COMPLETE, FROM THE LATIN · VENICE 1589 & 1595

Prophecies of the Popes

The Vaticinia of Abbot Joachim and the Prophecy of St Malachy

30 ENGRAVINGS · 112 MOTTOES



TO THE LAST POPE — PETER THE ROMAN

BLUSABOOKS

BOOKS OF WISDOM



Prophecies of the Popes

The Vaticinia of Abbot Joachim and the Prophecy of St Malachy on the Last Pope

Thirty prophecies with the engravings of the Venice edition of 1589 and the commentary of Pasqualino Regiselmo, the Life of Abbot Joachim, the Wheel and the Turkish Oracle, and all 112 mottoes of Malachy from Arnold Wion's book of 1595 — complete, translated from the Latin, with notes

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Modern English text, notes, foreword and commentary © 2026 SIA "Blusa Entertainment".

Sources: «Vaticinia, sive Prophetiae abbatis Ioachimi & Anselmi episcopi Marsicani», Venice: Hieronymus Porrus, 1589 (edited with commentary by Paschalinus Regiselmus), from the digitised copy of the Getty Research Institute (Internet Archive), public domain; Arnold Wion, «Lignum vitae», Venice, 1595, Book II, pp. 307–311, from the digitised copy of the Bavarian State Library, public domain. The engravings and pages have been cropped and toned. The colour illustrations are modern.

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FOREWORD



Abbot Joachim writing his commentaries at night (illustration)

Since the Middle Ages people have wanted to know who will sit on the throne of St Peter after the present pope, and how much longer Rome will stand. This book contains the two most famous attempts at an answer: two "prophecies of the popes" that passed from hand to hand for centuries, and were copied, printed, explained and disputed. Both are given here in full translation from the Latin, in the form in which readers in Venice first saw them in the sixteenth century.

Part One: the Vaticinia with engravings

Around the beginning of the fourteenth century a strange little book appeared in Italy: fifteen pictures of popes, animals, stars and mysterious objects, each with a short, dark text. It begins with the words «Genus nequam», "the wicked race", and its first pope is Nicholas III of the Orsini family, whose name comes from the bear (Italian «orso»). Scholars connect it with the time of Benedict XI (1303–1304) and the struggles around papal elections; some of its pictures and ideas were borrowed from older Byzantine prophecies attributed to the Emperor Leo the Wise.

A few decades later an imitator wrote a second series of fifteen prophecies, beginning «Ascende calve», "Go up, bald head". It is usually dated to around 1330. In the combined book, including the edition of 1589, the younger series is printed first (I–XV) and the older «Genus nequam» follows as the second (XVI–XXX). Later the two series were joined into one book of thirty prophecies, and by the time of the Council of Constance (1414–1418) it was already known as the work of the Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202). Joachim was a famous interpreter of the Bible who taught that history has three ages; but he died about a hundred years before these prophecies were written. His name was given to them because he was the best-known prophet of the Middle Ages.

About fifty manuscripts of the book survive, each with its own pictures and its own order. In the sixteenth century it began to be printed. This book translates the Venice edition of 1589, prepared by Pasqualino Regiselmo and printed by Girolamo Porro. Regiselmo compared eight manuscripts and seven printed editions, had the pictures newly engraved on copper, and added a Life of Joachim, a mysterious "Wheel" said to begin with Pope Pius IV, and the "Turkish Oracle", a prophecy in Turkish about the fate of the Ottoman Empire. For each prophecy he wrote a long explanation in which he cites the Kabbalah, the Bible, the historians and the astronomers of his day.

In this book each prophecy has its own opening: on the left-hand page the engraving of 1589 with its Latin and Italian titles, on the right the text of the prophecy, the marginal notes and Regiselmo's explanation. The edition prints everything in two languages; the Italian is a translation of the Latin, so the Latin is translated here, and the Italian is noted separately only where it adds something new.

Part Two: the Prophecy of St Malachy

In 1595 the Benedictine monk Arnold Wion published in Venice his book «Lignum vitae», "The Tree of Life", in which he listed the notable men of his order. Under the Irish bishop St Malachy (1094–1148) Wion printed a short Latin list: 111 brief mottoes, one for each pope, beginning with Celestine II (1143), and closing words about "Peter the Roman", in whose time "the city of seven hills will be destroyed". Wion writes that as far as he knows this text has never been printed. Beside the first mottoes stand the names of popes and explanations, but Wion adds that these are not Malachy's own but the work of the Dominican Alfonso Chacón (1530–1599).

Malachy was a real historical figure: Archbishop of Armagh, later Bishop of Down, who died on 2 November 1148 at the abbey of Clairvaux in France in the arms of his friend Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard wrote his Life, in which he also tells of Malachy's gift of prophecy; but it has not a word about a list of popes. No one mentioned it for four hundred years, until Wion's book.

Reading the list, it is easy to notice how its character changes. Up to 1590 the mottoes are astonishingly precise: they are puns on the popes' families, home towns, coats of arms and the titular churches of their cardinalates: a sow in a sieve for the Crivelli family, "the little man" for a Piccolomini, "from the dew of heaven" for an archbishop of Rossano in Calabria, where manna is gathered. After 1590 the mottoes become general and ambiguous. Historians concluded as early as the seventeenth century (the Jesuit Claude-François Menestrier in 1689) that the list was compiled around the conclave of 1590, and that its first part was

taken from Onofrio Panvinio's history of the popes of 1557, with all its mistakes. The motto «Ex antiquitate Urbis» ("From the antiquity of the City") was probably meant for Cardinal Girolamo Simoncelli of Orvieto (in Latin Urbs vetus, "the old city"), but another man was elected.

In our edition Malachy's list is given in full, together with Chacón's explanations in translation. Beside the mottoes after 1590, where Wion has nothing, we add the pope to whom later interpreters applied them, so that the reader can see how the list "was fulfilled". The last motto, «Gloria olivae», has traditionally been applied to Benedict XVI (2005–2013). After him came Francis (2013–2025), and since 8 May 2025 the pope has been Leo XIV. We neither fulfil the prophecy nor interpret the future: we give the text and what history knows about it.

How to read this book

The translation is complete and close to the original; the words and views of the time are left as they are. Unfamiliar words, people and places are explained in notes at the foot of the page where they first appear; the notes are numbered from 1 on each page. The marginal notes that Regiselmo printed beside the text are given as notes beginning "Margin". At the end of the book there are short commentaries: in plain words about each part, how these prophecies came to be, and what we know about them today.



A conclave: the cardinals elect a new pope (illustration)

TITLE PAGE AND DEDICATION

PART ONE. The book printed in Venice in 1589 opens with a title page on which Abbot Joachim holds two scrolls bearing the Latin and Italian titles, and with the dedication of its editor, Pasqualino Regiselmo, to Francesco Cornaro, Bishop of Treviso.