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## Pseudo-Malachy and the Popes

“He too (St. Malachy of Ireland, + 1184) is said to have written several small works, which I have not seen, except for a certain Prophecy concerning the Sovereign Pontiffs; since this is brief, and still, as far as I know, unpublished, and because of a widespread interest in the subject, we have reproduced it here.” With this brief preamble, Arnold Wion, Benedictine monk of Douai, presented to the world in 1595 the celebrated “*Prophetia S. Malachiae archiepiscopi de Summis Pontificibus*.” The periodic interest in these auguries is persistently recurrent, and to make them readily accessible is the main purpose of the present article.

The text of the *Lignum Vitae* contains a series of 112 oracles, together with the *adjecta* or interpretations of the Dominican savant, Alfonso Ciacconio, for the first seventy-four, beginning with Celestine II and ending with Urban VII. The oracles seldom consist of more than two or three words, descriptive of the Pontiff’s name, place of birth, previous title, coat of arms, etc. In the following list the interpretations follow Ciacconio’s *adjecta*, except in those instances where more apt exegesis seems indicated. Indeed, the first seventy-four devices do not require the aid of an exegete, for they are so clear that their appropriateness literally leaps to the eye.

1. Celestine II, 1143—44: *Ex castro Tiberis* (from a castle on the Tiber), Guido di Costello, from Città di Castello on the Tiber.
2. Lucius II, 1144—45: *Inimicus expulsus* (the enemy routed), Gerhard Caccianemici (It. “chase-enemy”).
3. Eugene III, 1145—53: *Ex magnitudine montis* (of the high mountain), from Montemagno.
4. Anastasius IV, 1153—54: *Abbas Suburranus* (The suburban Abbot), Conrad della Suburra, Abbot of St. Rufus of Velletri.
5. Adrian IV, 1154—59: *De rure albo* (from the white country), of St. Albans in England, and Cardinal Bishop of Albano.
6. Victor IV \* (Asterisk signifies antipope) 1159—64: *Ex tetro carcere* (out of the loathsome prison), Card. Deacon of St. Nicholas in *Carcere tulliano*.
7. Paschal III, \* 1164—68: *Via Transliberina* (road on the further side of the Tiber), Guido of Crema, Cardinal Priest of Santa Maria in Trastevere.
8. Calistus III, \* 1168—78: *De Pannonia Tusciae* (from the Hungary of Tusculum), John Unghieri, Cardinalis Tusculanus.
9. Alexander III, 1159—81: *Ex ansere custode* (from the watchful goose), Roland Bandinelli, alias Paparo (goose); the “custode” very likely refers to the keep or tower in the family arms.
10. Lucius III, 1181—85: *Lux in ostio* (light in the gate), Lucius’ name was Humbald Allucinoli, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia.
11. Urban III, 1185—87: *Sus in cribro* (the sow in the sieve), Humbert Crivelli

- (sieve), whose family coat of arms is “canting,” and contains a *pig* in a *sieve*.
12. Gregory VIII, 1187: *Ensis Laurentii* (Sword of Lawrence), Cardinal Priest of St. Lawrence in Lucina; coat of arms has two crossed swords.
  13. Clement III, 1187-91: *De schola exiet* (he will come out of the school), Paul *Scolari* (scholars).
  14. Celestine III, 1191- 98: *De rure bovensi* (from the animal country), Hyacinth *Boboni-Orsini*.
  15. Innocent III, 1198 -1216: *Comes signatus* (a signed count), Lothaire *Conti*, Count of *Segni*.
  16. Honorius III, 1216—1227: *Canonicus ex latere* (a canon from the side), Canon of St. John *Lateran*.
  17. Gregory IX, 1227-41: *Avis Ostiensis* (the bird of Ostia), Cardinal Archbishop of *Ostia*, had an *eagle* on his arms.
  18. Celestine IV, 1241: *Leo Sabinus* (the Sabine lion), Cardinal Bishop of *Sabina*; *lion in arms*.
  19. Innocent IV, 1243—54: *Comes Laurentius* (Count Lawrence), Count of Lavagna, Cardinal Priest of S. Lawrence in Lucina.
  20. Alexander IV, 1254—61: *Signum Ostiense* (sign of Ostia), Count of *Segni*, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia.
  21. Urban IV, 1261—64: *Jerusalem Campaniae* (Jerusalem of Champagne), of Troyes in *Champagne*, Latin Patriarch of *Jerusalem*.
  22. Clement IV, 1265—68: *Draco depressus* (the crushed dragon).2
  23. Gregory X, 1271—76: *Anguinus vir* (the snake-man), the arms display a *snake* devouring a *man*.
  24. Innocent V, 1276: *Concionator Gallus* (the French Preacher), Peter de Champagni, *Frenchman* of Tarentaise, Savoy, Dominican (friar *preacher*).
  25. Adrian V, 1276: *Bonus Comes* (the good count), Ottobono Fieschi, Count of Lavagna.
  26. John XXI, 1276—77: *Piscator Thuscus* (the Tusculan Fisherman), Cardinal Bishop of Frascati (*Tusculum*).
  27. Nicholas III, 1277—80: *Rosa composita* (a well-formed rose), an Orsini, whose family arms has a *rose* gules in chief.
  28. Martin IV, 1281—85: *Ex telonio Liliacaei Martini* (from the treasury of Martin with the lilies), Name: formerly *treasurer* of the Church of St. Martin of Tours; *fleurs-de-lis* traditionally emblazoned on the shield of France.
  29. Honorius IV, 1285—87: *Ex rosa Leonina* (of the leonine rose), shield contains a *rose* and two *lions*.
  30. Nicholas IV, 1288—1292: *Picus inter escas* (a woodpecker amidst the food), pun on the pontiff’s native city, *Ascoli Piceno*.
  31. Celestine V, 1294: *En eremo celsus* (elevated from the hermitage), the *hermit* raised to the papacy.
  32. Boniface VIII, 1294—1303: *Ex undarum benedictione* (from the benediction of the waves), *Benedict* Gaetani, whose arms display a fesse *wave*.
  33. Benedict XI, 1303—1304: *Concionator pataraeus* (a preacher of Patara), Nicholas Boccasini, General of *Dominican* Order, named for St. Nicholas of Myra, native of *Patara*.

34. Clement V, 1305--1314: *De Fessis Aquitanicis* (of the Aquitanian fesses), Frenchman of Billandreau, Gascony-*Aquitaine*; arms have three bars like narrow fesses.
35. John XXII, 1316—1334: *De sutore osseo* (of the bony shoemaker), of Ossa (Guienne), whose father was a *shoemaker*.<sup>3</sup>
36. Nicholas V, \* 1328—1333: *Corvus schismaticus* (schismatic crow), *antipope*, from *Corbara*; his shield has five *crows*.
37. Benedict XII, 1334—1342: *Frigidus Abbas* (the cold Abbot), *Abbot* of *Fontfroide*.
38. Clement VI, 1342—52: *De rosa Arthrebatensi* (of the rose of Arras), Bishop of Arras; shield displays six *rose* gules.
39. Innocent VI, 1352—62: *De montibus Pammachii* (from the mountain of Pammachius), Frenchman of *Mons*, Limousin, Cardinal Priest of the Church of SS. John and Paul, called the *Titulus Pammachii*.
40. Urban V, 1362—1370; *Gallus Vicecomes* (French viscount), born of a *knightly* family in *France*.
41. Gregory XI, 1370—78: *Novus de virgine forti* (a new man from a strong virgin), Peter Roger de Beaufort, Cardinal Deacon of *Santa Maria Nuova*.
42. Clement VII, \* 1378-1394; *De cruce apostolica* (of the apostolic cross), Cardinal Priest of the Church of the SS. Dodici *Apostoli*; cross on the shield.
43. Benedict XIII, \* 1394-1423: *Luna Cosmedina* (Moon of Cosmedia), Peter de *Luna*; arms have a *crescent*; Cardinal Deacon of S. Maria in *Cosmedin*.
44. Clement VIII, \* 1423—1429: *Schisma Barchinonium* (Schism of Barcelona), *antipope*, Canon of *Barcelona*.
45. Urban VI, 1378—89: *De inferno praegnanti* (out of the teeming hell), Bartholomew *Prignano*, Italian of Naples, near *Vesuvius*.
46. Boniface IX, 1389—1404: *Cubus de mixtione* (the mixed cubes), referring to his arms, a bend *checky* argent and azure.
47. Innocent VII, 1404—06: *De meliore Sydere* (of the better star), Cosmo *Miglioroti* (It. *migliore*, better); has *star* in shield.
48. Gregory XII, 1406—15: *Nauta de Ponte nigro* (sailor of the black bridge), *traveled* considerably, Commendator of the Church of *Negropont*.
49. Alexander V, \* 1409—10: *Flagellum solis* (scourge of the sun), *antipope*, *sun* in arms.
50. John XXIII, \* 1410-15: *Cervus Sirenae* (stag of the siren), Cardinal Deacon of St. Eustace (cf. legend of *stag*), Italian of Naples, whose ancient name was *Parthenope* (a *siren*).
51. Martin V, 1417-31: *Corona veli aurei* (pillar of the golden awning), Otho *Colonna*, whose family arms display a *crown* over a pillar; Cardinal Deacon of St. George in *Velabro* (velabrum, awning).
52. Eugene IV, 1431—47: *Lupa coelestina* (the celestian she-wolf), *Celestinian*, Bishop of Siena, which has a *she-wolf* on its municipal shield.
53. Felix V, \* 1439—49: *Amator crucis* (a lover of the cross), *Amadeus* of the house of Savoy, whose arms display a *cross* argent.
54. Nicholas V, 1447—55: *De modicitate Lunae* (of the humble moon), from *Luna* in Tuscany, born of *poor* parents.

55. Callistus III, 1455—58: *Bos pascens* (the browsing bull), Panvinio attributes to this pontiff a coat of arms displaying a *bull* with his head down *cropping* tufts of grass. In the authentic device the figure is more of a “bos mugiens.”
56. Pius II, 1458—1464: *De capra et albergo* (of the goat and the inn), secretary to Cardinals *Capranica* and *Albergati*.
57. Paul II, 1464 1471: *De Cervo et leone* (of a stag and a lion), Bishop of *Cervia*, Venetian, Cardinal Priest of *San Marco* (winged *lion* of Venice).
58. Sixtus IV, 1471 1484: *Piscator Minorita* (Franciscan Fisherman), General of the *Franciscans*.
59. Innocent VIII, 1484 92: *Praecursor Siciliae* (Precursor of Sicily), *John Baptist Cibo*, long stationed at the court of the king of Naples and *Sicily*.
60. Alexander VI, 1492 1503: *Bos Albanus in portu* (an Alban ox in the Port), Cardinal Bishop of *Albano* and of *Porto*, with the characteristic Borgia ox in his shield.
61. Pius III, 1503: *De parvo homine* (of a little man), of the *Piccolomini* family.
62. Julius II, 1503 1513: *Fructus Jovis juvabit* (the fruit of Jupiter will avail), shield contains an oak tree, sacred to *Jupiter*.
63. Leo X, 1513-1521: *De craticula Politiana* (of the gridiron of Politian), John de Medici, son of Lawrence (cf. story of *gridiron* in martyrdom of St. Lawrence), taught by celebrated humanist, Angelo *Poliziano*.
64. Adrian VI, 1522 23: *Leo Florentinus* (lion of Florentius), son of *Florentius* of Utrecht, *lions* rampant on shield.
65. Clement VII, 1523- 34: *Flos pilae aegri* (the flower of the pill for the sick), Julius de *Medici*, whose family escutcheon bears the well known six *torteaux*.
66. Paul III, 1534 49: *Hiacinthus Medicorum* (the hyacinth of the physicians), Cardinal Deacon of SS. Cosmas and Damian, *physicians*; “hyacinth” seems to refer to the *golden* tint of the field in the arms of the Farnese family.
67. Julius III, 1550 55: *De corona montana* (of the mountain crown); John Mary Cioocchi dal *Monte*, whose arms display two laurel *wreaths* and three *mountains*.
68. Marcellus II, 1555: *Fruentum floccidum* (the weak grain), an allusion to the *brevity* of his pontificate (22 days), and to the *limp* stalks of *grain* in his shield.
69. Paul IV, 1555-59: *De fide Petri* (of the faith of Peter), *Peter Caraffa* (cara fides).
70. Pius IV, 1559-65: *Esculapii pharmacum* (the medicine of Aesculapius), John Angelo de *Medici*.
71. Pius V, 1566—72: *Angelus nemorosus* (the angel of the wood), *Michael Ghislieri*, *saintly* pontiff, of *Bosco* (It. wood)
72. Gregory XIII, 1572-85: *Medium corpus pilarum* (a half-body of the balls), refers to the arms, a *demi-dragon*; created Cardinal by Pius IV, whose coat contained the customary six *torteaux* of the Medici.
73. Sixtus V, 1585—90: *Axis in medietate signi* (the axis in the midst of the sign), arms contain a lion (Leo, *sign* of zodiac), across which stretches a bend gules (*axis*).
74. Urban VII, 1590: *De rore coeli* (of the heavenly dew), Archbishop of *Rossano*.

Modern scholars have unanimously noted, in the thirty-seven subsequent

mottoes, a radical departure from the unfailing precision and appropriateness of the previous seventy-four, and they are agreed that the “Prophecy of Malachy” is a counterfeit. In other words, we have in the series from Celestine II to Urban VII a perfect sample of a *prophetia post factum*, that entitles the pseudo-Malachy to a distinguished place among the prophets portrayed by Horace Walpole: “The wisest prophets make sure of the event first.” It will be recalled that the latter series of mottoes begins with Gregory XIV (1590-91), and that Wion’s *Lignum Vitae* appeared in 1595. Far from harking back to St. Malachy of Armagh in 1139, the original ink could have scarcely been dry when the prophecies were first published.

Internal evidence overwhelmingly supports the view first advanced by Claude Menestrier, S.J. (1631—1705),<sup>4</sup> and championed by modern scholarship, e.g., Harnack, Vacandard, Pastor, etc.,<sup>5</sup> that the prophecies were forged shortly before the election of Gregory XIV, and precisely between September 16 and December 4, 1590, (interregnum between Urban VII and Gregory XIV). Moreover, most authorities now hold, with Menestrier, that the forgeries were perpetrated to favor the cause of Cardinal Simoncelli of Orvieto in the conclave that elected Cardinal Sfrondato (Gregory XIV). The seventy-fifth Malachian augury would have fitted Cardinal Simoncelli to a nicety: “Ex antiquitate Urbis,” (Orvieto,—*urbs vetus, antiqua*).<sup>6</sup> As to the actual identity of pseudo-Malachy, various individuals have been suggested, viz., Wion himself, Ciacconio, etc.

In view of the foregoing, the latter series of Malachian auguries is herewith presented without any *adjecta*, except the exegesis unavoidably entailed in a translation:

75. Gregory XIV, 1590—91: *Ex antiquitate urbis* (from the old city).
76. Innocent IX, 1591: *Pia civitas in belio* (a pious city in war).
77. Clement VIII, 1592—1605: *Crux Romulea* (cross of Romulus).
78. Leo XI, 1605: *Undosus vir* (man of the waves).
79. Paul V, 1605-21: *Gens perversa* (a perverse race).
80. Gregory XV, 1621—23: *In tribulatione pacis* (in the tribulation of peace).
81. Urban VIII, 1623—44: *Lilium et rosa* (the lily and the rose).
82. Innocent X, 1644—55: *Jucunditas crucis* (the joy of the cross).
83. Alexander VII, 1655—67: *Montium custos* (the guardian of the mountains).
84. Clement IX, 1667—69: *Sidus olororum* (the star of the swans).
85. Clement X, 1670—76: *De flumine magno* (of the great river).
86. Innocent XI, 1676-89: *Bellua insatiabilis* (the insatiable beast).
87. Alexander VIII, 1689-91: *Poenitentia gloriosa* (glorious penance).
88. Innocent XII, 1691—1700: *Rastrum in porta* (portcullis in the gate).
89. Clement XI, 1700—21: *Flores circumdati* (the encircling flowers).
90. Innocent XIII, 1721—21: *De bona religione* (of the good religious order).
91. Benedict XIII, 1724—30: *Miles in bello* (a soldier at war).
92. Clement XII, 1730—40: *Columna excelsa* (the lofty column).
93. Benedict XIV, 1740—58: *Animal rurale* (a rural animal).

94. Clement XIII, 1758—69: *Rosa Umbriae* (rose of Umbria).
95. Clement XIV, 1769—74: *Ursus velox* (the swift bear).
96. Pius VI, 1775—99: *Peregrinus apostolicus* (Apostolic wanderer).
97. Pius VII, 1800—23: *Aquila rapax* (the rapacious eagle).
98. Leo XII, 1823—29: *Canis et coluber* (the dog and the serpent).
99. Pius VIII, 1829—30: *Vir religiosus* (a religious man).
100. Gregory XVI, 1831—46: *De balneis Etruriae* (from the Tuscan baths).
101. Pius IX, 1846—78: *Crux de Cruce* (the cross of the cross).
102. Leo XIII, 1878—1903: *Lumen in coelo* (light in the heavens).
103. Pius X, 1903—14: *Ignis ardens* (burning fire).
104. Benedict XV, 1914--22: *Religio depopulata* (depopulated religious life).
105. Pius XI, 1922—39: *Fides intrepida* (faith undaunted).
106. Pius XII, 1939— : *Pastor angelicus* (the angelic shepherd).
107. *Pastor et nauta* (a shepherd and a sailor).
108. *Flos florum* (the flower of flowers).
109. *De medietate lunae* (of the half-moon).
110. *De labore solis* (from the toil of the sun).
111. *De gloria olivae* (from the glory of the olive).
112. *In persecutiōne extrema Sacrae Romanae Ecclesiae sedebit Petrus Romanus qui pascet oves in multis tribulationibus; quibus transactis, civitas septicollis diruetur; et Judex tremendus judicabit populum.* (In the final persecution, there will sit upon the throne Peter the Roman, who will feed his sheep amid many tribulations, after which the seven-hilled city will be demolished, and the awful judge will judge the people).<sup>7</sup>

Despite the patent fog-artistry of this latter series of mottoes, M. Elie Daniel does not hesitate to say that these legends are almost perfectly descriptive! If the reader desires to see how “perfectly descriptive” they have been, he is referred to the welter of interpretations offered by the *initiati*.<sup>9</sup>

The article “Prophecy” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* professes to see “something more than a coincidence” in the mottoes applied to Pius IX, Leo XIII and Pius X. A coincidence, perhaps, but hardly more! The *ignis ardens*, for instance, applied to Pius X, might very well, in the spirit of the early series’ penchant for the *arma virimque*, have been attributed to Cardinal Svampa, whose coat of arms displayed a *golden sun*, or to Cardinal Seraphin Vannutelli (Seraphin in Hebrew means the “burning one”). Vacandard, who terms the forgery “*l’horoscope des Papes*,” feels that only three of the mottoes can be “rigorously” applied, namely, Alexander VII, Pius VI and Leo XIII.” Granting that they can be “rigorously” applied, three out of twenty-nine is still a very unsatisfactory score for a prophet, for they are “*rari nantes in gurgite vasto*.” But the classical *tour-de-force* is the *aqnila rapax* of Pius VII (1800—23). In 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte ordered Rome to be occupied by his troops, and in the following year he abolished the Papal States, then had the aged Pontiff carried off first to Savona and then to Fontainebleau, and held him prisoner until March 10, 1814 . A particularly unrapacious eagle, one would be tempted to exclaim! Yet, apply the *aquila rapax*

to Napoleon “and all becomes clear”! 11 The one thing that does emerge clearly from the vague and vaporous jargon of the whole latter series is that the forger should be labeled “pseudo-Malachy” until his identity can be clearly determined, and that the whole series be definitely branded as counterfeit.

I can think of no more fitting epitaph for the latter series of Papal mottoes, and hence for the “prophecy” as a whole than Cicero’s remarks about the oracles of Apollo:

Chrysippus has filled an entire volume with your [Apollo’s] oracles, which, to my mind are in part false, in part true by coincidence (as is very often the case in oracular utterances), in part so tortuous and hazy that the interpreter must consult an interpreter, and the ensuing enigma be in turn submitted to an oracle for interpretation; in part so ambiguous that they must be referred to a dialectician. 12

The Church, “the pillar and ground of truth,” is ill-served by forgery. *Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis!* As Pastor rightly insists, “the Catholic Church has no need of such prophetic inventions; she has all that she needs in the promise of Christ that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church, which is built upon the Rock, Peter.” 13

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1. Cf. *Lignum Vitae, ornamentum et decor Ecclesiae, in quinque libros divisum*, etc., Auctore D. Arnaldo Wion Belga, Duacensi, Venice, 1595, Pars. I, lib. II, cap. XL, p. 307.

2. The details for the prophetic jargon were furnished to the forger by two works of the historian and archeologist, Onofrio Panvinio (1530—68), who was styled by Paul Manutius “a glutton for antiquity.” Like all gluttons, he sacrificed something to careful digestion, and we find his mistakes copied by pseudo-Malachy. Clement IV is a case in point, for in the *arma* attributed to this Pontiff by Panvinio we find an eagle trampling upon a dragon, but in the authentic arms we discover nothing but six lilies. Similar cases will be noted as they occur.

3. According to Panivio. The story is now discredited.

4. Cf. *Refutation des Prophéties faussement attribuées à S. Malachie sur les élections des Papes*, par le P. Cl. Fr. Menestrier, S.J., Paris, 1689.

5. “It cannot be for a moment in doubt that the whole series of mottoes . . . is a fabrication...” Herbert Thurston, S.J., in his Preface to *The Book of the Popes*, by F. J. Bayer, English Translation by E. M. Lamond, London, 1925.

6. "The supporters of Cardinal Simoncelli of Orvieto tried to work on his behalf by putting about the well-known prophecy concerning the Popes attributed to St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh in Ireland." L. von Pastor. *The History of the Popes*, English Translation by K. F. Kerr, St. Louis and London, 1932, Vol. 22, pp. 349—50.

7. This apocalyptic augury seems to indicate that the end of the world and the *parousia* are not far off, since there are only six mottoes left to be assigned. Authorities, however, disagree on its interpretation, some holding that it implies an imminent final catastrophe while others believe that there is an undetermined hiatus between the *de gloria olivae* and *Petrus Romanus*. H. J. Forman in his *The Story of Prophecy*, New York, 1910, pp. 154—55, favors the first interpretation, while the article "Prophecy" in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives the second.

8. Cf. *Serait-ce vraiment la fin des temps?* Paris, 1932.

9. Among the more important tentatives at interpretation were that of Giovanni Germano in his *Vita . . . del Glorioso Padre S. Malachia*, Naples, 1670; that of Joseph Maitre, in his *La Prophétie des Papes*, Beaune, 1901; and that of Forman, mentioned above. The reader is also referred to the excellent study by the Marquis of Bute, "The Prophecies of St. Malachi" in the *Dublin Review*, Oct. 1885, pp. 369 ff.

10. Cf. "Un Eveque d'Irlande au XIIe siecle, S. Malachie O'Morgair," in the *Revue des questions historiques*, July, 1892. See also *Etudes de critique d'histoire religieuse*, 4th series, Paris, 1923.

11 Cf. Furman, *op. cit.* p. 144.

12 *De Divinatione*, II, 56.

13 *Op. cit.* p. 350.