

---

# NOSTRADAMUS

*Michel de Nostredame*



The Most Illustrious Michel de Nostredame, Bibliothèque de la Béjanes Royal Councillor and Physician, Prophet of France, and Pride of His Country, in his 63<sup>rd</sup> year

## PROPHET, OR PRETENDER?



A 19th century caricature

**WORLD EVENTS ARE NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. WAS THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FRENCH-BORN 'STAR-GAZER' THE GREAT SEER HIS MULTITUDE OF FOLLOWERS CLAIM? DID HE FORETELL THE COMING OF HITLER, THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY?**

### **WHO WAS NOSTRADAMUS?**

- Michel de Nostredame (1503-1566), more familiar to us today as Nostradamus, was born in St Rémy de Provence. Educated in Avignon, he was later said to have trained as a doctor at the renowned Montpellier University, in the company of the likes of Rabelais and other prominent French personalities, all attracted by the academic reputation of the institution. There is however no evidence of his attending the university. He was to become an acknowledged expert on the rampant Plague of the period... although he admitted in his work 'Traité des Fardemens' (1552) that none of his cures actually had much effect on the disease! It has been alleged by some commentators that he never used blood-letting as a form of treatment, although the same work admits to the inefficacy of this method when he tried it himself. It was at Montpellier that he first studied astrology, a 'science' whose alleged value lay in predicting the development of disease through the study of planetary movements and alignments. Twice married, he had two children by his first wife (all lost to the Plague), and six by his second. He was to take less of an interest in practising medicine from 1550, when he turned to writing. This 'semi-retirement' marked a turning point in his life, with in particular the publication of his first series of 'quatrains' in 1555 (prophecies in rhyming four-line verse) bringing him into public prominence, and leading to his gaining of considerable influence at the French court - Cathérine de Médicis commanding his presence to predict the future of the four royal children shortly after the first series of quatrains, known as the 'Centuries' was published.

### **WHAT FORM DID HIS PROPHECIES TAKE?**

- A series of internationally best-selling 'Presages', 'Almanachs' and 'Prognostications', with some 6,338 predictions (mainly in prose) for weather and harvests over the coming months, as well as possible wars, disasters, etc.  
 - A collection of a thousand prophecies in 'quatrains' (rhyming verse of four lines), arranged in 10 books (or 'Centuries'), 100 quatrains in each. 58 (in Book VII) disappeared before publication. They were all written in deliberately obscure language, and most were undated.  
 - Two posthumous collections, including 141 dated 'Presages' in verse, selected from the 159 in his Almanachs. However with respect to the second collection of 58 'sixains', more poetic and easier to understand than the rest, their authorship remains in dispute.

### **HOW DID HE DO IT?**

- The 'Centuries', it has recently been suggested, were at least in part a re-expression of the Bible-centred, end-time prophecies that were all the rage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is certainly true that a huge work in Latin, the 'Mirabilis Liber' had been published only a few years previously, in 1522/3. This anthology of doomsday predictions some even ascribe to Jaume, father of Nostradamus. Other sceptics suggest that Nostradamus borrowed heavily by taking analogous events from ancient history and more recent years, projecting them into the future, on the grounds that (as many believed at the time) 'history repeats itself'. Nostradamus himself hints pretty heavily in his covering 'Letter to King Henri II' that his primary method involved 'comparative horoscopy' - i.e. looking up the horoscopes of major past events, and calculating when, and which latitude, their major elements would reoccur. It was constantly a case of 'another Hannibal', 'another Nero', and so forth - which explains why figures of classical antiquity continually crop up in his predictions. He then claims to have enlarged on the results of the above by means of traditional astrology, and allegedly also invoked the practice of 'theurgy' - the ritual summoning of 'gods' - to obtain actual names and other information directly.  
 - All perfectly allowable under the broad-minded terms of Renaissance science and scholarship, of course. However, the suggestion that he possessed some kind of 'magic mirror', as some would have us believe, is rather less easy to verify!

### **DIDN'T HE WRITE IN CODE?**

- Most would argue not, although he certainly left the 'Centuries' in scrambled order, as well as using deliberately obscure languages in their writing. Allegedly, this was in order to protect himself from his more vociferous religious critics, most of whom were Protestant. As a result he used not only the standard linguistic contortions of 16th century verse, but also a sprinkling of homonyms (i.e. re-spellings), and a large number of imported Greek and Latin words - to say nothing of Provençal.

### **DO COPIES OF THE PROPHECIES STILL EXIST?**

- Yes. Even the long-lost original 1555 edition was rediscovered and published in facsimile in 1984. Many of the world's major libraries hold original copies of early editions of his works (i.e. 1605 and earlier).

**HOW FAR CAN THE VARIOUS MODERN EDITIONS OF THE 'PROPHETIES' BE TRUSTED?**

- Not very far! Most of them rely on late and highly corrupted editions. Their attempted word-for-word renderings (a elementary mistake in the world of translation, one which can lead to a complete misunderstanding of the intended meaning) are nonetheless claimed by many of his more fanatical followers to be the only way to interpret his work. Yet for genuine French-speakers and linguists, many of these versions are arbitrary at best, or worse still, characterised by credulity, paranoia, or hidden agendas!

**WAS NOSTRADAMUS PERSECUTED BY THE INQUISITION?**

- No - although he was once reportedly summoned before the Inquisition of Toulouse to explain a heretical remark, allegedly about a statue of the Virgin Mary. In fact he was extremely pious, with reformist, Franciscan sympathies. Despite frequent modern statements (and a Britannica article to the contrary) his books were never placed on the Vatican's Index of Forbidden Books (though some did appear on the Spanish equivalent).

**DID HIS PROPHECIES NAME NAMES, AND SPECIFIC DATES?**

- Yes and no. They certainly name Franco (IX.16), and apparently Napoleon (VIII.1). Possibly they name Pasteur, though the reference (I.25) could simply be to an unidentified shepherd or bishop. 'Chyren' (referred to 6 times) almost certainly does not refer, as many French would like to believe, to President Jacques Chirac. Many others are mentioned, but only as 'another Hercules', 'another Hannibal', etc. As for dates, a few of these are specified in clear language (X.72's prediction for 1999 is probably the most famous). A somewhat larger number bear astrological signatures that tend to reoccur on a cyclic basis, and so could help to pinpoint the date of the next fulfilment, or the one after that...

**HOW OFTEN HAS NOSTRADAMUS BEEN PROVED RIGHT IN THE PAST?**

- Estimates vary. Most commentators seem to think that around half of his predictions have been fulfilled so far. The trouble is they disagree about just what predictions apply to which events! As a result, taken overall, critics suggest the number of agreed bull's eyes actually numbers less than 10%.

**DID HE REALLY PREDICT HITLER?**

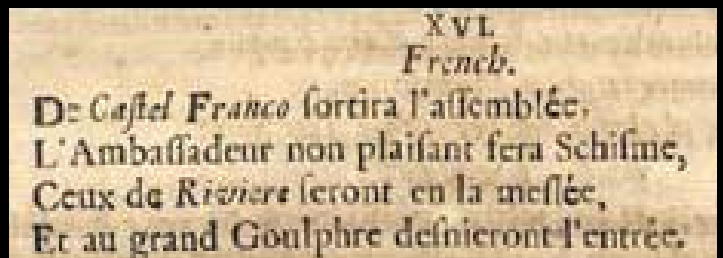
- Possibly, but only anonymously. At IX.90, for example, he refers to 'a captain of Greater Germany' in terms that seem to fit. Suggestions that the use of the term Hister apply to the former German leader ignores the fact that the word was also the classical name for the river Danube - and Nostradamus himself confirms this.

**WHAT ABOUT THE KENNEDY FAMILY, AND THE SUGGESTION THAT NOSTRADAMUS PREDICTED A NUCLEAR ATTACK ON NEW YORK?**

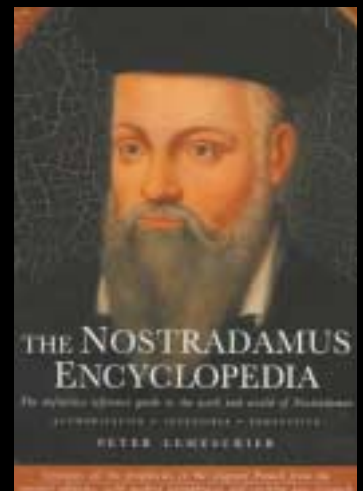
- Nostradamus admittedly refers to 'three brothers', but in terms that generally suggest the leaders of three allied nations in a future Muslim/Christian conflict, not a single dynasty. As for a nuclear attack on New York, the city is in fact never named; the widespread tradition (especially popular, curiously enough, among Americans) derives from VI.97 where a "grand cite neufve" on latitude 45 degrees is attacked with fire from the sky. New York itself lies well to the south. The reference is more likely to be to some town or city that, like Naples (Greek 'Neapolis' is actually named 'New City' - Villanova d'Asti in Italy, and Villeneuve sur Lot in France being the best geographical candidates.



Plaque commemorating the life and works of Nostradamus on the walls of his former home in Salon de Provence, where he lived and died. The building now houses the Nostradamus Museum.



The 'Prophecies' volumes 8, 9 & 10



Peter Lemesurier's The Nostradamus Encyclopaedia



The first volume of the 'Prophecies'

**WHAT DOES THE FAMOUS '1999' PROPHECY SAY?**

*L'an mil neuf cens nonante  
neuf sept mois  
Du ciel viendra un grand Roy  
deffraieur  
Resusciter le grand Roy  
d'Angolmois  
Avant apres Mars regner par  
bon heur*

- Many versions claim that 'Roy deffraieur' means 'a great King of terror'. Yet the old French term means 'defraying', or 'paying up'. A far less doom-laden interpretation is as follows:

*When 1999 is seven months o'er  
Shall heaven's great King -  
albeit a dread host, he,  
Restore the King from  
Angoumois once more,  
Ere - after March - he'll reign  
propitiously.*

- i.e. at some point between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1999 (or shortly thereafter) a ruler who has been imprisoned and/or removed from office will be restored to power by a redoubtable and/or spendthrift rival, and that from March 2000 he will rule with great good fortune...



Nostradamus's predictions to anything you liked. But in fact what we know as Presage 141 (actually it is number 152) is specifically dated for November 1567 - whereas the seer in fact died in July 1566. So even if this verse WERE a prediction of his death, he got the date wrong...

**BUT SURELY IT IS AT LEAST TRUE THAT NOSTRADAMUS WAS BURIED UPRIGHT SO THAT PEOPLE SHOULD NOT WALK ON HIS BODY?**

- There is absolutely no evidence for this, nor is any provision to this effect contained in his will.

**BUT ISN'T IT THE CASE THAT, WHEN HIS BODY WAS DUG UP AT THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, THEY FOUND A MEDALLION AROUND HIS NECK BEARING THE EXACT DATE OF THE EXHUMATION?**

- No. This is a pure urban myth with no evidence whatever to back it up - as the wonderful ability of the alleged date to change from one account to the next more than amply demonstrates!

**PG 2003**

**ARE THERE OTHER SO FAR UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES?**

- Around half are generally supposed to be 'unfulfilled' - which doesn't of course mean that they actually will be fulfilled!

**DOES NOSTRADAMUS ACTUALLY PREDICT THE END OF THE WORLD?**

- No. At least not in the 'Prophecies', though there are vague allusions to its imminence in other works. True, he does seem to indicate that there will be some kind of 'Apocalypse'. However he specifically states that his predictions cover the history of the world up to the year 3797 - which presumably means that the world will still be here then.

**ISN'T IT TRUE THAT YOU CAN MAKE NOSTRADAMUS'S PROPHECIES MEAN ALMOST ANYTHING?**

- Yes, if you take them in isolation, and especially if you insist on treating even Nostradamus's plain-language statements as if they had been framed in some kind of arcane code. There is no evidential basis for this.

**HOW ACCURATE ARE THE VARIOUS FILMS AND VIDEOS ABOUT HIM?**

- Not at all, for the most part!

**DIDN'T NOSTRADAMUS PROPHECY HIS OWN DEATH IN PRESAGE 141?**

- No. Granted, his secretary Chavigny later assumed that that was what it was about, and altered the verse to fit - so starting the long and shaky tradition that you could retrospectively fit

Collated by Peter Garwood, with grateful thanks to Peter Lemesurier who provided the bulk of research for this study, and to whom copyright is granted. Full details of Peter Lemesurier's books can be found at <http://www.amazon.com/>, including...

Nostradamus: The Final Reckoning  
The Nostradamus Encyclopedia: The Definitive Reference Guide to the Work and World of Nostradamus  
The Essential Nostradamus

Peter's biography 'The Unknown Nostradamus' (John Hunt Publishing/O Books NY, is planned for May 2003)

**Peter Lemesurier's measured and detailed studies of Nostradamus go a great way to debunking the myths that surround this fascinating and influential figure, while demonstrating respect and balance in examining his wisdom and achievements.**

Apart from his almanachs, Nostradamus wrote major works in the field of medicine. His works are comprehensive, alive, ageless, and express the eternal enigmas present at each turning point of history. 'NOSTRA DAMUS' - we give that which we have, we transmit our knowledge. The author himself should not be held responsible for the hysteria and profiteering of a certain number of those who claim to be his followers.

*One thing Nostradamus clearly failed to predict was that he would become a one-man industry in the 20th and 21st centuries! I hereby prophesise that publishers will always make a mint printing alleged predictions, especially those relating to impending disasters!*