomy / astrology) , he was forced to leave Avignon when the university closed its doors in the face of an outbreak of the plague . After leaving Avignon , Nostredame , by his own account , travelled the countryside for eight years from 1521 researching herbal remedies . In 1529 , after some years as an apothecary , he entered the University of Montpellier to study for a doctorate in medicine . He was expelled shortly afterwards by the student procurator , Guillaume Rondelet , when it was discovered that he had been an apothecary , a " manual trade " expressly banned by the university statutes , and had been slandering doctors . The expulsion document , BIU Montpellier , Register S 2 folio 87 , still exists in the faculty library . However , some of his publishers and correspondents would later call him " Doctor " . After his expulsion , Nostredame continued working , presumably still as an apothecary , and became famous for creating a " rose pill " that supposedly protected against the plague .

= = = Marriage and healing work = = =

In 1531 Nostredame was invited by Jules @-@ César Scaliger , a leading Renaissance scholar , to come to Agen . There he married a woman of uncertain name (possibly Henriette d 'Encausse) , who bore him two children . In 1534 his wife and children died , presumably from the plague . After

their deaths , he continued to travel , passing through France and possibly Italy .

On his return in 1545 , he assisted the prominent physician Louis Serre in his fight against a major plague outbreak in Marseille , and then tackled further outbreaks of disease on his own in Salon @-@ de @-@ Provence and in the regional capital , Aix @-@ en @-@ Provence . Finally , in 1547 , he settled in Salon @-@ de @-@ Provence in the house which exists today , where he married a rich widow named Anne Ponsarde , with whom he had six children ? three daughters and three sons . Between 1556 and 1567 he and his wife acquired a one @-@ thirteenth share in a huge canal project organised by Adam de Craponne to irrigate largely waterless Salon @-@ de @-@ Provence and the nearby Désert de la Crau from the river Durance .

= = = Seer = = =

After another visit to Italy , Nostredame began to move away from medicine and toward the occult . Following popular trends , he wrote an almanac for 1550 , for the first time Latinising his name from Nostredame to Nostradamus . He was so encouraged by the almanac 's success that he decided to write one or more annually . Taken together , they are known to have contained at least 6 @,@ 338 prophecies , as well as at least eleven annual calendars , all of them starting on 1 January and not , as is sometimes supposed , in March . It was mainly in response to the almanacs that the nobility and other prominent persons from far away soon started asking for horoscopes and " psychic " advice from him , though he generally expected his clients to supply the birth charts on which these would be based , rather than calculating them himself as a professional astrologer would have done . When obliged to attempt this himself on the basis of the published tables of the day , he frequently made errors and failed to adjust the figures for his clients ' place or time of birth .

He then began his project of writing a book of one thousand mainly French quatrains , which constitute the largely undated prophecies for which he is most famous today . Feeling vulnerable to opposition on religious grounds , however , he devised a method of obscuring his meaning by using " Virgilianised " syntax , word games and a mixture of other languages such as Greek , Italian , Latin , and Provençal . For technical reasons connected with their publication in three installments (the publisher of the third and last installment seems to have been unwilling to start it in the middle of a " Century , " or book of 100 verses) , the last fifty @-@ eight quatrains of the seventh " Century " have not survived in any extant edition .

The quatrains , published in a book titled Les Propheties (The Prophecies) , received a mixed reaction when they were published . Some people thought Nostradamus was a servant of evil , a fake , or insane , while many of the elite evidently thought otherwise . Catherine de Médicis , wife of King Henry II of France , was one of Nostradamus ' greatest admirers . After reading his almanacs for 1555 , which hinted at unnamed threats to the royal family , she summoned him to Paris to explain them and to draw up horoscopes for her children . At the time , he feared that he would be beheaded , but by the time of his death in 1566 , Queen Catherine had made him Counselor and Physician @-@ in @-@ Ordinary to her son , the young King Charles IX of France .

Some accounts of Nostradamus 's life state that he was afraid of being persecuted for heresy by the Inquisition , but neither prophecy nor astrology fell in this bracket , and he would have been in danger only if he had practiced magic to support them . In 1538 he came into conflict with the Church in Agen after an Inquisitor visited the area looking for Anti @-@ Catholic views . His brief imprisonment at Marignane in late 1561 was solely because he had violated a recent royal decree by publishing his 1562 almanac without the prior permission of a bishop .

= = = Final years and death = = =

By 1566 , Nostradamus 's gout , which had plagued him painfully for many years and made movement very difficult , turned into edema , or dropsy . In late June he summoned his lawyer to draw up an extensive will bequeathing his property plus 3 @,@ 444 crowns (around \$ 300 @,@ 000 US today) , minus a few debts , to his wife pending her remarriage , in trust for her sons pending their twenty @-@ fifth birthdays and her daughters pending their marriages . This was

followed by a much shorter codicil . On the evening of 1 July , he is alleged to have told his secretary Jean de Chavigny , " You will not find me alive at sunrise . " The next morning he was reportedly found dead , lying on the floor next to his bed and a bench (Presage 141 [originally 152] for November 1567 , as posthumously edited by Chavigny to fit what happened) . He was buried in the local Franciscan chapel in Salon (part of it now incorporated into the restaurant La Brocherie) but re @-@ interred during the French Revolution in the Collégiale Saint @-@ Laurent , where his tomb remains to this day .

= = Works = =

In The Prophecies Nostradamus compiled his collection of major , long @-@ term predictions . The first installment was published in 1555 and contained 353 quatrains . The third edition , with three hundred new quatrains , was reportedly printed in 1558 , but now only survives as part of the omnibus edition that was published after his death in 1568 . This version contains one unrhymed and 941 rhymed quatrains , grouped into nine sets of 100 and one of 42 , called " Centuries " .

Given printing practices at the time (which included type @-@ setting from dictation) , no two editions turned out to be identical , and it is relatively rare to find even two copies that are exactly the same . Certainly there is no warrant for assuming ? as would @-@ be " code @-@ breakers " are prone to do ? that either the spellings or the punctuation of any edition are Nostradamus ' originals .

The Almanacs , by far the most popular of his works , were published annually from 1550 until his death . He often published two or three in a year , entitled either Almanachs (detailed predictions) , Prognostications or Presages (more generalised predictions) .

Nostradamus was not only a diviner , but a professional healer . It is known that he wrote at least two books on medical science . One was an extremely free translation (or rather a paraphrase) of The Protreptic of Galen (Paraphrase de C. GALIEN , sus l 'Exhortation de Menodote aux études des bonnes Artz , mesmement Medicine) , and in his so @-@ called Traité des fardemens (basically a medical cookbook containing , once again , materials borrowed mainly from others) he included a description of the methods he used to treat the plague , including bloodletting , none of which apparently worked . The same book also describes the preparation of cosmetics .

A manuscript normally known as the Orus Apollo also exists in the Lyon municipal library , where upwards of 2 @,@ 000 original documents relating to Nostradamus are stored under the aegis of Michel Chomarat . It is a purported translation of an ancient Greek work on Egyptian hieroglyphs based on later Latin versions , all of them unfortunately ignorant of the true meanings of the ancient Egyptian script , which was not correctly deciphered until Champollion in the 19th century .

Since his death only the Prophecies have continued to be popular , but in this case they have been quite extraordinarily so . Over two hundred editions of them have appeared in that time , together with over 2 @,@ 000 commentaries . Their persistence in popular culture seems to be partly because their vagueness and lack of dating make it easy to quote them selectively after every major dramatic event and retrospectively claim them as " hits " .

= = Origins of The Prophecies = =

Nostradamus claimed to base his published predictions on judicial astrology ? the astrological ' judgment ' , or assessment , of the ' quality ' (and thus potential) of events such as births , weddings , coronations etc . ? but was heavily criticised by professional astrologers of the day such as Laurens Videl for incompetence and for assuming that " comparative horoscopy " (the comparison of future planetary configurations with those accompanying known past events) could actually predict what would happen in the future .

Research suggests that much of his prophetic work paraphrases collections of ancient end @-@ of @-@ the @-@ world prophecies (mainly Bible @-@ based) , supplemented with references to historical events and anthologies of omen reports , and then projects those into the future in part with the aid of comparative horoscopy . Hence the many predictions involving ancient figures such

as Sulla , Gaius Marius , Nero , and others , as well as his descriptions of " battles in the clouds " and " frogs falling from the sky . " Astrology itself is mentioned only twice in Nostradamus 's Preface and 41 times in the Centuries themselves , but more frequently in his dedicatory Letter to King Henry II . In the last quatrain of his sixth century he specifically attacks astrologers .

His historical sources include easily identifiable passages from Livy , Suetonius , Plutarch and other classical historians , as well as from medieval chroniclers such as Geoffrey of Villehardouin and Jean Froissart . Many of his astrological references are taken almost word for word from Richard Roussat 's *Livre de l'estat et mutations des temps* of 1549 ? 50 .

One of his major prophetic sources was evidently the *Mirabilis Liber* of 1522 , which contained a range of prophecies by Pseudo @-@ Methodius , the Tiburtine Sibyl , Joachim of Fiore , Savonarola and others (his Preface contains 24 biblical quotations , all but two in the order used by Savonarola) . This book had enjoyed considerable success in the 1520s , when it went through half a dozen editions , but did not sustain its influence , perhaps owing to its mostly Latin text , Gothic script and many difficult abbreviations . Nostradamus was one of the first to re @-@ paraphrase these prophecies in French , which may explain why they are credited to him . It should be noted that modern views of plagiarism did not apply in the 16th century ; authors frequently copied and paraphrased passages without acknowledgement , especially from the classics . The latest research suggests that he may in fact have used bibliomancy for this ? randomly selecting a book of history or prophecy and taking his cue from whatever page it happened to fall open at .

Further material was gleaned from the *De honesta disciplina* of 1504 by Petrus Crinitus , which included extracts from Michael Psellos 's *De daemonibus* , and the *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (Concerning the mysteries of Egypt ...) , a book on Chaldean and Assyrian magic by Iamblichus , a 4th @-@ century Neo @-@ Platonist . Latin versions of both had recently been published in Lyon , and extracts from both are paraphrased (in the second case almost literally) in his first two verses , the first of which is appended to this article . While it is true that Nostradamus claimed in 1555 to have burned all of the occult works in his library , no one can say exactly what books were destroyed in this fire .

Only in the 17th century did people start to notice his reliance on earlier , mainly classical sources . This may help explain the fact that , during the same period , The Prophecies reportedly came into use in France as a classroom reader .

Nostradamus 's reliance on historical precedent is reflected in the fact that he explicitly rejected the label " prophet " (i.e. a person having prophetic powers of his own) on several occasions :

Although , my son , I have used the word prophet , I would not attribute to myself a title of such lofty sublimity ? Preface to César , 1555 (see caption to illustration above)

Not that I would attribute to myself either the name or the role of a prophet ? Preface to César , 1555

[S] ome of [the prophets] predicted great and marvelous things to come : [though] for me , I in no way attribute to myself such a title here . ? Letter to King Henry II , 1558

Not that I am foolish enough to claim to be a prophet . ? Open letter to Privy Councillor (later Chancellor) Birague , 15 June 1566

His rejection of the title prophet is consistent with the fact that he entitled his book *Les Propheties de M. Michel Nostradamus* (a title that , in French , as easily means " The Prophecies , by M. Michel Nostradamus " ? which is what they were ? as " The Prophecies of M. Michel Nostradamus " , which , except in a few cases , they were not , other than in the manner of their editing , expression and reapplication to the future) .

Given this reliance on literary sources , it is doubtful whether Nostradamus used any particular methods for entering a trance state , other than contemplation , meditation and incubation . His sole description of this process is contained in letter 41 ' of his collected Latin correspondence . The popular legend that he attempted the ancient methods of flame gazing , water gazing or both simultaneously is based on a naive reading of his first two verses , which merely liken his efforts to those of the Delphic and Branchidic oracles . The first of these is reproduced at the bottom of this article and the second can be seen by visiting the relevant facsimile site (see External Links) . In his dedication to King Henri II , Nostradamus describes " emptying my soul , mind and heart of all

care , worry and unease through mental calm and tranquility " , but his frequent references to the " bronze tripod " of the Delphic rite are usually preceded by the words " as though " (compare , once again , External References to the original texts) .

= = Interpretations = =

Most of the quatrains deal with disasters , such as plagues , earthquakes , wars , floods , invasions , murders , droughts , and battles ? all undated and based on foreshadowings by the *Mirabilis Liber* . Some quatrains cover these disasters in overall terms ; others concern a single person or small group of people . Some cover a single town , others several towns in several countries . A major , underlying theme is an impending invasion of Europe by Muslim forces from farther east and south headed by the expected Antichrist , directly reflecting the then @-@ current Ottoman invasions and the earlier Saracen equivalents , as well as the prior expectations of the *Mirabilis Liber* . All of this is presented in the context of the supposedly imminent end of the world ? even though this is not in fact mentioned ? a conviction that sparked numerous collections of end @-@ time prophecies at the time , including an unpublished collection by Christopher Columbus .

Nostradamus has been credited , for the most part in hindsight , with predicting numerous events in world history , from the Great Fire of London , and the rise of Napoleon and Adolf Hitler , to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center . In 1992 one commentator who claimed to be able to contact Nostradamus under hypnosis even had him ' interpreting ' his own verse X.6 (a prediction specifically about floods in southern France around the city of Nîmes and people taking refuge in its collosse , or Colosseum , a Roman amphitheatre now known as the Arènes) as a prediction of an undated attack on the Pentagon , despite the historical seer 's clear statement in his dedicatory letter to King Henri II that his prophecies were about Europe , North Africa and part of Asia Minor . Skeptics such as James Randi suggest that his reputation as a prophet is largely manufactured by modern @-@ day supporters who fit his words to events that have either already occurred or are so imminent as to be inevitable , a process sometimes known as " retroactive clairvoyance " (postdiction) . Thus , no Nostradamus quatrain is known to have been interpreted as predicting a specific event before it occurred , other than in vague , general terms that could equally apply to any number of other events . This even applies to quatrains that contain specific dates , such as III.77 , which predicts " in 1727 , in October , the king of Persia [shall be] captured by those of Egypt " ? a prophecy that has , as ever , been interpreted retrospectively in the light of later events , in this case as though it presaged the known peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Persia of that year . Similarly , Nostradamus 's notorious ' 1999 ' prophecy at X.72 (see Nostradamus in popular culture) describes no event that commentators have succeeded in identifying either before or since , other than by dint of twisting the words to fit whichever of the many contradictory happenings they are keen to claim as ' hits ' . Moreover , no quatrain suggests , as is often claimed by books and films on the alleged Mayan Prophecy , that the world would end in December 2012 . In his preface to the Prophecies , Nostradamus himself stated that his prophecies extend ' from now to the year 3797 ' ? an extraordinary date which , given that the preface was written in 1555 , may have more than a little to do with the fact that 2242 (3797 ? 1555) had recently been proposed by his major astrological source Richard Roussat as a possible date for the end of the world .

= = Alternative views = =

Views on Nostradamus have varied widely throughout history . At one end of the spectrum , there are extreme academic views such as those of Jacques Halbronn , who has suggested at great length and with great complexity that Nostradamus 's Prophecies are antedated forgeries written by later hands with a political axe to grind . No other major source accepts this view [see reference @-@ list] .

At the other end of the spectrum , there are numerous fairly recent popular books , and thousands of private websites , suggesting not only that the Prophecies are genuine but that Nostradamus was

a true prophet . Due to the subjective nature of these interpretations , however , no two of them agree on exactly what he predicted , whether for the past or for the future . Many of these do agree , though , that particular predictions refer , for example , to the French Revolution , Napoleon , Adolf Hitler , both world wars , and the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki . There is also an evident consensus among popular authors that he predicted whatever major event had just happened at the time of each book 's publication , from the Apollo moon landings , through the death of Diana , Princess of Wales in 1997 , and the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986 , to the events of 9 / 11 : this ' movable feast ' aspect appears to be characteristic of the genre .

Possibly the first of these books to become popular in English was Henry C. Roberts ' *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* of 1947 , reprinted at least seven times during the next forty years , which contained both transcriptions and translations , with brief commentaries . This was followed in 1961 (reprinted in 1982) by Edgar Leoni 's *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* . After that came Erika Cheetham 's *The Prophecies of Nostradamus* , incorporating a reprint of the posthumous 1568 edition , which was reprinted , revised and republished several times from 1973 onwards , latterly as *The Final Prophecies of Nostradamus* . This served as the basis for the documentary *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* and both did indeed mention possible generalised future attacks on New York (via nuclear weapons) , though not specifically on the World Trade Center or on any particular date . A two @-@ part translation of Jean @-@ Charles de Fontbrune 's *Nostradamus : historien et prophète* was published in 1980 , and John Hogue has published a number of books on Nostradamus from about 1987 including *Nostradamus and the Millenium : Predictions of the Future* , *Nostradamus : The Complete Prophecies* (1999) and *Nostradamus : A Life and Myth* (2003) .

With the exception of Roberts , these books and their many popular imitators were almost unanimous not merely about Nostradamus 's powers of prophecy , but also about various aspects of his biography . He had been a descendant of the Israelite tribe of Issachar ; he had been educated by his grandfathers , who had both been physicians to the court of Good King René of Provence ; he had attended Montpellier University in 1525 to gain his first degree ; after returning there in 1529 , he had successfully taken his medical doctorate ; he had gone on to lecture in the Medical Faculty there , until his views became too unpopular ; he had supported the heliocentric view of the universe ; he had travelled to the north @-@ east of France , where he had composed prophecies at the abbey of Orval ; in the course of his travels , he had performed a variety of prodigies , including identifying future Pope , Sixtus V , who was then only a seminary monk . He is credited with having successfully cured the Plague at Aix @-@ en @-@ Provence and elsewhere ; he had engaged in scrying , using either a magic mirror or a bowl of water ; he had been joined by his secretary Chavigny at Easter 1554 ; having published the first installment of his *Propheties* , he had been summoned by Queen Catherine de ' Medici to Paris in 1556 to discuss with her his prophecy at quatrain I.35 that her husband King Henri II would be killed in a duel ; he had examined the royal children at Blois ; he had bequeathed to his son a " lost book " of his own prophetic paintings ; he had been buried standing up ; and he had been found , when dug up at the French Revolution , to be wearing a medallion bearing the exact date of his disinterment .

Curiously , this particular story seems to have been first recorded by Samuel Pepys as early as 1667 , long before the French Revolution . Pepys records in his celebrated diary a legend that , before his death , Nostradamus made the townsfolk swear that his grave would never be disturbed ; but that 60 years later his body was exhumed , whereupon a brass plaque was found on his chest correctly stating the date and time when his grave would be opened and cursing the exhumers .

From the 1980s onwards , however , an academic reaction set in , especially in France . The publication in 1983 of Nostradamus 's private correspondence and , during succeeding years , of the original editions of 1555 and 1557 discovered by Chomarat and Benazra , together with the unearthing of much original archival material revealed that much that was claimed about Nostradamus did not fit the documented facts . The academics revealed that not one of the claims just listed was backed up by any known contemporary documentary evidence . Most of them had evidently been based on unsourced rumours relayed as fact by much later commentators , such as Jaubert (1656) , Guynaud (1693) and Bareste (1840) , on modern misunderstandings of the 16th

@-@ century French texts , or on pure invention . Even the often @-@ advanced suggestion that quatrain I.35 had successfully prophesied King Henri II 's death did not actually appear in print for the first time until 1614 , 55 years after the event .

Additionally , the academics , who themselves tend to eschew any attempt at interpretation , complained that the English translations were usually of poor quality , seemed to display little or no knowledge of 16th @-@ century French , were tendentious and , at worst , were sometimes twisted to fit the events to which they were supposed to refer (or vice versa) . None of them were based on the original editions : Roberts had based his writings on that of 1672 , Cheetham and Hogue on the posthumous edition of 1568 . Even Leoni accepted on page 115 that he had never seen an original edition , and on earlier pages he indicated that much of his biographical material was unsourced .

However , none of this research and criticism was originally known to most of the English @-@ language commentators , by function of the dates when they were writing and , to some extent , of the language in which it was written . Hogue was in a position to take advantage of it , but it was only in 2003 that he accepted that some of his earlier biographical material had in fact been apocryphal . Meanwhile , some of the more recent sources listed (Lemesurier , Gruber , Wilson) have been particularly scathing about later attempts by some lesser @-@ known authors and Internet enthusiasts to extract alleged hidden meanings from the texts , whether with the aid of anagrams , numerical codes , graphs or otherwise .

= = In popular culture = =

The prophecies retold and expanded by Nostradamus figured largely in popular culture in the 20th and 21st centuries . As well as being the subject of hundreds of books (both fiction and nonfiction) , Nostradamus 's life has been depicted in several films and videos , and his life and writings continue to be a subject of media interest .

There have also been several well @-@ known Internet hoaxes , where quatrains in the style of Nostradamus have been circulated by e @-@ mail as the real thing . The best @-@ known examples concern the collapse of the World Trade Center in the 11 September attacks , which led both to hoaxes and to reinterpretations by enthusiasts of several quatrains as supposed prophecies .

With the arrival of the year 2012 , Nostradamus 's prophecies started to be co @-@ opted (especially by the History Channel) as evidence suggesting that the end of the world was imminent , notwithstanding the fact that his book never mentions the end of the world , let alone the year 2012 .