Classical Tradition and Angelology: A Case Study of the Early Modern Python

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Abstract

The article explores the legacy of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* in the angelology of Vincenzo Cicogna (1519? - after 1596), an Italian Catholic reformer who approached Biblical interpretation in search of the harmony between Christianity and pre-Christian philosophical systems. Cicogna's dedicated his *Angelorum et daemonum nomina et attributa...* (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute MS 86-A866, c. 1587) to Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santori (1532–1602), Italy's Grand Inquisitor, presumably in an attempt to restore the author's reputation after repeated clashes with the Inquisition. Cicogna's angel and demon lexicon evoked the mythological Python to explain the origins and limits of the diabolic ability to foresee the future and juxtapose the powers of preaching and fortune-telling. His Christian application of Greek philosophy echoes the ideology of Bishop Gianmatteo Giberti's (1495-1543) Church reform process, executed with Cicogna's collaboration.

Key-words: angels, Python, Pliny the Elder.

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Classical symbolism encounters its Christian counterpart in MS 86-A866 of the Getty Museum and Research Institute's collections in Los Angeles[2]. The work is a c. 1587 angel and demon lexicon embellished with the elaborate title *Angelorvm et daemonvm nomina et attribvta passim in divinis scriptvris contenta ad patrvm sententiam explicata ad illvstris et reverendiss ivlivm antonium sanctorivm cardinalem sanctae severinae amplissimvm et de ecclesiastica hierarchia* ("On the names of angels and demons as found in the Divine Scriptures and explained by the Fathers, dedicated to the illustrious reverend Giulio Antonio Santori, the highest Cardinal of Santa Severina, and on the ecclesiastical hierarchy"). The extensive, 170-folio work interprets, in alphabetical order, 223 direct and metaphorical references to angels and demons in the Bible. Following a foreword, the manuscript divides into a lexicon part with *De Angelis* and *De Demoniis* sections, each consisting of one- or two-page entries which identify demons as fallen angels. The lexicon entries argue for the universal power of Christianity by highlighting the harmony between Christianity and pre-Christian philosophical systems; and the work points out problems within the internal organization of the Catholic Church in a concluding treatise drawing a parallel between the angelic and the ecclesiastical hierarchies. The treatise is all the more interesting as the work was ambitiously dedicated to Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santori (1532–1602), Italy's Grand Inquisitor at the time. The *Angelorum* completes Cicogna's literary oeuvre as the work which arguably received the most attention from the Inquisition and therefore also completes our understanding of Early Modern angelology by providing an example for an approach not universally accepted in its times. The following article is going to illustrate this approach through the example of the classical Python as a metaphor for demons in Cicogna's *Angelorum*, and contextualize this interpretation on the basis of the author's wider Church reform activity.

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Vincenzo Cicogna (1519 – after 1596) is remembered as a Catholic reformer and a devotee of the ancient Greek cultural inheritance. He was born in Verona and became the first ecclesiast in a three-generation dynasty of painters, whose first member immigrated to Italy from Southern Greece[3]. Vincenzo was raised as a protégée of a client and friend of his painter father Pier-Leonardo and of his painter-engineer uncle Girolamo, the influential Bishop Gianmatteo Giberti (1495-1543). Bishop Giberti's influence upon the theological currents of his times is difficult to overstate. His ecclesiastical reforms elevated the clergy's intellectual and moral level, and served as a model even for the Trent reforms[4].

Vincenzo Cicogna belonged to the group of learned ecclesiasts who assisted the bishop's wide scale reform programme. Cicogna started to publish sermon collections around the middle of the century, during his rectorship of the San Zeno in Oratorio monastery in Verona[5]. His oeuvre opened with *Sermones VII* (Venice, 1556), a collection of seven sermons on the Eucharist, which was later republished and extended with six new Passion sermons under the shortened title *Sermones* (Venice: Andrea Arrivabene, 1562). These early sermon collections were followed by the oratory speech *Oratio in Bernardi Naugerii cardinalis amplissimi et episcopi veronensis aduentu* (Venice: Iordani Zileti, 1564); and a sermon commentary, *Enarrationes in psalmos* (Patauii: ex officina Laurentij Pasquati and Patauii: 1567, 1568). 'Nisi corrigantur' included in the 1580,

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[3]   BRENZONI. **Dizionario di artisti veneti**. Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1972, 106.

[4]   ESZENYI. "Vincenzo Cicogna: A Veronese Angelologist from the Cinquecento". **Studi Veronesi.** Verona, 3, 2018, 1-26.

[5]   TACCHELLA. **Il Processo agli eretici veronesi nel 1550. S. Ignazio di Loyola e Luigi Lippomano**. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1979, 129. Gaetano Da Re's suggested 1544 for the beginning of Cicogna's rectorship (DA RE, "I Cicogna dal secolo XVI". **Madonna Verona. Bollettino del Museo Civico di Verona**. Verona, 7, 1913, 113); while Luciano Rognini dated it to 1555 in a list of rectors of the S. Zeno in Oratorio. Rognini's list nevertheless does not fully cover the period before 1555 as it signals the end of Antonio de Pedrazzi's period in 1542 and follows with Cicogna immediately after him but with the starting date of 1555 (ROGNINI. **La chiesa di San Zeno i Oratorio. Guida storico-artistica**. Verona, 2004, 21).

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1583, and 1596 Indexes of Prohibited Books[6], the *Enarrationes* may have been Cicogna's first work which raised the interest of the Inquisition but apparently not the last one.

The Archives of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, the congregation formerly administering the Inquisition, hold the dedication of Cicogna's lost 1572–1585 work entitled *Thesaurus divina oracula et attributa continens*[7]. A reference to this work in the *Angelorum*'s dedication, combined with Cicogna's biographical data, point towards the year 1587 as a likely date for the *Angelorum*'s completion, and suggest that it was Cicogna's last major literary enterprise. The reason why the text was preserved in a manuscript format may well be related to a letter attached to the *Thesaurus*' dedication in the Archives, which strictly prohibited Cicogna from publishing or even just composing anything related to theology in the future[8].

The same archives of the Roman Inquisition also catalogued a document containing notes about the *Angelorum*, suggesting this work also could not escape censorship. The exact nature of the corrections, however, cannot be studied, given that the document itself is regrettably listed as missing

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[6]   DE LUCA. **Archivio italiano per la storia della pieta**. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007, 319. FONSECA. **Mediterraneo, Mezzogiorno, Europa: studi in onore di Cosimo Damiano Fonseca**. Naples: Liguori, 2000, 981. DE BUJANDA et al. *Index* **de Rome 1590, 1593, 1596: avec étude des index de Parme 1580 et Munich 1582**. Québec: Centre d'études de la Renaissance, 1994, 769.

[7]   Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina delle Fede, Index *Protocolli* G, fols 306^r-317^r. Eszenyi, "Thunderbolt: Shaping the image of Lucifer in the Cinquecento Veneto". **Culture and Cosmos.** Bath, 20, 1-2, 2016, 173.

[8]   'Vincenzo Cicogna Veronese abiuris come vehementissimo sospetto / et hebbe tra' l'altre pene de no(n) puotere comporre ne' / dare a' stampa libro alcuno che trattasse della fede. / Servitore di V.P. molto R. / Fra Stefano da Caliufon.' I thank Dr. Barbara Bombi from the University of Kent Canterbury for the transcription and translation of the text. The letter is bound together with the *Thesaurus* dedication in Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina delle Fede Index *Protocolli* G, cc. 306^r-317^r without separate folio numbering. The backside of the page turned 90 degrees left contains three lines which could possibly be the titles of other, perhaps lost works by Cicogna. See ESZENYI, "Vincenzo Cicogna", p. 15-17.

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from the archival collection[9]. Cicogna was incarcerated in 1573 for reasons as yet unknown for research[10], and the attention his two last works received from the Inquisition presumably may have contributed to his imprisonment. Problems on various levels within the Catholic Church, listed in the *Angelorum*'s closing treatise and carelessly, naively, or perhaps provocatively dedicated to the Cardinal heading the Inquisition, could be a plausible reason for the cold welcome. Cicogna's approach to the theology of angels and demons, where he applied Classical antiquity's pagan traditions for the elucidation of Christian doctrines, might have been similarly thin ice. This approach is traceable, among multiple other passages, in the *Python* entry in the lexicon part of his *Angelorum* as well (fols 152^v-153^r).

Cicogna's lexicon entries all follow a similar structure. They open with the source specification of the biblical passage where the keyword originates from; this is followed by the etymological analysis of the name or metaphor denoted by the keyword; and closed by the interpretation of the passage, where the author explains why a metaphorical reading of the passage may describe an angelic or demonic entity. Cicogna's most rewarding inspiration was apparently nature herself as altogether 45 among his 223 lexicon entries describe some sort of natural phenomenon including real and mythical plants, animals, stones, or geographical formations.

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[9] The corrections are registered in the Index of the volume: "*Vincentii ciconii de nominibus Angelorum et demonum p<er> federicu<m> Metiu<m> f<ol>. 567*" (Archivio della Congregatione per la Dottrina della Fede, Index *Protocolli* D, Fol. 3^v.) The volume contains documents dated after 1575. Federicus Metius, bishop of Thermolaneum, is mentioned as a *familiaris* of Cardinal Santori in numerous lists of counsellors (*consultores*) of the Congregation for the Index of Prohibited Books, and he is normally included in the lists of primary counsellors. Archivio della Congregatione per la Dottrina della Fede, Index *Protocolli* I, fols 359^v and 361^v use term "*familiaris*", fols 362^r and 360^r list him in the first class of inquisitors; while Fol. 366^r specifies that Metui was charged with censorship of books (*quibus assignati sunt Libri ad Censurandum*). Fol. 373^r lists him in a list of *consultores* without further specification. The volume contains documents dated to 27 April 1573 – 28 June 1593.

[10] DA RE, op. cit., p.119. GUZZO, "Il palazzo Del Bene di San Zeno in Oratorio in Verona (e le relazioni di Giovanni Battista Del Bene con alcuni artisti veronesi)". in VARANINI, Gian Maria (Ed.) **La famiglia Del Bene di Verona e Rovereto e la villa Del Bene di Volargne** Rovereto: Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, 1996, 96.

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His elaborate nature metaphors make the *Angelorum* a masterpiece not only of theology but also as a work of natural history. Cicogna based his angelic and diabolic parallels on the habits, behaviour, and particular characteristics of the species analyzed. His nature metaphors help comprehend angels and demons as spiritual beings; and also reveal the literary skills of the author, who occasionally extended the metaphors to thematically bridge the *De Angelis* and *De Demoniis* sections with complex allegories. Recurring references within the nature metaphors suggest that Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, the first scientific book printed in Europe over a century before Cicogna wrote his *Angelorum*, must have been among his primary sources. All the more so as Cicogna refers to Pliny as his 'fellow countryman' (*conterraneus*, Fol. 26[v]), using the same word that Pliny used in the introduction of his *Natural History*. Whether this is the voice of a Greek descendant paying dues to his family origins, a medieval monk of the countryside taking inspiration from his everyday environment, or a Renaissance man rediscovering nature, Cicogna recognized God in every piece of nature surrounding him and expected the same vision from his reader as well.

His technique can perhaps be better illustrated by the example of snake metaphors. In line with the evil connotation snakes received in Christianity, they are represented by four species in the *De Demoniis* section[11]. The description of the asp (*Aspis*, Fol. 100[r-v]) largely follows Pliny's *Natural History* 8. 35-36, and argues that the asp's incurable venom is similar to the devil's fatal venom, which induces ignorance and leisure[12]. Cicogna defines the *Coluber* (Fol. 111[r-v]) as a venomous night water snake and an apt metaphor for demons, who also live in darkness amidst the venom of

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[11]   HUNT. "Serpent (as symbol)". **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, 2nd ed., Vol. 13, The Catholic University of America: Washington, D.C, 2003, 18-22.

[12]   'Prophetae vero eo usi sunt nomine ut Diaboli insuparabilem [SIC] malitiam, et versatiam describerent...Illius venenum est insanabile et letiferum… Ignorantiae et ocii somnum inducit…' (GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 100[r])

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hatred, anger, and other sins[13]. The way the legendary basilisk (*Basiliscus*, Fol. 104[r-v]) walks on tiny feet instead of coiling reminds Cicogna of pride (*superbia*) and self-exaltation, which caused the downfall of Lucifer and his followers at the Fall of the Angels[14].

Cicogna's *Python* entry nonetheless differs from the common modern understanding of the word and does not denote a snake[15]. In ancient as well as in Renaissance European writings, "Python" similarly did not refer to a species of snake but to a specific character from classical Greek mythology. According to the perhaps most popular version of the legend, Python was a huge, evil, and particularly smelly snake, who guarded the Delphi oracle. Hera commissioned Python to hunt down a lover of her husband, who was expecting their extramarital son, Apollo, but Apollo decided to take revenge at the age of a mere four days. He found Python's

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[13] 'Diaboli naturam explicat Coluber: odit enim ille, sicut et iste lucem, et tenebras sicut fur amat, ut veritatem insectetur, mendacium vero diligit: Vivit in aqua et in ea suum venemum deponit: quia in hac mundi parte inferiori degit, et in ea virus odii irae et peccati effundit et exerit.' (GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 111[r]).

[14] 'Ambulat ille quidem rectus non autem per sinus, at non erectus, cum super pectus suum per terram repere Dei sen<ten>tia urgeatur: ut vel sic eius elatio et superbia reprimatur: qua cum se supra se fuerit elatus, merito infra se ipsum est deiectus.' (GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 104[v]).

[15] Of course the question whether Cicogna knew about the existence of a certain type of snake called python remains open as a theoretical possibility. However, the mere fact that he did not grab the occasion to create another demon metaphor here suggests that he did not knew this species, all the more so as pythons as snakes would have provided excellent material for demon metaphors in his work. Twelve species belong to the python genus and twenty-six to the python family of snakes today, with some of the world's longest and heaviest serpents among them. Most pythons are ambush predators who camouflage well. They are endowed with exceptional backward-curving teeth with four rows in the upper jaw and two in the lower jaw, used for grasping pray. Once prey is bitten, pythons quickly wrap it up in strong coils, in the depth of which prey suffocates and typically ends up swallowed as a whole while still alive. MCDONALD. **Pythons.** Minneapolis: Capstone Press, 1996. FONTENROSE. **Python. A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins**. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1959. Even this basic introduction to pythons is suffice to demonstrate that their behavioural habits would have offered solid grounds for associations with evil, therefore the lack of similarities between features of pythons and characteristics attributed to the devil in Christianity is, by all probability, not the reason for Cicogna's diversion from the usual naturalistic approach at the interpretation of this metaphor. Considering that the family of Pythonidae appear in tropical areas while the genus is limited to Africa and Asia, an easy explanation for the diversion could simply be that Cicogna was not aware of the existence of this type of snake. The python as a snake species is also missing from Pliny's *Natural History*, Cicogna's important source as argued above.

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cave in Delphi and killed the serpent, as a result of which he acquired divinatory skills right on the spot[16]. The myth exists in several versions, and although Apollo does not necessarily acquires divinatory skills in all of them, the connection between Python and the oracle remains a central feature, also key to Cicogna's Christian interpretation[17]. The mythological Python had a long history in early Christian thought and symbology, mentioned in popular and influential works like Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and the Ovid *Moralisee*. In fact, Cicogna's Python entry in the *Angelorum* seems like an almost direct copy of Isidore; also sharing common features with Pliny[18].

As usual in his lexicon entries, Cicogna opens that of the *Python* with recalling the Biblical appearances of the word. The first passage is the bizarre prelude to King Saul's death in 1 Sam 28:7-19. Once the prophet Samuel passes away, Saul cannot hear the voice of God any further and decides to consult the medium of Endor instead. When the king visits the medium in disguise, Samuel's ghost predicts the king's death

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[16] 'Pyto autem a Graecis est appellatus, quod serpentem sonat, qui ab Apoline fuerit sagittis confossus: unde Pytij nomen est adeptus. Et quia in Delphis antrum Apolini dicatum erat: ad cuius ostium vetula in tripode insidens, et spiritum Pytonem per inferior foramina excipiens, et quasi demens facta, oracular edebat, future praedicens, Pytonissae nomen adipiscebatur: et spiritus ille immundus Pyto a consulendo dicebatur…'(GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 152^v-154^r). A hardly readable Second Hand notes on the margin: 'quod <?> vetule imundissimis <?> response daret et ventriloqus est appellatus.' This hand, whose style is clearly differentiable from the secretarial calligraphy of the First Hand, produced occasional margin references and additions to the main text. According to the J. Paul Getty Library catalogue, the Second Hand could have been the author himself providing further additions to his first version of the text. ESZENYI, **On Perfect and Imperfect Angels: A Catholic Reformer's Angelology from the Late-Sixteenth Century Veneto.** .PhD dissertation. University of Kent Canterbury, 2014, 21.

[17] In one version Python guarded the Delphi oracle and Apollo liberated the site; in another version Apollo built the oracle where he buried Python; in a third but probably not last version Python is female and she is the Oracle at Delphi. BARTLETT. **The Mythology Bible: The Definitive Guide to Legendary Tales.** New York – London: Sterling, 2009, 107-108. For a recent overview of the early Christian and medieval discussions concerning "pythonic" and "pythonissae" and its link with the ventriloquist tradition see TUCZAY. "Divination by Spirits and Spirit Mediumship in the Middle Ages". in PÓCS, Éva (Ed.) **The Magical and Sacred Medical World**. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, 158-160.

[18] OLSZEWSKI, "Praxiteles' 'Apollo' and Pliny's 'Lizard Slayer'". **Notes in the History of Art** 31, 2, Winter 2012, 2-9.

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through her, together with the downfall of the royal army. Saul's army is indeed defeated in the battle, following which the king commits suicide. Cicogna's second biblical source, Acts 16:16-Corsiniani 18, features a slave girl in Philippi, Macedonia, who earned her living by fortune telling. When the girl meets St. Paul, she starts to follow the apostle and his company around, recognises them and reveals their identity to the people. The irritated Paul stops the girl by commanding the spirit of divination out of her. Given that the word *pythonem* denotes the spirit enabling the woman to be a medium in the first biblical passage and denotes the skill of divination in the second, Cicogna takes as a starting point that the word refers to the spirit of divination, magic, and deceit[19].

How could, nevertheless, a deceitful spirit tell the truth in both cases? Cicogna explains the logical controversy with the help of St. Augustine, quoting *De octo dulcitii quæstionibus liber unus* 6.4 on the possibility, limits, and dangers of fortune telling:

> For when God wishes someone to know true things even through base and infernal spirits, although they are only temporal and pertain to this mortal life, it is convenient and not inappropriate for him who is almighty and righteous to grant, by the hidden working of his ministers, some power of prediction even to such spirits so that they may announce to human beings what they hear from angels, and thus, for their punishment, those to whom these things are foretold will suffer through foreknowledge the evil that threatens them before it comes. But they only hear as much as the Lord and Ruler of all either commands or permits. […] Yet these being mix in lies, and the truth that they have succeeded in knowing they

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[19] 'PYTO spiritus ille immundus appellatur, ut in Apostolorum Actis ha<be>tur de puella, quae habebat spiritum Pytonem idest Ariolum Magum et Praestigiatorem: qualem quaesivit Saul, postquam Deus ei non responderet neque per somnia, neque per sacerdotes, neque per prophetas: qui praestigiis et incantationibus Maga ab inferis excitatus, sub falsa et conficta Samuelis forma e<t> specie delusit impium Regem: etsi aliqua vera illi praedixerit...' (GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 152ᵛ).

foretell as much for the sake of deceiving as for that of teaching[20].

The theological context is followed by the etymological analysis of the keyword *Python*. Cicogna traces back the Vulgate's 'pyto' to the Hebrew 'ob' and 'oieb', combining the letters waw, iod, and cholam[21]. He explains the original Hebrew phrase denotes a hostile spirit of witchcraft who bewitches man with the help of tricks and magic, and creates nothing but misery.[22] This is the point where Cicogna extends Greek mythology with Christian and Hebrew interpretations and traces the connection between the word 'python' and mediums back to the serpent combatted by Apollo in Greek mythology.

The juxtaposition of Christian, Hebrew, and Greek interpretations leads Cicogna to the conclusion that although pagan writers may explore the ability to foresee the future, this ability in its full power belongs to God only. Accordingly, demons may know something about the future but their knowledge is imperfect and limited to what God permits them to access through divine revelation. In other words, the quota of demons is never the

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[20] 'Cum enim vult Deus etiam per infimos infernosque spiritus aliquem vera cognoscere, temporalia dumtaxat atque ad istam mortalitatem pertinentia, facile est et non incongruum, ut omnipotens et iustus ad eorum poenam quibus ista praedicuntur, ut malum quod eis impendet, antequam veniat, praenoscendo patiantur, occulto apparatu ministeriorum suorum etiam spiritibus talibus aliquid divinationis impertiat, ut quod audiunt ab angelis praenuntient hominibus. Tantum autem audiunt, quantum omnium Dominus atque moderator vel iubet vel sinit. […] Miscent tamen isti fallacias, et verum quod nosse potuerint non docendi magis quam decipiendi fine praenuntiant.' Saint Augustine: *De octo dulcitii quæstionibus liber unus*, MIGNE, J.-P. (Ed.) **Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina**. Vol. 40, Turnhout: Brepols, 1956, cols. 162-65. Curiously, the only sentence missing from the quote fully supports Cicogna's argumentation: '*Unde etiam spiritus pytonius in Actibus Apostolorum attestatur Paulo apostolo et evangelista esse conatur*'. English translation by Boniface Ramsey in CANNING, Raymond (Ed.). **The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century**. Part I: Books, Vol. 12. New York: New City Press, 2008, 262. On Augustine and necromancy see BAILEY. **Magic And Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present**. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, 106.

[21] For the term 'ob' in the Bible see RAPHAEL. **Jewish Views of the Afterlife**. Plymoth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, 50-51.

[22] '…et sonat inimicus: ut significet spiritum hanc esse inimicum homini, qui eum suis praestigijs dementet: et qui non nisi mala nobis praenunciare posit, cum natura nobis sit inimicus." (GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 152ᵛ)

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full entirety of knowledge but a rather partial access which they easily abuse. Demons are rather perceptive and understand nature well, and even though their understanding is limited by God, they use this limited knowledge to deceive human senses through illusions. 'Python', therefore, is a proper name for the devil, Cicogna concludes, because the devil, like a magician or illusionist, makes falsity appear truth and cheats with the help of misleading chants. Cicogna's closes the entry with noting that Christ is the real Apollo. Christ slays the serpent of evil with the arrows of the Apostles, who prevent people from being demented by demons when they correct false predictions through the preaching the Gospels[23].

As the *Python* metaphor extends into Apollo as the allegorical figure of Christ, the emphasis on preaching at the core of this conclusion is hardly unintentional. Cicogna's preaching was labelled 'a fountain of heresy' already in a 1550 series of inquisitorial trials in Verona, where several suspects named his sermons as the source of their own heretical beliefs[24]. Sermons were key channels of communication for Bishop Giberti, Cicogna's reformer bishop protector during the reform process executed with Cicogna's collaboration. Cicogna's profound interest in sermons, also traceable in his early publications, echoes the significance attributed to preaching, sermons, and the immense power attributed to orality overall in bishop Giberti's reform program[25].

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[23] 'Propterea Daemones de futuris ea tantum sciunt: quae Deus sanctis suis revelavit: neque ea quidem omnia, sed quaedam tantum, et ea imperfecte. Cum autem spiritus perspicacissimi sint: et rerum naturas et proprietates optime valeant, multa suis praestigijs agere possunt: quibus sensus hominis illudantur, et falsa ac apparentia *pro veris accipiantur*. Unde Pyto idest Magus et Praestigiator appellatur *Diabolus* qui falsa pro veris ingerat, et omnibus modis, incantos decipiat. At verus Apollo Christus serpentem hunc sustulit Apostolorum sagittis, et eius oracula vana declaravit praedicatione Evengelij, ut ultra homines dementare nequeat.' (GRI MS 86-A866 Fol. 153ʳ)

[24] CONFORTI, "Villa Del Bene: iconografia e inquietudini religiose nel Cinquecento. Gli affreschi della loggia e dell'Apocalisse". BRUGNOLI, Andrea. (Ed.) **Annuario Storico della Valpolicella 2003-2004**. Verona: Centro di Documentazione per la Storia della Valpolicella, 2004, 104. TACCHELLA. op. cit., p.128-129, 140-141, 153-154.

[25] SIMEONI. "Un volume manoscritto di prediche attribuito al vescovo Giberti". **Atti e memorie dell'Accademia di agricoltura, scienze e lettere di Verona**. Verona, 110, 1933, 125-129.

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The bishop firmly believed that renewal must start on an individual level. The renewal of preaching must root in the renewal of the preacher's private life. As preaching was supposed to teach the Gospels and elucidate proper conduct, the Bishop instructed his priests to evangelize through an exemplary lifestyle, and remain clear and simple in private discourses as well as in sermons. Accordingly, Giberti's 1542 diocesan statutes forbade cultural and literary discourses in the private conversations of priests, and declared philosophical discussions similarly unnecessary. Priests were supposed to adapt the intellectual level of the discourse to that of the audience instead: to the level of the partner in case of private conversations, and to the level of the audience in case of preaching. The bishop expected preachers to polish the population with the help of sermons but avoid heavy rhetorical clichés. Controversial theological statements were above all frowned upon. Giberti obliged priests to base their sermons solely on the Gospels, using exclusively interpretations offered by the Church Fathers[26].

As a result of the new provisions, the reformed sermons lost their flamboyance and elaborate character; and were simplified to sheer readings and explanations of the Gospels. Grace and justification remained a common theme, but complicated rhetorical formulas were eliminated. Sermons conveyed simple and clear messages based on the Scriptures instead of deeper intellectual arguments. In order to make sure the provisions were not created in vain, the Bishop's 1530 and 1541 pastoral visits also checked if sermons were kept in line with the reform program's requirements as the key channel for the return to the evangelical basics of religious life[27].

TUCKER. "Gian Matteo Giberti, Papal Politician and Catholic Reformer. Part II." **The English Historical Review.** Oxford, 18 April 1903, 282-284. PROSPERI. op. cit., p. 235.

[26]   PROSPERI. op. cit., p. 235-238.

[27]   TUCKER. "Gian Matteo Giberti, Papal Politician and Catholic Reformer. Part III." **The English Historical Review.** Oxford, 18 April 1903, 444-447. PROSPERI. **Tra evangelismo e controriforma**, 235-236, 245.

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Cicogna's *Python* entry echoes the same underlying idea. Similarly to the preaching reform of his master and protector, who aimed to limit conversation to what is proper, clear, and necessary; Cicogna instructed his reader to refrain from seeking foreknowledge, as it may prove to be dangerous in the long run even after a seemingly advantageous initial gratification. By defining the roots of his theology in both Christian and non-Christian literature, Cicogna's *Python* entry presented another conciliatory approach fashioning Christianity as a universal umbrella of belief systems[28] which also embraces the Classical tradition. In its complexity, Cicogna's *Angelorum* witnessed an attempt at the synchronization of theology with an internal Church reform process, this time with a very special form of help from angels.

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[28] OLIVIERI. "Simeone Simeoni 'filatorio' di Vicenza (1570): il dibattito su charitas e paupers". **Quaderni di Storia Religiosa**. Verona, 2, 1995, 234-236. CONFORTI. op. cit., p. 99-119.

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[28]