

## **Gout a Papal Disease: A Study of 22 Popes from Gregory I (580–604) to Pius VIII (1829–1830)**

Gout, from Latin gutta, is considered the disease of kings and of affluent people. It was identified in Egypt (2460 BC) and described by Hippocrates (460–367 NC) as ‘the unwalkable disease’. Aeraetus of Cappadocia (floruit 130–140 AD) described the pain at the great toe, Galen (129–199 AD) described tophi, Alexander of Tralles (c525–c605) introduced colchicum autumnale to relieve pain.

This study was devised to study gout in Roman pontiffs and is centered on 22 popes — reigning in the years 580–1830 AD — studied mainly in the works of De Novaes (1736–1821), Marini (1742–1816), von Pastor (1854–1928) Cosmacini (b.1931) and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (b.1943).

The first gouty Pope was Gregory I (Magnus)— born c.540 AD, pope 560–604 AD — who wrote ‘ have been confined to bed for the last eleven months, because of pain and malaise and suffer because of gout and my life has been turned into a penitence’. The list includes Sisinnius, (b.650, Pope 21 day in 708); Boniface VI (b. 806, Pope 15 days in 886), Honorius IV (b.1210, Pope 1285–1287); Boniface VIII (b. 1230 , Pope 1294–1303); Clement VI (b.1281, Pope 1342–1352), Nicholas V (b.1387, Pope 1447–1455); Callixtus III (b.1378. Pope 1455–1458; Pius II (b. 1405, Pope 1458–1464); Sixtus IV (b. 1414, Pope 1471–1474); Pius III (b.1440, Pope 26 days in 1503); Pius IV (b. 1499, Pope 1559–1565); Julius II (b. 1443, Pope 1503–1516); Julius III (b.1481, Pope 1550–1555); Clement VIII (b. 1536, Pope 1592–1605); Gregory XV(b.1554, Pope 1621–1623); Clement X (b.1581, Pope 1670–1676); Innocent XI (b.1681, Pope 1676–1689); Innocent XII (b.1649, Pope 1676–1692); Innocent XIII (b.1655, Pope 1721–1724); Benedict XIV (b. 1765, Pope 1740–1758) and Pius VIII (b.1761, Pope 1829–1830).

Their mean age at death was 69.4 years, the youngest being Sisinnius (59 years), the oldest being Clement X (96 years). Some popes were strong eaters like Boniface VIII. He was chronically affected by gout and renal stone disease and by the fear for death, and the search for therapies capable to prolong life. Cosmacini says „podagroso e gottoso”... the Pope is affected by arthritis and renal disease due to overalimantation very rich (straricca) in meat“. He enrolled various archiaters among them Taddeo Alderotti (1223–1295), Pietro da Abano (1257–1315), Anselmo da Bergamo, Simone of Genova (author of *Clavissanationis*), Accursino from Pistoia, Manzia from Fabriano, Guglielmo da Brescia, Angelo

da Camerino and Campano da Novara, the naturalist affected by renal stone disease. Julius III was a strong eater (he loved fatty foods seasoned with garlic) as was Pius IV, the hard worker who everyday used to take a nap after lunch and a long walk later in the day. By contrast Nicholas V (his Pontiff saw in 1453 the Fall of Constantinople and the end of the Hundred Years War) was a sober eater and drinker as were Pius II who made use of simple common foods, little wine and slept up to 5—6 hours. Probably Nicholas V died uremic since his pale natural color switched into yellowish-brown. His disease started in 1450 as painful gout attacks and pain on the flank. It is reported that some time he was obliged to ‘refrain from hearings’. Pius III “was a sober eater and drinker and used to dine every two days. Callixtus III, a sober man, spent great part of his papal days confined in bed afflicted by pain, fever, renal stones and sandy urine.

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