

# MOUNT BUGARACH SAVED FROM THE END OF THE WORLD: AN INCONSISTENT PREDICTION

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ARNAUD ESQUERRE

## Mount Bugarach Saved from the End of the World: An Inconsistent Prediction

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“THE VILLAGE OF BUGARACH seems to be an assembly point for a number of people, most of whom are New Age devotees, who are persuaded that this village in the Aude region will be spared from the Apocalypse.” This is the assessment of the *Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires* (Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances, or MIVILUDES) in its report published in the year prior to the supposed date of the end of the world: December 21, 2012. Several media sources also paid a great deal of attention to this prediction, which for our purposes I shall call “Bugarach 2012.”

One possible approach to this type of eschatological prediction is to follow Stephen O’Leary’s method and focus on the statement itself. O’Leary analyzed the speeches of William Miller who, in the 1830s, predicted the end of the world for 1843; and of Hal Lindsey, who announced in the 1970s that the end of the world would coincide with the end of the twentieth century. On the basis of this study, O’Leary considers apocalyptic discourse to be a rhetorical solution to the problem of evil, based on a discursive construction

of temporality.<sup>1</sup> Although this approach identifies the recurrent patterns characteristic of eschatological statements, it fails to consider the conditions in which such statements are made and received. An eschatological prediction proposes a different relationship to time than that which is most widely accepted (i.e., time divided into regular periods, such as hours, months, or years, which are used primarily for economic forecasts). Although an eschatological prediction can make use of such periods by providing a specific date for the end of the world (December 21, 2012), the prediction uses this date as an event from which point it is possible to identify a before and an after.<sup>2</sup> A second possible approach would be to analyze the Bugarach 2012 prediction on the basis of the outcome – that is, to consider the effect of the end of the world’s failure to materialize on the group awaiting this Apocalypse. As in Leon Festinger’s classic study,<sup>3</sup> this analysis would focus on whether the number of people in the group increased or decreased, and what actions, such as special rituals or ceremonies,<sup>4</sup> were subsequently required in order to maintain the group’s coherence. However, this analysis presupposes that group members have a strong belief in the prediction. Damian Thompson has shown that it is possible for a majority of group members, like those in his Kensington temple study, to have only a weak belief in a prediction without ever calling it into question. Each temple member seems to believe, with varying degrees of intensity, that Jesus will someday return. Several even admit that his return is near. But most members remain silent as to precisely how imminent it is. This ambivalent attitude can be summarized by one believer’s statement: “It’s there, in the back of my mind, but I don’t think about it.”<sup>5</sup>

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1. Stephen O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse. A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
  2. On the differentiation between time based on the past/present/future progression, and time based on a before/after duality, see Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology of Time. Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images* (Oxford: Berg, 1992).
  3. Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956); new edition with preface by Elliot Aronson (London: Pinter & Martin, 2008).
  4. Susan J. Palmer and Nathalie Finn, “Coping with Apocalypse in Canada,” *Sociological Analysis* 53 (1992): 397-415; Simon Dein, *Lubavitcher Messianism. What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails?* (London/New York: Continuum History in Jewish Thought, 2011).
  5. Damian Thompson, *Waiting for Antichrist. Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 109.

Nonetheless, focusing on group members' attitudes during the period prior to the date announced for the end of the world fails to take into consideration people external to the group. If, as Thompson shows, members of a group have an ambivalent relationship to an eschatological prediction, it then becomes necessary to consider the attitudes of those outside this group. The focus therefore shifts to studying a statement's dissemination without being solely restricted to those defending the given statement.

This approach, which I will use as the basis for my study, does not focus on knowing whether or not an eschatological prediction will take place on the date specified or, if no date is specified, knowing whether or not it will occur in general. A characteristic shared by all eschatological predictions is that none have ever come to pass. This observation should be the starting point for any research on the subject. The fact that the end of the world once again fails to materialize is therefore unsurprising. The important question is not the future event specified in the prediction, but rather the prediction itself as it is connected to those making such predictions and to the conditions in which such predictions are made. The questions that I will try to answer through my analysis of the Bugarach 2012 prediction are neither that of knowing what happens when a prediction fails, nor of evaluating whether or not group members maintain a strong belief in a prediction prior to the date specified for the predicted event. The questions are: who is responsible for disseminating a prediction that the world will end; how; and for what reason?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to differentiate between the various ways in which predictions are disseminated. Studies on groups within which a prediction circulates can identify the varying degrees of belief among group members, but they do not consider any possible reason for this circulation other than belief. Yet a prediction can be disseminated by being denounced, criticized, and even ridiculed. As soon as these different types of dissemination are considered, a new question arises that has not yet been asked: who first started disseminating the prediction? Who was the "prime-enunciator" (to coin a term)? The studies cited above assume that this concerns one person in the group who has a special status in relation to other group members. This person makes a prediction that other group members then take up, and is often qualified as a "prophet." However, if we consider that a prediction can be stated

in a manner other than an affirmation or defense, then the “prime-enunciator” can be someone other than a prophet, and can even be a denouncer or critic.

The question of knowing who disseminates an eschatological prediction, and how, is even more pertinent when considering the following enigma that is rarely pointed out. The period between the date when the prediction is first announced (prime-enunciation) and the anticipated end of the world, which I will call the “waiting period,” is never brief (a day), but on the contrary tends to be long (several weeks or years). Although “the time is near,” it appears that there is first a considerable wait. In his gift exchange model, Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes that “the interval between gift and counter-gift is what allows a pattern of exchange that is always liable to strike the observer and also the participants as reversible (i.e., both forced and interested) to be experienced as irreversible” and that “to abolish the interval is also to abolish strategy.”<sup>6</sup> However it seems here that the interval factor is something other than the perception of time as reversible or irreversible. Why is it that the statement claiming that Mount Bugarach would be saved from the end of the world, anticipated to be on December 21, 2012, did not just circulate a few days prior to the date in question, but was instead widely circulated two years in advance? Whom and what purpose does this period of time serve? To answer this question, I will first provide a brief chronological overview of the prediction’s dissemination, after which I will discuss the region where the Bugarach mountain or “pech” (as it is called in local slang) is located, using information collected during two on-site stays.<sup>7</sup>

### How an Eschatological Prediction Began to Circulate

Before the prediction appeared announcing that Mount Bugarach would be saved from the Apocalypse, a text discussing the supernatural events that would occur at this location in 2012 was available as early as 2006. A short story called *Revelation on Mount Bugarach* by Jean d’Argoun was published by a small

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6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 2000 [1972]), 339-340.

7. February and August 2012.

publishing house based in the south of France.<sup>8</sup> The author was presented as a ufologist and medium who had published other works on the region's "mysteries," and who predicted the coming of a messiah.<sup>9</sup> The story's narrator encounters a being, referred to as "He who comes" and code named Metaxa. This being reveals to the narrator that "Mount Bugarach in the Pyrenees will soon enter its final phase of vibratory emergence. Ufologists from around the world will be alerted by the sudden increase in UFO phenomena." A relationship exists between the appearance of UFOs and Mount Bugarach, "a high cosmo-telluric location." Among other things, the mountain harbors an immense deposit of uranium that would be the envy of several secret military organizations. According to the narrator's tale, the secret services of powerful nations had, since 1947, controlled all information on UFOs. This "conspiracy among planetary authorities" is destined to "conceal the Truth" from all human beings.

Metaxa tells the narrator that an alien vehicle, King Nimrod's vessel, is buried under the rocky outcrop of Mount Bugarach. Jules Verne, referred to as an initiate, apparently knew about this "secret," which was his inspiration for the Nautilus in *The Mysterious Island*, written at a farm facing Mount Bugarach. The vessel is hidden in the subterranean lake of a gigantic cave. Mount Bugarach itself comes from the same extra-terrestrial source as King Nimrod's vessel:

It is the energetic periphery of this planetary vortex that, through materialized remanence, generates the entire UFO phenomenon. There are not hundreds of machines and alien crews. There is only the visual and psychic deployment of a single Entity. What is this Entity? Metaxa assures me that this is the greatest secret of the Guardians of Nimrod. This ultimate secret will be revealed to me on August 11, 2012, in a cave under Mount Bugarach.<sup>10</sup>

This initiation tale contains a number of themes that have been widely used in fantasy literature since Lovecraft (the presence of a

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8. Jean d'Argoun, *Révélation sur le Mont Bugarach* (Auriol, France: Éditions Chantepierre, 2006).

9. Such as: *L'ultime secret de Rennes le Château, Bugarach la montagne sacrée* and *Issabà: la lumière qui vient . . .*, all published by Éditions Guy Trédaniel. Jean d'Argoun is a pseudonym, but this is hardly relevant.

10. d'Argoun, *Révélation sur le Mont Bugarach*, 53.

sleeping entity under the earth, which is called to awake; Cthulhu in Lovecraft; King Nimrod in Argoun; the narrator’s reference to an earlier manuscript that corroborates the “secret”). It also borrows from spy novels (conspiracy, secret organizations, “concealing the truth” from all humanity<sup>11</sup>) and science fiction (UFOs). These themes are combined and then located at Mount Bugarach in a specific temporal context (2006-2012). However, in spite of the diversity of themes used, the story lacks the prediction of the end of the world as such. The year 2012 is mentioned only in reference to a “revelation” that is to take place in a cave under Mount Bugarach.

Four years later, at the end of November 2010, a local daily newspaper for the Bugarach region, *L’Indépendant*, published an article entitled “Bugarach, the Only Survivor of the End of the World!” which included the following statement from the mayor:

What I fear most is those people who believe in the end of the world. [...] According to them, our village is one of the sites on earth that will be spared from the final apocalypse on *December 12, 2012!*<sup>12</sup>

In subsequent weeks, other articles followed in the local press, echoing the mayor’s concern for December 12, 2012.<sup>13</sup> This echo then traveled abroad. On December 21, London’s *Daily Telegraph* published an article that said the village of Bugarach was “plagued” by visitors who believed it would survive the Apocalypse, set to occur on two potential dates, December 12 or December 21. The article claimed that a number of UFO websites, primarily American, were the source of the prediction (“online UFO websites, many in the US”) without giving any further details.<sup>14</sup>

One month later, the *New York Times* published an article reporting on the mayor of Bugarach’s fears for December 21, 2012:

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11. See Luc Boltanski, *Énigmes et complots* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

12. “Bugarach, seul rescapé de la fin du monde!” *L’Indépendant*, November 30, 2010. (Author’s emphasis.)

13. “Bugarach: le maire s’inquiète face à la folie du 12-12-12”, *L’Indépendant*, December 7, 2010. *La Dépêche du Midi*, December 31, 2010.

14. “French Village Which Will ‘Survive 2012 Armageddon’ Plagued by Visitors,” *Daily Telegraph*, December 21, 2010.

“Some American websites were selling tickets to come here,” said Jean-Pierre Delord, the mayor. “We are 200 locals; we don’t want 2,000 to 3,000 utopians showing up in Bugarach.”<sup>15</sup>

According to the article, French and international websites devoted to the Apocalypse claim that Mount Bugarach is a “sacred place” that will be spared from the end of the world. Believers think that on the Final Judgment Day, they will be spirited away by a group of aliens who live under the mountain. The date in question is when a 5,125-year cycle in the Mayan calendar comes to a close.<sup>16</sup>

In France, the national press then gave column space to the prediction. In February 2011, the newspaper *Le Figaro* published an article in which the mayor’s concerns (“Absolutely no way that our village will be transformed into a Solar Temple,” a reference to the collective deaths of the Order of the Solar Temple), were contrasted with a statement by the director of the office of the prefect for the Aude region, who stated that in the face of “an increase in irrationality surrounding Bugarach [...] [t]here have not, for the moment, been any disturbances of public order.”<sup>17</sup>

The MIVILUDES devotes a large part of its annual report, which was published in June, to apocalyptic predictions and their perils. In its report, the body calls for public authorities to undertake surveillance of Mount Bugarach:

Bugarach therefore seems to warrant *surveillance*, particularly with 2012 approaching, particularly in terms of potential public order disturbances caused by large gatherings of people. For the time being, we have primarily observed a *commercial exploitation* of the site’s virtues, particularly in terms of *real estate* and *tourism*. However, seminars, free or fee-based conferences, and site visits organized by groups that are primarily inspired by New Age ideas must not be neglected. There is a potential risk to those who could *fall under the influence*, or simply a risk of *scams* to benefit from the supposed mystical character of the sites.<sup>18</sup>

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15. “For the End of the World, a French Peak Holds Allure,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2011.

16. “For the End of the World.”

17. Cyril Hostein, “Bugarach, le village de la fin des temps,” *Le Figaro*, February 18, 2011.

18. MIVILUDES, *Rapport 2010 remis au Premier Ministre le 15 juin 2011* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2011): 95-106 (author’s emphasis).



The report specifies the various popular explanations for the site's peculiarity: its strong magnetic force; its esoteric nature which accounts for its nickname, the "sacred mountain"; the mythical existence of a subterranean life; a passage towards unknown worlds or civilizations that have disappeared; its sheltering an alien base; the location of the buried Ark of the Covenant; etc. MIVILUDES reports on the existence of Mount Bugarach "believers" who hold various hypotheses concerning the apocalypse: "earthquake, tidal wave, cataclysms of all sorts due to the inversion of the magnetic poles, increased solar activity, collision with the planet Nibiru, etc."

Among the successive articles in the national press at this time, there was a long report published in *Le Monde* on December 31, 2011.<sup>19</sup> This report states that the Apocalypse will occur on December 21, 2012 "according to the recent interpretation of a Mayan calendar," and that the mayor heard about the apocalyptic prediction for his village in the fall of 2010 through a number of "American websites." A few months later, in early April, *Le Parisien* published a two-page spread on "Bugarach: The Unwilling Refuge from the Apocalypse," including an interview with the mayor, who claimed: "It started on the Internet." There is no statement from a named believer or defender of the Bugarach 2012 prediction, but there is a statement from an anonymous person who refers to the mountain as a "place of passage" and to 2012 as a "turning point":

The prophecy nevertheless has its believers, such as this man in his sixties, who refuses to tell us his name. He settled in Bugarach a year ago, "because it is a place of passage between the infra-terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial [...] This year represents a turning point in the history of the world," says this person who interprets the Arab Spring and earthquakes as definite signs. "Ancient energies are failing, and new ones are emerging, primarily around the Sun."<sup>20</sup>

The *Parisien* article, however, added a new element that had not previously been seen in the other articles on this subject. A 57-year-old man had been found dead in a field in Laroque-de-Fa

19. "Bugarach avant la fin du monde," *Le Monde* 2, December 31, 2011.

20. Timothée Boutry, "Bugarach, refuge malgré lui de l'Apocalypse," *Le Parisien*, April 6, 2012.

(Aude). He had a bag that contained 17,000 Euros, “esoteric” writings, and documents about Bugarach. However, at the end of April, another newspaper provided a different angle on this man’s death by interviewing his father. According to the deceased’s father, his son, who had left home a year earlier, “didn’t want to survive the Apocalypse; he just wanted to see what it [Mount Bugarach] looked like.”<sup>21</sup> Until August 2012, when this inquest closed, reports on Bugarach appeared one after the other. They did not differ on the major points, and all focused on the mayor, who was ready to fight the mass arrival of “illuminated believers” invading the village to survive the end of the world. To conclude, I would like to mention that in an interview published on August 24 in *Le Figaro*, Georges Fenech, who had just completed his term as president of MIVILUDES, confirmed that “sectarian groups had acquired properties” in Bugarach, and that “bunkers and underground galleries with storage for food had been created in surrounding areas.” As a result, the village would be monitored by the services of the sub-directorate of general information.<sup>22</sup>

This brief chronology, from November 2010 to August 2012, of the Bugarach 2012 prediction’s dissemination gave rise to a number of observations. When the prediction first appeared in the newspapers at the end of 2010, the first date for the end of the world was specified as December 12, 2012. Then, two dates were mentioned. Finally, the second date, December 21, 2012, became definitive. 12/21/2012, is consistent with the history of emblematic dates used for eschatological predictions, such as the years 1000, 1666, and 2000.<sup>23</sup> This date, which is not just a year, but instead a specific day, is a throwback to the temporal order of the calendar. As Norbert Elias<sup>24</sup> demonstrated, the calendar represents a State monopoly, a contemporary example of which is the passage from “winter time” to “summer time.” However, if the Bugarach 2012 prediction is based on the calendar established and controlled by current States,

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21. Jean-Pierre Vergès, “Le ‘suicide’ de l’ermite de Bugarach,” *Journal du Dimanche*, 2012.

22. Georges Fenech, «Les grandes sectes infiltrent les lieux de pouvoir,» *Le Figaro*, August 24, 2012. “G. Fenech also explains that by flying over the region in a helicopter he was able to locate a dozen or so yurts as well as a dozen or so properties recently acquired or leased by New Age believers”: *Apocalypse menace imminente? Les sectes en ébullition* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2012): 19.

23. See André Vauchez (ed.), *Prophètes et prophétisme* (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

24. Norbert Elias, *Du temps* (Paris: Fayard, 1996 [1984]): 61.

it is in fact to contest the continued hegemony of this calendar by identifying its end and replacement by another calendar, the Mayan calendar. This Mayan calendar is not only presented as an alternative (derived from a so-called “New Age” movement), but as imposing itself on the current calendar. Aside from the question of the exactitude of the Mayan calendar interpretation, which is the subject of scientific controversy, the mention of a competing calendar in the Bugarach 2012 prediction is a way of reaffirming, through a State entity such as MIVILUDES’ denunciation of the prediction, the superiority of the calendar imposed by current States. This calendar is applied universally, and will impose itself on an end of the world that will not take place on the day announced.

A second conclusion to flow from the chronology presented above is that the dissemination of the Bugarach 2012 prediction in the media does not precede the mayor’s November 30, 2010, statement in the local newspaper. The mayor is in fact the “prime-enunciator” of the prediction. The best proof of this is the fact that another date existed, namely August 11, 2012, in the *Révélation sur le Mont Bugarach* by Jean d’Argoun, which is not cited by any article, even though there are a number of common themes such as the extra-terrestrial vehicle lodged in a cave under the mountain. The Bugarach 2012 prediction is primarily disseminated through denunciation, whether this denunciation is made by the prefecture’s spokesperson or by MIVILUDES.

The mayor’s status of “prime-enunciator” is not apparent at first, as he mentions a number of unspecified, primarily American websites. The fact that the mayor is relaying an apocalyptic message initially made by others is a characteristic common to apocalyptic statements. As Jacques Derrida noted, the Apocalypse of John of Patmos is itself founded on a differential multiplication of voices: “So John is the one who already receives mail [*courrier*] through the further intermediary of a bearer who is an angel [...]. John transmits a message already transmitted.”<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to consult an angel in order to verify the information that someone claims to have been given. In this case, however, it is important to note that none of the newspaper articles ever provides a web address of any sort,

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25. Jacques Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,” *Oxford Literary Review* 6 (1984): 75.

either French or foreign, and that the only person who claims to have consulted these sites is the mayor. When questioned on this specific point, the journalist from the local daily newspaper, who is the author of several articles on the Bugarach 2012 prediction, does not provide any additional information. Although he maintains that these websites exist, he has never visited them and is incapable of providing even a single address for such a website.<sup>26</sup>

The absence of a prime-enunciator who defends the Bugarach 2012 prediction explains its open character: the prediction can be modified, i.e., added to, subtracted from, merged with other statements, permuted, mutated (as when the date changed from December 12 to December 21). This open structure is the opposite of a closed statement, namely a prediction controlled by one person who claims to be the only person to deliver an “authentic” prediction.

The articles cited above show how the Bugarach 2012 prediction, which first appeared locally in French (November-December 2010), then spread to London and New York after being translated into English (December 2010), before returning to France in French, but this time in Paris (from February 2011 onwards). This transmission from *South of France* > *London* > *New York* > *Paris* differs profoundly from a dissemination that starts in a local area and spreads from person to person, as occurs with rumors of “genital theft,” analyzed by Julien Bonhomme,<sup>27</sup> which spread in West and Central Africa from Nigeria, primarily in the 1990s.

## “Normal People” and “Strange People”

One aspect that is specific to the Bugarach 2012 prediction is that being saved is associated with a specific location. In most eschatological predictions, those who are saved are generally characterized not by their place of residence, but rather by their lifestyle (prayers, rituals, etc.), or by the affirmation of being among the chosen people. These are characteristics that are specific to the people themselves.

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26. Author's interview with the journalist from *L'Indépendant*, based in Limoux (May 2012).

27. Julien Bonhomme, *Les voleurs de sexe. Anthropologie d'une rumeur africaine* (Paris: Seuil, 2009).

In the case studied by Leon Festinger, gathering in a specific location is certainly also important, since group members assembled as a result of the eschatological prediction will be carried away from that location by spacecraft. Yet simply being present is not enough to be saved; members of one group believed that wearing or carrying metal would prevent their being saved, so they all refused to wear any metal, including zippers.<sup>28</sup> For the Bugarach 2012 prediction as disseminated, simply being present on the mountain would make it possible to be saved. Now we must discuss the location.

The mayor's claims that appeared in the articles and newspapers are not substantiated on the basis of testimony from members of an "apocalyptic" community, but instead on information concerning accommodations as well as real estate sales in the village of Bugarach. The mayor, again, states: "It fills up the hotels and restaurants, it isn't bad for tourism. It has piqued the interest of some people who thought they might sell their houses at a high price. But they didn't find any willing buyers."<sup>29</sup>

The articles frequently claim that no more rooms would be available in the village at the date announced for the end of the world. An article on the *Rue89* website<sup>30</sup> stated, "In fact, there is no point in trying to get a room for the week of December 21, 2012. Everything is already fully booked in the village." This statement of "fully booked" must nevertheless be verified against the following information. There is no hotel in Bugarach. The only accommodation available comes in the form of vacation rentals (*gîtes*) and guesthouses. These have a total capacity of approximately sixty to seventy people.<sup>31</sup> In August, a manager of the village's largest vacation rental confirmed that it was not yet full for December 21.<sup>32</sup> It is also paradoxical to use room reservations as an indicator of the end of the world: is the end of the world not going to last more than a few days? Is a vacation rental a sufficient structure for facing this end

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28. Festinger, Riecken, Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*.

29. *Le Parisien*, April 9, 2012.

30. "À un an de l'apocalypse, le pic de Bugarach fait des affaires," <http://www.rue89.com/2011/12/24/un-de-la-fin-du-monde-bugarach-fait-des-affaires-227605>.

31. The parsonage which has been transformed into a guesthouse has four rooms. A nature and hiking vacation rental can accommodate a large group of up to 40 people, and also has a campsite. Two other vacation rentals have a capacity of 7 rooms (for 14 people) and 2 rooms (for 4 people) respectively.

32. Field notes, August 2012.

of the world? Would it not be necessary to stay on the mountain itself, rather than in the nearby village?

Although busier from spring to autumn, the village of Bugarach huddles against the cold in the winter, when it seems fairly dead.<sup>33</sup> The mountain of the same name looms over the village and is quite distinctive among the other mountain peaks. During a visit in February, none of the stores, nor the bar, café, or restaurant were open. Several houses had closed shutters. Some seemed abandoned, with boarded up windows. Several “for sale” signs were posted on the walls of houses in the village center. Even in the summer, the high tourist season during which, according to the *Figaro*, Bugarach’s streets “are perpetually filled” and it is “assaulted by Apocalypse fanatics,”<sup>34</sup> the streets are usually empty. A few villagers, in an attempt to flee the oppressive heat, cool off at the shore of a lake near the village.<sup>35</sup>

Journalists who have written about the Bugarach 2012 prediction did not notice the small number of vacation rentals, indicating that the village has a very small accommodation capacity. They also failed to notice the large number of buildings for sale, which undermines the credibility of a real estate inflation claim. Although the village does have a store that sells organic products, Bugarach does not have any New Age stores or esoteric bookshops, as is the case in the neighboring villages of Rennes-le-Château and Rennes-les-Bains. Perhaps the journalists did visit Bugarach but, in this case, did not identify anything that could contradict the prediction that they were investigating.<sup>36</sup> As such, they had to “save” the Bugarach 2012 prediction, or at least maintain and intensify it as much as possible in order to capture the interest of their readers or viewers. The facts of the matter are not considered particularly important; what matters is that the elements collected, or invented, capture the attention of those at whom the story is directed.

In all of the reports, journalists consistently failed to provide not only statements from, or even a description of, a community

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33. Field notes, February 2012.

34. Angélique Négroni, “Bugarach assaillie par les fous de l’Apocalypse,” *Le Figaro*, August 24, 2012.

35. Field notes, August 2012.

36. A few journalists did, however, provide a more distanced report of their stay on-site, notably: Violaine de Montclos, “Bugarach, la fin du monde et les journalistes,” *Le Point*, August 11, 2011; Nicolas d’Estienne d’Orves, *Le village de la fin du monde. Rendez-vous à Bugarach* (Paris: Grasset, 2012).

having settled in the village to await the end of the world, but even a statement by someone openly defending the prediction. Numerous visits to the village and surroundings areas did not detect any traces of such a community, which simply cannot be found. When questioned on this matter, the journalist for *L'Indépendant* residing in Limoux, who wrote several articles on Bugarach, responded: “These people are discrete; they tend to hide and often belong to a very comfortable social class. They come from all over Europe. There are also some North Americans.”<sup>37</sup> To these “irrational” people, he opposed the “locals,” whom he characterizes as predominantly farmers and “normal” people, that is, people who do not believe in the prediction.<sup>38</sup> This opposition is made in one of the journalist’s articles, in which he interviews a couple who run a restaurant called “*La Ferme de Janou*” and who have lived in the village since 1995. Originally from the Narbonne area, which, like Bugarach, is located in the Aude region, these locals are worried by the surge of enthusiasm since the publication of the *L'Indépendant* articles in November 2010, although their business had “increased by about 10%” in 2012. Yet this local couple claims to have seen “strange people” coming to Bugarach since 2000:

And they’re quite well off! They always drive big cars, often German makes. They are Canadians, Luxembourgish, Italians, Spaniards, Swiss, Finnish, Norwegian, English, etc.<sup>39</sup>

The restaurant owner specifies that some of these “strange people” driving “big cars” (therefore supposedly rich) “pray all day in the forest, dressed in white.” He also adds this story:

A Parisian called me to buy a piece of land on which to find refuge with his family on December 21. I told him that the end of the world was a *joke*. He replied, in a nasty tone: “You are part of the conspiracy of the nation states. You just want to save your own family, not mine. . . .” This type of reaction is frightening. He wasn’t the first to mention a conspiracy. According to him, nations would save

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37. Journalist’s e-mail message to author, April 30, 2012.

38. Author’s interview with the journalist, May 2012.

39. Bruno Coincé, “Ils disaient qu’ils buvaient leur urine le matin qui contient la mémoire du corps,” *L'Indépendant*, May 21, 2012.



themselves while their people die. And the Internet is just spreading this *delusion*. (Author's emphasis.)

When I asked the restaurant owner's wife about the origins of people who were supposedly coming to Bugarach on December 21 to survive the Apocalypse, she responded that they are people from "big cities." Hence "normal people" (i.e., locals from a simple background) are opposed to "strange people," who are considered foreign regardless of whether they come from another country or from big cities. The first group consider the Bugarach 2012 prediction a joke and eventually a cause for concern; the second group are described by the first as "delusional" and "irrational."

There are people in this region whose practices combine therapy, spirituality, and esotericism. They are described by the locals as "hippies," "marginal characters," or even "neo-rural people" when they have bought a parcel of land that they cultivate. Although these people do not live in Bugarach, they spend time there or visit for a day in order to visit the mountain, which is considered a source of "energy."<sup>40</sup> A few kilometers away in Rennes-les-Bains, a village that is well-known for its hot springs, there are a few stores that can be associated with therapeutic practices and spiritual movements, such as a reflexology clinic, a mineral shop where stones are "selected for their energy," an esoteric bookstore, and a movie production company specializing in movies that focus on therapy, legends, and spirituality. In 2012, a hypnotist-dowser gave seminars at the municipal center on such subjects as "Natural Energies" and "Chakra Reharmonization."<sup>41</sup> The Rennes-les-Bains video production company<sup>42</sup> made a movie called *Pic Bug Welcome*, released in January 2012. Screened in Paris at a fee-paying seminar<sup>43</sup> called "2012 et après" (2012 and after), which was held in a location that is owned and managed by the AMORC (Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis), the video was screened to an audience of approximately one hundred viewers. Most viewers were women over the age of 50. Before showing the movie, the movie's producer told this story about circumstances that occurred during filming:

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40. Field notes, August 2012.

41. Field notes, August 2012.

42. Debowska Productions.

43. Sunday March 11, 2012, at the Saint-Martin space.



We used aerial shots for this movie. Friends of ours had a drone, and came to film. The big surprise was that when we were at the summit, the device was completely disoriented, and the person operating the drone had never seen anything like it. We observed that the Bugarach peak does have very strong *energy*, and that certain electronic devices are consequently unable to function.<sup>44</sup> (Author's emphasis)

The video is a fictional “initiation,” showing a group of people hiking the mountain and commenting as they go along, paying special attention to the trees, rock formations, and “energies” emanating from the location. The Bugarach 2012 prediction is repeated here as an invitation to an initiation journey, similar to the *Révélation sur le Mont Bugarach* by Jean d'Argoun, and not as an eschatological prediction.

In the end, we can generally distinguish three main categories of people present in Bugarach:<sup>45</sup>

- People drawn by the “energy” emanating from the mountain and various surrounding areas (in and around Rennes-le-Château, Rennes-les-Bains, and the ruins of the Cathar castles) but who do not believe in an apocalyptic prediction;

- People who come to Bugarach for tourism, primarily for hiking, and who often hike mountain summits or who are following the “Cathar Way” and who have heard about the apocalyptic prediction in the media, but do not believe in it; and, finally,

- The villagers, or locals, some of whom live off tourism (accommodations, restaurants), and who benefit from or adapt to the influx of the other two categories.

An apocalyptic prediction, as Derrida affirms, is a ruse that can be used to deceive the people (for conservative purposes) or to deceive those in power (in order to avoid censure by using the encrypted message).<sup>46</sup> Such an analysis connects an apocalyptic prediction to political power and to the intentions of the enunciator (to conserve or bypass power). Yet an apocalyptic prediction can simply support an expression describing a situation experienced at the local level by the person expressing it, even if the expression is

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44. Field notes.

45. Observed during stays in February and August 2012.

46. Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone”

disseminated much farther afield. The Bugarach 2012 prediction, disseminated by the village mayor, is substantiated on the basis of accommodation reservations and real estate sales. One of the purposes is to generate appeal and ensure that the village can live off tourism, like the two neighboring villages of Rennes-le-Château and Rennes-les-Bains. The first is reputed for its church with its supposed “treasure,”<sup>47</sup> the other for its thermal waters. From this perspective, the actual problem is not that accommodations are fully booked, but rather that they are not; it is not that houses are too expensive, but that there are no buyers.

However, while its purpose is to draw foreigners to the village, the Bugarach 2012 prediction also creates a barrier between these foreigners and locals, who repudiate the prediction or consider it a joke. Accommodations are rented out to strangers, and it is strangers who supposedly intend to buy houses or land. There are two types of strangers: a good stranger if the person is simply a tourist, and a bad stranger if the person believes in the prediction. The foreigner (from other countries or even from big cities in France) is depicted as rich, better off than the locals. This foreigner hides, is concealed, or is even dangerous. In bocage witchcraft, as studied by Jeanne Favret-Saada,<sup>48</sup> believers are called “backwards” locals by institutions (the Church, the State), whereas members of these institutions “don’t believe in it.” In the case of the Bugarach 2012 prediction, and the inverse of the witchcraft model, the locals (the mayor, local journalists, village inhabitants) insist that they do not believe in the prediction and accuse foreigners of believing it. Yet in both cases, those who do not believe claim that a “naïve idiot” exists who supposedly believes in the prediction. However, in terms of witchcraft and the Bugarach 2012 prediction, there is no naïve idiot outside of the discourse: the naïve idiot is never manifested and exists only as a fictional character.

The importance of the waiting period between the time the prediction is made and the date announced for the end of the world is measured not by given rules or strategies, but rather, in the methods used to support the consistency of an extremely fragile claim that has

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47. Rennes-le-Château became famous at the end of the 1960s as a result of a story by Gérard de Sède (*L'or de Rennes* [Paris: René Julliard, 1968]) elements of which were then used in the internationally successful novel by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

48. Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Les mots, la mort, les sorts* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

always been denounced and that is destined, once again, to fail to materialize. Those who produce these arrangements (in this case, the mayor, MIVILUDES, journalists, etc.) are not necessarily coordinated, but nevertheless they ensure that they do converge in order to ensure that the eschatological prediction continues to circulate, even though they denounce and ridicule it. ♦

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ABSTRACT

**Mount Bugarach Saved from the End of the World: An Inconsistent Prediction**

Many studies on apocalyptic predictions focus on communities of believers and question the effects produced by of the end of the world’s failure to materialize. Contrary to this approach, this article instead focuses on the initial dissemination of an apocalyptic prediction through denunciation, and shows the key role of the “waiting period” that occurs between the initial enunciation and the date announced for the apocalypse. The study focuses on a small village in southern France named Bugarach, whose mayor is concerned because certain websites (which are never cited) claim that the nearby mountain will be the only safe place come the end of the world on December 21, 2012.