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GEOGRAPHY, POLITICS AND RELIGION
IN A PROPHECY RELATED TO AMERICA.
THE *VAE MUNDO IN CENTUM ANNIS*,
ATTRIBUTED TO JOACHIM OF FIORE

Politics and religion would have been impossible to differentiate in the minds of the people living between the last decades of the thirteenth and the end of the fifteenth century. In the late medieval mindset they were considered as one, and closely connected with geography, as shown by the works of Pope Pius II (*Historia rerum ubique gestarum*, Venice, 1477), who wrote his description of Asia with a clear religious-political purpose: that of demonstrating to the Christians what they had to lose if they did not stop the advance of Islam. Prophecy gave to these concerns a mythical dimension, a supernatural justification. The words of the Old Testament prophets were in the beginning uttered to warn and comfort the Jews in the face of the imminent changes threatening them: the loss of their own land and with it the loss of their identity. Jerusalem was always at the centre of these prophetic visions, as it was at the centre of the medieval maps. This geographical dimension, the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple where God would dwell among his people was the key component of these prophecies. It was also the necessary condition for the realisation of the eschatological dream of a utopian society ruled by a universal monarch who would unify the world under one religion. This was the primordial meaning of the «New Heavens and New Earth» promised by Isaiah (Isaiah, 65.17).

In his letter to the King and Queen of Spain of September 1501, introducing his *Book of Prophecies* («Raccolta Colombiana», 1894, I, II, p. 82), Columbus writes:

«I have said that for the execution of the enterprise of the Indies I have not been helped by reason, or mathematics or world-maps, but by it has only been accomplished what had been predicted by Isaiah. This is what I desire to write here, in order to remind your Highnesses of these points, so that you can rejoice in the other things I shall tell you about Jerusalem, based on the same authorities. And if you have faith in this enterprise, the victory is certain».

Columbus concludes this letter with the words: «Joachim, the Calabrian Abbot, said that there would come from Spain the one who would rebuild the Holy House of Mount Zion»¹. In the Discoverer's mind, the rebuilding of the Temple would initiate a new era, in which all the prophecies both of the Old and the New Testament would be fulfilled. As Caraci has remarked, on the evidence of the *Libro Copiador*, this idea was also very dear to the Spanish rulers and may have been a determining factor in securing support and funding for Columbus' enterprise (LUZZANA CARACI, 2000, pp. 114-115).

Our question is: why should Columbus have thought that this mission was reserved for the rulers of Spain? He erroneously attributed this prognostication to Joachim of Fiore, but we owe to Alain Milhou (MILHOU, 1983, p. 235) the identification of the true author of this prophecy: namely Arnau de Vilanova², who, under the title of *Vae mundo in centum annis*, included it in his treatise *De mysterio cymbalorum Ecclesiae*. The original text starts with the words:

¹ Columbus attributes the mentioning of this prophecy to a letter sent by the Genoese Ambassadors to the Spanish Monarchs dated 1492 («Raccolta Colombiana», 1984, I, II, p. 148). Consuelo Varela in her commentary to the first letter of the *Libro Copiador* mentions at least five references to this prophecy in the writings of the Admiral, going from the Journal of the First Voyage, written in 1492, to the letter written in Jamaica in July 1503, where Columbus again repeats: «Jerusalem and Mount Zion shall be rebuilt by Christian hands, God, in the fourteenth Psalm has told, through the mouth of the prophet, who this will be. Abbot Joachim said that he will come from Spain» (VARELA, 1989, I, pp. 89-94).

² Born near Valencia, a city recently recovered from the Moors, Arnau de Vilanova was the typical *hombre de frontera* (frontier man), exposed from early childhood to Christian, Arabic and Jewish influences. After his early studies in the schools of the Dominican Order, he started his brilliant career as a physician and as a teacher of medicine at the University of Montpellier. His medical reputation was such that he became personal physician to the king of Aragon in 1281. From 1288 Arnau seems to have undergone a spiritual conversion, becoming more interested in apocalyptic subjects and in the reform and cure of the ills of society.

«Woe to the world in 100 years... there will be solitude on earth until a New David will come to restore the fortress of Zion».

The depiction of the world as it would be in 1401 is one of apocalyptic chaos and utter desolation, affecting every country of Europe. As for Spain, which, understandably for the minds of the time, is identified in relation to its large Muslim population, she is also described as momentarily split by inner strife, although a brilliant destiny is promised to her under a king who will overcome his enemies, attain universal Monarchy and defeat the Antichrist. Here we have the origin of the words used by Columbus, the first vision of a Spanish king who will rebuild the Temple of Zion.

The Vae mundo in centum annis and the coming together of the Joachimite and the Jewish traditions

The attribution of the *Vae mundo* to Joachim of Fiore can be easily understood, because, by the time this oracle was written, the legend of the Last World Emperor had become the political face of Joachimism (REEVES, 1969, pp. 311-312). This legend announced the rise of a «King of the Romans»³, who on the model of Augustus, would rule over the whole world. He would go to Jerusalem and recover the Holy Sepulchre. There he would depose his imperial insignia at the foot of Golgotha, and give back the Empire to Christ. This gesture would mark the beginning of the kingdom of God, to be followed by the final battle with the forces of evil and the end of the world. In the prophecies of the Pseudo-Methodius the Last World Emperor is called the «King of the Greeks» (ALEXANDER, 1971, p. 55). He will vanquish the Arabs, establish peace on earth, and also go to Jerusalem to surrender his power to God. The text of the *Vae mundo* has many points in common with this legend, but it is no longer alluding to a King of the Romans, or a King of the Greeks, but clearly referring to a «New David». An emblematic animal identifies this apocalyptic king: this is the «bat», who will come to devour the «mosquitoes» of

³ This legend had its origin in the oracle of the Cumaean Sybil, which announced the rise of an Emperor on the model of Augustus, who would rule the whole world. It was later incorporated into the oracle of the Tiburtine Sybil, and then into the prophecies of Pseudo-Methodius; see TANNER, 1993, p. 90.

Spain. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, the bat would have been immediately identified with the House of Aragon, because of the winged dragon or Bat their rulers bore on their helmets⁴. The mosquitoes could also be easily identified as the Moors of Spain. This prophecy, therefore, refers specifically to a king of Aragon.

This king is called the New David, the name usually given to the King-Messiah expected by the Jews. Neglected from late antiquity and only briefly used by kings with messianic aspirations such as Charlemagne and Frederick II, the figure of King David reclaimed by Arnau possessed an enormous symbolic weight. In Biblical terms King David was not only seen as the good king chosen by God, as opposed to Saul, the tribal king who was obeyed mostly out of the need for survival; but he was also the type of the king of a small nation who defeats and overcomes much larger enemies. The restoration of the Holy House was a symbol of the return of God's Divine Presence among his chosen people, and a reminder of the covenant He had made with David and his dynasty. However, the idea that a Christian king should rebuild the Temple was alien to the tradition of the medieval Church, which did not accept that the Temple could be built for a third time (GIL, 1989, I, p. 211). Only the Jews believed in this possibility, as demonstrated by the numerous references to the subject during the Dispute of Barcelona of 1263 (MARTI, 1990, II, p. 236 and p. 240). Clearly the *Vae mundo* contains a composite of notions concerning the Last Days proceeding from both the Joachimite and the Jewish messianic traditions. It demonstrates that the royal messianism of the House of Aragon was the result of the incessant reworking of disparate millenarian and messianic materials, and that it contained a good proportion of Jewish elements.

The sources of Arnau's early prophetic writings (1288-1301)

Joachim of Fiore had been extremely careful not to give a definite date for the events of the end. However, the reading of his *Tables of Concordances* clearly suggested the year 1260 as that of the end-date. Once this year had passed without major apocalyptic upheavals, Joachim's theories

⁴ MILHOU, 1982, pp. 61-78. For the image of the bat, see AURELL, 1997.

were re-interpreted and given a new life in a series of pseudo-Joachimite prophecies of definite political character. These prophecies were rapidly disseminated in Italy and Germany among the Spiritual Franciscans, but when they reached the south-western region of France they took on a different character. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, Narbonne and Montpellier had become a breeding ground for political agitation. This region was also the home of Jewish communities who, from 1147 onwards had taken refuge there, fleeing the persecution of the Almohads in the south of Spain. The Languedoc was also the birthplace of the Jewish *Kabbalah*, a phenomenon which Scholem defines as specific of Jewish life in the Christian Occident (SCHOLEM, 1987, p. 12). The earliest kabbalistic circles flourished in this region, and it was from there that the teachings of the Kabbalah spread into Spain. Scholem establishes a direct link between the birth of the Kabbalah in the Languedoc and the cultural and religious tensions of this region, which in fact favoured a rapprochement between Christians and Jews not possible in other places.

Towards the end of 1291 Arnau de Vilanova was in Montpellier, and by this time, he had become fully acquainted with the theories of Joachim of Fiore, as his early spiritual treatises demonstrate. The first of them, the *Introductio in librum Joachim de semine scripturarum*, a commentary to a proto-kabbalistic tract Arnau falsely attributed to Joachim of Fiore, was written in 1292. In the *De semine* the letters of the Latin alphabet are given a numerical value and used to prophesy the course of history. The early kabbalists believed that there was a direct link between the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the process of creation, and that therefore the numerical value of these letters (or *gematria*) could be used to calculate the duration of the world. An interesting feature of the *De semine* is that its author implies that the nations will succeed each other in their supremacy over the world, and that he ascribes to each people a duration equal to the number of the letters in its alphabet. In this way, to the twenty-two centuries given to the Hebrews according to the letters of their alphabet follow the twenty-three centuries granted to the Latins for the same reason. As each letter equals one hundred years, the time allotted to the Christians coincides with the number 2300 mentioned in Daniel's prophecy (Daniel, 8.14). Arnau's attribution of this treatise to Joachim of Fiore, whose works he specifically mentions in his *Introductio*, indicates that he associated his teachings with these ideas, i.e. the Christianisation of Jewish kabbalistic methods of calculating the time of the end.

Although the role of the Jews in apocalyptic times was usually viewed with great mistrust, Joachim had conceived of a different outcome for Christians and Jews in the light of the Apocalypse⁵. He had imagined that once the third *status* of mankind he announced had been reached, and men had been transformed by the action of the Spirit, purified Christians and reformed Jews would march together as a united flock, and that they could both aspire to a common understanding beyond the limitations of their respective churches. Joachim was the product of a historical moment in which the emergence of new forms of debate based on the translation of post-Biblical Hebrew literature had contributed towards some constructive exchange of ideas between Christians and Jews (BARKAI, 1994, pp. 36-37). In the beginning this form of dialogue contained the promise of mutual understanding because it was based on a serious consideration of the philosophical and esoteric roots of both religions. The best example of this are the writings of Petrus Alphonsi⁶. Important elements of Petrus Alphonsi's theories were incorporated into the writings of Joachim of Fiore, making him a representative of this trend. This brief moment of understanding came to an abrupt end with the denunciation of the *Talmud* in Paris by Nicholas Donin in 1242, which was followed by active efforts at conversion from the Dominicans and other Mendicant Orders.

Changing attitudes towards conversion are revealed by comparing the treatment of the Hebrew *Tetragrammaton* as a prefiguration of the Trinity by Joachim of Fiore in his *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (late twelfth century), by Ramon Marti in his *Pugio Fidei* (middle of the thirteenth century), and by Arnau de Vilanova in his *Allocutio super significatione nominis Tetragrammaton* (end of the same century). While Joachim enters deeply into the roots of the meaning of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, taking as his source the writings of Petrus Alphonsi and the teachings of an enigmatic treatise mentioned by him, the *Secreta Secretorum*⁷, Ramon Marti adopts a

⁵ Joachim treats of the subject in most of his works and in particular in his *Adversus Iudaeos*. For a detailed account of Joachim's beliefs see LERNER, 2000; and the preface to the edition of Joachim's treatise in IRITANO, 1928.

⁶ Particularly his *Dialogus contra Iudeos* (cfr. MIGNE, 1844-1864, vol. 167, cols. 527-672). In *Las obras de Pedro Alfonso, problemas de autenticidad*, in Charles Burnett argues that this work must have been written in Toledo after 1125. English version: *Medium Aevum*, 1997. See also TOLAN, 1993.

⁷ This treatise, quoted by Petrus Alfonsi in his own exegesis of the *Tetragrammaton* has no relation to Pseudo-Aristotle's work of a similar name: *Secreta secretorum*. Although

dogmatic and accusatory attitude towards the Jews, which admits no discussion or compromise. Arnau de Vilanova, although acknowledging the influence of Marti as his master in the Hebrew language, seems to be much nearer to Joachim.

The Tetragrammaton and Joachim's understanding of history

In his exegesis of the *Tetragrammaton* Joachim considers the way in which God has revealed himself to the Jews in the Old Testament through the letters of his sacred name, and the way in which he has revealed himself to the Christians in the words «I am Alpha and Omega» (*Apo.*, 1.8). He then applies the Neoplatonic theory of emanation to explain how the divinity which manifests itself in the shape of these letters can be at the same time trine and one. In the *Psalterium decem cordarum*, he associates the letter Alpha with the geometrical figure of a triangle, in which, although each of the angles is separate and distinct, none of them can exist independently, the three corners of the figure being indissolubly linked to each other by the shape of the figure itself. This is the way in which the power of God unfolds itself in the Christian Trinity, suggests Joachim, by passing – through a process of emanation – from the Father, the «beginning without beginning», to the Son who is «begotten» by it, and to the Holy Spirit «who proceeds from both». This interpretation has clear kabbalistic undertones. The kabbalists believed that the way in which the cosmos was generated, the way in which it had come into being was connected to the letters of the Divine Name. It was through them that the link between God and creation was established. Joachim Christianises this notion when he applies it to the Alpha and Omega and when he translates the letters of the Hebrew *Tetragrammaton* into Latin characters and places them within the graphic representation of the Hebrew *Tetragrammaton* given by Petrus Alphonsi: that of three interlaced circles within which the letters of the sacred name of God are contained⁸. In this diagram the power of God, symbolised in the Latin letters of the *Tetragram-*

Petrus Alfonsi's source has not yet been identified, it is supposed to have been the *Book Rasiel*; see HIRSCH-REICH, 1966, p. 231.

⁸ See diagram, p. 81.

maton, extends through the whole duration of history: from Adam to the end of the world, but the four letters which compose it are separated into three groups of two letters, each of these groups occupying one of the three circles symbolising Joachim's three *status*. In his *Expositio* Joachim explains that the letter E repeats itself at the beginning of the second circle and towards the end of the last one, because the Spirit symbolised by the letter E (Elias) must manifest itself twice: once at the beginning of the New Testament, and again at the start of the third *status* (the Age of the Spirit, according to his theories). From this we can conclude that, following the kabbalistic model, Joachim extends the divine dynamism implied in the unfolding of the three persons of the Trinity within the core of the divinity itself to the action of God in the world. This is expressed in his theory that to each person of the Trinity corresponds a certain time in history (his theory of the three *status* of mankind). Joachim's interpretation of the Hebrew *Tetragrammaton*, therefore, goes much further than a simple apologetic exercise, since it demonstrates that within the sacred name of God, either in Latin or in Hebrew, is not only contained a reference to the Trinity, but also the pattern of the action of the Trinity in history. Arnau follows Joachim very closely in his interpretation of the letters Alpha and Omega, but he expands it thanks to his great knowledge of contemporary kabbalistic writings.

Joachim's interpretation of the book of Daniel: the renewal of Christian messianism

The perspective adopted by Joachim not only points towards the common ground existing between both revelations, but establishes a pattern through which the texts of the Old and the New Testament can be interpreted in a creative way. The ultimate consequence of this approach becomes evident in Joachim's exegesis of the book of Daniel (*Liber de Concordia*, l. V). In essence, the book of Daniel, *locus classicus* of all apocalyptic speculations, points beyond the decline of the powers which rule the present world towards the future triumph of a Kingdom of God. Once these powers have been defeated, Daniel announces the passing of «the kingdom, the power and the glory» to a group of the Elect, those who have survived the trials preceding this end. The wording of the prophecy implies that this will be a kingdom of this world.

Through his unique exegetical method of the *concordia*, Joachim establishes a direct correspondence between the book of Daniel and Saint John's *Apocalypse*. This permits him to read Daniel's prophecy as a perfect pattern, both structural and numerical, of the events of the last days in the New Testament. He also introduces precise calculations within this scheme. These are mostly based on the numbers given by Daniel, his own account of the generations of men, and his Trinitarian vision of history, which furthers the idea of three cycles of time which overlap and succeed each other as three interlaced circles contained within the vaster linear scheme of the whole duration of the Old and the New Testaments. Accordingly, Joachim interprets the words of Daniel on three different levels: literally, as referring to what was about to happen in the future in Daniel's own time, following the method of *concordia* as referring to matters relating to the New Testament, and according to the Spirit as a reference to matters pertaining to the end of the world.

In Joachim's interpretation of Daniel's prophecy we have therefore returned to the initial vision of God's manifestation in the world provided by Petrus Alfonsi, and its Jewish roots. In fact, many of Joachim's innovations, such as the placing of a period of peace in this world after the defeat of the Antichrist and before the End of the World, his conception of the messianic age as an earthly kingdom, and his adoption of the «day-year principle» to interpret Daniel's numbers, had a precedent in medieval Jewish messianic ideas (to be found particularly in the works of Saadia Gaon and Abraham bar Hiyya). This could not escape the attention of a trained Hebraist such as Arnau de Vilanova, who apparently learned from Joachim to look towards the «Masters of the Old Testament» when seeking for guidance about matters concerning the last days.

The culmination of Joachim's exegesis of the book of Daniel is his description of the opening of the seventh seal on the seventh day of the Church. For Joachim this will be a time of peace in the world after the defeat of the Antichrist⁹ during which his «spiritual order of the just» will

⁹ It has been traditionally agreed that Joachim's greatest innovation in the expounding of the Apocalypse was to place this time after the defeat of the Antichrist. It was Marjorie Reeves who first pointed this out. Although this theory has now been somehow disproved and deepened by the input of Robert Lerner, who found some predecessors to Joachim's beliefs among previous Christian exegetes, the fact remains that Joachim's clarity and precision in the conception of this period of peace on earth remains unsurpassed and it is the one which has had the greatest impact. See LERNER, 1976, pp. 97-144.

rule on earth. Thanks to his threefold exegesis of the book of Daniel, Joachim is able to locate the beginning of this kingdom in time, and to make it coincide with the messianic age announced by the Angel to Daniel. The fact that his *spiritualis ordo iustorum* is nothing less than the kingdom of the «saints of the Most High» mentioned by Daniel has been remarked by Mottu, who quotes the comments of the Commission of Anagni who had understood this very well:

«they did not condemn Joachim as the founder of a new religious order, but as the announcer of an order of the just identified with the people of the saints of Daniel's prophecy» (MOTTU, 1977, p. 128).

The meaning of this association was that Joachim was announcing an eschatological kingdom of the just on this earth, who would prevail over all others and not pass away. Joachim gives a full description of what will happen on this seventh day, which he regards as a Sabbath on earth. On this day the pouring out of the spirit into the hearts of men will transform them into spiritual men, in the same way as in Daniel prophecy «the learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament... as stars for all eternity» (Daniel, 12.3). At this time all the prophecies yet to be accomplished shall be fulfilled, starting with the return of the exiles to Jerusalem (Isaiah, 2.2-4), an indication that this will be a kingdom on this earth, since a precise geographical location is mentioned. This is to be followed by the accomplishment of the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jeremiah, 31.31-34) which announce that God will make a new covenant with this people, and those of Ezechiel who says that this people shall be cleansed and gathered in Jerusalem, promising them a kingdom under the rule of a messianic monarch of the line of David. This people shall dwell in peace and security under his guidance forever. God will establish a covenant with them and with their king, and his sanctuary will be placed among them, indicating that the presence of God will continually be with them (Ezechiel, 37.22-27).

What Joachim has done through his interpretation of the book of Daniel is to transform the eschatological Messianic kingdom promised to the Jews into a Christian prophecy. The features of both kingdoms are the same. Saadia Gaon describes the Jewish Messianic Age in this way:

«The Lord will restore his sanctuary and the Temple will be rebuilt, in the form desired by Ezechiel. The light of God's presence will shine upon the Temple. In this messianic age, men themselves will be changed, they will be given a new heart and a new spirit: This will be the New Heavens and a New Earth announced by Isaiah» (Isaiah, 65.17; SAADIA GAON, 1948, pp. 309-330).

The birth of a prophecy

Potestà was the first to point out that proof of Arnau's dependence on the theories of Joachim of Fiore could be found in their common use of the book of Daniel as the basis of their own exegetical innovations (POTESTÀ, 1996a, p. 314, n. 105). Both claim that these are justified by Daniel's concept of progressive revelation of Scripture (Daniel, 12.4). This concept was essential for Joachim, and references to it recur in most of his works (POTESTÀ, 1996b, pp. 321-325). The similarity between Arnau de Vilanova's description of the seventh day and that of Joachim has also been remarked by Harold Lee, and is undeniable (LEE, 1974, pp. 36-37). Although Arnau does not enter into so much detail as Joachim, he refers to the seventh day as the time of the opening of the seventh seal, when there will be universal tranquillity and peace in the Church, and in which throughout the world truth shall be manifest, Christ will be worshipped, and «there will be one shepherd and one flock». These words suggest that Arnau had read and fully understood Joachim's messianic programme.

The political importance of these beliefs becomes clear in Arnau's the *De mysterio cymbalorum Ecclesiae*, a treatise written in 1301, while he was living at the court of Boniface VIII. Arnau was then suffering from extreme anxiety, bordering on insanity¹⁰. Robert Lerner describes the aural and visual hallucinations Arnau was suffering during this period (LERNER, 1988-89, pp. 72-73). This was not surprising, since a renewed persecution had been launched against him, and the Pope with whom he had taken refuge, and who was perhaps the only authority capable of defending him, was himself undergoing a time of extreme turmoil, plunged as he was in his famous dispute with King Philip IV of France, which would lead to his death. By this time a vast propagandistic machinery had been put into place by King Philip, best exemplified by the works of Pierre Dubois. In a famous treatise written in the last months of 1300, Dubois proposes to the King a strategy to acquire universal monarchy over the whole of Christendom (DUBOIS, 1936). This consists in restricting the

¹⁰ The Aragonese ambassador G. de Albalato in his letter to King James II of 14 September 1401 says: «Ad hec sciatis, inclite domine, quod alia die duxi Berengarium de Monte alacri ad locum, ubi magister Ar(naldus) de Villanova patitur dolorem magnum in capite propter solem, qui mense Julii capud et eius cerebrum perforavit ac, etiam penetravit» (FINKE, 1902, XXXII-XXXIII).

powers of the papacy, even if this means the confiscation of the Pope's temporal possessions, thus making of the Pope a vassal to the king of France. He also advises on a series of strategic dynastic alliances which would secure French dominion over Germany and which would extend the king's power to the Latin Empire of Constantinople. Concerning Spain, Dubois advises the king of France to take advantage of the dynastic disputes between Castile and Aragon to increase his power over this country, and finally bring it to submission. These dangerous suggestions went beyond a theoretical exercise, for many of these alliances were already taking place. The attack against the Pope became a reality towards 1302, when Guillaume de Nogaret publicly accused Boniface VIII of unacceptable behaviour. Among the accusations piled up against Boniface was that of having protected Arnau de Vilanova and his writings. During this time, Arnau was right in the middle of these conflicts, being particularly affected by them in his position as a representative of the king of Aragon, whose interests were threatened. In his letters, the Aragonese Ambassador describes him as prophesying, in a state of frenzy, great changes in the Church and the political situation of the time¹¹.

It is in this context that Arnau wrote his *De mysterio cymbalorum Ecclesiae* where he adopts the metaphor of the bells of the Church, which ring louder and louder as danger approaches, as his main theme. These bells are now announcing the apocalyptic end, he affirms, since according to Daniel's prophecy, the persecution of the Antichrist should be expected for the year 1376. Among the many authorities he cites in support of his argument he mentions, in a privileged manner, the utterances of an illiterate man, who, inspired by the Holy Spirit had produced a marvellous prophecy, and confided it to him. This oracle is the *Vae mundo in centum annis*, which predicts that there will be solitude on earth until a New David will come to restore the fortress of Zion.

¹¹ «Et cum sibi de factis vestris, quomodo se habebant, redderem rationem et dole-rem de modico favore, quem habetis in curia, respondit magister in presentia dictis Berengarii: Non sitis tristis propter aliqua, que videatis vel audiatis, quia pro certo constet vobis, quod status ecclesie cito mutabitur et cicius, quam credatis. Et cavete de nimia diligentia in factis domini regis Aragonum adhibenda, quia sitis certus, quod rex noster habebit in curia Romana maiorem potentiam et favorem, quam aliquis princeps habuerit, de quo hominum existat memoria. Nec desperetis, quia videbitis mirabilia in brevi. Et illi, quos modo rogatis, vobis supplicabunt pro certo» (*Ibid.*).

My interpretation of the emergence of this prophecy in this context is the following: placed as he was in the middle of the rivalries between Philip IV and the Pope, and witness to the relentless machinations of the former and the subsequent humiliation of James II at the papal Court, what could Arnau have done to counteract the imperial triumphalism of the king of France? How could he have supported the cause of the impoverished king of Aragon, and forward his aspirations to universal monarchy? The active propaganda of Pierre Dubois, represented the views of the French lawyers. Arnau opposed the words of the lawyers with those of the prophet. He assigned the role of «Last World Emperor» to the king of Aragon, ruler of one of the smallest kingdoms in Europe, the one perhaps least favoured by the Church, and the one with the least sacred credentials in its favour (MILHOU, 1999, pp. 86-89). Apparently, there were no grounds for this attribution, apart from the need to give to this monarch the prestige of a sacred mission, and the aura of being the one favoured by God.

How was this achieved? Joachim of Fiore had imagined an utopian kingdom in this world. Arnau gave to this kingdom a definite political character when he depicted its ruler with the features of the Jewish King-Messiah. He had learnt about them at the time of the Disputation of Barcelona, and through the abundant literature written about the event. These features, which are all mentioned and discussed in the *Capistrum Iudaeorum* of Ramon Marti were: that the King-Messiah will be a king of flesh and blood, that his name will be David, that he will rule from «sea to sea», and that he will rebuild the Holy House of Mount Zion. In this way, Arnau de Vilanova re-interpreted Joachim's messianic kingdom in a political manner, giving to it the precise features of the messianic kingdom expected by his Jewish contemporaries.

The *Vae mundo* would have the most outstanding career among all the other vaticinations of its time. It was reinterpreted from the beginning of the fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries and beyond, and applied to different European monarchs, including Ferdinand the Catholic, who, given his Aragonese ancestry, could feel most strongly identify with it. Its imagery was also a source of inspiration for the voyages of discovery, because of the link it established with the prophecies of Isaiah through the figure of the New David. By the time it was used by Columbus to explain the meaning of his enterprise, its contents had been thoroughly assimilated into the machinery of Spanish royal propaganda, and their Jewish origins

totally forgotten. Whoever was its author was also forgotten, and by a strange twist of poetic justice the oracle was attributed to Joachim of Fiore. In this way, when the Genoese Ambassadors joined the two names, that of the prophet and that of the Discover, Joachim of Fiore and Christopher Columbus, they established a link which has come through the ages as an enduring homage to the Italian genius.

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