

Papal confusion in the 10th century

A very bleak time in Roman church history, much of the first half of the century found the papacy in the powerful grip of the wealthy Roman, Theophylact and his family. His wife Theodora and his daughters Theodora the Younger and Marozia, manipulated the Roman clergy and the papacy. Eventually Alberic, son of Marozia, gained the ascendancy and put his mother in prison where she would spend nearly fifty years...and then be murdered by fearful pretenders. There is nothing good to be said for any of the group but the worst is not in yet.

John XII (955-864), son of Alberic and only 16 when elected pope perhaps was the most profligate holder of the office. It was bought for him, of course. His whole career was one of political juggling and profiteering combined with deep licentiousness. It was he who crowned Otto I as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire but his short and total adult life was given to wicked and unworthy enterprises.

John XIII (966-972) signalled a new wave of pirates in the holy office until the time of Gregory V (996) who tried to help things but was poisoned for his efforts. Boniface VII, in the midst of these things, actually absconded to Constantinople with the Vatican Treasure.

So long as emperors made popes, and vice-versa, this sort of situation was bound to continue. If a good man did get in the office..he was frustrated before the curia found some way to dispose of him.

The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals

Isidore of Seville (560-636) was a famous Spanish churchman, a scholar, monastic, and archbishop of Seville. His fame as an encyclopedist was such that when, in the 9th century someone produced a bunch of documents that supposedly had been collected by him, there was little challenge. Included with the documents were some associated with pope Fabian of the third century and other early Roman leaders. These documents were used to enforce papal privilege in Rome and in the preference of the emperor. It was later shown they were fabrications but only after considerable use had been made to enlarge the growing papal claims.