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Alexander Corrigan

John Napier of Merchiston’s *Plaine Discovery: A Challenge to the Sixteenth Century Apocalyptic Tradition*

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD, Ecclesiastical History
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Abstract

This thesis examines John Napier of Merchiston’s 1593 commentary on the Book of Revelation within the context of sixteenth century apocalyptic thought in Scotland and England. Napier is usually remembered as a mathematician and this study aims to contribute to a more complete understanding of the man. Its most important contribution to scholarship is its discussion of Napier’s identification of himself as a conduit for divine revelation, chosen by God to expose the mysteries of scripture in the final age of human history. This placed him in the tradition of reformers like Knox but he differed from them in two crucial ways. Firstly, he broke from the texts that had influenced him by controversially predicting the approximate date of the apocalypse. Some of these works, and responses to Napier’s conclusions, are considered. Secondly, he did not regard a call to ministry as a facet of his prophetic status. Instead, he saw his biblical commentary as the expression of an intellectual gift from God. He employed grandiose eschatological themes to appeal to the highest echelons of society in an attempt to affect religious change. His dedicatory epistle to James VI was a direct correspondence that revealed shared knowledge and experiences. Napier’s approaches to the apocalypse and alchemy stemmed from a worldview that presented him as belonging to an intellectual and moral elite, preordained by God to receive and disseminate hidden knowledge at appointed times. The impact of historical events on the content of his work, including the Spanish Armada, Scottish Reformation and resulting sense of unity between Scotland and England, are assessed. The current biographical understanding of Napier is critiqued. The unique aspects of the Plaine Discovery, including the explicit chronology of salvation history that framed its conclusions, are discussed in detail.
Declaration

This thesis is of my own composition and is based solely on my own research. It has not been submitted for publication or for another degree or qualification.

Signed ..................................................

Edinburgh, 2014
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Conventions

- All quotations have been reproduced faithfully. Italics have been preserved but have not been added for any reason, including emphasis. The original spelling has been retained but contractions have been expanded. For example, if the original text had, ‘vnderstād’, the word would be reproduced as ‘vnderstand’ and not transliterated to ‘understand’.

- All biblical quotations out with the Book of Revelation are taken from the 1560 Geneva Bible unless otherwise stated. This was the version on which Napier’s translation of the Revelation was primarily based and the Bible with which he was most familiar.

- ‘Plaine Discovery’ and PD refers to the first edition of the John Napier’s work, published in 1593, unless otherwise stated.

- Biblical events, such as ‘Day of Judgement’, and characters, such as ‘Antichrist’ have been capitalised. The only exception is the word ‘apocalypse’, to draw a distinction between the event and the Book of Revelation, often known as the Apocalypse. The Book of Revelation has not been termed ‘The Apocalypse’ to further avoid confusion.

- The term ‘Roman Catholic has been used to differentiate between the Roman Catholic Church and the term ‘catholic’ meaning ‘universal’ which several churches have claimed to be. It has also been used because the sixteenth century Protestant writers discussed below, especially Napier, were deeply concerned with the institution’s connection to Rome and the Roman Empire, employing the associations as polemical devices.
Abbreviations

CCEL – Christian Classics Ethereal Library
CUP – Cambridge University Press
DOST – Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue
ELR – Edinburgh Law Review
EUP – Edinburgh University Press
GB – Geneva Bible
ODNB – Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED – Oxford English Dictionary
OT – Old Testament
OUP – Oxford University Press
MUP – Manchester University Press
NMS – National Museums of Scotland
NT – New Testament
PD – Plaine Discovery
RPS – The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707
SCJ – The Sixteenth Century Journal
SHR – The Scottish Historical Review
STC – Short Title Catalogue
TAMO – The Acts and Monuments Online
General Introduction

John Napier of Merchiston lived from 1550 to 4th April 1617. He is widely remembered as the inventor of logarithms, and his *Mirifici logarithmorum canonis descriptio* was published in 1614. However, his first written work, *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John*, first published in 1593, is less well understood. The reasons why are easy to identify, the logarithms facilitated a significant leap in astronomy and helped lay the foundations for modern space exploration. The *Plaine Discovery*, on the other hand, predicted the Second Coming of Christ and apocalypse at around the end of the seventeenth century and one of its central contentions has therefore proved incorrect. However, whether Napier’s claims in the *Plaine Discovery* were factually right or wrong is irrelevant to this historical enquiry. What matters is what the work has to say about its author’s concerns, personality, views and religious and political hopes for the future, as well as those of his intended audiences.

Napier’s commentary on the Revelation reveals his worldview and conception of important events that occurred in his lifetime. It provides an intellectual, moral and religious foundation for all of his later achievements, allowing a more complete understanding of the man who is often called ‘the Marvellous Merchiston’. This thesis offers a detailed examination of the *Plaine Discovery*, its content, themes and influences, illustrating the impact on the creation of the work of the historical context in which Napier must be placed. One of its most important aims is to encourage

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scholars in the future to seek a more complete image of Napier and his life’s work by better understanding the religious belief that underpinned all of his endeavours and dominated his worldview.

The way in which Napier perceived himself and how he compared to other intellectuals of his time is a major consideration of this study. Of course, he was a product of his age, but he also differed from the prominent thinkers of the later sixteenth century in several important ways. For example, like John Knox (1514-1572) he believed himself to be a conduit for divine revelation, bringing the truth of God’s words to humanity in the last age of creation. However, unlike Knox, he did not make a claim to ministerial status. Instead, he cast himself as chosen by God to bear gifts of divine knowledge about the true meaning of scripture to humanity.

Another prominent figure during Napier’s lifetime was George Buchanan (1506-1582) and several modern scholars have made comparisons between the two men. As Roger Mason has correctly argued, both reflect an interest with the idea of chronology and Scotland’s place within history in the years leading up to the Union of the Crowns. They both sought to construct a chronology of historical events that was intended to support arguments they were making about the age in which they lived. Buchanan also advocated resistance to secular tyrants and Napier celebrated the removal of Mary, Queen of Scots and her regent, Mary of Guise. However, several of the differences between Napier and Buchanan were so profound that it is difficult to regard them as belonging to a single ‘intellectual tradition’. Napier

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4 Ibid., pp. 55-6.
5 See below, ch. 1 & pp. 126-7.
differed from Knox in that he was less concerned with ministry than the latter. He differed from Buchanan in that he was less concerned with Scotland’s political or ‘civic’ future.

Buchanan’s *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* was a political work that defended Scotland’s sovereignty. Its ideas were even adopted by many Scots who supported the Union but wanted to ensure that Scotland did not simply become a part of England, with no separate identity or sense of independent cultural heritage. Napier however, revealed no caution about the Union. In the *Plaine Discovery*, the unification of Scotland and England became little more than a polemical device by which Napier sought to achieve two ends. The first was to win favour with James VI and persuade him to carry out more extensive religious reforms in Scotland, especially by dealing more harshly with Roman Catholic traitors. The idea of a Great Britain unified under James was an appeal to his grandiose notion of kingship, which presented him as the natural ruler of the Atlantic Archipelago.

The second was to encourage Protestants in Scotland and England to come together as a religious community by portraying the two realms as a single unit. They were then to lead their collective island home against the forces of Antichrist in the impending final battle between good and evil described in the Book of Revelation. This underscores the most important point that distinguished Napier from Buchanan. With its heavily apocalyptic focus, *Plaine Discovery* was not concerned with the political future of Scotland in a ‘British’ context, or whether Scotland

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7 For a more detailed discussion see Mason, ‘Certain Matters...’ pp. 38-65 & Williamson, Scottish National..., p 127.
8 Wales was noticeably absent from the *Plaine Discovery* and Napier’s stance on its role may only be inferred. The fact that he repeatedly used the term ‘Iland’ to refer to Great Britain implies that he regarded Wales as a part of the religious community he was advocating, though he never stated this explicitly. The Protestant Reformation in Wales was largely dictated by the English monarchy and Napier probably regarded Wales simply as part of England in terms of religion.

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would, or indeed should, retain a degree of robust political independence. It propagated the view that all temporal institutions, including borders and nations and the very ground on which they stood, were about to be destroyed to make way for the kingdom of heaven. For Napier, all future plans other than preparing for the apocalypse were an illusion and all loyalties to temporal institutions, country, king, history or culture were inherently transient. It only mattered that as many people as possible were saved on the Day of Judgement and Napier believed the best way of helping to achieve this end was to implore the king to purge his country of corrupting influences.⁹

An Introduction to the Plaine Discovery

The Plaine Discovery was printed by Robert Waldegrave, official printer to James VI, to whom the work was dedicated. It was probably largely completed by the beginning of 1593, as the dedicatory epistle was dated 29 January of that year. It was printed in a small, octavo format and had 294 pages, including the frontispiece. It was therefore lightweight and easily carried around or read from one’s hands or desk. The work was divided into two main treatises and was organised systematically, in a way that favoured ease of use and accessibility, which was in keeping with Napier’s wish for the work to appeal to the widest possible audience.

⁹ Nor does the thesis consider Carion’s Chronicle in detail. This work was influential to Napier in its employment of the Prophecy of Elias, combined with Matthew 24:22 to argue for an imminent apocalypse. However, Carion’s Chronology differed from Napier’s by focussing on events directly relevant to the contemporary Holy Roman Empire. Napier may have borrowed one aspect of Carion’s methodology but the Plaine Discovery did not significantly draw on the content of the Chronicle. Instead, Napier produced a work that took a similar approach but was concerned more with international history with a special focus on Anglo-Scottish affairs. Napier was probably using the English translation of Carion: Funke, J. (ed) & Lynne, W. [A Wouter van Lin] (trans.), The thre bokes of Chronicles, whyche John Carion (a man syngularly well sene in the Mathematycall sciences) Gathered with great dili
gence of the beste Authours that haue weitten in Hebrue, Greke or Latine Mierdman (London 1550) STC/4626. See Almond, P. ‘John Napier and the mathematics of the ‘middle future’ apocalypse’ Scottish Journal of Theology 63 (1) 2010: pp. 54-69, p. 58.
The first treatise comprised 36 introductory ‘Propositions’, each in the form of one sentence, which were then expanded, or as far as Napier was concerned ‘proved’, in a supplementary statement. These were mostly between one and two pages in length, although some were less than a full page and others significantly longer. This format allowed Napier to explain many points in detail, which the format of the second treatise would not allow. It also meant that, once complex issues and conclusions had been expanded, they could be treated as accepted facts in the second part of the book. For example, the first two propositions explained Napier’s system of dating, which was employed to construct a chronology of Christian history from the baptism of Christ to the Second Coming.¹⁰ This chronology provided a framework within which the polemical claims of the work were based. Early in the book, Napier’s fascination with mathematics could be discerned and mathematical calculations helped form the foundations of Napier’s polemical assertions later in the work.

¹⁰ *PD*, pp. 1-3.
17. Proposition.

The description of the throne of God in the fourth chapter, is not the description of the majesty of God in heaven, but of his true religion, wherein he is authorised and sits in the throne among his holy elect on earth.

Because it is said in the text, that this throne is set in heaven; therefore, some thinks this to be a vision of God's glory in heaven, but that can no waise be for these reasons. First, because heaven, for the most part prophetically, is taken for God's heavenly Elect or true Church upon earth. Secondly, because it were superfluous curiosity for us to know any farther of God's heavenly estate, and glory of his majesty, than the simple points of our salvation. Thirdly, because the Scripture testifies, that no pen can describe, nor wit comprehend, the glory of God's majesty in heaven. Fourthly, because the four beasts and 24. Elders, who here are coherent members of his throne, confesseth them felices to reign upon earth, and that Christ hath redeemed the with his blood. Fiftly, because it is said, that among them, even among these four beasts, arose a famine and dearth of Barley and Wheat. Therefore, this throne can not be God's throne in heaven, but must needs be his throne upon earth among his heavenly Elect here; and consequently, are either his Church or true religion: but his Church is not properlie his throne and seate, but rather these over whom hee sits. Therefore, this throne must needs be his truth and true religion, wherein he sitteth, abideth, & making his residence, therein is authorised and inthronized here upon earth, among his heauenlie Elect servants.

1. Proposition 17, from the Plaine Discovery p. 26. Note the use of biblical references in the margin, which were intended to demonstrate that Napier's arguments were based on scripture.
The second and, as Napier put it, ‘principal’ treatise occupied the majority of the work, covering almost 200 pages. This was Napier’s biblical commentary, in which the page was divided into between two and four columns. The first was Napier’s own version of the Book of Revelation, which he claimed to have translated from the Vulgate, but which was largely drawn from the 1560 Geneva Bible.\textsuperscript{11} The second column ostensibly ‘paraphrased’ the biblical text, in such a way that readers could understand its true meaning. In reality, this column contained doctrinally loaded interpretations that laid the foundations for the third column, Napier’s historical application of scriptural prophecies. This third column was arguably the most important for Napier’s work and of the greatest interest to modern scholars. This was where the main conclusions of Napier’s analysis and polemic were made, and where his skills in mathematics were brought to bear. In this column, Napier identified historical events as fulfilments of the prophecies of the Revelation, including the seven trumpets, vials and seals, the two Beasts and the Whore of Babylon. His fiercest attacks against those he perceived as the enemies of God’s true church, most commonly the papacy and Roman Catholic Church, were made here. A fourth, narrow column helped explain the dating of the events within Napier’s chronology of salvation history, telling the reader in which period or jubilee the historical events being described occurred.

This use of tables had a number of advantages. The most obvious were for the benefit of the reader. The text was set out in a way that was highly accessible; the presence of Napier’s analyses beside the biblical text made his arguments easy to

\textsuperscript{11} Whittingham, W. (et al), The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated according to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languges. With moste profitable annotations vpon all the hard places, and other things of great importance as may appeare in the epistle to the reader Rouland Hall (Geneva 1560) STC/1019:06. Henceforth ‘Geneva Bible’ or ‘GB’.  

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relate to the biblical text. Napier’s interpretive text was also comparatively pithy, as the use of tables demanded brevity. As a result, the language used in the *Plaine Discovery* appears efficient and highly readable. However, equally as important – and of greater interest to modern historians – were the advantages to Napier and his polemical agenda. It is no coincidence that Napier tended to use three columns when attacking the papacy and its church, as well as Islam, but often relied on two columns at other times. The structure allowed him gradually to impose layers of interpretation onto the biblical text, giving the illusion that his analysis was the manifest meaning of scripture. This was a central contention of the work. Even its title was intended to support this contention: Napier’s discovery was ‘plain’ in that it was factually straightforward, unadorned and unembellished by human interpretation; it merely reported the true meaning of God’s Revelation to John.
Napier's application of the scriptural text to historical events and figures. Note the way in which the conclusion that Rome was the new Babylon built upon the claim made in the central column, that the scriptural text was using 'Babylon' as an allegory. Thus, the conclusion that the Bible was actually referring to Rome seems less of a logical leap. Of course, the interpretation of Rome as the successor to Babylon was not new in the 1590s, but Napier's explanation of why this interpretation was correct was unusually exhaustive.

This column contained Napier's version of the Book of Revelation, based on the Vulgate and the 1560 Geneva Bible. This column contained Napier's paraphrase of the scriptural text. In this case he explained that the use of the term 'mysterium Babylon' meant that the biblical text did not refer to the city of Babylon itself but to the successor of the city as the epitome of cruelty and spiritual corruption.

2. Revelation 17:5 from The Plaine Discovery, p. 204
The use of tables reflected the vogue in humanist scholarship which influenced Napier’s work and made the Plaine Discovery highly accessible. His use of columns, of analysis beside the text, was undoubtedly influenced by the Geneva Bible, which prioritised ease of use for its readers.\(^\text{12}\) Another influence was probably the Ramist school of logical textual analysis, which favoured the use of tables to juxtapose original and analytical text or commentary.\(^\text{13}\)

Equally as important to Napier’s aim that a wide audience should be able to read and understand his book was his use of the English language, which was in line with his vision for a united Anglo-Scottish religious community: He claimed to have written in English, as opposed to Latin, so that, “the simple of this Iland may be instructed”.\(^\text{14}\) The format of devotional texts had changed during Napier’s lifetime. Since the Reformation, vernacular Bibles had replaced the more traditional Latin but in Scotland the situation was more complex. The influence of the Marian Exiles on Scotland’s Reformation had led to the country’s official Bible and order of worship being produced in English, not Scots, and the Plaine Discovery reflected this trend. The new-found religious commonality between Scotland and England was enhanced by the fact that military support from England had helped facilitate the Scottish Reformation. In addition, James VI whom Napier addressed personally in the Plaine Discovery, hoped to succeed to the English throne and if he achieved his ambition, the relationship between the countries would change forever.\(^\text{15}\) As a result, Napier aimed his work not at the population of Scotland, but the Island of Great Britain as a

\(^{12}\) See below, ch. 9.
\(^{14}\) PD, A7.v.
\(^{15}\) See below, ch. 1.
collective Godly community. He deliberately chose the language that would appeal to, and enable the understanding of, the widest possible audience, seeking to avoid idioms that might alienate potential readers. As he put it, “herein purposely I presse not to follow the particular ornate termes, of neither Scottes nor Englishmen: but rather contrarily for both their instructions, I vse so much as I can these wordes and termes, that be more common and sensible to them both, then proper or ornate to any one of them.”\textsuperscript{16} The issue of Napier’s intended audience is a major consideration of the thesis. Although he ostensibly wrote the text for the broadest possible audience, the fact that much of the population were non-literate made his audience very different from that of ministers who expressed their polemics through sermons as well as the written word. Napier was aware of this and his arguments were primarily aimed at the political nation. His aim was to affect change primarily by persuading those in positions of power to press on with extensive programmes of religious reform.\textsuperscript{17}

**Structure of the Thesis**

The first part of this thesis is a biographical outline of John Napier, eighth Laird of Merchiston. The second part offers a detailed analysis of the *Plaine Discovery* and the third examines the context of apocalyptic religious thought and literature in the British Isles, to which Napier’s work belongs. A fourth, shorter part examines some responses to the *Plaine Discovery* that were published soon after it was written. To preserve a sharp chronological focus the short term responses have been considered, but not the entire range of responses. Texts from the sixteenth century and the first

\textsuperscript{16} *PD*, f. 7v.

\textsuperscript{17} See below, ch. 8, for a comparison between Napier and John Knox, who was more concerned with appealing to the lower social orders to drive religious reform.
decades of the seventeenth century have been examined to include the second edition of the *Plaine Discovery*, published in 1611. Following the *Plaine Discovery*, there was no great outpouring of explicitly apocalyptic literature or religious exposition that relied on mathematical calculations in Scotland. Several works undoubtedly influenced by Napier were published in England in the seventeenth century but including them would have constituted a major shift of the geographical, as well as chronological, focus.

The thesis is a study of a text, not a biography. The relevant biographical material needed to shed light on the central text has been included and deliberately placed at the beginning of the study. Napier is one of the more enigmatic figures from early modern Scottish history whose name is well known. The thesis contends that Napier’s views on prophecy, the apocalypse, religion and politics were shaped by historical and personal events through which he lived and these must be understood before his views, which formed a set of responses to those events, are explained in detail. Another central argument of the study is that the modern biographical understanding of Napier, his ideas and motivations is flawed. It is therefore important to expunge some myths and misconceptions about his life before examining his work.

Texts written before the *Plaine Discovery* are intentionally placed after the work is analysed. Although the content of the *Logarithms* is well-known, the conclusions and tone of the *Plaine Discovery* are less well understood. Establishing first what the

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18 Napier, J., *A Plaine Discovery, of the Whole Revelation of S Iohn: set downe in two treatises: the one searching and proving the true interpretation thereof: The other applying the same paraphrasicallie and Historicallie to the text. Set Foorth by Iohn Napieir L. of Marchiston. And now revised, corrected and enlarged by him. With a resolution of certaine doubts, mooved by some well affected brethren*. Andrew Hart (Edinburgh 1611) STC/1147:04. Hereafter ‘Napier, 1611’.
work had to say and why, is essential before demonstrating how far it fitted into, or departed from, the wider context of apocalyptic works in English.

**Historiography and Approach**

This thesis approaches its subject primarily from a broad historical perspective. Drawing upon ecclesiastical history, it attempts to understand the relationship between belief and historical events, as well as how John Napier and his beliefs related to the church as an institution. Intellectual history has informed the study of the crucial relationships between Napier’s ideas and those of the thinkers who had influenced him. However, the thesis is not a piece of intellectual history in its purest sense since it does not emphasise broad trends or similarities in the philosophies or approaches of thinkers. It relies instead upon detailed, critical analysis of primary sources, seeking to demonstrate causal relationships and influences of one text by another by identifying similarities that could not exist if one writer did not have access to the other’s work. This approach has been developed from a personal fascination with the written word as a manifestation of ideas. Finally, history of science has provided a significant conceptual framework for the thesis. The idea of ‘unity of thought’ offers the best way of understanding early modern thinkers such as Napier, who were active in intellectual disciplines that modern observers tend to view as separate.

One of the main attractions of studying Napier is that he was an enigmatic figure who appears to have been active in several separate, even unconnected, areas, that is to say, theology, mathematics, science and alchemy. When studying this man, the first task was to understand how to approach him as an intellectual and how to
reconcile the apparently diverse passions he followed. The concept of ‘unity of thought’ offers an elegant solution to this dilemma, explaining that the understanding of these disciplines as mutually exclusive, or even separate, is a modern construct that had no place in the sixteenth century. ‘Sciences’, including natural philosophy, astronomy and theology, were driven by passionate religious belief and represented attempts to attain a closer relationship with God by more fully understanding His creation. Since the 1970s, this approach has been developed as a postmodern response to Isaac Newton. Groundbreaking work by Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs laid the groundwork for articles by Stein, Newman, and Brooke, and the approach found its most developed expression in two articles by John Henry.\(^{19}\) The concept of ‘unity of thought’ solves several problems associated with studying intellectuals of the past. Many modern scholars whose works predated the development of the approach found the work of early modern thinkers difficult to reconcile because their various avenues of inquiry appeared mutually exclusive. Some attempted to downplay the devotion of figures like Newton to alchemy and theology and construct an image of them as ‘modern’ scientists, whilst dismissing theology and metaphysics as foolish, misguided, or futile. Most importantly, the unity of thought approach reminds the modern scholar that the sciences, theology and metaphysics were not crystallised in the separate spheres of understanding that intellectuals now take for granted. Those

who had pursuits that crossed what modern eyes would see as boundaries were not, therefore, confused or mad.\textsuperscript{20}

The body of literature examining John Napier himself is rather limited. He is a notoriously difficult figure to study because so few of his personal papers have survived. The most famous and influential work on Napier is Mark Napier’s \textit{Memoirs of John Napier of Merchiston}.\textsuperscript{21} Published in 1834, the book has had an enduring effect on the popular and academic conceptions of John Napier, his life and works. Its strengths, weaknesses and legacy are considered in detail in Part I, below.

Three years earlier, a short entry on Napier had appeared in George Lille Craik’s \textit{Persuit of Knowledge}.\textsuperscript{22} This work contained a brief biographical outline, an explanation of Logarithms and a discussion of John’s alleged activities in magic, all of which Mark Napier improved dramatically. In 1915 a compilation of essays celebrating the tercentenary of the invention of logarithms was published. The work contained a biographical piece by the University of Edinburgh’s Professor of Scottish History, Peter Hume Brown, which was based largely on Mark Napier’s work.\textsuperscript{23}

More recently, a short work was published by the National Library of Scotland to accompany an exhibition held in 2003.\textsuperscript{24} While this was not an academic study, it

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{20} Nineteenth century thinkers who attempted to portray Newton as solely a ‘scientist’ include August Comte and essayist Charles Lamb, who is reputed to have described Newton as “a fellow who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle.” (Let Newton Be! p. 6.) A more recent scholar who struggled to reconcile Newton’s studies in various fields was Karin Figala, who described his outlook as ‘schizophrenic’. Figala, K., ‘Newton’s Alchemy’ Cohen & Smith pp. 370-86, p. 371.
\textsuperscript{21} Napier, M., \textit{Memoirs of John Napier of Merchiston : His lineage, life, and times, with a History of the Invention of Logarithms} William Blackwood (Edinburgh 1834).
\textsuperscript{24} Gladstone-Millar, L., \textit{Logarithm John} NMS Publishing Ltd (Edinburgh 2008).
\end{quote}
provided important information about the popular conception of Napier and made an admirable attempt at revising some of the myths about his life.

Again, relatively few works have engaged with the *Plaine Discovery* in detail, probably because the logarithms are widely regarded as Napier’s greatest achievement. Mark Napier discussed the work, although, as will be discussed below, he did so in a way that was intended to defend and aggrandise the reputation of his ancestor. In 1974, Robert G. Clouse provided a brief but helpful summary of some of the key points of the *Plaine Discovery* and its chronology.25 Professor Clouse built on some of Mark Napier’s more astute observations, noting the timing of the publication of the *Plaine Discovery* in relation to the political events of the time, especially the Spanish Blanks Affair.26

In 1979, Katharine Firth’s classic study, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain* presented Napier as one of several formative apocalyptic thinkers in the British Isles.27 Firth offered an excellent introduction to the *Plaine Discovery*, examining its chronology and placing it within a tradition of eschatology alongside polemicists such as John Bale. In the same year, Arthur Williamson’s doctoral thesis was published as the monograph, *Scottish national consciousness in the age of James VI*.28 This work was an excellent accompaniment to Firth’s achievements. It sought to place Napier within a specific intellectual tradition in Scotland, examining the way in which Napier reflected the influence of the Marian Exiles in the country. Professor Williamson’s book was a product of the academic vogues that were present in the late 1970s. In seeking to follow the approach of

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26 The Affair and its aftermath are major considerations of this study.
28 See above, p. 2 (n.3).
intellectual history in as narrow a sense as possible, it eschewed a detailed analysis of historical events, making a working knowledge of Scottish history vital to understanding its conclusions. This thesis is distinguished from Dr. Williamson’s in that it contains a greater focus on the relationship of Napier to the Kirk and to the historical events that shaped his life and beliefs. *Scottish national consciousness* contained a number of important insights into Napier’s analysis, especially his approach to the papacy and Roman Empire. The most important influence of the work on this study may be seen in Chapter 4, below. Professor Williamson also discussed the *Plaine Discovery* in an article written with Paul J. McGinnis, which was published in 2010.29 This piece built upon Williamson’s earlier assertions, emphasising the controversial aspects of Napier’s work, whilst placing him in the religious and political context of later sixteenth century Scotland.

In the same year, Philip Almond published an article that examined Napier’s eschatology within the context of Protestant thinking about the Book of Revelation.30 Professor Almond noted the importance of the Revelation to the growing Protestant conception of the papacy as Antichrist in the sixteenth century. Most recently, a doctoral thesis by David Drinnon examined the influence of the *Plaine Discovery* on subsequent Scottish apocalyptic thought and works.31 It was successful in explaining how the *Plaine Discovery* related to similar contemporary works, including James VI’s *Frutifyll Meditatioun*, discussed in Part III, below. Dr Drinnon concurred with a contention of Part IV of this study, that Napier’s work was reasonably well received but failed to spark an interest in predicting the date of the apocalypse, which

30 See above, p. 4 for full title.
31 See above, n. 13.
remained highly controversial.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, this study differs from these works because at its core is a more detailed analysis of the \textit{Plaine Discovery} than has been previously seen.

Several other texts that did not engage with the \textit{Plaine Discovery} in detail were important for background reading about the role and prominence of Apocalyptic thinking in late sixteenth century Scotland and England. In 1971, Carol Wiener’s seminal article ‘The Beleaguered Isle’ demonstrated that the hatred and fear of Roman Catholics, especially the pope, was a defining characteristic of English national identity in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.\textsuperscript{33} Wiener helped to illuminate the mindset of an age, showing that English Protestants tended to view Roman Catholics as a single force, commanded by the almost mythical figure of the pope. Similarly, Peter Lake’s ‘Anti-Popery: The construction of a prejudice’ helped establish the framework within which modern scholars tend to view sixteenth century apocalyptic works.\textsuperscript{34} Lake identified the employment of Roman Catholicism as a ‘foil’ by which polemicists sought to enhance the positive aspects of Protestantism and this was a technique employed by Napier.\textsuperscript{35} Napier also used sexual sin, most conspicuously prostitution, as a metonym for all sin, especially idolatry, and Lake identified this as a common trope of Protestant polemicists in the early modern period. Like Wiener, Lake employed techniques from the sociology and psychology subject areas, arguing that the papacy was inherently ‘foreign’ which allowed Protestants in the British

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{35} See Lake, pp. 73-4 & below, pp. 184 & 223.
Isles to externalize their fears, which served as a coping mechanism.\textsuperscript{36} However, Wiener argued more forcefully that this thinking resulted in a distorted worldview, leading English authorities to misjudge foreign and domestic affairs, which impacted negatively on policy decisions.\textsuperscript{37}

John Bale (1495-1563) was an important influence on Napier’s \textit{Plaine Discovery} and his works are a major consideration of this thesis. Leslie Fairfield’s excellent study on Bale, published in 1976, constructed his influences and showed why his works were so groundbreaking.\textsuperscript{38} Fairfield rightly cast Bale among the ‘magisterial reformers’, those who praised and celebrated their monarchs as the driving force of England’s reformation following Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy in 1534. The fact that Napier lived in a country whose Protestant Reformation had been sparked following a rebellion from the monarch made the tone of the \textit{Plaine Discovery} significantly different to that found in Bale’s works and this is considered in Parts II and III, below.

Arthur Williamson’s \textit{Apocalypse Then} was especially useful for its differentiation between the intellectual characters of the Scottish and English Reformations, and their respective stances on the apocalypse.\textsuperscript{39} It also provided an excellent introduction to the impact of the Anabaptist Revolt of 1534 on sixteenth century Protestant eschatology.\textsuperscript{40} Jane Dawson has published a number of articles that have contributed to the scholarly understanding of exile and eschatology in the thinking of sixteenth century figures, both in and from the British Isles. In 1994, the paper, ‘The

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 81.
\textsuperscript{37} Wiener, pp. 40 & 58.
\textsuperscript{40} See ibid, p. 58.
Apocalyptic Thinking of the Marian Exiles’ did for sixteenth century Scotland what Wiener’s article had done for England by demonstrating how pervasive, even all-encompassing, apocalyptic thinking became following the Protestant Reformation.\(^{41}\) Thus, by the time Napier was an adult, apocalyptic thinking provided the basis of an entire worldview for many in his country, which shows that such an explicitly apocalyptic text was timely in the 1590s. Both the articles, ‘Satan’s bludy clawses’ and ‘John Knox, Christopher Goodman and the ‘example of Geneva’’ emphasised the role of the Marian Exile in the construction of a Scottish religious identity, its Church and order of worship.\(^{42}\) The exile also influenced Scotland’s identification as an elect nation and eschatological view of contemporary political and religious events. These elucidations were vital to Part III of this study. Crawford Gribben’s \textit{The Puritan Millennium} provided useful background reading on eschatological thinking in the British Isles, including the role of the Marian Exile and Geneva Bible, which was an important influence on the \textit{Plaine Discovery} and is explored in Part III, below.\(^{43}\) More recently, Alan Ford’s ‘Apocalyptic Ireland’ highlighted the prominent position that fear of either the Roman Catholic or Protestant ‘other’ held in daily life and identified links between apocalyptic thinking, policy and national identity in the British Isles.\(^{44}\)


\(^{43}\) Gribben, C., \textit{The Puritan Millennium: Literature & Theology 1550-1682} Four Courts Press (Dublin 2000).

Steven Reid’s article on Andrew Melville’s eschatological works illuminated something of the relationship between the Presbyterian party, of which Napier appears to have been a committed member, and the crown.\textsuperscript{45} Reid’s analysis of Melville’s chronology as ‘completely incoherent’ serves to illustrate the impressive achievements of Napier’s clear and thorough chronological system.\textsuperscript{46} Daniel Fischlin produced a similar appraisal and critique of King James VI’s early apocalyptic works, one of which is considered in detail in Chapter 10, below.\textsuperscript{47} Fischlin offered a useful analysis of the texts and how they relate to contemporary works, especially those of John Bale, but probably went too far in his presentation of the texts as early indicators of James’s political programme.\textsuperscript{48}

Finally, it was vital to understand the political and religious conditions which shaped the world in which Napier lived and several historical studies helped to facilitate this. In 1960, Gordon Donaldson wrote a work on the Scottish Reformation that remains a useful introduction.\textsuperscript{49} However, the most authoritative analysis is Professor Dawson’s \textit{Scotland Re-Formed}, which provides an accessible outline of the historical events that formed and influenced the first generation of religious reform in the country.\textsuperscript{50} It also discussed the relationship between these events and political and religious policy and doctrine. Alan MacDonald’s \textit{The Jacobean Kirk} is an essential guide to the relationship between James VI and the ecclesiastical

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{45} Reid, S.J., ‘Andrew melville, sacred chronology and world history: the \textit{Carmina Danielis} 9 and the \textit{Antichristus}’ The Innes Review Vol. 60, no. 1 (Spring 2009) pp. 1-21.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Fischlin, D., ‘“To Eate the Flesh of Kings”: James VI and I, Apocalypse, Nation, and Sovereignty’ in Fischlin, D., & Fortier, M., Royal Subjects: \textit{Essays on the writings of James VI and I} Wayne State University Press (Detroit 2002) pp. 388-420.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 396 & throughout.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Donaldson, G. \textit{The Scottish Reformation} CUP (Cambridge 1960).
\item \textsuperscript{50} Dawson, J.E.A., \textit{Scotland Re-Formed: 1488-1587} EUP (Edinburgh 2007).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
institutions of Scotland that was as important for its approach as its findings. The book successfully identified problems with primary, and older secondary, sources, eroding some of the religious bias that had marred Scottish ecclesiastical history. It traced the evolution and development of James VI’s religious policies, arguing that the idea of a fixed or predetermined royal agenda is fallacious. Gordon Donaldson produced a work that demonstrated the importance of the existing Episcopal system in Scotland’s Reformation, emphasising the fact that moderates had as important a role to play as Presbyterian radicals. Reformed by Bishops contained a case study on John Napier’s uncle, Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney, who probably had an important influence on his religious beliefs. Donaldson’s dense and exhaustively researched All the Queen’s Men provides an invaluable resource for understanding the complex web of allegiances that governed the civil wars through which Napier lived. A great success of this work was its revision of the previously dominant conception that siding with the Queen or King’s parties was determined by religious devotion. The assertions that the situation was far more complex; that personal, financial and political factors were as important motivations as confessional alliances and that people often changed sides was developed further by Professor Dawson and influenced Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Roger Mason’s doctoral thesis illuminated and explained the complexities of the negotiations between the Protestant ‘Lords of the Congregation’ and the English

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53 Donaldson, G., All the Queen’s Men: Power and Politics in Mary Stewart’s Scotland Batsford (London 1983).
during and following the revolution of 1559-60. A significant achievement was its explanation of the fears and motivations of both the Protestant lords and Elizabeth, and the reasons for the controversial John Knox’s exclusion from the meetings. Mason helpfully discussed the development of Knox’s political thought, especially concerning the idea of England, and latterly Scotland, as ‘covenanted nations’ and his stance on resistance to secular tyrants. An article published in 1998 expanded on these themes and showed that Knox’s conception of the reformations of England and Scotland was constantly evolving, especially as his attitudes to the country’s respective monarchs, and his ideas on monarchy itself, changed. It further illustrated how Knox justified resistance to secular rulers and justified the revolutionary activities of the Lords of the Congregation, with which he became closely involved.

Michael Lynch’s classic *Edinburgh and the Reformation* provided an important foundation for the religious and political turmoil that would have affected Napier’s life. It was especially useful for its addition of a modern analysis to the historical narrative that can be taken from Mark Napier’s retelling of the civil war that directly impacted on the Napier family at their home at Merchiston. More generally, it provided important information on the development of Edinburgh as the religious and administrative centre of Scotland around the sixteenth century, which explains why the town became the focus of the conflict. Similarly, John Cairns’s two-part article on William Wellwood, published in 1998, traced the emergence of a ‘legal

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55 Ibid., pp. 305-6.
56 Ibid., ch. 8.
class’ in and around Napier’s lifetime, which saw Edinburgh gradually replace St Andrews as the centre of legal education and administration in Scotland.\(^59\)

Lynch wrote two articles that explore the relationship between pageantry, religion and politics in the early years of the Scottish Reformation, at both the Baptism and coronation of James VI.\(^60\) The character of these ceremonies was important because it reveals how the new regimes sought to demonstrate continuity as opposed to a sudden break with the past. James’s relationship with the Kirk as an adult was explored in Alan Macdonald’s ‘James VI and the General Assembly’, especially in light of the fear of apostasy sparked by the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation.\(^61\) James’s dislike of the Geneva Bible for what he perceived as its seditious content was an important formative tool in this study’s treatment of Napier’s dedicatory epistle to James and this was also influenced by Maurice Betteridge’s ‘The Bitter Notes’.\(^62\)

These works were also important for the sense of unity between Scotland and England in Napier’s lifetime. The idea of unification was important to Napier’s contemporaries in Scotland, especially because their king might one day sit on the English throne, and what may be inferred about Napier’s stance on the matter is considered throughout this thesis. After 1560 the two realms shared a newfound sense of religious commonality and England had been instrumental in instigating


Scotland’s Reformation. However, as Professor Dawson has explained, the Marian Exile also had a role to play, not least because the Geneva Bible and liturgy that were adopted as standard devotional texts in Scotland after the Reformation were written in English rather than Scots.63

This thesis does not accept Arthur Williamson’s conclusion that Napier was a key member of an ‘anti-imperialist camp’ centred around Edinburgh, which sought to defame Constantine the Great, in order to subvert the Erastian aims of James VI. In this reading, Scots who feared monarchical dominance over the Kirk directly opposed the image of a godly emperor, modelled on Constantine and proposed by John Foxe, which English monarchs had attempted to foster since the Henrician Reformation. Williamson’s inclusion of Napier on this group was predicated on a number of arguments, which display several flaws.

Williamson has repeatedly argued that Napier heaped unqualified criticism on Constantine throughout the Plaine Discovery, describing his treatment of the emperor as ‘brutal’ and implying his portrayal was wholly derisory.64 For Williamson, this was important because Constantine was such a well-known exemplar of godly rulers who led religious reform that to denounce him was to leave no doubt that one was attacking the very notion of the ‘godly prince’.65 However, as Professor Mason has noted, the idea of a godly ruler, modelled on Constantine, was never a part of Scottish religious or national identity in the way it was in England, not least because the Scottish Reformation had been instigated by a rebellion from

65 Williamson, Scottish National..., p. 30.
the monarch, as opposed to the leadership of the monarch themselves. In fact, Williamson himself conceded this point. The Scottish Napier would have been less likely to deal with the issue than the English Foxe because it was not a major part of the intellectual context in which he lived. Moreover, as will be shown in Part II, Napier’s portrayal of Constantine was more complex and contained more positives than Williamson has allowed. After all, the conversion of Constantine represented the end of persecution of Christians under the rule of the Roman Empire, which Napier identified with the binding of Satan, described in the Revelation.

Williamson has asserted that, “Napier took pains to discredit Constantine and the godly Roman emperors as models for Christian kingship and thereby undermined much of the basis of King James’s British designs.” He argued that the Constantinian ideal was intrinsically linked to a union between Scotland and England. However, Napier had no qualms about James’s designs on the English throne and actively welcomed the prospect of a religious and political union between the two countries, explicitly using it to appeal to James as a monarch with the ability to force through more religious reforms.

Finally, Williamson implied that Napier’s dedicatory epistle to James was ‘irreverent’ in tone, which betrayed John’s wish to remove any possible comparison between James and Constantine. The Epistle is examined in detail in Part I. For the time being though, it is sufficient to note that Napier addressed the king as a “RIGHT

66 Mason ‘Knox...’ pp. 154-5.
67 Williamson, Scottish National..., p. 30.
68 See below, pp. 132-9.
69 Foxe also saw a connection between the binding of Satan and the reign of Constantine, as had many before him. For more information see below pp. 210-3.
71 See below, pp. 71-7.
EXCELENT, HIGH AND MIGHTIE PRINCE”, and described his written work as ‘godly’. It must be noted that Williamson never claimed that Napier was arguing against Foxe directly or more specifically the Acts and Monuments, instead referring to Napier’s alleged opposition to the ‘Foxian’ position. The reasons for this are clear: Napier never mentioned Foxe or any of his works in the Plaine Discovery and there is no evidence that he had even read the Acts and Monuments.

The most persuasive argument for why Napier regarded the reign of Constantine as a negative turning point is not that he was actively or deliberately arguing against Foxe but that he was drawing upon the work of John Bale. Leslie Fairfield has identified similarities in their conceptions of Constantine and Napier’s debt to Bale is explored at length in parts II and III of this thesis. As Fairfield noted, although Bale celebrated Constantine as a man, he concluded that the unwitting result of his reign had been to empower the papacy, which became antichrist and persecuted the true church of God, manifested in the sixteenth century as Protestant churches. Similarly, Napier never branded Constantine evil but claimed that his reign had had evil results; in ending the persecution of Christians he had acted well, but part of his unplanned legacy was the rise of antichrist on the earth. In fact, this position had been voiced by Lollards before Bale. Thus, Napier’s position was not novel or particularly controversial but a familiar trope, adapted to his unique chronology and

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72 PD, ff. A3r & A4r (his capitals).
74 See below, pp. 210-3.
75 Fairfield p. 208 (n.).
76 Ibid., pp. 111-2 & 154. However, in Bale’s works, the papacy became Antichrist more gradually than in Napier. See below, pp. 154-7 & 220-1
expressed in his typically forceful tone, which was in keeping with his emphasis on absolutes of good and evil.\textsuperscript{77}

In 1606, an unidentified person nailed a verse to the door of parliament, which was in line with Napier’s interpretation of Constantine but unfavourably compared James VI to the Emperor as a secular prince whose actions enabled Antichrist to gain additional power. However, Williamson’s implication that this shows that Napier belonged to a distinct faction who opposed James’s imperial vision is probably without merit, given the approach Napier took to the king in his dedicatory epistle.\textsuperscript{78}

The fact that some of Napier’s conclusions were popular enough to be accepted by people who opposed a union should not be taken as an indicator that Napier opposed it, and the \textit{Plaine Discovery} proves that he was willing to embrace the change. The work also shows that, however much he wished to, Napier could not predict the future and he should not be held responsible for the actions of those who adapted some of his ideas to their own political aims. The \textit{Plaine Discovery} and Napier’s other activities in the early 1590s reveal his belief that the Kirk should wield a degree of power independent from the monarch and that God should be obeyed before men.\textsuperscript{79} However, by appealing to James VI as central to the religious destiny of Scotland, he both tacitly and explicitly recognised a degree of religious power held by the monarchy and welcomed the idea of an Atlantic Archipelago united under a single godly prince.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} For more on Napier and Bale on Constantine, see below, pp. 116, 122, 130-2, 154-6, 164-5, 160, 193-6, 301 & 309.

\textsuperscript{78} Williamson, ‘Scotland, Antichrist...’ pp. 45 & 51-2.

\textsuperscript{79} See below, pp. 75-7.

\textsuperscript{80} See below, chs. 1 & 10.
The Context of Apocalyptic Thought in Scotland in Napier’s Lifetime

By the time Napier was a young adult, Scottish Protestantism was saturated with apocalyptic imagery and many of the devices and ideas employed in the *Plaine Discovery* would have been familiar to his audience, both at home and abroad. For example, the conception of the Papacy as Antichrist would have been shared by a significant majority of educated Protestants in the British Isles. This claim played a prominent role in the *Plaine Discovery* and the longest of all Napier’s ‘Propositions’ was dedicated to this issue alone. As early as 1520, Martin Luther had denounced the papacy in this way and continued to do so in later works. Earlier scholars such as Wycliffe and Hus had identified individual popes as Antichrist. However, it was not until the beginning of the Protestant Reformations that thinkers began to identify the entire institution of the papacy as Antichrist in the way that Napier did. Other reformers such as Melanchthon quickly followed Luther’s example and the highly influential *Magdeburg Centuries* also attempted to demonstrate the veracity of the claim.

Not only was the assertion common, in Scotland it was a fundamental part of the way in which the religion of the state was defined by both the Kirk and the king. In 1581, James signed the King’s Confession. This document represented a form of covenant between Scotland, or more accurately, James as the country’s leader, and God. It also represented a reciprocal political obligation; James promised to maintain the Protestant faith in his country and the other signatories and observers in churches across the land promised to “defend his person and authority with our goods, bodies, and lives, in the defence of Christ... against all enemies within this realm or

\[81\] *PD*, pp. 41-9.
Drafted by John Craig, Knox’s assistant and successor as minister of Edinburgh, the fact that the document is often called ‘the negative confession’ is unsurprising. It denounced all aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine and tradition that differentiated it from Protestantism, defining what its signatories believed by listing the positions they rejected. Most importantly for this study, it denounced the papacy as ‘that Roman Antichrist’.

Linked to the idea of a covenant with God was another important facet of the religious identity of sixteenth century Scotland: the belief that Protestants represented the successors to the Israelites of the Old Testament as God’s chosen people. God had established the need for a covenant between Himself and His chosen people in the Old Testament and covenants in the early modern period sought to follow this example. As will be shown in Part III, the idea that Protestants were the ‘new Israelites’, found its most developed expression in the works and sermons of John Knox. He presented himself as a new prophet according to the Old Testament model and believed that the collective deliverance of his country would follow the patterns established in the Old Testament. However, the belief was widespread and pervasive. The 1560 Geneva Bible was laden with such imagery, from its cover page, which showed the Israelites, with the Red Sea before them and the Egyptians at their heels. The illustration was surrounded by extracts from the Bible, urging the reader to remain constant in their faith, secure in the knowledge that the tribulations they faced were about to end and their enemies would soon be punished. Napier explicitly incorporated this view into his chronology, explaining that the Reformation ushered in the first period in centuries, in which the true church

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82 Full text available at: http://reformationhistory.org/kingsconfession_text.html [accessed 29/08/12].
83 See below, Appendix 2, for image.
did not have to remain hidden from the persecution of Antichrist. Accordingly, he attempted to demonstrate continuity between the Old Testament Jews and Protestants:

These Israelits with manie Gentiles, being hitherto hidlings, preserued by God in these six ages, under the Pop[e]s tyranny. Now in the seuenth age, about the 1541 year of christ, god stirred vp openly, his first ministers and servants, Luther, Caluin, Melancthon, & others, to prech out... the perfite verity of the Gospell publikly, which before was his & obscured vnder the Antichristian raign, so that nowe the true Church lurketh no more, but Gods treuth to all the worlde is made patent by these ministers.\textsuperscript{84}

This idea was pervasive because it helped to explain why, if Protestantism was indeed the one true faith, so much of the world, including parts of the Holy Roman Empire and many powerful countries of Europe, were opposed to the movement. The Old Testament showed God had decreed that His chosen people must endure suffering, persecution and minority status. Thus, persecution by Roman Catholic powers was interpreted as proving the elect status of Protestants and their enemies’ allegiance to Antichrist. Just as important was the need to answer the question often posed by Catholics: ‘Where was your church before Luther?’\textsuperscript{85} Roman Catholics had a long and noble tradition on which to draw in order to lend their church a sense of legitimacy, authority and pre-eminence. The best example of this was the claim to apostolic succession, which seemed to demonstrate that Christ himself had mandated the foundation and supremacy of the Roman Church. The belief that the Protestant Church was the ultimate manifestation of the eternal Church, which was often forced into hiding by the false church of Antichrist, provided a suitable rejoinder.

\textsuperscript{84} PD, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{85} Williamson, Apocalypse Then, p. 38. Chronologies, like the one employed by Napier, were developed by Lutherans, in part, to deal with this criticism.
Another important concept in Christian eschatology is the millennium, primarily drawn from Revelation 20:4-7. These verses describe the binding of Satan and the followers of Christ reigning alongside Him for 1000 years. Throughout the history of Christianity there have been many interpretations of when this millennium would occur and about the character of this period and its significance for humanity. Although there was no consensus in Napier’s lifetime, the majority of Protestants distanced themselves from the idea that the elect would reign with Christ in a temporal kingdom for a millennium. This type of ‘Premillennialism’ or Chiliasm was tainted by its association with the bloody Anabaptist Revolt at Münster in 1534-5. These events cast a long shadow and Protestants in the sixteenth century widely condemned both Anabaptists and the Chiliasm with which some were associated.86

Protestants in the British Isles tended to downplay the role of the Millennium in eschatology. Many were exponents of ‘Amillennialism’, which held that no golden age during which Christ would reign on earth would ever occur. Instead, exegetes like John Bale and Napier expounded the view that the binding of Satan had occurred in the past. They built upon Augustine’s conception of a visible and invisible church, arguing that the period for which Satan was bound represented a period of gradual corruption within the visible church; that of the papacy.

The Geneva Bible, which probably influenced the Plaine Discovery more than any other work, called the beliefs of Anabaptists, “monstruous errors and blasphemies”.87 It identified their beliefs, along with those of Roman Catholics that lacked a scriptural basis, as, “drawen out of the depe dongeon of hell”.88 The work downplayed the millennium, identifying the thousand year reign of the true church

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86 For more on the legacy of Münster see Gribben, p. 16.
87 GB, Rev. 2:24, note f. Fff.iiiir.
88 Ibid.
with Christ in Revelation 20:6 as meaning “for euer.” Similarly, Napier stated that
the 1000 year period meant forever, whilst emphasising that the reign would not be
on this earth, so as to further emphasise his doctrinal differences from the Münster
Congregation. In his words, the true church was to, “reigne with him spiritually, the
thousand yeares of the great sabboth, which is to say, for euer and euer.”

This exclusion of a future millennium from Napier’s historical application of the
Revelation had repercussions for the way in which the last events of human history
predicted in the Revelation were viewed. Because there was to be no future
millennium, the Second Coming, Day of Judgement, and apocalypse would occur
within a short space of time. In fact, in his narrative, they almost became merged into
a single event, so that no distinction was made between them in his chronology.
Napier’s commentary on chapter 20 concluded with a description of the Second
Coming and God’s final judgement of humanity occurring as a single event: “And
we are sure that then the second and last resurrection should be, wherein generally all
men small and great, that euer died, shall rise againe, and appeare befor that justice
seate of God, and the register books of all mens consciences be opened up”. Then,
in the first verse of Chapter 21, Napier immediately described the creation of a New
Heaven and Earth, necessitating the destruction of the old creation in its entirety:
“Then I foresawe that the heauens & earth should be renewed to their vtermost
perfection: for this imperfect estate of the heauens and the earth that nowe is, shal
dissolue and melt away, and there shall be no sea, or raging inundations of worldly
troubles.”

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89 Ibid., Rev. 20:6, note l N.T. f. 122v.
90 PD, p. 235.
91 Ibid., p. 236.
92 Ibid., p. 244.
The concept of time was hugely important to the *Plaine Discovery*, but here, no passage of time was implied. The chronology was abandoned and Napier employed two columns, rather than the three he used when explaining events in chronological order with a space of time between them. There is no doubt that Napier understood the Second Coming, Day of Judgement and apocalypse, as well as the creation of the New Heaven and Earth as different aspects of a single event: “When Christe in his majesty shal come to judgement, for then certainlie shal heauen and earth bee renewed.”\(^93\) The way in which these terms are employed in the context of the *Plaine Discovery* throughout this thesis reflects Napier’s usage of them. When one is discussed, the fact that the others were intrinsically linked, both in Napier’s chronology and his understanding of the destiny of humanity, must be borne in mind.

As the most explicitly apocalyptic text of the Christian canon, the Book of Revelation was, and still is, bound up with concern with the end times. However, the fact that it was often central to polemical works by Protestant scholars, such as John Bale’s commentary of 1545, *The Image of Both Churches*, was no coincidence.\(^94\) The book itself appears well-suited to both the kind of chronological, historical interpretation employed by Napier and attacks against Rome as a centre of spiritual and temporal power. For example Revelation 17:9 claimed that the whore of Babylon sat on seven hills. Legends famously tell that Rome was built on seven hills and the interpretation of the whore as Rome therefore appears obvious.\(^95\) The book was

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\(^93\) Ibid., p. 236, Rev. 20:11.

\(^94\) Bale, J. *The Image of Both Churches* Thomas East (London 1570) STC/485:01. This text is discussed in more detail in ch. 7, below. This second edition was used for the sake of legibility but the work was originally published in 1545.

\(^95\) Ironically, legend also has it that Napier’s home town of Edinburgh was built on seven hills. However, this was an image cultivated by many cities in Europe, which hoped to borrow some of the prestige of Rome.
employed in propaganda against specific popes in the medieval period.\textsuperscript{96} John Knox rarely referred to the text but did employ it when attacking the papacy explicitly.\textsuperscript{97}

However, use of the Revelation in theological works was problematic in the sixteenth century. Its authorship and, by association, canonical status had been called into question and its vivid, violent imagery and obscure meaning put it at odds with much of the Bible. It was also linked to the Chiliasm that was being widely denounced after the Münster rebellion. The most relevant aspects of this debate to the \textit{Plaine Discovery} emerged from the tradition of humanism that developed in Europe after the fourteenth century. Perhaps most famously, The Revelation’s Apostolic origins were disputed by Erasmus in the annotations to his groundbreaking Latin and Greek New Testament of 1516.\textsuperscript{98} These doubts became sufficiently widespread that Bullinger, Meyer and Bibliander were compelled to defend the canonicity of the text in their subsequent commentaries.\textsuperscript{99} The arguments against Erasmus which had the most influence on Napier’s defence of the Revelation were found in Theodore Beza’s Annotations to his translation of the New Testament, published in 1565. One of Erasmus’s most well-known criticisms of the Revelation was that the author repeatedly referred to himself as ‘I John’ but John did not do so in his Gospel or Epistles.\textsuperscript{100} Napier employed Beza’s argument that this criticism was unfounded because, in the Revelation, John was attempting to emulate the style of Old Testament prophecies, which often identified their authors: “Consider hereupon,

\textsuperscript{97} See below, pp. 247-50, for a discussion of the most explicitly apocalyptic of Knox’s published works, which contained several allusions to the Revelation and the alleged evils of Roman Catholicism.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 665.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., pp. 663-4.
Daniels prophecie, where ye shall finde his name more than threescore times repeated: yea, in the first person, ye shal find [I Daniel] repeated about nine times, in the 7.8.9. and 10. chapters: whereas Iohn repeateth his name but fiue times in all this booke."101 Beza also claimed that John’s text must have been the revealed word of God because so many of its prophecies had come true and the vast majority of Napier’s chronology referred to events in the past.102

As was typical for the Plaine Discovery, Napier’s placement of his discussion of this issue within his work was very deliberate and shrewd. Perhaps surprisingly, his defence of the Revelation was not one of his ‘Propositions’ in the first section of his book. This would have drawn attention to arguments that might undermine the assumptions on which his entire commentary was predicated. Instead, he discussed the matter in an endnote to Revelation 1:1, probably in the knowledge that he could not altogether ignore it and risk condemnation.103 The context in which the Plaine Discovery was written was a hugely important influence on its content and must be considered in detail if the text is to be understood.

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101 Ibid. & PD, p. 76, his parentheses.
103 PD, pp. 75-6.
3. John Napier of Merchiston, unknown artist, 1616, National Galleries of Scotland


Chapter 1 - Napier’s Life and Times

Dramatic events occurred in Napier’s lifetime that changed Scotland forever and influenced his views on politics, religion and the ‘end times’ that were dominant themes of the Plaine Discovery. This chapter offers an outline of the life of John Napier of Merchiston and highlights historical events that had an impact on his life, especially those that influenced the style and content of the Plaine Discovery. It advocates a scholarly return to Napier’s works in order to understand better their author and highlights problems in the existing biographical understanding of him. In 1915, when Peter Hume Brown wrote that the Plaine Discovery, “forms an essential part of,” Napier’s biography, he seems scarcely to have appreciated the accuracy of his claim.\(^1\) Hume Brown was referring primarily to Napier’s introductory epistle, To the Godly and Christian Reader, in which he briefly discussed his youth at St Andrews. However, a detailed analysis of the whole of the Plaine Discovery reveals more to the modern observer than has previously been estimated. The text has much to say about its author’s attitudes, aspirations, fears and personality. Despite his relative fame, no recent academic work has made a serious attempt to construct a biography of Napier because so few of his personal papers have survived. Many were destroyed by a fire at the home of his descendants in Renfrewshire in the early nineteenth century.\(^2\) Study of Napier’s life is therefore exciting, as so little has been written before, and fraught with difficulty, as so little may be said with certainty.

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\(^1\) Hume Brown, p. 48.
\(^2\) Napier, M., Preface, V.
Current Biographies of Napier

The modern biographical understanding of John Napier is based almost entirely on a work by one of his descendants, Mark Napier’s Memoirs of John Napier of Merchiston. Published in 1834, all subsequent attempts at biography have drawn heavily on the work and its assertions have been the most important formative influence on the academic and popular understandings of John Napier. Its influence has been so profound that any attempt at a biography of Napier must start with the book. It was painstakingly researched, lengthy and detailed, meaning that few additional factual details or events can be added to the narrative of John Napier’s life that have not already been described. However, the work was published 180 years ago, and modern scholars may have much to contribute, particularly with regards to the analysis of primary materials and understanding of the historical context to which the Plaine Discovery belongs.

In 1914, 80 years after Mark Napier’s work was published, E.W. Hobson directed his audience to the book, describing it as, “a full account of the life and activities of Napier”, and not attempting to add any further biographical information. Hume Brown’s account of the following year was based solely on Mark Napier’s work, along with selected entries from the Privy Council Register. As late as 2003, a short work was published that shared and reinforced many of Mark Napier’s conclusions. Little was added, to the biography of Napier except some embellishments about what Napier might have experienced if he travelled in Europe. The fact that Mark Napier’s conclusions have endured is as much a testament to the

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2 Hume Brown, p. 33.
3 Gladstone-Millar. See above, p. 15 for full title.
quality of his writing and research as it is an indicator of how difficult it is to write about Napier’s life. The work was well written, in language that was succinct by nineteenth century standards. It was also free from many of the absurdities and inaccuracies of contemporary biographical works.\(^6\) The mere fact that the majority of Mark Napier’s assertions were based on the interpretation of evidence rather than hearsay and rumour distinguished it from previous attempts to describe Napier’s life. Its greatest service to scholarship was its inclusion of transcripts of almost all the letters and unpublished documents relating to Napier. Future generations thereby had easy access to these materials and did not have to rely on Mark Napier’s interpretations.

However there are problems with Mark Napier’s analysis because his portrayal of his ancestor was unapologetically romantic. He used hyperbolic language to accentuate John Napier’s greatness by overstating the backwardness of Scotland, relative to mainland Europe: “He was distant and isolated from the great arena of letters; cooped up within the narrow limits of desolate Scotland, and encircled with savage sights and sounds of civil discord, above which the name of God was howled by those whose hands were red with murder.”\(^7\) Mark Napier ostensibly attempted to revise the popular conception of John as a reclusive character: “I cannot discover, though such is his popular character, that he possessed either the temper or the habits of a recluse”.\(^8\) However, he also reinforced the classic conception by claiming that Napier, “lived the life of an intellectual hermit, entirely devoted to his theological

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\(^6\) For example, see Craik, p. 46, which claimed that Napier was rumoured to have a large black dog as a familiar spirit. The rumours involved a black cock, not a dog. See below, p. 91.

\(^7\) Napier, M., p. 56.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 147.
and mathematical speculations”.⁹ Although the language has changed, the substance of these claims was found in the 2003 work of Lynne Gladstone-Millar, which illustrates the legacy of Mark Napier’s work: “Although Scottish travellers brought home many of the glories of the Renaissance from Europe, they did not give a high priority to news of new mathematical research which was going on. Without the stimulation of this, Napier plodded on with his ideas and his figures, quite alone.”¹⁰

John Napier lived in an imposing stone tower with walls six feet thick.¹¹ The only existing portraits of the man show him dressed in black, with a long beard and stern demeanour, as was the style of the time. The image of him as a silent hermit, working alone, hidden from the world, is romantic and attractive. However, it ignores important evidence to the contrary. His involvement in the aftermath of the Spanish Blanks Affair speaks to his active role in the administration of the Kirk, and the high regard in which he was held by its members. His friendship with Robert Pont, one of sixteenth century Scotland’s leading reformers, shows that he was an active member of the religious intellectual elite of Edinburgh. Moreover, he was married twice and fathered 12 children. He played an important role in the life of his father, Archibald, and the offspring of his second marriage, who appear to have held him in high regard. For example, in 1600, John Napier’s half-brother, also called Archibald, was murdered as the result of a quarrel over a horse. His younger brothers plotted revenge and planned to murder the accused and flee to the company of their uncle, the Catholic sympathiser Francis Mowbray, in the Netherlands. John wrote a

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⁹ Ibid., p. 323.
¹⁰ Gladstone-Millar, p. 3. Hume Brown (p. 34) presented a similar picture: “Even to-day a certain mystery surrounds the figure of the Laird of Merchiston. Appearing at the time he did, and in an environment seemingly so strangely in contrast with his special pursuits, he strikes us as the most singular of apparitions among his contemporaries.”
¹¹ See Appendix 3 for images of Merchiston tower, appearing as it would have when Napier lived there.
letter to his half-brother, Alexander, urging him to abandon the scheme. The letter had the desired effect, and the correspondences seem to show real affection between those involved.12

Mark Napier’s Memoirs also portrayed Napier as an unprecedented aberration, whose influence single-handedly and irrevocably changed Scotland and her thinkers, dragging them from a dark age of ignorance into the Renaissance: “John Napier is the great land-mark of the most important epoch of letters in Scotland.”13 Mark Napier claimed that the Plaine Discovery, “for learning and research has never been equalled by any of his countrymen. At the same time, alone and unaided, he placed his sterile country upon a level in mathematical learning with those more propitious climes, Germany and Italy, - the cradle of astronomy, and the hot-bed of letters.”14 John Napier lived at a time of important change in Scotland, and the British Isles as a developing political unit. The claim that the reforms in the arts, sciences, and religious thought that approximately coincided with his lifetime are the result of his actions is untenable.

The tone of Mark Napier’s biography was often defensive because some of his contemporaries had attacked his ancestor. In 1819, Walter Scott bemoaned Napier’s, “wasted time in endeavouring to discover the mysteries of the Apocalypse”.15 Baden Powell called Napier’s Plaine Discovery, “a peurile commentary, in which he imagined he had decyphered all the mysteries of the Apocalypse.”16 The Plaine Discovery was also defamed in the nineteenth century because Napier’s dating of the

13 Ibid., p. 85.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 181.
apocalypse between 1688 and 1700 had proved incorrect.\textsuperscript{17} As a result, Mark Napier’s praise of John was excessive and unqualified, at times seeming so extravagant as to appear comical, for example, when describing his “serene presence, thoughtful eye and ample beard”.\textsuperscript{18} As T.F. Henderson once wrote, “although in many cases his representations are substantially founded on fact, his exaggeration necessarily awakens distrust, even when he has a good case.”\textsuperscript{19} Throughout the Memoirs, not a single negative charge against Napier was conceded, and every event was cast in as positive a light as possible.

\textbf{The Napiers of Merchiston: A Brief History}

Napier was born at his family’s residence at Merchiston in 1550. The Napiers were not one of the major land-owning families of Scotland, though they did have links to the Chisholms of Cromlix and the Menteiths of Rusky. They also acquired some small portions of the lands of the Lennox. They were notable for their service to the crown, as diplomats and in various roles in local government. They were one of a number of families including the Bellendens, who formed a new class of ‘merchant lairds’ leading up to the sixteenth century. As Edinburgh developed into the economic, legal and administrative centre of Scotland, families like the Napiers

\textsuperscript{17} PD, pp. 16-22. Powell later wrote against external revelation, especially miracles, arguing that when disproven, they cast Christianity as a whole in a negative or absurd light. The intellectual vogue of the enlightenment was to emphasise the moral lessons of the Bible over external supernatural occurrences and prophecy. See Powell, B., ‘On the Study of the Evidences of Christianity’ in Essays and Reviews, Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts (London 1860) pp. 94-144, (p. 140). Mark Napier addressed these issues by stating that the apostles had believed in an imminent Second Coming. See Napier, M., p. 187.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 164.

became the new, educated, urban elite.\textsuperscript{20} In fact, so reliant was the Stewart dynasty on these families for their skills in legal administration and civil service, and for the funding that they often provided through loans to the crown, that they entered into the burgh oligarchy of Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{21} In addition to their rising prominence in the urban centre of Edinburgh, they attempted to integrate into the landed elite through the acquisition of rural estates. In the case of the Napiers, this was primarily achieved in the lands of the Lennox through marriages.\textsuperscript{22} Families like the Napiers of Merchiston arguably occupied a more important position than the upper echelons of the aristocracy from the early sixteenth century as the foci of the economy shifted to urban centres.\textsuperscript{23}

John Napier was the eighth Laird of Merchiston. The first, Alexander Napier, (d. 1454) was a burgess of Edinburgh who had amassed some wealth from the wool trade. In around 1434 he was granted a charge over the lands of Merchiston, as surety for cash funds he had lent to the crown.\textsuperscript{24} James I was assassinated in 1437 and the land was officially granted to Napier on a permanent basis by charter in 1438.\textsuperscript{25} Alexander Napier had success in his role in local government and was appointed

\begin{itemize}
\item This was part of a trend of centralisation across Europe, which saw large towns emerge as the legal, economic and administrative centres of states.
\item Van Heijnsbergen, T. ‘The Interaction between Literature and History in Queen Mary’s Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Manuscript and its Prosopographical Context’ in MacDonald, A.A.; Lynch, M. & Cowan, I.B. (eds.) The renaissance in Scotland: Studies in Literature, Religion, History and Culture E.J. Brill (Leiden 1994) pp. 183-225, p. 186. Lynch has argued that, despite the success of these families in integrating themselves into the bureaucracy of Edinburgh, the influence of the royal court prevented them from monopolising the town’s power structures in the way families of similar status did in other towns, including Aberdeen. See Lynch, Edinburgh..., p. 6.
\item Mark Napier wrote a work in which he defended his family’s claim to various Lennox lands. See Napier, M., History of the Partition of the Lennox William Blackwood and Sons (Edinburgh 1835).
\item Van Heijnsbergen, p. 186.
\item Ibid.
\end{itemize}
provost in around 1436. He also acted as a diplomat and played a role in arranging a
truce between Scotland and England in 1451.26

Alexander’s son, also called Alexander, was an important figure in the
development of the family’s status. He attempted to defend Joan Beaufort, mother of
James II, from kidnap by the Livingston family in 1439. For his services, the crown
granted him the lands of Philde, Perthshire, which had previously been held by the
Livingstons. Although the lands reverted to the Livingston family, the standing of the
Napiers was enhanced by this episode. He served as provost of Edinburgh, in 1453,
1456 and 1469, and the lands of Over Merchiston were incorporated into his family’s
possessions in 1465.27 He was also granted the Pultrie lands which carried with them
the hereditary title of Poulterer to the king.28 This Alexander Napier was granted
leave to travel to England in 1460 and was knighted and made comptroller of the
royal household in 1461. Like his father, he acted as an ambassador to England and
held the office of Vice-Admiral of Scotland. He was given diplomatic missions,
being sent to Bruges in 1472 and to Burgundy in 1473, in which year he was also
granted a small portion of the earldom of Lennox.29

Alexander the younger’s eldest son, John Napier, third Laird of Merchiston, also
served as provost of Edinburgh. He acquired the lands of Calziemuck in Rusky,
north-west of Stirling, through his marriage to Elizabeth Menteith. Her mother was a
daughter of Duncan, Earl of Lennox, which provided a link between the Napiers and
that great family.30 John’s eldest son Archibald founded a chantry for his ancestors at

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., pp. 404-5.
28 This is of particular significance to John Napier because the story of the black cockerel, that has
been called his familiar, was probably linked to this hereditary position. See below, p. 91.
29 Scots Peerage, pp. 405-6.
30 Ibid., p. 407.
St. Giles’s Cathedral, Edinburgh, then a Collegiate Church.\(^{31}\) He was involved in a dispute with the Stewarts of Darnley and the Haldanes of Gleneagles over the inheritance of various Lennox lands. He eventually retained Merchiston, Over and Nether Merchiston and the Lennox possessions that had been inherited through Elizabeth Menteith. He was married to Catherine Douglas, daughter of Sir William Douglas of Whittinghame, and latterly Margaret Campbell, Daughter of Sir Colin Campbell of Glenorchy.\(^{32}\) Archibald’s son and grandson, the fifth and sixth Lairds of Merchiston both called Alexander, continued the family’s involvement in local affairs. Alexander the elder’s sons by his third marriage settled in Exeter and the elder of these, known as Alexander Napier of Inglistoun was the father of the noted astrologer, physician, theologian and alchemist Richard Napier.\(^{33}\) Alexander Napier, sixth Laird of Merchiston’s eldest son was John Napier’s father, Archibald.

**John Napier’s Early Years**

John Napier was born at a time of seismic change, both for Scotland and for the wider British Isles. These changes impacted directly on the young man and helped to shape his views on religion, the apocalypse, foreign powers, the monarchy, and ultimately his treatment of the Book of Revelation. The first great change Scotland faced in Napier’s life was the country’s Protestant Reformation. In 1558, when John was seven or eight years old, Mary Queen of Scots was married to Francis, who was crowned Francis II of France in September the following year. This union heightened the fear that Scotland would lose autonomy in favour of French rule. However, Elizabeth I had acceded to the English throne in November 1558, which emboldened

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 409.
\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) See below, pp. 99-100.
Protestants in Scotland. In January 1559 John Knox returned from Geneva and began calling for reform in a series of fiery sermons, one of which sparked an iconoclastic riot at Perth. The Regent, Mary of Guise’s heavy-handed response, including mobilising troops against the town and reinstating the mass, helped galvanise the Protestant cause and their secular champions, the so-called ‘Lords of the Congregation’. Knox served as the party’s secretary and religious agitator, stirring Protestants to action in the towns of Northern Fife, which were then reinforced by the Congregation. Mary’s position was temporarily bolstered by a French military force, which drove the rebels from their stronghold at Linlithgow. However, in January 1560, an English fleet anchored in the Firth of Forth, preventing French troops and supplies from landing and providing aid to the Protestant Lords. Their position was consolidated in the following month, when the Duke of Norfolk signed the treaty of Berwick on Elizabeth’s behalf, safeguarding the new regime’s protection against French interference with the promise of English support. Mary of Guise died on 11 June and Parliament met on 10 July. Over the course of around a month, this Parliament effectively instituted the Scottish Reformation. Its acts abolished the Roman Catholic mass, declared that the pope had no jurisdiction in Scotland and authorised a new confession of faith.

The consequent shared religious allegiance of Scotland and England fostered a sense of unity between the two countries, which was enhanced by the geographical isolation of these island realms from Europe. In the coming years, the threats from Roman Catholic Europe, whether real or imagined, would add to this sense of

34 Dawson, Scotland Re-Formed, p. 205.
36 For a more detailed account of these events see Dawson, Scotland Re-formed, ch. 9 & Donaldson, The Scottish Reformation, ch. 3.
isolation, which came to be expressed within an apocalyptic framework. The *Plaine Discovery* belongs very much to this context, reflecting both the fear of invasion and hope for an Anglo-Scottish union that followed the Scottish Reformation and Spanish Armada.

Archibald Napier was aged 15 or 16 at the time of his son’s birth and the two men appear to have enjoyed a close relationship. John’s mother, Janet Bothwell, was the older half-sister of the Bishop of Orkney and daughter of Francis Bothwell, one time provost of Edinburgh, and Janet Richardson. She died when John was 13. In the same year he was enrolled at St Andrews and, although there is no record of his graduation, his experience at the university appears to have had a significant impact on him. In the introductory note, *To the Godly and Christian Reader*, in the *Plaine Discovery*, he claimed that it was here that his fascination with the apocalypse was developed:

> in my tender yeares, and barneage in Sanct-Androis at the Schooles, having on the one parte contracted a louing familiaritie with a certaine Gentleman, &c. a Papist: And on the other part, being attentiue to the Sermons of that worthie man of God, *Maister Christopher Goodman*, teaching vpon the Apocallyps, I was so mooued in admiration, against the blindnes of Papists, that could not most euidently see their seuen hilled citie Rome, painted out there so liuely by Saint Iohn, as the mother of all spirituall whoredome, that not onlely bursted I out in continual reasoning against my said familiar, but also from thenceforth, I determined with my selfe (by the admittance of Gods spirit) to employ my studie and diligence to search out the remanent mysteries of that holy book: as to this houre (praised be the Lorde) I haue bin doing at al such times, as conveniently I might haue occasion.

Along with John Knox, Christopher Goodman had led the congregation of English-speaking Protestant exiles at Geneva during the reign of Mary Tudor that

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37 In his adult life, John handled many of his father’s affairs while Archibald was engaged at the mint or the office of Justice Depute. See Napier, M, pp. 147-8.

38 *PD*, f. A6r. Unfortunately, Napier did not reveal the identity of his Roman Catholic friend.
had produced the famous 1560 Geneva Bible. This book was replete with apocalyptic themes and imagery, and its translation and marginalia were a major influence upon the *Plaine Discovery*.³⁹

One of the most important presences in John Napier’s formative years was that of his maternal uncle, Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney. Bothwell belonged to the same social group as the Napiers and his family also played important legal and administrative roles around Edinburgh in the sixteenth century. His father had been provost of Edinburgh and, along with Adam’s uncle, a senator of the college of justice immediately following the foundation of the Court of Session in 1532.⁴⁰ His mother, Katherine Bellenden, was the sister of Justice Clerk Thomas Bellenden of Auchnoule, whose son subsequently held that office.⁴¹ Bothwell was consecrated bishop in 1559 but was captured and detained by the English before taking up his post as the Bishop of Orkney in 1560. Although he was consecrated before the Scottish Reformation, he swiftly embraced the new religious policies. He married soon after taking up the post and had six sons and two daughters.⁴² He had personally begun preaching the Reformed faith in his diocese by early in 1561.⁴³ In the first two years of his administration he introduced Protestant clergy to every church in his diocese.⁴⁴

He appears to have been moderate in his policies of religious reform and Gordon Donaldson has pointed out that no instances of iconoclasm occurred in Orkney

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³⁹ The influence of the Geneva Bible on Napier is assessed below, ch. 9.
⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴³ Ibid., p. 27.
⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 28-9.
during his tenure.\(^{45}\) In July 1567, at a coronation ceremony that harked back to the pageantry of Roman Catholic rites, he anointed the infant King James VI.\(^{46}\) Bothwell attended the majority of the General Assembly’s meetings from 1563-6 and, in December 1563, was appointed to the commission to revise the Book of Discipline.\(^{47}\) After the controversial marriage of Mary and James Hepburn, fourth Earl of Bothwell, in 1567, which he conducted, Adam Bothwell’s relationship with the General Assembly soured.\(^{48}\) Many charges were made against him and, as his health failed, he spent more and more time away from his see. His later life was spent in administration in Edinburgh, where he managed the revenues of the Abbey of Holyrood, attended parliament and was a member of the Privy Council until his final years.\(^{49}\) He died in 1593, seven months before the publication of the *Plaine Discovery*.\(^{50}\)

One complaint made against Bothwell by the General Assembly was that he spent too much time in Edinburgh and neglected his diocese.\(^{50}\) Several letters, written in an affectionate tone, between him and John Napier’s parents have survived. Some of these directly refer to John and he probably played a significant role in Napier’s young life. Adam Bothwell’s library contained volumes by

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 34.

\(^{46}\) Michael Lynch explained the character of this ceremony in ‘Scotland’s First Protestant Coronation’. He argued that the anointing, use of the sword of state and sceptre, which were papal gifts, and the imagery of imperial monarchy were intended to establish a sense of continuity to provide the new regime with a sense of legitimacy. The Reformation and Mary’s forced abdication could be taken as an absolute break with the past, but the Protestant regime did not want to undo the work of their forebears who had gradually increased the prestige of Scotland’s monarchy on the international stage. The coronation of James harked back to the past in order to show that Scottish monarchs still had a place among the greatest rulers of Europe, whilst emphasising the Protestant future of the realm. (‘Scotland’s First...’, pp. 201-3.) Adam Bothwell was a logical choice to anoint the king because he was part of the new Protestant establishment but was moderate in his faith and policies. (Ibid., p. 188.)

\(^{47}\) Donaldson, *Reformed by Bishops*, p. 31.

\(^{48}\) For more information on Adam Bothwell’s relationship with the Kirk, see ibid., pp. 37-46. The marriage and its consequences are discussed below, pp. 58-9 & 79.

\(^{49}\) Donaldson, *Reformed by Bishops*, p. 44.

numerous reformers in a variety of languages, which suggests significant learning and a genuine commitment to the Reformed faith. He owned books by Melanchthon, Calvin and Bullinger, as well as later reformers like Beza.\textsuperscript{51} Although there is no evidence to suggest that John’s parents were averse to religious change, there is no evidence of zealous commitment either.\textsuperscript{52} The best evidence that Napier had a close family member who influenced his theological position comes from what can be discerned about Adam Bothwell.\textsuperscript{53}

**The Problem of Napier’s Youth and Education**

Whilst it is impossible to construct a complete narrative of John Napier’s early life, revisions are needed to the existing biography. There is no evidence that John Napier ever travelled outside of the British Isles though it has been widely accepted that Napier was removed from St Andrews, where he matriculated in 1563, and completed his education in Europe.\textsuperscript{54} The reasons for this are clear. Few documents referring to John Napier’s life have survived; consequently the importance of those that are available has been overestimated.

Although there is no record of John Napier graduating from St Andrews, the standard of his published works implies an educated author. During Napier’s lifetime it was common for wealthy young men to be sent to the continent for study and one may reasonably suppose that this was the case for John. However, during the early

\textsuperscript{51} *ODNB*: Adam Bothwell.

\textsuperscript{52} Archibald’s refusal to commit to either side in the civil war is discussed below. However, this need not be taken as evidence for a lack of religious commitment. The fact that people from both ends of the religious spectrum supported both the Queen’s and the Regent’s party is well established.

\textsuperscript{53} Bothwell was closely related to the Bellenden family, noted for their Protestant leanings, on his mother’s side. (See Van Heijnsbergen pp. 191-98.) Mark Napier reproduced a letter from 1561, stating that John was to be the sole beneficiary of Adam Bothwell’s estate. However, this was before the birth of Bothwell’s children and his will has not survived. Whether John received any inheritance from Bothwell is therefore unknown. See Napier, M, pp. 74-6.

\textsuperscript{54} Matriculation records reproduced in Napier, M., p. 92.
modern period, it was also common for young men to leave universities without having formally graduated. There is no evidence to suggest that Napier could not have received perfectly good schooling at St Andrews, despite not gaining a formal degree, and it is not known how long he spent at the university. The certainty that now typifies claims about Napier’s education in Europe stems from a single, frequently cited, piece of evidence. In 1560, Adam Bothwell wrote a letter to Archibald Napier, in which he urged the Laird to, “send your sone Jhone to the schuyllis; oyer to France or Flandaris; for he can leyr no guid at hame’, nor get na proffeit in this maist perullus worlde”. 55 Gladstone-Millar’s claim that, “John’s father took the advice of his brother-in-law and sent his son abroad”, must be treated with caution. 56 It fails to account why, if Archibald were so inclined to take Bothwell’s advice and feared for John’s safety in Scotland, John ever attended St Andrews.

Bothwell was writing in 1560, when Scotland had been experiencing great turmoil with the Wars of the Congregation. In the letter, Bothwell complained about how the upheaval had affected him personally and apparently wished to spare John a similar experience. 57 As a man of considerable intellect, Bothwell was concerned his eldest nephew should receive a good education and he doubted the religious and political atmosphere in Scotland would facilitate this goal. The fact that John’s mother had recently died may explain why Archibald chose to send John to St Andrews and not Europe. Mark Napier cited as evidence for John’s alleged European

56 Gladstone-Millar, p. 10.
57 Napier, M., p. 67. Bothwell was held prisoner on his way to Orkney and the experience, alluded to in the letter, had been traumatic.
education the fact that no mention of John exists in any document between his matriculation at St Andrews and the arrangements for his marriage to Elizabeth Stirling in 1571.\footnote{Napier, M. p. 129.} This is an argument from silence and must therefore be regarded with caution.

Numerous universities at which Napier may have studied have been proposed. The strongest candidate is the Collège of Guienne, which was in Bordeaux and was first suggested by Katherine Firth in 1979.\footnote{Firth, pp. 135-8.} When Napier attended St Andrews, he lodged with John Rutherford, the principal of St Salvator’s College.\footnote{Napier, M. p. 93. Provision for his board was made in his mother’s will.} Rutherford was known as a forceful man with a fierce temper.\footnote{McCrie, T.D.D. *The Life of Andrew Melville*, Vol. I. William Blackwood (Edinburgh 1819) p. 110 cit. ibid., pp. 94-5. Rutherford was reprimanded by his superiors for his rash actions in the same year John matriculated.} He was educated at Guienne and may have influenced Archibald to send his son to that institution. Several noted Scotsmen had taught at the collège, including George Buchanan, who was professor of Latin.\footnote{Woodward, p. 140 & Abbott, D. M., ‘Buchanan, George (1506–1582)’ in Goldman, L. (ed), *ODNB*, online ed. OUP 2004, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3837 (accessed December 14, 2012). Robert Balfour later taught at the College and became its principal in 1602. Woodward, p. 140 & Todd, R.B., ‘Balfour, Robert (b. c.1555, d. in or after 1621)’ in Goldman, L. (ed), *ODNB*, online ed. OUP 2004, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1194 (accessed December 14, 2012).} Joseph Scaliger, to whom Napier referred directly in the *Plaine Discovery*, also attended Guienne in his youth.\footnote{Napier, M., p. 179 & PD p. 9. Napier referred the reader to Scaliger in the second edition of the *Plaine Discovery* (Napier, 1611, p. 342). However, one might argue that Napier would have mentioned knowing Scaliger personally if the two men were acquainted, given the pre-eminence of the latter.} In addition to the evidence identified by Firth, Guienne, like St. Salvator’s, was noted for its religious diversity, though the atmosphere may have been becoming less tolerant by the time Napier would have attended.\footnote{Woodward, W.H., *Studies in Education During the Age of Renaissance, 1400-1600* CUP (Cambridge, 1906) p.141. Also Napier, M., pp. 85-6.} Napier claimed to bear no animosity towards Roman Catholics, despite
demonising the pope and their church throughout the *Plaine Discovery*. He also attempted to deal with his detractors in a cordial manner. Few European educational institutions would have been better suited to cultivating this attitude than Guienne. The Collège would also have been among the most accessible in mainland Europe from Scotland in the sixteenth century. Bordeaux was one of the principal ports of entry for Scots travelling to French Universities, including those going to Paris, where Mark Napier believed John was educated. Unfortunately, the matriculation records for the Collège have not survived and whether or not Napier attended cannot be verified.

The problem of John Napier’s education has been investigated at length and seems unlikely to ever be solved with certainty. Many European universities had a comparatively relaxed attitude to attendance and record keeping. It was commonplace for privileged young men from the British Isles to acquire some learning on the continent and it is perfectly possible that Napier was educated in Europe. However, there is no historical merit to speculating about the perils that John may have faced on his hypothetical travels or the ‘flea-ridden’ beds on which he may, or may not, have slept. Mark Napier did not make factual statements based on speculation but others, who have based their research on his, have added their own embellishments and assumptions. One such instance was the claim that John was 14 years old when he travelled to Europe, based on nothing more than the fact that he

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65 See below, pp. 184-5.
66 See below, ch. 5.
67 Napier, M., p. 106.
68 Neither the Universities of Oxford nor Cambridge have records of Napier’s matriculation, nor do the continental Universities consulted during this research or by Gladstone-Millar, who discussed the problem on pp. 13-14.
69 Gladstone-Millar p. 12.
matriculated at St Andrews when he was 13. John wrote about his time at St Andrews personally, demonstrating that his experience there had influenced him significantly. He did not imply that his passion for biblical exegesis or preoccupation with the apocalypse was developed further elsewhere. Nor did he mention an education in mathematics in either the Logarithms or his final published work, the Rabdologia.

The legacy of Mark Napier’s analysis is so profound that the documents he chose to emphasise have formed the foci of subsequent studies, whereas those to which he devoted little attention have been ignored. For example, when John would have been around ten years old, Adam Bothwell wrote to his sister, John’s mother, apparently continuing an ongoing correspondence with her. His letter discussed the unhappy state of the marriage between Janet and Archibald, noting, “ther is sume variance betwixt you and your housband, and that ye ar not sua luiffet of him as ye war wont”. He urged his sister to have faith in God that the conditions would be temporary, writing that she should regard her situation as a test, which Bothwell likened to the story of Job. Whether Janet’s prayers were answered before her untimely death is not known. However, if the letter is representative of the general state of his parents’ relationship, the effect of an unhappy home life on the young

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70 Ibid., p. 13.
71 Napier, J. Rabdologiae, sev Noverationis per Virgulas libri duo Andro Hart (Edinburgh 1617).
72 See Napier, M. pp. 65-6. The letter is dated ‘19th of January’ but no year is given. It is signed ‘Bishop of Orknay’. Bothwell wrote, “I am sorie that ye suld be at sic disease [unease], and specially I beyng sua far removet fra you”, implying that he had arrived in his Orkney Diocese, making the year 1561.
73 Ibid., p. 65.
74 Ibid., p. 66.
John Napier could have been significant. Mark Napier paid little attention to the letter and it has been ignored in subsequent analyses.75

**Troubles in Scotland**

In the period between Napier’s matriculation at St Andrews and his marriage to Elizabeth Stirling, a number of events occurred in Scotland that impacted on the Napier family to varying degrees. In 1565, Mary, Queen of Scots married her first cousin Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley. Both had a claim to the English throne and the marriage was probably a deliberate move to secure the succession after Elizabeth’s death.76 However, Elizabeth had no intention of naming a successor and relations with England quickly began to sour. Mary focussed her attention on consolidating Scotland’s relationship with Roman Catholic France and Spain. She aligned herself with the Roman Catholic nobility and encouraged all nobles to attend mass. These attempts were most determined in February 1566, during the visit of three French envoys. Mary was attempting to maintain close ties to the court of her cousin, Charles IX, and return the pageantry of the French court, which was laden with Catholic imagery, to Scotland.77 Scottish Protestants began to worry that the Roman

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75 Mark Napier’s only use for the letter was as a device by which to denigrate Adam Bothwell: “the ghostly comfort and advice he bestows upon his favourite sister, to bear patiently her crosses as the signs and token’s of God’s love, is precisely the reverse of his own conduct through life.” (Napier, M., p. 65.) He romanticised the story of Mary Queen of Scots in order to protect the reputation of his ancestors who had demurred from fighting against her. As the man who had officiated the wedding between Mary and the earl of Bothwell, Adam Bothwell became a scapegoat for the wrongs done against the Queen and the greed and cowardice that Mark Napier portrayed as typifying the King’s side during the civil war. This was especially poignant in light of the alleged rape of Mary by the Earl of Bothwell. A farer assessment of Adam Bothwell is that, like his brother-in-law Archibald Napier, he appears to have swum with the tide of politics and reform, backing the side that was in power. See below, pp. 63-4.


77 Goodare, J., ‘Queen Mary’s Catholic Interlude’ in Goodare & Lynch, pp. 154-170, p. 164. Goodare asserted that the overtly Catholic policies of 1566 were an ‘aberration’ that belied the policy of religious appeasement, which typified her reign. Thus, the Protestant fears that the queen was intent
Catholic forces of Europe were massing and would soon act to destroy their church, unopposed by their monarch.\textsuperscript{78} Darnley did little to help matters. After the French delegation honoured him with the Order of St Michael he publicly boasted of his achievement, and of reinstating the mass, which provoked a Protestant backlash, including the murder of Mary’s Italian servant, David Rizzio.\textsuperscript{79}

Just 18 months after their marriage, Darnley was murdered. Rumours abounded that James Hepburn, 4\textsuperscript{th} Earl of Bothwell had masterminded the killing. His close relationship with Mary encouraged speculation and helped to implicate her in the conspiracy. Moreover, Mary’s refusal to adhere to the protocols demanded of a grieving widow aroused further suspicion.\textsuperscript{80} The Earl of Bothwell was acquitted but married Mary in May 1567. The marriage of the queen to the man accused of murdering her husband was controversial and helped to galvanise the opposing political camps that existed in the country. The Confederate Lords forced Mary, with her modest accompanying force, to surrender at Carberry, while she was returning to Edinburgh from Dunbar.\textsuperscript{81} On 24 July Mary abdicated under duress, leaving the throne to her infant son, James VI.

The direct connection of the Napier family to events in the last years of Mary, Queen of Scots’ personal reign reveals their standing in Scotland. Mary’s marriage to Bothwell and the anointing of James VI at his coronation were carried out by John Napier’s uncle, Adam Bothwell, the Bishop of Orkney. Archibald Napier attended the coronation reflecting this kinship and his prominent position in Edinburgh on reinstating Roman Catholicism may have been ill-founded and influenced by Darnley’s boastful and abrasive personality. See also Lynch, 1990, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{78} Dawson, 2007, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{79} Lynch, 1990, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{80} For example, Mary attended the wedding of one of her servants the day following the murder. Dawson, \textit{Scotland Re-Formed}, p. 260.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 261.
society. However, this was not necessarily an indicator that he was passionately committed to the new regime. The house where Darnley was murdered, Kirk o’ Field, was owned by Robert Balfour, whose brother James was councillor to the Queen. There was evidence linking James Balfour to the murder and he stood trial but was acquitted in April 1567. Gilbert Balfour, James and Robert’s brother, was married to Margaret Bothwell, Adam Bothwell’s sister and half-sister to John Napier’s mother. Though there is no reason to suspect John’s immediate family of involvement in the conspiracy, the incident was likely to have resonated with the Napiers because of their connection to those involved. The country was in turmoil, serious questions about religion and royal authority – prominent themes in the Plaine Discovery – were being raised and the troubles were encroaching on the Napiers’ relatively peaceful lives.

In the following year, 1568, an outbreak of plague occurred in Edinburgh and the surrounding areas, which was severe enough that the General Assembly was postponed and the courts of justice were closed. The sick and dying were driven from the city and settled, amongst other places, at Merchiston. Mary had escaped from her custody at Loch Leven Castle in May and rallied her supporters. After their decisive defeat at the Battle of Langside on 13 May, Mary was forced into exile in England and an atmosphere of mistrust gripped the Scottish nobility. Archibald Napier was compelled, under a bond of £2000 to remain within two miles of Edinburgh so that he might appear before the Privy Council at six hours notice. He had probably been aligned with the queen’s supporters at this point. The situation for

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82 Donaldson, Reformed by Bishops, p. 86.
83 Napier, M., p. 115.
84 Napier, M., p. 108.
85 Privy Council Record, 12 August 1568, cit. ibid.
the Napier family, forced to remain at Merchiston and surrounded by plague victims, must have been miserable. Adam Bothwell, himself a member of the Privy Council that had issued the bond, wrote to Archibald, urging him to leave Merchiston for another, safer location within the designated area and to send the children to the family’s lands at Menteith, west of Stirling.\(^{86}\) Whether John was in Scotland or not, these events must have been affecting for his family and may have influenced his attitudes later in life.\(^{87}\)

**Merchiston and the Civil War**

Fighting between the supporters of the King and Queen erupted again in 1570, in the wake of the assassination of Regent Moray, and intensified around the capital during the following year. Edinburgh was of major strategic importance as the legal and administrative centre of the country and much of the fighting was increasingly concentrated around the burgh. Merchiston was important for its location and substantial fortifications, lying just south of the town. The queen’s forces held the Castle and took steps to secure Edinburgh and its administrative institutions in April 1570, gradually consolidating their position over the next 12 months. As the Marians fortified the city, the king’s party were forced to base themselves in Leith, then a separate burgh to the north.\(^{88}\) Since it was the major port of Edinburgh, holding Leith meant controlling provisions going in and out of the capital. English ships could also be landed at the port, providing additional support for the king’s side. Merchiston’s importance increased because it lay on the main route into Edinburgh from the South. The queen’s party sought to secure the tower as a means to maintaining a flow

\(^{86}\) Napier, M., pp. 110-1.  
\(^{87}\) See below, p. 80.  
of supplies into the capital from the South. Conversely, the king’s men aimed to cut off supplies and force a surrender.\textsuperscript{89} With the regent’s troops to the north of the city at Leith, combined with potential support of English troops at Berwick, lead by Sir William Drury, the queen’s party inside the walls would be encircled and have little hope of victory.\textsuperscript{90}

Archibald Napier attempted to remain essentially neutral during the conflict, though this proved a difficult task. The Regent Mar’s forces occupied Merchiston first, capturing the tower in 1571. The Napier’s were quickly summoned to Edinburgh Castle by Sir William Kirkcaldy of Grange, Archibald’s cousin, who was holding the position for the Queen.\textsuperscript{91} While the Napiers were at the castle, Kirkcaldy bombarded Merchiston with canon fire in an abortive attempt to capture it. Soon after, Archibald withdrew the family to their lands at Mentieth, where they probably stayed with John at his marital home.\textsuperscript{92} Throughout 1572 the Queen’s party, becoming ever more desperate and hungry inside the walls of Edinburgh, staged three more attacks against Merchiston, during which they attempted to carry off livestock and supplies from the Napiers’ lands. The month of May 1572 was especially eventful, on 5\textsuperscript{th} the Queen’s men besieged the tower, burning outbuildings in a desperate attempt to smoke out the occupying garrison.\textsuperscript{93} On 10\textsuperscript{th} they redoubled their efforts, sending cannon and cavalry from Edinburgh, lead by the Earl of Huntly, to capture Merchiston. The siege broke, and Huntly began to negotiate the tower’s surrender. Luck was not on his side though, and when the local population gathered to investigate the commotion, Huntly assumed they were reinforcements for the

\textsuperscript{89} Napier, M., p. 134.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., pp. 133-4.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
regent’s troops and retreated to Edinburgh.94 Towards the end of June, 24 men rode out of Edinburgh in search of food and attempted to steal goods from Merchiston. Although they were ultimately repulsed, they succeeded in killing Captain Patrick Home of Polwarth and four of his troops.95 One of the 24 horsemen was killed by a shot from Merchiston’s battlements and many on both sides were wounded.96 Archibald incurred the wrath of the queen’s party for his failure to side with them more vigorously. He was summoned before the queen’s council in July 1572 for ‘rebellion’ and may have been at Merchiston, along with King’s troops at that time, indicating that he had finally aligned himself with that party.97

Pressure for Archibald to side with the queen must have been significant, since his wife’s family appear to have been firm supporters of her cause.98 However, the Napiers also had important familial ties to the king’s faction and to some staunch religious reformers, going back to the decades before the Scottish Reformation. Archibald’s cousin Sir John Melville of Raith, was an early Scottish reformer, who was executed in 1548 for treason.99 He had hoped to instigate a Scottish Reformation with the help of English military backing.100 His son, John’s cousin, Robert Melville, was a diplomat and Privy councillor who was tasked by the Lords of the Congregation with asking for Elizabeth I’s help in ousting Mary of Guise.101 Both

94 Ibid, pp. 136-7 & Pollock MS, reproduced in Thomson, T., A diurnal of remarkable occurrents that have passed within the country of Scotland since the death of King James the fourth till the year M.D.LXXV. Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh 1833).
95 Pollock, p. 303.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., p. 135 & ODNB: Archibald Napier.
98 Ibid.
99 Melville was married to Archibald’s sister, Helen Napier, who was also therefore his cousin.
Adam Bothwell and his cousin, Sir John Bellenden of Achnoul had embraced the new government before the outbreak of the civil war.\textsuperscript{102} Archibald’s brother, Andrew, a wealthy merchant, appears to have been a supporter of the King throughout the conflict. In 1573 he served as a member of the Assize that convicted, and sentenced to death, his cousin James Kirkcaldy of Grange and James Cockie for their services to the queen’s party in Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{103} A decade later, in June 1584, he was among a group of merchants and craftsmen exiled from the town on pain of death for their religious radicalism.\textsuperscript{104} In common with a number of Edinburgh families, different members took different sides and wider family relations pulled in both directions.

The complex web of familial loyalties and personal relationships did not make committing to either faction easy for Archibald. However, his hesitation was also undoubtedly due to the position of the Napier family in Edinburgh. They were not a great landowning family and their influence derived from the administrative roles they had played, making continuity, not swift change, central to their interests. Archibald simply tried to avoid the worst dangers of the conflict and, when the time came, chose the winning side. John Napier’s marriage to Elizabeth Stirling took place late in 1572 and the couple immediately moved into their marital home, a sizable house at Gartness, close to Loch Lomond, which no longer stands. Whether he was living at Merchiston or Gartness prior to his marriage is not known. In any case, the dramatic events unfolding at his family home, and affecting those he loved,

\textsuperscript{104} Lynch, \textit{Edinburgh...}, p. 371.
probably influenced his views on the relationship between religious reform and military conflict, which was an important theme of the *Plaine Discovery*.

**John Napier’s Marriages and Children**

John’s first marriage was to a young woman whose family had close ties to his own. Elizabeth Stirling’s father, Sir James Stirling of Keir, was a colleague of Archibald’s at the office of Justice Depute and the two were knighted in the same year, either 1564 or 1565. The Stirlings of Keir were, in many ways, a similar family to the Napiers of Merchiston. Both had acquired a number of lands gradually over several generations, had links to parliament and had members who had served as town provosts. They belonged to the group of middle-ranking lairds, who were developing into an urban elite whose influence lay in the legal and administrative spheres of government that were increasingly centred around Edinburgh in the sixteenth century. Elizabeth was probably a minor at the time her wedding was planned. For her dowry, she renounced her claim to lands granted to her by her father in 1567. Her Tutor’s signature appeared beside hers as was often the case for girls into their late teens. The marriage between John and Elizabeth is just one example of a long and amicable relationship between the Napiers and Stirlings. It seems that a marriage between members of the families had occurred in 1399. In 1621, John’s son, Archibald, was appointed curator of the estate of Sir George Stirling of Keir

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105 Fraser, W., *The Stirlings of Keir, and their Family Papers* Privately Printed (Edinburgh 1858) p. 43 & ODNB: Archibald Napier.
106 Ibid., pp. 29-35.
107 See above, pp. 44-5 & Van Heijnsbergen.
108 Fraser, p. 43, listed these lands as Wellcoig and Westercoig.
109 Ibid. A ‘tutor’ in this context is a legal guardian or representative.
110 Ibid., p. 44. A stone at the Wright’s Houses, close to Merchiston, commemorates the marriage of an A. Napier and I. Stirling using heraldic imagery.
during his minority. Sir George went on to marry Archibald’s daughter Margaret in 1637. Further marriages between members of the two families took place in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. This illustrates the fact that the Napiers and Stirlings deliberately maintained these close family ties and moved in similar social, economic, professional and political circles. Elizabeth and John lived at the marital home that John had built at Gartness in Stirlingshire, near to lands owned by Elizabeth’s family. She bore two children, Archibald, who later became the first Lord Napier, and Jane. Elizabeth died in 1579.

111 Ibid., p. 48. A written correspondence between Lilias Napier, Archibald Napier’s younger daughter and Sir Georg Stirling of Keir has survived and appears to illustrate a close and amicable relationship. (Ibid., pp. 484-5.)
112 Ibid., pp. 54.
113 Ibid., pp. 112, 136, 149 & 168.
Copies of reproductions by W. Geikie, commissioned by Archibald, first Lord Napier from unknown originals.
John’s second wife, Agnes Chisholm, was Elizabeth Stirling’s second-cousin. She was also the second-cousin of John’s father, whose paternal grandmother was Janet Chisholm.\textsuperscript{114} Again, the Chisholms appear to have moved in similar circles to the Napiers. In 1585, both John’s father, Archibald, and Agnes’s father, James Chisholm of Cromlix, were summoned before the Privy Council to give evidence concerning crimes committed against landowners in the Lennox lands and Stirlingshire.\textsuperscript{115} John’s second marriage tends to be viewed in light of James Chisholm’s implication in a Roman Catholic plot and Napier’s response to the scandal.\textsuperscript{116} However, there is no evidence to suggest that John and Agnes had an unhappy marriage and it produced ten children. One of his daughters from his second marriage was named Elizabeth, though whether this was a tribute to his first wife is unknown.

\textbf{A Context of Crisis}

John Napier lived through a period of Scottish crises, some of which directly affected his family. International events in the period before the \textit{Plaine Discovery} was written had an even greater impact on its apocalyptic tone and content. They created a sense of urgency in Napier’s apocalyptic vision that set the \textit{Plaine Discovery} apart from contemporary eschatological works and this was reflected in the date of its publication. In 1588 the Spanish Armada was met by the naval forces of Elizabeth I and failed in its objective of landing an invasion force. The fact that the direction and strength of the wind had played such a large part in the English

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] \textit{ODNB}: John Napier.
\end{footnotes}
victory was interpreted as divine providence; Protestants in both England and Scotland became sure that God was on their side. The size of the Spanish fleet and the collective military strength of the Roman Catholic countries of Europe remained a cause for concern since further invasion plans were made and might have succeeded. Discussing the Armada and the general threat from Roman Catholicism, Napier referred to the British mainland as an ‘Iland’ and placed the word in italics for added emphasis. He wanted to promote the idea that Scotland and England ought to operate as a single military and religious entity. He also wished to win favour with James VI, who believed he was Elizabeth’s rightful heir to the English throne. Napier appears to have regarded the Armada as a watershed moment in the history of the British Isles. He portrayed subsequent events including the perceived re-emergence of popular Catholicism in Scotland as a continuation of the precedent established by the attempted invasion: “this new insolencie of Papists arising about the 1588 year of God, and dayly incresing within this Iland doth so pitie out hearts, seeing them put more trust in Iesuites and seminarie Priests, then in the true scriptures of God, and in the Pope and King of Spaine, then in the King of Kings”. As Dawson has demonstrated, the fact that the British mainland formed an Island was seen by many as evidence that God wanted Scotland and England to unite under the banner of Protestantism and eventually play a role in the defeat of Antichrist, which they believed was prophesied in the Book of Revelation. In the meantime, this united, godly Island would provide a refuge and a symbol of hope for

118 PD, Epistle to the reader f. A7v.
119 See below, ch. 10, on James’s commentary on the Revelation.
120 PD, A7. For a brief discussion of the fear created by the Counter-Reformation in Scotland see MacDonald, ‘James VI…’.
the persecuted Protestants of mainland Europe. The *Plaine Discovery* shows that there was a desire for unity among many sixteenth-century Scottish Protestants, even if Scotland and England ultimately failed to forge a single, unified ecclesiastical institution.

In December 1592, the Spanish Blanks Plot was discovered. Not only did this treasonous conspiracy damage the relationship between James VI and the Kirk, it had a direct impact upon John Napier and his associates. George Ker was arrested before he was able to set sail for Spain and in his possession were numerous letters and documents including blank parchments signed by the earls of Huntly, Angus and Errol. These ‘blanks’ were to be filled in by Jesuits and amounted to a *carte blanche* for invasion: the Roman Catholic Lords had effectively given their permission for Spain to do as she wished regarding Scotland. Napier’s father-in-law, Sir James Chisholm of Cromlix was implicated in the Affair. He had been rumoured to be acting for Spanish interests in Scotland in the years following the Armada. In 1592 he had collected the signatures and was originally supposed to carry the papers to Spain.

The aftermath of the Spanish Blanks Affair in relation to Napier and the Presbyterian Party cannot be fully understood unless the state of James’s relationship with the Kirk is also considered. The *Plaine Discovery* was composed at a time of both optimism and trepidation for the Presbyterians. For the better part of his personal reign, and especially since the end of the 1580s, James had taken a

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122 Ibid.
123 See Dawson ‘Anglo-Scottish...’, pp. 101-3. Robert Pont, Napier’s friend and colleague in the Kirk also supported a degree of unification. His life and works are discussed below, pp. 77-9 & ch. 11.
124 The letters, including some by and referring to, James Chisholm of Cromlix were reproduced in, Thomson, T. (ed), *The History of the Kirk of Scotland, by Mr. David Calderwood Vol. 5 – 1589-1599* The Wodrow Society (Edinburgh 1844) (Hereafter Calderwood, Vol. 5) pp. 192-213.
conciliatory tone, granting a several requests of the Kirk, including permitting the
general assembly to convene annually and to discipline and censure bishops.125 The
political optimism of the Presbyterian Party reached a zenith when, on 5th June 1592
(N.S.), parliament passed what later became known as the ‘Golden Act’.126 In the
short term, this legislation succeeded in placating the Presbyterians by recognising
the ecclesiastical polity they espoused. It appeared to grant privileges to the Kirk,
allowing presbyteries to carry out sentences of excommunication and explicitly
quashing the hated ‘Black Acts’ of 1584. Perhaps most importantly, it suggested a
definite break with the past and the old Roman Catholic Church. The Kirk it
endorsed was a new body, part of the true church of God, as opposed to the false
church of the papacy, the Episcopal structure of which was implicitly superseded.
Only in subsequent years was the document recognised en masse for what it truly
was: an attempt by James to appease the Kirk by granting minor concessions, whilst
pressing a firm stamp of royal authority and control over the ecclesiastical arena.127

However, the Spanish Blanks dampened the mood of reformers like Napier
because of James’s unwillingness to act decisively against the Roman Catholic
nobility. Thus, the majority of the Plaine Discovery was written at a time when the
power of the Presbyterian Party seemed to be on the ascendant and the confident,
fiery tone of the work reflects the robust position in which Napier perceived himself.
The dedicatory epistle, on the other hand, was written when Presbyterians feared that

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125 For a detailed analysis of these events and James’s approach to the Kirk during this period, see
MacDonald, The Jacobean Kirk, ch. 2. These examples are cited on pp. 33-4.
126 Brown, K.M. et al (eds), The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707 (St Andrews, 2007-
47-9.
all they had achieved might be lost and Napier used the piece to urge James not to betray the ideals he had recently appeared to champion.

**Napier's Dedicatory Epistle to James VI**

George Molland implied that the publication of the *Plaine Discovery* in the year following the Spanish Blanks Affair was expedient for Napier, as it served to underscore his doctrinal and political differences from Chisholm.\(^{128}\) Katherine Firth went a step further, asserting that Napier may have rushed to print the *Plaine Discovery* in 1593 specifically to avoid suspicion.\(^{129}\) However, the relationship between Napier’s dedicatory epistle to James VI and the Spanish Blanks was even more fundamental. The *Plaine Discovery* was published, with its epistle to James dated January 1593, soon after the plot came to light.\(^{130}\) One aim of the dedication was to encourage James to adopt a more thorough policy of religious reform and rid the country of all traces of Roman Catholicism. This was very much in keeping with the stance of the General Assembly, which had consistently encouraged James to commit to more extensive reforms throughout his personal reign.\(^{131}\) However, the Spanish Blanks directly influenced the tone and content of the epistle. Napier called the Affair, “the treasonable practises in these present daies, attempted both against God’s trueth, your authoritie, and the common wealth of this countrie”.\(^{132}\) Thus, the tone of the dedication was dictated by events that had affected Napier and James personally. The epistle was not simply intended to persuade James to execute further

\(^{128}\) *ODNB*: John Napier.
\(^{129}\) Firth, p. 138.
\(^{130}\) If Napier had been using the Old Style of dating, this date would be 8\(^{th}\) February 1593 in the New Style.
\(^{131}\) MacDonald, ‘James VI...’, p. 171.
\(^{132}\) *PD*, f. A4r.
religious reform using abstract religious rhetoric. It was a direct correspondence that revealed shared knowledge and experience, and an attempt to foster a singularity of purpose.

Napier employed several tactics to make the epistle as persuasive as possible. He admonished James to reform, he demonised the Roman Catholic Church as a threat to the British Isles and he appealed to James’s elevated notions of kingship, casting him as a key player in the apocalyptic narrative he believed was unfolding. The Epistle opened with a declaration that the Book of Revelation was meant as an exhortation to temporal kings, to take their place as executors of God’s judgement against the kingdom of Antichrist on Earth. They could do this only by embracing true religious faith and practices. Napier sought to establish a scriptural and historical precedent for admonishing secular rulers to act and employed what would have been a familiar metaphor of the body politic, with James as the head. “Prophets of al ages, haue for the most part, directed al their admonitions generally to Kings, princes and governors, to the effect that they (as Heads-men) being by holy admonitions forewarned, might... holde all the whole body of their commoun wealth in good order: for certain it is, that the heade being well affected, will of neceßitie ministrat health and wholesome humors to the whole body.” Napier’s attitude towards religious reform was revealed in his plea for reform to the monarch and political elite, and hope that the rest of the population would follow their example. The quotation also implies that he perceived himself within a tradition of prophets.

Napier emphasised his main conclusion that the Day of Judgement was approaching and that everyone must do their utmost to expedite God’s triumph over

\[133\] PD, f. A3r.
\[134\] Ibid. f. A3v.
Antichrist in the final battle foretold in the Book of Revelation. They were to do this
by encouraging and supporting their leaders: “it is... the dutie of God’s servaunts in
this age... to incourage and inanimate Princes, to be ready against that great day of
the Lords reuenge, and also to exhort them generally, to remoue all such
impediments in their cuntries and common wealths, as may hinder that work, &
procure Gods plagues.”\(^{135}\)

Napier appealed to James personally by endorsing an elevated conception of
kingship. He was precise about the role that James would play in the drama of the
apocalypse that was about to unfold. Revelation chapter 17 described a dragon with
seven heads and ten horns. The horns were ten kings, who were originally aligned
with the Antichrist but ultimately side with Christ against the Whore of Babylon and
bring her to destruction. Napier claimed that James was one of these horns.\(^{136}\)

When he cast the royal dynasty of Denmark, to which James’s bride belonged, as another of
these horns, Napier was appealing to the royal couple as a unit.\(^{137}\) This interpretation
added urgency to the need for further religious reform. James had to act immediately
because Scotland’s Reformation had arrived late and almost all the other horns had
already taken their places as leaders of Protestant countries, including Denmark.

\(^{135}\) Ibid.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., f. A4r. & p. 207, Napier’s interpretation of Rev. 17:12: “And there arisen of thir decayed
empyre, ten chief Christian kinges: to wit, of Spaine, France, Lombardie, England, Scotland,
Denmark, Swaden, of the Hunnes or Hungarians in Hungarie, of the Gothes in Italie, & the Exarchat
of Ravenna”.

\(^{137}\) PD, p. 157. Napier also praised the royal couple collectively, wishing God’s blessings upon them:
“wee pray and humbly beseech the Almighty, to be also vnto your highnes selfe and most honourable
bedfellowe, the Queens M. a perpetuall protector of your honourable estates and welfare of your
persones, both in body and soule, to the quieting of your M. lieges, increase of the true church, and
honour of God, to whome, in Trinitie and Vnitie bee praise for euer.” (Ibid, f. A5r.) The Plaine
Discovery opened with with James’s matrimonial coat of arms, combining the heraldry of Scotland
with that of Denmark to commemorate his marriage to Princess Anne in 1589. However, caution is
advisable when using Mark Napier’s analysis of this page. See Appendix 4.
The king could secure his pivotal role in the great narrative of human salvation only if he took certain steps, which Napier urged James to take in forceful language. These included a re-evaluation of his own faith and a purge of the entire country of all traces of Roman Catholicism, starting with the court and those closest to him.

let it be your M.[ajesty] continuall study (as called and charged thereunto by God) to reform the vniersall enormities of your country, and first (taking example of the princely Prophet David) to begin at your M. own house, familie and court, and purge the same of all suspicion of papists, and Atheists or Newtrals, whereof this reuelation foretelleth, that the number shall greatly increase in these latter daies. For shall any Prince be able to be one of the destroiers of that great seate, and a purger of the world from Antichristianisme, who purgeth not his own countrie? shal he purge his whole country, who purgeth not his owne house? or shal hee purge his house, who is not purged himselfe by priuate meditations with his God?138

When Napier urged James to purge his own house, he was reflecting the tone of several ministers, including Robert Bruce, and may have been referring specifically to Huntly, whose wife was James’s cousin.139 Napier’s denunciation of religious neutrality was also telling, early in the Plaine Discovery, he revealed his belief in absolute good and evil with no possibility of compromise.140 The Spanish Blanks Affair lent additional immediacy to the need to take action against all perceived enemies of Protestantism. Napier glorified James’s position by using the biblical example of King David. He knew James would have been receptive to such a comparison, and the king was undertaking his own translation into verse of the psalms.141 For Napier, the presence of heightened religious tension in Scotland was a sign of the imminence of the apocalypse. The Armada, Spanish Blanks Affair and

138 Ibid., f. A4v.
140 This was one of the defining features of the work, and other sixteenth century Protestant works. See below, Part III.
presence of Jesuits in Scotland proved the forces of Antichrist were massing and, in the final battle, only James could lead his country to Christ’s side.

Napier’s Epistle did not prove effective enough for some sections of the Kirk. On 25th September 1593 the Synod of Fife bemoaned “the king’s slownesse in repressing of Papistrie, and planting of true religioun”, and voted to excommunicate those involved in the Spanish Blanks Conspiracy.\(^{142}\) In the following month, John Napier, in his capacity of the Presbytery of Edinburgh’s Commissioner to the General Assembly, sat on the delegation that carried out the General Assembly’s excommunication of the conspirators, including his father-in-law James Chisholm.\(^{143}\) The king was furious that the conspirators had been excommunicated without his consent and complained that, “the ministers were cruel and as they sought blood they would [sic] have it.”\(^{144}\) The broader issue of royal authority was at stake; James wanted to exercise greater control over excommunication in particular and the Kirk in general.\(^{145}\) Whether the General Assembly would have believed themselves to be acting unlawfully is debatable. Both the Book of Discipline and Golden Act placed excommunications in the hands of the presbyteries and, in a very narrow reading of this legislation, they had acted in a way that was permissible.\(^{146}\) However, the Golden Act was designed to give the crown a maximum amount of control over the Presbyterian Kirk. It specified that the General Assembly could not convene unless the monarch called it to do so. In short, the Kirk was within its rights to execute a sentence of excommunication but, in meeting to decide on or pass that sentence, it had acted illegally.

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\(^{142}\) Calderwood *History* Vol. 5, Synod’s report, pp. 262-8; quotation, p.265; excommunication, p. 267.

\(^{143}\) Napier, M., pp. 161-2.

\(^{144}\) Calderwood *History* Vol. 5, p. 269 & Napier, M. p. 162.

\(^{145}\) See MacDonald, 2000, p.173.

\(^{146}\) See Mason, *Kingship...*, p. 268.
Along with James Melville and Patrick Galloway, Napier was commissioned by the Assembly to meet the king to petition for his support and to recommend harsher punishments for the conspirators. The meeting took place in October 1593 and James agreed to convene a special meeting at Linlithgow to discuss the conspirators on his return from Jedburgh.¹⁴⁷ When James finally did return he ruled against the Kirk. Huntly and the other plotters were effectively pardoned, under oath that they would not engage in seditious activities in the future.¹⁴⁸ Napier and the Kirk’s attempts to influence James had failed. The dedicatory epistle was absent from all subsequent editions of the *Plaine Discovery* since James had been unwilling to undertake the religious reform the letter demanded. Following the resolution of the Spanish Blanks Affair, one of the epistle’s *raisons d’être* had been removed. James might also have been displeased by Napier’s epistle, though no evidence of the king’s reception to the book has been found.

Napier’s epistle to James VI implied the *Plaine Discovery* had been written especially for the King and reflected his general approach as a polemicist. He sought to affect change by appealing to the upper echelons of society, hoping for swift, decisive action and using the idea of an imminent apocalypse in a way that would have seemed unprecedented in its immediacy. He succeeded in constructing a thesis that was both grounded in scripture and based on contemporary events to achieve his aims.

¹⁴⁷ Calderwood *History*, Vol. 5, pp. 270-9 & Napier, M. pp. 166-7. Calderwood’s account (p. 275) ascribed to Napier the words “It is not tyme to goe to resoun with words, when the enemies appeared with swords: we will provide for our selves, if the mater goe this way”, implying he may have advocated battle with supporters of the Roman Catholic cause.
¹⁴⁸ MacDonald has shown that James was reticent to act harshly against the Roman Catholic nobility because many, including Huntly, were his personal friends and many Roman Catholics were useful to him, serving a variety of functions and roles. See *The Jacobean Kirk*, p. 39.
The epistle also provides important clues as to Napier’s political and religious ideologies. His work with the general assembly, involvement with the aftermath of the Spanish Blanks Affair, doctrinal positions revealed in the *Plaine Discovery* and friendship with Robert Pont all suggest a definite placement within the Presbyterian Party and belief that the Kirk could operate independently of the monarch. However, Napier was not so hard-line that he envisioned the Kirk operating completely outside the bounds of monarchical control. His epistle tacitly acknowledged that James had authority over the Kirk and the power to drive religious reform and change the religious future of his country. The dedication recognised James as the ‘head’ of the country’s secular and ecclesiastical arenas and James was incorporated into Napier’s chronological scheme and cast as one of the figures in the Book of Revelation. Although he was certainly no Erastian, Napier was not anti-monarchical and never advocated resistance to secular rulers, in fact, monarchs were the most important players in his vision of the eschatological future.\(^{149}\)

**John Napier and Robert Pont**

John Napier was firm friends with the respected Scottish reformer Robert Pont (1524–1606). By the time the *Plaine Discovery* was published, Pont was one of few surviving first-generation reformers in Scotland. Born in 1524, he sided with the Protestants swearing to assist the Lords of the Congregation in 1559. He had been a commissioner for St Andrews to the General Assembly during the period Goodman was the town’s minister, though he was appointed minister of Dunblane before John

\(^{149}\) Roger Mason has shown that John Knox held similar views and these may have influenced Napier, directly or indirectly. Although Knox eventually came to advocate resistance to Roman Catholic Tyrants, he was not anti-monarchical on principle and believed that God had commanded “not simply obedience, but the utmost veneration” towards Godly, secular rulers. *Kingship...*, p. 270.
reached the university as a young student.\footnote{Kirk, J., ‘Pont, Robert (1524–1606)’ in Goldman, L. (ed), \textit{ODNB}, online ed. OUP 2004, \url{http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22507} (accessed March 5, 2013).} Pont served in many roles within the Kirk, including moderator of the General Assembly, and settled in Edinburgh as provost of Trinity College and minister at St Cuthbert’s in 1572 and 1574 respectively.\footnote{Ibid.} Since Napier seems to have been buried at St Cuthbert’s, Mark Napier’s inference that Pont had been John’s minister is probably correct.\footnote{Napier, M., p. 196. St Cuthbert’s was demolished and rebuilt over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The monuments did not survive. The church was closer to Merchiston than St Giles’s and lay out with the city walls; it was therefore the most likely place for Napier to have worshipped during his time at Merchiston.} A resolute Presbyterian, Pont approved the Ruthven Raid and protested against the Black Acts, fiercely opposing the Episcopal system.\footnote{\textit{ODNB}: Robert Pont. The Ruthven raid and its context are highly complex issues that coloured James VI’s attitude to religious sectarianism. For an introduction to the raid and its aftermath see Dawson, \textit{Scotland Re-Formed}, pp. 310-16.} Pont and Napier were equally interested in the apocalypse and mathematical interpretations of biblical prophecy.\footnote{Ibid.} Pont’s vision for the future of the Kirk was substantially in line with that held by Napier and Pont went even further with his condemnation of the King’s perceived inaction. On 19th June 1594, Pont delivered a sermon reflecting the crisis that followed the Spanish Blanks Affair. It bemoaned the lack of reforming fervour in Scotland and James VI’s policies of religious moderation, important themes that featured in the \textit{Plaine Discovery}.\footnote{Pont’s work on this subject is examined in ch. 11, below.} The sermon’s text was Romans 10:9-12 and it indicated that the Scottish Reformation had become a victim of its own success. Pont argued that, in the early days of reform, Protestants had been courageous enough to lay down their lives for their beliefs and now they could not even punish Roman Catholic traitors: “whereas now, the authoritie and lawes standing for us, and the whole realme, as it were, professors, three meane lords
darre professe and erect idolatrie in sindrie parts of the land, and yitt no man darre, for confessioun of the truthe, withstand them, and put hand to reformatioun.” On the following Sunday, he preached a sermon on Psalm 20, a Psalm especially associated with royal rule, which attacked James’s moderation and laxity in religion, “he said, we could not pray with David’s people to fulfil the desire of the king’s heart, becaus we suspected our king’s heart be not upright; which the countenancing of evil men, and unreverent hearing of the Word, declared.”

The faith of Napier’s boyhood had been shaped by religious moderates such as Adam Bothwell but after his time at St Andrews, an increasingly hard-line, Presbyterian set of influences came into play. There is a poignant symbolism in the fact that it was Pont who, in 1569, executed the General Assembly’s excommunication of John’s uncle, Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney, for his part in the marriage of Queen Mary and the Earl of Bothwell. Napier’s friendship with Pont demonstrated he was aligned with the radical Presbyterian wing of the Kirk. This friendship also stands in stark contrast to the more outlandish claims made about some of Napier’s acquaintances and activities.

**Later Life and Death**

Archibald Napier died in 1608 and John moved permanently from Gartness to his ancestral home at Merchiston. He was concerned with the reception of the *Plaine Discovery*. In 1611, a new edition of the work was published, which contained clarifications and rejoinders to arguments that had been made against the first

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156 Calderwood, Vol. 5, p. 329. The ‘meane lords’ were the leaders of the Spanish Blanks Plot, Huntly, Angus and Errol.
157 Ibid.
159 See below, ch. 2.
His table of logarithms, *Mirifici logarithmorum canonis descriptio* was published in 1614.

During the later years of his life he was involved in various legal disputes, some of which reveal details about his character. In 1602, during another outbreak of plague, he appeared before the Privy Council, protesting that magistrates of Edinburgh had erected temporary shelters to house the infected on his lands at Sciennes without his consent. Sciennes is around one and a half miles to the east of Merchiston. Today the area is typical of the suburbs in the South of Edinburgh, being largely comprised of Victorian tenement housing. However, in Napier’s age the area was insalubrious, semi-rural, outside of the city boundary, and a convenient location for the displaced sick. This was not the first time the Napiers had been affected by plague and John’s approach to the plague victims of 1602 may have been influenced by what had transpired in 1568. The Privy Council found in his favour and the city was ordered to relinquish its claim over the buildings after the following Candlemas.

In 1613, Thomas Graham was accused of attempting to harm Napier while he was rendered defenceless by the agony of gout. Graham was also accused of threatening the safety of Napier’s tenants and their livestock at his lands at Menteith. The Grahams of Menteith were a prominent family and this may have been one occurrence in a larger feud. Though Napier failed to win the case, he was determined to defend his rights, and those of his tenants through the law courts. Soon

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160 The second edition is discussed in more detail, below, ch. 5.
161 Hume Brown, p. 43.
162 It was also the site of the ruined Convent of St Catherine of Sienna, burnt in 1567, which may further explain the area’s usage for housing the sick.
163 Hume Brown, p. 43.
164 Ibid.
after Archibald’s death, Napier refused to hand over his father’s professional papers to the then controller of the mint, John Aitcheson.\textsuperscript{165} Aitcheson swore Archibald had promised them to him on his deathbed and, under protest, John eventually submitted the documents.\textsuperscript{166} John probably did not want to give up the papers because he shared his father’s interest in the study of metals.\textsuperscript{167} As often happened over an inheritance, soon after he succeeded his father as the Laird of Merchiston, the apparently good relationships between John and his siblings became strained. A dispute broke out between Napier and the children of Archibald’s second marriage over the rights to farm the lands at Merchiston. The situation escalated to such a degree that rumours circulated of pitched-battles on the lands. Eventually the Privy Council intervened, appointing a neutral party to store the harvested grains until an amicable resolution could be reached.\textsuperscript{168}

In 1617, despite ill health, Napier published his \textit{Rabdologia}. In this ingenious work he explained methods of calculation using metal plates; a grid, based on a chess-board; and numbered rods, commonly known as ‘Napier’s Bones’. John Napier, eighth Laird of Merchiston, died on 4\textsuperscript{th} April 1617, after a long and painful struggle with gout. His will testified to his physical infirmity, balanced by health “in mynd and spereit,” as indicated by his \textit{Rabdologia}.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., p. 44.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} See below, pp. 86-9.
\textsuperscript{168} Hume Brown, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{169} Will in full reproduced Napier, M. p. 430.
Conclusion

John Napier was a man of his time and the *Plaine Discovery* belongs within the tradition of apocalyptic thought that had emerged in the British Isles.\(^{170}\) It reflects a wider trend in European politics, in which political divisions and affiliations were increasingly drawn along confessional lines. Its dedicatory epistle reveals Napier’s view of James VI and his role. The contemporary cult of monarchy meant temporal rulers were regarded as guiding the religious destiny of nations. The crisis that followed the Spanish Blanks Affair was the result of the Kirk’s belief that the King was shirking his responsibilities. On his part, King James sought a greater degree of control over the ecclesiastical arena. The Affair reflected the wider tensions between the crown and the church. James’s unwillingness to punish his close friend Huntly, and the other conspirators was symptomatic of his refusal to bow to the pressure generated by the Presbyterian party. Napier’s epistle reflects the attitudes of the Kirk to the monarch, as a figurehead who must lead, but who must also be steered in the correct direction.

Napier lived through one of the more important periods in the formation of modern Scotland, particularly with regards to its relationship with its neighbour, England. It was a period combining crisis with tentative optimism about a shared eschatological destiny. Far from being a recluse, Napier managed to balance a busy family life with an active role in ecclesiastical and political affairs. His mathematical achievements reveal a dedication to solving problems that were slowing the progress of scientific development. His theological work speaks of an awareness of the

\(^{170}\) This theme is explored in more detail below, Part III.
political and religious conditions in which he lived and illustrates he was well read and aware of the intellectual tradition to which he was attempting to contribute.
Chapter 2 - Exploding the Myth: Napier the Magician

The popular nickname ‘Marvellous Merchiston’ has been used to describe John Napier because of his ingenuity in several disciplines. It also reflects one of the most enduring images of Napier, as a practitioner of magic. The wish to present Napier as a true ‘Renaissance Man’ or polymath, dabbling in magic, mathematics and theology, is partly due to Mark Napier’s biography, which called John, ‘the oracle of occult sciences in Scotland’.¹ The issue of John Napier’s involvement in magical practices impacts heavily on the way the Plaine Discovery must be judged. Practices like sorcery and necromancy, often termed ‘the Black Arts’ fly in the face of orthodox Christian belief to such an extent that involvement in them is regarded as wholly incompatible with sincere devotion to Christianity. Thus, if Napier were a magician or warlock, his reasons for writing the Plaine Discovery and the sincerity of the claims he made in the book are cast into doubt. However, Napier’s reputation as a warlock potentially misleads modern observers, not just about his life and works, but about the place and time in which he lived. In 1994, Arthur Williamson argued that only Napier’s placement in the political and social ‘establishment’ prevented his prosecution for witchcraft and extrapolated the conclusion that the Scottish establishment was therefore accepting of occult practices.² However, this chapter argues that there is almost no evidence for Napier’s alleged magical activities aside from an interest in alchemy, which was relatively common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and classified in a very different category from the ‘Black Arts’, with which Napier is often associated.

¹ Napier, M., p. 155.
² Williamson, ‘Number…’, p. 199.
Alchemy

One of the most important reasons for Napier’s reputation as a practitioner of the occult is his apparent interest in Alchemy. In Napier’s lifetime, science and magic were not the separate, mutually exclusive spheres of understanding that typify modern enquiry. For men like John Napier, James VI and later Isaac Newton, alchemy was as much a science as astronomy. Alchemical enquiry was not regarded as incompatible with Christianity and was often driven by passionate religious commitment.  

In the sixteenth century, the physical properties of elements were a source of great mystery and knowledge of metallurgy and the study of metals in general were inextricably linked to alchemy. John Napier’s father, Archibald, served as General of the Mint for around a decade in the 1580s to 90s. He had struck gold in the Pentland Hills, south-west of Edinburgh, and later, in 1604, impressed an English commission with his skill and knowledge of metals. The fact that he held this prestigious post for many years and passed on information about alchemy to his son illustrates how wide-spread and accepted beliefs in its efficacy were. It also elicits an obvious comparison with Isaac Newton, who served as Warden and Master of the Royal Mint and studied alchemy extensively.

A document from John Napier’s later life has survived, in which he explicitly declared his interest in the subject. The manuscript, written by Napier, described a meeting between himself and a German physician, Daniel Müller, during the latter’s

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3 See above, pp.13-15, for an introduction to ‘unity of thought’, which is a major theme of this thesis.
4 Napier, M., p. 155.
visit to Edinburgh in 1607.\textsuperscript{6} Napier documented a conversation, in which Müller described methods of using mercury to achieve various alchemical ends. While there was nothing remarkable about the alchemy it described, the document contains several significant points. Firstly, Napier claimed Müller requested his presence because of his skill in alchemy, ascribing to Müller the words: “S\textsuperscript{r}, you ar occupied in alchymie, I haue been thir manie years ane verie earnest student therinto, and haue attained to the knowledge therof... Sir, I will be plaine, knowinge that you ar a man who fears God and will be secret”.\textsuperscript{7} The fact that Müller requested Napier’s personal presence suggests the Scot had a significant reputation as an alchemist that had developed over a number of years. Reflecting on his conversation with Müller, Napier explained he, “remembered that my father shew me that he made ane worke which”, helped him to better understand one of Müller’s claims.\textsuperscript{8} This confirms that his father Archibald had practised alchemy. The fact that Napier was known to Müller as a ‘man who fears God’ shows that, by 1607, the \textit{Plaine Discovery} had brought esteem to its author and underlines that alchemy was not regarded as one of the ‘black arts’ or something that contradicted the tenets of Christianity. Indeed, it appears that fearing God made one a more suitable student of alchemy.

Müller’s request for secrecy might make the modern observer think the two were engaged in occult or illegal activities. However this was not the reason for the secrecy. A letter from John’s son, Robert, to his son, urged him to guard closely an alchemical treatise and not to allow it to fall into the wrong hands. John’s papers had

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 413.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 415.
been bequeathed to Robert, suggesting knowledge of alchemy was being passed down the generations of the Napier family.⁹ Robert admonished his son that the book was,

not to be made known to any, except to some neir friend, being a scholler, studious of this science, who feares God, and is endewed with great secrecie not to reveal and mak commone such misteries as God has apointed to be keipit secrecit among a few in all ages whose harts are upright towards God, and not given to worldlie ambitione or covetousness, but secretly to do gud and help the poore and indigent in this world, as they wold eschew the curse of God if they do otherways.¹⁰

Robert’s chief concern appears to have been the corruption that might follow the acquisition of untold wealth that alchemy could bring. The secret of chrysopoeia, the transmutation of base metals into gold, was to be known only by a select few whom God had deemed worthy. It was occult, not because it was intrinsically evil, but because of the evil that could be result from its secrets falling into the hands of the unworthy:

Divulge this secret, and the hind would become greedy of gold to his own destruction. The earth would be deluged with iniquities. Agriculture and the other arts of civilization would no longer exist. Mighty in their gold, nations would rush to causeless war. The worthless would wax proud, and scorn their rulers. The reins of civil power and legitimate government thus relaxed, a fearful convulsion would follow. Oh! I say, reveal this secret to the vulgar, and the darkness of chaos must again brood on the face of the waters.¹¹

Robert’s reference to Genesis 1 reveals his belief that alchemy must be practised within the bounds of Christianity and God’s laws. More importantly, alchemy was seen as linked to the secrets of creation itself. Knowledge of the art brought one closer to God, not simply through shared knowledge with the creator, but because it

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⁹ Small, p. 416.  
¹⁰ Ibid., p. 417.  
¹¹ Ibid., p. 418. In Scotland a ‘hind’ was a skilled farm worker, in England a domestic servant, implying a concern by Robert Napier that the lower orders did not acquire knowledge that should remain the preserve of the privileged, educated elite. See OED (www.oed.com) & DOST (www.dsl.ed.ac.uk).
gave one a tiny fragment of His power, which was usually hidden from humanity. The reference to the creation of the world in Genesis was therefore intended to highlight the perils of meddling with the forces of creation itself.

Thus, Napier was no warlock, but should be viewed instead in the intellectual tradition of the magus. He regarded himself as one of a select group, who were wise and responsible enough to be privy to such hidden knowledge. They believed that God had obscured information from most people to protect them from themselves. This approach to alchemy was indicative of Napier’s entire worldview; in the *Plaine Discovery* he presented himself as belonging to a small, elite group who were preordained by God to reveal the final secrets of scripture.

**Popular ‘Napier Myths’**

Oral tradition played an important role in Napier’s reputation as a magician. Several stories about his allegedly bizarre activities have been passed from one generation to the next. Taken in isolation, these anecdotes provide an entertaining insight into a life about which there is a dearth of information. However, they also have a cumulative effect, each one contributing to the popular image of Napier as an enigmatic eccentric and together providing a basis for the common understanding of his life as rooted in magic.

In the area around his marital home at Gartness, the locals believed he was a warlock due to his eccentric habit of wandering around in his nightgown and cap when the nearby water-wheel disturbed his evening studies. Rumours that his periods of study were spent in communion with the Devil quickly followed. As Mark

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Napier pointed out, in an age in which education was a privilege and not a right, fear and mistrust of the educated as mysterious holders of occult knowledge was common.\textsuperscript{13} The famous trial of Barbara Napier for witchcraft in 1591 might have affected his reputation, despite the fact that there was no relationship, familial or otherwise, between the two.\textsuperscript{14}

In another incident, when his crops were being eaten by pigeons Napier was seen capturing the stupefied birds. The tale is so famous that a tiny pigeon was added to the two portraits of Napier that hang in the National Portrait gallery and Old College, Edinburgh, respectively.\textsuperscript{15} Mark Napier’s explanation, that the story was true but his ancestor had soaked peas in alcoholic liquor and scattered them in the fields to capture the birds, appears to have been universally accepted. It is certainly entertaining. Embellishments that were meant to entertain made Mark Napier’s biography enjoyable to read. He imagined a conversation between John Napier and a neighbour, in which Merchiston expressed his frustration with the birds and determination to impound them: “‘Do so if you can catch them,’” said probably his “‘nichbour, the Laird of Roslin,’”.\textsuperscript{16} Unfortunately, some of his embellishments have been misunderstood by modern readers. An internet search, with the terms ‘Napier pigeons’ returns an account that asserts that the conversation actually took place, that the birds belonged to the neighbour, and that the peas had been soaked in brandy.\textsuperscript{17}

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\textsuperscript{13} Napier, M, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} See above, p. 37. The inclusion of the bird in the portrait (above left shoulder) may be important because it implies that the story was persistent soon after Napier’s death and was not a later invention.
\textsuperscript{16} Napier, M., p. 215.
\textsuperscript{17} http://www.scotlandvacations.com/JohnNapier.htm accessed 13/11/2012.
The most famous anecdote about John Napier’s behaviour relates how valuables had gone missing from his home at Merchiston and he was convinced a servant had stolen them. To catch the thief he placed a black cock in a darkened room and instructed his staff to enter, one at a time, and stroke the bird’s back. They were told that this magical fowl would crow when touched by the guilty party. Napier had dusted the bird’s back with soot and reasoned that the thief would be the one person with clean hands, having failed to touch the bird for fear of detection.\(^\text{18}\) If Napier had indeed taken part in these activities, he might be seen to be deliberately cultivating an image of himself as a magician. However, all this demonstrates is that Napier’s friends in the political and religious establishments would have known the difference between someone who exploited the suspicions of his servants in order to find a thief, and someone who dabbled in sorcery and necromancy.

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\(\text{6. Napier’s fabled cock, with Merchiston Tower in background. From Napier, M. p. 434.}\)
Napier and Logan

In 1594, John Napier entered into a contract with Robert Logan of Restalrig, which has since been used to cast Napier as a magician. Napier agreed to travel to Logan’s residence, the remote and windswept Fast Castle in Berwickshire. Once there, he was to “do his utter and exact diligens to serche and sik out, and be all craft and ingyne that he dow, to tempt, trye and find out”, “a soum of monie and poiss”, rumoured to be hidden there.\textsuperscript{19} Alternatively, Napier was to conduct a thorough search and satisfy Logan that no such treasure existed. The contract was written by Napier and the handwriting matches other documents written by him.\textsuperscript{20} This suggests Napier entered into the pact willingly, and he was to be paid one third of whatever treasure was found. A safe return to Edinburgh would be ensured by Logan’s accompanying Napier on his journey. Once back at Merchiston, Napier would destroy the contract in Logan’s presence. It is not known whether Napier ever travelled to Fast Castle. However, as one of the conditions of discharge was that Napier must destroy the contract, its terms must never have been completed. Furthermore, the accord between Napier and Logan does not appear to have concluded amicably. In 1596 John Cunningham of Ross leased some of Napier’s lands at Gartness. Among the terms of the lease was that nobody of the surname ‘Logane’ would be permitted to farm the lands.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Full contract reproduced in Ibid., p. 220-1. Quotation from p. 221. ‘Dow’ means ‘to be able or fit to do something’ as in ‘can’ or ‘could’ (DOST).
\textsuperscript{20} See Ibid., p. 222 for a compelling comparison of handwriting samples.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 223-4.
Mark Napier claimed that the contract must have meant that Napier was planning to use some magical means to find the treasure.22 This is the most enduring part of the document’s legacy. As with many of Mark Napier’s assertions, his conclusions have been distorted over the years so Napier’s use of magic to locate the treasure is presented as a fact. A non-academic, internet source has claimed that, “a contract still exists between John Napier and one Robert Logan of Restalrig to search Fast Castle (by means of magic) for treasure allegedly hidden there”.23 This incorrectly implies magic was discussed explicitly in the contract. Moreover, Mark Napier’s interpretation of his ancestor’s relationship with Logan has influenced serious academic works. In 1974, Robert G. Clause argued that the contract was evidence of Napier’s involvement in the black arts and stated that he intended to “find the treasure through some form of divination”.24 Similarly, Arthur Williamson wrote, “Although the contract does not disclose the divining techniques Napier would employ, they were certainly occult.”25 Also citing the Fast Castle incident, Katherine Firth wrote that, “a truly inventive mind is always prey to curiosity, and there is some reason to believe that Napier had several unorthodox interests he would not have been foolish enough to display in print.”26 As the full contract demonstrates, there is no evidence to support any of these claims and if Napier was deliberately preventing his occult activities from appearing in print, he would have been unlikely to have retained a potentially incriminating manuscript rather than destroying it.

22 Ibid., p. 225. This was in line with his overall agenda of seeking to protect his ancestor’s reputation against allegations of involvement in ‘black magic’, whilst reinforcing his reputation as an expert in benign ‘white magic’.
23 http://www.scotlandvacations.com/JohnNapier.htm accessed 17/11/2012. This source also features the word ‘craft’. See below, p. 95 (n.).
24 Clause, p. 103.
25 Williamson, ‘Number…’, p. 199.
26 Firth, p. 147.
At Edinburgh the... day of Julij, yeir of God i\textsuperscript{m} v\textsuperscript{v} fairscoir fourtein yeiris -
It is apointit, contractit, and agreit, betwixt the personis ondirwretin;
that is to say, Robert Logane of Restalrige on the ane pairt, and Jhone
Neper, fear of Merchistoun, on the uther pairt, in maner, forme, and
effect as folowis:-
To wit, forasmekle as ther is dywers ald reportis
motiffis and appirancis, that thair suld be within the said Robertis
dwellinge place of Fasscastell a soum of monie and poiss, held and hurdit
up secritlie, quilk as yit is on fund by ony man. The said Jhone sall do
his utter exact diligens to serche and sik out, and be al craft and ingyne
that he dow, to tempt, trye, and find out the sam, and be the grace of
God, ather sall find the sam, or than mak it suir that na sik thing hes
been thair; sa far as his utter trawell dilligens and ingyne may reach. For
the quilk the said Robert sall giff, as be the tenour heirof, giffis and
grantis unto the said Jhone the just third pairt of quhatsoewir poiss or
heid treasour the said Jhone sall find, or beis fund be his moyan and
ingyn, within or abut the said place of Fasscastell, and that to be pairtit be
just wecht and balance, betwixt thaim but ony fraud, stryff, debait, and
contention, on sik manner as the said Robert sall heff the just twa partis,
and the said Jhone the just third pairt thereof upone thair fayth, truth,
and consciens. And for the said Jhonis suir return and saiff bakcumming
tharwith to Edinburgh, on beand spulzeit of his said third pairt, or
utherways hairmit in body, or geir, the said Robert sall mak the said
Jhone saiff convoy, and accumpaine him saifflie in maner forsaid bak to
Edinburgh, quher the said Jhone, beand saifflie returnit, sall, in presens
of Robert, cancell and destroy this present contract, as a full discherg of
ather of thair pairtis honestlie satisfiet and performit to utheris; and
ordanis that na uther discherge heirof but the destroyng of this present
contract sal be of ony availl, forse, or effect. And incaiss the said Jhone
sal find na poiss to be thair eftir all tryall and utter dilligens tane; he
referris the satisfactione of his trawell and painis to the discretione of the
said Robert. – In witnes of thir presens, and of al honestie, fideletie,
fayth, and uprycht doing to be observit and keipit be bayth the saidis
pairtis to uther, thei, heff subscrywit thir presentis with thair handis at
Edinburgh, day and yeir forsaid.

Robert Logane
of Restalrige
Jhone Neper, Fear of Merchistoun.
Mark Napier’s speculative suggestion that John may have planned to dowse for whatever treasure lay at Fast Castle is not unrealistic, given the widespread belief in the efficacy of such practices in the sixteenth century. However, the truth was probably more mundane than his speculation that John was summoned to Fast Castle under false pretences, in order to summon a demon. John’s familial connection to the mint might have encouraged the belief he was an expert in metals. He probably had a reputation as an alchemist several years before his meeting with Müller, since that meeting implies his renown had spread to mainland Europe. A more likely explanation for amicable relations between Napier and Logan not enduring comes from what is known of the latter’s roguish character. While ensconced at Fast Castle, the impoverished Logan was reputed to have ordered his servants to commit highway robbery on the nearby roads. Napier was probably lucky to have severed ties with Logan, who became associated with Francis, Earl of Bothwell and was implicated in the Gowrie conspiracy that sought to kidnap James VI in 1600.

The word ‘craft’ has probably been linked to ‘witchcraft’ among some who read the document, as the word features in the most commonly quoted sentence of the contract. However there is nothing in the document to suggest that the word was intended to mean anything but “Intellectual power; skill; art.” Since Napier stated that he would find the treasure by, “the grace of God”, he clearly did not envisage anything occurring that contradicted the tenets of Christianity. The not uncommon practice of destroying a completed contract when both parties had discharged its

27 Napier, M., p. 226.
28 Ibid., p. 227.
29 Napier, M., pp. 218-22.
31 OED.
32 Napier, M. p. 221.
conditions has added to the contract’s air of mystery. However, this does not suggest sinister intent, especially as Napier and Logan hoped to acquire a sizable amount of money from their endeavour. The location and character of Fast Castle have also added to the romantic tenor of the story. The ruins of the castle cling to a rocky promontory, walled by steep cliffs which are battered by the cold waves of the North Sea. In the lifetime of Mark Napier, its prospect fitted perfectly with a Gothic romanticism.
7. Fast Castle as it would have looked in Mark Napier's lifetime. Rev. John Thomson, Fast Castle from Above, 1823, Scottish National Gallery.
**Napier the Astrologer?**

The common conception of Napier as an astrologer has been constructed without a single piece of substantive evidence. The myth began because the *Logarithms* had such significance for astronomy, allowing complex calculations to be performed with more accuracy and in a fraction of the time. As Mark Napier stated, in the sixteenth century, astronomy, “had not yet escaped from judicial astrology”.\(^{33}\) Through this link to astronomy, John Napier has become associated with astrology.\(^{34}\) Even Arthur Williamson, who unequivocally stated, “Napier practiced astrology”, could muster no more compelling evidence than his friendship with Pont and probable acquaintance with Mark Kerr of Newbattle.\(^{35}\) Again, it would be wrong to place ‘Judicial Astrology’ in the same category as alchemy, something which may be classified as ‘magic’ today but was a serious pursuit in the sixteenth century. In his *Daemonologie* of 1597, James VI called astrology, when used for predicting the future, “utterly unlawful to be trusted in, or practiced among Christians.”\(^{36}\)

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\(^{33}\) Napier, M., p. 224.

\(^{34}\) There is evidence of his younger half-brother taking an interest in astrology, however, non that relates directly to John. See Napier, M. p. 321.

\(^{35}\) Williamson, ‘Number...’, p. 198 & next footnote.

Richard Napier: ‘The Warlock of Oxford’

John Napier’s familial relationship with Richard Napier, the so-called ‘Warlock of Oxford’ encouraged rumours of magical practices. A fascinating character in his own right, Richard was the son of Archibald’s younger brother, Alexander, who had settled in Exeter.\(^37\) There is some evidence that he was a practitioner of magic; however, there is no surviving correspondence or evidence of links between the two cousins.\(^38\) The striking family resemblance between them has undoubtedly added to the mystique surrounding their association.\(^39\)

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 238.
\(^{38}\) The evidence of Richard’s dealings in sympathetic magic for healing, and his alleged communication with angels are set out in Napier, M., pp. 239-42. Much of this evidence appears unreliable, being based on second hand accounts and rumour.
\(^{39}\) So pronounced is this resemblance that the ‘Google Books’ version of Mark Napier’s Memoirs erroneously bares the image of Richard on its front cover. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=husGAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=mark+napier+memoirs&hl=en&sa=X&ei=XXIrUpWtLz5p0wXG54D4Cw&ved=0CDkQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=mark%20napier%20memoirs&f=false
8. Richard Napier, c. 1630, unknown artist, the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology.
Other Evidence

Several other examples have been cited to support the conception of Napier as a magician. One of his relations was rumoured to have died during an attempt to raise the Devil. Adam Bothwell’s library contained books on demonology and sorcery, and the accusation of witchcraft had been directed at him on several occasions. However, this need not be interpreted as demonstrating an interest in the occult. These were important subjects in sixteenth century and those wishing to combat magical practices would have purchased volumes that detailed them. As Gordon Donaldson has pointed out, accusations of involvement in the black arts were directed towards almost every educated man in Napier’s lifetime, including the preeminent churchman John Knox.

Sir William Stewart, Lord Lyon King of Arms, was executed in 1568 “for Conspyring to take the Regent’s lyffe by Sorcerey and Necromancey”. He was accused of summoning the spirit Obirion at Merchiston, along with Archibald Napier, John’s father. Archibald was never tried for the crime. Allegations of black magic were sometimes used to defame one’s enemies in sixteenth century Scotland, especially where murder plots were concerned. This charge may have been levelled against Stewart to besmirch his character and secure a conviction for a capital offence. Peter Maxwell-Stewart has implied that the allegations against Archibald may not have been completely unfounded because John, “was also rumoured to

40 Napier, M., p. 236.
41 Donaldson, p. 22.
42 Ibid pp. 22-3.
43 Pitcairn, R. (ed), Ancient criminal trials in Scotland, 7 pts in 3, Bannatyne Club, 42 (1833) p. 510 n.
44 See Maxwell-Stuart, P.G., Satan’s Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland Tuckwell Press (East Linton 2001) p. 58 & Haigh, J. (ed), The Historical Works of Sir James Balfour Vol. 1 Library of the Faculty of Advocates (Edinburgh 1824) p. 345. Maxwell-Stuart cited a manuscript source, but this appears to have been lost. Obirion was the inspiration for Shakespeare’s Oberon in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, though Obirion was a far more malevolent character than Shakespeare had envisaged.
dabble in the magical arts.”

John Napier’s reputation as a magician has been built on the flimsiest of foundations but is so pervasive it has been used to implicate others. Finally, Archibald was accused of employing ‘the spirit of divination’ on several occasions by his successor at the mint John Lindsay. Their relationship appears to have been unfriendly and, in 1592, Archibald protested against his replacement as General of the Mint with the title of ‘master of metallis’, given to Lindsay by act of parliament. Lindsay was an ambitious man, determined to use his new office to increase his personal fortune and might have been using the accusation of divination to attack his professional rival’s character.

The Potential Fruits of an Inventive Mind

In the early modern period, academic disciplines had not crystallised and as entirely separate, and a breadth of knowledge was valued amongst intellectuals. In addition to his theological and mathematical research, Napier considered the design of several remarkable weapons. The construction of some of these items is known to be impossible today, making them appear fantastical. As a result, Napier’s research probably contributed to the conception of the ‘Marvellous Merchiston’ as a magician.

The best-known experiment was a ‘burning mirror’, inspired by the account of Archimedes focussing the rays of the sun to destroy the ships of the Roman invasion force at Syracuse. Napier believed that, by rejecting parabolic mirrors, which had proved ineffective over significant distances, in favour of plain mirrors, he could

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45 Maxwell-Stuart, p. 58.
46 Napier, M., pp. 232-3.
burn objects, “at whatsoever appointed distance.”

He even suggested the device would be so powerful that, at night, torchlight might act as a substitute for the rays of the sun. His other planned devices were a submarine, something akin to an armoured personnel carrier and a piece of artillery, capable of destroying every living thing “within the whole appointed place”.

Napier had tacitly admitted the weapons had mainly been ideas that had not even got to the drawing board, “These inventiones... with divers other devises and stratagemes for harming of the enemyes, by the grace of God and worke of expert craftesmen I hope to perform.” However, it is his desire to create them that is most important to modern historical enquiry. His designs illustrated the fear of the invasion of the British Isles in the years following the Spanish Armada. Mark Napier’s claim, that the capture of Calais by Spain in 1596 was driving John’s efforts, was helpful and set the efforts in their historical context. When discussing the purpose of the weapons, Napier wrote of the defence of the ‘Iland’, further indicating the sense of shared purpose and destiny which was developing between Scotland and England. The assumption that any attack on the British Isles would be a religious conflict between the Antichrist and God’s church, and not merely be a military invasion, was clear from Napier’s writing. He believed he was working specifically to defend the land from, “enemies of God’s truth and religion.” Gladstone-Millar has helpfully designated these weapons, along with the Plaine Discovery, as a kind of ‘two-pronged attack’ on Spain, intended to expedite the

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48 Ibid., p. 264. Mark Napier discussed the history of the burning mirror in some detail, pp. 253-70.
50 Napier, M., p. 248.
51 Ibid., p. 246. See below, p. 241 for further religious responses by English and Scottish polemicists to the capture of Calais.
52 Napier, M., p. 247. See above, pp. 3, 10, 68-9 & below, pp. 144, 190 & ch. 10.
53 Ibid., p. 247.
victory of the British Isles on both a military and spiritual battlefield. Though separate endeavours, Napier’s published work and planned inventions were inextricably linked.

The new-found sense of religious unity between Scotland and England, coupled with the threat of destruction from powerful outside forces was expressed in a concern with destiny and the apocalypse. Because this atmosphere combined fear and optimism, the inhabitants of Scotland and England adopted a defensive position, whilst also believing that their predestined victory and salvation was at hand. Napier was a product of this environment, providing a framework for spiritual development and renewal, whilst attempting to formulate strategies for military supremacy. Napier’s various goals had a single end, to consolidate the religious reform in his country, so that it could take its rightful place as an ally of God in the apocalyptic battle that was about to occur. As is the case for Newton, Napier’s endeavours in various fields do not reveal a confused mind, but one whose various endeavours were unified by passionate religious commitment.

**Conclusion**

Although there are numerous pieces of what might be termed ‘circumstantial evidence’ associating John Napier with magic, there is nothing that should be regarded as conclusive. Napier denounced magic in the *Plaine Discovery*. He attacked popes as, “abhominable Necromancers”. He claimed that the Roman Catholic Church was misusing crosses as, “magical marks of sorcerie,” and denounced their employment in “charmes and exorcisms, as though, the whol vertue

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54 Gladstone-Millar pp. 28-33.
55 *PD*, p. 44.
of Christ and his passion, wer transferred ouer into them”.

That he, as most of his contemporaries, believed in some forms of supernatural agency in the world, and even the efficacy of some magical practices is highly likely, but this does not mean he was an active participant in the magical arts.

Many scholars who have examined Napier’s life believed that an enquiring mind in the sixteenth century would naturally have dabbled in the occult. This, combined with the fact that scientific and magical thinking had not yet separated appeared to some observers to make John appear a more rounded intellectual: “he must have belonged to the very highest class, the class of Newton, and could not have been a mere mathematician.” The conception of Napier as a master of the occult is attractive. It evokes a sense of a romantic and mystical past, in which eccentric men in nightcaps stalked the moors, performing spells in between writing treatises on theology and mathematics. However, for too long, scholars and casual observers have simply assumed that Napier was active in magic. The idea of Napier as a warlock distorts the modern view of his life and works more than any other factor and should be abandoned. The conclusion that Napier believed that there was something magical or mystical about mathematics should also be treated with caution As Part II will illustrate, for him, numbers were a tool for discovering the truth, whether mystical or profane, and there is scant evidence that he regarded them as having some intrinsically metaphysical quality.

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56 Ibid., pp. 58-9. Sorcery was also condemned on p. 167.
57 Napier, M., p. 211.
58 Williamson, ‘Number...’ p. 199.
Part II – The *Plaine Discovery*

Introduction to Part II

Napier conceded that the Revelation was very different to the rest of the Bible. It stood apart from the other books of the New Testament because it was a summary of all previous prophecies that had not already come to pass, whereas the previous books were a guide for the Church on all points of doctrine: “his Majestie prouided, all the former books hitherto of the new Testament, to conteine the Christian doctrine: and this book of Reuelation, to contein the whole Christian Prophecie to the worlds end.”¹ The Revelation was of special significance to Christians, but it was also uniquely suited to his polemical agenda. For Napier, the Revelation existed primarily to inform Christians that the papacy was the Antichrist and encourage true believers to reject the Roman Catholic Church: “this whole work of Reuelation concerneth most the discouerie of the Antichristian and Papisticall kingdome”.²

Chapter 4 is the longest in Part II because it deals with Rome and the papacy, the subjects to which Napier devoted the majority of his work and regarded as the most important in the Revelation and his commentary. However, Napier’s conclusions cannot be appreciated fully until one understands the chronology of salvation history that provided the methodological foundation for his polemical arguments. To this end, his chronology is considered in detail in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 examines the second edition of the Plaine Discovery, primarily for the clues it contains about its author’s attitudes and personality. Further details about Napier’s perception of his role and position as a messenger of divine revelation are explained in Chapter 6.

¹ PD, p. 75, from a note to Rev. 1:1.
² Ibid., f. A7r. From the introductory Epistle to the Reader.
Chapter 3 - Napier’s Chronology

Napier’s historical interpretation of the Book of Revelation, expressed in the detailed chronology of salvation history he devised, was the central defining characteristic of the *Plaine Discovery*. This chronology described Christian history from the Baptism of Christ, in 29 A.D., to the Day of Judgement, which Napier predicted would fall between 1688 and 1700. It provided a framework within which all other conclusions of the book were placed. The denunciation of the papacy as Antichrist, another key component of the work, depended upon Napier’s interpretation of history as ‘evidence’. Although the *Plaine Discovery* was derivative of several works, including in its approach to history, it was distinguished by Napier’s coherent, detailed, systematic chronology of the history of the Christian Church. ¹ Moreover, the chronology promised that the Day of Judgement and apocalypse were imminent in a way that no previous Protestant text in English had before.

Napier’s debt to the tradition of Protestant humanism is revealed in the methodical approach of his writing. He closed the first part of the work with four contentions that demonstrate the importance of his systematic, historical approach: Firstly, when interpreting the text, revealing one ‘mysterie’ leads to others being revealed until a complete picture is formed. This revealing of mysteries meant the successful linking of a historical event to a biblical prophecy. Napier believed all reported events were closely interlinked and culminated in a single narrative. The whole was more than the sum of its parts and he never intended his revelations to be taken in isolation or for some to be accepted and others rejected. Secondly, the first

¹ See below, pp. 116 & 135-7 on *Carion’s Chronicle* & pp. 150-9 & ch. 7 on *John Bale.*
12 chapters of the Book of Revelation were in chronological order and highlighted key events that befell God’s true church from the baptism of Christ to the end of the world. Thirdly, Napier claimed that all scriptural prophecies could be dated in relation to actual events. Finally he stated that chapters 12 to 22 of the Book of Revelation reiterate and reinforce points made in the first 12.²

The chronology also allowed Napier to showcase his mathematical skills, which were brought to bear when calculating the dates of historical events in relation to biblical prophecy as well as the date of the apocalypse, the age of the world and the number of the beast. His impressive skills would have served to make his chronology appear more accurate than it actually was.³ Moreover, the fact that arguments based on mathematics may be easily verified would have lent weight to Napier’s more abstract assertions.

Like the Plaine Discovery as a whole, the chronology was tailored to specific audiences, partly by providing them with an elevated sense of their own importance. In Napier’s chronology, the end of the Antichrist’s reign coincided with the Scottish Reformation in 1560.⁴ Thus, Scots were given a role in the great drama of Christian cosmology that was soon to end in the triumph of good over evil and their salvation.

The chronology was also designed to appeal to James VI. Napier interpreted the ten horns of the beast in Revelation 12:3 and 13:1 as reformed countries, including Scotland, “who shall hate the harlot [Rome as the Whore of Babylon], and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eate up her flesh and burne her selfe with

² PD, p. 69.
³ The chronology contained many errors and inaccuracies, which are discussed throughout chs. 3 & 4.
⁴ PD, p. 66.
This casting of James in a central role in the apocalyptic narrative was combined with flattery: “I trust no man shall thinke, that this our discouery (wherein is contained God’s Iustice and seuere iudgement against the Antichristian seate) can more iustly be dedicate unto any man, than unto these ten Christian Kings, sometimes maintainers of that seat, whome, or whose successors now both the Prophet promises to be executors of that iudgement”.

Napier also subtly incorporated himself and his fellow intellectual exegetes into the chronology. His translation of Daniel 12:4 was, “Seale the booke till the appointed time, manie shall gae to & fro, and knowledge shal be increased.” By implication, the knowledge Napier was bringing to humanity was part of God’s plan; the actions of people like him had been predicted in the Old Testament. Napier’s translation of this verse is hugely significant because, as will be demonstrated below, he primarily used the 1560 Geneva translation of the Book of Revelation in the Plaine Discovery, despite claiming to have used the Vulgate in his epistle to the reader. The Geneva Bible, had “seale the boke til the end of the time”, implying that the hidden knowledge was to be revealed only at the apocalypse. However, the Vulgate may be translated in the way that Napier phrased the verse. Thus, Napier appears to have deliberately selected the version of the Bible that best suited his polemical agenda. The fact that he would be selective about the text in this way demonstrates how important it was for him to aggrandise himself as a divinely selected recipient and disseminator of God’s revealed mysteries. His interpretation

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5 Ibid., pp. 157 & 166. Also f. A4r from Dedicatory Epistle. See above, p. 73.
6 PD, f. A5v, Dedicatory Epistle. Note that, while flattering, this is also highly critical of James’s ancestors as ‘maintainers of that seate’. This was especially important in the context of the conflict between those loyal to James and those loyal to his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, which was often portrayed as a religious war.
7 PD., p. 17.
8 Ibid., ff. 7r-8v.
implied that his intellect, and ability to interpret scripture accurately, provided further evidence that the apocalypse was drawing near. The revealing of hidden knowledge from scripture was an important component of the final years of human history, which would facilitate the salvation of as many people as possible, partially by making them turn away from the papal Antichrist. Daniel 12:10 also made Napier appear virtuous; “none of the wicked shall have understanding, but the wise shall understand.”

Napier skillfully constructed his chronology so that many of the dates highlighted successfully linked events in the Revelation to important dates in the history of Christianity. However, the success of his framework rested on its rigidity and this was also its downfall. Many of his dates did not coincide with important historical events and this forced him to make some bizarre qualifications.

**Napier's Chronological Method**

The chronology underpinned the *Plaine Discovery* and the foundation of the chronology was the system of dating, Jubilees and Sabbaths that Napier employed in its formulation. The system was explained from number one of the 36 Propositions that made up the ‘Introductory Treatise’ of the book. It was the first thing the reader would have encountered after the dedication and epistle to the reader and therefore held a prime position within the book.

Napier was keen to point out that his system of calculating was not a novel human invention but was divinely mandated through scripture. In the first

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9 Ibid., p. 18.  
10 Ibid., p. 1.
proposition he stated “In propheticall dates of daies, weekes, moneths, and yeares, euerie common propheticall day is taken for a yeare.” A key justification for this approach is found in Numbers 14:34 “After the number of fourtie daies, in vvhich ye searched out the land, the year shal be counted for a day”. However, Napier went further than claiming his methods were based in scripture. He argued that the 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 represented 490 years and accurately predicted the birth of Christ. Therefore, to deny the efficacy of his method was to deny Christ and be damned: “vpon necessitie of saluation, al christians must confesse, in the seventie weeks of Daniel, a day to be taken for a yeare, extending in the whole to 490. yeares; otherwise, that prophecie of the Messias comming wold not fal vpon the just time of Christs comming, as necessarily it ought to do.” The idea of interpreting days as years was combined with the notion of Shmita or sabbatical years. In the Old Testament, every seventh year was declared to be a Sabbath. In addition, every seventh Sabbath was a celebratory Jubilee year. In other words, every 49th year was

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11 Ibid., f. BIr.
13 “Seventy weeks are shortened upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, that transgression may be finished, and sin may have an end, and iniquity may be abolished; and everlasting justice may be brought; and vision and prophecy may be fulfilled; and the Saint of saints may be anointed.” 70x7=490. The interpretation of these 70 weeks by Christians had a long and complex history with many scholars coming to mutually contradictory conclusions. Napier’s view that the 70 weeks predicted the First Coming of Christ was approximately in line with that of John Calvin. See Meyers, T. (ed & trans.), Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel by John Calvin Vol. II CCEL (Grand Rapids) URL: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom25.pdf (Accessed 28/03/11) pp. 189-94 & Firth pp. 35-6.
14 PD, p. 2. See previous footnote. One year in prophetic language was taken to mean 360 years of human history, the number of years in the ancient Hebrew calendar. See PD f. BIr-p. 2.
15 Exodus 23:10-11: “Six years thou shalt sow thy ground, and shalt gather the corn thereof. But the seventh year thou shalt let it alone, and suffer it to rest, that the poor of thy people may eat, and whatsoever shall be left, let the beasts of the field eat it: so shalt thou do with thy vineyard and thy oliveyard.”
to be a Jubilee. These Jubilees were used to determine the age of the world and, in Napier’s scheme, important events fell upon them.

Napier used the seven seals, trumpets and ‘Thundering Angels’ in Revelation Chapters 6, 9, 11 and 14 as the framework for much of his chronology. The vials in chapters 16 to 18 reinforced the previous chronology. In Napier’s system the Seals were opened at seven year intervals, on Sabbatical years. Each trumpet and associated vial occurred every 245 years, every five Jubilees or half of the 490 years indicated by the 70 weeks of Daniel. This figure tied to ‘Great Mutations of Empires’, the period for which God permits an empire to maintain its dominance, or the time at which He causes seismic shifts in temporal institutions. For example, Napier reported that Jerusalem was destroyed in 71 A.D. and that Constantine transported his Imperial seat to Constantinople in 316 A.D. These dates are actually incorrect, but they fit with Napier’s model based around periods of 245 years. Napier credited Carion’s Chronicle with inspiring this figure, though this text did not explain the dates and numbers in the accessible and explicit manner of the Plaine Discovery.

One of most important numbers in the Plaine Discovery is 1260, which was identified as the number of years Antichrist must reign before being vanquished by Christ. It was employed extensively by Napier and occurs in many chapters of the books of Daniel and Revelation, the two most important prophetic texts of canonical scripture. In many cases the text refers to 1260 days, which were interpreted as years.

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16 PD, p. 7 & Leviticus 25:8 “Thou shalt also number to thee seven weeks of years: that is to say, seven times seven, which together make forty-nine years.”
17 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
18 Ibid., p. 8.
19 Jerusalem was sacked in 70 A.D. and the Imperial capital was moved to the East gradually, from around 306 to its consecration in 330.
20 See Carion f. ciiiir on Constantine’s alleged transfer of power in the west to the papacy.
For example Revelation 12:6 states “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they shulde feede her there a thousand, two hundreth and thre score daies.”

21 Napier’s initial discussion of this subject was at *PD*, p. 43. Other examples from scripture include Revelation 11:2-3 “But the court which is with out the temple, and mete it not: for it is giuen vnto the Gentiles, and the holy Citie shall they tread vnder foote, two and fourtie moneths. But I will giue power unto my two witnesses & they shall prophecy, a thousand, two hundreth and three score daies, clothed in sakecloth.” Other sources cite the figure in more cryptic terms. Daniel 7:25 states “And he shall speak words against the High One, and shall crush the saints of the most High: and he shall think himself able to change times and laws, and they shall be delivered into his hand until a time, and times, and half a time.” Daniel 12.7: “And I heard the man that was clothed in linen, that stood upon the waters of the river, when he had lifted up his right hand, and his left hand to heaven, and had sworn by him that liveth for ever, that it should be unto a time, and times, and half a time. And when the scattering of the band of the holy people shall be accomplished, all these things shall be finished.” A time was taken to mean 1 year in the ancient 360 day calendar. Therefore time, and times, and half a time means 360+(360x2)+(360÷2)=1260.
The Chronology

Seven Seals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seal</th>
<th>Scriptural Reference</th>
<th>Napier’s Date</th>
<th>Napier’s Historical Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Rev. 6:3</td>
<td>36 A.D.</td>
<td>Christians persecuted. Gospel of Mark written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Rev. 6:5</td>
<td>43 A.D.</td>
<td>Global famine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Rev. 6:7</td>
<td>50 A.D.</td>
<td>Gospel of John written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Rev. 6:9</td>
<td>57 A.D.</td>
<td>Nero’s temporal power increased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Rev. 6:12</td>
<td>64 A.D.</td>
<td>Nero persecuted Christians, committed incest &amp; murder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Rev. 8:1</td>
<td>71 A.D.</td>
<td>Persecution of Christians suspended under Flavian Dynasty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table summarising Napier’s historical application of the Seven Seals from Revelation 6 & 8. Note that the seals were opened at intervals of exactly seven years, reflecting Napier’s use of Sabbaths to construct his chronology.

Napier interpreted the seven seals from Revelation 6 and 8 as referring to historical events occurring from 29 A.D. to 71 A.D. The seals were opened every Sabbatical year during this period and were therefore spaced apart seven years. The modern reader will note the historical inaccuracy of many of Napier’s interpretations. However, many of his contemporaries would have accepted them because of the comparatively poor standard of detailed historical awareness at the time. In his system, the first four seals coincided with the writing of the gospels and the remaining three represented important dates in the development of the early church.

According to Napier, the first seal was opened in 29 A.D. and coincided with the Baptism of Christ. Revelation 6:1 reads “After I beheld when the Lambe had

\(^{22}\) PD, p. 108. The dating of the Baptism comes from Luke 3:1-2: “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother tetrarch of Iturea and the country of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilina: Under the high priests Anna and Caiphas: the word of the Lord was made unto John, the son of Zachary, in the desert.” Augustus Caesar died in 14 A.D., meaning that this may be regarded as the
opened one of the seals, and I heard one of the four beasts say, as *it were* the noise of thunder, Come and see.” Napier interpreted the beast as Matthew, who began writing his Gospel in that year, a process that took seven years. The second seal was opened in or around 36 A.D., coinciding with the composition of the Gospel of Mark, which was written “in comfort of the afflicted Church”, who were being persecuted at this time.\(^{23}\)

Napier asserted that the third seal was opened when the Gospel of Luke was written, in 43 A.D., which is highly unlikely.\(^{24}\) Napier declared that the appearance of the Horseman of the Apocalypse in Revelation 6:5 referred to famines around the world but gave no specific details or examples.\(^{25}\) The fourth seal was opened in 50 A.D., when Napier claimed the Gospel of John was written. It is important to understand that the Church at this time was celebrated by Napier as being free from the stain of Papal corruption; “the deuil was so ready, that how sone [soon] the true word of God was sowen by the primitive Church, incontinently he raised up the Papistical antichrist to devour & confounde the same with false glosses, & sinister interpretations.”\(^{26}\) This was in keeping with Protestant humanist philosophy, which sought to return Christianity to this supposedly purer state, when the message of Christ had not been corrupted by human greed and unnecessary traditions.

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\(^{23}\) *PD*, p.109. Rev. 6:3 “and when hee had opened the second seale, I heard the second beaste say, Come and see.” Modern scholarly consensus holds that the Gospel of Mark was written before Matthew. See Barclay, W., *The Gospel of Mark* Saint Andrew Press (Edinburgh 2001) p. 1.


\(^{25}\) *PD*, Rev. 6:5 “loe a black horse & hee that sate on him had ballances in his hand”. *PD*, p. 29, did refer to famine described in Acts 11:28: “And there stode vp one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit, that there shulde be great famine throughout all the worlde, which also came to passe vnder Claudius Cesar.” (GB)

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 158.
The Emperor Nero reigned from 54 to 68 A.D. but Napier highlighted 57 A.D. as important to his ascension: “[in] the yeare of Christ 57 arose the tyrant Nero”. This was because, for Napier’s system to be effective, the mathematical patterns that formed its basis had to be portrayed as completely accurate. For Napier, the date on which the fifth seal was opened had to occur seven years after the fourth. Nero was associated with persecution of Christians and therefore made the perfect scapegoat for the events described in Revelation 6:9 “And when had opened the fift seal, I saw vnder the altar the souls of them, that were killed for the worde of God, and for the testimony which they maintained.” Napier’s system dictated that the sixth seal was opened in 64 A.D. and again, Napier connected Nero to this date: “now Nero raised great persecutions against the true spiritual professors, to haue vterrorly darkened and extinguished the light of the Gospel, as also, hee became a vile incestuous tyrant and paricide [patricide], a polluter of his whole Empire, and estates thereof, with blood and tyrannie”. This interpretation worked well because Napier wrote that Nero, “vtterly darkened and extinguished the light of the gospel”, which was an effective allegory of Revelation 6:12: “And I beheld when he had opened the sixt seal, & loe, there was a great earthquake, and the sun was as black as sackcloth of haire, and the Moone was like blood.”

Finally, Napier stated the seventh seal was opened in 71 A.D. and took it to represent the relative peace and tolerance that Christians enjoyed under the Flavian

27 Ibid., p. 111.
28 Ibid., p. 111. Nero was a common figure of hate, and was commonly used by Protestants to denounce the Roman Empire, and the papacy by association, as evil. See below pp. 220 & 236.
29 PD, p. 112. Nero was rumoured to have murdered his mother, which would make him guilty of matricide rather than patricide.
30 PD, p. 112.
Dynasty, specifically during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus.\textsuperscript{31} Again, this was effective because it appears compatible with the scriptural source. Revelation 8:1 had, “And when hee had opened the seventh seal, ther was silence in heauen about half an houre.”\textsuperscript{32}

### Trumpets/Vials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trumpet/Vial</th>
<th>Scriptural Reference</th>
<th>Napier’s Date</th>
<th>Napier’s Historical Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st}</td>
<td>Rev. 8:7/16:2</td>
<td>71 A.D.</td>
<td>Effeminate/tyrannical Roman Emperors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>Rev. 8:8-9/16:3</td>
<td>316 A.D.</td>
<td>Constantine shifted Imperial Seat from Rome to Constantinople.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd}</td>
<td>Rev. 8:10-11/16:4-7</td>
<td>561 A.D.</td>
<td>Rise of Islam &amp; apostasy of Christians in the Near East.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Rev. 8:12/16:8-9</td>
<td>806 A.D.</td>
<td>Church corrupted by Islam in the East &amp; Papacy in the West. Charlemagne divided Holy Roman Empire between his sons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Rev. 9:1/16:10-11</td>
<td>1051</td>
<td>Rising power of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Rev. 9:13/16:12-16</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>Unification of formerly disparate Islamic peoples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Rev. 11:15/16:17-21</td>
<td>1541</td>
<td>Protestant Reformers active &amp; successful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table summarising Napier’s historical application of the seven trumpets from Revelation 8-11, and the seven Vials from Chapter 16, which he regarded as a repetition of the same information. In Napier’s system, these events happened at intervals of exactly 245 years, half of the 490 years inferred from the 70 weeks in Daniel 9.

Napier regarded the seven vials in Revelation, Chapters 16 and 18 as simply repetitions of the trumpets in Chapters 8, 9 and 11. As he put it, “The seuen Trumpets of the 8. and 9. chapters and the seuen Vials of the 16. Chapter, are all one.”\textsuperscript{33} The terms are therefore interchangeable in relation to the \textit{Plaine Discovery} and the term ‘trumpets’ will henceforth be used to mean both trumpets and vials. In

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 2.
Napier’s chronology, they followed directly from the seals and were spaced evenly, at intervals of 245 years.

The first trumpet was identified in Revelation 8:7 and was accompanied by, “haile and fire, mingled with blood”.\textsuperscript{34} For Napier, this meant a combination of effeminate, slothful and tyrannical Emperors who ruled the Roman Empire between 71 and 316 A.D.\textsuperscript{35} The second trumpet was blown in Revelation 8:8-9, which described a mountain being cast into the sea, destroying a third of all ships. Napier interpreted this as representing Constantine’s shift of the imperial seat from Rome to Constantinople in 316, which effectively left the papacy in charge of Rome and left the city vulnerable to “Hunnes, Gottes, Vandals & other fierce nations”.\textsuperscript{36} This was a particularly important date for Napier because it represented an increase in the temporal power of the papacy.\textsuperscript{37} The next date dictated in the chronology was 561 A.D. Napier highlighted no specific incident in this year, instead associating the third trumpet with the rise of Islam in a rather vague manner: “then begins in the yeare of God, 561. the third age, in the which, the wicked Mahomet arose & taught the damnable doctrin of his Alkaron [Quran], among the Christian Churches of the Orient, wherethrough these Easterly countries became altogether corrupt with his bloodie heresie.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp. 123-4.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 124. See also p. 192.
\textsuperscript{37} See below, pp. 132-4, on the Millennium.
\textsuperscript{38} PD, pp. 192-3. Revelation 8:10-11: “Then the third Angel blew the trumpet, & there fel a great star from heauen burning like a torch, and it fell into the thirde parte of theriuers, & into the fountains of waters. And the name of that star is called wormwood: therefore the third parte of the waters became wormewood, and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.”
The following trumpet was blown in 806 and, “the third parte of the sun was smitten, & the third parte of the moone & the third parte of the starres”.\textsuperscript{39} This part of Napier’s interpretation successfully combined the earlier idea of Islam as a threat to Christianity with the theme of the papacy as the enemy of God’s true Church, “so that the third parte of the light of gods truth that shined somtime in the primitiue Church, is nowe extinguished, the oriental or Græcian Churches being seduced by the Mahomet; & the occidental or Latin churches, by the Pope of Rome.”\textsuperscript{40} The year 806 was also important because it was at this time that Charlemagne divided the Holy Roman Empire between his sons.\textsuperscript{41} The identification of the Holy Roman Empire with the forces of evil was crucial to Napier. He was attempting to demonstrate continuity between the Christ-killing Roman Empire of the New Testament and more recent events. The portrayal of the Holy Roman Emperors as puppets of the papacy made them, in Napier’s framework, agents of Satan rather than simply secular tyrants. In short, they became the beast that rose from the sea in Revelation 13:1-10.\textsuperscript{42}

The fifth trumpet was blown in Revelation 9:1, which described a star falling to Earth and the angel receiving the keys to the bottomless pit. Napier did not associate this with any specific event, instead claiming that the power of Islam was increasing in 1051.\textsuperscript{43} The sixth trumpet was opened in Revelation 9:13. Revelation 9:14 described a voice which called to the angel: “Loose the four Angels, which ar bound in the great riuer Euphrates.” Napier stated that these four angels were the Saracens,

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., Revelation 8:12, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 126.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 171 reinforced this theme.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp 128-9 & 194-5.
Turks, Tartars and Arabs, joining together in 1300, after the trumpet was blown in 1296.44

The seventh trumpet heralded the final age of human history and is arguably the most important because, for Napier, it represented the single most important turning point. The Reformation meant that the balance of power was shifting in favour of God’s Church, which had hitherto been oppressed by the temporally dominant forces of evil. This shift was achieved through military force and preaching of the Word of God, which was central to Reformed Theology. Unfortunately for Napier, some of the impact was removed from his argument because, again, 1541 was an approximate date which lacked a dramatic incident on which to focus. Instead, he emphasised the point that, by 1541, the Reformation had a strong foothold in Europe and great reformers were active.

Napier’s tone also changed at this point. His anger at the papacy and Islam were replaced, temporarily, by the optimism that arises from the assurance of one’s salvation and the defeat of one’s enemies.

that yeare began the seventh age, wherein, the last dayes approaching al the Empires and kingdoms of the worlde must bee trodden downe, and Gods and his Sonne Christes æternall kingdome, only erected. And Gods holie Scriptures, which lay as deade the time of the Antichristian raigne, now beeing restored to their former authoritie and honour, doe stir vp the harts & mouths of all true proffessour, to humble themselues, and to yeelede their due praise and honour to God almightie.45

By emphasising the restoration of scripture to its ‘former authoritie’, Napier was celebrating the Protestant Reformation. Taken within the context of the Plaine Discovery as a whole, his goal of explaining the remaining mysteries of scripture

44 Ibid., pp. 131,195. Proposition 4, pp. 3-5 explained that this date is approximate. Napier’s discussion of these groups was overly simplistic to the extent that it became factually dubious.
45 PD, p. 150.
emerged as the final expression of Protestants’ emphasis on the Bible as the basis of their faith and practice. The Reformation returned the Bible to the common people and Napier was revealing to them the final truths of the text in the last days of temporal history. Again, he was emphasising his role and portraying his exegesis as important to the whole of humanity, forming a part of the chronology of salvation history it sought to explain.

**Napier’s ‘Thundering Angels’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angel’s Jubilee</th>
<th>Scriptural Reference</th>
<th>Napier’s Date</th>
<th>Napier’s Historical Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Rev. 14:6</td>
<td>1541</td>
<td>Protestant Reformers bringing truth of Gospels to light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Rev. 14:9-10</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>Final defeat of Rome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Rev. 14:14</td>
<td>1688</td>
<td>Second Coming of Christ, God’s Judgement, Destruction of World, Creation of New Heaven and New Earth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table summarising Napier's historical application of the four angels from Revelation 14. In Napier's system, these events happened at intervals of exactly 49 years, or on every seventh Sabbath, known as a ‘Jubilee’.

In Napier’s chronology, the first four angels in Revelation Chapter 14, delivered proclamations that occurred every 49 years, during Jubilees. This part of the chronology is of special interest because it coincided with the period in which Napier wrote his *Plaine Discovery*, it therefore contained a shift from historical narrative to predictions about the future. It was also the most positive stage of human history for Napier because it contained the final victory of God and His church over Antichrist.

Revelation 14:6 had: “Then I saw another Angel fly in the mids of heauen, hauing an euerlasting Gospel, to preach vnto them, that dwell on the earth, and to
euerie nation, and kindred and tongue & people.” Again, this was vitally important for Napier because, according to his philosophical and religious position, it served as an elegant analogy for the Protestant Reformation. This was the opening of the seventh age of human history in 1541, when reformers like Luther, Calvin and Melanchthon brought the true meaning of scripture to light. In Napier’s words, “God’s trueth to all the worlds is made patent by these ministers.”

The second of these final Jubilees occurred in 1590, when an angel in Revelation 14:8 declared the fall of Babylon, which Napier understood as representing Rome. This interpretation was successful because dramatic events had occurred around that year. The defeat of the Spanish Armada would have been fresh in the minds of all Napier’s contemporaries. It seemed to be a sign that God favoured the British Isles and the Reformed theology that they had adopted. Napier’s discussion demonstrated the belief that God was supporting Reformed Protestant nations against Roman Catholic Europe in ways that were real, dramatic and observable as opposed to abstract or open to interpretation: “seeing now and perceauing by daily experience, that God fights for vs, and daily advanceth our causes more and more to their destruction”.

This period also witnessed the succession of France’s first Protestant king, Henry of Navarre, in 1589. This was intrinsically valuable to the Protestant cause but also represented a defeat of the House of Guise. As Napier stated, this powerful Roman Catholic dynasty had played a key role in the infamous St

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46 Ibid., p. 178
47 “And there followed another Angel, saying, It is fallen, it is fallen, Babylon the great citie; for thee made all nations to drinke of the wine of her fornication.” PD, Proposition 23, pp. 34-6, identified Rome as the new Babylon and this was a common theme throughout the work, see below pp. 159-62.
48 PD, pp. 178-9. For more on Armada see ibid., p. 223.
Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of Huguenots in 1572. Moreover, Mary of Guise, who served as regent of Scotland from 1554 to 1560, was the aunt of Henry, third Duke of Guise, who had helped plan the massacre. Thus, Scotland’s recent history, its Protestant Reformation and, by association, its current monarch were again celebrated within the chronology of salvation history. What Napier neglected to mention was that this celebrated Protestant king of France converted back to Catholicism in 1593. It is possible that Napier did not know of this when he was writing the first edition and, in an unusual show of caution, he changed the description of Henry from ‘a Protestant’ to ‘one named a protestant’ in the 1611 edition. However, in keeping with his habit of including every piece of evidence at his disposal, he maintained that this was evidence of the impending ruin of the ‘papistical kingdom’. Napier portrayed the age in which he was writing as central to the final battle and defeat of the New Babylon, adding greater immediacy to the chronology and further emphasising the potential spiritual and military roles of James and his subjects.

Napier’s interpretation of the final Jubilee represented a shift from past to future events as fulfilments of the prophecies of the Revelation and a focus on the events leading directly to the apocalypse. The emphasis on the last days and Napier’s prediction that the Day of Judgement would occur between 1688 and 1700 was a dramatic departure from the Protestant eschatological texts that had preceded the

49 Ibid., pp. 179 & see p. 184 for more on French Protestantism. As the Mother of Mary, Queen of Scots and Catholic Regent of Scotland, Mary of Guise could be held responsible for impeding the progress of religious reform in Scotland but, surprisingly, Napier did not take the opportunity to defame her.
50 Ibid, p. 179 & Napier, 1611, p. 223. See below, ch. 5, for more on the second edition.
51 Napier, 1611, p. 223.
Like the Geneva Bible that had influenced him, Napier took the opportunity to emphasise the horrors that awaited those who did not embrace the true faith. “God shall pour out on her the plagues of death and mourning, for the slaughter of her [Rome as the new Babylon] inhabitants, and she shall be inclosed and effamished: finally, taken and burnt with fire: for almightie is the Lord, that hath giuen that sore sentence against her.” In Revelation 14:9-10 an angel warned people against worshipping the beast. This was the third Jubilee, beginning in 1639, when the Papal seat of Rome and the Holy Roman Empire would be so weakened that the true messengers of God would have a minimal amount of work to do in overturning the remnants of Roman Catholic doctrine. Any who resisted and continued to worship the beast, “shall bee tormented eternallie in the bitter sulphurous fire of hel, in the presence of Christ and his holie Angels.”

Napier’s interpretation of Revelation 14:14 had Christ, as the fourth angel, returning as judge in 1688 to gather God’s elect:

And behold now, and loe (the fourth Jubelie being begun in Anno 1688.) bright clouds shall appeare, and thereupon Christe, the Sonne of man comming vnto judgement, as the fourth of the thundering Angels, hauing on his head the glorious crowne of eternall victorie, and in his hand the sickle of sharpe diligence, to gather in his elect.

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52 See below, Part III.
53 See below, ch. 9 for the influence of the Geneva Bible.
54 PD, p. 217.
55 PD, pp. 179-80: “And the third Angel followed them, saying, with a loude voyce, If anie man worship the beaste and his image and recieue his marke in his foreheade, or on his hand, The same shall drinke of the wine of the wrath of God, yea, of the pure wine, which is powr into the cuppe of his wrath, and & [sic] he shal be tormented in fire & brimstone, before the holie Angels, and before the Lambe.”
56 PD, pp. 179-80: “the ministers and messengers of God, shall (God willing) haue only the latter dregs of that Romish seat to admonish”.
57 Ibid., p. 180.
58 Ibid., pp. 180-1. Rev. 14:14: “And I loked and behold, a white cloud, & vpon the cloude one sitting like vnto the Sonne of man, hauing on his head a golden crown and in his hand a sharp sickle.”
This would be followed by another angel, an embodiment of the holy sickle, instructing Christ to gather the elect before the final angels emerged to gather the reprobate and cast them into hell.\(^5^9\) It should be noted that the Bible, including the Vulgate and Geneva version on which Napier drew did not identify Christ on the cloud in Revelation 14:14 as an angel. Napier may have done so in order to increase the total number of angels in Revelation 14 up to the mystical number seven, which formed the Sabbaths and Jubilees on which his chronology was based. His conclusions would therefore appear more consistent and coherent.

**The Antichrist’s Reign**

Napier concluded that the millennium for which Satan was bound in Revelation 20 coincided with the 1260 years of Antichrist’s reign.\(^6^0\) This view was based on his interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3. Napier’s thirty-fifth ‘Proposition’ posited the idea that Satan was prevented from harming only the outward, visible, Roman Catholic Church, as opposed to the true Church of God, “which euer he troubleth”.\(^6^1\) The ‘visible’ church was made up of people who were inherently evil and predisposed to idolatry. During this period, the Antichrist allowed this false church to stagnate and become increasingly corrupted by idolatry by not inciting it to internal wars. This continued until the spiritual nadir of the Roman Catholic Church at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when warfare between Catholic Europe and the

\(^5^9\) Ibid.

\(^6^0\) See above, p. 117 (n.) for scriptural references.

\(^6^1\) Rev. 20:1-3 “And, I saw an Angel come down from heauen, hauing the key of the bottemlesse pit, and a great chain in his hand. And hee tooke the dragon, that olde serpent, which is [t]he deuill & Satan, and hee bounde him a thousand yeares. And cast him into the bottomlesse pit, and he shutte him vp, and sealed the door vpon him, that he should decieue the people no more, till the thousand years were fulfilled, for after that hee must be loosed for a litle season”. *PD*, pp. 40-1.
Islamic Near-East reached a peak. These opposing forces were also cast by Napier as Gog and Magog, described in Revelation 20:7-10: “the whole Papistes & pretended Christians on the one side, against the whole Mahometanes on the other side, euen the whole Occident against the whole Orient, vnder the names of Gog and Magog, were conuened in number as the sand of the sea, as the text saith. So that in comparison hereof, all small ciuill warres, skirmishings and incursions, that occurred during those thousand yeares, were thought nothing but peace”. Napier claimed that God displayed mercy by allowing Antichrist to rule during the binding of Satan. Had Satan and the Antichrist been powerful at the same time, the threat to the true, persecuted Church would have been too great: “lest on both sides, Gods Church were vtterly extinguishe’d”.  

Napier asserted that the 1260 years of Antichrist’s reign lasted from the ‘Donation of Constantine’, “as is alleged betwixt the yeere of Christe 300. & 316. to the year of God 1560. which time the notable decay of his kingdom began.” This date would have appealed to James VI and the wider Scottish readership by presenting the year of Scotland’s Protestant Reformation as an important milestone in the defeat of Antichrist. Napier was careful to formulate his chronology around certain dates that would appeal to his audience; 1560 emerged not simply as an

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62 This is factually dubious but the fourteenth century did see the first real incursions by the Ottoman Empire into Europe. From a western perspective, the conflicts and threat would therefore have seemed more horrific.

63 PD, p. 64. Rev 20:7-10. And when the thousande yeare are expired, Sathan shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall go out to deceiue the peo[ple] which are in the four quarters of the erth euen Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battel, whose number is as the sand of the sea And they went vp into the pline of the earth which compassed the tentes of the Saintes about, and the beloued cittie: but fire came down from god out of heauen, and deuoured them. And the deuil that deceued them, was cast into a lake of fire & brimston, where the beast and the false prophet shall bee tormented euen day and night forever more.

64 Ibid., p. 65. This appears to contradict Napier’s earlier statement that Satan was only bound from harming the false, outward church. However, one of the ways of harming the Antichristian Church was through wars, which would have also threatened the true Church.

65 Ibid., p. 43. See also p. 66.
important date for Scotland, but for the whole of humanity. A successful
Reformation meant that conversion would be the primary weapon against false
religion: “the scriptures of God are liuely and quicklie interpreted & restored to the
true estimation and honour: & thousandes converted daylie from their Papistry to the
true feare of God”.66 Napier also noted that the dissolution of monasteries had been
carried out in several European states at this time and established a link to scripture.
Revelation 11.13 stated “And the same houre shal there be a great earthquake, & the
tenht parte of the cite shall fall”.67 For Napier, monasteries and nunneries were that
ten percent of the city, Rome, as the new Babylon, which represented the Roman
Catholic Church as a whole. As further evidence of the accuracy of these dates,
Napier highlighted events during the period that illustrated the dominance of the
papacy, such as Barbarossa’s submission to the authority of Alexander III in 1177.
He also portrayed the popes as persecutors of ‘True Christians’ and celebrated
martyrs like Jan Hus, Jerome of Prague and Girolamo Savonarola.68

The Donation of Constantine, and what Napier perceived as the Emperor’s
abandonment of the Western Church to the papacy were important because of the
temporal authority they afforded the popes. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8, the
Man of Sin or Antichrist was to have dominion over a geographical area for a short
time before he is destroyed by Christ: “And now you know what withholdeth, that he
may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity already worketh: only that
he who now holdeth do hold, until he be taken out of the way. And then that wicked
one shall be revealed: whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of his mouth and

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66 Ibid., p. 148.
67 Ibid., p. 149.
68 Ibid. See also p. 137.
shall destroy with the brightness of his coming".\textsuperscript{69} Napier’s view of Constantine was complex and multifaceted. He portrayed the emperor as responsible for giving the church over to the Antichrist: “after the yeare of God 300, the Emperor Constantine subdued all Christian Churches to Pope Syluester; from which time , til these our daies, euen 1260.”\textsuperscript{70} However, as the following subsection will show, Napier saw a positive side to Constantine that was equally important to his history of the Christian Church.

**The Millennium of Satan’s Binding**

According to Napier’s interpretation, the binding of Satan was a great turning point, which had both positive and negative ramifications for Christianity. Satan was prevented from doing serious harm to the Church but his deputy, the Antichrist, was given licence to corrupt the church from within. Although he had expressed a negative view of Constantine, the Emperor was also celebrated for embracing Christianity and ending the persecutions of Christians.\textsuperscript{71} It was Constantine “who, and whose successors (except a few of short raign) maintained Christianisme and true religion, to the abolishing of Sathans publique kingdome: and therefore, say wee, this yeare Sathan is bound.”\textsuperscript{72} A similarly ambivalent view of the First Council of Nicaea can be found in the *Plaine Discovery*. Napier celebrated the council as an important step towards doctrinal and theological uniformity but also saw the council as central to the rise of the papacy. It banished Satan from the Church but only in an outward sense, opening the door to his representative, the papal Antichrist:

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. p. 149.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 145.  
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., pp. 62-3.  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
shortlie after this time, was the first publike and generall godlie counsell, holden by the Christians at Nice, in which the Apostolicall beleefe was published, the authentik Scriptures authorized: and finallie, the true Christian religion so receiued, that all satans outwarde opposition was banished, and his publique tyrannie and kingdom overcome: although yet, by his Lieutenaunt the Antichriste, euen then began his dissipulate and hypocryticallyal kingdome.\textsuperscript{73}

Satan was released when the sixth trumpet was blown, around the year 1296, as were Gog and Magog: “about the yeare of God 1300; were the armies of Gog and Magog loosed, and so Sathan was then loosed, to stirre them vp to battell: from the which 1300. yeares deduce the thousand years, that Sathan lay bound, and it will consequentlie followe, that Sathan was first bound in Anno Christi 300.”\textsuperscript{74} Napier celebrated religious thinkers who were active from around 1300, including Dante Aligheri, and latterly Jan Hus, whose works Napier regarded as precursors to the Protestant Reformation.\textsuperscript{75} Napier proclaimed the emergence of these figures was significant because the release of Satan was a necessary step before his defeat by God. Finally, he believed that the introduction of Jubilees into Christian practice by Boniface VIII around 1300 was further evidence that Satan had been released. These Jubilees were, according to Napier, of no relation to the true Jubilee years mandated by the Old Testament and were linked to pilgrimage to Rome for remittance of sins. They were therefore linked to the doctrine of purgatory, which was abhorrent to Protestants like Napier.\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, because Jubilees were at the foundation of

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. See also pp. 146-7: “Now after the primitiue Church had recieued and admitted these testaments & confirmed the same in the Council of Nice, anno Christi. 322 euen from thence forth the Roman and Papisticall empire hath trobled those scriptures of God, with humane traditions & superstititions, and so hath preuailed, and the true sense & meaning thereof, was as deade out of the world.”
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 62.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. This was a similar conclusion to one John Bale reached decades earlier. See below, pp. 231-2.
\textsuperscript{76} PD, p. 149.
Napier’s research and conclusions, it would have been important for him to distance himself from the usage of a term that had such implications.

It should be noted that Napier placed no significant emphasis on the millennium described in Revelation 20:6, when the faithful would reign over the earth with Christ for 1000 years. In the *Plaine Discovery*, this number was taken figuratively and actually meant, “for euer and euer.” This amillennial position was partially born from necessity; the chronology Napier had devised was incompatible with the idea of a thousand year long age of spiritual perfection. It could not have occurred in the past, which was portrayed by Napier as largely negative, characterised by corruption of God’s Word and persecution of His true church by Antichrist. Nor could it have occurred in the future, since the apocalypse was to occur in around 100 years. The only place this millennium could possibly ‘fit’ was after the apocalypse, which was by definition an eternity. As Napier put it, “this reigne of 1000. yeares... cannot be temporall... for by the grounds of Christian religion, that reigne is æternall”.

**The Day of Judgement**

The dating of the Day of Judgement was too important and complex a subject for Napier to only discuss in his commentary. His fourteenth ‘Proposition’ argued that, “The day of Gods iudgement appears to fall betwixt the yeares of Christ, 1688. and 1700.” He drew this conclusion from numbers taken from scripture, primarily the books of Daniel and Revelation. His discussion was striking because, before he provided evidence or arguments to support his argument, he attempted to justify his

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77 Ibid., p. 240. This was typical of the period, see above, pp. 32-3 & below, pp. 230-4, 275, 282 & 328-9.
78 Ibid., p.16.
attempt to date the last days. Clearly, he was well aware of the controversial nature of his actions.

The numbers on which he based his calculations were derived from an eclectic mix of scriptural and non-scriptural sources. First, he posited the idea that the six days of labour, followed by a day of rest, represented a total of 6000 years of human history because 2 Peter 3:8 had “a thousand years shall be as one day in God’s sight: and a day as a thousand yeares”. Napier asserted that this was believed “by the most learned”. The idea that human history would endure for 6000 years was also partially derived from the Talmudic Prophecy of Elias, which had been brought to the attention of Protestants by the many editions of *Carion’s Chronicle* that had been published since 1532. The prophecy divided world history into three ages; one before law or under the law of nature, a second under the law of the Old Testament, from the time of Abraham to the birth of Christ and the third under the law of Christ: “The worlde shall stande syxe thousand yeares and after shall it falle. Two thousande yeares wythout the Lawe. Two thousande yeares in the lawe. Two thousande yeares the tyme of Christ. And yf these yeares be not accomplisyed,oure synnes shall be the cause, whych are greate and many.” Napier certainly derived his interpretation of the prophecy from Carion, referring to the

79 Ibid., p. 18.
80 Ibid., p. 19.
81 Ibid., p. 18.
82 The original work was in German but Melanchthon soon translated the text into Latin. Many editions were published in several European languages. When the text was translated, additional details concerning the history of the country for which it was intended were often added. For a helpful discussion, see Skovgaard-Petersen, K.: ‘Carion’s Chronicle in sixteenth-century Danish Historiography’ *Symbolae Oslossenses* 73:1 (1998) 158-167.
One of the Biblical verses that profoundly influenced his belief in an imminent apocalypse was Matthew 24:22: “And except those dayes shulde be shortened, there shulde no flesh be saued: but for the electes sake those dayes shalbe shortened.” Both Napier and Carion used this verse in conjunction with the prophecy of Elias, declaring that the final age would be cut short to spare the elect undue suffering in the last, and most wicked, days of human history.

Carion’s Chronicle presented the idea that the apocalypse was to occur in the near future far more explicitly than the other texts that had influenced Napier. However, in attempting to predict the approximate date of the last judgement, Napier went further than even Carion had dared. Napier’s earliest estimation of when the Second Coming would occur, in 1688, was drawn from the Revelation. He claimed that the first of the three ‘Thundering Angel’s Jubilees’ was in 1541 and that they occurred every 49 years, which meant the last would occur in 1688.

His calculations from Daniel, which gave the date 1700, were slightly more complex. Daniel 12:11-12 had, “And from the time that the dayly sacrifice shal cease, & the abomination put to desolation shal be 1290 daies. Blessed is he that waiteth and commeth to the thousand, thre hundreth and fiue and thirtie dayes.” Napier had already established the technique of interpreting days as years and applied it here so that the 1335 days were assumed to represent years. He interpreted the abomination and sacrifices to which Daniel referred as the attempted rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem and the return to Paganism under the Emperor

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84 For example, PD, pp. 20 & 60.
85 GB, NT, f. 14r & PD, p. 19. Mark 13:20 has similar content.
87 Carion’s Chronicle, f. lxxxviii. “the worldes end is... not farre of[f].” See below, ch. 3.
88 PD, p. 21. 3x49=147. 147+1541=1688.
89 Ibid., p. 19.
90 Ibid., & see above pp. 115.
Julian ‘the Apostate’ in 365 A.D. Napier claimed that these enterprises were brought to desolation when, “God sent his thunder from above, and earthquake from beneath, and thereby overwhelmed both those chief Temples about one time”.\textsuperscript{91} 1335 years after the year of this supposed earthquake was 1700.\textsuperscript{92} In fact, Napier’s dating of this attempted rebuilding of the temple was incorrect. Julian died in 363, the same year in which the building of the temple was abandoned.

Finally, Napier reinforced this approximate dating with an interpretation of Revelation 14:20, “blood came out of the wine press, unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.”\textsuperscript{93} He asserted that these 1600 furlongs represented years and that the Revelation was written between 97 and 99 A.D. and that, by this estimation, “The end of the count shall fall about the year of Christ 1697. or the yeare 1699. which is betwixt the said terme 1688. and 1700. And so the difference of these dates is but small”.\textsuperscript{94}

One of the more striking things about Napier’s ‘Proposition’ on the dating of the Day of Judgement was the amount of text dedicated to justifying his attempt to do

\textsuperscript{91} PD, p. 20. The temple of Jerusalem was the only location in which Jews were permitted to conduct sacrifices, hence the connection of the site to sacrifice. See Deuteronomy 12:5-14. The idea that God had caused the earthquake and prevented the temple being rebuilt was common among Christian writers, who sought to demonise Julian for his apostasy. For example, see Sozomen’s \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} from around 440-443 A.D. Book 5 ch. 22, Reproduced in Walford, E. (Trans.), \textit{History of the Church by Sozomen and Philostorgius} Henry G. Bohn (London 1860) pp. 240-2.

\textsuperscript{92} Napier (\textit{PD}, p. 20) conceded that some Hebrew scholars claimed that Daniel 12:11 meant desolation and abomination were to begin rather than end. However, he argued that this made no difference to his dating, “for who was more horrible & wasting Abomination, than was the foresaid Iulian, that blood-thirstie Apostate, together, with his detestable, idolarous and magickall decrees, which publiklie he erected and set vp, to bring Christianity to ytter desolat.” Again, on pp. 20-21 he stated, incorrectly, that 365 was the key date: “in that verie same yeare, all the foresaid accidents occurred: for, in that one year both first the foundations of the Iewish Temple of daylie Sacrifice: as secondlie (in passiue sense) the said Temple of the Ethnickes Abominations in Delphos, were by thunder and earthquake both destroyed”.

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{PD} p. 182.

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{PD}, p. 22.
so. His main method of justifying his actions was to attempt to establish a scriptural basis for predicting the end times. The fact that he was attempting to predict the date approximately was a useful qualification, as he confessed that attempting to ascertain the exact date was forbidden in scripture. To this end, he employed a very literal reading of Mark 13:32: “But that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the Angels which are in heauen, nether the Sonne him self, saue the Father.” Napier declared, “let none be so base, of judgement as to conclude thereby, that the yeare or age thereof, is also vknowne to Christ, or vnable to be known any waies to his servants”. He believed that Christ must have known the approximate date and wanted his church to be able to deduce it in the future because, “he gives vs divers indices and foretokens, which hee could not, nor would not have forewarned, if he had bin ytterly ignorant of the time thereof, or yet minded that we should neuer haue foreknowne the age, and appearant yeares thereof, although the precise day and houre be onely knowne to God.” He even implied that to doubt that Christ had some awareness of the date of the last days was blasphemous. Referring to Revelation 12:12 he wrote, “seeing that the Deuill hath great wrath in these latter daies, and doth know his time is short, shal we say, that Christ shall be ignorant of that, which the Deuill doeth know.”

In Acts 1:7, Jesus told the disciples, “It is not for you to know the times, or the seasons, which the Father hathe put in his owne power”. However, for Napier, this did not apply to all of humanity. He believed that he was living in a time without precedent and that God had revealed the fact that the last age had arrived through the

95 Only one proposition was longer, that which sought to demonstrate that the pope was Antichrist. Ibid, pp. 41-9.
96 PD, p. 16.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., p. 18.
fulfilment of prophecies in the Revelation. The disciples did not live in this time and their ignorance of when the Second Coming was therefore understandable. Napier believed that many of the rules that had governed the interpretation of prophecy simply no longer applied because of his generation’s proximity to the end times: “God hath hitherto concealed these misteries from them whom the knowledge thereof might haue endammaged: yet that proueth not, that the same shall be hidde from vs, to whom the knowledge thereof might bring repentance and amendement.” 99 To bolster his claim, Napier made reference to Daniel 12:4, “Seale the book till the appointed time, manie shall gae to & fro, and knowledge shal be encreased.” 100 He believed that time had come.

**Conclusion**

Napier’s chronology aimed at consoling Protestants who felt threatened and persecuted by the might of Roman Catholic Europe. It was an attempt to impose mathematical order on events that were traumatic and appeared random. In this way it was nothing new. Protestant writers had, by 1593, spent several generations attempting to validate their position by casting themselves as God’s only true followers and their enemies as the reprobate agents of evil. What made the *Plaine Discovery* different to the works that preceded it was Napier’s combination of the sense of apocalyptic imminence from *Carion’s Chronicle* with the polemical force of the Geneva Bible. 101 He took ideas from various sources and combined them with his own, bold claims about when the Second Coming would occur and a rigid

99 *PD*, p. 16.
100 Ibid., p. 17. Napier’s translation of Vulgate. See below, p. 197 & 310.
101 See below, Ch 9.
chronology that seemed to lend a sense of mathematical certainty to his interpretation of prophecy. Events like the rebuilding of the temple and the reign of Vespasian had been discussed in relation to prophecy before but Napier’s great innovation was to incorporate them into a coherent, chronological narrative that was systematically constructed and easy to understand. To the modern reader, his chronology may appear cryptic and complex, but by comparison to similar works that had preceded it, the *Plaine Discovery* was a masterpiece of humanist simplicity and efficiency.

Napier’s chronology was successful, partly because it emphasised the transient nature of the suffering of God’s elect. One of the ways this was achieved was by emphasising the role of divine providence. This reassured the reader that all the hardships they and other Protestants had endured were part of God’s plan and were therefore worthwhile and temporary. Discussing the ten horns in Revelation 17:17, Napier told his audience that they were living at a time of change for the better: “although God made these princes, first to assist & authorize her [Rome as the Whore of Babylon] with one consent: yet now is the time come, in the which God hath decreed them to revolt from her and destroy her.” Most importantly for Napier’s polemical agenda, the chronology served to establish a framework within which to denounce the Papacy. As Antichrist, the papacy was cast as the chief antagonist in the grand drama of human history.

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102 These were listed by Calvin as alternative events suggested by various scholars as coinciding with the end of the 70 weeks. See Calvin’s *Commentaries on Daniel* pp. 410-3.

103 *PD*, p. 208.
Chapter 4 - Napier on Rome and the Papacy

I plaine proclaime and prooue by prophecie,
That thou, O Rome, raisd up on hilles seuen,
Citie supreme and seat of Sodomie:
Under vvose reigne our Lord to death was driuen,
And many Martyres rudely rent and riven:
Art Hiere and Eroy to the Great Babylone,
Whereby her name here God hath to thee giuen,
Thou whore that sittest the bloudie beast upone:
Thy daies are done, thy glorie now is gone.
Burnt shall thou be, and made a den of Deuills.
Flie from her then my flock, leaue her alone,
Lest that yee be partaker of her euills:
For doth at hand approache the latter day,
When Christes Church shall reigne with him for ay.¹

Taken together, Napier’s attacks on the Papacy, its seat at Rome, its secular allies and its church, occupied more of the Plaine Discovery than any other issue. The fervent, passionate and occasionally chaotic nature of these attacks indicates that they were based on Napier’s genuine sentiments. This chapter will argue that Napier’s intended audience, of whom he was acutely aware, was the most important factor in deciding his approaches to these issues. The belief that Roman Catholicism was the principal means by which Satan interacted with humanity provided Napier with a tangible target against which to direct the full polemical force of his work and gave meaning to the chronology at its core. It gave his audience an enemy or scapegoat to blame for all of their anger and misfortunes and told them that they

¹ PD, A8.r. Extract from a 26 line summary of the Revelation. More than half of the poem dealt with Rome or Roman Catholicism, illustrating the emphasis Napier placed on the subject in his work. The poem may have been intended to curry favour with the scholar James VI, a noted patron of the arts who wrote poetry and treatises on poetical theory. (A compilation of such works was published as The Essayses of a Prentise, in the Divine Art of Poesie Thomas Vautroullier (Edinburgh 1584) STC/346:10.) ‘Eroy’ was an alternate spelling of the Scots word ‘ieroe’ meaning ‘great grandchild’. For ‘ay’ means ‘forever’: DOST.
were God’s chosen people whose deliverance was a part of God’s predestined plan for humanity.

Napier’s approach to Roman Catholicism, the Papacy and Rome itself has much to tell the modern reader about his motivations and the context within which he lived. It also reveals his attitudes towards a plethora of subtly connected issues including the nature of kingship. One may also observe Napier’s strengths and weaknesses as a writer and researcher as he attempted to deal with the subjects, with varying degrees of success. He was not especially discriminating regarding which arguments to include in support of his claims, essentially using every piece of evidence he could find, even when this meant that he contradicted himself. Napier’s approach to the issues surrounding Roman Catholicism may be viewed as a microcosm of the Plaine Discovery itself because it contained the combination of derivative and controversial arguments and techniques that typified the work.

The Importance of Rome and the Papacy in the Plaine Discovery

From the very beginning of the book, the denunciation of the papacy as Antichrist, and its seat at Rome as Babylon, were the most dominant polemical themes in Napier’s Plaine Discovery. Napier called his commentary, “our discouery (wherein is contained Gods Iustice and seuere iudgement against the Antichristian seate)”. Moreover, the attack on Roman Catholicism emerged from the Plaine Discovery as the raison d’être of the Book of Revelation itself. The opening sentence of Napier’s work had, “our diuine Prophet S.IOHN, intreating here most speciallie of the destruction of the Antichristian seate, citie and kingdome doth direct the

\[PD, A5v.\]
execution of that great worke of Gods Iustice and iust iudgement to the Kings of the Earth”. Napier’s audience was important here. This quotation is from the Dedicatory Epistle to James VI and was intended to appeal directly to the King. Napier was telling James that the Book of Revelation, and Napier’s work by association, were of special relevance to him. He was one of the kings of the 10 nations that had been prophesied to bring about the destruction of the whore of Babylon in Revelation 12:3 and 13:1. Napier hoped to persuade James to commit to a more expansive policy of religious reform; appeals to his sense of importance as monarch were intended to expedite this process.

The decline of Roman Catholicism, destruction of Antichrist and ultimate fall of Rome, assisted by these secular monarchs including James were, for Napier, part of God’s revelation to humanity. These events and the chronology that told the reader they were predestined, validated the position of Protestants, reassuring them that their hardships would soon be over, and that their enemies would be punished. “Now, the last of the seuen ages being come, the Spirite of God letteth vs euidentlie see the destruction approaching of the great Antichristian citie, and Idolatrous empire of Rome, which hither to hath empired over all nations.” The destruction of Rome was portrayed as central to the narrative of the apocalypse itself. Again, addressing James, Napier wrote, “abide constant and couragious against that day of the destruction of that Apostalik seate and citie, in case (God willing) it fall in your time

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3 Ibid., f. A3r.
4 See above, pp. 73 & 112-3.
5 PD, p. 128.
but also in the meane time, untill the reformation of that Idolatrous seat to be preparing and purging your M. own seat and kingdome”.\textsuperscript{6}

Fear of apostasy, that Scotland’s Protestant Reformation might prove temporary, was also a key motivating factor for Napier. This was expressed first, not in the dedication to James, but in the introductory note to the general reader: “I haue but of late attempted, to write this so high a worke, for preuenting the apparant danger of Papistrie arising in this Iland”.\textsuperscript{7} Napier was using specific rhetorical devices to appeal to different groups of people. In this case he was appealing to the general population of Scotland and the wider British Isles rather than to individuals, reminding them of their collective responsibility to remain constant in their faith. As well as notions of salvation and doctrine, Napier was concerned by the perceived military threat from Roman Catholic Europe. The Spanish Armada was a recent occurrence and fear of invasion would have been palpable.\textsuperscript{8} The Armada was not simply an attempted invasion of one temporal state by another. It was an attempt by the Antichrist to crush one of the few remnants of the true Church of God: “These mightie marriners with their gret Galliasses, Venetians, Spanishes, and other of that Antichristian flote, who hitherto, and latest of all in this 1588. yeare of God, haue bene so readie at euery nod of their Apostalik step-mother, \textit{Rome}, to haue ouerwhelmed vs poore and true christian professors.”\textsuperscript{9} Thus, Rome was portrayed as the true commander of the fleet and Spain as little more than a pawn in the Antichrist’s plans. The coming final battle between good and evil would be led by Rome on the one side and Protestant nations like Scotland on the other. Ordinary

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., f. A4v.
\item\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., f. A6r.
\item\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., f. A7v. See above, ch. 1.
\item\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 223.
\end{itemize}
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people in these countries, like the audience of Napier’s introductory epistle to the reader, might have had to stand up and literally fight against the supposed forces of Antichrist in this impending war.

**Antichrist**

The idea that the papacy was the Antichrist was familiar to Protestants in the late sixteenth century and was the cornerstone of Napier’s attack on Roman Catholicism. It explained why the church had become corrupt and provided a justification for religious reform. As was usually the case in Napier’s work, this justification was absolute; to fail to reform one’s religious belief and practices, and the ecclesiastical institutions of one’s home country, was to side with Satan and his representatives on Earth. The portrayal of the papacy as Antichrist also explained why much of Europe seemed to be pitched against the British Isles, which might be taken to indicate that God was angry about the religious reform in the island realms. Since the persecution of the Jews in the Old Testament, God’s true church had always been in the minority. Napier’s chronology also reassured Protestants that the papacy’s rise to dominance was divinely mandated and that its decline was inevitable.

Within the *Plaine Discovery*, the conclusion that the papacy and its ‘kingdom’ were Antichrist was treated as an accepted fact and used to provide a foundation for additional anti-Roman Catholic assertions. The conception of the papacy as

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10 Luther, Calvin, Bale, Knox, Joye, Foxe the authors of the ‘Magdeburg Centuries’ and many others had argued that the Papacy was the Antichrist before Napier. See above, General Introduction & below, Part III.

11 *PD*, discussed the Protestant Church as the successor to the Israelites on p. 178. See above, Introduction & below, ch. 8.
Antichrist was so well established by 1593 that Napier felt free to use it as a piece of evidence for his more novel conclusions. This method distinguished it from the approach used to defend many of his other assertions, the evidence of which was built up gradually throughout the commentary on the Book of Revelation. However, he did need to first establish what he regarded as the proof that the papacy was Antichrist, which he did at the beginning of the book. Napier had written of the Antichrist in connection with the Papacy from the very start of the work but began his explicit argument in his 41st ‘Proposition’: “The Pope is that only Antichrist, prophecied of, in particular.”

First, he argued that many things exist that are contrary to Christ’s example and teaching and may therefore be termed ‘antichrist’. However, there is one that unifies and leads them all and the coming of this ‘Man of Sin’ was foretold in 2 Thessalonians. This figure could not be a Muslim, Jew or Pagan because they make no profession to follow Christ. Instead, the Antichrist must be a more subtle opponent of the Church: “he needs be a latent and not a patent enemie, that the spirite of God so carefully points out: and so no Turk, Iewe nor Pagan; yea, no plaine Wolfe must he be: but a Wolfe in Lambs skin, even an Antichrist vnder the name of a

12 Ibid., p. 41.
13 This was a technique used by many in the sixteenth century. See below, ch. 7 on Bale.
14 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10: “Let no man deceuie you by any meanes: for that day shal not come, except there come a departing first, and that man of sinne be disclosed, even ye sonne of perdition, Which is an aduersarie, and exalteth him self against all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he doeth sit as God in the Temple of God, shewing him self that he is God. Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you I tolde you of these things? And now ye knowe what withholdeth, that he might be reuiled in his time. For the mysterie of iniquitie doeth alreadie worke: onely he which now withholdeth, shall let til he be taken out of the waye. And then shall the wicked man be reueiled, whome the Lord shal consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and shal abolish with the brightnes of his coming, even him whose comming is by the working of Satan, with all powers and signes, and lying wonders, And in all deceieuablenes of vnrighteousnes, among them that perish, because thei receiued not the loue of the trueth, that they might be saued.”
Christian.” Napier referred to 2 Thessalonians again in his second piece of evidence, arguing that, “he must sit, saith Paul, in the Church of God: Therefore an alleged Christian must he be”.16

Napier’s arguments were complex and had many layers of meaning. Important conclusions were built on other, more fundamental, premises. His interpretation of the text dictated that the Antichrist must sit in Babylon, which Napier identified with Rome.17 Napier argued that so many papal policies were anathema to the teachings of Christ, that the papacy must be the Antichrist. This section appears unplanned and disorganised, making it jar with much of the rest of the book, which was comparatively well structured. This suggests fervour in the writer, illustrating Napier’s passion and commitment to the Reformed cause. He employed Matthew 24 verses 23-6: “For there shal arise false Christs, & false prophetes, and shal shewe great signes and wonders, so that if it were possible, they shulde decieue the verie elect... Wherefore if they shal say vnto you, Beholde, he is in the desert, go not forthe: Beholde, he is in the secrete places, belieue it not.”18 He asserted that Roman Catholics propagate the belief that Christ is in these secret places in, for example, the belief in transubstantiation: “Christ bodelie is that hoste, which sometime they carrie in procession in the desert & barren fields, to bles the fruits thereof; at other times they close it vp again in their secreet box beside their Altars.”19

Napier then set about criticising every aspect of Roman Catholicism that differentiated it from the Protestant interpretation of the teachings of Christ. This was

15 PD, p. 41.
16 Ibid. Napier did not identify the passage of 2 Thessalonians on which this argument was based, however he was probably referring to 2:14: “Whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to obteine the glorie of our Lord Iesus Christ.”
17 See below, pp. 159-62.
18 PD, p. 42.
19 Ibid., pp. 42-3.
a simple task because Protestants alleged many Catholic traditions lacked an explicit scriptural basis and they therefore provided grist for the Protestant polemical mill. He attacked clerical celibacy, the ban on consuming meat on Fridays and indulgences, which Napier claimed amounted to selling souls: “the Popes Clergy brought in pardons and indulgences, whereby they promise remission of sinnes and the kinddome of heaven, priuile and in effect therby, denying Christ to be their onely redeemer, and so haue they through covetousnes vnder fained pretext of religion, made marchandise of poore Christians, selling by such deuillish wares, even their soules to the Devill.” He also bemoaned religious persecutions and the meddling of churchmen in secular affairs, which for Napier typified the policies of senior Roman Catholic clerics. He also identified false miracles, meant to deceive potentially good Christians and encourage them to bow to the papal Antichrist. Much of Napier’s audience would already have found these differences abhorrent and in direct opposition to their conception of true religious practice.

Napier’s final argument that the papacy was Antichrist was that popes had allegedly done the opposite of what Christ taught, logically making the institution ‘antichrist’. He gave 17 examples to support this conclusion. For example, “Christ came so soberlie, and so meekelie, that he woulde not haue broken a bruised reede. The Pope came proudlie, ouerwhelming the most mightie Empires.” “Christ is the onely Mediatour betwixt God and man. The Pope makes and canonizeth his own saints, whome he cals Mediatours betwixt God and vs.” “Christ shed his blood once, that we may reign spirituallie. The Pope sheds our blood daylie, that he may

20 Ibid., p. 43.
21 Ibid., pp. 43-4. This was a dominant theme in Protestant polemical texts, see below, Part III.
22 PD, p. 44.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 45.
reign temporallie”. Of course, this type of argument appears fallacious in the light of modern scholarly standards. However, in the age of religious and political turmoil in which Napier was writing, the technique would have been far more effective. It may have been familiar to some of Napier’s audience, as he was certainly not the first to employ direct comparison between Christ and the Pope to demonise the latter. Whether familiar with the technique or not, much of Napier’s audience would have been predisposed to receive the argument positively because the idea of the papacy as Antichrist was already well established. There was also a kind of circular reasoning to be found in Napier’s work. For him, the chronology described above proved that the pope was Antichrist. However, the efficacy of the chronology, and associated arguments, rested on the assumption that the papacy was the Antichrist.

One of Napier’s strengths was his ability to pre-empt possible criticism to his thesis. 1 John 2:22 stated, “Who is a lyer, but he that denyeth that Iesus is Christ? the same is the Antichrist that denyeth the Father and the Sonne.” The pope, however, does not deny the Father and Son and surely cannot therefore be the Antichrist. However, Napier interpreted the text in such a way as to support his conclusion: “there be two denialls, the one in mouth and profession plainly, and that way the Pope seemeth a Christian... The other deniall is in heart and deed tacitely...the Pope

25 Ibid., p. 47.
26 For example, Luther’s *Passional Christi und Antichristi* of 1521 contained illustrations by Lucas Cranach the Elder, which directly compared the papacy to Christ. In one scene Christ was pictured driving the money changers from the temple beside an image of the pope sitting before a great table piled high with money generated from the sale of indulgences. See www.smu.edu/Bridwell/Collections/SpecialCollectionsandArchives/Exhibitions/Durer2011/Durer%20and%20the%20Reformation/Passional%20Christi. Accessed 12/01/14.
denies Christ, in that he establisheth other mediators... Wherefore, in effect the Pope denies the Son, and consequently both the Father & the Son.”

Napier identified the two horned beast in Revelation 13:11 as, “the Antichrist and his kingdome, it alone.” Revelation had, “And I beheld another beast comming vp out of the erth, which had two horns like the Lamb, but hee spake like the dragon.” Thus, the Antichrist must outwardly resemble Christ. For Napier, the two horns were significant, representing “double power, spirituall and temporal”. Speaking like the dragon was taken to mean doing the work of Satan and deceiving the ignorant with false miracles to persuade them to worship the Devil. Again, the idea that the Papacy’s corruption stemmed, in part, from its meddling in secular affairs was an important theme in the Plaine Discovery, and one that may have been familiar to Napier’s audience.

Napier and Bale on the Papacy

In order to bolster the view of the papacy as Antichrist, as well as enhance the efficacy of his chronology and generally defame the Roman Catholic Church, Napier identified several popes for specific attention. This provided additional evidence of the popes’ alleged wrong-doing and was intended to show how the papacy became the archetype of evil on earth. Napier’s main sources on individual popes were Bartolomeo Platina’s Vitæ Pontificum, to which he referred several times, and John Bale’s Acta Romanorum Pontificum, published in English as The Pageant of Popes

27 PD, p. 48.
28 Ibid., p. 40.
29 See below, ch. 7, on John Bale’s Image. There was a long tradition of anti-papal propaganda, often stemming from conflict between the papacy and Holy Roman Emperors, which influenced this line of thinking amongst sixteenth century Protestants. For an example of a source that had a demonstrable influence on the Plaine Discovery, probably through, Bale, J., The Pageant of Popes Thomas Marshe (London 1574), see following pages, on Cardinal Benno.
in 1574. Although some of Napier’s conclusions were derived from these two sources, the differences in style and content provide a window on the different historical contexts in which the works were produced and the writers’ respective aims and intended audience. Comparison with Bale is especially revealing because it shows how much more developed Napier’s sense of apocalyptic urgency was than that of his predecessors. It also highlights his attitudes to kingship and the relationship between ecclesiastical and secular spheres of authority.

Gregory VII is of particular interest to this study because Napier’s treatment of him drew upon Bale’s but diverged because of the distinct aims of the two writers, and the historical context within which they lived. Both portrayed Gregory, also commonly known by his birth name, Hildebrand of Sovanna, as an evil magician. Napier’s description of Gregory was clearly based on the one found in Bale. He wrote of Gregory,

When he list, he did shake down his sleeves & fire did flie out, in maner of sparks, and by these miracles, as by a sign of holines he deluded the eies of the simple people: And because the deuil might not persecute Christ openly by Pagans, therefore by this false Monk vnder a Monks habit, & shew of religion, he fraudfully preassed to subuert Christs name.30

Similarly, Bale wrote,

when hee listed, hee would caste of his sleeues, and skip and daunce in forme of sparkles, or flames or fyer, and with these myracles he deluded the eyes of the simple people, bearing them in hande it was a signe of his great holiness. And (sayth Benno) because the deuill could not openlye persecute Christians by Pagans, he practiced crafteyle to ouerthrowe the name of Christe by this counterfaite monke, vnder the colour of religion.31

30 PD, p. 175.
Such close textural similarities prove Napier had read Bale. However, Bale’s description of Gregory was far more detailed and helped form the basis of a specific tone in his work which set it apart from Napier. Bale was attempting to illustrate the authority of secular rulers over the church in the wake of the English Reformation and Henry VIII’s split from Rome. The mere fact that he referred to Gregory’s ‘treason’ against the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, speaks volumes. If the pope was able to commit treason against the Emperor, temporal rulers had the natural right to assert dominance over the Church.

Similarly, discussing Alexander III, Bale condemned the pope for his involvement in the affairs of the English crown. He described how Alexander declared that:


none should be king of England, vnlesse he were first called king by the Pope. This arose vpon the quarel betwenee the king and Thomas Becket, who so vexed and disquieted his soueraigne prince, with all the nobles and prelates of this Realme, with cursinges, excommunications, interditinges, threatninges, mowing both French kinge & Pope to molest the king in his behalfe: and finallye as then Pope Alexander played the incarnate deuill against the Emperours, so did Becket rage like a subdeuill against the ki

Thus, the killing of Becket was the result of Roman Catholic arrogance, which forced the king to exercise his rights as secular ruler. Bale was arguing that the Papacy’s influence over the English crown was tyrannical, cruel and lacking authority. Henry VIII’s split from Rome and the subsequent English Reformation

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32 Bale, f. 84v.
33 Ibid., f. 102v. Henry VIII had ordered the destruction of the shrine to Becket at Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, along with his bones in 1538. Thus Bale was lending his support to this action, and to the wider process of the Dissolution of the Monasteries.
were therefore justified and laid the foundations of a new, permanent, godly society. Napier’s stance on secular institutions was completely different. Whether good or evil, Roman Catholic, ‘ethnic’ or Protestant, their destruction was an integral part of the narrative that culminated in the Apocalypse: “the last dayes approaching, al the Empires and kingdomes of the worlde must be trodden downe, and Gods, and his Sonne Christes æternall kingdome, only erected.”34 His eschatology and historicism were based on works of people forced into exile by a tyrant and his Reformation had largely been brought about against the wishes of the monarch.35

Of Celestine III (1191-1198), Bale wrote: “Pope Celestine perceyuing the aduantage here of for his estate, was still vrgent to sende out the Christian Princes to fight for the holye lande, while he at home with theyr treasures buildeth for his ease & pleasure (as Platina mentioneth) diuers stately Pallacies and Temples.”36 Thus, in Bale’s work, even Roman Catholic secular leaders emerged almost as victims of the greed of the exploitative and tyrannical papacy.37 In Napier’s interpretation, the crusades were the result of the war between Gog and Magog and little distinction was made between the Popes who authorised them and the rulers who executed them. The secular leaders were the 10 horned beast, at least partially complicit supporters and maintainers of the papal Antichrist. Importantly though, Napier agreed with several of Bale’s assertions on Celestine, most notably his account of the coronation of Henry VI as Holy Roman Emperor and Celestine’s claim that “he had

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34 PD, p. 150.
35 See above, ch. 1 on the instigation of the Scottish Reformation by military force & below, Part III on the influence of the Marian Exile on Protestant eschatological thought in the British Isles.
36 Bale, f. 105v.
37 This reflected the influence on Bale’s work of anti-papal tracts written by supporters of the Holy Roman Emperors during papal-imperial conflicts. See above, p. 151 (n.).
Napier and Bale both regarded interference by the papacy in secular affairs as a sign of corruption that was vital in the papacy’s role as Antichrist. For example, Bale denounced Alexander III for becoming embroiled in the troubled preparations for the Third Crusade. He claimed that Alexander betrayed Frederick Barbarossa to Saladin in an attempt to have the Emperor killed, describing Frederick as, “a worthie and noble gentleman, in which there was no vertue meete for so princely a personage wanting”. Both Napier and Bale used the legend that Alexander III trod on Barbarossa’s neck to illustrate his Antichristian pride and claim to dominance over secular rulers.

An important difference between Napier’s and Bale’s interpretation of papal history is exemplified by their respective treatments of Sylvester I. As Firth has noted, the transformation of the papacy into Antichrist was, for Bale, the result of a gradual process. Napier, on the other hand, regarded all the popes, beginning with Sylvester, as Antichrist. Napier described Sylvester as the “first Antichristian Pope”, who “began the Papisticall kingdome”. His papacy represented an important turning point in human history. The so-called donation of Constantine, in which the Emperor supposedly transferred control of the Western Empire to the papacy,

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38 PD, p. 176. Bale wrote “I haue power to make and vnmake Emperours at my pleasure”, f. 105v.
39 Bale, ff. 98r-100v. Quotation from f. 100v.
40 Bale, 1574, f. 101r.: “Pope Alexander commaunded the Emperour to prostrate himselfe on the ground, and to craue pardon. The Emperour did as hee commaunded him: then the pope trode on the Emperours necke with his foote, sayinge it is written: Thou shalt walke yppon the serpent and adder, and shalt tredde downe vnder rhy [sic] feete the Lion and dragon. The Emperour distaying this reproach e aunswered: It was not sayd to thee but to Peter. The Pope then treadinge downe his neck againe sayde: Both to mee and to Peter. The Emperour then fearing some daunger, durst saye no more,” PD, p. 43: “The Antichrist the son of Perdition shall extol himselfe against al that is called God, so doth the Pope style himselfe God, and causeth Emperours and Kinges to kisse his feete. And Pope Alexander the third trod with his feete vpon the neck of the emperour Friderick Barbarossa”.
41 Firth, p. 50.
42 PD, pp. 56 & 8.
represented the beginning of the Church’s meddling in secular affairs and the beginning of Antichrist’s rule of the Earth.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, as the “first Pope or Bishoppe that reigned in Rome vn martyrred, and the first that euer possessed patrimonie, rent or dignitie”, he set the precedent of the papacy acquiring vast earthly riches.\textsuperscript{44}

Bale also saw Sylvester’s papacy as a turning point, but in a different way to Napier. In Bale’s work, the Papacy did not truly earn the title of ‘Antichrist’ until the papacy of the legendary Pope Joan. Sylvester was the last in Bale’s first group of Roman bishops, whom he celebrated as, “godly and faithfull pastours, farre from all wordly pompe and glory, either in pride of attier, as miter and pall, or hawty and ambicios title of Christes general vicar, but paynfull preachers of the Gospell, with all humilitie”.\textsuperscript{45} It was the second type of Pope, beginning with Mark and ending with Sabinius that became corrupted by material wealth and power, and began to pollute Christianity with invented traditions, “and so pecemeale began to plante and sowe in Rome the seade of Antichrist”.\textsuperscript{46} Bale did not blame the corruption on Sylvester or Constantine directly. In fact, he celebrated them both, while conceding that they were indirectly connected with the corruption they preceded. For example, he believed it was the greed of popes who succeeded Sylvester that caused the decline into evil: “Constantine, for the loue and zeeale whiche he bare unto the Church, did endewe the pastors thereof with many large benefices, ryches, and possessions, that they might with better oportunitie addicte them selues to preache

\textsuperscript{43} See above, ch. 3, for more on the Donation and its consequences as Napier saw them.
\textsuperscript{44} PD, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{45} Bale, 1574, f. 15r. However, like Napier, Bale pointed out that Sylvester was the first Bishop of Rome not to be martyrred. (Bale f. 23v.)
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., f. 25r.
the Gospel. But where as he gaued them an inche, some haue since stollen an elle, fathering upon him the forged donation for their supremacy”.

This is important because Napier did not acknowledge the possibility that the donation was forged in the first edition of the *Plaine Discovery*, despite the fact that this was well known before his lifetime. Clearly, the idea of Constantine’s explicit transfer of temporal power in the West to the papacy had a symbolism that resonated with Napier and provided too dramatic an event for his chronology to be excluded. Bale also discussed the First Council of Nicaea, declaring that its sole shortcoming was its failure to destroy Arianism completely. He went to some lengths to defend Sylvester’s reputation: “There are many, some indifferent, but moste detestable grosse and fonde decrees, falsely fathered upon this Syluester”. He also stated that,

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47 Ibid., f. 24r. ‘Elle’ is an alternate spelling of ‘ell’, an archaic unit of measurement. England 45 in. Scotland 37.2 in. OED.

48 Lorenzo Valla’s *On the Donation of Constantine* was widely published and translated in Europe from 1518. It is inconceivable that Napier would not have known that the provenance of the Donation had been dealt a serious blow before composing the first edition of the *Plaine Discovery*. See Bowersock, G.W. (Trans.), *On the Donation of Constantine* Harvard University Press (Cambridge 2008) p. xi: “By 1547 [Valla’s *On the Donation of Constantine*] was available in Czech, French, German, English and Italian. Its value for Reformation was immediately apparent, and it soon became an embarrassment for a church that had accepted it with equanimity a century before. Luther famously hailed it soon after von Hutten had made it widely available.” See below, ch. 5, for Napier’s assessment of Valla in the 1611 edition of the *Plaine Discovery*.

49 Robert Black has argued that the view that Valla’s work instantly destroyed belief in the Donation’s authenticity is inaccurate: “the Donation continued to enjoy the limelight of controversy well into the sixteenth century; the refutations by Nicholas of Cusa, Valla, and Reginald Peacock did not prevent the Donation from becoming a bulwark of orthodoxy for reformed Catholicism nor from being one of the *bêtes noires* of Protestantism.” Moreover, “belief in the donation continued until the eighteenth century”. Black, R.: ‘The Donation of Constantine: A New Source for the Concept of the Renaissance’ in Brown, A. (ed): *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy* Clarendon Press (Oxford 1995) pp. 51-85. Quotations from pp. 54 &72. Despite this, Napier would at least have known that the Donation had been called into doubt. He had certainly read Bale’s *Pageant*, which stated that the Donation was forged. He diverged from the overwhelming Protestant consensus in emphasising the historical importance of the Donation. Protestants had tended to embrace Valla’s conclusion eagerly because it allowed them to argue that the papacy had usurped the temporal power of the Emperors. Professor Black’s article provides a helpful overview of the history of attitudes towards the Donation and the Papacy, some of which bore similarities to Napier’s conclusions.

50 See above, ch. 3, for Napier on Nicaea.

although the miracles that are ascribed to Sylvester are contrary to Reformed doctrine, this was not the fault of Sylvester himself.\textsuperscript{52}

The Myth of Pope Joan was useful for Protestant writers like Napier and Bale because it provided them with a tangible link between sexual sin and the papacy. Napier included a description of Joan in a note on the alleged incest, sodomy and adultery of the papacy and used the myth to summarise all of the papacy’s sexual misdeeds: “the shee Pope called \textit{Ioane}, who was first called \textit{Gilberta} an English woman borne in the towne of \textit{Lyn} [King’s Lynn], who being two yeares and an halfe Pope, at last dieth in deliuerie of a child openly vpon the high street of \textit{Rome}, going in publike procession by the way to the church of saint Iohn de Laterane, & so made her whordom and filthines of her seat, patent”.\textsuperscript{53}

For Bale, Pope Joan was an important figure in the papacy’s complete transformation into Antichrist.\textsuperscript{54} He also used the fact that Joan was a woman to further the connection between the whore of Babylon and the papacy: “Lewis the seconde came to Rome, and recieued of her the scepter and crowne of the Empier with Peters blessing: whereby the whore of Babilon shewed her selfe so mightie that she made kinges stoupe vnto her.”\textsuperscript{55} Napier and Bale’s versions of the Pope Joan Myth are both derivative of Platina’s account, however, Napier appears to have had another source.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Ibid.
\item[53] PD, p. 138.
\item[54] Bale, \textit{Pageant}, ff. 56v-r. (erroneously has f. 55) Joan was the first pope in the fourth book of the work, “contayning the third order of popes, in whom Antichrist appeareth to be come toward fulnesse of hys wickednes specified in the 14. Chapter of the Reuelation”.
\item[55] Ibid., f. 56r-57v.
\item[56] Platina, p. 165. Bale’s account also closely resembles that found on pages 118-20 of Robert Barnes’ \textit{Uitae Romanorum Pontificum, quos Papas vocamus} (Basileae 1535). \textit{Carion’s Chronicle}, f. cxxxiir. contained a reference to the female pope. All of these sources asserted that Joan was born in Germany, whereas Napier had England.
\end{footnotes}
Bale’s history of the papacy as a whole was, compared to Napier’s, strikingly balanced. He was careful to point out that some popes were good, whilst others were evil. In Napier the whole institution of the papacy, along with the temporal rulers that supported it were the irredeemably evil representatives of Satan on Earth. Napier implied that temporal rulers who supported Rome knew it was evil but still sided with it for worldly gain: “The Kings, Cardinals, and rulers of the earth, who have followed her in whoring spirituallie after Idols, & haue led a careles life in all her worldlie pleasures... shal mourn in their heartes, saying Alas, alas, our cheife citie Rome, that great and mightie successour and daughter of Babel, for vnawares is come thy destruction.”\(^57\)

The different tones reflect the different contexts, purposes and audiences of Bale and Napier’s respective works. England and Scotland were separate realms, with different governments in the sixteenth century and this geographical difference certainly had a role to play. Bale was writing to defend godly princes against the tyranny of the papal Antichrist in the early years of the English Reformation. He would have hoped to contribute to a new, earthly, Reformed society, its members unconcerned with the date of God’s judgement but living a pious life, as if it could occur at any time.\(^58\) Napier was writing in terms of absolutes, not compromises. The papacy had always been evil and was the chief agent of Satan on the Earth. Any temporal rulers who had supported the papacy, including the monarchy that directly

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\(^{57}\) *PD*, pp. 217-8.

\(^{58}\) Like Napier’s, Bale’s works contained salvation chronologies. However, they were intended for a different audience. Williamson has argued that chronologies written for a solely English audience were designed to reassure, not persuade with fear of damnation or imminent destruction. They emphasised continuity rather than change because the concepts of permanence and longevity were defining features of the cultural identity of England. Bale’s chronology was intended to help the English come to terms with the dramatic changes that did occur by arguing that they had been foretold in scripture. See Williamson, *Apocalypse Then*, pp. 39-40 & below, Part III.
preceded that under which he was writing, were also evil. He emphasised the transient nature of all temporal institutions, whose destruction was imminent and whose role was to push on with religious reform to ensure their elect status when the Day of Judgement occurred. He had no long-term aims for Scotland beyond religious reform. His reformation was not about forging a new society with any sense of permanence; it was concerned with the urgent removal of evil before the world’s inevitable destruction.

**Rome as the New Babylon**

The portrayal of Rome as the successor to Babylon, described in the Books of Daniel and Revelation, was a dominant theme in the *Plaine Discovery* and was employed by Napier to several ends. Firstly, it allowed him to demonstrate a sense of continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The idea that the Revelation described, to a great extent, fulfilments of the prophecies in Daniel, would have lent the book an even greater degree of gravitas. Secondly, emphasising the geographical seat of the papacy gave Reformed, secular leaders a definite enemy on which to concentrate their military strikes as the papacy weakened and the apocalypse drew closer: a real war between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Europe might form a part of the final battle between good and evil. Thirdly, the inclusion of an additional figure of hate that was connected to the papacy allowed for a more complete and focussed interpretation of the Revelation. Scriptural attacks on enemies of God and His church that could not easily be manipulated to denounce the papacy were directed at an alternative but intrinsically linked target. Finally, the rich history of Rome provided events that could be tied to Napier’s chronology, providing further
evidence for the coming apocalypse and the conclusion that the papacy was Antichrist.

Napier was determined to ‘prove’ that ‘Babylon’ and the ‘Whore of Babylon’ in the Book of Revelation referred to Rome: “The Whoore, who in the Reuelation is styled spirituall Babylon is not reallie babylon, but the uerie present Citie of Rome.”\textsuperscript{59} Employing the idea of the Whore of Babylon would have also encouraged the reader to associate the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church with sexual sin and corruption. The use of direct comparisons was a useful tool for illustrating the respective qualities of scriptural figures. Satan was the opposite of God and the Antichrist was the direct opposite of Christ. Here Napier portrayed the Whore of Babylon as the opposite of the spouse of Christ, His true Church, described in Revelation 19:7-9.\textsuperscript{60} “In al things this Whoore, or whoorish Babylon, is contrarious to Christes holi Spouse”.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, the whore, the embodiment of sin and corruption represented the church of the Antichrist, with its centre at Rome.

Napier relied on scripture for evidence to support this view. For example, Revelation 17:9 stated that the seven heads of the beast on which the Whore sits “ar seuen mountaines, whereon the woman sitteth: they are also seuen kings”.\textsuperscript{62} As Napier pointed out, traditional accounts tended to present Rome as being built on seven hills.\textsuperscript{63} For Napier, the fact that Babylon had already been destroyed when the Revelation was written was conclusive proof that the text could not refer to Babylon.

\textsuperscript{59} PD, pp. 34-6.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., pp. 225-6: “Let us be glad and reioyce, and giue glorie to him: for the mariage of the Lambe is come, and his wife hathe made her self readie. And to her was granted, that she shulde be araied with pure fyne linen and shining. for the fine linen is the righteousnes of Saintes. Then he said vnto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called vnto the lambes supper.”
\textsuperscript{61} PD, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
itself.\textsuperscript{64} This was supported by the Vulgate, Revelation 17:5, which contains the term ‘mysterium Babylon’, which Napier interpreted as meaning, “mysticall or figurative Babylon: Therefore, it is not Babylon itself in Chaldee”\textsuperscript{65}

For Napier, the size of the Roman Empire made it the logical successor to the powerful Babylonian Empire.\textsuperscript{66} This supported the view that the Revelation described the fulfilment of the prophecies of the four kingdoms in Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 11. As a result, Napier reiterated the point many times and expanded on it significantly. He claimed that “in idolatrie, pride couetousnesse, and exceeding crueltie against the Sanctes of God, Rome was nothing inferiour to Babylon.”\textsuperscript{67} In fact, Napier perceived clues to the true identity of ‘mysterium Babylon’ in several scriptural texts and viewed them in relation to the Revelation: “as Rome it selfe is here comparable to Babylon, in that she succeeded to her Empire and impietie, so also here [Rev. 14:8], and in the 18. chap. hereafter, doth the Prophet S. John, in describing the fal of this Babylonical Rome, borrow the verie words of Esay [Isaiah] and Ieremie, describing the fall of Babylon it selfe”.\textsuperscript{68} Of course, this is a profoundly flawed analysis because it is predicated on the assumption that John was definitely referring to Rome.\textsuperscript{69} Clearly, Napier believed that he had provided adequate evidence for this conclusion to be accepted as fact.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 183. Rev. 14:8 “And there followed another Angel, saying, It is fallen, Babylon the gret citie: for thee made all nations to drinke of the wine of her fornication.” Jeremiah 51:7 “Babél \textit{hath bene} as a golden cuppe in the Lords hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nacions haue drunken of her wine, therefore do the nacions rage.”
\textsuperscript{69} Napier may have been inspired by the 1560 Geneva Bible’s Jeremiah 51:7, which had a marginal cross-reference to Rev. 14:8.
Napier displayed his talent for disarming possible arguments of his detractors by pointing out that Roman Catholics may argue that the label ‘New Babylon’ applied only to Classical Rome, before the city was sacked by Visigoths and vandals in the fifth century. He argued that Rome was still inhabited after these attacks and had not been completely destroyed. The same could not be said of Babylon, which meant that the complete destruction of Rome was yet to come.  

The Ten-Horned Beast

Napier cast the ten-horned beast described in Revelation 13 as the Roman Empire, granted authority to rule by Satan and held aloft by the Antichrist. Napier drew no distinction between the Ancient and Holy Roman Empires. “The great ten-horned beast, is the whole bodie of the latine Empire, whereof the Antichrist is a part.” This interpretation was undoubtedly designed to appeal to Reformed monarchs like James VI, whose countries were represented by the separate horns. These countries originally sided with the Antichrist but would later fight on the side of Christ, “which when Sainct Iohn wrote had not receiued their kingdoms, but should receiue their kingdome at an houre after the beaste, and then (saith he) shal they giue their power againe to the Beaste, and all at once shall make warre with the Lambe: but at length (saith he) these shal hate and destroy that harlot beast” Thus, military enemies of Scotland were presented as absolutely evil antagonists of the

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70 Ibid., p. 36.
71 Ibid., p. 36.
72 Ibid., p. 39. Rev. 17:12-14: “And the tenne hornes that thou sawest, are tenne Kingses, which yet haue not receued a kingdome, but shal receiue power as kings at one houre after the beast. These haue one mind, and shal giue their power, and authoritie vnto the beast. these shal fight with the Lambe, & the Lambe shall overcome them for he is the Lord of Lordes, and king of kings, and they that are on his side, ae called, & chosen, and faithful.”
great drama that was unfolding and as their opposite, leaders such as James had the potential to become absolutely good. To do so they had to continue to reform and rid their countries of all traces of Roman Catholicism.

The idea of continuity between the Books of Daniel and Revelation is also important here. The physical description of the beast in Revelation 13:2 was similar to the descriptions of beasts that represented kingdoms in Daniel 7. Daniel 7:23-4 described a fourth beast, which was predicated to be more powerful than any that have gone before and would subdue many kingdoms. This beast had 10 horns and it must therefore, in Napier’s estimation, be the same beast ridden by the Whore of Babylon in Revelation Chapter 13: The Roman Empire. Again, one may observe Napier’s appeal to James VI by emphasising the importance of kings in the apocalyptic narrative as destroyers of the Antichristian church.

As well as seven hills or mountains, Revelation 17:9-10 identified seven kings with the seven heads of the beast; “Fiue are fallen, and one is, and another is not yet come”. Napier interpreted these kings as representing seven forms of government of Rome. The first five – kings, consuls, dictators, triumvirates and tribunes – predated John. Emperors ruled during his lifetime and the seventh form, the papacy, was yet to emerge. For Napier, this interpretation not only provided grounds to attack Rome, but helped prove the accuracy of John’s prophecy because John could not have correctly predicted that the final form of government would emerge without some form of divine inspiration.

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73 Daniel 7:4-6 Described three beasts that resemble a lion, a bear and a leopard respectively.
74 PD, pp. 36-7. Daniel 7:23: “Then he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom in the earth, which shall be unlike to all the kingdoms, and shall tread it downe and breake it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall rise” Rev. 17:3: “and I saw a woman sitte vpon a scarlet coloored beast, full of the names of blasphemy, which has seven heads and ten horns.”
75 Ibid.
In Napier’s reading of history, the power of the Emperors had come from the pope since the Donation of Constantine. This tied to scripture rather well. Revelation 13:15 had, “And it was permitted vnto him to giue a spirite to the image of the beaste, so that the image of the beast shuld speake,” which Napier interpreted as, “the king of Romans. Who was not yet Emperour, but as a dead figure, Image, or shew of the Empire, til he solemnlie receiued the Popes injuctions, and did sweare to maintaine his profession, and then did the Pope crowne, inaugurat and confirme him Emperour of Germanes and Romans”.

As Williamson has pointed out, Napier went to great lengths to show that the contemporary Roman Catholic Church was the direct successor to Classical Rome in terms of its idolatry and tyranny. Napier described how the Romans “worshipped the devill in the idolles of Mars, Minerva, Ladie Fortune, and others”. It should be noted that Napier did not write of ‘a devil’ or ‘devils’ but the Devil himself. Polytheism, particularly involving idol worship was, for him, akin to worshipping Satan. It was within this context of devil worship that the papacy rose to power. “In this Empire ariseth the Pope... & he began his mightie power, by Pope Sylvester the first, about the year of Christ three hundreth and sixteene, and hath raigned a thousand, two hundreth and three score yeares.” This was typical of the way in which Napier frequently referred back to his chronology, hoping both to provide further evidence of the accuracy of his system and that the chronology would lend weight to his many conclusions. It is significant that Napier discussed “images of our ladie, the Crucifixe, Saint Paule, S. Helen, S. Margaret, S. Sylvester Pope, and

76 Ibid., p. 171.
77 Williamson, Scottish National..., pp. 24 & 157. This idea was made more explicit in Williamson & McGinnis’s ‘Politics, Prophecy, Poetry...’. See pp. 1-2.
78 PD, p. 168.
79 Ibid.
infinite moe Papisticall Idolles”, in the same sentence as Pagan idols. By doing so he strongly implied that the Roman Catholic use of images was tantamount to devil worship. He also reiterated his distaste for Sylvester and, to a lesser extent Constantine, whose mother was St Helen.

Napier’s emphasis on the idea of direct continuity between the Classical and Holy Roman Empires has not hitherto been identified: It must be understood that, in the Plaine Discovery, the Holy Roman Empire was the Roman Empire. The only meaningful change in religious terms was the Donation of Constantine. Since this point the Emperor had been subject to the will of the papal Antichrist. Revelation 13:3 described the healing of the beast’s wound: “and I saw one of the heades, as it were wounded to death, but his deadly wound was healed, and al the world wondered and followed the beast.” This healing was the beginning of the Holy Roman Empire, and title of Emperor under Charlemagne: “afterwards rose new Emperours againe, intituted [sic] of Germanes and Romans, of the which Charle-maigne was the first, and in them was the Roman Empire in a maner reviued and restored againe.” The new empire was not a new beast but the same beast, healed. “And so that imperiall state, that reigned before S. Iohn wrote, to wit, the gouernment by Emperours (after it had vaked from the daies of Augustulus in anno. 475 ore then three hundreth years) was renewed againe in Charlemaign in Anno. eight hundreth and six”.

This idea of continuity is significant because it illustrates the extreme lengths to which Napier was willing to stretch his conclusions. He asserted that Christ was, in effect, crucified at Rome: “Christ is saide to bee crucified in this Antichristian citie

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80 Ibid., pp. 202-3.
81 Ibid., p. 167. Napier wrote “Charlemaign came, in Anno 806” This is actually the year in which Charlemagne made provision for the empire to be divided among his sons but Napier probably chose it because it features in his chronology.
82 Ibid., p. 206.
of Rome, for four causes:”\(^{83}\) The first related to the doctrine of Christ as Divine Logos. Christ was the eternal word of God. The word of God, found in the Bible, had been corrupted by the Roman Catholic Church, “The Antichrist here, hath slaine Gods holie Word and Scriptures, by deprivving them of their true sense, which is their spiruall life, and the execution of this slaughter proceedeth from Rome.”\(^{84}\) Secondly, Napier offered a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of Galatians 3:1, “O Foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that ye shulde not obey the trueth, to whome Iesus Christ before was described in your sight, & among you crucified?” This, for Napier, meant that “wheresoeuer Christ is truelie preached and afterward despised (as in Rome) he is said there to be crucified”.\(^{85}\) Thirdly, he interpreted Matthew 25:41-5 as meaning “wheresoeuer Christs members ar crucified and afflicted, there Christ esteemeth himselfe to be crucified and afflicted... But in Rome manie martyres haue suffered death”.\(^{86}\) Finally, Christ was crucified under the Roman Empire and “the whol Antichristian and Roman Empire, is comprehended vnder the name of this chief metropolitan city thereof, which is Rome”.\(^{87}\) Thus the papacy and the secular princes that supported the institution were a part of the same evil empire that had killed Christ. Deicide had been added to the papacy’s litany of sins.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., p. 153.
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
\(^{85}\) Ibid.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., pp. 153-4. Matt. 25:41-5: “Then shal he say vnto them on the left hand, Departe from me ye cursed, into euerlasting fyre which is prepared for the deuil and his angels. For I was an hungered, & ye gaue me no meat: I thursted, & ye gaue me no drinke: I was a stranger, and ye lodged me not: I was naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shal they also answere him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or a thurst, or a stranger, or naked, or sicke, or in prison, and did not minister vnto thee? Then shal he answer them, & say, Verely I sai vnto you, in as muche as ye did it not to one of ye least of these, ye did it not to me”.
\(^{87}\) PD, p. 154.
The Number of the Beast

Napier was determined to leave the reader in no doubt as to what the number 666 referred: “The image, marke, name, and number of the beast: are of the first great Romane beast, and whole Latine impyre universallie, and not of the second beaste, or Antichrist alone in particular.” This demonization of the Roman Empire allowed Napier to present the Papacy and Roman Catholic secular rulers as part of a single, evil institution. He identified the ‘man’ whose number is 666 in Revelation 13:18 as Latinus, an ancient mythological king of the Latins. In Greek characters, this name is λατεινος: “The name of the beast expressed by the number of 666... is the name λατεινος only.” The Ancient Greeks often connected names and letters to numbers in prophetic and mystical texts and Napier correctly stated that, “λ is 30. α is 1. τ is 300. ε is 5. ι is 10. ν is 50. ο is 70 and ς is 200. which altogether make sixe hundred three score and sixe.” This was based on the work of Irenaeus; however, Napier appears to have deliberately misused Irenaeus’ statement. Latinus was, for Irenaeus, just one of three figures to whom the number might refer:

For if there are many names found possessing this number, it will be asked which among them shall the coming man bear. It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and zeal for the truth: for the name Evanthas (ΕΥΑΝΘΑΣ) contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it. Then also Lateinos (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence]. Teitan too,... the first syllable being written with the two Greek vowels ε and ι, among all the names which are found

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88 Ibid., p. 51.
89 Ibid., p. 51.
90 Ibid., p. 52.
among us, is rather worthy of credit. For it has in itself the predicted number, and is composed of six letters, each syllable containing three letters; and [the word itself] is ancient, and removed from ordinary use; for among our kings we find none bearing this name Titan, nor have any of the idols which are worshipped in public among the Greeks and barbarians this appellation. Among many persons, too, this name is accounted divine, so that even the sun is termed “Titan” by those who do now possess [the rule]. This word, too, contains a certain outward appearance of vengeance, and of one inflicting merited punishment because he (Antichrist) pretends that he vindicates the oppressed.

Irenaeus was more concerned with the methodology of identifying the man than actually identifying him. He emphasised the fact that he was not giving any definite answer to the man’s identity: “Although certain as to the number of the name of Antichrist, yet we should come to no rash conclusions as to the name itself, because this number is capable of being fitted to many names.” In fact, Irenaeus expressly forbade what Napier was doing: “Moreover, another danger, by no means trifling, shall overtake those who falsely presume that they know the name of Antichrist. For if these men assume one... when this [Antichrist] shall come having another, they will be easily led away by him, as supposing him not to be the expected one, who must be guarded against.” As a final irony, despite misusing Irenaeus, Napier attempted to add a sense of gravitas to his claim to have followed his methods by stating that Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who was in turn a student of Saint John. The method was therefore “receiued mouth by mouth by Sanct Iohn.” Napier had established an intellectual link between himself and the author of the text he

92 Ibid., p. 1374.
93 Ibid., p. 1375.
94 PD, p. 52.
sought to explain, the recipient of the divine revelation and personal friend of Christ.\footnote{95}

As well as identifying what the number did represent, Napier was careful to point out what it did not. For example, it did not mean a number of years because, “these be neyther the names of a man, neyther the names of the \textit{Latine or Romane} Empire, as is proued, that the name of the said number ought to be.”\footnote{96} Interestingly the marginalia in the Geneva Bible described 666 as referring both to a number of years and the name Latinus:

\begin{quote}
About 666 yeeres after this revelation ye Pope or Antichrist began to be manifest in the worlde: for these characters \(\chi\zeta\zeta\), signifie 666: & this nomber is gathered of ye smale nomber, \(\lambda\alpha\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\varsigma\), which in the whole make 666 & signifieth Lateinus, or Latin, which noteth the Pope or Antichrist who vseth in all things ye Latin tongue, & in respect thereof he contemneth ye Ebrewe & Greke wherein ye word of God was first & best writen: & because Italie in olde time was called Latinum, the Italians are called Latini, so that hereby he noteth of what countrey chiefly he shulde come.\footnote{97}
\end{quote}

John Bale had also argued that the number referred to a period of time.\footnote{98} His argument was overly long, unconvincing and lacking in polemical force. Napier’s analysis may have been derivative but it was also distinguished by his willingness to disagree with writers who had influenced him in order to bolster his conclusions and add more elegance to his chronology.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item This also speaks to Napier’s self perception as an intellectual successor to the apostles. See below, ch. 6.
\item Ibid., p. 53.
\item GB Rev. 13:18, note e. f. GGg.iiir.
\item Bale, \textit{Pageant}, ff. 37r-39v.
\end{itemize}

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**The Marks of the Beast**

And hee made al, both smal and gret, rich and poore, free and bond to recieue a marke in their right hands, or in their foreheads, And that no man might buy or sel, saue hee that had the marke or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

*Revelation 13:16-17*

But the beast was taken, and with him that false Prophet, that wroght miracles before him, whereby he deceived them that received the beasts mark, and them that worshipped his image. These both were alive cast into a lake of fire, burning with brimstone.

*Revelation 19:20*

Napier’s interpretation of the marks of the beast was convoluted and revealed further evidence of his willingness to be economical with the truth to support his arguments. His interpretation was predicated on the view that 666 in Greek characters was χξς: “The visible marks of the Beast, are the abused characters, of χξς and crosses of all kindes, taken out of the number of the first beasts name.”

However, this is incorrect and his argument was fundamentally flawed. The ancient character ‘stigma’, ζ represented the quantity 6. Napier was erroneously employing the similar looking ‘final sigma’, ς, which represents 200, and his three Greek characters would therefore have added up to 860.

He asserted that a multitude of crosses, including the Saint Andrews and Saint George Crosses and the Cross of Jerusalem were the marks of the beast. This was based on the fact that crosses had become ubiquitous in Roman Catholic Churches, in clerical dress and on religious rings, amulets and other accoutrements. He claimed

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99 *PD*, p. 54. χ represents 600; ξ represents 60; ζ represents 6.
100 Ibid., pp. 58-9.
that these uses of the cross were tantamount to sorcery.\textsuperscript{101} He contended that Christians being compelled by the clergy to daub crosses of ash on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday and wear crosses of palm leaf on Palm Sunday was further evidence.\textsuperscript{102} If they refused, “they wer thought to be Hereticks, and cursed from the communion of Christians: and these excommunicates... shal not be permitted to keep houses or lodging, or to make any block or bargain, or to occupie any traffike or trade or marchandize, or to have any society with Christians.”\textsuperscript{103} Clearly, these assertions fit reasonably well with Revelation 13:16-17, above, which prophesied limitations on the activities of those who did not bear the mark.

Napier argued that the Greek characters for 666 needed minimal manipulation to represent the word ‘cross’: “the two extreme letters respectiuely agreeing in one, and the final disagreance of the middlemost: to wit, betwixt ξ and ρ”.\textsuperscript{104} Thus Napier transposed the numeric characters χξϛ for the phonetic χρς, which makes the sound ‘chrs’ and bares an obvious similarity to cross, or the Latin ‘crux’, but has no intrinsic meaning in Greek.\textsuperscript{105} He appears to have done so for no better reason than their superficial resemblance. To bolster his argument, Napier added a dash above the middle letter, claiming that the upper part of the ‘xi’, ξ, that it replaced, represented the Antichrist’s crown, and the lower portion adequately resembles the letter ‘rho’, ρ, for the substitution to be effective.

Ironically, elsewhere Napier’s analysis did imply that ζ must have been a different letter to ξ. He asserted that χρζ represented the name of Christ, perverted by

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{101} Ibid., p. 56.
\bibitem{102} Ibid., p. 58.
\bibitem{103} Ibid. See Revelation 13:16-17. Napier stated that Martin V had instituted these rules.
\bibitem{104} Ibid., p. 56.
\bibitem{105} Ibid., p. 57.
\end{thebibliography}
“the second Beast the Pope & his Clergie”. The Greek letter stigma came to represent sigma tau, στ. Transliterated into English, this makes the sound ‘st’. Therefore, for χρϛ to resemble the word ‘Christ’, Napier must have been viewing the final character as sounding ‘st’ and not simply ‘s’.

Finally, Napier argued that each character of the number of the beast represented a cross individually. χ bares an obvious resemblance to a cross. Similarly he transliterated ξ to the Latin letter X, which, “is also a crosse, and these bee crosses asidewaies called S. Andrewes crosse”. Napier also stated that ξ, “the third and last letter is a double letter of abbreuiation, containing these two letters ς.τ. whereof the last is called a headles crosse, likest to the crosse, which they cal our Lords crosse”. Napier tacitly acknowledged the different properties of sigma and stigma, whilst also writing that ‘the two extreme letters respectiuely agreeing in one,’ and failing to account for the numeric differences between sigma or 200, and stigma or six. It is unlikely that he would have genuinely believed that stigma and final sigma were interchangeable. Far more likely is the conclusion that he could not resist the temptation to add every piece of evidence he could bring to bear, even when they were in conflict with each other. This considerably weakened his argument, making it appear confused and ill conceived to the modern observer. Misuse of Greek characters and Irenaeus also set Napier apart from scholars in the tradition of Erasmus. Leading humanists tended to prioritise a return to, and faithful analysis and
translation of, original Greek and Hebrew texts, and regarded the writings of Church Fathers as representing an ideal to which the Church should return.  

**Gog, Magog and God’s Punishment of Rome**

And when the thousande yeares are expired, Sathan shall be loosed out his prison. And shall go out to decieue the people which are in the four quarters of the erth euem Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battel, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

*Revelation 20:7-8*

Napier’s interpretation of Gog and Magog asserted that God had given ample warning to the papacy, which continued in evil and thus assured the destruction of Rome. Citing Carion, he concluded that Gog meant *tectum*, or ‘covered’ and that Magog meant *detectum*, or ‘discovered’. The Turks and other Islamic forces were the clear, uncovered enemies of God’s Church, or Magog, and the papacy was Gog, the hidden, internal, “couered enemie & a dissembling Christian”.

Napier referred to descriptions of Gog and Magog from the Old Testament to reinforce his conclusions. “Gog was of the tribe of Reuben, who was accursed for incestuous whoordome. So is the pope chiefe of that Romish seate, which is called the spirituall whoore”. According to 1 Chronicles Chapter 5, Gog was a descendent of Joel, of the tribe of Reuben. Magog is listed in Exodus 10:2 as one of the sons of Japheth: “Gog was an Israelite borne, the Israelites then being the Church of God. And as Magog was a borne Ethnicke: so is the Pope borne among Christians,

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109 The translators of the Geneva Bible translated the Greek and Hebrew texts to the best of their ability and did not change scriptural passages to suit their doctrinal agenda. See below, pp. 263-4.

110 *PD*, p. 60.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.
which nowe are Gods Church: And the Turks and Mahumetans are born Ethnikes.”

Furthermore, Napier stated that the Turks were descended from Japheth and that the Italians were descended from Tubal, of which Gog was named ‘chief prince’ in Ezekiel 39:1.

Gog and Magog were ideal characters to represent the papacy and Islam in a negative light. They were commonly seen as evil, destructive enemies of God’s true Church that were nevertheless opposed to each other. Napier cited several historical examples to illustrate struggles between the two forces:

Consider the progresse of Ottomans warres, and his successors Emperors of Mahometanes, and ye shall find the greatest part of all their battels, both intestine, and also against the Popes forces, to haue bene fought among Christians, and Gods holy Citizens. For Ottoman fought, and did win Bithynia, and much of the coaste side at Pontus Euxinus in the country of Asia minor, where these seuen Churches lay, that Saint Iohn writeth to. Then ottomans sonne Orobans fought among the Grecians, and in diuers Christian partes of Europe, and conquered Prusia.

This was important because Napier believed the rise of Islam was a warning to Roman Catholics that they had displeased God. God had displayed His mercy by allowing Islam to rise and warn Roman Catholics of His displeasure by threatening their dominance in Europe. By ignoring His warnings, the papacy had left God no option but to destroy Rome completely: “the Roman Empire reformed not themselues, nor amended their workes, neither left they their vngodlie & deuilish worshipping of alleged Saintes, neither their filthie idolatrie... but continued in their charmes and exorcismes and in ther vild Sodomie and horrible whoredome, and

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113 Ibid. By ‘Ethnickes’ Napier meant races of non-Christian Gentiles.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., p. 241.
repented not to decieue simple men, in stealing from them both their goods and their soules”.\textsuperscript{116}

In fact, God’s punishment of Rome had many stages, starting from the days of Nero: “when Peter and Paul & othere of gods servants had likewise suffered martyrdom vnder the same tyrant Nero, then poured out GOD his greate vengeance on him, his seate, familie and successours”.\textsuperscript{117} The revolt in Gaul, internal political machinations, civil war, and the instability that followed Galba’s reign after Nero’s death were all punishments from God. Similarly, the shift of the imperial seat from Rome to Constantinople and subsequent attacks by Huns, Goths and Vandals were part of the divinely mandated decay of the Roman Empire. Although both the Roman Catholic Church and Islam were believed to be enemies of the true Church of God, Protestants and Muslims were the primary agents of God’s punishment of Rome: “This Papisticall kingdome suffered great troble by Turkish dominators, and far greater by the Mahometane Emperours: and these troubles are passed, but now thridlie, and greatest of all, these Ministers of Gods trueth, arising in this age, since the yeare of God 1541. shall bring it to vtter wracke.”\textsuperscript{118}

It is important for the modern observer to understand that, to Napier, the destruction of Rome and associated bloodshed was not harsh or brutal. Rome was to be treated as her denizens had treated others: “they shall be killed by the sword, because they haue killed others with the sword”, “they shal be led captiue, because they haue led others captiue.”\textsuperscript{119} God had treated Roman Catholics with mercy by

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 133. See also p. 195: “And yet continue they still in their former impieties, idolatries and schismses, without repenting the same, or crauing pardon of God for their wicked works.”
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 112.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 150.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 222 & 223.
providing the papacy and secular rulers with adequate warnings. They had brought about their own destruction by ignoring them.

**Napier's Denunciation of Roman Catholic Doctrine**

Arthur Williamson has claimed that Napier represented the papacy as a ‘secular empire’. However, Napier identified specific aspects of the popes’ religion as anathema to God’s truth. By attacking these points of doctrine, Napier attempted to establish himself as part of the tradition of great Protestant reformers such as Calvin and Luther. He also underscored the defining aspects of Protestant faith and the practices and beliefs that his audience must avoid in order to confirm their elect status.

One of Napier’s major complaints with Roman Catholic doctrine was centred on the idea that clerics could grant remission of sins. As he stated several times, a common Protestant grievance was that Roman Catholics denigrated Christ by claiming that clerics and saints could mediate between humanity and God, but Christ alone had this ability. Roman Catholics emphasised contrition and good works, often accompanied, or indeed replaced, by financial contributions to the Church to achieve forgiveness from God. The Protestant rejection of this, and the associated belief in justification by faith alone which dictates that works do not contribute to salvation, is one of the most fundamental differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Napier’s emphasis on indulgences helped place him within the

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121 See above, pp. 149-50.
122 Napier argued against the efficacy of Good Works, *PD*, p. 87. He did however, argue that the elect will necessarily do good works because, “a working faith and faithfull workes are inseperable, and none can haue one without the other.” (p. 243.)
tradition of Protestant reformers, going back to Martin Luther. This was a useful
device for emphasising a sense of continuity in the *Plaine Discovery*, rather than its
novel or controversial aspects. Luther’s attack on the selling of indulgences is often
regarded as the first event of the Protestant Reformation, which made the practice
particularly reviled. As was shown above, Napier presented the use of indulgences
as tantamount to selling souls, and he returned to this idea several times: “they shall
bring in damnable errors, denying the Lord that redeemed them, and through fained
wordes shal they make marchandise of men, to wit, (as here is saide) by selling both
their poore peoples soules, and their owne soules to the deuill for worldly lucre”.

For Napier, the selling of indulgences was a stain that tarnished every level of the
Roman Catholic clergy. Priests who had successfully sold remission of sins to their
congregation later rose to positions of greater ecclesiastical authority, becoming
powerful exponents of Antichristian superstition: “thy merchants (chief sellers of
indulgences and soule wares) become Cardinals and Bishops, and great men vpon
earth, and with thy alluring superstitions, all people & nations were blinded and
decieued.” Thus, Napier presented the idea that the papacy perceived the souls of
the humble and ignorant, as well as rich and powerful supporters of the papacy, as no
more than commodities to be bought and sold by the church of the Antichrist. These
‘soulwares’ were traded to bolster the material wealth of the papacy: “soule wares,

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123 Luther’s first controversial work *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* was
written in 1517. Indulgences were particularly hated by Protestants because of their link to the
doctrine of purgatory, which lacked a direct scriptural basis and is contrary to the doctrine of
justification by faith alone or *Sola Fide*.

124 *PD*, p. 223. See below, pp. 269-70.

125 *PD*, p. 220.
which they and their marchants vsed chiefly to sel, wherby, they were so inriched, that thereby they were made able to buy al the former costly wares.”

Another point of Roman Catholic doctrine, which Reformers like Napier were keen to denounce, was the belief in transubstantiation. He ridiculed the idea that the substance of the host was physically transformed into the body of Christ as a result of the words of consecration during the celebration of the Mass. On Revelation 2:17, “To him that overcommeth, wil I giue to eat of the manna that is hid,” Napier wrote “that patent Manna, is not this hid Manna by transubstantiation, as the Papists do judge”. Napier blamed the Council of Nicaea, in part, for the belief in transubstantiation. He believed that the council placed undue emphasis on bread and denounced “certaine Godlie Emperors of Greece, who had demolished Imagerie”. Napier blamed the Council of Nicaea, in part, for the belief in transubstantiation. He believed that the council placed undue emphasis on bread and denounced “certaine Godlie Emperors of Greece, who had demolished Imagerie”.

In Reformed eyes, Transubstantiation was idolatry because, in Napier’s words, it amounted to “calling it God, that was not god”. Napier even asserted that the Bible contained clues that transubstantiation was a falsehood. He interpreted the phrase “one like vnto the Sonne of man,” in Revelation 1:13 as meaning that John had only seen a vision of Christ’s human form because His real body was in Heaven.

126 Ibid., p. 223.
127 Ibid., p. 89.
128 Ibid., p. 194.
129 Ibid.
130 Napier revealed his doctrinal affiliation by employing this argument. Protestants had failed to agree universally on the status of the body of Christ. Lutherans believed that Christ was omnipresent, and was therefore in the host as much as in anything else in Heaven or on the Earth. ‘Reformed’, Calvinist denominations taught that Christ was in Heaven with the Father and could not possibly be in the host. Nor was this an isolated instance in the Plaine Discovery. Napier asserted that the body of Christ was in Heaven several times. For example, ibid., p. 79: “his humanitie whereby he is the Sonne of man, is not here, but in heauen”; p. 80: “his Deitie sheweth not his humanitie, here on earth to his Saints, but onlie the likenes thereof (as saith the text) and so brings down not his real & naturall bodie from heauen while the latter day; therefore, his real bodie can neuer be in the Hoste, nor transubstantiate therein.” Note that the apocalyptic thinking permeating the Plaine Discovery can be found here. Many of Napier’s contemporaries would have been familiar with this thinking. Perhaps the most famous example in English that predated Napier’s work was in the so-called ‘Black Rubric’ that appeared at the end of ‘the order for the administracion of the Lordes Supper or holye Communion’ in the 1552 version of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer: "as concernynge the naturall bodye and bloud of
Napier presented Roman Catholic traditions as part of a two-fold attack, along with Islam, on true religion: “in the fourth age... this erroneous doctrine of... Mahomet... on the one part increased, & on the other part such heresies & new traditions are crept in & authorised by the Pope... so that the third parte of the light of gods truth that shined somtime in the primitiue Church is nowe extinguished, the oriental or Græcian Churches being seduced by the Mahomet; & the Occidental or latin churches, by the Pope of Rome.”\footnote{131} Although this may have seemed like the result of God abandoning His Church, Napier was careful to point out that the corruption of Christianity by the Antichrist was an integral part of the predestined narrative of salvation history and would therefore be temporary: “as for the outward and visible face of the pretended Church... it must be giuen ouer to the Antichristian and Idolatrous people”.\footnote{132} Napier was attempting to draw doctrine, denunciation of the papacy and a sense of chronological development and fulfilment of prophecy together into a single polemical argument.

**Pomp, Earthly Wealth and Sex**

The magnificence of Rome represented, for many Protestants, much of what was wrong with Roman Catholicism. They believed that opulent, decorated buildings did not bring one closer to God, but removed one further from Him. Temporal grandeur was transient, being based in the earthly, sinful and idolatrous. “And this imperiall citie injoyeth al the pomp and riches of the world... their temples and idols decored with pearls, and precious stones: for al the world paies tribute, vnto her, but shee

\footnote{131 PD, pp. 125-6.}
\footnote{132 Ibid., p. 145.}
communicated nothing to them again, but her poysonable doctrine, and vile allurements of idolatry.”¹³³ Napier deliberately used the word ‘temple’ as opposed to ‘church’ to emphasise idolatry and a complete departure from the proper way to worship God.

Napier produced a great list of earthly trappings that he saw as distractions from true religion including, “rich and costly Idoles, chalices, Paxes, & crucifixes, threefold crownes, myters, Bishops staues, and rings of golde, & siluer set with pearles, and all manner of precious stones, survplices of fine linnen copes, masse-clothes, and other vestiments of purple, of silke, & of skarlet, sierlerings, tabernacles and other ornamentes in Churches”.¹³⁴ He combined these physical objects of Roman Catholic religious practice with feasting at Christmas and Easter, which were not found in Scottish Reformed practice, which demanded a dour form of religious observance in which only services drawn directly from scripture were to be practised. “Yea, their confections of cannell and sugered spices, for their Christmas & Easter feastes, their delicate perfumes, odours, and costly oyntments: for their Pontificalls, their incence, roset and frankinscence, to burne in Churches, wine for their drinke, and for daylie masses, oyle for their extreame vnction, fine floure for their Hosts and masse bread.”¹³⁵ He was also sure to emphasise the dire consequences of these practices, again referring to indulgences as instruments of damnation: “finallie the pretended merchandise of the soules of men from hell and purgatorie, by soul

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 203-4.
¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 218.
¹³⁵ Ibid.
masses, dirges, pardons indulgences, remissions of sinnes, and such soule wares for lucre.”

In addition, Napier used sexual imagery to reinforce the image of Rome as the whore of Babylon, generally to illustrate sin and more specifically in an attempt to tie his attack on Rome into the wider context and chronology of the Plaine Discovery. He compared Rome to “a lusty Ladye” and claimed “That an Idolatrous citie is called in the Scriptures a whore, it is common, For saith Esay I.21. How is the holie Citie become a vhorse, &c. And how, more particularlie, this decked whore, and filthie woman, is interpreted to be that citie”.  

The Sibylline Oracles

Napier placed great emphasis on the role of canonical scripture in Christian belief and its pre-eminence over other human works. For example, on the two witnesses in Revelation 11 he wrote, “they are called Testamenta from the word Testis, which is to say, a Witnesse, as being witnesse of Gods wil all other doubtfull testimonies of men being refused, as testifieth Christ saying, I receiue not the testimonie of men, &c But afterwards hee saieth, Search the Scriptures, for they are they vvhich testifie of me.” For this reason, his inclusion of several extracts from the Oracles of Sybilla at the end of the Plaine Discovery may appear odd. Napier described them as “neither being so authentik, that hitherto vve could cite any of them in matters of scriptures, neither so prophane that altogether we could omit them”. The choice of

136 Ibid., p. 219.
137 Ibid., pp. 222 & 209.
138 Ibid., pp. 32-3.
139 Ibid., p. 273
words was very revealing, demonstrating again that Napier could not bring himself to exclude any evidence that supported his conclusions.\textsuperscript{140}

Their sole function in the \textit{Plaine Discovery} was to provide a final category of historical, if not canonical, evidence of the evil of Rome. Explicit attacks on Rome were largely absent from the last chapters of the commentary. It appears that Napier desired a final denunciation of the papacy at the end of his book to reinforce the issue in the minds of his audience. The Oracles had captured the imaginations of many sixteenth century Reformers due to their eschatological and anti-Roman content and Napier only included passages that demonised Rome and foretold her destruction.\textsuperscript{141} Those he selected contained very similar themes to those expressed throughout his commentary. For example the Seven Hills of Rome were a prominent feature.\textsuperscript{142} However, these were common themes and the extent to which the Oracles influenced the \textit{Plaine Discovery} is a matter for speculation. The texts were particularly useful because they dealt with Rome explicitly, rather than predicting the destruction of Babylon, which Napier interpreted allegorically. Perhaps most importantly for Napier, they lent weight to this interpretation, providing evidence that the Babylon of the Book of Revelation represented Rome: “Thou Babylon of Italie the Land: Who murthereth Saints and many faithful low”.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{140} The Oracles had been employed by both Protestants and Roman Catholics in the sixteenth century. Antoine Caron had adopted them to support Roman Catholic Orthodoxy in his painting of \textit{Augustus and the Sybil of the Tiber} (c. 1578). Napier may have been attempting to secure their status as supportive of the Protestant cause.


\textsuperscript{142} \textit{PD}, p. 273: “Rome raised on her hills seuen”.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 276.
The Potential for Roman Catholic Redemption

Despite Napier’s demonization of the papacy and those who supported it, he repeatedly appealed to Roman Catholics directly, urging them to repent and convert to Protestantism. “O miserable Papists, why goe ye barefooted, and barelegged on pilgrimage... The Lord open your eyes, for in this text among many moe, doeth the light clearlie shine.” One could argue that this type of direct address was nothing more than a literary device; however, the book ended with another, more detailed appeal:

In summar conclusion, if thou O Rome alledges thy self reformed, and to beleeue true Christianisme, then beleeue Saint Iohn the Disciple, whome Christ loued, publickly here in this Reuelation proclaiming thy wrack-but if thou remaine Ethnick in thy priuate thoughts, beleeuing the old Oracles of the Sibylls reuerently kneeled sometime in they Capitoll: then doth here this Sibyll proclaime also thy wrack. Repent therefore alwais, in this thy latter breath, as thou louest thine æternall saluation, Amen.145

This statement had two clear messages. Firstly, it made the foretelling of God’s punishment of unrepentant papists appear to be one of the Revelation’s central aims. Secondly, it told Roman Catholics that it was not too late to embrace the Reformed faith and confirm their elect status. Napier’s God was vengeful but also merciful. Despite the evils perpetrated by the church of Antichrist and the imminence of the apocalypse, there was still a century left in which to repent. Through writers like Napier, God’s message was to be revealed to the world as a final act of mercy; salvation awaited all who would take note. An interesting device used by Napier was to present the Revelation as containing “an exhortation to all true Christians to leave and renounce”, the Church of Rome.146 By implication, then, Roman Catholics had

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144 Ibid., pp. 239-40.
145 Ibid., p. 282.
146 Ibid., p. 216.
the potential to be true Christians. Again, there was a strong sense of urgency in Napier’s vision of religious reform; Roman Catholics had time to repent, but they must do so immediately.

**Conclusion**

Napier’s vilification of Roman Catholicism was a device by which he sought to rally support for the Reformed cause. However, he also employed Roman Catholicism as a kind of foil by which to accentuate the positive aspects of Protestantism. The more corrupt Roman Catholic doctrine was made to appear, the more untainted Protestant doctrine seemed. The more evil Napier declared the papacy was, the more justified religious reformers were. The more malevolent were the actions of Roman Catholic secular princes, the more virtuous Protestant monarchs like James VI appeared.

By the final chapters of the *Plaine Discovery*, a polemical model for denigrating the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy had been established. Even when the text did not directly attack a specific figure or group, the papacy fit implicitly into general assertions when read within the context of the book as a whole. The reader would be able to infer who Napier meant by, “the vnbeleeuer, and the execrable and abominable liuers, cruel murtherers, filthie whormongers, execrable Sorcerers”. The incessant condemnation of everything connected to the Roman Catholic faith led Lynne Gladstone-Millar to state that “The *Plaine Discovery*... is to modern eyes a curious mixture of bigotry, scholarship and humility.” However, it must be noted

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147 See above, p. 18.
148 Ibid., p. 245.
149 Gladstone-Millar, p. 30.
that Napier wrote that he had no specific agenda against Roman Catholicism and was simply attempting to explain the true meaning of arguably the most cryptic of canonical texts:

O Reader, in repelling of errours, and discouering the trueth, without partial loue to Protestant, or hatred to Papists, as to thishoure, neuer hauing recieued worldely injurie of Papist, nor fleshlie commoditie forbeing protestant: yea, I spare not in this work to blame, the negligence of such professed Protestants, as in these daies are waxed cold, carelesse, and without charitie: as againe, I spare not to purge and excuse the Pope and Papistes of some texts in this booke, which others applies against them: namely, in that (contrarie the opinion of many learned) I purge the pope from being the Apostat of the fift trumpet: And where soever I accuse the Pope by this work, by admonishing of his errors, & threatning the decay of his sect, seate and kingdome: I do nothing more thereinto, nor the very evidence of the text, harmony of other scriptures, and the truth of God enforceth me vnto.\textsuperscript{150}

The fury with which Napier impugned the papacy might make this claim appear disingenuous. However, by appealing to Roman Catholics to repent and emphasising the inherent mercy of God’s judgement, he did just enough to make his statement feasible. Napier lived at a time of fear, when religious and political upheaval caused immeasurable stress and when Protestants thought very much in terms of eternal fire and damnation or salvation, with no middle ground. Their sense of national and political identity was increasingly bound up with this sense of religious confessionalism and they judged other countries according to their religious observance. The extreme nature of Napier’s language reflected this atmosphere, and the need to urge James VI to adopt a stricter, Reformed doctrinal system before the imminent Second Coming.

\textsuperscript{150} PD, p. 270.
A great challenge to Napier was that the *Plaine Discovery* was not written with a single audience in mind. His book was written for James VI and for Protestants of the British Isles, to encourage them to embrace the Reformed Faith and galvanise them in their resilience against the Roman Catholic powers of Europe. It was intended for the barely literate and the learned scholar. It appealed to both committed and wavering Protestants, and to Roman Catholics, both at home and abroad. Attempting to appeal to so many groups and individuals created contradictions in the tone of the work. For example, the rise of Protestants such as Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin was a major turning point in Napier’s chronology. For the first time in centuries, the true Church of God could feel optimistic and content with the world in which they lived. However, an important theme was also the misery and hopelessness of the latter days: “Svch is the miserie of these latter daies, through self loue, and coldnes of charity (as Christ fortelleth) that every man envying other, aspires by reproaching his neighbours godly workes, howe godly soeuer, lacketh some one or other detestable calumniator and envious reproacher”.¹⁵¹ This quotation comes from the postscript, entitled ‘To the misliking Reader Whosoeuer’. It employed the threat of God’s imminent judgement to terrify his detractors into submission by telling them that their actions were evil and a predestined part of the apocalyptic narrative. However, this type of argument would have little impact on the more general reader.

The name of the book, *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John*, was intended to tell the reader that Napier was simply explaining the true meaning of the Book of Revelation and not offering his own interpretation. “I take me onely to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 270.
the interpretation and discoueire thereof, by coherence of scripture, and godly reasons following thereupon: which also not only no Papist, but euen no Christian may justly refuse.”¹⁵² This was a recurring theme in the *Plaine Discovery*. It allowed Napier to assert that, to argue against his explanations of the scriptural text was to argue against the word of God. Casting one’s detractors as simply evil was a powerful rhetorical device that was used by many of his contemporaries. Napier claimed that to use unspecified “blasphemous reproaches”, to criticise his work was to “borrowe... manifest darters of the Deuill, and armour of Sathan”.¹⁵³ This idea was prominent in Napier’s mind and shaped the way in which he dealt with detractors in the second edition of the *Plaine Discovery*. Finally, Napier stated that he had criticised the work of many great scholars, but that he did so out of necessity and without malice: “me, who reproacheth no man that euer wrote hereof: but judging them al to haue done faithfully as they could”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid., *Epistle to the Reader*, f. A7r.
¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 270.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
Chapter 5 - The Second Edition of the *Plaine Discovery*

The years between 1593, when the first edition of the *Plaine Discovery* was published, and 1611, when the second edition appeared in print, witnessed important changes in the religious and political conditions of the British Isles. The relationship between James VI and the Presbyterian Party had continued to sour. In December 1596, a group of Protestants were refused entry to an Edinburgh tollbooth to petition the king to limit the powers of the Roman Catholic nobility and a riot ensued.\(^1\) James portrayed the event as an attempt on his life and used it to justify a gradual change of religious policy.\(^2\) Over subsequent years, he sought to limit the autonomy of the general assembly and exerted more power over the Kirk. He alienated the more ambitious Presbyterians, not least by gradually sidelining their most prominent member Andrew Melville, who lived the final years of his life as an exile in France. James’s theories of monarchy and politics were published in his *Basilikon Doron* of 1599, which portrayed the Kirk as seditious and bemoaned the fact that Scotland’s Reformation had not been instigated by a godly monarch, urging his son to use a firm hand against the Church during his reign.\(^3\) Perhaps most importantly, James gradually reintroduced episcopacy, which enabled him to wield greater influence over the Kirk, delegating control to those who were better disposed to royal supremacy. By the time James ascended to the English throne in 1603, episcopacy

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\(^1\) The ‘Tollbooth Riot’ and its consequences are discussed in detail in Macdonald *The Jacobean Kirk*, pp. 69-73 & ch. 4.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 70.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 88 & Mason, *Kingship…*, p. 270.
was re-established and by the time the second edition of the *Plaine Discovery* was published, the Presbyterians’ vision for the future of the Kirk was all but dead.\(^4\)

The first thing to be noted in the 1611 edition of the *Plaine Discovery* is the omission of the dedicatory epistle to James VI.\(^5\) Not only had James failed to punish the Spanish Blanks conspirators, he had failed to fulfil hopes of Napier and his fellow Presbyterians. Nor was the second edition published by the royal printer, but by the prominent Presbyterian, Andrew Hart, who also published Napier’s subsequent mathematical works.\(^6\) Whether Napier excluded the epistle because he was unhappy with James, or whether James was unhappy with the *Plaine Discovery*, or indeed both, is unclear.\(^7\) Thus, the second edition was published when Napier was in a less confident, and more ‘defensive’ position than he had been in 1593.

Aside from the exclusion of the Epistle, Napier’s second edition was largely the same as the first, except for some minor changes in layout, some additional illustrations and an additional note at the end of the first section. The biblical commentary was almost identical to that in the first edition.\(^8\) However, the text was printed in a larger font and the work therefore occupied significantly more pages.\(^9\) The most notable addition was a new section at the end of the book, entitled A

\(^{4}\) Napier’s advocacy of an Anglo-Scottish union was not removed along with this epistle. His introductory note to the general reader continued to refer to the ‘Iland’ of Britain, implying he may have approved of James’s ascension to the English throne, as had his friend, Robert Pont. Napier, 1611, f. A2r. See above, pp. 25-8 & below, pp. 297-8.

\(^{5}\) See above, pp. 71-7 for a discussion of the dedication.


\(^{7}\) MacDonald has argued that, after the ‘Tollbooth Riot’, James increasingly saw those who criticised his policies towards the Roman Catholic nobility as ‘dangerous revolutionaries’. See *The Jacobean Kirk*, p. 99. Wishing to avoid suspicion as a traitor may also have encouraged Napier to remove the epistle.

\(^{8}\) For one example of a minor change to the content of the second edition see above, p. 127. This is the only substantive change to the content, which demonstrates the fact that Napier was happy with his original commentary.

\(^{9}\) 201 leaves. The first edition covered 154.
Resolution of certaine doubts, proposed by well-affected brethren, and needfull to be explained in this Treatise. Here Napier addressed several criticisms and queries that had been made of the first edition. This section is particularly important to this study for what it reveals about Napier’s personality and attitude to his detractors.\(^\text{10}\)

**Napier’s Approach to Criticism**

Napier made a determined effort to engage with his critics in a cordial manner, only addressing criticisms that had been expressed in a way that he deemed acceptable. As was the case for many of the techniques he used, he sought to establish a scriptural mandate for writing the piece: “we are bound and commanded with gentlenes and mekenes, to instruct all that are doubtfull minded, that they may know the trueth .2.Tim.2.23.24.25.26, And seeing there are certaine wel-affected brethren, who not in the spirit of arrogancie and contention, but in all sobrietie and meeknes, haue craved of me the resolution of some doubts... I haue thought good to write a Resolution of their doubts”.\(^\text{11}\) However, he also implied that there were criticisms that had been levelled against the 1593 edition to which he refused to respond, condemning those who revel in controversy: “As to the contentious and arrogant reasoners, I leave them to the mercie of the Lord.”\(^\text{12}\) This was a useful device for condemning potential detractors as simply evil and discouraging attacks against his work. Unfortunately, it leaves frustratingly little evidence to the modern scholar, and the nature of some of the criticisms that might have been made against

\(^{10}\) Napier also added some minor marginal notes to the main body of the *Plaine Discovery*, most of which either referenced verses of the Bible or alluded to clarifications discussed in this chapter, which reveals their importance to him and, in his mind, their comprehensive nature.

\(^{11}\) Napier, 1611, p. 333.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
him may never be known. For example, whether any criticism was made against his usage of Greek letters is not known. Napier did not name any of the people who had levelled criticism against him, whether he chose to respond to their queries or not.

**Criticisms Addressed by Napier**

The *Resolution* underscores how confident Napier was in his original thesis. He made no concessions to any of his detractors. Instead, he took the opportunity to explain that the criticisms against him were unfounded, or based on misunderstandings. For example, his first point argued that “the space betuixt one yeare of Iubilie, and the next yeare of iubilie is 49 yeares precisely, and not 50 yeares as some do suppose.” His explanation of why this was the case was simple. A jubilee is a period of seven sabbatical periods of years, each of which is seven years, which gives a total of 49 years. The confusion began when some people included either both the first and last year, or neither of these years, when calculating the date of the next jubilee, which gave a period of 48 or 50 years respectively. Napier explained that years between jubilees should be counted in the same way as days of the week; on a Sunday, the next Sunday is seven days away because the first day is not counted but the last day is. Thus between Sunday and Sunday, seven days should be counted, viz. Monday, Tuesday Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Napier’s clarification of this issue is unsurprising, given the fact that his friend and colleague

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13 See below, Ch 12 on Robert Rollock’s criticism of Napier’s attempt to date the apocalypse. Napier never responded to, or revealed whether he had read, Rollock’s arguments. The criticisms to which Napier did respond were relatively minor technical details that could be disputed in a comparatively short piece of writing. Moreover, Napier believed that he had adequately justified his calculations. See above, pp. 137-9 & below, ch. 12.

14 Napier, 1611, p. 334.

15 Ibid., pp. 335-6.
Robert Pont had published a treatise that calculated periods of history using Jubilees in 1599 and his answer was thorough and clear.\textsuperscript{16}

His answer to a query about the interpretation of the four kingdoms described in Daniel chapter 7 was also systematically argued and well considered. Napier hailed Immanuel Tremellius as a great man, but disputed his assertion that the fourth monarchy represented the Seleucid Empire.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, Napier asserted that this kingdom must have been the Roman Empire and claimed that this interpretation had been offered by many scholars before and after Tremellius.\textsuperscript{18} He contended that the Seleucid Empire was too geographically similar to the Greek Empire and that, according to scripture, the fourth kingdom must be truly distinct from the third.\textsuperscript{19}

However, Napier’s sixth ‘Resolution’ was unconvincing and illustrates his unwillingness to concede criticism, even when well founded. As noted above, in the 1593 edition, Napier wrote of the Donation of Constantine as if the authenticity of the document were undisputed.\textsuperscript{20} However, the document was widely considered to be a fake, especially in light of Lorenzo Valla’s analysis, written in 1439-40 and published in 1517. One of Valla’s reasons for dismissing the Donation was the fact that it was not mentioned in contemporary accounts. Napier argued that writers like Eusebius of Caesarea may have been unaware of the Donation, which seems unlikely.

\textsuperscript{16} Pont, R., \textit{A newe treatise of the right reckoning of yeares} R. Waldegrave (Edinburgh 1599) STC/349:07. See ch. 11, below, for a discussion of this work and p. 289 (n.) for Pont’s emphasis on the fiftieth year.
\textsuperscript{18} Napier, 1611, p. 346.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 347.
\textsuperscript{20} See above, p. 156.
given its momentous contents.\textsuperscript{21} He disputed Valla’s claim that the Latin was anachronistic and too crude for the document to be authentic, arguing that the version Valla was using must have been a more modern copy.\textsuperscript{22} Valla had also concluded that Constantine would simply never have given away such an important and valuable portion of his Empire and that Sylvester would not have accepted it. Napier implied that historical and Biblical evidence provided a basis for the kind of relationship Constantine and Sylvester were alleged to have had: “whosoever shall weigh and consider well the actions of all Christian Princes, and shall conferre the same with the holy Scriptures, they shall finde it most likelie, yea verie true, that both Princes haue giuen, and the Papist cleargie hath taken the substance of the rents of all kingdomes.”\textsuperscript{23}

Most importantly, Napier implied his chronology demonstrated that the Revelation foretold the usurping of temporal power by ecclesiastical authorities, which led to the corruption of the church. Napier emphasised the idea that God’s providential relationship with humanity was predestined and could easily be understood by carefully studying the Bible. To dispute the Bible was to dispute God, and this was both foolish and evil. Referencing Revelation 17:17 he wrote, “\textit{For God hath put in their [hearts] to fulfil his wil, and to doe with one consent, for to giue their kingdome vnto the beaste, vntil the words of God be fulfilled. Ye see then that Christian kings must giue their kingdomes to the beast, Shall we then thinke that the Emperour shal be free from this decree of God?}”\textsuperscript{24} Thus, Napier’s main reason for discounting Valla’s thesis was that it called into question his chronology, which was

\textsuperscript{21} Napier, 1611, p. 356.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 357-8.  
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 356.  
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 356-7.
the keystone of his overall thesis. Napier was arguing that to question his chronology was to question a fundamental message of scripture.

**Conclusion**

Napier answered criticisms of both his methodology and the content of the *Plaine Discovery*, asserting that he had been correct in every instance and conceding no point of any of the arguments against him. His confidence in his original thesis is illustrated by the fact that he made so few changes to the main body of the work in its second edition; both the ‘Propositions’ and the commentary on the Book of Revelation remained almost completely unchanged. His approach to the detractors to whom he replied was polite and gracious, and he attempted to answer their queries as clearly as possible. However, he uncompromisingly held to the belief that the world was divided into the followers of good and the followers of evil with no possibility of compromise or moderation. This was coupled with the conception that he was simply revealing the truth of scripture and that to disagree with his interpretation of the Bible was therefore to disagree with God. In his mind, these rigid beliefs gave him carte blanche to dismiss some of his critics as evil and refuse to engage with them further. The problems associated with the rigidity of Napier’s chronology are also further illustrated by the way in which Napier dealt with the Donation of Constantine. The fact that he did not mention Valla’s thesis in the first edition was a glaring omission and he struggled to produce convincing arguments against Valla’s claims in the *Resolution*. Napier’s technique of attacking the Roman Catholic Church amounted to using every piece of evidence he could muster, even if it was flimsy or
contradicted another of his assertions.\textsuperscript{25} The Donation of Constantine was too momentous a historical turning-point for Napier to ignore because it provided a definite point at which the church was corrupted by temporal riches and power, and became the tool of Antichrist.

\footnote{25 See above, pp. 170-3.}
Chapter 6 - Napier’s Self-Perception

Napier believed that alchemy was an esoteric discipline, full of power and protected by secrecy, that should be shared by a small minority but hidden from the majority of people.¹ In the Plaine Discovery, he portrayed himself as a member of an equally elite group; those who were chosen to understand and then reveal the last secrets of scripture in the final days of human history.² It is no coincidence that Napier regarded himself as belonging to an elite in his approach to both alchemy and scriptural exegesis; his attitude to these areas of enquiry was the result of a single religious worldview. The uncovering of hidden knowledge was a part of Napier’s historical application of prophecy, which formed the basis of the Plaine Discovery and demonstrated that his role was divinely sanctioned. Along with the Bible, the disclosure of biblical secrets was part of God’s revelation to humanity through latter day expositors like Napier.³ God had deemed specific individuals worthy vessels for His knowledge and used them to reveal previously hidden secrets to humanity in small, measured doses. Napier deliberately interpreted Daniel 12:4 in such a way as to justify his approach to scripture and sought to construct a connection between himself and the author of the Revelation, casting himself as an intellectual successor to the apostles.⁴

Intellectual power and understanding were common themes throughout Napier’s biblical commentary and he interpreted the text as representing the gift of knowledge or understanding in surprisingly subtle ways. For example, Revelation 19:1 had,

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¹ See above, pp. 86-9.
² See above, pp. 113-4.
³ Napier believed himself to be living in an age that differed from those that had gone before it. The rules that once governed prophecy no longer applied and his status as a revealer of hidden knowledge reflected this period. See below, p. 329.
⁴ See above, pp. 113 & 168-9.
“And after these things, I hearde a great voice of a great multitude in heauen”. Napier’s interpretation stated, “hereafter I considered, and beholde, the voice of the whole multitude and congregation of Gods true church”. Napier had changed the emphasis from sensory input, hearing, to the internal, intellectual process of considering. There were several other cases of this type of substitution in the Plaine Discovery, whereby sensory information was replaced with intellectual cognisance. For example, “he shewed me” was interpreted as, “the Angell let me to vnderstand”. Revelation 11:1 was interpreted as meaning the gift of divine knowledge: “And there was given me a reed, like unto a rod. And it was said to me: Arise, and measure the temple of God and the altar and them that adore therein”, became, “and there was power and knowledge giuen me straightly, as with a metwand, to measure the estate of things to come”. As well as changing the emphasis from speech to a gift of knowledge, this interpretative statement changed what was being measured from physical distance to the passage of time. This gave the text added resonance when read in the context of predicting an imminent apocalypse. Napier’s argument that ‘things to come’ could be measured ‘as with a metwand’, showed his conviction that the numbers contained in the Bible, when interpreted correctly, provided as accurate a tool for predicting future events as a measuring rod did for measuring distance. His system and the results it yielded were therefore as close as possible to mathematically perfect.

5 PD, p. 224
6 Ibid., p. 259 on Rev. 22:1.
7 Ibid., p. 145. A ‘metwand’, more commonly, ‘metewand’ or ‘meteyard’ was a measuring rod. The item was laden with symbolism, being synonymous with wisdom or judgement in many ancient cultures including Greek, Roman and Egyptian. Nor was the above verse from Revelation the only mention of such an object in the Bible. Ezekiel 40:2-3 described a vision of God holding ‘a rede to measure with’. In the British Isles, this symbolism lead to the practice of burying measuring rods beside corpses, a tradition that survived after the Reformation in some areas.
Similarly, the angel who bore the keys to the bottomless pit in Revelation 20:1 was presented as delivering the “power of God, to open and close the mysteries of hell”. Rather than hell being literally opened, the secrets it contained were being brought to the light of understanding. Napier ended his commentary with a quotation from the Geneva Bible, Romans 15:4, which emphasised the idea that scriptural prophecy existed to give knowledge and hope to humanity “Whatsoever thinges are vwritten aforetime, are vwritten for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might haue hope.”

In his Epistle to James VI, Napier implied he belonged to a tradition of prophets. He used language designed to establish himself as a prophet, especially when claiming that he was revealing secrets ‘by the admittance of God’s Spirit’. This is significant because, in Christian theology, God’s messages were traditionally transmitted to prophets through the Holy Spirit. However, Napier cannot comfortably be placed in the tradition of sixteenth century Protestant clergy who cast themselves as prophets, such as John Knox and the annotators of the Geneva Bible. They assumed that an essential component of the role of a prophet was also to preach God’s Word but Napier did not regard being a minister in the Kirk as a part of his prophetic status.

Despite his emphasis on knowledge and understanding, Napier believed he was able to reveal the secrets of the Revelation, not by virtue of his innate intellectual power, but because God had chosen to reveal hidden knowledge to him. He described the times he spent, musing over the text to little avail, “yea, the more

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8 PD, p. 269.
9 See above, p. 72.
10 PD, f. A6r.
11 See below, chs. 8 & 9.
subtily I searched, the more darknes I found”. It was only after hours of quiet prayer and meditation that God unlocked the mysteries of the Revelation to him: “And so, when after a long time spent, with little knowledge, I (justly disparing of my owne habilitie) became trulie sorrowfull and humble in heart, then it pleaseth God, (to whome be the onely glory) to giue me that grace, to espy in short time, that woonderfull ouverture which in long time before I could not considder”. This down-playing of his own intellect, combined with absolute belief that he was revealing God’s truth to humanity, manifested itself in fascinating ways.

Firstly, Napier used false modesty, which was a trope that had been common among Christian polemicists for centuries and was favoured by many humanists when addressing potential critics. In his note To the Misliking Reader he wrote:

> I graunt indeede, and am sure, that in style of wordes and utterance of language wee shal greatly differ: for therein I do judge my selfe inferiour to all men: so that scarcely in these high matters could I with long deliberation, finde wordes to expresse my minde: but this imperfection, seeing God perchance sendeth it, to make the greater perfection in humilitie, and to beate downe vaine glory, and that Moses and many great men haue lacked the eloquence of toung: I trust charitable Christians shall not disdaine me therefore, but rather amende the same in their own editions.

Although he was discussing his shortcomings, he speculated that these were gifts from God to help him avoid the sin of hubris. He also compared himself to Moses, which further emphasised his prophetic status, and implied that anybody who would treat him with disdain for his failings was not a true Christian.

Secondly, the belief that he was reporting God’s truth to humanity fostered unwillingness to compromise on any of his conclusions. He portrayed acceptance of

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12 Ibid., f. A6r.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 272.
his system of dating as vital to one’s salvation as a Christian and argued that he was merely elucidating the truth of scripture, not imposing an interpretation.\textsuperscript{15} To argue against his conclusions was therefore to argue against the word of God. Like many who went before him, he argued that there was no compromise to be made on matters of faith; one was either completely on the side of good or evil.\textsuperscript{16} This lack of compromise was exemplified in the 1611 edition, in which Napier denied the viability of any criticisms against the first edition, either by portraying them as factually wrong or based upon devilish pedantry.

Napier’s view of scriptural prophecy therefore had much in common with his view on alchemy. It was God’s will that the secrets of both things be hidden from the vast majority of people throughout history. However, the key difference was the fact that the secrets of the Revelation that he was bringing into the light of human understanding were intrinsically linked to the salvation of humanity. Napier believed that it was time for the privileged few, who understood what God was trying to tell his church and its enemies, to reveal the “mysteries of that holy book”.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 2 & f. A7\textit{r} & see example above, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{16} Napier (\textit{PD} p. 197) wrote of the “pretended Christian Neutralitie”, that he believed typified the last age of human history.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{PD}, f. A6\textit{r}. From Napier’s \textit{Epistle to the Reader}. See above, p.49, for full quotation.
Conclusion to Part II

The purpose and intended audiences of the *Plaine Discovery* can be identified by studying the text and comparing it to works that preceded it. The comparison with John Bale’s *Pageant of Popes* is especially illuminating because the tone, content and contexts of the two works are strikingly different. Napier and Bale’s treatment of the religious Reformations of their home countries and attitudes to their monarchs varied because of the different events through which they had lived. Bale had fled England following the passing of the Act of the Six Articles in 1539, which included the death penalty for those who denied transubstantiation. He believed flattering his king was the best way to encourage Henry to reinvigorate his abandoned policies of religious reform. Napier despaired of his monarch’s religious moderation and unwillingness to act against the Roman Catholic lords following the Spanish Blanks Affair. He believed emphasising an impending apocalypse and promising James a starring role in the final events of human history would expedite the changes he desired.

By constantly appealing both explicitly and implicitly to Napier’s audience, the *Plaine Discovery* became a mirror, reflecting their hopes and fears. With religious divisions increasingly dictating political allegiances after the Reformation, Europeans became fearful of a coming religious war. After the Spanish Armada and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish Blanks Plot, Scottish Protestants became increasingly convinced that this war was about to occur. The prophecies of the Book of Revelation described a huge, final battle between good and evil and this seemed to tie perfectly to the events that were being played out on the international and domestic stages. In this context, Napier’s assertion that there was little time in which
countries could secure their positions as allies of God before the world was destroyed made sense. The *Plaine Discovery* attempted to make the best of a terrifying situation, allowing Protestants to feel justified as enemies of the most powerful institution Europe had ever seen: the Roman Catholic Church. The book explained that the inhabitants of the British Isles could soon be saved and that their Reformations would have cosmic significance. It provided comfort by appearing to demonstrate that their minority status proved their position as God’s chosen people.

The *Plaine Discovery* also reveals much about its mysterious author. He had a clear conception of the correct literary conventions, which dictated how he approached his critics in the *Resolution of Doubtes* and his king in the dedicatory Epistle. He was also a man who wanted to both have his proverbial cake and eat it. He wished his work to appeal to everyone but was an elitist, directing his arguments to the King and believing himself to be part of a tiny group who were worthy to hold and disseminate occult knowledge. He compared himself to Moses, but professed modesty. He presented himself in the tradition of prophets but was not active as a minister. He was not judicious with the evidence he used, heaping every argument he could into his work and failing to perceive when this was a detriment to his conclusions. He employed the latest methods in formatting his arguments, including tables, and used Talmudic and mystical texts but failed to adhere to the ideals of Humanism by manipulating the Greek text of the Revelation.\(^1\) The final thing that can be said of Napier’s personality with certainty is that he despised religious moderation. This was because of the atmosphere of fear in which he lived, when people were defined as good or evil, ally or enemy. This attitude was present in the

\(^1\) See Reid, pp. 10 & 20-1 for more on the use of the Talmud and classical texts by humanist scholars in Scotland.
works the majority of Protestant polemicists writing in English in the sixteenth century and, above all others, reveals the extent to which Napier belonged to an intellectual and religious tradition.
Part III - Protestant Apocalyptic Thought in English before the *Plaine Discovery*
Introduction to Part III

Part III offers an overview of apocalyptic thinking in the British Isles before Napier composed the *Plaine Discovery*. It does not attempt an exhaustive list of works but discusses key texts that contributed to and represented the intellectual context within which Napier was working. It shows that the *Plaine Discovery* contained elements common to the Protestant texts of his age but also how far Napier departed from them in some of his innovations. For example, the rigidity of Napier’s chronology of salvation history clearly distinguished it from preceding works.

The books being discussed have been selected for specific reasons to reveal their influence upon the *Plaine Discovery*. Without Bale, Napier’s approach to exegesis would have been very different because he established the framework for eschatological and exegetical texts in the English language. The religious and political climate in which Napier lived was shaped by the writings, sermons and career of John Knox. The 1560 Geneva Bible provided Napier with the Biblical text on which his commentary was based and influenced his passionate polemical style. James VI’s pamphlet on Revelation suggested to Napier how best to direct his work towards the king and spoke to a new sense of unity that existed in the British Isles.¹

Certain themes were common to all of these texts. They promoted the idea that no compromise was possible in matters of religion; that absolute good was pitted against absolute evil and that to deviate from the message of the Bible was to follow Satan. They regarded selected historical events as fulfilments of Biblical prophecy. The coming judgement of God was used as a device to promote adherence to

Protestant teaching and pious behaviour, employing the notion of ‘end times’ to console Protestants and encourage Roman Catholics to convert and repent. The authors interpreted scripture in ways that highlighted themselves and those who shared their vocation or approach to religious reform. They all concluded that it was impossible for humans to know when the Day of Judgement and apocalypse would occur. Though he rejected this final, important point, the rest of these themes were found in Napier’s work. While the Plaine Discovery belonged very much to an intellectual tradition, Napier was an original thinker, confident enough to propose extremely controversial ideas.

This chapter does not offer an analysis of John Foxe’s Actes and Monuments. Unlike Bale and the Geneva Bible, Foxe does not appear to have influenced Napier directly and, unlike Knox, Foxe did not make a major contribution to the religious conditions in Scotland during Napier’s lifetime. In fact, Napier appears to have ignored the Acts and Monuments and there is no evidence in the Plaine Discovery that Napier had even read the book, though Napier had surely heard of the famous work. Foxe’s views on the apocalypse and the historical application of scripture differed greatly from those found in Napier but there are several superficial similarities between the texts.²

Like Napier, Foxe connected the ending of persecutions of Christians by the Roman Empire under Constantine as fulfilling the prophecy of the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:2.³ However, Napier identified the release of Satan as coinciding with the papacy of Boniface VIII, whereas Foxe highlighted Innocent III’s

² For a comparison between Foxe and Napier see, Olsen, V.N., John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church University of California Press (Berkeley 1973), pp. 74-7.
persecution of heretics, probably referring to the Albigensian Crusade.⁴ Although Napier’s dating of this period was closer to Foxe, his interpretation of the character of the period was closer to Bale, who saw the 1000 years as a period of increasing corruption in which Satan was nevertheless unable to tyrannise and reign over the elect.⁵ Foxe, on the other hand, regarded the Catholic Church as the true church of Christ until the papacy of the often-demonized Pope Gregory VII, a vastly different approach to Napier, who portrayed the Roman Church as the Church of Antichrist from the fourth century.⁶

Another similarity was in Foxe and Napier’s interpretation of Revelation 9:14. Foxe wrote: “By losing the Angels which had rule of the great river Euphrates, is signified the letting out of the East Kings, that is, the Turkes, out of Scithia, Tartaria, Persia, and Arabia, by whome the third part of Christendome shall be destroyed, as we see it this day hath come to passe.”⁷ Napier too interpreted this passage as referring to four Islamic peoples but listed the four angels as “Saracens, Turks, Tartarians, and Arabians.”⁸ Foxe interpreted the destruction of ‘the third part of men’ in Revelation 9:15 as meaning that these forces destroyed one third of Christendom, whereas Napier claimed they subdued “all Asia, and much of Europe, even about the third part of the world.”⁹ Of course, the idea that these destructive angels represented Muslims was a common interpretation of Revelation 9 in an age when Christians hated and feared the Islamic world. Napier’s interpretation was, without

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⁵ Fairfield p. 153.
⁶ Ibid., pp. 153-4 & see above pp. 151-2 for more on Gregory VII.
⁸ PD, p. 131.
⁹ Ibid., p. 132.
doubt, derived from the 1560 Geneva Bible, which identified the four angels as “enemies of the East Countrey, which shulde afflict the Church of God, as did the Arabians, Sarasines, Turkes and Tartarians.”

Thus, though there are similarities between Napier and Foxe, the details tend to vary significantly enough to imply that they simply had a similar set of influences. The type of linguistic similarities that exist between the works of Bale and Napier do not exist between the *Plaine Discovery* and the *Acts and Monuments*. Moreover, for every similarity between Foxe and Napier, there are numerous differences. As Firth noted, this may have been due to the fact that Foxe became increasingly influenced by Calvin and Erasmus as his great work passed through four editions. Napier, on the other hand, was more heavily influenced by Bale and the Geneva Bible. Napier and Foxe’s respective stances on the issue of Constantine as a model for British imperialism have been compared in modern scholarship. The two men had vastly different ideas of monarchy because they lived in different countries and different ages. Foxe’s Protestant Reformation had been sparked by the monarch, whereas Napier’s had been forced through from below as a result of resistance to the monarchy. Napier’s vision of the future was also vastly different to Foxe’s because he believed that all monarchies and temporal authorities would soon be destroyed in the apocalypse, making secular princes intrinsically less important in the scheme he proposed. However, just because Napier’s position on monarchies differed from Foxe’s, it does not necessarily follow that he was directly disputing the Englishman’s position and it is more likely that he was simply drawing upon the conclusions of

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10 GB, Rev. 9:14 (note a) N.T. 118v.
11 Firth, p. 77.
12 See above, pp. 25-8.
Bale. Napier mentioned several works with which he engaged, by Scaliger, Carion and Bale, but he made no mention of Foxe and, for whatever reason, he seems to have overlooked, or at least failed to engage with, the *Acts and Monuments*. 
Chapter 7 - John Bale – The Image of Both Churches

John Bale’s *Image of Both Churches* (1545) was written in exile during Henry VIII’s persecution of Protestant radicals. The work was similar in content to Bale’s *Pageant of Popes*, discussed above. However, the *Image* warrants specific attention because, like the *Plaine Discovery*, it was based around a chronology developed from the Book of Revelation. Furthermore, it broke new ground in its polemical and exegetical techniques and was highly influential within the British Isles. It was the first book in English to propose an explicit chronology of salvation history based on the Book of Revelation. Bale’s genius was to combine the chronological structure of Barnes’s *Vitae Romanorum Pontificum* with the portrayal of historical events as fulfilments of biblical prophecy.¹ In the text Bale set the tone for future Protestant works that applied biblical prophecy to historical events. He established the linguistic and methodological frameworks for formulating chronologies based on scripture that were used over the subsequent decades by many writers, including Napier.

Bale presented human history in terms of a constant battle between two churches. The true church of God was represented by Protestants, which would eventually triumph over the false church of Antichrist, represented by Roman Catholics. Though these are similar themes to those explored by Napier, there are important differences between the *Image* and the *Plaine Discovery*. A comparison of the two texts reveals both Napier’s debt to Bale and the originality of his analysis, as well as the distinct aims of the two writers. Bale employed the idea of God’s judgement to encourage his audience to comply with his vision of true religion. Unlike Napier though, he offered no real indication of when this might occur. Implicit in his vision for reform was a

¹ Fairfield, pp. 56-7.
sense of longevity that was incompatible with the idea that the world would soon end. He also promoted the idea that the church must be subservient to the rule of monarchy. This was dictated by the context of the Henrician Reformation, when the king asserted his dominance over the ecclesiastical arena, and was a view that Napier never shared. This chapter explores Bale’s approach to the Revelation, discussing his interpretation of historical events as fulfilments of biblical prophecy in chronological order, emphasising the Image’s points of contrast to Napier’s chronology.

**Bale’s Approach to the Revelation**

John Bale presented the Book of Revelation as a summary of the entire Bible: “Not one necessary poynt of belief is in all the other scriptures, that is not heere also in one place or other. The very complet summe and whole knitting vp is in this heauenly booke of the vnyuersall verities of the Bible.”¹ Like Napier, he appreciated the value of the text to polemical writers seeking to admonish the public to remain constant in their faith: “No where are heresies more earnestly condempned, blasphemous vices more vehemently rebuked, nor yet their iuste plagues more fiercelye threatened, then in this compendious worke.”² Bale perceived a sense of progression throughout the Bible, so that the New Testament superseded the Old, and the prophecies in the Revelation superseded those made in previous books.³ “A prophecye is this Apocalips called, and is much more excellent then all the other prophecies. Lyke as the lyght is more precious then the shadowe,... the new

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² Ibid., f. Aiir.
³ Note how this standpoint differed from that of Knox, discussed below in ch. 8.
testament then the olde, and the gospell then the lawe, so is this holy oracle more precious then they.”

Bale also understood the Book of Revelation’s potential to provide consolation for Protestants who perceived the Roman Catholic Church as a threatening, oppressive force: “Consider the dignytie and worthinesse of this most precious Jewel that the Lord hath left here to our consolation.”

Consolation derived from the belief that Protestants were the contemporary manifestation of the true Church of God that had existed throughout human history as a persecuted minority or faithful remnant: “For besides all that is afore expressed, it containeth the universal troubles, persecutions and crosses, that the church suffered in the primatyue spring, what it suffereth now, and what it shall suffer in the latter tymes by the subtile satellytes of Antichrist which are ye cruell members of Sathan.” The suffering of this Church was mandated by God in the Old Testament, through the oppression of the Israelites, for example, during the Babylonian captivity. Thus, the suffering of Protestants proved that they were God’s chosen people, whose oppression was part of an established framework of God’s providential relationship with humanity. Most importantly, the Old Testament, combined with the Protestant interpretation of the Book of Revelation, demonstrated that Protestants’ deliverance from suffering and ultimate salvation were inevitable facets of this framework.

In Bale’s Image, as in his Pageant of Popes, the Church of Rome’s corruption stemmed largely from its meddling in secular affairs. This conclusion was common in sixteenth century Protestant works, including the Plaine Discovery. It held special

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5 Bale, Image, f. Aivv.
6 Ibid., f. Aiiir.
7 Ibid., f. Aivv.
resonance for Bale, who was writing within the context of Henry VIII’s 1534 Act of Supremacy. The *Image* was written in exile as a result of Henry’s conservatism following the 1539 Act of the Six Articles. Bale was careful to refrain from writing anything that might be construed as seditious. He wished to return to England and press for a more extensive programme of religious reform and so he did not want to appear extreme or opposed to the royal supremacy. His approach to the monarch was therefore very different to the stance that Napier would later come to take. In the *Image*, Bale combined gentle flattery and praise of the Henrician Reformation, with the hope that more religious reform would follow.

Finally, as Fairfield has noted, the fact that Bale was writing the *Image* far from his native land helped shape his attitude to the Book of Revelation, which was also ostensibly written in exile. He identified with the text on a personal level, writing, “Of such a nature is ye message of this boke & the other contentes therof, that from no place is it sent more freely, opened more cleerly, not tolde foorth more boldely, than out of exyle.”

### Bale’s Chronology

#### Seven Seals

The most fundamental way in which Bale’s chronology differed from Napier’s was that it was derived almost entirely from the seven seals in Revelation 5 to 8. The trumpets and vials, described respectively in chapters 8 to 11 and 16 to 18 were

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9 Fairfield, pp. 71-2.
interpreted as representing the same events, reinforcing the conclusions of the previous chapters.\textsuperscript{11} Compared to Napier’s innovative chronology, Bale did not go to great lengths to connect events in the Revelation with specific dates or occurrences in human history, often describing history in terms of broad trends. Nor did the events that formed the narrative of the \textit{Image} occur at uniform chronological points. Consequently, Bale avoided the errors in historical accuracy that blighted Napier’s rigid system. However, Bale’s system lacked the polemical impact achieved by Napier’s, which might have seemed to his readers to prove a perfect pattern in God’s providential actions.

Bale’s chronology began in the earliest years of the history of the Christian Church, “when the Apostles & disciples of Christ abundantly replenished with the holy Ghost, did constantly preach the gospel over the universall world.”\textsuperscript{12} The white horse, described in Revelation 6:2 was taken as symbolising the purity of the apostles and their message of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{13} However, it was not long before errors began to creep into Christianity: “For so soone as the sayde Apostles and fyrste Disciples of Christe were taken from the world, yea and partly in their time also, many pernicious errours did springe and increase by craftie teachers and subtile seducers in dyvers quarters.”\textsuperscript{14} These errors included the introduction of circumcision at baptism among certain sects. Always conscious of presenting the emphasis on scripture as the defining virtue of Protestantism, Bale identified circumcision with Jewish

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} This idea of ‘recapitulation’ had been pioneered by Victorinus of Pettau in the third century and was popularised in the sixteenth century by scholars including Antoine du Pinet, whose work influenced English religious exiles in Europe. For a more detailed discussion see Backus I., \textit{Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich and Wittenburg} OUP (Oxford 2000) pp. 135 & xiii.

\textsuperscript{12} Bale, \textit{Image}, Book I f. 69v.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., f. 70v.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., ff. 71v-r.
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superstition. He pointed out that it was not mandated for Christians in the New Testament, which had, in many respects, superseded the Old Testament.\(^\text{15}\)

The opening of the second seal was a merciful act by God, intended to foster uniformity of religious belief and practices. To achieve this, He gave knowledge of true religion to the Church Fathers. These scholars were revered by Protestants, who identified them with a period of scriptural purity, before corruption of the Church by the papal Antichrist, and to which they sought to return, partly through renaissance humanism:

he removed once agayne the darke cloudes of ignorance, he replenyshed with hys grace, & strengthened with his spirite certayn of the Greeks and Gentiles which beleueued, to confute the errors & condempne the lyes of those false teachers & deceuiable Antichristes. Of this number was Ignacius, Policarpus... & divers other. These boldely confessed Christ, they taught his veritie, they put aside the darknes, they ministered the light, they confounded the aduersries both with tonge & pen.\(^\text{16}\)

Bale used the term ‘antichrists’ to denounce many people and practices. By largely reserving the word for the papacy, Napier intensified the psychological and polemical impact of the name.

The third seal was opened around the time that Christians were being martyred under the Roman Empire.\(^\text{17}\) Like many sixteenth century Protestants, including Napier, Bale identified Nero as a particular figure of hatred.\(^\text{18}\) As in the *Pageant*, Bale expressed the belief that the Bishops of Rome had not always been evil, but that their corruption was gradual, highlighting the fact that many were Christian martyrs:

“from the tyme of Peter unto the dayes of Siluester, to the number of xxxii not one of

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\(^{15}\) Ibid., f. 71r. This was a standard contention in Christian thought.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., f. 72v.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., f. 74v.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., ff. 73r.-74v. & *PD*, p. 112.
them escaped.” However, it was vital that Bale did not cast the papacy in a positive light and he was careful to state that the time of virtuous bishops was short and that they were soon to be replaced by another sort: “More desirous were they to rest then to labour, to sleep then to worke, to take then to giue, to bankette, then to preache, to dally then to dye. Then stroue they among them selues for the premacy, them sought they ambiciously to raign ouer all. Not one Martyr was then among them”. This idea that the bishops were corrupted in part by a desire to reign was very much in keeping with Bale’s support of the royal supremacy. The second beast described in Revelation 4:7, which had a face like a calf, was identified with martyred ministers. By emphasising the role of ministers in the narrative of salvation history Bale elevated his own position as a minister. Finally, controversies and heresies including Arianism and Manichaeism arose within Christianity, which Bale connected with the black horse in Revelation 6:5.

The fourth seal ushered in a period of religious uniformity, beginning with the silencing of Arianism and the reaching of a broad consensus on matters of doctrine, “partlye by the publyke power, and partlye by the continuall disputations and writinges of the faythfull Doctours, and catholyke fathers”. It may be inferred that Bale was referring to the first Council of Nicaea, in 325 A.D. as the key event in this increased uniformity and the opening of the fourth seal may be dated to the fourth century. In Napier’s chronology though, the reader was not obliged to infer the dates

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19 Bale, *Image*, Book 1, f. 74r.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., f. 72r.
22 Ibid., ff. 75r-76v.
23 Ibid., ff. 78v-r.
of key events, they were stated explicitly. Bale argued that the new uniformity in the Western Church did nothing to halt the progress of ecclesiastical corruption, “yet continued the Byshops styll in their vanyties, and the Prelates in theyr pryde, whereby the trueth was blemished and the lyghte had a sore Eclips.” This ambivalence towards Nicaea is significant and appears to have influenced Napier’s chronology. For Bale, the period of the fourth seal represented the greatest turning point in the Church before the Reformation. It was then that greed and the desire for individual supremacy began to seduce and corrupt religious leaders on a grand scale: “John the Archebyshoppe of Constantinople contended to be the universal Patriarke, Boniface the thirde of that name Byshoppe of Rome, tooke upon hym to be the head Byshoppe of all the worlde, and Gods onely Vicar in earth, Mahomet boasted hym selfe to be the great Propheete and messanger of God.” Clearly, then, the period marked by the fourth seal lasted at least until the late sixth century.

The corruption of religious leaders quickly spread throughout the world and changed the fabric of religious faith and practice:

Thus was Christes coate withoute seame among them devided, and his church most rufully dispersed. Thus out of ye corrupted & depraued scriptures tooke ye Jewes their Talmud, ye Saracens their Alchorane [Quran], and the Byshops their popish lawes and decrees. Then folowed innumerable sectes of perdicion vnder the romishe pope, in Europa, vnder Mahomet the false Prophet in Afryca, and vnder prester John in Asia, which dith their execrable tradicions and rules banished Christ and his pure doctrin for euer.

The truth of scripture was now all but lost to the majority of people, who in their ignorance began to practise idolatry. At this time the church was typified by

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24 In the Pageant, Bale had bemoaned the fact that the First Council of Nicaea failed to completely crush Arianism. Again, the dating of the seals was approximate. See above, p. 156.
25 Bale, Image, Book 1, f. 78r.
26 See above, pp. 132 & 178.
27 Bale, Image, Book 1, f. 78r.
28 Ibid., f. 79v.
traditions that lacked a scriptural basis, including the Latin Mass, the use of holy
water and relic worship, all of which Protestants equated to magical and superstitious
thinking. Of course, Bale’s denouncement of these practices was in line with his
Protestant beliefs. However, like Napier, he also used them to portray Roman
Catholicism as a foil for Protestantism, by which the perceived faults of the former
emphasised the virtues of the latter.

In Bale’s chronology, the opening of the seals did not cause these negative things
to occur, they were acts of God’s providential mercy, intended to provide relief to
His church from the troubles by which it was beset. In the case of the fourth seal,
God was revealing the corruption of the clergy to the people so that they might not
be deceived: “In that Seale openinge, the Lorde shewed what the head rulers of his
Church were, euen very hypocrites, rightly compared vnto a pale Horse. For after
their dissembling manner they shewed sad countinaunces outwardlye to appeare
fastinge, and babled very much to seeme deuounte men.”

The opening of the fifth seal may be dated to the twelfth to thirteenth centuries,
when the Cathars and Waldensians emerged to question the authority of the papacy
and reveal its corruption. However, the Antichrist dealt harshly with those groups,
“of whom an hundred thowsande were slaine”. Bale offered little discussion of this
seal, which reveals his belief that some were more important historical turning points
than others. Napier’s system of scriptural interpretation was more consistent in terms
of the attention he devoted to each juncture. One reason for this was that Napier’s

29 Ibid., ff. 79v-r.
30 See above, pp. 18 & 184.
31 Bale, Image, Book 1, f. 80v.
32 Ibid., f. 80r.
analysis appeared alongside the scriptural text, whereas Bale included the Biblical verses at the beginning of each chapter.
THE IMAGE OF

The sixt Chapter.

THE TEXT.

1 And I saw... one of the scales, 2, and I heard one of the iiiij. beasts say as it were the noise of thunder. 3. Come, and see. 4. And I saw... and a crowne was giuen vnto hym, 7. and he went forth coquering, & for to overcome.

The Paraphrase.

Consequently (sayth saint John) as I was beholdeynge these wonders, I sawe that the Lambe (which is the soune of God) opened the first of the seuen scales, declaring the first mysterie of the booke. These openings betokeneth not onely the manifestation of Gods trueth for seuen ages of the world, but also for the viij. seuerall times, and after viij. diuers soyses from Chriistes death to the latter end of the world. The first scale was removed, and the mysterie there under contayn.
During the period of the sixth seal, the position of the papacy as supreme Antichrist and Man of Sin was secured.  As the seal was opened to reveal the corrupt nature of the church and coincided with an earthquake that shook the synod at which John Wycliffe’s teachings were declared heretical:

as the Lambe Christ disclosed the sixte seale to manifest the cleernesse of his truth, to shewe the estate of his church, anon I behelde a merueylous earthquake arise. Most liuely was this fulfilled such tyme, as William Courteney the Archbishoppe of Caunterburie with Antichristes sinagogue of sorcerers sate in consistorie against Christes doctrine in John Wycleue. Mark the yeare, day, and houre, and ye shall wonder at it.

This earthquake occurred on 21 May 1382, however another earthquake famously shook the Council of Constance in 1415, when Wycliffe, Hus and Jerome of Prague were condemned as heretics. The dating of the sixth seal in Bale’s chronology was therefore also approximate.

The seventh and final seal in Revelation 8:1 was followed by half an hour’s silence: “This signifieth that there shal bee in that age, that peace in the Christian churche, which Christ brought with him from heauen, and left heere with his disciples. Then shall wretched Babylon fall”. Surprisingly, Bale proposed two millennia of Satan’s binding, one from in the past and one in the future: “Then shall wretched Babylon fall... then shall the fierce Dragon bee tyed vp for a M. yeres... Happie are they that shal see those dayes.” This was an unusual statement for a mid-sixteenth century Protestant polemicist. The idea of a future millennium bore the taint of the Anabaptist rebellion at Münster. However, the concept fit with Bale’s

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33 Ibid., ff. 86r-v.
34 Ibid., ff. 87v-r.
35 Ibid., f. 87r.
36 Ibid., f. 106v.
37 Ibid., f. 106v-r. See below, pp. 230-2, on the past millennium.
38 Like Napier, Bale did not place a significant emphasis on the millennium of Christ’s reign in Revelation 20:6, perhaps to distance himself from the Chiliasm that had become so controversial. Bale
desire to imbue the new, reformed society with a sense of longevity. Though the period was to be ushered in by the Protestant Reformation, it would not be an ethereal age, during which a select few would reign with Christ. Instead, it was a time of feverish activity on the Earth, during which the final events foretold in the Revelation would come to pass and the foundations for God’s eternal, post-apocalyptic kingdom would be laid. Bale employed 2 Peter 3:8 to connect the half an hour of silence to the idea of a future millennium:

This silence shall endure but half an houre space, whiche may bee the thousande yeares that are spoken of heere afore, consideryng that all the age after Christ is but the last houre, and a thousand yeares before God is but as the day that is paste. In the time of this sweete silence shall Isauell be reuued, the Jewes shall be converted, the Heathen shall come in agayne. Christ will seeke vp his lost sheepe and bryng hym agayne to his folde, that they may appeare one flock, lyke as they haue one shepetherde.

As Williamson has stated, Bale did not explicitly describe the last days or the apocalypse itself. His declarations about the apocalypse had a far more figurative tone than Napier’s. However, it appears that this was a deliberate decision by Bale, who sought to emphasise the impending judgement of God, whilst retaining a sense that the physical world might endure for a significant period into the future. He would not have emphasised an imminent apocalypse, as this would have erased the new, godly society he was encouraging his readers to construct. Moreover, a focus used the idea that the suffering of God’s church demonstrated their elect status by arguing that they reigned with Christ when they were most cruelly persecuted. Napier may have derived his conclusion that the thousand years meant an eternity on Bale’s claim that “they reygned with Christ the pastour & high bishop of their soules, not onely here were [sic] they suffered wyth hym for a thousand yeres space, but also aboue where as he sitteth on the right hand of gods maiestie seat, thousand wythout end.” See Bale, Image, Book 3, ff. 60r-61v.

Fairfield, pp. 79-80 argued that this controversial belief in a future millennium was due to his plagiarising Francis Lambert. However, the importance of the idea to Bale as a ‘magisterial reformer’ must not be overlooked.

Ibid., 106r. 2 Peter 3:8: “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

Williamson, Apocalypse Then, p. 50.
on the end of the world would have removed the emphasis from the royal supremacy, presenting Henry’s achievements and dominance as transient. Bale’s long term aims for England were made clear by his treatment of the Number of the Beast.

The Number of the Beast

Unlike Napier, Bale did not claim that the number 666 definitely represented a single figure, period or institution. Instead, he presented a number of possibilities that had been posited by various scholars. This meant that Bale’s conclusion lacked the polemical force of the Plaine Discovery. However, he did emphasise his own interpretation. He contended that the three sixes may represent three periods of creation. The first was the number of days in which God created the Earth. The second referred to the number of ages of human history from the creation to the Nativity of Christ. The third was the number of ages from the Ascension of Christ to the end of the world:

Since Christes ascention hath the church continued by VI. other ages of much lesse tyme comprehended in the vi. seales, in the latter end of whom we are now. And this shall conclude with suche a sabboth of peace in the freedome of Gods word as hath not bene since the beginning. Sathan shall be tyed vp, and the true beleeuers shall occupye in much quietnesse, ye beaste condemnped with all his false prophets. And this is the Number of the sixt. But this peace shall not thus inquietnesse long continue. For longe can not Christes church be without persecution. Sathan shal be loosed againe, and the beleauings of the beast shall set up their bristles, and persecute the Sainctes a fresh.

This extract is important because it illustrates Napier’s dramatic departure from Bale. For Bale, the apocalypse was far from imminent and human history would have

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43 Ibid., ff. 86r.-87v. Bale did not produce mathematical evidence of this dating, implying that the system of sabbatical dating was derived from another source and would have been familiar to his audience.
further predestined ages or periods after his lifetime. Bale was writing in the ‘latter daies’ only in respect to his age and he believed that another age was to follow. The future millennium, during which Satan would be bound, was imminent but this would be another age of temporal human history, as opposed to a period in a spiritual realm after the destruction of the physical world. After these 1000 years had passed, Satan would rise again and then be defeated in the final battle in the end times: “But sodainly shall the latter iudgement day of ye Lord light vopn them vnbewares, the perpetuall Sabbath of ioye shyning to the electe flocke of Christ. And this is the least number of all, compared here unto six.” Although Napier’s conclusions were very different to Bale, the two writers employed similar imagery, in this case in declaring the time after the destruction of the physical world to be an eternal Sabbath. Bale was deliberately interpreting scripture to support the conclusion that the complete reformation of the religion of England was important on a cosmic scale. It would usher in a period of religious truth, during which Satan would be powerless on the Earth. Moreover, this glorious period of English religion would endure for 1000 years at the very least.

Bale argued that he was writing during the second of seven Sabbaths of the third and final period of human history: “The second sabboth here, or libertie of Gods truth, hath had his shew in England alreadie, if ye marke it well. And wither it will yet appeare more open or nay, it is in the Lords handes, let vs pray and hope, for it hath great likelihooode of a much farther appearaunce.” A sense of optimism about the course of religious reform, both in an international and English context, was

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44 Ibid., Book 1 ff. 81r-82v.
46 See above, pp. 32-3.
47 Bale, Image, Book 2, ff. 87v-r.
present in the *Image*: “Not only in England is healed the beastes wounded heade, but also in other certain regions.”

**The Past Millennium**

Although Bale expounded the idea of a future millennium, he was more traditional of his treatment of the past millennium described in Revelation 20:3. He wrote that this period of Satan’s binding lasted from the nativity to, “the dayes of Siluester the second Bishop of Rome of that name, and ye shall all finde that that it was from Christes nativitie a complete thousande, after all the historiographers. By such Nicromancy as he learned of a Sarazin in Spayne obtayned he the papacy”. Bale’s portrayal of this period was more positive than Napier’s, who regarded the millennium of Satan’s binding as a period of gradual corruption. In Bale’s narrative, Satan could do no harm to humanity during this period and the martyrs described in Revelation 20:4 ruled alongside Christ. “He was then so weake, so infatuate and babysh, that not onely wyse men, learned men, and stronge men, dyd set him lyghte, but also yong maydens, children, and tender infantes in a maner did laugh him to scorn”. However, like Napier, he understood the period to be characterised by a gradual increase in the power and corruption of the papacy.

Bale demonised Sylvester II, whose greatest crime appears to have been the fact that he was pope in the year 1000, which fit with Bale’s chronology: “This beastly Antichriste boasting himselfe not onely to bee Christes vicar in earth, but also to be

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48 Ibid., f. 87r.
49 Ibid., Book 3 ff. 52r-53v.
50 See above, pp. 132-4.
52 Ibid., f. 53v-r.
53 See above, pp. 218-24 for Bale on the seven seals.
equal with him in majesty and power, set first the Diuell at large by his Necromancy, which took from the heartes of men the liuing worde of the Lord lest they should be saued."\textsuperscript{54} Thus, Bale demonised the papacy by combining the Protestant ideas that the Roman Catholic Church concealed the Word of God and desired supremacy over secular rulers, with the reviled practice of black magic. Moreover, he was expounding the common Protestant assertion that the Roman Catholic Church had assured the damnation of many people by propagating false doctrine.

Bale selected several events that occurred shortly after the year 1000 to support the view that Satan had been released in that year. Citing \textit{Carion’s Chronicle}, Bale alluded to Nicholas II’s bull of 1095, \textit{In nomine Domini}, which transferred the right to elect popes to the Cardinals, effectively stripping the Holy Roman Emperor of his influence over the process.\textsuperscript{55} Again, Bale was keen to show his approval of Henry VIII’s act of supremacy by declaring that ecclesiastical authorities should be subject to the will of secular rulers. In his chronology the interference of the church in secular affairs was so intrinsically evil it had helped release Satan from imprisonment.

The rise of the Cathars and Waldensians in the twelfth century was portrayed by Bale as a sign that God had willed the authority of the papacy to be questioned in the wake of the loosing of Satan. Despite the fact that Cathar theology was dramatically at odds with Protestant belief, Bale portrayed them as the first reformers, who were succeeded by Hus and Wycliffe.\textsuperscript{56} In Bale’s narrative, these groups laid the

\textsuperscript{54} Bale, \textit{Image}, Book 3, f. 54r.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., f. 55v. & see \textit{Carion’s Chronicle}, f. cliv.
\textsuperscript{56} For a good assessment of the theology and Christology of the Cathars, see Barber, M., \textit{The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages} Pearson (Harlow 2000). Bale was not the first Protestant reformer to identify the Cathars as precursors to the Reformation, see Fairfield, p. 78, on Francis Lambert.
foundation for the true Protestant Reformation and he emphasised a sense of continuity: “Now last of all commeth Martyne Luther... with other sincere and godly deuynes”\textsuperscript{57}

Of course, Bale regarded the Protestant Reformation as a major turning point in history. However, it was not as explicitly linked to the Apocalypse as it was in the Plaine Discovery because Bale sought to promote the idea that the new, reformed society would endure well into the future. In the Image, the complete reformation of religion might mean the end of an era, but not necessarily the end of the world: “So merciful is the Lord to hys people in these and such other the Antichrist is clearly uttered, and all his Hypocrisy disclosed. I doubt not but within few dayes, the mightie breath of his mouth (which is hys liuing Gospell) shall vtterly distroye hym with hys whole generation of shauelings, by their faythfull administration in the worde.”\textsuperscript{58}

**Conclusion**

There are many similarities between John Bale’s Image of Both Churches and Napier’s Plaine Discovery. Both are commentaries on the Book of Revelation that defined human history largely in terms of a conflict between the true Church of God and the Church of Antichrist, which would eventually be defeated. Both focussed the majority of their rhetoric against the Roman Catholic Church and denounced its head as Antichrist. Many of Napier’s conclusions rested on the assumption that sabbatical periods of years gave religious meaning to the dating of events and it was Bale who had brought this to the attention of readers of English. It should be noted though, that

\textsuperscript{57} Bale, Image, Book 3, ff. 57v-r.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., f. 57r.
Bale made no claim to have originated the system and did not use Jubilees with the same level of mathematical preciseness as Napier came to do. Despite never using Elias in his system, Bale indirectly brought the prophecy to the attention of British Protestants through his use of Carion’s Chronicle. In addition, the language used by Napier was often reminiscent of Bale. Both men were given to abandon standard prose without warning, producing great lists of the trappings of Roman Catholicism to prove its idolatrous nature. Finally, like Napier, Bale presented religious observance in terms of absolute good, pitted against absolute evil, with no compromise or middle ground possible. For Bale, to err from the path to God was to walk the path to damnation: “eyther wee are citizens in the new Hierusalem with Jesus Christ, or els in the old supersticious Babylon with Antichrist ye vicar of sathan.”

However, the dramatic differences between the two works demonstrate the different contexts and purposes of their authors. Napier’s work was distinguished from all other sixteenth century texts in English by its sense of polemical urgency stemming from the belief in an imminent apocalypse. Bale repeatedly sought to validate his own position by emphasising the role of ministers, who acted as transmitters of God’s word, in the narrative of salvation history. By contrast, Napier emphasised the role of intellectuals, who unlocked the secrets of God’s word, in the narrative of humanity’s coming salvation. In fact, Bale’s text contained a distinct theme of anti-intellectualism. He attacked universities as tools of Antichrist for

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59 Bale’s stance on the Prophecy of Elias is unclear. He condemned the Talmud, from which the prophecy was drawn and did not discuss Elias. See below, p. 335 However, his use of Carion, the key conclusions of which rested on the prophecy, might be taken as tacit approval of Elias.
60 Ibid., Preface, f. Biii v, Book 3, f. 55r.
61 For example, see above, p. 74.
62 Ibid., Aiii r.
propagating invented religious traditions and asserting illegitimate dominance over the secular realm. The universities were then furnished with learned men, mightely to proue the Pope Christes vicar in earth, and the only husbande and ouersier of hys churche... By this meanes got he an imperial seate, and might make both Emperours & kinges at his pleasure. The nature of the earlier English Reformation was such, that to ingratiate himself with the court of Henry VIII, Bale felt he had to promote royal authority over every sphere of human existence. Again, the historical context is important here. Not only were the universities another set of institutions that lay, at least in part, outside of the sphere of monarchical influence but Oxford, especially St. John’s College, was associated with the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation.

This awareness of the context within which he lived shaped Bale’s portrayal of the Reformation within the predestined narrative of human history. Implicit in his appraisal of the reformed England was a sense of longevity; the kingdom would endure in religious perfection for a millennium as a shining example to the rest of the world. The Image was intended to help lay the foundations for this godly society. To emphasise an imminent apocalypse, which would necessarily include the destruction of all temporal institutions, would have been counterproductive. He placed little emphasis on the apocalypse itself and portrayed the destruction of the world as far into the future. This emphasis on the longer term character of the reformed nation was not shared by Napier, but it was found in the writings of his fellow countryman, John Knox.

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63 Bale, Image, Book 1 f. 79r. He also condemned the works of Greek philosophers: “By the doctrine of Aristotle, Plato... and such other, became the Riomish Pope Christes vycar, and head of the vniuersall churche.” Book 3 ff. 66v-r.

64 Ibid., Book 3, f. 55v.
Chapter 8 - John Knox

John Knox was the most important and famous Scottish churchman of his age and, arguably, Napier’s lifetime. By leading the Scottish Reformation he helped shape the religious and political landscape in which Napier lived and wrote the *Plaine Discovery*. He was the country’s most famous preacher and helped introduce the Genevan form of worship, which formed an important part of Napier’s devotional experience.\(^{65}\) However, Knox’s influence was even more direct. The 1560 Geneva Bible, which had a significant influence on the *Plaine Discovery*, was translated and annotated by a congregation of religious exiles during Knox’s tenure as their minister.\(^{66}\) He was also a close friend and colleague of Christopher Goodman. The two men helped shape each other’s religious views and Napier credited Goodman with sparking his fascination with the Book of Revelation.\(^{67}\) Like Bale, the Marian exile played an important role in Knox’s life, religious views and approach to eschatology. Knox and Bale were acquainted by 1554. Bale, who had again fled England after the ascension of Mary Tudor, was the chief signatory of a letter, asking Knox to travel to Frankfurt to minister to the congregation of English exiles in the city.\(^{68}\) However, soon after his arrival, in November 1554, the congregation became divided over which version of the liturgy they should follow. Bale ultimately sided with the party who were content to follow the 1552 Book of Common Prayer. Knox

\(^{65}\) A Genevan Metrical Psalter also played a role in the Reformation, and the official liturgy for the Kirk, Knox’s 1560 Book of Discipline, was devised according to the Genevan model.

\(^{66}\) See below, Ch 9.

\(^{67}\) Dawson, ‘Satan’s bludy clawses’ for more on Knox and Goodman’s relationship.

however rejected the text and sought a more Calvinistic form of worship.\textsuperscript{69} In 1554 a work was published in which he controversially compared the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to Nero.\textsuperscript{70} Soon after, the city council asked him to leave and he travelled to Calvin’s Geneva.\textsuperscript{71}

Following his return to England in 1559, Bale was appointed canon of the eleventh prebend of Canterbury Cathedral and he maintained an amicable relationship with the court of Elizabeth I until his death in 1563.\textsuperscript{72} Knox was never accepted by Elizabeth and returned to his native Scotland in 1559, where he led the Protestant Reformation in his own country. Even if relations between Bale and Knox had been strained, they were sufficiently reconciled by 1558 for Bale to call Knox, “my most affectionate brother” in his \textit{Scriptorum illustrium majoris Britanniae}.\textsuperscript{73}

Knox was a prolific writer and orator. He left a large body of work, some of which had an apocalyptic tone. Although he rarely presented historical events as fulfilments of prophecies from the New Testament, his works imply that Scots would have been familiar with this technique before Napier composed his \textit{Plaine Discovery}. Knox and Napier’s respective visions for the salvation of humanity differed greatly. Like Bale, Knox did not attempt to estimate when the Day of Judgement might occur. The implication that he wished to help construct a new, godly society is present in his written works. Again, a sense of longevity, or even permanence, may

\textsuperscript{69} Knox’s rejection of the 1552 version is unsurprising, given his rejection of the original text. Moreover, the so-called ‘Black Rubric’ was inserted into the text partially in order to underscore Cramner’s rejection of Knox’s appeal to the privy council, that the Eucharist be received sitting, as opposed to kneeling.

\textsuperscript{70} Knox was writing within the context of what he regarded as the apostasy of England under the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor, especially in light of her marriage to Charles’s son, Philip. See \textit{A faithful Admonition to the Professors of God’s Truth in England} in Knox, \textit{Works} 3, pp. 251-330. See p. 308 for “the Emperoure, which is no lesse enemy unto Christe then ever was Nero”.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{ODNB}: Knox.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{ODNB}: Bale.

\textsuperscript{73} Knox, \textit{Works} 6, lxxxiii.”
be discerned in his vision for the future of Scotland. However, he became disheartened with the progress of reform in his final years and his later works reveal an increasing preoccupation with the ‘end times’.

Care must be taken when comparing the apocalyptic visions of Napier and Knox. Everything that can be known about Napier’s view comes from a single, systematically written work, the majority of which took the form of a commentary on the most important apocalyptic book of the Christian canon. Knox’s opinions must be inferred and constructed from a sizeable body of works, written over several decades, for a variety of purposes and audiences. He never intended to produce a systematic apocalyptic narrative, or a detailed exegesis on an existing apocalyptic text. The most dominant theme in his declarations on the salvation of humanity was not the apocalypse, but the doctrine of divine immutability. Knox believed that God interacted with humanity according to a fixed, unchanging pattern. To understand how God would deal with humans in the future, one needed only to look at His actions in the past, described in the Old Testament.

**Knox and the Last Age of Human History**

Like Napier, Knox was unflinching in his portrayal of the time in which he lived as the final age of human history. This “wickit generatioun” was typified by its evil nature and distance from true religion.\(^{74}\) Knox wrote of, “these last and manifest wicked dayes, in which Sathan... blydeth the hartes of many”.\(^{75}\) For Napier, this contempt of the age in which he lived was reflected in a sense that the apocalypse would occur before long. However, Knox was far more cautious about declaring the

\(^{74}\) Knox, *Works* 4, p. 269.
\(^{75}\) Ibid, p. 77.
imminence of an apocalypse. His stance on when the end might occur was complex and can only be inferred. For example, he wrote that his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, was composed so “that God may be praised for his mercy schawin, this present age may be admonished to be thankfull for Goddis benefittis offered, and the posteritie to cum may be instructed how wonderouslye hath the light of Christ Jesus prevailled against darkness in this last and most corrupted age.”\(^{76}\) The fact that the work was intended, even in part, for future generations distinguished it from the *Plaine Discovery*, which foresaw little more than a century of human existence into the future.\(^{77}\)

Like Napier, Knox perceived the gravity, and potential hazards, of imparting a sense of inevitable doom to the reader. Both men tempered their declarations that the wicked would soon be punished with the assertion that there was still ample time to repent, embrace the one true faith, and be saved:

> yf ye intende to escape God’s severe judgementes... sleape no longer in your syn; consider from what honour you are fallen, what daunger hangeth over your heads; remember how fearful and horrible it is to have God your ennemie, and in depe consideration thereof, call for mercie, studie unfaynedly to rise agayne, profess the trueth which ye have denied, remove to your power iniquitie frome amongst yow, and abstayne in your bodies from idolatrie committed and maynteyned by your wicked rulers.\(^{78}\)

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\(^{76}\) Knox, *Works* 1, p. 5.

\(^{77}\) Kyle has argued that Knox is unlikely to have believed the apocalypse was imminent, given his emphasis on the Prophecy of Isaiah, that the true church would spread throughout the world before the end, which had not yet come to fruition. See Kyle, R., ‘John Knox and Apocalyptic Thought’ *SCJ* Vol. 15. No. 4 (Winter 1984) pp. 449-464, p. 467 & Knox, *Works* 4, p. 486.

Providence and Deliverance

The key to understanding Knox’s stance on God’s providential relationship with humanity was the prominence of the Old Testament in his thought. Of course, Knox believed Protestants were the successors to the Israelites of the Old Testament as God’s chosen people. However, the Old Testament taught that the deliverance of God’s chosen people did not necessarily come in the form of the apocalypse. Nor did the belief he shared with Napier, that the papacy was the Antichrist and man of Sin foretold in the New Testament, foster a sense of eschatological immediacy. Instead, Knox emphasised the eternal ebb and flow of persecution of God’s chosen people, and deliverance by their creator, when the prayers of the godly under cruel oppression moved Him to intervene. Just as God had delivered the Israelites from captivity in Egypt and Babylon, so would He free England from the tyranny of Mary Tudor and Scotland from the idolatry of the Regent, Mary of Guise and Mary, Queen of Scots.

The doctrine of divine immutability revealed a fixed pattern to God’s modes of interacting with humanity. He understood its potential to strike fear into his audience, using it to admonish various specific groups to embrace the Reformed faith. Exhorting the inhabitants of Newcastle and Berwick to repent and reform in 1558, Knox warned that, “The hand of God is no more feble noe then it was then”. Similarly, when urging the population of Scotland to embrace Protestantism en masse in the same year, he declared, “be ye assured Brethren, that as he is immutable of nature, so will he not pardon in you that which so severely he hath punished in

79 Knox, Works 4, p. 326: “the cry of the Israelittis movit God to send Moses to plague proude and tirannous Pharo.”
80 Knox, Works 5, p. 493.
others”. This desire for a popular movement to instigate reform reflected Knox’s vocation as a minister and differentiates his work from the *Plaine Discovery*, which sought to affect change primarily from the ‘top-down’ by appealing to the ‘Heads-men’.

However, Knox also used the concept of divine immutability to console. His 1556 Exposition on Matthew 4 was written within a pastoral context and aimed at a more general audience and, consequently, was more comforting in tone:

He fed his people Israel in the desert forty years, without the provision of man. He preserved Jonas in the whale’s belly; and maintained and kept the bodies of the three children in the furnace of fire. Reason and the natural man could see nothing in these cases but destruction and death, and could have judged nothing, but that God had cast away the care of his creatures, and yet was his providence most vigilant towards them in the extremity of their dangers, from which he did so deliver them, and in the midst of them did so assist them, that his glory, which is his mercy and goodness, did more appear and shine after their troubles than it could have done if they had not fallen in them. And therefore I measure not the truth and favour of God, by having or lacking of corporal necessities, but by the promises that he hath made to me: as He himself is immutable, so his word and promises constant which I believe, and to which I stick and do cleave, whatever can come externally to the body.

The Old Testament was a guide to God’s chosen people, intended to show them that He was always watching and would protect them and punish their enemies. Like other sixteenth century Protestant writers, including Napier, Knox presented the persecution of the elect as proof of their favoured status, and that their deliverance was predestined and inevitable. “Their victory standeth not in resisting, but in

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81 Knox, *Works* 4, p. 537.
82 See above, ch. 1 & *PD*, f. A3r. Ultimately Knox’s approach bore fruit. In 1559 he preached a sermon which sparked an iconoclastic riot at Perth. This, along with further riots incited by his sermons, helped bring about the Scottish Reformation by assisting the victory of the Lords of the Congregation.
suffering.” Knox’s emphasis on the Old Testament distinguished his vision of deliverance from Napier’s in a final, crucial way. The Book of Revelation described events that were yet to occur and the punishment of Satan’s followers at the end of human history and into the next, eternal life. The Old Testament described past events and evils that were punished in the temporal world according to God’s will. The doctrine of divine immutability meant that Knox believed the enemies of God’s chosen people would be punished according to this precedent: corporally as well as spiritually, in this life as well as the next. He portrayed the 1558 capture of Calais by Henry II as God’s punishment for England’s apostasy under the rule of the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor: “Dothe not the suddayne and miserable fall of Calice, sometymes called the Key of Englande, yea, and the open dore into forayne countreys, move you to consider what is God’s powere, and how easie it is to him to overthrow all the pryde of man in one moment?” Moreover, when describing the punishments of the wicked, Knox used imagery that was more akin to the physical punishments of the Old Testament than the eternal damnation that typified systematic apocalyptic exegesis: “Then shal ye grope and wander to and fro seking remedy, but shal finde none; ye shalbe like blinde men in extreme darkenes, ye shal stumble, ye shal fal, ye shal crye and rore for anguishe, but non shalbe able to releave your

84 Knox, Works 4, p. 75.
85 Knox, Works 5, p. 490. This was a common argument. Bartholomew Traheron had blamed the fall of Calais on the religious conservatism of its governor and warned that more catastrophes would befall England if the country continued in its apostasy under Mary Tudor. See Traheron, B.: A vvarning to England P.A. de Zuttere (?) (Wesel (?) 1558) STC/24174 ff. Aiir-Aiir.
miseries: all creatures shalbe ennemies unto you, because you have despised the
goodnes and mercie of Him who so lovinglye hathe intreated you”.

**Audience and Historical Context**

Knox’s tone when dealing with deliverance was dictated by events around him as well as the audience he was addressing. He rarely employed the notion of ‘end times’ explicitly as a polemical device. As in Bale’s *Image*, eschatology served little purpose, other than as a reminder that God would one day sit in judgement of his audience, and all humanity, and thereby encourage constancy in faith and certain desirable behaviours. Knox’s 1558 *Letter to the Commonality of Scotland* was written at a time when Protestantism was gaining ground in Scotland. Knox wrote the text to encourage Scots to fight, literally if necessary, to secure victory for the Protestant Lords of the Congregation. Admonishing against laxity Knox wrote, “neither yet will it availe you in the day of his visitation, to say, We were but simple subjects, we could not redresse the faultes and crimes of or rulers, bishoppes, and clergie”.

In his letter to Mary of Guise, written two years earlier, God’s judgement was evoked in a more positive sense. The epistle promised personal rewards, both spiritual and temporal, for renouncing the idolatry of Roman Catholicism and instigating a Protestant Reformation in Scotland: “wisdom, ryches, glory, honor and long lyfe shall accompany you in this your regiment temporal, and immortalitie, with joy inestimable, shalbe your portion when the King of kinges, the Lord Jesus, shal

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87 This idea of direct action by the laity to assist in pushing through reform was not found in the *Plaine Discovery* and Napier aimed his arguments primarily towards the ruling elites.
appere to judgemente, before whome ye shall make accompt of this your regyment”. 89

The key difference between this stance and Napier’s is that Knox’s assertions about the Day of Judgement lack the sense of urgency that typified the Plaine Discovery. The urgency in Knox’s work came primarily from the idea of impending divine punishment according to the Old Testament model and damnation in the next life. Although he argued that he was living in the last age, he did not attempt to gauge its length. Like other first-generation Reformers of the British Isles, he directed his pleas towards members of every level of the social strata. His aim was for secular rulers, the ecclesiastical authorities and the general population as the ‘church militant’ to come together with the single purpose of creating a new, godly society. Implicit in this new system was a sense of permanence; its longevity would be testament to its success. Moreover, Knox and those like him could not risk any accusation of inciting panic by warning of an imminent Second Coming of Christ, which had been so tainted by the Anabaptist revolt. Within this context, the idea of an imminent apocalypse served little function, and might even prove counter-productive. Napier’s vision for reform was defined by the apocalypse, his selection for the date of the end, a century in the future, was shrewd because it meant he could not be accused of causing panic within his lifetime. In his interpretation, people had

89 Knox, Works 4, p. 84. Knox was displeased at Mary’s reception of the letter and, in 1558, issued a new version with lengthy additions, which contained more violent imagery and rebuked Mary harshly. See ibid., pp. 429-461. In keeping with his belief in divine immutability, he drew on Exodus: “The kinges and princes, whiche by power oppresse the people of God, and will not suffer that the people trulie worshippe God, as he hath commanded, but will retein them in Egipt, are brethren and companyons to Pharao.” Ibid., p. 436. He also employed imagery from the Revelation to remind Mary of the horrors that awaited her in the next life: “because of one crime they are all gyltie (which is treason and rebellion against Christ), of one torment they shal taste, which is, of the fier that never shall be quenched. And herin oght you, Madam, be circumspect and careful, if that ye have any hope of the life to come.” (Ibid., p. 437).
just enough time in which to consolidate their nations’ reformed status and pursue the staunchest possible religious policies, or repent their Antichristian faith. This would allow as many people as possible to enter Heaven after the impending Day of Judgement.

**Knox's Denunciation of Roman Catholicism**

Unsurprisingly, the claims made by Knox and Napier about the papacy and its seat at Rome correspond more closely than any other area of their analysis. In fact, this may be the most important part of Knox’s legacy to Napier. As has been noted throughout this study, the *Plaine Discovery* was typified by its passionate and unequivocal denunciation of the Roman Catholic Church. Knox had helped produce an intellectual and religious conditions in which this was possible. His scathing attacks against the papacy and Roman Catholic rulers were unprecedented in the English language and helped form the atmosphere in which Napier grew up and composed his work. Knox had denounced the papacy as Antichrist as early as 1547 in the first sermon he ever delivered. His later, written works also discussed the “Romane Antechrist”. He rejected the notion that the antiquity and pervasive nature of Roman Catholicism lent it any legitimacy and contended that such arguments, “could justifie any religion, then was the idolatrie of the Gentiles, and now is the abomination of the Turkes, Good religion. For antiquity approved the one, and a multitude hath receaved and doth defende the other.”

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90 See Mason, *Kingship*..., pp. 248-9 on the impact and originality of Knox’s invective against Roman Catholics.
91 *OBNB*: Knox.
Like Bale, he concluded that the papal urge to supremacy and its suppression of heresy and religious controversies were central to its position as Satan’s agent on Earth: “no one thing hath more established the kingdome of that Romane Antichrist then this most wicked Decree, to wit, That no man was permitted to reason of his power, or to call his lawes into doubt.”\textsuperscript{94} Knox adopted themes commonly used to demonise the Roman Catholic Church, including comparing the institution to the Whore of Babylon: “the vennoume and malice of Sathan ringeth in all Papistis (for the most part) is now more evident, evin to infantis, than that it can greatlie hurt any, except sic as willinglie, and with apetit insaciabill, do drink the poysone of that harlotis cupe, either for feir of corporal punishment, or else for hoip of warldlie promotioun.”\textsuperscript{95} However, Knox did not expend much effort proving a correlation between the Whore and the Roman Catholic Church. Such ideas were already common in Scotland and Knox could forgo lengthy explanations. Napier was the first Scottish writer to explain in a systematic way the alleged connection between the Roman Catholic Church and figures from the Book of Revelation. However, he was probably systematising ideas already familiar to much of the country’s population.

The role and ultimate destiny of the papacy differed greatly between the works of Knox and the \textit{Plaine Discovery}, partly because of the former’s emphasis on the Old Testament. For Knox, the papacy’s role as Antichrist was second in importance to its position as the successor to Egypt and Babylon as the oppressor of, and adversary to, God’s elect. Its defeat ushered in deliverance, but in a temporal rather than an apocalyptic sense. Like other sixteenth century Protestant polemicists, Knox expounded the idea that the Protestant Church was the successor to the faithful

\textsuperscript{94} Knox, \textit{Works} 4, p. 526.  
\textsuperscript{95} Knox, \textit{Works} 4, p. 270.
remnant of Israelites in the Old Testament. However, his emphasis on the Old Testament meant that this chosen group and the role of its adversaries were unusually prominent in his work.

**Later Life and Works**

In his final years, Knox’s view of the world around him, and especially of the Scottish Reformation in which he had been instrumental, changed. Consequently, a shift in his views on deliverance, salvation and the apocalypse can be observed in his works. His later letters betray a state of lingering depression that was expressed in apocalyptic language.96 He made no secret of the fact that he hoped for death as his health deteriorated in his later years, writing to his close friend and colleague Christopher Goodman in 1569, “I my self am weary of the world, for in it I perceave no amendement but daily apostasye frome God, & that with blasphemye.”97 In 1568 he wrote, “The end of all things draweht neyr”.98 In 1572, the year of his death, he wrote again to Goodman, opening the letter with a hitherto unusual reference to the Book of Revelation: “The continuall assistance of Godes holy Spirit be multiplyed with yow & all those that unfeynedlie feight against the power of Sathan, now more furiously rageing then at any tyme before becaus he knoweth his tyme to be short.”99

His fiery sermons proved divisive and many committed Protestants began to disassociate themselves from his views. He failed to accept the private Mass permitted to Mary, Queen of Scots, and became increasingly distant from, and resentful of, his erstwhile allies the Protestant Lords of the Congregation, who had

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97 Ibid., p. 197.
98 Dawson & Glassey, p. 179
99 Ibid., p. 199.
occupied prominent positions at court since 1560.\textsuperscript{100} His mistrust of the royal court quickly developed into a belief that the nation was slipping into apostasy. His fears of Roman Catholic resurgence were heightened by Mary’s policies and these worries climaxed when he heard the news of the 1572 St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in France.\textsuperscript{101}

\textit{An Answer to a Letter Written by James Tyrie, a Scottish Jesuit}

It was in this atmosphere of paranoia, his health failing, that Knox penned his final published work. Written between 1568 and 1572, the piece is especially pertinent to this study for the density of condemnations of the Papacy and allusions to the Book of Revelation it contained. As Kyle has noted, Bale was a likely influence on Knox’s later works, and his new found interest in the Revelation may have been in part due to the legacy of the \textit{Image}.\textsuperscript{102} Tyrie had written the letter to his brother, David Tyrie of Drumkilbo, urging him to renounce Protestantism and return to his Roman Catholic faith. Knox’s response was striking in its unusually overt apocalyptic content, and for his systematic approach to the disputation: As he had in his 1558 tract \textit{On Predestination}, Knox divided his opponent’s letter into separate points and debated them in turn.\textsuperscript{103}

Knox stated that he was writing in the “last and moste wicked dayis, wherein Sathan rages, knowing that he hes a short time to trouble Goddis peple.”\textsuperscript{104} This was the first of several references to Revelation 12 intended to demonstrate a correlation

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{ODNB}: John Knox.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. & see above, ch.1 for more on Mary’s reign & pp. 126-7 on St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.
\textsuperscript{102} Kyle, p. 454. Goodman’s sermons in St Andrews, which had a profound impact on the young John Napier, may also have been influenced Knox’s approach to the Revelation. See above p. 49.
\textsuperscript{103} See \textit{An Answer to the Cavillations of an Adversary Respecting the Doctrine of Predestination}, Knox, Works 5, pp. 7-468.
\textsuperscript{104} Knox, Works 6, p. 481, referring to Rev. 12:12.
between the Devil’s agency on earth and the Roman Catholic Church. He also referred to Revelation 12:6 in an attempt to demonstrate that the Protestant Church, as the true, invisible church had a scriptural basis: “Maister Tyrie will acknowledge no Kirk except that which hes bene, and is visible. We, in the contrare, acknowledge and reverence the spous of Christ Jesus, somtymes exyled from the world, receaving somtymes the wynges of an egle that she may fle to the wyldernes, whereof God, and not man she hath her place prepared.”

He even went so far as to offer a tentative historical interpretation of Revelation 12:4 implying that the dragon drew the stars from heaven and the waters of the fountains turned to blood in the fifth century: “Now to the sentence of the ancient wryter, whose name he suppresseth, we answer, That his wordes cut the throttes of the proud Papistes of that age, and of all their followers sence those dayis. For then began the taill of the Dragoun to draw the starres from the heaven to the earth; then began the fontanes, which somtymes gave cleare and holsome watter to become bitter, yea, to be turned unto blood”. Again, the fact that Knox did not attempt to prove a connection between historical events and imagery from the Revelation implies an assumption on his part that his audience would have broadly understood the technique he was using. It also illustrates the fact that Knox was not a textual scholar and never intended to offer a comprehensive historical analysis of the Revelation. Another common theme that Knox used to attack Rome was the linking of the city with Babylon. Citing Joachim of Fiore, who was an important influence on Bale, Knox asserted, “That if (sayeth he) the watters of this flood that is called

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105 Knox, Works 6, p. 502. Establishing a scriptural basis for Protestantism was an important issue for many reformers, including Napier, see above, pp. 31 & 124-6.

106 Knox, Works 6, p. 504. Tyrie had, “it is said by ane godly, haly, and cunning man, ane xi hundreth zeir by past, “Quod nihil infelicius felicitate peccantium, quia et penalis nutritur impunitas, et mala voluntas, velut interior hostis roboratur,” ibid., p. 503.
Euphrates, be people, nationis, and tounge that obey the Romane impyre, for the cietie of Rome itself is new Babilon."¹⁰⁷

Connected to Babylon in the Revelation was the Great Whore and Knox, like Napier, used this figure to connect the papacy with sexual deviancy. He also attacked secular leaders who had been ‘seduced’ by this harlot, supporting the papacy and adhering to its religious decrees. These ideas were combined when Knox disputed the argument that the correct interpretation of Rome as the successor to Babylon referred only to the ancient Roman Empire, as opposed to contemporary Rome:

and least that any should think that the author meaneth of the ancient Romane impyre, and not of the regiment of the Kirk that was in it, or in the dominion thereof, he explains him selfe after whill, that he interpretes the great hoore, and the kin ges of the earth who commit huredome with her. The great hoore, he sayes, the universal Fatheris affirmed to be Rome: not, says he, as concerning the congregation of the just, which sometyme was a pilgramer in it, but as concerning the multitude of the reprobate, who be their wicked workes blasphemeth and impungeth the same Kirk, being a pilgramer with hir.¹⁰⁸

Like Bale and Napier, Knox demonised the papacy for its condemnation of heretics. In this vision of history, those who had stepped forward to question the invented traditions of the Roman Catholic Church were evidence that the true church was always present, though had often been forced into hiding by the oppressive forces of Antichrist. For Knox, this concept was fitted into his paradigm of why God intervened on behalf of the faithful:

For this hath bene the mercyfull provydence of God towardses his lytle flock ever from the beginning, that when an universall corruption began to spred the selfe, then wer rased some, as it were one or two amonges the hole multitude, till admonishe the present age and the posterities to come, how far men had declyned from the originall puritie, that at least

¹⁰⁸ Knox, Works 6, p. 506. See above, p. 162 for Napier’s stance on this issue.
God might have some testimonie that the veritie of god was not altogether buryed in the earth. 109

The s most striking similarity between Knox’s Answer and the Plaine Discovery was the claim that both salvation and heaven had been reduced to ‘merchandise’ by the invented traditions, greed and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. 110 This specific phrasing of a common Protestant complaint was unusual and it is likely that Napier drew some inspiration from Knox on the matter, either through the Answer or the 1560 Geneva Bible. 111 Knox referred to, “fals preastes and hypocrites, who, making merchandice of the kingdome of God, gapes for temporall advantage”. 112 In case there was any doubt, Knox explicitly attacked the doctrine of Purgatory and the associated selling of indulgences. Referring to Revelation 18:11 he wrote that, “the merchandes of the earth, (as is before said), they are brutish preastes...who sell prayers and messes for money; making the hous of prayer ane chop of merchandice, yea, making it (I say) a publict and oppen mercat, and a den of theves” 113

However, despite the increased emphasis on the apocalypse and Book of Revelation, Knox’s disputation with Tyrie contained no mention of when the apocalypse might have occurred, or even a vague estimation of how long humanity might have to wait before God made his final judgement. This is the single most important difference between the Plaine Discovery and the eschatological Protestant works in English that preceded it and what made Napier’s conclusions so revolutionary.

109 Knox, Works 6, p. 507.
110 See above, p. 180.
111 See below, pp. 269-70.
112 Knox, Works 6, p. 506.
113 Ibid., pp. 506-7.
Conclusion

The final similarity between the writings of Knox and Napier lay in the shared sense they were playing a vital, predestined role in the salvation of humanity during the final age of universal history. Napier identified with the apostles on an intellectual level and aspired to act as their successor. His revealing of the final secrets of scripture was a part of God’s final act of providence, His final testament to His church before the judgement of humanity. Knox cast himself as a latter-day prophet, according to the model established in the Old Testament. Like Moses, physically leading his people, or Jeremiah the great preacher and condemner of idolatry, God had preordained that Knox would guide and admonish his people, using the word of God as a beacon to be followed to deliverance and glory.\footnote{For more on Knox’s self perception see Kyle, pp. 449, 455 & 457; ODNB: John Knox & Mason, Kingship... p. 252 on Knox ad ‘God’s trumpet’.

Connected to this elevated sense of their own positions was something they shared with Bale, the belief that absolute good was pitted against absolute evil in matters of religion, and that a compromise or middle ground was impossible. Napier abhorred religious moderation and argued that he was bringing to light the manifest truth of scripture and that to disagree with him was therefore to disagree with God. Knox was equally bald in his assertion that, “in religioun thair is na middis: either it is the religioun of God, and that in everie thing that is done it must have the assurance of his awn Word, and than his maje\textit{stie trewlie honourit, or els it is the religioun of the Divill, whilk is, when men will erect and set up to God sic religioun as pleaseth thame”\footnote{Knox, Works 4 p. 232.}.}
There is no evidence that Napier based his interpretations substantially on those made by Knox. However, Knox helped create the religious and political context in which Napier lived and a direct comparison between their works shows that, in writing the *Plaine Discovery*, Napier adapted, improved and systematised concepts already current in Scotland.\footnote{For another work that supports this conclusion, see Anderson, J., *Ane godly treatis, calit the first and second cumming of Christ, with the tone of the winters-nicht shewing brieflie of our native blindess* Andro Hart (Edinburgh 1595) STC/572.5 & Reid-Baxter, J, ‘James Anderson’s Poem The Winter Night’ in Houwen, L. (ed), *Literature and Religion in Late Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* Peeters (Leuven 2012) pp. 145-65.} The apocalypse had a different role in the works of the two writers, not least because of their mutually defining aims for future reform. For the majority of his career, Knox believed his role lay in helping to construct a permanent, godly society. Napier did not believe this was feasible and his view of society was more in line with that expressed in Knox’s later works. For Napier, the public at large were too cruel, selfish and lascivious to sustain a nation worthy of God for a prolonged period. His aim was to minimise the number of people who would be cast into eternal damnation, not to construct new temporal institutions, which he saw as intrinsically transitory.
Chapter 9 - The 1560 Geneva Bible

Arguably the single most important influence on John Napier's *Plaine Discovery* was the 1560 Geneva Bible. This was the only major work that dealt with apocalyptic themes in detail printed in Scotland before the *Plaine Discovery*. It placed Bale’s system of interpreting historical events as fulfilments of the prophecies of the Book of Revelation into the hands, hearts and minds of the people of Scotland in Napier’s lifetime. The 1560 edition was written by a congregation of English Protestant exiles at Geneva during the reign of the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor. Christopher Goodman, who Napier credited personally with inspiring his fascination with the apocalypse, shared the ministry of this congregation with John Knox.

The version of the Book of Revelation included in the *Plaine Discovery* was ostensibly Napier’s own but was based primarily on the Genevan translation. However, the educational, interpretive and instructional notes published in the margins of the 1560 Bible had an equally profound impact on his work. The notes were replete with eschatological themes and imagery and emphasised the role of historical events as fulfilments of biblical prophecies. The annotations inserted into the Geneva Bible suggested a chronological narrative, which culminated in the apocalypse. The role of Protestants as the latter-day manifestation of God’s true church and successors to the Israelites of the Old Testament was a dominant theme. The idea of this church, and its impending victory over the church of Antichrist, allegedly based at Rome, was easily recognisable to sixteenth century Protestants. However, the Geneva Bible was an important milestone due to the polemical force of its notes and, more importantly, simply because it was the Bible. The fact that these doctrinally charged interpretations were placed alongside the scriptural text gave
them an additional authority that no other polemical tracts or biblical commentaries could hope to replicate.

In 1579 the Scottish parliament passed an act ordering all families of sufficient means to be in possession of a copy of the 1560 edition.¹ It was the first Bible to be printed in Scotland and also enjoyed huge popularity in England. Despite the fact that the Bishops’ Bible was the officially sanctioned text of the Anglican Church from 1583, the Geneva Bible was the most widely printed, disseminated and read.² It was the Bible most often read in Scottish churches until the publication of the 1611 Authorised Version and its marginalia helped to shape the content of sermons. The 1560 edition was printed in quarto form. Consequently, it was small enough to be kept at home and read on one’s lap, unlike, for example, the large and unwieldy Great Bible of 1539, in folio format. The Geneva Bible was beautifully printed in clear columns and contained few errors. It was embellished with illustrations, tables and maps to educate and entertain the reader. It was written in simple, authoritative language and was widely available and relatively affordable. Between 1575 and 1644, over 150 editions were produced in England alone.³ It was the Bible of literary greats such as William Shakespeare and John Donne and was taken to America by

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¹ “Item, it is statute and ordained by our sovereign lord and his three estates in this present parliament that all gentlemen, householders and others worth 300 merks of yearly rent or above, and all substantial yeomen or burgesses, likewise householders, estimated to be worth £500 in lands or goods, be held to have a bible and psalm book in vulgar language in their houses for the better instruction of themselves and their families in the knowledge of God, within a year and a day after the date hereof, each person under the pain of £10” RPS, 1579/10/25 (accessed 12/04/2013).
the Pilgrim Fathers. Over 200 editions were produced on the Continent and in England and Scotland but the 1560 edition was the most popular and enduring.4

Thus, the Geneva Bible was the standard religious text of Scotland for much of Napier’s lifetime and a detailed reading of the work and a comparison with the Plaine Discovery reveals Napier’s debt to the 1560 version. However, Napier diverged from its interpretation in some striking and important ways. An understanding of the Geneva Bible therefore illustrates the originality of Napier’s thinking and his willingness to embrace controversial methodologies and conclusions.

The Creation of the Geneva Bible

The authors of the Geneva Bible did not identify themselves and their identities may never be proven absolutely. William Whittingham, who produced the 1557 Geneva New Testament on which the 1560 version was based, was certainly involved in the translations. Anthony Gilby most likely had a hand in the notes to the Old Testament.5 Gilby was known for his expertise in Greek and Hebrew and probably played a major role in the translations.6 It is not known whether Goodman or Knox personally contributed to the text. Whatever the case, as ministers to the congregation, their influence on the doctrine and theology of the translators would have been profound and they would have approved of its translation and annotations.7

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4 Danner, pp. 1-6.
5 Betteridge, p. 58.
7 An emphasis on the evils of Nero as the representative of the Roman Empire was common to Knox and the Geneva Bible, which may indicate Knox’s influence on the work.
By the mid-sixteenth century, apocalyptic ideas had become widespread and pervasive in Europe. Protestants had fled from England to Europe during the conservative years of Henry VIII’s Reformation. Several apocalyptic texts emerged from this context, including John Bale’s *Image of Both Churches*. By the 1550s, Geneva was rapidly developing into a major intellectual centre of the Reformation and as David Daniel has stated, the city was a hotbed of biblical scholarship and scriptural translation.\(^8\) It was also a major printing centre for Bibles and Genevan Scholars and the religious communities in exile specialised in the psalms. Four versions of the Metrical Psalter were produced at Geneva between 1556 and 1560, though only three survive today.\(^9\)

Like many eschatological texts Geneva Bible was written at a time of both trauma and optimism. Apocalyptic ideas were growing in popularity, partly as a result of the Reformation, the spread of the Ottoman Empire and the decline of the Holy Roman Empire. The English Protestants who created the Geneva Bible had experienced a period of instability. The ideals of the first tentative reforms enacted under Henry VIII seemed to be betrayed by his policies in later life, which resulted in the persecution of more ambitious reformers. Then, in 1547, a new hope came in the form of the young King Edward VI. During his reign, further religious reform was enacted through legislation.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Daniell, D., *The Bible in English* Yale University Press (New Haven 2003) p. 278.

\(^9\) Illing, R., ‘The English Metrical Psalter of the Reformation’ *The Musical Times* Vol. 128 No. 1735 (1987) pp. 517-21, p. 517. The Psalter included was the basis for all Scottish and English Metrical Psalters until 1645, when the ‘Westminster Directory’ was approved by the parliaments of both countries. The psalms were emphasised in the Geneva Bible by the inclusion of the Metrical Psalter at the end of the book. For the most up-to-date discussion of the Scottish and English Metrical Psalters see Duguid, T., *metrical Psalmody in Print and Practice: English 'Singing Psalms' and Scottish 'Psalm Buiks*', c. 1547-1640 Ashgate (Aldershot 2014).

\(^10\) Altars, seen to bestow a sacramental quality on the Holy Communion, were replaced by tables, which were intended simply as a reminder of the last supper. Chanties, linked to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, were banned and use of the Book of Common Prayer was demanded by statute.
In 1553 Edward died and Mary Tudor repealed these acts and, in 1555, began a period of bloody persecution. Many English Protestants fled to the continent and produced texts responding to Mary’s policies, further developing Bale’s method of historical interpretation of prophecy. Thomas Becon portrayed the death of Edward VI and the subsequent reintroduction of Catholicism as a punishment from God, brought about by the laxity and ingratitude of the English people regarding religious reform. Apostasy was a dominant theme in the Geneva Bible because of the abiding sense that the population of England was guilty of the sin *en masse*. Many of Napier’s contemporaries shared a fear of apostasy with the English exiles, to whom their knowledge and interpretation of scripture owed so much.

The Geneva Bible was composed between 1557 and 1560. Mary I died in November 1558 and the coronation of Elizabeth I took place in January 1559. The Geneva Bible was dedicated to Elizabeth who was praised as the new Zerubbabel, who rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem in Haggai Chapter 1. As was the case with Napier’s dedication to James VI, the dedication reflected the hopes of the authors. The rebuilding of the temple was used as an allegory for the reforming policies the exiles hoped Elizabeth would adopt in order to make England a part of the New

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12 Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain which notes were written during the reign of which of these monarchs. Hardin Craig proposed a method in 1938 that involved comparing the annotations to Whittingham’s New Testament of 1557. (See Craig, H, ‘The Geneva Bible as a Political Document’ *The Pacific Historical Review* 7:1 (1938) 40-49, pp. 41-2) However, the annotations in the 1560 version were almost entirely new and bare so little resemblance to Whittingham’s originals that such a comparison is fruitless.

13 *GB, Epistle*, iiir.
Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{14} Also, similarly to the \textit{Plaine Discovery}, the dedication admonished its addressee to reform, and did so within an apocalyptic framework: “you must shewe your selfe strong and bolde in God’s matters: and though Satan lay all his power and craft together to hurt and hinder the Lordes building: yet be you assured that God wil fight from heauen against this great dragon”.\textsuperscript{15}

There are several reasons that the Geneva Bible was not recognised officially by the English Church as it was in Scotland. The most obvious was the book’s connection to John Knox, who had blackened his name at Elizabeth’s court with the unfortunately timed tract, \textit{The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women}.\textsuperscript{16} Published in 1558, this work used scripture to argue that women have no authority as secular rulers. The text was primarily intended as an attack on Mary Tudor; however Knox’s technique was to attack the legitimacy of all ruling queens, rather than targeting specific individuals.\textsuperscript{17}

Moreover, Geneva itself was a unique and fascinating place, which carried some negative connotations for religious moderates. Michael Jensen has argued that the Elizabethan authorities were cautious about the Geneva Bible even before the text

\textsuperscript{14} A marginal note to Zechariah 4:10 has, “Zerubbabél which represented Christ”. (Zechariah 4:10, note I OT 381.r.) By implication then, Elizabeth might be taken as a Christ-like figure, illustrating the hope felt by the exiles in the first year of Elizabeth’s reign. For more on the rebuilding of the temple as a metaphor for the Elizabethan Reformation, see Gunther, K., ‘Rebuilding the Temple: James Pilkington, Aggeus and Early Elizabethan Puritanism’ \textit{The Journal of Ecclesiastical History}, Vol. 60, Part 4, (Oct. 2009) pp. 689-707.

\textsuperscript{15} GB, Epistle, iiiiv.

\textsuperscript{16} Knox, \textit{Works}, 4 pp. 349-422. The book was originally published at Geneva.

\textsuperscript{17} So offensive was the work to Elizabeth that Knox was excluded from talks leading to the Treaty of Berwick between the Lords of the Congregation and Elizabeth’s representatives. See above, Ch. 1 & Mason, \textit{Kingship...} p. 270. John Calvin was aware of the disrepute that the First Blast had brought to Geneva. In 1559 he wrote to William Cecil to protest that his commentary on Isaiah, sent as a gift to Elizabeth at her accession, had not been “kindly received by her majesty”. (Robinson, H. (ed), \textit{The Zurich Letters, (Second Series) Comprising the Correspondence of Several English Bishops and Others with some of The Helvetian Reformers, During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth The Parker Society/CUP (Cambridge 1845) p. 34) Calvin distanced himself from the First Blast and Knox, giving tacit approval to the rule of women, denouncing the book’s contents as ‘ravings’ and bemoaning Knox’s ‘thoughtless arrogance’. (Ibid., pp. 35-6.) For more on the reception of the First Blast, see Dawson, ‘John Knox...’, pp. 107-35.
was available in England because, to many, the word Geneva smacked of extremism. As noted above, Knox was banished from Frankfurt in 1555. Those who desired a more Reformed order of prayer than the Book of Common Prayer including Whittingham, followed him to Geneva, a city dominated by the uncompromising Reforming programme of John Calvin. Others travelled to Basel.

It must be noted that the exile itself was an important formative influence on the Geneva Bible. Like-minded and educated scholars were thrust into the same location, under stressful conditions, which facilitated apocalyptic thought. Moreover, as Dawson has argued, the sense of guilt that the exiles must have felt for fleeing and leaving their fellow Protestants to die in England was another factor in the creation of a unique context. The burning of Protestants in England meant that the exiles felt obliged to produce a work of great magnitude, not simply to validate their positions as ministers, but to validate their existence.

The Geneva Bible, like the Plaine Discovery was very much a product of the time and place in which it was written. The shock of the apostasy of England and the terror that followed were expressed within an apocalyptic framework that was designed to provide consolation to the reader. The book proclaimed that the persecutions were transient and meaningful. An important theme within the Old and New Testaments was the persecution and suffering of God’s chosen people. As was the case in Knox’s written work, the marginalia of the Geneva Bible argued forcefully that the suffering of Protestants proved their status as members of God’s

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18 Jensen, p. 31.
19 See above, pp. 235-6.
20 For a more detailed summary of these events see, Vander Molen, R.J., ‘Anglican against Puritan: Ideological Origins during the Marian Exile’ Church History 42 (1) March 1973. 45-57 For a more modern analysis see Dawson, J., ‘Satan’s bludy clawses’.
21 Dawson, ‘Satan's bludy clawses’ p. 2.
22 Ibid.
true church. Their suffering was predestined, but so was their eternal reward in Heaven and the destruction and damnation of their persecutors.

**The Geneva Bible in Scotland**

The Geneva Bible was written at a pivotal moment in Scotland’s history and published in the same year as the Scottish Reformation Parliament. This Bible, translated and annotated under the watchful eye of John Knox, became the official Protestant version and proved more popular than all others. From 1579 it was printed in Scotland and widely disseminated, being the standard text both at home and in church. Its popularity continued after the publication of the King James version in 1611. Cases of its use in churches well into the second half of the seventeenth century have been found.23

However, the Geneva version was never popular with James VI & I and his dislike of the marginalia may have contributed significantly to the creation of the 1611 version. The Geneva version was a product of its historical context and this was ultimately its downfall. The notes emphasised the service of God before any temporal obligations since much of the text was written by those in exile from monarchical tyranny. Arthur Williamson has shown that, in a general sense, monarchies and other secular bodies appear transient and unimportant against the grandiose backdrop of the apocalypse and the tone of the Genevan marginalia certainly supports this conclusion.24 A necessary facet of the apocalypse was the destruction of all earthly monarchies to usher in the governance of Christ. A marginal note on Daniel 2:44 had, “all the kingdoms of the worlde are transitorie,

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&... the kingdome of Christ shal onely remaine for euer.”  

James bemoaned the notes on passages that advocated resistance to secular rulers as “partial, untrue, seditious and favouring too much of dangerous and trayterous conceits.” The version that he authorised had no annotations and was intended to satisfy Reformers and moderates alike.

Napier and the Geneva Bible

Technical Features

The Plaine Discovery bore a number of technical similarities to the Geneva Bible. Napier used several conventions that, despite being well established by 1593, were groundbreaking when they appeared in 1560. In the 1550s William Whittingham’s genius was to use several recently developed innovations in conjunction with one another for the first time, “that by all meanes the reader might be holpen.” These improvements included clear, Roman type-face that replaced the more commonly used black letter font; numbered biblical verses; the inclusion of indexes; the use of Arabic rather than Roman numerals to denote the chapters; and the use of Arabic numerals, along with the traditional folio classification, to mark each leaf. The legacy of the Geneva Bible may be seen in Napier’s employment of all these techniques to make the Plaine Discovery as user-friendly as possible.

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25 GB, OT f. 358r. Daniel 2:44 reads, “And in the dayes of these Kings, shal the god of heauen set vp a kingdome, which shal neuer be destroyed: and this kingdome shal not be giuen to ano ther people, but it shal breake, and destroye all these kingdomes, and it shal stand for euer.”


27 For a more detailed discussion of the reception of the Geneva Bible at the court of James VI see Betteridge.

28 GB, AV, v.

29 See above, pp. 7-11
Whittingham and the other translators of the Geneva Bible also took the monumental step of favouring ease of use over the aesthetic qualities that previously typified humanist Bible production. For example, in Tyndale’s translations of the 1530s, the notes were brief and appeared at the end of each chapter. As a result, the margins were less cluttered and the text fit into four neat columns on each leaf. In the Geneva Bible, the notes were presented beside the scriptural text so that the reader could easily glance from one to the other. As demonstrated by a comparison between the *Plaine Discovery* and the *Image of Both Churches*, Napier similarly favoured ease of use over aesthetic appearance, presenting his analysis beside the scriptural text.\[^{30}\] Like the exiles, Napier began each chapter with a brief summary of the text called the ‘Arguments’. In both books, these arguments were doctrinally loaded. Napier conceded that they were intended to summarise, “not of the literall sense of the chapter, but of the true meaning and interpretation of the same.”\[^{31}\]

The authoritative tone of the assertions in the annotations of the 1560 Geneva Bible was mirrored in Napier’s *Plaine Discovery*. Notes in Bibles that predated the Geneva version, such as Tyndale’s translation, and those that followed the publication of the King James Version, lacked the polemical force of the 1560 Geneva edition. In 1616 an edition of Theodore Beza’s Greek New Testament was published in English. This version had accompanying notes to the Book of Revelation, written by the Huguenot scholar Fransiscus Junius, which were far more extensive than those in the 1560 version. The notes frequently provided more than half of the text on each leaf and the book covered 275 leaves, whereas the 1560 version’s New Testament covered 122. However, the notes were portrayed as just

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\[^{30}\] See above, p. 9.  
\[^{31}\] *PD*, A7v.
what they were: a disputable interpretation. Note 28 to Revelation 13:18, on the interpretation of the number of the beast, carried the following admission, “I am not ignorant that other interpretations are brought upon this place: but I thought it my duetie, with the good favour of all, and without the offence of any to propound my opinion in this point.”32 In the 1560 Geneva Bible, as in the Plaine Discovery, the interpretations of the authors were worded as facts; there were no apologies and few qualifications.

The Translation

The marginalia of the Geneva Bible, with their staunch, polemical tone have been a subject of considerable controversy.33 However, the majority of scholars have conceded that the translation of the biblical text was of a high standard and without bias. In 1938 Craig concluded that the authors of the Geneva Bible translated the text from the Greek and Hebrew to the best of their abilities and did not alter the text to suit their doctrinal standpoint.34 In 2003 David Daniell praised both the quality of the translators’ comprehension of the Hebrew texts and the quality of the English language used.35 Nor can the translators be accused of shying from the more challenging content of the original Hebrew text. For example, in Tyndale’s translation, the rape of Dinah in Genesis chapter 34 is portrayed as consensual sex.36

32 The New Testament of our Lord Iesvs Christ, Translated out of greke by Theodore Beza [...] Englished by L. Tomson Robert Barker (London 1616). It may be the case that the cautious tone of these notes allowed the book to be published in English, given James’ dislike of the Geneva version.
33 Daniell provided a good introduction to the notes, but one that has a decidedly apologetic tone.
34 Craig, p. 47.
35 Daniell, p. 316.
The 1560 Geneva Bible, however states that Shechem “defiled her”. In addition, the notes occasionally contradict the text directly. The translators could have subtly changed the text to match their doctrinal stance but did not, even when it was detrimental to their arguments.

Napier did not share this devotion to scriptural accuracy at the expense of his conclusions. In his introductory note to the reader, he attempted to play-down his reliance on the Geneva Bible, stating, “I follow not altogether the vulgar English translation, but the best learned in the Greek tong, so that (for satisfying the Papists) I differ nothing from their vulgar text of S. Ierome... except in such places, where I proue by good reasons, that hee differeth from the Originall Greek.” Despite this statement, the most cursory comparison between the Plaine Discovery, the Geneva Bible and the Vulgate reveals that Napier’s greatest debt was to the 1560 edition.

The two versions match almost exactly, with the vast majority of differences being due to the desire to justify the text within the margins. For example, the use of the ampersand as opposed to the word ‘and’ was by no means consistent in either work. The same may be said of contractions. A good example of this is the mixed use of ‘cădlestickes’ and ‘candlestickes’ on page 115 of the Geneva Bible. However, the most compelling similarity between the Book of Revelation in the Plaine Discovery and the Geneva Bible is the use of italics to denote words that have been inserted by the translators. When translating, it is often necessary to add words

37 GB, Gen. 34:2 OT, f. 16r.
38 For example, notes to Rev. 20:6-7 (f. 122v.) interpreted the thousand years as meaning ‘foreuer’, but subsequently discuss a period after this time.
39 See above, pp. 113 & 170-3.
40 PD, A7.r. He cited Christopher Plantin’s 1564 version of the Vulgate, printed at Antwerp. This version was notable for its division of the New Testament into verses, according to Robert Estienne’s system, on which subsequent divisions were based.
because a literal translation might miss, for example, grammatical articles. As the translators of the Geneva Bible put it,

wheras the necessitie of the sentence required any thing to be added (for suche is the grace and proprietie of the Ebrewe and Greke tongues, that it can not but ether by circumlocution, or by adding the verbe or some worde be vnderstand of them that are not wel practised therein) we haue put it in the text with another kynde of lettre, that it may easely be discerned from the common lettre.\(^\text{31}\)

Translation is an art and not an exact science because so much of the process is up to the discretion of the translator and reflects their personal taste or bias. These italicised words in Napier’s version of the Book of Revelation match those in the Geneva Bible in almost every instance, of which there are many.\(^\text{42}\)

\(^{31}\) GB, ff. A4r-A5v.

\(^{42}\) See attached page for a comparison of Napier’s version of Rev. 1:1-7. The text differs significantly from the Vulgate, which has, \(^{\text{31}}\)apocalypsis Iesu Christi quam dedit illi Deus palam facere servis suis quae oportet fieri cito et significavit mittens per angelum suum servo suo Iohanni \(^{\text{2}}\)qui testimonium perhibuit verbo Dei et testimonium Iesu Christi quae cumque vidit \(^{\text{3}}\)beatus qui legit et qui audiunt verba prophetiae et servant ea quae in ea scripta sunt tempus enim prope est \(^{\text{4}}\)Johannes septem ecclesiis quae sunt in Asia gratia vobis et pa\xa0\text{\textemdash}ab eo qui est et qui erat et qui venturus est et a septem spiritibus qui in conspectu throni eius sunt \(^{\text{5}}\)et ab Iesu Christo qui est testis fidelis primogenitus mortuorum et princeps regum terrae qui dilexit nos et lavit nos a peccatis nostris in sanguine suo \(^{\text{6}}\)et fecit nostrum regnum sacerdotes Deo et Patri suo ipsi gloria et imperium in saecula saeculorum amen \(^{\text{7}}\)ecce venit cum nubibus et videbit eum omnis oculus et qui eum pupugerunt et plangent se super eum omnes tribus terrae etiam amen” Weber, R. (ed), \textit{Biblia Sacra Vulgata} GBS (Stuttgart 1990).
He revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly be done: which he sent, and shewed by his Angel unto his servant John,

Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he said.

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that heare the wordes of this prophecy, and kepe those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

John, to the seven Churches which are in Asia, Grace be with you, and peace from him, Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before his Throne,

And from Jesus Christ, which is a faithful witness, & the first begotten of the dead, and Prince of the Kings of the earth, vnto him that loued vs, & washed vs from our sinnes in his blood,

And made vs Kings and Priests vnto God euene his Father, to him be glorie, & dominion for euermore, Amen.

Behold, he cometh with cloudes, and euerie eye shall see him: yea, euery thing which he pierced him through: and all kinred of the earth shall waile before him, Euen so, Amen.

The 1560 Geneva Bible

The Plaine Discovery

The Book of Revelation

Few Books of the Bible were celebrated in the introductory ‘arguments’ in the 1560 Geneva edition as passionately as the Book of Revelation. Like Bale before them, the annotators asserted that it summarised prophecies from previous books of the Bible, calling it, “a summe of those prophecies, which were writen before, but shulde be fulfiled after the comming of Christ”. Like Napier after them, they called the text ‘lively’ and emphasised the conflict between God’s true church and the oppressive Church of Antichrist. The annotators urged the reader to “read diligently: iudge soberly, and call earnestly to God for the true vnderstanding”, of the text and Napier appears to have done just that. Bauckham has argued that the Revelation was of particular importance for the exiles because it was assumed to have been written in exile and addressed to churches in crisis. Thus, like Bale, by emphasising the text, the translators drew a direct parallel between their own position and that of biblical prophets. They portrayed their authority as being drawn from scripture and as such they had a vital role in the process of salvation of God’s Church.

The marginalia placed within the Book of Revelation are the densest in the Geneva Bible, which illustrates the importance of the text to the polemical agenda of the translators. In the Book of Daniel, the other most important prophetic text in the biblical canon, the average number of marginal notes per leaf was 39, in the Revelation that number increased to 48. More importantly, the notes to Revelation

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43 GB, NT, f. 115v.
44 Ibid. & PD, f. A6r.
45 See above, p. 49, for Napier’s assertions about his fascination with, and study of, the Revelation.
47 See above p. 218.
were more interpretive and went further in imposing meaning onto the text. As Dan Danner has pointed out, the notes differed from those to other texts in their fervent anti-Catholic sentiments and denunciation of the pope as Antichrist.\textsuperscript{48} In Daniel approximately 48\% of the notes may be regarded as doctrinally neutral and existed to assist the reader. In Revelation, this proportion dropped significantly to around 36\%.\textsuperscript{49} The number of notes accompanying the most apocalyptic passages increased, and an even lower proportion may be seen as doctrinally neutral.

An analysis of the Book of Revelation in the Geneva Bible proves that Napier was influenced profoundly by the notes placed beside the text. Napier’s interpretation of the deceptive two-horned beast in Revelation 13:11 derived from that in the 1560 Geneva Bible, where the beast was identified as Pope Boniface VIII who, “hathe two swords caryed before him” and “shewed himself one day in apparel as a Pope, & the next day in harnes as the Emperour, and the two hornes in the bishops mitre are signes hereof.”\textsuperscript{50} Similarly, Napier described the horns as representing “a two-fold power, spirituall and temporall; signified by their two horned Miter, and by the two swords that Pope Boniface the eight caused to be carried before him, saying Ecce duo Gladii hic, while as he was clad the one day in the pontificall of a Bishop, the next day in Armour like an Emperour”\textsuperscript{51}

One of the most important similarities between the texts was that both sought to demonise the papacy by explicitly associating it with the Christ-killing Romans, represented by Pontius Pilate, and establish continuity between the Ancient Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church. Napier’s arguments on these subjects were

\textsuperscript{48} Danner, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{49} Daniel: 313 notes, 151 (48.24\%) non-polemical. Revelation: 398 notes, 144 (36.18\%) non-polemical. Figures approximate because judgement on neutrality is subjective.
\textsuperscript{50} GB, Rev. 13:11, note q, f.119v.
\textsuperscript{51} PD, p. 157.
passionate and detailed and his analysis was probably influenced by the Geneva Bible. Revelation 11:8 was translated as, “And their corpses shall lie in the streets of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where our lord was crucified.” The annotators interpreted this as, “Meaning the whole jurisdiction of the Pope, which is compared to Sodom for their abominable sin, and to Egypt because the true libertie to serve God is taken away from the faithful: and Christ was condemned by Pilate, who represented the Romaine power which shulde be enemie to the godlie.” The Geneva Bible placed a far greater emphasis on the evils of the Roman Empire than other Protestant eschatological works that preceded it, which probably helped shape Napier’s beliefs. For example, George Joye’s 1545 Exposition of Daniel was more concerned with attacking the papacy directly than the Geneva Bible’s notes on Daniel, which cast the Roman Empire as the chief temporal antagonist of God’s chosen people.

Since 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of All-Saints Church in Wittenburg, indulgences had been a target of hatred for reformers. Pointing out the evils of indulgences was a useful tool for Protestant polemicists to attack the Roman Catholic Church and establish their place in the same tradition as Luther, the father of the Reformation. Napier’s specific assertion that Roman Catholic clerics had reduced the souls of humans to ‘merchandise’ through the selling of indulgences was striking, as was its similarity to a claim made in the Geneva Bible. The fact that this assertion was made by Knox in his final published

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52 For example, see above, pp. 165-6.
53 GB, f. 118r.
work might indicate that he had developed the idea and shared it with his congregation of exiles.\textsuperscript{55} Alternatively, it may have been a popular idea among the congregation, which Knox embraced. In the 1560 edition, Revelation 18:13 read, “And of synamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankinsence, and wine, and oile, and fine floure, and wheat, & beastes, and shepe, and horses, and charrets, & servants, and soules of men.”\textsuperscript{56} The marginal note in the Geneva Bible had, “This is the vilest ware that these merchants sell, and best cheape, which soules notwithstanding ye Sonne of God redeemed with his precious blood.”\textsuperscript{57} In his analysis of the same verse, Napier wrote of, “the pretended merchandise of the soules of men” in relation to masses and indulgences.\textsuperscript{58}

Villification of the papacy was a central aim of any eschatological, Protestant text of the sixteenth century. However, both the \textit{Plaine Discovery} and the Geneva Bible both took the important step of implying that the denunciation and foretold destruction of the papacy and its seat at Rome was the \textit{raison d’être} of the Book of Revelation itself. Revelation 10:8 described a voice, instructing John to take the little book that had been sent from Heaven. In the Geneva Bible, the note to this verse read, “As S. Iohn vnderstode this by reuelation, so is the same reueiled to ye true preachers to discouer the Pope & Antichrist.”\textsuperscript{59} Thus, the idea that the Pope was Antichrist was central to understanding the text and was God’s reason for revealing the message to John. The quotation revealed not only the annotators’ conception of

\textsuperscript{55} See above, p. 250.  
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{GB}, Rev. 13:3, f. 121v.  
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{PD}, p. 219. He expanded on the point on p. 223. Knox’s discussion in the \textit{Answer} was more explicit and impassioned, implying that Napier may have read both texts.  
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{GB}, Rev. 10:8, f. 118.r.
the papacy, but also their self-perception as God’s ministers, revealing His truth in the latter days of human history.

Finally, the Geneva Bible may be the source of Napier’s revulsion at, and even preoccupation with, prostitution.60 The Geneva Bible referred to, “idolatrie or whoredome” implying that the terms are interchangeable.61 Later in the text, whoredom was treated as a byword for all sin. Revelation 14:4 referred to the 144,000 as “not defiled with women: for they are virgins”.62 The annotators were very careful in their treatment of this statement, writing that whoredom and not sexual intercourse in a general sense was being alluded to: “By whoredome: and vnnder this vice he comprehendeth all other: but this is chiefly ment of idolatrie which is the spiritual whoredome.”63 It was important that the annotators eliminate the possibility that the biblical verse could be used to advocate the Roman Catholic tradition of clerical celibacy which they, as Protestant ministers, opposed. By shifting the emphasis from sex to idolatry, they emphasised the sins with which the Pope and his church were charged. The limited space within which they were able to make their assertions demanded brevity, and they displayed great skill in imbuing their annotations with several layers of meaning.

**A Chronology in the Geneva Bible?**

The marginal notes placed within the Book of Revelation by Knox’s congregation at Geneva suggested a sense of chronological development. However, because it merely suggested or implied a chronology, the Geneva Bible was

60 Napier used the themes of sex, lust and prostitution several times. For example, see above, pp. 49, 157 & 181 & PD, pp. 209, 216 & 222.
61 GB, Rev. 2:17, f. 115r.
62 Ibid., f. 119r.
63 Ibid.
fundamentally different from the *Plaine Discovery*. Napier’s chronology was not simply explicit, it was central to his work. It served as the foundation on which all his attacks against the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church were constructed. It provided a unifying factor for the diverse arguments he made, drawing them together into a coherent narrative framework.

In the Geneva Bible, the events and descriptions of the Book of Revelation were rarely applied to specific historical events and figures. The earliest chapters contained explicit historical application, but the notes cannot be called interpretive in any meaningful sense because they alluded to events that supposedly occurred whilst John was writing. For example, Revelation 2:8-11 described a letter from John to the church at Smyrna. The annotators concluded that the words, “I know thy workes and tribulation,” referred to, “the persecution vnder the emperor Domitian.” Domitian reigned from 81 to 96 A.D. and the church of Smyrna was led by Polycarp, believed to be the disciple of John for whom the letter was allegedly intended.

As had been the case in Bale’s *Image*, the approximate dating of many later events identified in the Geneva Bible’s marginalia can only be inferred. For example, the four angels, whose release was heralded by the sixth trumpet in Revelation 9:14, were interpreted as, “Meaning the enemies of East countrey, which shulde afflisse the church of God, as did the Arabians, Sarasines, Turkes & Tartarians.” This probably referred to the period around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when formerly disparate Islamic peoples began to enjoy a greater sense of unity, especially under Saladin the Great, and posed a greater threat to European interests.

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64 Ibid., Rev. 2:9, f. 115r.
65 Ibid. Napier did not regard these chapters as important to his polemical agenda, referring to ch. 2 as a ‘general preface’ and used a format of two columns, displaying the biblical text and a paraphrase respectively and not including any historical application. *PD*, pp. 82-3.
66 *GB*, Rev. 9:14, f. 118r.
In many cases, the notes did not supply dates, or even clues to a specific time period, but gave a general sense of historical development. For example, the common motif of corruption of the Church and clergy by the papacy was explored in a note to Revelation 12:4, which described the dragon casting a third of the stars from the heavens: “By his flatteries & promises he gaineth manie of ye excellent ministers & honorable personed, and bringeth them to destruction.” When read within the context of the *Plaine Discovery*, with its rigid system of dating, the Geneva Bible’s lack of historical application is striking. For example, no real interpretation of the seven seals was offered, save for an explanation that the riders of the horses that were released represented Christ, Satan, famine and pestilence respectively.  

When the annotations did refer to specific historical events or figures, they tended to be highly derivative of Bale. For example, the thousand year period during which Satan was bound, was determined to be, “from Christs natiiuitie vnto the time of Pope Syluester the seconde: so long the pure doctrine shulde after a sorte remaine.”

Although the annotators of the Geneva Bible rarely proffered an overt historical application to the reader, their assessment of human history and humanity’s collective eschatological destiny shared a key element with Napier: the destruction of the papacy was integral to God’s inevitable triumph over Satan and the new world that would follow the apocalypse. In fact, this new kingdom would be typified as much by the absence of the Roman Catholic Church as by the presence of adherents of the ‘true Church’. Revelation 19:4 had “And the foure and twentie Elders, & the foure beastes fell downe, and worshiped God that sate on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelu-iah.” This was interpreted in the marginalia as, “Signifying that his

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67 Ibid., Rev 6:2-8, f. 117r.
68 Ibid., Rev. 20:2, f. 121r. See above, p. 230-1.
judgements are true & iust, and that we oght to praise him euermore for the destruction of the Pope.”

The notes cast the Papacy and its temporal supporters as adversaries of God and His chosen, to be destroyed in the impending final battle: “The ouerthrowe of the beast and his which shalbe chiefly accomplished at the seconde coming of Christ.” However, the destruction of the papacy would give no clue to the date of the coming end because it would exist until the very moment of the Second Coming: “For the Pope & ye worldlie princes shal fight against Christ euen vntil this last day.”

Napier’s predictions about the date of the apocalypse were the most dramatic and controversial departure he made from the Bible that would have played a major role in his life since childhood. The Geneva Bible implied that the Day of Judgement and apocalypse would occur before long. However, for its annotators, the end of the world was used to urge the reader to remain constant in faith and behaviour, acting as if God’s judgement were at hand and confident that they were soon to be delivered from their troubles. The notes stated that the date of the apocalypse was unknowable to humanity and this secrecy was a part of God’s plan: “Seing the Lord is at hand, we oght to be constant and reioyce, but we must beware we esteme not the length nor shortnes of ye Lords coming by our owne imagination.” They believed living as if the Day of Judgement were at hand but not being concerned with exactly when it would occur was the best guide to living a good life and observing sound religious practice. Napier was less concerned with consoling the reader and modifying their behaviour than he was with encouraging those in positions of power to enact swift

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69 Ibid., f. 121r.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., Rev. 22:20, f. 122r.
and extensive religious reform. He provided a finite period within which people could act to secure their part in the final scenes of the drama of good versus evil.

The Prophecy of Elias

The Talmudic prophecy of Elias was one of the essential components of Napier’s chronology and dating of the apocalypse. In expounding the belief that the date of the apocalypse was beyond the grasp of human knowledge, the Geneva Bible forbade the use of the prophecy. The reader was urged, “to beware of all dreames & fantasies of men which wearie themselves & others in searching out curiously the time that the Lord shal appeare, alledging for them selues a vaine prophecie, and moste falsely ascribed to Elias that 2000 yere before the lawe, 2000 vnder the Lawe and 2000 after the lawe the worlde shal endure.” As a qualification, the note to 1 Thessalonians 5:20, “Despise not prophesying”, added that prophesying referred to preaching and not predicting the future. Thus it was strongly implied that prophesying, when defined as predicting future events, should be despised. In addition, in 2 Thessalonians, the annotations declared prophecy concerning the date of the apocalypse to be the work of false prophets. Producing a Bible for the general reader carried significant responsibilities and the congregation at Geneva needed to distance themselves from the taint of premillennialism. Their chronology of salvation history was less overt than Bale’s and unlike him, they explicitly forbade the use of the Prophecy of Elias.

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73 GB, note to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, “Bvt of the times & seasons, brethren, ye haue no nede that I write vnto you. For ye your selues knowe perfitley, that the day of the Lord shal come, euuen as a thefe in the night.”
74 GB, 1 Thessalonians 5:20 note l, f. 96r.
75 GB, 2 Thessalonians 3:15 note f, f. 97v.
However, Napier was not bound by such constraints and went even further than Bale. He employed the Prophecy of Elias and Matthew 24:22; “for the electes sake those dayes shalbe shortened”, along with historical evidence, and specified that the Second Coming would occur between 1688 and 1700.\footnote{PD, pp. 16-22. See above, pp. 134-9 for a more detailed analysis.} He was aware that predicting the date of the apocalypse was controversial and his dating of the apocalypse to an approximate period of years, as opposed to a specific year or date, was a useful caveat. He accepted “that the day of judgement and houre thereof, none doth knowe: yea not the Sonne, but the father only”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 16.} However, he argued that the ‘age’ within which the end would come was accessible to both Christ and His Church.\footnote{Ibid.}

**Conclusion**

Without the influence of the Geneva Bible, Napier’s *Plaine Discovery* would have been very different. It was the Bible that Napier had used for most of his life and probably influenced his understanding of scripture more than any other text. When he referred to a scriptural verse outside of the Revelation, even when he did not provide the text, he would have had the Genevan version in mind. Although he downplayed his debt to the 1560 translation of the Book of Revelation, he derived his biblical text almost entirely from that version. The Spanish Blanks affair encouraged him to publish the *Plaine Discovery* in English earlier than he originally intended and having a good translation of the biblical text facilitated this process.\footnote{Ibid.} In addition, the annotations placed in the margins of the 1560 edition deeply influenced Napier’s analysis of the papacy, the Roman Empire, and the apocalypse. However, Napier’s
Chronology was largely of his own device and he departed from specific instructions of the annotations in employing the Prophecy of Elias to attempt to approximately date the apocalypse.

There are several reasons that Napier’s approach to eschatology differed from that of the annotators at Geneva. The exiles were writing at a time of great uncertainty. They did not know when they would be able to return to their homes, and what sort of reception would greet them when they did. They had been in fear of their lives because of their religious beliefs and had witnessed the persecution and execution of those with similar convictions. Their main aim was to offer consolation to the persecuted Protestants of England. Consequently, their annotations were ‘defensive’ in tone, arguing that Protestants were the successors to the Israelites of the Old Testament as God’s chosen people and that their Roman Catholic persecutors would soon be destroyed. After November 1588 they sought to ingratiate themselves to the court of Elizabeth I, hoping to return home and act as ministers in the newly Protestant England. The work they had produced was not an exegetical tract but a Bible. This meant that it was aimed at the widest possible audience and would potentially be the most important text for members of every level of the social strata, playing a role in their devotional lives from baptism to burial. Of course, the Protestant emphasis on vernacular scripture and the desire to construct all doctrine and religious practices according to the Bible further increased the gravity of the text. There is no reason to think that the exiles believed in an imminent apocalypse but these factors meant that emphasising the end of the world would not have suited their professional or polemical agendas. Doing so would have risked inciting panic and blackening their names at the Elizabethan court. As was the case in the works of Bale
and Knox, God’s judgement of humanity in the future was employed as a device to encourage religious constancy but there was little cause to declare its imminence, and doing so might have proved detrimental to their aims.

The *Plaine Discovery* on the other hand was written by a wealthy man, living in his own country, which had recently been through a comparatively complete Protestant Reformation and was ruled by a Protestant monarch. In 1593, Napier and his associates in the Kirk were unsatisfied with the pace and extent of reform, and Scots were feeling threatened by exterior Roman Catholic forces in the wake of the Spanish Armada and Spanish Blanks Affair. However, their position was not as fragile as the Marian exiles, who had experienced the trauma of being forced to flee their homes in fear for their lives and who often had personal friends and colleagues who had been put to death. The relative confidence in his own position made Napier’s work far more ‘offensive’ in tone. Unlike the annotators of the Geneva Bible, he did not run the risk of appearing extreme by attacking specific figures, such as the Roman Catholic monarchs of Europe, as Knox had done in his unflattering portrait of Charles V in 1555.  

This was especially true in the years following the Spanish Armada and Spanish Blanks Affair, when Protestants in the British Isles fixed in their minds the idea of Roman Catholic Europe, especially Spain, as their temporal and spiritual adversaries. Accordingly, Napier presented a passionate argument, bolstered by overtly apocalyptic themes, in order to demand acceptance of his religious vision.

As ministers, writing at a time when many of their colleagues were being persecuted, the annotators of the Geneva Bible exalted this vocation above all others.

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80 *ODNB*: John Knox.
In the Geneva Bible, the primary weapon of the Antichrist was regarded as the dissemination of false doctrine. Revelation 16:13 had, “And I sawe thre vnkleane spirits like frogges come out of the mouth of the dragon, & out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet”. As the annotators explained, “That is, a strong nomber of this great deuil ye Popes ambassadours which are euer crying and croking like frogs and come out of Antichrists mouth, because they shulde speake nothing but lies and vse all maner of craftie deciet to maintaine their riche Euphrates against true Christians.” As the counterparts to these disseminators of false doctrine, Protestant ministers cast themselves as teachers of true religion and adversaries of evil with an important role to play in its downfall. The heavy burden of this role was also emphasised. The annotators interpreted John’s eating of the book in Revelation 10:9-10, finding it sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach, as meaning the goodness of the Bible combined with the difficult task of preaching the truth of scripture: “ministers have consolation by the worde of God, yet shal he haue sore, & grieuous enemies, which shalbe troublesome vnto him.”

Napier did not emphasise the role of ministers to nearly the same extent. Although he claimed to have aimed the Plaine Discovery at a wide audience, he was, in essence, an elitist. His work appealed to grandiose notions of kingship and cast himself and a small group of contemporaries as involved in the final battle between good and evil by virtue of their intellect. He contended that the emergence of learned men like himself, who would reveal the truth of scripture’s most obscure verses, was a sign of God’s mercy in the last days.

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GB, f. 120r.
GB, Rev. 10:10, note f, f. 118r.
Chapter 10 - James VI’s Fruitfull Meditatioun

James VI’s 1588 pamphlet on Revelation 10:7-10 was the only work that dealt primarily with the Book of Revelation, and the only explicitly eschatological text other than the Geneva Bible, to be published in Scotland before the Plaine Discovery. Despite the fact that the exegesis covered less than ten full sides of text, it contained many of the elements that were common to sixteenth century polemical works in English. For example, the pope was denounced as Antichrist and the apocalypse was used as a device for encouraging adherence to Protestantism and hatred of Roman Catholicism. A sense of chronological development, according to a similar model to Bale’s Image was also suggested. Above all, the work was epitomized by a preoccupation with warfare and the portrayal of the British Isles as a single entity in the wake of the Spanish Armada. The attempted invasion had occurred just two months before James composed the text.

The work is especially important for this study because it gave Napier an insight into how his patron felt about the specific Biblical text on which he was commentating. Napier had studied James’s tract and wrote that God had reformed the king’s, “inward minde, by purging the same from all apparant spot of Antichristianisme, as that fruitfull meditation vpon the 7, 8, 9, and 10. verses of the 20. Chapter of the Reuelation, which your highnes hath both godly & learnedly set forth, doth beare plaine testimony, to your M[ajesty’s] high praise and honour”.¹ The Fruitfull Meditatioun told Napier that James might be receptive to certain arguments and imagery and this influenced the content of the Plaine Discovery, especially its dedicatory epistle.

¹ PD, Dedicatory Epistle, f. A4r.
James’s Approach to the Revelation

In many respects, the *Fruitfull Meditatioun* was a standard sixteenth century Protestant analysis of the Book of Revelation. In it, James celebrated the Revelation as the best book of the Bible for instructing Christians, particularly in what he regarded as “our last age”. As Napier did five years later, James phrased his denunciation of the pope as Antichrist as manifest fact, writing, “I think surely it expoundes it self: Dois he not vsurpe Christis office calling him self vniversall bishop, & heid of the kirk: Playis he not ye part of Apollyon and Abaddon the king of the locustis and destroyer or sone of perditioun”. James also identified Gog and Magog as “the Turke ye awewit enemie, and ye Pape ye couered enemie”. This interpretation was based on Bale’s *Image*, and Napier placed great emphasis on it, devoting one of his 36 ‘propositions’ to explaining the identities of Gog and Magog as well as discussing the issue in his main commentary. This may have been an attempt to demonstrate his agreement with James’s interpretations.

Like the annotators of the 1560 Geneva Bible, James was largely unconcerned with mathematics, in contrast to Napier’s fascination with the subject. For example, James argued that the millennium during which Satan was bound did not necessarily refer to a specific number of years and the term may have been used figuratively: “Ther thousand zeiris ar bot [but] ane number certane for ane uncertane, quilk phrase is oft uste be the Spirit of God in the scriptures, meaning ane greit number of zeiris.” Despite this, James did imply a sense of chronological development, again discussing the binding of Satan, he wrote, “This time did indure from Christ ane space efter

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3 Ibid., f. Biir. More examples followed.
5 PD, pp. 61, 235 & 241.
Augustineis dayis, quhen ye bloodie sword of persecutioun ceassing, ye haill Kirk began to be defylit with diuerse heresies, quilk cumming to ane mature & rype heip did produce ye Antichrist”. He also wrote that Satan was bound by the preaching of true religion and released by the dissemination of false doctrine.

As was typical for the time, James concluded that the date of the Day of Judgement was unknowable to humanity, whilst arguing that it would occur within a relatively short space of time: “in how short space it sall follow, that is onlie knawin vnto God. Onlie this far ar we certaine, that in that last estait without ony ma generall mutatiounis ye warld sall remane till ye consummatioun.”

The Besieged Island

James’s pamphlet on the Revelation was a direct response to the Spanish Armada, which had occurred in the same year he wrote the work. In writing the piece, he showed that he favoured the coming together of England and Scotland. As Jane Rickard has argued, this was especially important because James wished to demonstrate that he did not hold a grudge against the English court for the execution of his mother. James was hoping to succeed to the English throne since Elizabeth was likely to die without issue. A charm offensive, including an emphasis on the shared religious stance of Scotland and England would assist his cause. When he

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7 James VI, Meditatioun, f. Biiv.
8 Ibid., f. A4r. “The deuill, having bene bound, & his power in his instruments is hauing bene restraint for a lang space be ye preaching of ye gospell, as last he is lowsed out of hell by ye raising vp of so mony new errouris and notable euill instrumentis”.
9 Ibid., f. B4v. Note that Napier had also used the term ‘mutations’ when discussing changes to earthly kingdoms and institution, implying that this was familiar vocabulary at the time.
10 Rickard, J., Authorship and authority: The writings of James VI and I MUP (Manchester 2007) p. 76.
11 Lynch, ‘Queen Mary’s Triumph’, pp. 12-13. In fact, the idea that James might lead the realms of Scotland and England had been a feature of his life since his birth. For example, at his baptism he was portrayed as the new Arthur, who would one day rule over the British Isles. See ‘Scotland’s First...’, p. 180.
described the British mainland as an ‘Iland’ in his introductory epistle to the reader, Napier was probably reflecting James’s portrayal of Britain as ‘this Ile’.\textsuperscript{12} James portrayed the British Isles as a single entity, united geographically and spiritually under Protestant monarchs and threatened in a very real sense by the Roman Catholic powers of Europe. He repeatedly used the pronoun ‘our’ to develop the conception that every echelon of society was united against a common enemy and emphasised the immediacy and reality of the perceived threat, both spiritual and military: “Our estait is, we are thriefaidlie beseagit [threefoldly besieged], First spirituallie be ye heresies of ye Antichrist. Secundlie corporallie and generallie, as members of that Kirk ye quilk in the hail they persecute. Thirdlie corporallie & particularlie be yis present armie.”\textsuperscript{13}

To rectify this situation, the inhabitants of the British Isles were implored to act collectively in three ways. Firstly, they were to pray for divine intervention, secondly to study the bible for reassurance that they were God’s chosen people who would soon triumph over their enemies. Finally, they were to unite militarily and act, “in defence of our liberties, natie countrie, and lyfes.”\textsuperscript{14} In the \textit{Plaine Discovery} Napier employed the impending judgement of God to instil a sense of urgency. James’s text also contained a sense of urgency, but it was created above all by the threat of invasion. Military conflict was a dominant theme throughout James’s work because of the context of the post-Armada crisis. Nearly a fifth of the ten page text was dedicated to the final battle between good and evil. Violent imagery was used to

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{PD}, f. A7\textsuperscript{v}, James VI, \textit{Meditatioun}, f. b3\textsuperscript{v} & see above, pp. 3, 10, 68, 103, 144 & 190.
\textsuperscript{13} James VI, 1588, f. b4\textsuperscript{v}. James’s second point referred to the concept that the true church of God is constantly persecuted and that Protestants were the successors to the Israelites of the Old Testament as God’s chosen people.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., f. b4\textsuperscript{r}. The sense of unity between the realms had an obvious religious connotation due to the involvement of the English military in the Scottish Reformation and the legacy of the Marian Exile in both countries. See above, chs.1 & 9.
emotive effect, to stir the reader to action and assure them that their victory was inevitable and that their enemies would be punished in the most horrific ways imaginable: “fyre sall cum doun from heauin, and deuour them, and ye deuill yat deceauit them and all his instrumentis, cheiflie ye beast and fals prophet sall be cast into ane lake of fyre and brimstone, and sall be tormented day and nycht incessantlie for euer and euer”.

So dominant were the themes of conquest and punishment in the Fruitfull Meditatioun that James hardly mentioned the comforting qualities of the Revelation that were a theme in other sixteenth century Protestant works like the Geneva Bible: “tyrannie of ye Antichrist sifting out ye caffe from ye corne, as our Maister sayis, sall tend to ye double condemnatioun of ye falleris bak, and to ye double croun of glorie to ye perseueireris. Blissis thairfoir ar they that perseueir to ye end, for they sall be saiff.”

The immediacy of the threat meant that James did not need to consider abstract theological concepts. He was able to identify specific enemies, in France, Flanders and Germany, as well as Spain, against whom to direct his polemic and stir up the hatred of his readers. As well as external threats, James repeatedly pointed out the threat of Jesuits within the British Isles. This is an important point, given the involvement of Jesuits in the Spanish Blanks affair. Perhaps James’s repeated mention of the Society years before led Napier and the Presbyterian party to expect that he would be more forceful in his reprisals against those involved.

15 James VI, Meditatioun, f. b1r.
16 Ibid., f. B3v.
17 Ibid., f. biiiiv.
18 Ibid., f. B2r & B5r.
19 See above, pp. 74-5.
James, as Napier was also to do, placed the British Isles and its military aims firmly within the context of an apocalyptic narrative. The battle that the population of the Isles faced, and in which James was urging his readers to take part, was the final battle between good and evil foretold in the Book of Revelation: “And quhat is preparit and cum forwart against this Ile: Do we not dayle heir: and be all appearance shortlie sall see: Now may ze iudge gif this be not ye tyme quhairof this place that I have maid chois of doeth meane, and sa ye dew tyme for the reuelling of this prophecie.” Nor was the post-Armada context of the text lost on Patrick Galloway (1551-1626), minister of Perth, who contributed the preface and described the text as, “a work... which God his spirite did vtter by our Soueraigne, as a witnesse of his Graces knowledge in the highe mysteries of God, and a testimonie of his Highnesse most vnfained loue toward true religion, by many nations at that time injoyned vnder the conduct of the Spaniard mightily inuaded”.

**James’s Notion of Kingship**

Rickard has also argued that James’s *Fruitfull Meditatioun* was a part of a concerted effort by the king to ingratiate himself with, and exert authority over, the fledgling Kirk of Scotland. The text does contain many allusions to the role of monarchs in the narrative of salvation history. For example, James asserted that, prior to the final battle, Satan would, “gather togidder the kingis of the earth in greit

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20 James VI, *Meditatioun*, B5r.
multitudis lyke the sandis of the sea”.\textsuperscript{23} James assumed that secular monarchs, as heads of states, were analogues of those states, writing that Satan, “shall moue and entyte ye princes of the earth to ioyne with him and mak weir against ye faithfull”.\textsuperscript{24} James’s analysis of the Revelation did not contain the detailed proclamations on the theology of kingship found in \textit{The True Law of Free Monarchies} and \textit{Basilikon Doron}, published around a decade later. However, it did place monarchs within the context of the apocalypse and the salvation, or damnation, of humanity. This in turn allowed Napier to appeal to James as a monarch within the context of an apocalyptic narrative, specifically his suggestion that James might be one of the ten horns of the beast, foretold in Revelation 17:16-17.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Despite its brevity and the fact that James was only 22 years old when he wrote the \textit{Fruitfull Meditatioun}, the importance of the work should not be underestimated because it casts the \textit{Plaine Discovery}, and its dedication to James, in a different light. In composing that dedicatory epistle, Napier employed several devices to which he would have expected James to be receptive, given the \textit{Fruitfull Meditatioun}. James recognised that reform and royal authority were bound into the coming final battle between good and evil. Napier built upon statements that James had already made, effectively telling the monarch that by following his own advice set out in the \textit{Fruitfull Meditatioun}, he might be cast as a central player in the final narrative of human history. James had urged his subjects to remain constant in their faith and

\textsuperscript{23} James VI, \textit{Meditatioun}, f. B2r.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{PD}, p. 208 & see above, pp. 73 & 112-3.
fight on the side of the ‘true church’. Five years later, Napier told James to follow the same policy to secure his position as one of the ten horns of the beast, thus fulfilling the destiny of humanity foretold in scripture. James’s exegesis was typified, above all, by a far greater sense of urgency than the previous texts. The violent and horrific imagery of the Revelation were used to urge the reader to direct action because the Armada had seemed to show that a great war was coming. In his appeal Napier built upon James’s own technique, using the idea of the military role of the monarch and adding the imminence of God’s judgement as a further incentive for immediate royal action.
Conclusion to Part III

Napier borrowed from many of the writings that predated the *Plaine Discovery*, producing something that was familiar as well as revolutionary. He adopted and adapted Bale’s system of applying historical events to scriptural prophecy and his tone matched the uncompromising polemical forcefulness of the Geneva Bible. He combined the military themes found in the works of Knox and James VI with the apocalyptic urgency of *Carion’s Chronicle*. Together, these influences helped Napier understand the conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics as part of the final battle between good and evil. To this he added his own unique interpretations and took the monumental step of predicting when the Second Coming would occur.

Many of Napier’s contemporaries would have recognised the motifs employed in the *Plaine Discovery*. By the late sixteenth century it was well established that Protestants were God’s chosen people, who were locked in a battle with the forces of Satan, lead by the Antichrist, identified as the papacy. Even Napier’s usage of Sabbatical years and the prophecy of Elias as the basis of his system of dating would have been recognised by the more educated members of his audience. However, Napier’s experience of religious reform differed greatly from those who had been forced into religious exile. Consequently, his vision for the future of the country in which he lived, and the eschatological destiny of its people, was distinct from that of his forebears. Napier was a wealthy man who had never experienced the kind of upheavals that marked the lives of Bale and Knox. Their lives and those of the annotators of the Geneva Bible had been at risk during Mary Tudor’s reign. Napier did not share these concerns and had the financial and professional independence to write what he pleased, so long as he did not appear seditious or libellous.
After 1558 the returning Marian exiles introduced Protestantism within Scotland and reintroduced it to Elizabethan England, attempting to lay the foundations for a religious Reformation. They had long-term aims for the direction the religious change would take and envisaged the creation of a godly society. Napier had seen the Reformation enacted in Scotland but worried it had stopped short of where he and the Presbyterians had hoped it would reach. The shift from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism had changed little in terms of human behaviour. People were still selfish, greedy and cruel. Drunkenness and prostitution were still commonplace. Scotland did not seem like a ‘godly’ or truly Christian society. In fact, Scots had failed to live up to the high ideals set by those first reformers. God would surely not let such a society, and such a world, exist much longer. “This cold haile of partialitie, iniquitie, selfe-loue, and lack of charitie, is not onely here the last token, that preceeds the day of judgement, but also is the very cause why the day of judgmement shalbe hastened”.1 Knox’s later works reveal that this pessimistic view of Scotland and her people was by no means peculiar to the Plaine Discovery. Napier used the immediate threats of destruction and damnation to strike fear into those around him, urging them to repent immediately to demonstrate they were members of the people of God and secure a place for themselves in Heaven when the end came.

It is unsurprising that the texts above define religion in terms of absolute good versus absolute evil, given the fact that the reformations of Scotland and England were consolidated after bloodshed and human suffering. In Scotland, this took the form of a civil war, through which Napier, Knox, and a young James VI had lived, whereas England saw the execution of hundreds of Protestants under Mary Tudor.

1 PD, p. 115.
Moreover, the Marian Exile produced a fascinating set of conditions in England, Scotland and on the Continent. Scottish and English Protestants, like John Knox, Christopher Goodman and John Bale experienced the trauma of religious persecution and were thrust together in a unique, dynamic environment. The shock of their experience, coupled with the fact that they were resolute enough in their faith to flee, rather than recant their Protestant beliefs, meant that the form of Protestantism they took back home was uncompromising in nature. They were exposed to some of the most ambitious reforming ideas found in Europe, especially those who travelled to Geneva. The shared experiences of exiles like Bale, the single most important contributor to Protestant eschatological exegesis in the British Isles, and Knox, who led the Scottish Reformation on his return in 1559, helped to contribute to a sense of shared reform in Scotland and England.

The succession of Elizabeth I, in November 1558, and the victory of the Protestant Party in Scotland, in summer 1560, had occurred within a relatively short space of time. Suddenly, the two countries were united in religion and politics, since military support from England was so instrumental in securing victory for Knox and the Lords of the Congregation. This new sense of unity, combined with the trauma of the Marian persecutions and conflict in Scotland, only furthered the conception of the British Isles as isolated and threatened by the Roman Catholic forces of Europe, which was magnified after the Armada. These fears, and the conception that an important watershed had occurred in the history of the Island realms, was expressed within an apocalyptic framework, for which Bale had laid the foundations. Napier then, was arguably the first in a new generation of ‘British’ apocalyptic thinkers. The

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2 It should be noted that Robert Waldegrave, the royal printer in Scotland, who published *the Plaine Discovery*, had been an English Protestant exile. See Williamson, *Scottish National...,* p. 77.
*Plaine Discovery* emerged from an environment that was peculiar to his historical and geographical context, in which both hope and fear about the future were combined with the promotion of England and Scotland as a unified political and religious entity.
Part IV: Two Sixteenth Century Responses

to the *Plaine Discovery*
Introduction to Part IV

The legacy of the *Plaine Discovery* in Scottish apocalyptic thought has been considered in some detail by recent scholars. The issue was a major consideration of David Drinnon’s doctoral thesis and Arthur Williamson has attempted to trace Napier’s influences in the works of several subsequent intellectuals.¹ However, the majority of the seventeenth century is beyond the scope of this study. The following chapters offer a detailed analysis of two works that exemplify the wide-ranging short-term response to the *Plaine Discovery*. Robert Pont was Napier’s personal friend and, in his *Treatise of the Right Reckoning of Yeares*, he praised the *Plaine Discovery*, recommending the work to his readers and adopting and expanding the system of dating using Jubilees employed by Napier. By contrast, the senior minister Robert Rollock responded by delivering a series of lectures at Edinburgh’s Toun College that passionately denounced attempts to date the Second Coming.²

At the very least, Pont’s positive response and Rollock’s negative response show that the *Plaine Discovery* was circulated, read, noticed and discussed in the years following its publication. Some of the book’s ideas were welcomed; others were not. As Drinnon has noted, its controversial prediction of the approximate date of the apocalypse did not provoke further Scottish writers to try to date the end of the world and even Pont demurred from doing so.³ Though some of the *Plaine Discovery*’s conclusions were accepted, Scottish churchmen remained cautious about adopting the idea of an imminent Second Coming. European Protestants had felt it necessary

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¹ Williamson, *Scottish National...*; ‘Scotland, Antichrist...’ & ‘Number...’
³ Drinnon, p. 32.
to distance themselves from the premillennial views of radicals and, for some, Napier’s predictions might have appeared dangerously close to the Anabaptist teaching that had sparked the Münster Rebellion.
Chapter 11 - Robert Pont: Treatise of the Right Reckoning of Years

Robert Pont’s Treatise of the Right Reckoning of Years was published in 1599, 6 years after Napier’s Plaine Discovery. The Treatise would not have existed without Napier’s work and Pont directly acknowledged and recommended Napier. Pont was one of the few surviving churchmen who had been active from 1560, when the Reformed Kirk was formally established in Scotland, and in the 1590s was a senior and highly respected figure. He was willing to defer to the much younger Napier, and draw upon his ideas, indicating that Napier’s approach to prophecy suited Pont’s vision of reform. Napier presented the British Isles as a fragile bastion of reformed hope, persecuted and threatened by the insidious Roman Catholic rulers of Europe, with the papal Antichrist at their head. This, coupled with his use of dates and calculations, gave depth and urgency to the call for further reform, thereby appealing to Presbyterians, for whom continued reform of the ecclesiastical structure was paramount.¹

Napier and Pont held similar views on the current state of the Church and how it should be improved. In his Dedicatory Epistle, Napier had urged James VI to reform the country and his household.² Pont summarised what he saw as the lamentable condition of the churches of England and Scotland: “In England, a proude ambition, both in Church and amongst the whole multitude: Yea, proude profanitie, with contempt and disdayne of others. In Scotland, a sluggish securitie, and in both the Landes, a loth-some haiting of the worde of GOD”.³ Pont, like Napier and James VI,

¹ See above, ch. 1, on the religious conditions in Scotland during Napier’s lifetime.
² PD, A4.v. See above, p. 74.
³ Pont, Treatise, p. 203.
was emphasising the shared religious destiny of the two realms, a theme he continued in 1604, when he published a short treatise celebrating the Union of Crowns.⁴

Napier and Pont believed they were living in the last days of human history and highlighted the Great Apostasy in Revelation 12:4 as one of the most important signs of the approaching end.⁵ The flattering progress of Scotland’s Reformation seemed to presage the end of the world. Napier, Pont and Rollock shared the assumption that apostasy was inextricably linked to the chronologies of salvation history and the coming apocalypse. Adhering to the demands of scripture, and of the Church, was the way in which nations would achieve eternal salvation. Conversely, rejecting God would ensure collective destruction and damnation. The combination of the coming apocalypse with the dangers of apostasy created a sense of immediacy; the time to reform one’s character and the wider country was short. This was especially relevant for Scotland, whose Reformation was still young and had been won with great difficulty. The Scottish Reformed Kirk seemed fragile; preaching and violence had accompanied Protestant reform and these same weapons might reinvigorate and reinstate Roman Catholicism.⁶

⁴ Pont, R., De Unione Britanniae seu De Regnorum Angliae et Scotie omniumque adiacentium Insularum Britannicarum in unam Monarchiam consolidatione:deque multiplici ejus unionis utilitate dialogus Robert Charteris (Edinburgh 1604).
⁵ PD, p. 270 & Pont, Treatise, p. 93.
Napier's Influence on Pont

Pont’s reliance on Napier may be demonstrated by comparing the content of the two texts. Pont’s main reason for writing his book was to prove that 1600 was not a Jubilee year, as the Roman Catholic Church declared. Jubilee years had become linked to indulgences and pilgrimage to Rome for remission of sins, and were strongly opposed in Protestant doctrine, with Pont explaining that Christ’s suffering and death were “the true Jubilee of Christians”. However, Napier and Pont used Jubilees as a tool for calculating the age of the world and the date of the apocalypse and both authors ensured they defined the term in detail at the beginning of their works. Just as every seventh day was a Sabbath, every seventh year was to be a sabbatical year. Each seventh sabbatical year was a Jubilee, when “everie man might returne to his owne possesion”. Both sources identified Boniface VIII as the cause of the alleged misuse of Jubilees: “Now let vs considder the bastard Jubilees, begotten and feyned by the Popes of Rome, wherevnto they have no respecte to Sabbaticall yeares, whereof Jubilees (as the law required) are made vp. But Pope BONIFACE, the 8. Pope of that name, the first father and inventer thereof, in the yeare of Christ, 1300. tooke the whole compleit number of every hundred yeare, conteining twise fiftie, for his Jubilee.” Napier identified the papacy of Boniface VIII with the loosing of Satan in Revelation 20:7, and with the great war between Gog and Magog, identified as the papacy and Islam respectively, in the two subsequent verses: “but in

7 Pont, Treatise, p. 22: Proposition.
8 PD, pp. 1-2, 7 & 178; Pont, Treatise, pp. 7-8.
9 Pont, Treatise, p. 8. Although Pont broadly agreed with Napier’s system, he emphasised the fiftieth year more than the Plaine Discovery, which explains Napier’s clarification in the 1611 edition. Pont’s Treatise, p. 8 had, “it was also institute, that the Israelites should number vnto them seaven Sabbathes of yeares, conteining 49. years; & immediatlie in the beginning of the 50. yeare the trumpet of a jubilee should be blowne”. See above, pp. 192-3.
10 Pont, Treatise, p. 24.
that 1300, yeare, began (by Sathans instigation) that proude strife between them for supremacy, both of them challenging to themselves the empire of the whole earth: for Pope Boniface the eight, instituted the first Iubelee, that yeare”. Napier’s analysis was particularly successful because it elegantly linked historical events to the overarching apocalyptic narrative he espoused: Jubilees were linked to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory and this was so evil that it caused Satan to be released.

This portrayal of historical events as fulfilments of biblical prophecy was important to both scholars, but Pont’s work was relatively short and he was careful not to stray too far from his central topic of Jubilees. When discussing the seven trumpets and vials from the Book of Revelation, he did not discuss their relation to historical events, instead writing: “who would know further, let them reade that learned and divine work of Iohn Naper, in the exposition of the Revelation, the 5. 6. 7. 8. & 9. propositions.” This illustrates Pont’s respect for Napier’s research and also that, in some instances, Pont felt he had nothing constructive to add to Napier’s analysis and regarded it as the preeminent work of its kind in English and that had the greatest sense of immediacy for Pont and his intended audience. The fact that he and Napier were personal friends would also have influenced this recommendation.

Napier and Pont agreed that the seven trumpets in Revelation 8, 9 and 11 were blown approximately every 245 years. Napier stated: “The space of the first trumpet or vial containeth 245 years, and so much also, every one of the rest of the trumpets

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12 See above, pp. 177 (n.), 250 & 256 for more on Protestant responses to the doctrine of Purgatory and pp. 133-4, for Napier on the release of Satan and Jubilees for remission of sin.
13 Pont, Treatise, p. 17.
or vials doe containe.”

Similarly Pont had: “every blast of trumpet containinge the space of one of those les periods, to wit 245 yeares.” These 245 years were meaningful because a ‘Great Period’ was 490 years or “70 weekes of years,” and 245 years, as half of this, was an important shorter period. Pont had not simply copied all his conclusions from Napier without any originality and he used some of his own examples to prove the worth of using periods of 245 years. Napier had: “the great mutations of Empires followed 245. years one after another: as Ierusalem was destroyed An.71. An.316 Constantine transported the imperial seat from Rome to Byzantium and in Rome Pope Sylvester began the Papisticalk kingdome. Anno 561 or thereabout, Totila king of Goths burned Rome & vsurped the dominion thereof.”

Pont used a different range of examples:

the medes and Persians indured both but the space of 495 yeares. The kingdome of the Greekes, begunne by Seleucic nicator, lasted but the half space, or lesse periode, to witte, about 245. yeares. Rome was governed by Kings likewise by one of these lesse periodes, to wit, about 243. year. The Concelles thereafter governed Rome by the space of an great period; to witte, about 462 years. Thereafter indured the Monarchie of Emperours, from Iulius Cesar the First, to Valentinian the Third: one of these great Periodes, in whose time Rome was taken and sacked: First by the Gothes, and thereafter by the Vandalcs: And albeit smaller kingdoms oftimes be not subject to great mutations, yet they have also certaine fatall periods of time.

Napier’s influence on Pont was clear, for though some different examples were used, the conclusion remained the same.

Carion’s Chronicle called these periods, “fatalis periodus imperiorum: the fatal period of Empires”. Napier used this idea along with the prophecy of Elias to argue
for an imminent apocalypse, but since the publication of Carion’s Chronicle, the Geneva Bible had forbidden the use of Elias.\(^{21}\) Because of this, Napier and Pont had to defend their employment of the prophecy and sought to establish a scriptural basis for the 6000 year period of human history it proposed. They employed 2 Peter 3:8, “in the Lord’s sight one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day”, to argue that the six days of creation in Genesis correlate to 6000 years of human history.\(^ {22}\) This was derived from Bale’s Image of Both Churches, though Bale did not explicitly employ the Prophecy of Elias.\(^ {23}\) Napier and Pont felt able to use the Prophecy of Elias because much of it had already come true.\(^ {24}\) Both men recognized Elias as a key text for defending their respective theses. Not only does this show their shared knowledge and Napier’s influence on Pont but also speaks to the importance of Elias to those who wanted to predict when the apocalypse might occur. The fact that the translators of the Geneva Bible felt it necessary to deal specifically with Elias when banning predicting the future also implies that the prophecy was popular in the sixteenth century.

\(^{20}\) PD, p. 8. Note the similarity to Pont’s assertion on previous page.

\(^{21}\) See above, pp. 275-6. For an example of an earlier scholar using Elias in an eschatological context, see Joye, 1545, f. Biiv.

\(^{22}\) Pont, Treatise, p. 36 & PD, p. 18.

\(^{23}\) See above, p. 233 (n.).

\(^{24}\) Pont, Treatise, p. 37 & PD, p. 19.
Conclusion

Napier and Pont had much in common. In addition to their friendship and similar approaches to eschatology they were both willing to take risks. Using the Prophecy of Elias was controversial and, despite its influence, Napier argued directly against the Geneva Bible on a number of occasions. Pont was also prepared to extol the virtues of astrology as a tool for predicting the future, even though James VI had described it as one of the “deuilles rudiments”.

Pont concluded that he was writing 5548 years after the creation of the world and his treatise is steeped with language declaring the imminent apocalypse. However, he never took the monumental step that Napier had, in predicting the precise period when the apocalypse would occur. He referred the reader to Napier, indicating that he did not condemn the attempt, though not specifying a date himself may underline its highly controversial nature. The deferential tone of Pont’s references to Napier and his willingness to accept Napier’s conclusions indicates the high regard he had for his friend and the quality and originality of the Plaine Discovery. Finally, Napier returned to the subject of Jubilees in the 1611 edition of the Plaine Discovery, despite having explained the system at length in the 1593 version. Pont’s Treatise may have encouraged Napier to undertake further clarifications. However, Pont had died in 1606 so any collaborative work on the additions made in the 1611 version had to have completed five years earlier.

26 See above, ch. 4.
27 Pont, Treatise, p. 45, Daemonologie p. 14 & see above, p. 98.
28 Pont, Treatise, title page.
Chapter 12 - Robert Rollock: *Lectures vpon the first and second Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*

Like Napier, Robert Rollock (1555–1599) was educated at St Salvator’s College, St Andrews where he graduated MA in 1577.¹ He was well respected and was chosen personally by James Lawson, the man selected by Knox to succeed him as minister of Edinburgh, to become the first master of the ‘Tounis College’ that later became the University of Edinburgh.² Like Napier, his method of scriptural analysis was probably influenced by the Ramist school.³ However, he was also a religious moderate, who had little connection to the Presbyterian party and was more willing to submit to the will of the king than Napier and his associates.⁴ Between 1591 and 1598 he delivered detailed lectures on the Book of Daniel and Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians, the two most important biblical apocalyptic texts aside from the Book of Revelation.⁵ His lectures on Thessalonians were meant as a direct attack on the *Plaine Discovery*, especially Napier’s views on prophecy. The two men represented two diametrically opposed standpoints current in late sixteenth century Edinburgh.⁶ On one side were Napier and his intellectual circle, who viewed the idea of an impending apocalypse as an incentive to drive through a policy of church reform. On the other side was Rollock, who prioritised personal devotion, preaching and pastoral care to reform individuals whose renewed faith would bring salvation and the

¹ *ODNB*: Rollock.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid. See above, ch. 1 for Napier and Pont on James VI.
⁶ The fact that Rollock’s *Thessalonians* was attacking the *Plaine Discovery* has been noted by Drinnon, see pp. 32-4.
betterment of society. These standpoints stemmed from the two men’s respective views on the doctrine of salvation and their different vocations.

Arthur Williamson has pointed out the importance of Kaspar Olevianus’ thought, transmitted through the work of Johannes Piscator in influencing Rollock’s interest in, “questions of personal salvation... rather than issues of church polity”. This is a useful observation; however, perhaps an even greater influence on Rollock was the 1560 Geneva Bible. Rollock often used identical scriptural verses as the Genevan annotators to support similar arguments. For example, concerning 1 Thessalonians 5:20, “Despise not prophesying”, both texts stated that ‘prophesying’ referred to preaching of God’s word and did not mean foretelling, which was to be abhorred.

Rollock and most of the Genevan translators were ministers who were deeply concerned with preaching and the reform of the faith and religious and moral practices of ordinary lay people. In this context, to argue the world was ending on a particular date might prove counter-productive. Rollock argued that identifying and emphasising a definite time would make people lax in their faith and behaviour: “the

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7 Williamson credited Olevianus, with emphasising the separation of ecclesiastical and secular authorities, within the context of covenant theology. Olevianus was also important for emphasising the role of grace and works as parts of a covenant with God. He was the rector of the Herborn Academy and Piscator succeeded him in the role. Piscator was a close associate of Rollock, and Williamson saw him as the link between the two men, emphasising the similarities between their respective theological positions. Williamson, Scottish National..., pp. 75-6.

8 GB, 1 Thes. 5:1-2 note a, f. AAaaiii. & 1 Thessalonians 5:20 note I. Rollock, Thessalonians Book 1. p.322. Williamson, 1979, pp. 76-7, has noted the probable influence of William Perkins on Rollock. Perkins debt to the Geneva Bible was also substantial. In his written works and sermons he borrowed more heavily from the marginalia than Napier, rarely contradicting the text. For example, on Revelation 2:24, Perkins wrote, “by such great termes the Anabaptists, Libertines and Arrians, maintaine their doctrine”. (Perkins, W., A Godly and Learned Exposition or Commentarie vpon the three first Chapters of the Reuelation Preached at Cambridge 1595 (London 1607) STC/1356:05, f. Aivr.) The Geneva Bible’s note on that verse had, has, “by such termes now the Anabaptists, Libertines, Papists, Arians &c vse to butifie their monstrous errors”. (GB, f. FFFiiv.) He also denounced the Prophecy of Elias as evil, arguing that the Elias to which the Talmudic text referred could not have been the same character from 1 & 2 Kings, Perkins, W.: A Fruitfull Dialogue betweene the Christian and the Worldling concerning the End of the World 1587 in Pierson, T. (ed), The Workes of that Famovs and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge M.W. Perkins Vol. 3, (London 1631), STC/899:01, pp. 465-77, p. 468.
ignorance of the tyme of his comming is verie profitable for vs, because it makes vs to watch and pray, wheras the knowledge of it would make vs careless.\(^9\)

Napier was not a pastor and he concentrated upon urging James VI to purge all traces of Catholicism from the highest echelons of Scottish society. The king could then take his rightful place as one of the 10 horns of the beast in Revelation 17:12 and ensure a direct role for his country in the apocalypse. An impending apocalypse with the chance to place Scotland near to the centre of the great cosmic drama generated a sense of urgency to the policy of reform. Rollock was less interested in trying to push the King towards reform, instead advocating the separation of ecclesiastical and temporal authorities.\(^10\) Rather than James VI, Rollock focussed his attention upon his audience of trainee ministers.

The importance of Rollock’s audience upon the content of his lectures is demonstrated by his emphasis on the role of pastors following an emphasis found in the marginalia of the 1560 Geneva Bible.\(^11\) When Rollock addressed young ministers in training, he was clear on their duties: “Learne shortlie; a pastor must be like a mother”, and, “he must be as a father teaching his sonnes standing in the midst of them, exhorting, comforting rebuking them; so must a Pastor stand in the midst of his flock, to exhort, comfort and rebuke them”.\(^12\) Rollock elevated the position of pastors by casting them as vital to the spiritual wellbeing of society: “if thou be not

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\(^10\) Like many of the texts discussed in Part III, including the *Plaine Discovery*, one of Rollock’s methods for denouncing the papacy was bemoaning the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in the secular affairs of Europe after the decline of the Roman Empire. Rollock, *Thessalonians*, Book 2 pp. 70-1.

\(^11\) For an example of the Geneva Bible on the role of preachers, see Rev. 10:9, note o: “ministers oght to receive the worde into their hearts, & to haue graue, & depe judgement, and diligently to studie it, & with zeale to vfter it.”

\(^12\) Rollock, *Thessalonians*, Book 1. pp. 61 & 73.
continuallie wattred with this ministrie, thou shalt not growe.”¹³ The Protestant emphasis on the Word of God as central to humanity’s salvation also provided an opportunity to emphasise the role of preachers as transmitters of the Word: “to regenerate a man vwho vvas once dead, it is not a mans tongue, his eloquence, his instancie that can doe it, but onlie that powerful, and blessed vvord of God”¹⁴

The importance of the role of pastors led Rollock to display a degree of intransigence; to go against the preached Word was to go against God. “What is it to disobey me or him that speakes? It is that great God that thou rebellest against, and in that great day thou shalt be challenged as a rebell to that great God.”¹⁵ Napier had adopted a similar mindset. He believed he was simply explaining manifest truths from scripture that anyone with sufficient intellectual faculties should be able to discern and to argue against his interpretation was to argue against God.¹⁶ With each man so convinced of his own viewpoint, it was unlikely their differences could have been resolved.

**Conflicting Methodologies**

One of Napier’s most important methods of exegesis was the linking of his chronology from the Book of Revelation to actual historical events.¹⁷ Rollock presented a much more literal interpretation of the Revelation. The stars falling from heaven in Revelation 6:13 did not mean, as Napier understood it, that God’s ministers would be corrupted. For Rollock, it literally meant the stars would fall from

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¹³ Ibid., Book 1, p.142.
¹⁴ Ibid., Book 1, p.84. Again, this also reflects the importance of the theological understanding of Christ as Divine Logos. See above, pp. 165-6.
¹⁵ Ibid., Book 1, p.190.
¹⁶ Ibid. & PD. A7r. See also above, chs. 5 & 6.
¹⁷ See above, ch. 5.
heaven, “or at least, shall appeare so, because they shall giue no light, and light shall be away, nothing in the face of the earth but darknesse: nothing in Heauen but darknesse.” Rollock was less concerned with external threats to the Church, such as Roman Catholic Spain and the Ottoman Empire, than the internal threat of sin. One of the main foci of his attacks was prostitution: “An harlote hes no loue, she is but a stumbling blocke, & would haue al the world to follow her: these are the destroyers of the building that shoulde be builded on Christ: woe to the destroyer of the Church of Christ.” Again, this reflects his audience, who would be encountering prostitutes in their parish ministries. Napier had dealt with prostitution, though the *Plaine Discovery* was not concerned with the phenomenon as a social problem. It became instead an allegory for sin itself, especially the perceived pomp and idolatry of the Roman Catholic Church. The only use Rollock had for the historical approach was regarding the subject of apostasy. He connected the beginning of the great apostasy with the rise of Islam and growing dominance of the papacy around the year 666: “vnder the Emperour of *Constantinople, Constantine, Vitilianus* being Pope of Rome at that tyme”. Apostasy was an enemy the prospective ministers he was teaching could directly fight against, by going out and doing the job for which he was training them: preaching.

Without naming Napier, Rollock disputed his methods in two main ways. Such direct attacks on specific methodologies could not have been coincidence, but indicate that Rollock was targeting Napier. Since Napier had used the Book of Daniel to help calculate the date of the apocalypse, Rollock asserted that Daniel’s

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18 Rollock, *Thessalonians*, Book 1, p. 218. See also *PD*, p. 112.
20 Ibid., Book 2, p.59.
prophecies giving clues to dates, could not be used to date events beyond the Nativity.  

He declared, “There is a great difference between the first coming of Christ, and his second coming. As to the first coming, it was the will of the Lord that the time of his coming should be knowne to the world: And therefore, he receaved the yeere of his coming to the olde Prophetes. As ye may see 9 Daniell.”

For Rollock, the Genevan translation of Daniel 12:4 was clear, “seale the boke til the end of the time”, meant the prophecy was not to be revealed in advance of its realisation: “Yea, in Daniell in his last chapter 4. verse, there is a plaine inhibition to seek out the tyme of it.” When discussing this verse, Napier had employed the Vulgate, which was translated as “Seale the book till the appointed time”. For Napier, that appointed time had indeed come and God bestowed upon him, and those like him, the mental faculties to calculate these dates because they were in the latter days “for knowledge shal then abound.”

Rollock also denounced all calculations concerning the date of the Second Coming, even approximate ones. One of Napier’s main defences was that he was not attempting to predict the exact date of the apocalypse, only the approximate time. Rollock absolutely rejected Napier’s calculations: “It pertaines not to knowe anie tyme of Christes comming, yea to knowe in what age of the worlde, let be the month, weeke, yeere or day it shall be.” He also qualified this assertion with the words, “or

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21 Napier took the date 1700 from calculations based on Daniel. See above, ch. 5 & PD, pp. 15-22.
22 PD, p. 21 & Rollock, Thessalonians, Book 1, p. 232.
23 Rollock, Thessalonians, Book 1, p. 232. Quotation of Daniel 12:4 from GB.
24 PD, p. 21.
25 Ibid., p. 18. See above, pp. 113, for Napier’s usage of multiple translations, which enabled him to select the version of this verse that best suited specific arguments.
26 See above, pp. 137-9.
27 Rollock, Thessalonians, Book 1, p. 231.
any greater tyme.”  

This was not an isolated occurrence; his lectures were replete with this kind of language: “false doctrine that stands in limitating and bounding his comming at a certaine tyme, as they would say, He will come in such an age, in such a yeere, such a day, an houre, all is false doctrine.”

Rollock adopted various approaches to denounce predicting the date of the world’s end. He argued first that declarations that the apocalypse was at hand were the work of the Devil, “the deuill is busie to confirme them in this error and therefore he raises vp deceuyers and false teachers”. 

Though describing the circumstances in Thessalonica when Paul wrote the epistle, Rollock’s use of the present tense is notable. The Devil sends false prophets to tempt and misinform people and accepting Napier’s teachings would risk damnation. The issue was so divisive because it concerned the salvation of people’s souls. Rollock’s lectures were laden with particularly vivid imagery about Hell, aimed at terrifying his audience into submission. For example, “the paine is infinite. As for example. let a King, or, Monarch take a man & torment him, and yet holde his lyfe in: Burne him, and boyle him with oyle, yet, that paine shall end. Let him pull the skin off him, doe what torment he can to him, yet, that paine shall end.”

Making a second point, Rollock declared that scripture forbad attempts to discover the date of the Second Coming: “Matt. 24.42 Watch, for ye knovv not vvh en the Lord shall come. The sodaintie & vncertainty of his comming shoulde make vs euer readie to looke for it.”

For example, “vvhen thou hast calculate to see the verie houre of his comming, it is

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., Book 2, p. 45.
30 Ibid., Book 2, p. 43 Similar language is used on f. Aa3r & p. 2.
31 Rollock, Thessalonians, Book 1, p. 236.
32 Ibid., Book 1, p. 221.
but vanitie. I tell thee, the lord shall come as a thiefe in the night, which tyme is most
vcertaine, and therefore all thy calculation failes thee.”\textsuperscript{33} With calculations forming
the basis of Napier’s argument, this may have been a direct reference to the \textit{Plaine
Discovery}. In addition, Rollock countered common interpretations of scripture used
to support the idea of an imminent Second Coming. Revelation 22:20, “surely I come
quickly”, seemed to show that the Second Coming would soon occur. However,
Rollock juxtaposed this verse with 2 Peter 3:8: “a thousand yeeres, in the sight of the
Lord, are but as an houre”, to prove that God and humanity might have different
ideas of what ‘quickly’ means.\textsuperscript{34}

Thirdly, Rollock maintained it was important the reprobate should not have the
opportunity to repent since they were to be taken unawares by the apocalypse.
Inspired by Revelation 22:11 he wrote, “in the day of judgement, there shall be no
lenientie, nor patience. And if thou be a reprobate, thou shalt not haue grace, nor
tyme, to say, Lord, Be mercifull to me”\textsuperscript{35} Rollock further claimed that predicting the
date of the apocalypse might damage the reputation of Christianity in the widest
possible sense. His reasoning was simple; if people placed their trust in predictions
that failed to be realised, their religious faith could be shaken: “it is pernitious and
euill to limitate and bound Christs comming; for if his comming be not in that age
which they calculate, it will fall out, that either the godly that would faine haue his
comming (for, they looke euer for it) will faint and fall away through impatience, or

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., Book 1, p. 235.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., Book 1, p. 233.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., Book 1, p. 236.
else it will make the people to think that this doctrine of Christ's coming is but a fable.”

As a final flourish Rollock implied such predictions arose from the sin of hubris or pride. He used Matthew 24:42, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”, to support the following statement: “It is a bolde thing to man to seeke out that thing the Lord hes hid. men will stand vp and calculate such a yeere of the Lords comming. O vanitie, thou passes thy boundes, and thou had no such thing in commission giuen to thee. The Lord keepe vs from such vanitie.”

A subtext of anti-intellectualism can be found throughout Rollock’s work. Paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 he wrote, “Alas, worldlie-wise men are not meete for the kingdome of God, he that would be wise in God let him be a foole” In addition he warned: “beleeue no man for his ranke. brethren, experience teaches this daily. The persons and authority of men decieues many simple men. The estimation of learning and dignitie deceives many.” Rollock’s lectures were published in English, posthumously, with a dedication to William Scott of Elie written by Henry Charteris and William Arthur. The dedication opens with a three page denunciation of educated men who practise science and other intellectual pursuits but do not prioritise sound theological practice. This is a peculiar way to begin the book and may also have been aimed at Napier.

36 Ibid., Book 2, pp. 51-2. This criticism of prophecy was also employed by nineteenth-century critics of the Plaine Discovery. See above, pp. 43-4.
37 Rollock, Thessalonians, Book 1, p. 235.
38 Ibid., Book 1, p. 135.
39 Ibid., Book 2, p. 52.
40 Ibid., A3r.
The Possibility of a Compromise?

Rollock regarded belief in a coming apocalypse as a central tenet of Christian faith and emphasised the placement of the Second Coming in the Creed: “This is a thing that euerie one of vs is bound to knowe, that Christ will come and sit in judgement, and put an end to all thinges in this worlde. And this is an artickle of our Creed. From thence he vvill come to udge the quick and the dead. If thou belieue not that Artickle, howbeit thou beleeue all the rest of the Artickles, thy faith is nothing.”41 He believed that living one’s life as if the judgement of Christ were at hand might be beneficial, “generallie to thinke and to say, the Lord will come shortlie, whether this age, or the next age, I know not: but, I know well, it shall not be long, when the judge shall come, it shal be soone: it is lawfull for thee to thinke and say this.”42

Rollock knew that the apocalypse could bring both fear and comfort. He tempered the use of terrifying imagery with the belief that, for true Christians, the Second Coming would be a wonderful event that would put an end to suffering. He even declared that it would probably occur before long: “as thou would haue comfort in that terrible judgement, doe well, and suffer wrong, and byde patiently, for surely it will not be long: there is such a crying of bloude, and such vvronges in this vworld, that, truelie, in this decrepite age, Christ must come shortlie.”43 Like the Geneva Bible, Rollock’s lectures emphasised patience and constancy as ways of attaining

41 Ibid., Book 1, p. 232.
42 Ibid., p. 233.
salvation: “let this be part of thy prayer: Lord strengthen me in suffering. For, as thou
wouldst reigne with him, so thou must take a resolution to suffer with him.”\textsuperscript{44}

However, predicting the date of the Day of Judgement, even approximately, was
so contentious that no compromise was possible between the two standpoints. In his
Soteriology, Rollock placed a far greater emphasis on grace as the mechanism of
salvation than Napier had done. “Loue is by grace, consolation is by grace, hope is
by grace, that is, of the free fauour of God, without any desert, or merite, on mans
part.”\textsuperscript{45} Grace flowed from various sources, with the first being Christ’s sacrifice for
the sins of humanity, which was the only source of justification.\textsuperscript{46} The second source
was prayer, which Rollock admonished his audience to practice frequently: “The
Gospell is an instrument to obdure thy hart, if it be heard without praier to God and
presence of his Spirit. Therefore pray that in hearing ye may vnderstand, and that ye
may walke according to the knowledge thereof.”\textsuperscript{47} The third source was acting well,
particularly towards other people. Although, according to Reformed doctrine,
humans did not contribute to their salvation or damnation, good works would flow
from those who were justified as a good tree produced good fruit.\textsuperscript{48} Rollock
emphasised living well in this life as a preparation for life in Heaven. “So as thou
wouldst be a citizen of that heavenlie kingdome, and partaker of that glorious calling,
liue a holy life, that, after this lyfe, thou mayest be a king, & raigne with god for euer
in Heauen.”\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{44} See above, ch. 4. & Rollock, \textit{Thessalonians}, Book 2, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{45} Rollock, \textit{Thessalonians}, Book 2, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., Book 2, p. 46. Grace played no significant part in the theology of the \textit{Plaine Discovery}.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., Book 2, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{48} In keeping with the vogue among Scottish Protestants, Napier was of a similar opinion. See above,
p. 177 (n.).
\textsuperscript{49} Rollock, \textit{Thessalonians}, Book 1, p. 75.
Finally, he emphasised the need for hard work and dedication to one’s profession: “looke that thou be exercised in this life, for if thou be not exercised heere, thou shalt enter in that damnation, where there shall be no end of thy labour: & thou that will be exercised in faith, charitie, and hope, assure thee in the life to come , thou shalt not be pyned with worke, thou shalt cease from thy labour, and the teares shal be wyped from thy eyes, all paine and anguish shall be put away.”

Again, this reflected Rollock’s audience. He believed that the young ministers he was addressing should follow this advice but also that they must encourage their flocks to live well, be productive and contribute to a peaceful and successful society.

Asserting that Christ’s return was at hand had caused real, observable violence and panic during the bloody Anabaptist Rebellion at Münster in 1534-5, which Europeans remembered with horror. Rollock attacked Anabaptists directly, stating that their belief in the immediately imminent Second Coming, “dependes on... illusions of the deuill and their owne fantasies and foolish reuelations.” The issue of predicting the date of the Second Coming was sufficiently divisive that it could irreconcilably split people with similar religious backgrounds. Rollock and Napier were profoundly influenced by the theology of the Marian exiles at Geneva. Napier credited Christopher Goodman’s sermons at St Andrews with sparking his interest in the apocalypse and his staunchly anti-Catholic stance. Rollock had work published in Geneva & knew Theodore Beza personally. The two men also moved in closely connected social circles. Rollock, like Robert Pont’s son Timothy, was taught

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50 Ibid., Book 1 p.12.
51 See above, General Introduction & Gribben, p. 16.
52 Ibid., Book 1, p. 324.
53 _PD, A6r._ See above, pp. 49-50 for more on Napier and Goodman.
54 Williamson, _Scottish National_... p. 76
Conclusion

Predicting the approximate date of the end of the world was a highly controversial subject for sixteenth century Scottish Protestants and Rollock’s Lectures on Thessalonians help explain why this was so. Many Christians believed the Scriptures commanded that the timing of the Second Coming was to remain secret. To flout biblical instructions was to defy divine commands. Consequently, Napier was courting his own damnation and posing a threat to the souls of his readership.

It is clear that Rollock’s Lectures on Thessalonians were intended as an attack on Napier’s Plaine Discovery. In 1591, two years before the Plaine Discovery, Rollock’s Latin lectures on the Book of Daniel were published. Even though Daniel is a central prophetic text, these lectures did not denounce predicting the approximate date of the apocalypse, or even mention the subject. Napier’s apocalyptic work was never published in Latin because its declared aim was for relatively uneducated people to be able to understand his work. In contrast to his book on Daniel, Rollocks lectures on Thessalonians were published in both Latin and English. This would have enabled the same readers who had studied Napier to have access to a

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55 Withers, p. 52.
56 In the Epistle to the Reader, Napier stated, “We desire earnestly with our hearts so to proceede hereinto, that trueth may come to light, and that such groundes may be laid, as thereby the ignorant and simple Reader may be best instructed, the godly and learned Christian most surely confirmed and the arrogant and obstinate calumnator ratherest confounded & put to silence.” PD, f. A8v.
book that denounced his theses. Rollock’s repeated insistence that even approximations concerning the date of the Second Coming were evil strongly implies he had a specific target: *The Plaine Discovery* was the only text in English that had made such an attempt.

When examining the works of Rollock and Napier, the modern reader may be tempted to emphasise their similarities. Both saw the apocalypse as a central tenet of Christianity and a tool for reform. The two men had similar backgrounds and moved in similar circles but the differences that did exist were profound. Both felt that they had a monopoly on the truth and the key to salvation. Their different standpoints also reflect different approaches, audiences and formats. Napier and Pont were concerned with grandiose notions of cosmic battles that would appeal to the highest secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Rollock was concerned with training preachers to encourage pastoral care, personal devotion and constancy. He admonished his audience to live as if the Second Coming were at hand but not be concerned with exactly when that might happen.
Conclusion to Part IV

The texts discussed in this chapter have much to teach the modern reader about devotion, salvation and the apocalypse in late-sixteenth century Scotland. They also reveal much about John Napier and his great theological work. Napier was persuasive, managing to make a great impact on the much older Pont. He was also courageous, knowing his views were at odds with those of many of his contemporaries, he was still determined to publish them. Rollock’s negative response is not surprising. Napier’s dating of the Second Coming was unprecedented in English and the horror of Münster was still remembered. Ministers like Rollock had to shoulder responsibilities to their flock and society as a whole, a burden Napier was never forced to bear. Rollock’s Lectures on Thessalonians also imply that the Plaine Discovery was popular and being widely discussed in Edinburgh in the years following its publication, otherwise he would not have devoted so much time and energy to denouncing its contentions.

As Arthur Williamson has noted, in the coming decades, even those who disagreed with Napier often acknowledged his work positively. In his commentary on the Revelation, Bishop William Cowper described Napier as, “worthily renowned, [sic] as peerless indeed, and specially for his great pains taken upon this Booke, out of rare learning, and singular Ingene”.¹ Through the first half of the seventeenth century, several translated editions of the Plaine Discovery appeared on the continent in both French and German. It influenced works by English

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¹ Williamson, Number and..., p. 198 & Cowper, W., The workes of Mr William Cowper late Bishop of Galloway: Now newly collected into one volume. Whereunto is added a commentary on the Reuvelation never before published. Also an alphabetical table for the finding out the principall heads contained in euery booke Iohn Budge (London 1623) p. 822. Cowper’s views on ecclesiastical polity were contrary to those held by the Presbyterian Napier.
intellectuals, including Joseph Mede, whose *Clauis Apocalyptica* of 1627 drew heavily on Napier’s mathematical interpretation of the prophecies of the Book of Revelation.\(^2\) In the 1640s, Napier’s predictions found a new audience when his prophecies were condensed and combined with astrological predictions in the form of the annual *Bloody Almanack*.\(^3\) During the English Civil Wars the idea that the world would end between 1688 and 1700 took on special relevance and Napier’s ideas were seized upon by English people who regarded the conflicts going on around them as part of the final battle foretold in the Revelation. Thus, the legacy of the *Plaine Discovery* was long and rich and will doubtless bear fruit for scholarly investigations in the future.


\(^3\) For example, see *A bloody almanack: foretelling many certaine predictions which shall come to passe this present yeare 1647. With a calculation concerning the time of the day of judgement, drawn out and published by that famous astrologer. The Lord Napier of Marcheston I. Coe, London 1647*) Thomason/59:E.371[3].
General Conclusion

This thesis has shown that John Napier of Merchiston’s *Plaine Discovery* belonged very much to an intellectual tradition and was a product of the concern with the apocalypse that dominated later sixteenth century thinking in the British Isles. Napier built upon techniques, innovations and conclusions made by thinkers such as John Bale, Christopher Goodman, William Whittingham, John Knox, and even James VI of Scotland. The dramatic events that unfolded in and around the British Isles during Napier’s lifetime, including the Spanish Armada, had a profound effect on the tone and content of the text. Despite having a place within an intellectual and religious tradition, the *Plaine Discovery* broke new ground by attempting to apply mathematical certainty to its chronology of salvation history, and connected scriptural prophecy to world events in a systematic way that was unprecedented in English. Most controversially, it sought to predict the approximate date of the Second Coming and the belief that the world was about to end allowed Napier to imbue his demands for religious reform with a sense of urgency that few polemicists had previously achieved. The text provides a window into the apocalyptic thinking of a generation and helps the modern scholar understand its enigmatic author. When read alongside his other written works it reveals his aspirations, fears and worldview through his approach to scripture and prophecy, and his imagined role in God’s plan for humanity. The thesis has advocated a return to Napier’s written works to better understand their author because the current understanding of Napier’s life is flawed and evidence about events in his life is notoriously scarce.
The Plaine Discovery as a Response to its Historical Context

The Plaine Discovery was both an expression of the hopes and fears that were present in late sixteenth century Scotland and an attempt on its author's part to harness them, using them to promote a more extensive policy of ecclesiastical reform. The work was written at a pivotal moment in Scotland's history, when political allegiances and diplomatic relationships were increasingly drawn along confessional lines. The Spanish Armada had a profound impact on Protestants in the British Isles because it highlighted their isolation and the fact that they had powerful enemies but also seemed to prove that God was on their side. The Plaine Discovery reflected this line of thinking and would have been very different had the event not occurred. Napier was aware of the importance of the Armada to his own times; he referred to it on several occasions and cast it as a precursor to the final battle between good and evil, incorporating it into the chronology that was so important to his work. Napier also attempted to devise weapons to fight the perceived enemies of his island home, which was consistent with his view of an impending apocalyptic battle between good and evil and his hopes to make an impact on his country’s destiny following the renewed threat from Spain following the Armada.

The fear that the British Isles would revert to Roman Catholicism, and might even be subjugated by Spain, was heightened in Scotland by the Spanish Blanks Affair at the close of 1592. The impact of the conspiracy on Napier’s thought has not hitherto been fully understood. It prompted Napier to appeal directly to James VI, both in his Dedicatory Epistle and in person, urging the king to mete out the harshest possible punishments on the plotters, including his father-in-law, James Chisholm. The seemingly imminent threat of Roman Catholic insurrection in Scotland
encouraged a sense of urgency in Napier’s apocalyptic vision that had never before been seen in a work in the English language.

Napier’s determined efforts to influence James VI’s domestic and religious policies reveal an acute awareness of the political context in which he lived and his place within that context, as well as his desire to affect change. The effects of the Spanish Blanks Affair on the Plaine Discovery show that he believed the work was not abstract but that its conclusions might have a real influence on the strategy of his country and an impact in the wider world. Its religious and political aims were linked by Napier’s hope that he would persuade James VI to bring his policies into line with those of the Kirk. None of this is in keeping with the mindset of the recluse, shut away from the world and engaged in solitary intellectual pursuits. His involvement in the political negotiations following the Affair shows his interest and involvement in Kirk administration, crown policy and the need to distance himself from a conspiratorial relationship with his father-in-law. He had a busy and active family life and Chisholm’s involvement must have had a significant impact on his private, as well as public, activities. The fact that he was selected by the Assembly to appeal to the king in person speaks to the esteem in which he must have been held by both the ecclesiastical and social elites and the close ties he must have had with the religious establishment.

Following the Scottish Reformation, a new sense of ‘Britishness’ emerged as England and Scotland’s religious and political ambitions became increasingly aligned and the monarchs of Scotland developed more realistic ambitions on the throne of England as Elizabeth I aged without issue. The two realms identified themselves as united in religion at approximately the same time that they developed a
coherent sense of a common set of enemies, especially as Scotland’s ‘auld alliance’ with France dissolved. The realms’ geographical isolation from Catholic Europe only increased this sense of unity with one another and isolation from foreign powers which fostered both hope and fear. These emotions were expressed in the belief that the countries’ religious Reformations would have cosmic significance, which was reflected in Napier’s approach to the Reformation, both in his chronology and the special place he gave Scotland in his interpretation of the Revelation.

**The Intellectual and Religious Context of the *Plaine Discovery***

The context which helped create Napier’s religious and political views was not comprised solely of historical events, but also of ideas. Intellectual and religious works from the sixteenth century illustrate the mindset of Napier’s contemporaries and the beliefs that influenced the *Plaine Discovery*. They also demonstrate the innovative aspects of Napier’s work and the controversial and original nature of some ideas he espoused. Common themes existed in all the sixteenth century texts that have been examined in detail in this study. Bale, Knox, the English congregation at Geneva, James VI, Pont and even Robert Rollock believed in absolutes of good, verses the adversarial, absolutely evil forces of Satan and Antichrist manifested on earth as the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, they all vehemently condemned the idea that a compromise was possible in matters of devotion, faith or doctrine. Napier was as fervent in his condemnation of religious neutrality as any of these men. Like them, he used his theological work to encourage constancy and good behaviour in his readers. He employed horrific visions of God’s punishment to strike fear into those who would oppose him, whilst at the same time, promising rewards to
the faithful. He built upon the technique developed by Bale and used by several other polemists, of interpreting historical events as fulfilments of prophecies in the Revelation. Finally, like all of the men listed above, he used his theological work to aggrandise himself and others like him.

However, the greater emphasis one places on the similarities between the *Plaine Discovery* and the texts that preceded it, the more pronounced its differences appear. The works of all the above scholars also expounded the belief that God intended that humanity must be ignorant of the time at which the Second Coming and apocalypse would occur. As Robert Rollock’s *Lectures on First and Second Thessalonians* demonstrate, Napier’s attempt to date the Second Coming was hugely controversial and novel. Moreover, doing so was explicitly banned by the Geneva Bible, which Napier was compelled to own by law and which formed the basis of sermons he would have heard from childhood and for most of his adult life. He credited Christopher Goodman with inspiring his fascination with the apocalypse but rejected an insistence of the Bible he had helped create by calculating that the Second Coming would occur between 1688 and 1700.

The importance of the fact that Napier was a layman on the controversial aspects of his work should not be underestimated. Almost every other primary text considered in this study was written by a minister but Napier had no responsibilities to a congregation and no vested interest in pastoral care or the spiritual wellbeing of the humbler levels of society. His only intended audience were the literate, who would have generally belonged to the upper echelons of society and he sought to affect change by appealing to the higher levels of the social hierarchy. Napier claimed to have written the book for the widest possible audience. However, the very
nature of the work, a written text as opposed to a sermon, made Napier’s role and duties different to almost every other sixteenth century author described above. His audience in his lifetime would not have been as large or diverse as that of Bale, Knox or Rollock because so much of their lives were devoted to mass communication via the pulpit. Preaching differed greatly from the written word as a medium, and ministers who publicly espoused controversial ideas could face serious consequences, as Knox learnt when he was expelled from Frankfurt in 1555.

It must not be supposed that those like Bale and Rollock would have rushed to predict the date of the apocalypse had their vocations permitted them to do so. However, the fact that, as a privileged man of leisure, Napier was free to do and write almost as he pleased was certainly a determining factor in the content of the work. He may have also been so convinced of his conclusions that he felt duty-bound to publish them. However, another key issue was expediency; Napier believed that the idea of an imminent apocalypse suited his vision for the future of Scotland. The pace of reform in the country had faltered and he was attempting to instil a sense of urgency. As shown in Chapter 1, he shared a sense of pessimism about the future with his friend Robert Pont, believing the age in which he lived to be evil and the population and king to be lukewarm in their faith. However, despite this pessimism, the first edition was written when Napier perceived the religious group with which he was aligned were confident about their position in Scotland and relationship with the crown. The assertion that the world would end in approximately a century was intended to stimulate reform and force the king to bow to the demands of the Presbyterian party, who believed themselves to be on a strong political footing. Most notable were their hopes that he would show no mercy to the Catholic Lords in the
wake of the Spanish Blanks Affair and fully deconstruct the old Episcopal system. Nothing could provide a greater sense of urgency than the apparent proof that the world was about to end.

Napier’s forebears, on the other hand, would have regarded the idea that the world was coming to an end as counterproductive. They were the first generation of reformers, full of hope and optimism for a future in a new, godly society, that they might help to construct. As ministers, they would have seen their role as lying, to a great extent, in encouraging the general population to reform their faith on a personal, devotional level. The Henrician exiles like Bale also sought to win favour with the king. They attempted to achieve this end by praising their rulers’ policies of reform and portraying themselves as supportive religious moderates who could be welcomed home to help construct the new church. Bale portrayed this new, godly society as long-lasting to appeal to Henry VIII, by showing that his position as godly prince, or Emperor, would endure. Thus, not only the current monarch, but their descendants, would reign over a covenanted nation which was to serve as a shining example to the rest of Christendom and a symbol of the failings of the Roman Catholic Church and her secular allies. The Marian Exiles, especially those at Geneva, did not share this attitude towards their monarch and advocated resistance to Mary Tudor, casting her as a tyrant, though they did attempt to win favour with Elizabeth after her accession.

The writings and sermons of these reformers were also intended for the general population. An imminent apocalypse might have caused panic but, perhaps more importantly, Protestant ministers wanted their flocks to work hard towards a peaceful and prosperous new society. An important way of achieving this end was by
promising personal rewards, prosperity and an end to their suffering in this life, as well as salvation in the next. John Knox promised temporal rewards, both to the general population and Mary of Guise, if they embraced the reformed faith. The *Plaine Discovery* promised no such thing because the physical world, with its transient, illusory pleasures, was soon to be destroyed. The only reward Napier promised, other than salvation, was the chance for James to achieve greatness on a cosmic scale by entering into the narrative of the Revelation, taking his place as one of the ten horns of the beast.

As a ‘second generation’ reformer, Napier was not so chronologically close as his predecessors to the horrors that were often blamed on the belief in an imminent Second Coming. Napier was certainly no Anabaptist. His amillennial stance, that the thousand years of Christ’s reign over the earth would not occur within human history, differentiated him from the Münster commune. They had believed that Christ was about to return and rule over a golden religious age, with their city as His New Jerusalem, for 1000 years. Napier explicitly rejected this type of Premillennialism or Chiliasm, which helped underscore the difference between his system and that of Jan Matthys, Jan Bockelson, and John of Leiden, claiming that his interpretation refuted, the great errour of Cerinthus, and his sect of Chilists or Millenaries, who thought our reign with Christ to be on earth, and temporal for a 1000 yeares, and so about by vicissitudes, as did of the old Platonicks and of new in a maner the Origenists. Further, some also by the mistaking of this text, suspected the authoritie of this whole Reuelation: but to the true Christian conceuuer hereof, both is the authoritie of this book confirmed and the heresie of the Millenaries refelled.¹

¹ *PD*, p. 240. Napier may also have found it especially important to distance himself from Chilists because of the importance of the Revelation itself in the formation of their apocalyptic standpoint. See Backus, ‘The Church Fathers...’ pp. 651, 654, 662 & 665.
Thus, Napier was not simply demonstrating the difference of his system from Chiliasm; he was making explicit the fact that his interpretation directly contradicted Premillennialism.

Napier argued that the very fact that he was living in the last days justified predicting the approximate date of the apocalypse. God had only mandated complete secrecy surrounding the end of the world for previous generations and Napier employed the most literal reading of Acts 1:7 possible. He argued that when Christ told the apostles, “It is not for you to know the times,” he was referring only to them.\(^2\) Napier’s generation was living in an unprecedented age and needed to be aware of God’s impending judgement. God’s providential relationship had changed and He had predetermined that “knowledge shal then abound.”\(^3\) Napier’s revealing of biblical secrets was therefore a part of God’s plan for His church.

Other than the *Plaine Discovery*, the only text considered above that was not written by a minister was James VI’s *Fruitfull Meditatioun*, which was a peculiar example simply because it was written by the monarch. The content of the work was shaped by the fact that James was seeking to endear himself to the English court in order to bolster his chances of succeeding to Elizabeth’s throne. His position as king also compelled him to urge his readers to fight for their country’s freedom if another invasion were attempted by Spain or other foreign powers. James was also attempting to cultivate an image of himself as a ‘Godly Prince’ in order to enhance his standing in the eyes of the Kirk. The increasing confessionalisation of politics following the Reformation meant that it was important for monarchs to both assert influence over, and derive legitimacy from, their domestic church. As well as his

\(^3\) Daniel 12:4, *PD*, p. 18.
desire to achieve political ends, the young king was probably writing out of genuine fear in the wake of the Spanish Armada, and the emotive language used to describe the danger of invasion in the *Fruitfull Meditatioun* reflected the depth of his feelings.

In addition to his position as a layman, Napier may have felt able to undertake the controversial enterprise of dating the Second Coming because works written in the years immediately preceding the *Plaine Discovery* had begun to posit the idea of an imminent apocalypse. A line of progression towards a sense of apocalyptic immediacy from Bale to Napier, through texts like the Geneva Bible, Knox’s later works and James VI’s *Fruitfull Meditatioun* may be constructed. Had Napier been a contemporary of Bale, or written his commentary immediately after the publication of the *Image of Both Churches*, the content of the *Plain Discovery* would have been more surprising. The *Image* portrayed the apocalypse as far into the future. However, by the time Napier was an adult, he had been influenced by subsequent works like the Geneva Bible, which argued that living as if God’s final judgement were imminent could be beneficial. Knox’s *Answer to Tyrie* went even further, actively welcoming the idea of the end of the world and hoping it would occur very soon. In this context, Napier probably believed that predicting the date of the Second Coming was compatible with the intellectual and religious vogues of his age. His insistence that predicting only the approximate age of the end was not forbidden by scripture, shows that he knew his actions were controversial but also believed his audience would be receptive to his claims if he made adequate justifications.
The Chronology

The other thing that set the *Plaine Discovery* apart from the works that preceded it was the explicit, detailed and rigid nature of the chronology of salvation history Napier devised and used as the foundation for his polemical arguments. Although chronologies were nothing new, Napier’s was striking and its precision, developed through mathematical calculations, revealed his fascination with the discipline two decades before the publication of his *Logarithms*. The rigidity of the chronology was representative of the tone of the work in general. It revealed Napier’s belief in the absolute truth of his arguments and seemed to prove with mathematical precision that God had a plan for His church and its enemies that was about to come to fruition. Historical events that fulfilled prophecies in the Revelation occurred at fixed junctures in a pattern that could be easily discerned. God had willed that Napier would uncover and reveal these truths for the comfort of the elect and as a warning to Roman Catholics to repent. The integration of events relating directly to Scotland, especially its Reformation and monarch, gave them extra weight and appealed to Napier’s domestic audience by making their experiences appear significant on a grand scale.

Napier’s prediction of the date of the Second Coming ensured the concept of time played a greater role in the *Plaine Discovery* than other contemporary texts. Napier’s chronology contained dates that were essential to his calculations; the mere fact that he was attempting to predict the date within a range of just 12 years meant that the dates for the other occurrences in his chronology had to be precise. Of course, to the modern observer, the rigidity of Napier’s chronology appears to be its greatest flaw. His seals, trumpets and thundering angels’ jubilees occurred at regular intervals, of
seven, 245 and 49 years, respectively. This forced him to falsify dates and occasionally have an event in the Revelation correlate to no specific historical occurrence. However, his contemporaries would not have had access to the diversity of works that modern observers take for granted. Verifying the accuracy of Napier’s chronology would have been a difficult process and many would have accepted his claims as factual.

The *Plaine Discovery* was substantially a product of the intellectual context within which it may be placed. The use of historical application of scriptural prophecy was becoming popular by the late sixteenth century and Napier was well placed to adopt the system for his own work. He was, to an extent ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’ by combining Bale’s historical application of the Revelation with the systematic approach of Petrus Ramus and the Geneva congregation and the belief in an imminent apocalypse found in *Carion’s Chronicle*. However, Napier was also an original thinker who was willing to take risks and engage in controversial intellectual enterprises and he brought an unprecedented level of apocalyptic urgency to his chronological system. Even when the influence of *Carion’s Chronicle* is taken into account, Napier’s attempt at calculating the date of the apocalypse was a dramatic innovation.

**Napier’s Approach to Rome**

Napier’s approach to prophecy, then, was controversial and even groundbreaking. Although his stance on the Roman Catholic Church, the Papacy and their seat at Rome was more typical of the time, he brought his own style of analysis and rhetoric to the subject. Napier claimed to have had amicable relationships with
Catholics and to bear them no ill will. He even denied having any predisposition to hatred of the papacy, despite denouncing the institution as Antichrist. However, Napier also strongly implied that the *Plaine Discovery* was, at least in part, divinely inspired. Thus the attacks on Roman Catholicism that played such a crucial role in the work were the result of a ‘true’ reading of the Book of Revelation and not Napier’s preconceptions. Roman Catholicism was being portrayed as the chief agency of Satan on Earth because this was the message that God was passing to humanity through Napier. To dispute the contention that the papacy was Antichrist was to question God.

Aside from the dating of the Second Coming, the claim that the perceived spiritual enemies of Protestantism were evil and would soon be punished was the central conclusion of the *Plaine Discovery*. Warnings about the evil nature of Roman Catholicism emerged from Napier’s analysis as the primary reason for God’s Revelation to John; God had inspired the work specifically so His church would know the truth about their adversary at the appointed time. Such a focussed and exhaustive attack on Rome gave Napier a tangible enemy or scapegoat against whom to direct his audience to rail. Napier portrayed the physical destruction of Rome as the ‘New Babylon’ as a central component of the narrative of the apocalypse. He also used military language to describe the destruction of Rome, presenting the city’s defeat as be literal and temporal as well as figurative and spiritual. The Armada and Spanish Blanks seemed to show that the final battle was coming, which would pit Protestant against Catholic states. Napier may have been appealing to James VI, who

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4 See above, pp. 175-6.
had made even more explicit calls for military action, by reminding his readers of their duties to the Protestant cause when that war came.

Napier employed many devices that would have been familiar to the readers of the *Plaine Discovery* when denouncing Roman Catholicism. For example, Bale’s insistence that much of the corruption of the papacy stemmed from its interference in secular affairs was present in Napier’s work. This was despite the latter’s focus on the transience of temporal institutions and the necessity of obeying God before men, which he inherited from the 1560 Geneva Bible. Also like Bale, Napier used sexual imagery to besmirch the reputation of the papacy, accusing individual popes of sodomy and whore-mongering, and connecting idolatry with prostitution. However, Napier’s stance on the papacy was characteristically uncompromising. For him, the papacy had not become Antichrist slowly over several generations; it had always been so, from the days of Sylvester I. This was representative of his wider view of the world, viewed through a lens of concern with the apocalypse, in which only good and evil existed and the idea of a middle-ground on religious matters was unconscionable.

**Napier’s Approach to Scripture**

In the *Plaine Discovery*, Napier’s polemical arguments were paramount and he used scripture to justify his methods and prove his conclusions. Napier’s Reformed doctrinal position emphasised the importance of the Word of God and vernacular scripture. Despite this, his belief that he was inspired by God led him to conclude that whatever he was writing was the truth. As was typical of religious works in the early modern period, he attempted to justify all of his techniques and conclusions by
selecting verses from the Bible that seemed to support his methods. This was especially important in the case of the *Plaine Discovery* because of its controversial content. Napier sought to emphasise continuity and downplay the novel or controversial aspects of his work, and demonstrating that they were based in scripture was the most effective way of doing so. However, the occasional need to force the Bible to support his arguments led to an ambivalent stance on the sanctity of scripture.

On the one hand he emphasised the importance of canonical scripture, on the other, he frequently used non-canonical sources to reinforce his arguments. He could not resist including selected verses from the Sibylline Oracles, which were chosen to bolster his demonization of, and predictions concerning, Rome. More important was the Talmudic Prophecy of Elias, which helped form the basis of his chronology. The use of this text remained controversial, despite its increased popularity following the publication of *Carion’s Chronicle*. Bale had grouped the Talmud alongside the Quran and invented Roman Catholic traditions as an abominable perversion of God’s word that coincided with the opening of the fourth Seal in the Revelation: “Thus out of ye corrupted & depraued scriptures tooke ye Jewes their Talmud, ye Saracens their Alchorane, and the Byshops their popish lawes and decrees.”

Napier was also willing to select the translation of scripture that best supported his conclusions, as he did when discussing Daniel 12:4, and to manipulate the original Greek of the Revelation to suit his own ends. However, his interpretation of the number 666 was not only designed to demonstrate the efficacy of his wider conclusions. It revealed Napier’s desire to aggrandise his own position by

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5 Bale, *Image*, f. 79v.
6 See above, pp. 113 & 170-3.
establishing a form of apostolic succession between himself and John. By claiming his method was derived from the work of Irenaeus, a student of Polycarp, who was in turn believed to have studied under John, Napier was establishing an intellectual and methodological link between himself and Christ through his youngest disciple. The importance of this was enhanced even further by the fact that John had supposedly written the text on which Napier was writing his commentary and the belief that both the Revelation and the *Plaine Discovery* were inspired by God. Despite this dubious approach to scripture, Napier would have balked at the implication that he was doing anything wrong and wrote that those who misrepresent the gospels faced damnation: “So that who (as the text saith) that would peruert them, God shall confirm them with the æternall fire of hell”.\(^7\) The way in which Napier viewed himself was an important formative influence on the *Plaine Discovery*, which warrants special consideration.

**‘Viewing’ Napier through the *Plaine Discovery***

This thesis has contended that there are serious flaws in both the popular biographical understanding of John Napier, who appears an enigma because few of his personal papers have survived. The dearth of accurate information has resulted in an overreliance on Mark Napier’s *Memoirs of John Napier of Merchiston*. Mark Napier’s work provides an excellent resource of primary materials and simplifies greatly the task of enquiring about John Napier’s life and works. However, much of the analysis in the *Memoirs* is now obsolete. Mark Napier sought to bolster the reputation of his family by portraying John as the greatest genius Scotland had ever produced. He also viewed his ancestor and his life through the lens of Gothic

\(^7\) *PD*, p. 33.
romanticism that typified the popular nineteenth century view of the past. The sense of certainty that surrounds Napier’s reputation as a recluse, his alleged magical practices and his education in Europe must be called into question.

More can be ascertained about Napier’s character, personality, hopes and fears by studying his works than by attempting to reconstruct a complete narrative of his life, which a lack of documentary evidence renders impossible. Of course, Napier left a tantalising insight into his young life and religious influences at St Andrews in his introductory note to the reader. As has been shown above though, a detailed reading of the *Plaine Discovery* has much more to tell the reader about its author. Napier clearly shared the fears of apostasy and invasion that were common to many in the British Isles. He also appeared to see the future of Scotland and England, as brief as it might be, as being defined by the countries’ shared religious destiny and hatred of common enemies. Napier was confident in his own prophetic status and beliefs to make highly controversial claims. However, he also sought to downplay the novel aspects of his work by portraying himself as belonging to a tradition of reformers. Clearly, he was aware of the position he wished to occupy within the tradition to which he was seeking to contribute.

One of the most important areas of Napier’s personality that can be illuminated through studying the *Plaine Discovery* is the way in which he perceived himself and his position as one chosen to reveal biblical mysteries. Napier placed a deliberate emphasis on knowledge in his commentary, often recasting seeing or hearing as understanding. His ability to reveal the mysteries of the most cryptic text of the Christian canon was a gift from God, not to Napier, but to the whole of humanity. This revealing of scriptural mysteries was a part of God’s predestined narrative of
humans’ salvation, in which hidden knowledge would be revealed in the last days to encourage the elect to remain faithful and constant in the face of danger. It was also intended to show Roman Catholics the error of their ways and compel them to convert to Protestantism. This conception of himself as belonging to a select few who were worthy to receive hidden or occult knowledge was not simply a device for making the *Plaine Discovery* appear more authoritative. Viewing the book along with Napier’s other works shows that it was a part of his general worldview that also governed his secret activities in alchemy. Napier did not intend to hide his dealings with Müller or Logan from public view because they might be viewed as diabolic. Alchemy was to be hidden from the masses because it brought one closer to the power of God’s creation. In addition, knowledge of metals, specifically Chrysopoeia, might bring untold wealth to its practitioners. If knowledge of how to produce gold became common, both the metal and all currencies would lose their value, resulting in chaos. He believed God intended alchemy to be understood by a select few who were wise and responsible enough to hold its secrets.

Napier never portrayed his membership of these elite groups as a result of vast intellect. In fact, he attempted to appear modest by deliberately belittling his own intelligence. However, the fact that God had chosen him as a vessel for His final revelations to humanity and the dangerous, occult secrets of alchemy, implies a perception of himself as morally superior to the majority of people. This inflated sense of his own status may also be seen in the *Resolution of Doubtts* in the 1611 edition of the *Plaine Discovery*. At first glance, this section might appear to show humility and a desire to engage with his critics in as cordial a manner as possible. However, when read carefully, it further illustrates Napier’s perception of himself as
superior to those around him: It reinforced Napier’s view that he was merely reporting the truth of scripture and that all those who differed from him were taking the side of evil. Although he approached the queries with which he dealt in a gracious manner, he also refused to engage with certain critics, against whom he threatened God’s judgement. The Resolvtion reveals that Napier believed manners and etiquette were important, implying that he had only responded to doubts raised “in all sobrieties and meekenes”. However, demanding these things of his audience also gave him carte blanche to ignore criticism as he saw fit, using the accusation of evil against those who might refute his conclusions.

With regards to both prophetic exegesis and alchemy, Napier was an elitist. He perceived himself as a member of a small, divinely chosen group, whose status was intrinsically linked to the salvation of humanity, a perception which was enhanced by the chronological system he employed. He directed his arguments to the elites of society, especially his king, and saw the actions of the Roman Catholic nobility as the greatest internal threat in Scotland following the Spanish Blanks Affair. Again, as a layman, Napier did not have a detailed or systematic approach to the general population beyond encouraging them to support their leaders, adhere to Reformed doctrine and possibly to take up arms in the final battle between good and evil foretold in the Revelation. He had no interest in pastoral care and, unlike Knox and Rollock, did not seek to affect change by appealing or ministering to the lower social orders. This elitism is perhaps unsurprising. In addition to the fact that the Plaine Discovery was a written work, and therefore aimed at the educated, Napier was born into privilege and would have associated primarily with those of his own social

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8 Napier, 1611, p. 333 & see above ch. 5.
status, or indeed those of even higher standing. As a result, he would have regarded the nobility as the people with the greatest potential to bring about the swift changes he desired.

**Napier's ‘Unity of Thought’**

One motivation for researching John Napier was that he was a mysterious, enigmatic figure who appeared to dabble in theology, mathematics and magic. These spheres of understanding seem mutually exclusive to many modern observers and Napier exemplified those characters that have been lost to the world as the sciences, metaphysics and religion have diverged as areas of enquiry. The idea that these apparently separate avenues of enquiry should be regarded as the result of a single worldview solves many problems associated with the study of early modern intellectuals and has formed an important component of the approach taken in this thesis. However, all approaches have limitations and none should be followed slavishly. The relevant limitation in this case is that not all magical beliefs and practices can be fitted into the paradigm, which is predicated on the assertion that religious belief was the unifying factor. ‘Black arts’ like necromancy and sorcery were anathema to the religious devotion espoused by Napier in the *Plaine Discovery* and could not be regarded as motivated by his doctrinal and theological positions. He lived during the height of the Scottish witch craze, when the suspicion of involvement in these practices was reviled and could bring shame, persecution, torture and even death. Moreover, the fact that he explicitly denounced witchcraft and ‘execrable Sorcerers’ meant that practising these arts would cast the sincerity of the *Plaine Discovery* itself into doubt.
However, except in the case of alchemy, no evidence of Napier’s alleged magical beliefs or practices exists and expectations must be cast aside in the light, or indeed lack, of evidence. The assumption that Napier dabbled in some form of witchcraft has been developed due to Mark Napier’s idealised reading of his ancestor’s papers and a dearth of reliable documentation, which has in turn resulted in an inadequately critical reading of Mark Napier’s conclusions. Alchemy does fit into the model of unified thought because, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was regarded as compatible with Christianity and might even bring one closer to God. Moreover, Napier’s conversation with Müller shows that both men believed knowledge of the discipline to be a gift from God, which was divinely mandated to be kept secret.\(^9\) This idea that he was one of a small group, chosen by God to receive special knowledge was also a unifying factor in Napier’s thought, which dictated his approach to scriptural revelation. Just as Napier had been chosen by God to understand the secrets of alchemy, he had been chosen to understand the secrets of the most cryptic book of the Christian canon, and transmit them to humanity in preparation for their impending judgement.

Hugh Trevor-Roper’s assertion that Napier devised logarithms to more accurately calculate the meaning of the Number of the Beast may be read as illustrating a degree of unity in Napier’s thought before the idea came into academic vogue.\(^10\) It seemed to show that the logarithms were devised specifically to answer religious questions. However, Trevor-Roper was fundamentally mistaken for two reasons. Firstly, he had misunderstood the chronology of Napier’s intellectual life. Napier had completed all

his calculations relating to scripture to his satisfaction by 1593, over two decades before the *Logarithms* were published. In the second edition of the *Plaine Discovery*, he robustly defended his original conclusions and added nothing to his mathematical calculations. Had he been dissatisfied with his original interpretations he could have made amendments and additions, bringing to bear the additional expertise in mathematics he had developed between 1593 and 1611. Secondly, the logarithms were devised to solve a definite problem that had been holding back the progress of mathematics and astronomy. Intellectuals like Kepler had known that there must be a method for speeding-up highly complex calculations for generations and it was Napier who succeeded in solving the problem.\(^{11}\) They were not an accidental discovery or ‘bolt from the blue’ they were a deliberate answer to a specific problem that Napier had determined to solve.\(^{12}\) They would have had negligible impact on the calculations in the *Plaine Discovery*, which, despite appearing complex to the casual observer, were simple in comparison to those required for astronomy.

The unity in Napier’s thought and the relationship between the *Plaine Discovery* and his later mathematical works is more subtle and complex than Trevor-Roper’s ‘cause and effect’ conclusion allows. It should not be supposed that what Napier

\(^{11}\) See Kepler’s Letter to Napier in Napier, M., pp. 432-4.
\(^{12}\) See Napier’s introductory note to the logarithms in Napier, 1614, f. A3r.: “Qvum nihil fit (charissili mathematum cultores) mathematicæpraxi tam molestum, quod; Logistas magis remoretur, ac retardet, quàm magnorum numerorum multiplicationes, partitiones, quadratæque ac cubiciæ extractiones, quà præter prolixitatis teadium, lubricic etiam erroribus plurimum sunt obnoxia: Cæpi igitur animo revolvere, quà arte certâ & expeditâ, possem dicta impedimenta amoliri.” & English Translation: “Seeing there is nothing (right well beloved Students in the Mathematickes) that is so troublesome to Mathematicall practice, nor that doth more molest and hinder Calculators, then the Multiplications, Diusiones, square and cubical Extractions of great numbers, which besides the tedious expence of time, are for the most part subject to many slippery errors. I began therefore to consider in my minde, by what certaine and ready Art I might remove those hinderances.” Wright (trans.), *A description of the Admirable Table of Logarithms: With a Declaration of The Most Plentifull, Easy, and speedy vse thereof in both kinds of Trigonometrie, as also in all Mathematicall calculations. Invented and Published In Latin By That Honorable L. Iohn Nepair, Baron of Marchiston, and translated into English by the late learned and famous mathematician Edward Wright* Nicholas Okes (London 1616) STC/1857:07, f. A5r.
wanted to achieve in the *Plaine Discovery* somehow necessitated the *Logarithms*. Rather, the *Plaine Discovery* was the work in which Napier’s pre-existing gift for mathematics found its first expression. It helped him further develop what must have been a prodigious talent and this laid the foundations for his later works. The 1611 edition shows that he did not simply leave theology behind and concentrate on mathematics for the remainder of his life, but had a continuing interest in both. The *Logarithms* aided astronomy, which was amongst the most important natural arts for the church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Observations of the heavens brought one closer to the secrets of God’s creation and therefore to God Himself. The *Plaine Discovery* is the key to understanding all Napier’s subsequent activities because Christianity was such a dominant force in people’s lives in the sixteenth century. It shaped their understanding of the world and their place within it to such an extent that no intellectual activity could ever be truly separated from it. Napier’s Christian belief was passionately elucidated in the *Plaine Discovery*.

**Final Reflections**

The term ‘early modern’ is perfectly suited to describe the *Plaine Discovery*. This was a work that was born from the context of, and a concern with, events and developments that truly laid the foundations for British modernity. It shows that some Scots perceived an Anglo-Scottish union as not simply desirable, but part of their destiny, which was shaped by their religious commonality and separation from mainland Europe. The work existed as it did because its author was a man of privilege and leisure, free from the constraints of ministry and political office. In and around his lifetime, men like Napier found themselves at the vanguard of intellectual,
governmental and religious developments as large towns became the centres of
government and the legal system. Families like the Napiers emerged as their
countries’ most important administrators and diplomats and became the precursors to
the middle-class in the modern era. The work also showcased some of the most
cutting-edge techniques in humanist scholarship, both in its presentation,
methodologies and content. The study of Napier confirms the unity of thought
approach has real potential to help modern scholars better understand this period and
does not only apply to Isaac Newton. It adds another dimension to the understanding
of the context in which thinkers like Napier lived by illuminating how they engaged
with the intellectual pursuits that were developing at the time.

The Plaine Discovery provides a unique insight into the apocalyptic beliefs that
were present in Scotland during the reign of James VI. It reveals a great deal about
John Napier, who is a well-known but little-understood historical character. More
importantly, it provides an insight into his audiences: the people of Scotland and
England, as well as King James. The hopes and fears of a generation were distilled in
this relatively small book. In Napier’s lifetime, history was believed to be defined by
a predestined struggle between good and evil that would soon come to an end. The
Plaine Discovery shows that concern with one’s place, and the place of one’s
contemporaries, within this cosmic narrative was a major concern in Scotland.
Napier’s work was controversial but not an aberration. In predicting the date of the
apocalypse it was at odds with the overwhelming consensus among religious writers
at the time but it also emerged from a clearly observable context. The work was a
product of Napier’s personality and view of the world and himself but it was also a
product of the works he had read, the sermons he had heard and the beliefs that were
common amongst his contemporaries. This thesis has hoped to further the modern understanding of the world in which Napier lived by illuminating his understanding of it and the place of his theological work within the context to which it belongs.

The idea that eschatology was the most pressing concern in Protestants’ religious experience in the British Isles in the decades following the Armada has been well-established in recent historiography. However, this thesis has shown that the *Plaine Discovery* contained the sixteenth century’s most passionate and full-fledged expression of eschatological belief in Scotland. Its clarity and systematic approach demonstrate that the ideas it contained were well-developed in Napier’s lifetime. The conceptions of the papacy as Antichrist, and of Protestants as God’s chosen people who were living in the last days of history were formed into a coherent framework through which all events were viewed and the *Plaine Discovery* is the clearest expression of this framework. Because the book was so transparent in the way it set out its author’s beliefs and conclusions it provides a uniquely clear window onto the apocalyptic beliefs that dominated Scottish thought during the reign of James VI.
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## Appendix 1 - Napier’s Complete Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event in the Revelation</th>
<th>Napier’s Date</th>
<th>Page in <em>Plaine Discovery</em></th>
<th>Napier’s Historical Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th Seal</td>
<td>50 A.D.</td>
<td>pp. 110-1</td>
<td>Gospel of John written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Seal</td>
<td>57 A.D.</td>
<td>p. 111</td>
<td>Nero’s temporal power increased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Seal</td>
<td>64 A.D.</td>
<td>p. 112</td>
<td>Nero persecuted Christians, committed incest &amp; murder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Seal</td>
<td>71 A.D.</td>
<td>p. 122</td>
<td>Persecution of Christians suspended under Flavian Dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Trumpet</td>
<td>71 A.D.</td>
<td>pp. 123-4</td>
<td>Effeminate/tyrannical Roman Emperors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Trumpet</td>
<td>316 A.D.</td>
<td>p. 124</td>
<td>Constantine shifted Imperial Seat from Rome to Constantinople.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Trumpet</td>
<td>806 A.D.</td>
<td>pp. 125-6</td>
<td>Church corrupted by Islam in the East &amp; Papacy in the West. Charlemagne divided Holy Roman Empire between his sons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Trumpet</td>
<td>1051</td>
<td>pp. 128-9</td>
<td>Rising power of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Trumpet</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>p. 131</td>
<td>Unification of formerly disparate Islamic peoples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Trumpet</td>
<td>1541</td>
<td>p. 150</td>
<td>Protestant Reformers active &amp; successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Jubilee</td>
<td>1541</td>
<td>p. 178</td>
<td>Protestant Reformers bringing truth of Gospels to light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Jubilee</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>p. 179</td>
<td>Final defeat of Rome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Jubilee</td>
<td>1688</td>
<td>pp. 180-1</td>
<td>Second Coming of Christ, God’s Judgement, Destruction of World, Creation of New Heaven and New Earth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table summarising Napier’s complete chronology of Christian history from the Baptism of Christ to the end of the world, included to illustrate the remarkably systematic nature of Napier's approach. Chronological progression was absolutely explicit. The chronology was expressed in this order throughout the *Plaine Discovery*, and may easily be reconstructed by reading the work from cover to cover. The reader never had to leaf back and forth to gather dates together, even when a new category began, illustrating Napier’s belief that the prophecies of the Revelation were themselves shown to John in chronological order. The fact that the last date of each category of events in the Revelation coincided with the first date in the next category is also striking. There was no space of time between the last seal and the first trumpet, or the last trumpet and the first angel’s jubilee. This ensured there were no gaps in the chronology and helped develop a sense of cohesion between each set of events.
Appendix 2 - Geneva Bible Front Page

Image from front page of 1560 Geneva Bible. The illustration shows the Israelites before the Red Sea, with the Egyptians in pursuit. This was a famous example from the Old Testament in which God’s chosen people found themselves in a desperate situation but were saved by divine providence. Here it was intended as an allegory for the position of English and Scottish Protestants, who were, or had recently been, perceived to be suffering under oppressive Roman Catholic Rulers. The surrounding biblical quotations admonish the viewer to remain constant in their faith and trust that God would soon deliver them from their suffering and punish their enemies. This is very much in keeping with John Knox’s emphasis on divine immutability, which was discussed in Chapter 8: Just as God had parted the Red Sea to deliver his chosen and drown their enemies, so would he remedy the situation of his true Church in the British Isles.
Appendix 3 - Merchiston Tower

Plan of Merchiston Tower as it would have been in Napier’s lifetime, before the addition of a round tower. From Smith, G.A., Merchiston Castle in Knott, pp. 52-61, p. 55.
Appendix 4 - Mark Napier on the Arms Matrimonial of James VI

When the reader opened the Plaine Discovery, they would have seen a large coat of arms, beside the Dedicatory epistle to James VI. Discussing this image, Mark Napier wrote, “As a frontispiece to this noble letter, the philosopher selected the arms matrimonial of Scotland and Denmark in compliment to the king’s recent alliance. Underneath the heraldic conjunction, however, he added the warning sentence with which this chapter concludes.”\(^1\) The text inserted below the image cautioned that all temporal power and pleasure was transient, and that God alone controlled the eternal. However, the fact that this message appears compatible with Napier’s stance on monarchy and other temporal institutions is irrelevant because the page was inserted, not by Napier, but by Robert Waldegrave the printer. The same page, with the quotation, featured in several works published by him around this time, including Robert Rollock’s sermons on Daniel, published in 1591. See overleaf for a comparison.

\(^1\) Napier, M. p. 173.
The Arms of James VI, from Napier's *Plaine Discovery* A3. Note the caption, which draws upon Ephesians 3:6 and emphasizes the importance of religious faith over temporal power. The Frontispiece from Rollock's *Lectures on Daniel*, f. A2. v. The work's title page also had identical borders and illustrations to the *Plaine Discovery*. Clearly this was the result of Waldegrave's discretion and not the choice of the authors.