



Chronicles and historiography: the interrelationship of fact and fiction

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the great progress in medieval historiography during the last century, a conceptual and methodological basis in regard to the analysis of narrative sources is still missing. This paper indicates some of the challenges posed by fourteenth-century chronicles while focusing on contemporary testimonies about Clement V, pope between 1305 and 1314. Discussion of the different testimonies allows drawing some conclusions and paves the way for a new approach to medieval narrative sources.

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Along with historical information, fourteenth-century chronicles are full of all sorts of anecdotes and stories flavoured with various doses of prejudices, fantasies, and stereotypes.¹ This state of affairs poses for medievalists the methodological challenge of extracting historical data from what at first glance contains all the features of a fairy-tale. The situation becomes especially difficult when different chronicles provide similar or even identical accounts that might be considered mutually reinforcing, but may easily transform tendentious information

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¹ An abridged version of this paper was presented at the *Fourth conference on medieval chronicles* (Reading, July 2005). For differing approaches to medieval chronicles, see, Bernard Guenée, 'Histoire et chronique: nouvelles réflexions sur les genres historiques au moyen âge', in: *La chronique et l'histoire au moyen-âge*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris, 1982), 10–11; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Theory into practice: reading medieval chronicles', in: *The medieval chronicle*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam, 1999), 7.

into historical fact. This was indeed the case with many chronicles written during and about the pontificate of Clement V, pope between 1305 and 1314. Contemporary chroniclers as a whole found it difficult to understand, let alone support, papal policy. Their approach, biased as it was, paradoxically finds ample echo in historical research. The pope's absence from Rome and what appeared to be his growing reliance on France and its king, Philip the Fair, acquire the weight of unquestionable proof of what has often been described as the decadence of the papacy in the late middle ages, with Clement's pontificate supplying the cornerstone of this characterisation.

This paper presents some examples from chronicles contemporaneous to Clement's pontificate that contributed to forming the 'factual' basis of his negative image. When analysed from a broad social and political perspective, fourteenth-century chronicles provide faithful reflections of prevailing attitudes in contemporary society or, at least, among those who reported its history, be they monks or members of the nascent bourgeoisie. They further show how vested interests, ideologies, and plain prejudices actually shaped the final form of medieval historiography as it has reached us today. Such an analysis further exposes much of the political essence of the chronicles, which have been underestimated hitherto in historical research.

Criticism of papal policy was hardly a new phenomenon that began in the late middle ages. Criticism actually shadowed the development of the papacy and increased in parallel with the transformation of the papal curia into an international establishment, particularly from the Gregorian reform onwards.² The expectations of a spiritual leadership harboured by contemporaries seemed to be missing in papal bureaucracy. Moreover, any attempt to assert papal supremacy over the church, especially in the fields of nominations and taxation, was regarded by contemporaries as a sign of greed and worldly ambition; these shortcomings gradually became characteristics of the princes of the church, the pope at their head.³ The gap between the institutionalisation of the church's highest hierarchy and the expectations of contemporaries shaped the background of fourteenth-century chronicles and influenced the perspective of their authors. The question still arises as to the most suitable methodological parameters with which to approach the sources that will allow a better perspective to analyse the point of view of their authors.

Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, the historian Jean Christophe pointed to the national identity of authors as a main catalyst for generating stereotyped attitudes toward the Avignon popes: French chroniclers were usually apologetic vis-à-vis the harsh criticism voiced from the Italian peninsula.⁴ Despite the problematic nature of the use of 'national' concepts in the fourteenth century, Christophe's political categorisation still provides a suitable methodological starting point for an examination of narrative sources.⁵ Norbert Kersken observed in this regard that by 1310, narrative sources had acquired stabilisation of former national historical concepts

² See, for instance, Gordon Leff, 'Heresy and the decline of the medieval church', *Past and Present*, 20 (1961), 36–51; Carole Jeanne Dobson, 'The thirteenth-century papacy as viewed by those outside the Roman curia' (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan, 1975), 171–216.

³ See, for instance, John A. Yunck, 'Economic conservatism, papal finance, and the medieval satires on Rome', *Medieval Studies*, 23 (1961), 334–51.

⁴ J. Christophe, *Histoire de la papauté pendant le XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1853), vol. 1, iv–v. Compare B. Guillemain, 'Punti di vista sul papato avignonese', *Archivio storico Italiano*, 111 (1953), 181–206; D. Waley, 'Opinions of the Avignon papacy: a historiographical sketch', in: *Storiografia e storia: studi in onore di Eugenio Duprè Theseider* (Rome, 1974), 175–80.

⁵ J. Muldoon, 'The Avignon papacy and the frontiers of Christendom: the evidence of Vatican register 62', *Archivum Historiae Pontificae*, 17 (1979), 126–9.

in the framework of universal historical presentations.⁶ Important as it is, the national connection of the authors provides only a fraction of the entire spectrum; prosopographical data,⁷ to the extent that it is available, is of paramount importance in understanding the chroniclers' background and their perception of historical developments or, more concisely, the particular way they chose to convey these developments. Still, more often than not, chroniclers remain anonymous or identified only by ecclesiastical affiliation, thus leaving many socio-economic and political questions unresolved. As to the sources themselves and their classification, Elisabeth M. C. van Houts provides some categorisation of chronicles and their local and regional sub-categories.⁸ Her differentiations, however, are of a technical character and lack any indication of the political and propagandistic nature of many of the chronicles.⁹ The examples presented here will show that this is indeed often the case; as such, the investigation of medieval chronicles raises methodological challenges that call for further attention.

Bertrand de Got, archbishop of Bordeaux, was elected to the papacy on 5 June 1305 and was crowned in Lyon as Clement V five months later.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the great splendour of the ceremony, it was also associated with misfortune. During the magnificent procession of the leading personalities of Christendom, an old wall overloaded with onlookers collapsed. Although the pope himself was not injured, 12 people died, among them Jean II, duke of Brittany. A report of the accident appears in many sources, and contemporary authors are often inclined to interpret it as an ill omen for the new pontificate.¹¹ The pope himself rued the fact that 'this day that a first glance should be an occasion of honour and joy, turned into embarrassment and sorrow'.¹²

The pontiff's 'embarrassment and sorrow' acquired eschatological features in the narrative sources. The Dominican Bernard Gui (1261/2–1331) – a prolific author who also wrote an important manual for Catholic inquisitors – reports in his universal chronicle that 'all people were astonished and, as the populace usually does, they predicted many issues for the future'.¹³ Another Dominican, Tolomeo da Lucca – who was close to Thomas Aquinas and was later appointed bishop of Torcello – refers to the accident as 'a most notable sign'.¹⁴ Were these

⁶ Norbert Kersken, 'High and late medieval national historiography', in: *Historiography in the middle ages*, ed. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Leiden, 2003), 181–215.

⁷ Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, 'Pour une approche prosopographique de la cour pontificale du XIII^e siècle: Problèmes de méthode', in: *Medieval lives and the historian: studies in medieval prosopography*, ed. Neithard Bulst and Jean-Philippe Genet (Kalamazoo, 1986), 113–21.

⁸ Elisabeth M.C. van Houts, *Local and regional chronicles* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 74, Turnhout, 1995), 14.

⁹ On the propagandistic value of chronicles and the growing awareness by the political elite of this utilitarian feature, see, David Dumville, 'What is a chronicle?' in: *The medieval chronicle II*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam, 2002), 22–3.

¹⁰ R. Fédou, *Les papes du moyen âge à Lyon* (Lyon, 1988), 82.

¹¹ *Continuatiois chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco, pars prima*, in *Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis de 1113 à 1300 avec les continuations de cette chronique de 1300 à 1368*, ed. H. Géraud, 2 vols (Paris, 1843), vol. 1, 350.

¹² *Foedera, conventiones, literae...inter reges Angliae...ab ineunte saeculo duodecimo... ad nostra usque tempora*, ed. T. Rymer, 10 vols. (Hague 1739–45), vol. 1, part iv, 46.

¹³ *Quarta Vita Clementis V (excerpta ex chronicis quae nuncupantur Flores chronicorum seu Catalogus pontificum romanorum) auctore Bernardo Guidonis episcopo Lodovensi*, in: *Vitae Paparum Avenionensium hoc est historia pontificum romanorum...ab anno Christi 1305 usque ad annum 1394*, ed. Etienne Baluze, new ed., Guillaume Mollat, 4 vols (Paris 1916–28), vol. 1, 61.

¹⁴ *Secunda Vita Clementis V auctore Ptolemaeo Lucensi ordinis praedicatorum (excerpta ex Historia ecclesiastica)*, in: *Vitae*, vol. 1, 24–5. See, also, *Prima Vita Clementis V auctore Joanne canonico Sancti Victoris Parisiensis*, in: *Vitae*, vol. 1, 1–2; *Chronographia regum Francorum*, ed. H. Moranvillé, 3 vols (Société de l'histoire de France, Paris, 1891–97), vol. 1, 176; *Continuatio chronici Girardi de Fracheto (RHGF, vol. 21)*, 26.

judgments written concomitantly with the facts or, what seems more probably, from a later perspective? It is quite difficult to offer an unequivocal answer to this question, which is part and parcel of research into narrative sources as a whole. In this particular case, it seems reasonable to assume that the chroniclers actually attributed to the incident some of the reservations that arose later on toward Clement V and his policy. Moreover, the very fact that the pope was not injured — a fact that in medieval terms could easily have been explained in terms of divine intervention — did not even cross the minds of the chroniclers. On the other hand, they paid attention to the impressive participation of the leading rulers of Christendom in the papal coronation: Philip the Fair, his brother Charles de Valois, and his eldest son Louis d'Evreux, as well as Jean II, duke of Brittany, and Henry of Luxembourg, the future Henry VII of Germany, came to Lyon and paid their respects to the new vicar of God on earth.¹⁵ Edward I of England and the prince of Wales, both engaged in the war in Scotland, sent an impressive delegation along with splendid gifts.¹⁶

The different testimonies relating to the papal coronation hint at the limitations, as well as the advantages, inherent in medieval narrative sources. They provide basic, but not always faithful, information of historical events at the factual level that could easily be balanced or verified by the parallel use of diplomatic sources, in this particular case ecclesiastical registers. Still, by referring to the wall crash in almost apocalyptic terms, fourteenth-century chroniclers provide additional information about the prevailing mood in ecclesiastical circles, the kind of information that can hardly be detected in other sources. The prevailing mood in ecclesiastical circles, however, was not always in accord with that of the political elite. Quite the contrary. From the perspective of Christian leaders, the coronation of Clement V reflected the renewed harmony between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, a rather refreshing change after the turbulent days of Boniface VIII that justified their attending the papal coronation in Lyon, as well as their subsequent obsequious attitude toward the new pontiff.

The gap between the complex, not always evident considerations of the leaders of Christendom and the prevailing attitudes of fourteenth-century chroniclers raises questions as to the political consciousness of the latter or their ability to fully understand political developments from a broad perspective. The ecclesiastical affiliation of many chroniclers, among whom there was still a considerable number of monks, may easily strengthen reservations in this regard. Still, there was a conscious effort to place the election of Clement V in a broad perspective, not only in the framework of ecclesiastical developments but also in the context of the multifaceted, varying relationship between *regnum et sacerdotium*. In this regard, some chroniclers regarded the election of Bertrand de Got as a compromise of sorts between the rival factions in the college of cardinals that supported or opposed the alliance with the king of France.¹⁷ The divergent stands did not, however, obviate recognition of the canonical procedure and, ultimately, the

¹⁵ *Chronique normande du XIVe siècle*, ed. Auguste and Emile Molinier (Paris, 1882), 28; Jean d'Hocsem, *Gesta pontificum Leodiensium*, in: *Gesta Pontificum Tungrensium, Traiectensium, et Leodiensium scripserunt auctores praecipui...*, ed. Jean Chapeauville, 3 vols (Liège, 1612–16), vol. 2, 344. B. Schimmelpfennig, 'Papal coronations in Avignon', in: *Coronations: medieval and early modern monarchic ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley, 1990), 179–96.

¹⁶ *Foedera*, 1–4, 41, 42–3. *Annales Londonienses*, in: *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, 2 vols (Rolls series, London, 1883), vol. 1, 143.

¹⁷ *Adae Murimuth Continuatio chronicarum*, ed. Edward M. Thompson, (Rolls series, London, 1889), 8; *Flores historiarum*, 123; *Continuationis chronici Guillelmi de Nangiaco*, 348–9; *Continuatio chronici Girardi de Fracheto*, 25; Gilles li Muisis, 'Li estas des papes', ed. A. Coville, *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 37 (1938), 298; Bernard Gui, *Tertia Vita*, in: *Vitae*, 54; *Annales Parmenses Maiores*, ed. Philippo Jaffé (MGH, SS, vol. 18), 733.

unanimous election of the new pope.¹⁸ There were even some chroniclers who expressed hope in the ability of the new pontiff to curb the extremism of Philip the Fair. The anonymous author of the *Annales Lubicenses*, a local history of the city of Lubeck, expressed confidence that ‘this pope will cause justice to be done and wreak his revenge on those who had arrested Boniface’.¹⁹ The longings for revenge were nurtured by the Anagni affair (7 September 1303), in the course of which some 500 armed men under the command of Guillaume Nogaret, the main counselor of the king of France, attacked Boniface at the papal palace in Anagni and tried to bring him by force to Paris to stand trial on charges of heresy.

The expectations for a real contender to Philip the Fair, however, were not shared by many. Some chroniclers who were closer to the Capetian court and more attentive to the prevailing mood there display, in fact, an opposite perspective. They were aware of royal efforts to bring about ‘the nomination of a pope in accordance with the wishes of the king’, a candidate who in time would transfer the apostolic see to the kingdom of France. According to the *Chronographia regum Francorum* and the *Anciennes chroniques de Flandre*,²⁰ Philip, before the election of Clement V, had supposedly negotiated the transfer of the papal curia to France with some cardinals – first and foremost those of the Colonna family.²¹ The negotiations between the Capetian court and the pro-French faction in the papal curia were well known in Italy, as well. Dino Compagni (1260–1324) – the author of a local history of Florence who favoured the White-Guelfs and was involved in local politics – points to the coalition between Philip and the Cardinals Colonna, both of whom had been excommunicated by Pope Boniface (10 May 1297), as a decisive factor in the election of Bertrand de Got.²²

The chroniclers’ awareness of the web of international relations and, in particular, the manipulative policy of the Capetian court and its goals, still raises further questions as to the nature of their testimony: Have we here a genuine, synchronic reaction to the election of Clement V, or an interpolation of later developments? Most of the chroniclers referred to above were indeed contemporary with Clement V, but they actually wrote their reports a few years *after* the events, thus enjoying some kind of perspective. This perspective could have affected the nature of their reports, which lack the authenticity of a reaction to something experienced first hand.

The interval that characterises most sources – namely, the period of time between the actual event and the written report – justifies an appeal to additional sources that may improve

¹⁸ *Extraits d’une chronique anonyme finissant en 1308–80*, RHGF, vol. 21, 136; Jean de St Victor, *Prima Vita*, in: *Vitae*, 1; *Iohannes Victoricensis* [John of Viktring] 1211–1343 (FRG, vol. 1), 349.

¹⁹ *Annales Lubicenses*, ed. I. Lappenberg (MGH, SS, vol. 16), 419. On this particular source, see, Augusto Vasina, ‘Medieval urban historiography’, in: *Historiography in the middle ages*, 344–5. On historical writing in late medieval Germany, see, Rolf Sprandel, ‘World historiography in the Late middle ages’, *ibid*, 157–79.

²⁰ Very popular in the Low Countries, it was written by a local chronicler, probably from St Omer, who was loyal to the Capetians. Henri Pirenne regarded the work as an abridged version of the *Chronographia*. The latter chronicle was probably written by a monk of St. Denys, and its final version – which is very close to the *Grandes Chroniques* and to the reports of Bernard Gui – dates to the fifteenth century.

²¹ *Chronographia regum Francorum*, 170; *Extraits d’une chronique anonyme intitulée Anciennes chroniques de Flandre* (RHGF, vol. 22), 396.

²² *La Cronica di Dino Compagni delle cose occorrenti ne’ tempi suoi*, ed. Isidoro del Lungo (RIS, n.s. vol. 9–2, Città di Castello, 1913), 192–3. On the prolonged struggle between Boniface and the Colonnas and the latter’s alliance with Philip the Fair, see S. Menache, ‘Un peuple qui a sa demeure à part: Boniface VIII et le sentiment national français’, 196–97. On historical writing in fourteenth-century Florence, see, Christian Bec, ‘Sur l’historiographie marchande à Florence au XIV^e siècle’, in: *La chronique et l’histoire au moyen-âge*, ed. Poirion, 45–72.

our understanding of prevailing attitudes in the context of the papal coronation. Contemporary correspondence shows that the longings for an outcome to the political impasse between the papal curia and the Capetian court were not confined to monastic circles, but were shared by at least some leading cardinals. In a letter to Philip the Fair following Clement's death, Cardinal Napoleone Orsini confirmed the tendency that had prevailed in the conclave of 1305 to bring about the election of a pope who would be totally receptive to the king of France and the interests of his kingdom, thereby concluding the harmful conflict between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*.²³

The political concerns of the highest prelates of the church, moreover, were known on the Italian peninsula and incited extreme fears in view of the memory of the too-recent Capetian outrage at Anagni. This was the framework of what can be called the 'French plot', as exemplified in the chronicles of Agnolo di Tura and Giovanni Villani. Both of these chronicles became in time an integral part of what may be called 'Italian narrative' on Clement's ascension to the papacy. Agnolo di Tura, a member of the nascent middle class, worked in urban administration. He also wrote a political history of Siena in the first half of the fourteenth century. Better known is Giovanni Villani (1276–1348), a merchant and international banker of Florence who wrote a political history of that city. Writing in the vernacular in the framework of a universal history, Villani had access to communal archives; nevertheless, his history is full of legendary and romantic stories that connected Florence with Troy, the alma mater of all medieval cities.²⁴ Both Agnolo di Tura and Giovanni Villani thus exemplify the new type of chronicler who appeared in the Italian peninsula in the late middle ages and whose term of reference was no longer the *scriptorium*; instead, they had access to the prolific environment of the flourishing cities and, no less important, their archives.

Di Tura and Villani each told how the candidacy of the archbishop of Bordeaux for the papacy had been promoted by Cardinal Niccolò Albertini da Prato, who, for the purposes of the story, was depicted as a most manipulative and sinister character.²⁵ At first, the cardinal's initiative seemed impracticable because of Bertrand's animosity toward the Capetians. This ill will, according to the chroniclers, resulted from the damage that the royal court had supposedly inflicted on his family's property — a subtle reference to the nepotistic characteristic that was to become the most prominent negative attribute ascribed to Clement.²⁶ On the other hand, Cardinal da Prato did know that the archbishop of Bordeaux was a man 'lacking honour and nobility, since he was a Gascon, who are essentially rapacious'. Niccolò da Prato thus encouraged the king of France to reach an early agreement with his candidate. This was supposedly undertaken at a meeting between king and archbishop in St Jean d'Angély, where the royal

²³ ...ut possem habere pontificem de regno, cupiens regi et regno esse provisum, et sperans quod quicumque regis sequeretur consilium, Urbem et orbem bene regeret et Ecclesiam reformaret. Et quoniam cum multis cautelis, quibus potuimus, hunc qui decessit elegimus, per quem credebamus regnum et regem magnifice exaltasse. Written between May and 24 July 1314. *Collectio actorum veterum*, ed. E. Baluze, in: *Vitae*, ed. Guillaume Mollat, vol. 3 (Paris, 1921), 237.

²⁴ Francesco Salvestrini, 'Giovanni Villani and the aetiological myth of Tuscan cities', in: *The medieval chronicle II*, ed. Kooper, 199–211.

²⁵ For a more accurate biography of the cardinal, see R. Fei, 'Il Cardinale Niccolò da Prato (1250–1321)', *Mémoire dominicaine*, 39 (1922), 467–83.

²⁶ J. Bernard, 'Le népotisme de Clément V et ses complaisances pour la Gascogne', *Annales du Midi*, 61 (1949), 369–411.

conditions — one may say, ultimatum — were presented to Bertrand de Got. There were five main demands:

- Reacceptance of the king and his supporters, including the cardinals Colonna, into the church. This was a rather far-reaching request, coming less than two years after the outrage at Anagni, which had brought about the formal excommunication of its main protagonists by the late pope.
- A formal denunciation of Boniface's memory, thus bringing to a successful end the Capetian vendetta against the late pope.
- A five-year tithe to finance the Capetian war in Flanders.
- The nomination of cardinals friendly to France.
- A secret clause, 'mysterious and great', which the king reserved to himself in the meantime but which would be communicated to the new pope, once in office. In time, this clause was explained as Clement's formal commitment to give his apostolic blessing to the suppression of the Templar Order in 1312.

According to Agnolo di Tura and Giovanni Villani, Bertrand de Got's obsequious response satisfied the king and ensured royal support for his election to the papacy: 'You [Philip] will command and I will obey, and it will always be settled in this way'.²⁷

The French historian Rabanis demonstrated long ago the imaginary nature of this report. He pointed out the friendly relationship of the de Got family, the pope at its head, with the Capetian court. Moreover, the unconditional support given by Niccolò da Prato to the militant policy of Pope Boniface nullified any possibility of an alliance, let alone any secret arrangement between the cardinal and the king of France.²⁸ Thus, the factors that supposedly acted in favour of the French plot, as told by Agnolo di Tura and Giovanni Villani, do not actually stand up to any serious analysis. Furthermore, the itinerary of Bertrand de Got prior to his election to the papacy proves beyond doubt the unfeasibility of a meeting with Philip the Fair where and when assumed by the Italian chroniclers.²⁹

Imaginary as they were, however, the reports of Agnolo di Tura and Giovanni Villani still enjoyed great popularity in the Italian peninsula and were repeated down through the generations. Even a serious historian like Odorico Rinaldi reproduced the whole account in his continuation of Baronius, though he did express doubts regarding its authenticity. Mansi was more apprehensive, though, and related to Villani's data as suspicious.³⁰

The reports by Agnolo di Tura and Giovanni Villani, however, deserve full consideration, if not because of the historical data they seemingly provide, but because theirs represented

²⁷ Giovanni Villani, *Istorie fiorentine*, 8 vols (Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, Milan, 1802-1803), vol. 1, viii, c. 80, vol. 4, 160-2; *Cronica di Giovanni Villani a miglior lezione ridotta*, ed. Franc. Gherardi Dragomanni, 4 vols. (Florence, 1845), vol. 1, viii, c. 80, vol. 2, 109-11; *Cronaca Senese attribuita ad Agnolo di Tura del Grasso detta la Cronaca Maggiore*, in: *Cronache Senesi*, ed. Alessandro Lisini and Fabio Iacometti, 2 vols. (RIS, n.s. 15-6, Bologna, 1934), 287-8.

²⁸ M. Rabanis, *Clément V et Philippe le Bel: Lettre à M. Charles Daremberg sur l'entrevue de Philippe le Bel et de Bertrand de Got à Saint Jean d'Angély* (Paris, 1858), 18 and following; C.J. Hefèle and Dom H. Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, 8 vols (Paris, 1909-17), vol. 6-1, 487-98.

²⁹ L. Andrat, 'L'entrevue de Bertrand de Got et de Philippe le Bel', *Bulletin de la société des archives historiques de la Saintonge et de l'Aunis*, 5 (1885), 230-2. See, also, M. Rabanis, *Clément V et Philippe le Bel*, 152-9.

³⁰ *Annales Ecclesiastici ab anno 1198 ubi desinit Cardinal Baronius auctore Odorico Raynaldus*, 24 vols (Lucca, 1738-50), vol. 15, 1-2; *Annales Ecclesiastici*, ed. G.D. Mansi, 34 vols (Lucca, 1738-59), vol. 4, 390n-391n.

a faithful reflection of the reactions in the Italian peninsula to the election of Clement V. Moreover, papal policy during Clement's nine-year pontificate, especially the close alliance with the king of France and papal generosity toward him, on the one hand, and the scandalous trial of the Templars, on the other, could easily have been explained in the framework of a prior alliance, based on a *do ut des* between a powerful, vindictive king in desperate search of money and an ambitious prelate of his kingdom, in a no less anxious search for prestige. The question remains as to the popularity of these attitudes beyond the circle of chroniclers, even if in this particular case we are not dealing with monastic chroniclers, but with scions of the nascent bourgeoisie, whose scope of influence could be assumed to be greater.

Contemporary literature may provide an additional perspective. The antagonism directed at Clement's purported unbridled ambition and at his perceived pro-French policy found ample echo in the *Divina Comedia*. Dante Alighieri depicted St Peter's anger at viewing the usurpation of his see by a Gascon, who had turned his sepulchre into a 'sewer...a flow of blood and stink'.³¹ Dante further accused Clement of subjugating the papal curia to the worship of avarice. Through his bad example, the Florentine poet charged, the pope was turning Catholic prelates — who were expected to behave as devoted shepherds — into bloodthirsty wolves, who 'drink our very blood'.³² Little wonder, therefore, that Villani came to the conclusion that Clement would lie in the after-life on a bed of fire together with his nephew, Raimond de Got, 'because of their simony'.³³ Besides the vice of simony, Agnolo di Tura and Villani further accused the pope of avarice, nepotism, and even intimate relations with Brunissende, the countess of Périgord, whom they described as 'a most beautiful lady, daughter of the count of Foix'.³⁴ Once again, this report seems quite improbable. The Aragonese representatives in the papal curia, who were usually very outspoken, never once mentioned the presence of this lady in the papal entourage.

The consensus among contemporary authors regarding the legitimacy of Clement's election did not, therefore, carry any special sympathy for the pope on the Italian peninsula. On the contrary, there was a consensus of opinion as to Clement V's unsuitability to lead the church and Christendom, whether this consensus was based on actual facts or on rumours, legends, or/and pure prejudice. The clear antagonism to what Italian sources regarded as a French plot may justify an expectation of more positive attitudes toward the new pope in the kingdom of France.

Indeed, according to Bernard Gui, following the news of Bertrand de Got's election to the papacy, all social strata of Bordeaux, both members of the clergy and the laity, aristocrats and the common people, all together participated in jubilant processions in honour of their archbishop.³⁵ In contrast to the joy of the Bordelais, however, the Gascon ancestry of Clement precluded any warm welcome in other areas of France. Geffroy de Paris (+1317) — a French poet who wrote a popular chronicle in verse about the reigns of Philip IV and Louis X — found

³¹ Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia, Paradiso*, c. xxvii, v. 22-27, The John Ciardi Translation (New York, 1954).

³² Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia, Paradiso*, c. xxvii, v. 55-59. This section was probably written after Clement's death, since it also refers to the Cahorsins, a clear reference to the countrymen of John XXII. E. Gorra, 'Dante e Clemente V', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 69 (1917), 215. On the evolution of Dante's attitudes toward the papacy and the main role of Clement V's last years in his anti-papal approach, see G. Holmes, 'Dante and the popes: his attitudes to Boniface VIII and Clement V and to Emperor Henry VII', in: *The world of Dante: essays on Dante and his times*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Oxford, 1980), 40-1.

³³ G. Villani, *Istorie Fiorentine*, vol. 1, ix, c. 58, 57. However, Raimond de Got died only in 1323.

³⁴ Agnolo di Tura, *Cronaca Senese*, 343; Villani, *Istorie Fiorentine*, vol. 1, ix, c. 58, 56-57.

³⁵ Bernard Gui, *Quarta Vita*, 60; *id.*, *Tertia Vita*, 54; Amalric Auger, *Sexta Vita*, in: *Vitae*, 90.

the prevailing scepticism reasonable in light of the notorious reputation of Bertrand de Got, whom he depicted as rapacious and tyrannical.³⁶ Gervais du Bus (+1334) – a French moralist and lawyer at the royal chancellery who wrote a long satire – vented his criticism at Clement's greed and the pope's ensuing gap with St Peter, the fisherman, whose mission on earth the highest prelate of the church was expected to fulfil.³⁷ In time, Clement's generosity toward his large family reinforced his reputation as a Gascon, with all the negative stereotypes implied in such a portrayal. Sayings such as 'a seeker of honour and glory like a Gascon' and 'the avarice of the Gascons' became common clichés in contemporary sources.³⁸

The animosity toward the Gascons, moreover, found violent expression in the riots that followed the papal coronation.³⁹ During a fight between Gascons and a retinue of Italian cardinals, Clement's brother was killed.⁴⁰ Soon afterwards, one of the pope's nephew met a similar fate, when a group of furious townsmen beat him to death for his endless pursuit of their daughters. One may therefore conclude that the chroniclers' reservations in regard to Clement's ancestry actually reflected a prevailing mood, not only in ecclesiastical circles and on the Italian peninsula but also among broad sectors of the population in large areas of France.

The Gascon ancestry of the new pope encountered a much more positive welcome in England, where most chroniclers refrained at this early stage from painting a stereotyped portrait of Clement V.⁴¹ The factors behind this attitude were faithfully voiced by Jean Froissart (1337–1415) – the well-known French chronicler and poet who served as secretary to Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III.⁴² 'The pope...was a Gascon from Bordeaux and all his ancestors had been subject to the kings of England. In his status and actions he was an Englishman who would never harm the king of England'.⁴³ Clement's loyalty to England and its rulers, surprising as it appears at first glance, has been corroborated in historical research.⁴⁴ Still, the papal positive approach toward the kingdom and, most especially, its king, did not ensure a positive attitude toward the pope in the long run.⁴⁵ On the contrary, as Clement's support of Edward II became more evident and his list of requests from the English church mounted, early support turned into hesitation and then even open antagonism toward the pope and his policy. The widening gap between the leader of Christendom and his flock found ample echo in the critical reports of

³⁶ *La Chronique métrique attribuée à Geffroy de Paris*, ed. Armel Divèrres (Strasbourg, 1956), 136, v. 2327–50.

³⁷ Gervais du Bus, *Le roman de Fauvel*, ed. Arthur Langfors (Société des anciens textes français, Paris, 1914–1919), 23, v. 553–58. On *Le roman de Fauvel* and its place in medieval satire, see J.C. Mühlthler, *Fauvel au pouvoir: Lire la satire médiévale* (Paris, 1994), 17–29.

³⁸ *La chronique métrique attribuée à Geffroy de Paris*, 175, v. 4444–48.

³⁹ E. Baluze, *Notae ad vitas*, 39.

⁴⁰ *La chronique métrique attribuée à Geffroy de Paris*, 137–144, v. 2379–2745; see, also, Thomas Jorz's letter to King Edward in January 1306 in C.V. Langlois, 'Notices et documents relatifs à l'histoire du XIIIe et du XIVe siècles: Nova Curie', *Revue historique*, 87 (1905), 71.

⁴¹ Willelmi Rishanger quondam monachi S. Albani *Chronica*, in *Chronica monasterii S. Albani* (London, 1865), 227; *Chroniques de Sempringham*, in: *Le livre de reis de Britannie e le livre de reis de Engleterre*, ed. J. Glover (Rolls series, London, 1865), 326. Monastic chroniclers were still in the forefront of historiography in fourteenth-century England, while St. Albans maintained its primacy; see, John Taylor, *English historical literature in the fourteenth century* (Oxford, 1987), 8–9.

⁴² Jean Devaux, 'From the court of Hainaut to the court of England: the example of Jean Froissart', in: *War, government and power in late medieval France*, ed. Christopher Allmand (Liverpool, 2000), 1–20.

⁴³ Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. G. Diller (Paris, 1972), 52.

⁴⁴ T.F. Tout, *The place of the reign of Edward II in English history*, ed. Hilda Johnstone, (2nd edition Westport, CN, 1976), 195.

⁴⁵ *Vita Edwardi Secundi Monachi Cuiusdam Malmesberiensis*, ed. Noël Denholm-Young (London, 1957), 46.

papal policy as they appear in parliamentary records and as they were echoed in contemporary chronicles.⁴⁶

The sources reviewed to this point suggest an essential problem that was part and parcel of ecclesiastical history in the late middle ages. Though the very existence of the papacy relied on the consensus of Christendom as to the indispensability of papal leadership, this awareness per-se did not imply an overwhelming acceptance of papal policy. This paradoxical stance was clearly manifested during Clement's pontificate and sharpened by the suspicion and even anger that the election of a non-Italian pope who fixed his residence in the Comtat-Venaissin aroused. Prior to the Avignon period, at least four popes had been born in the kingdom of France – Urban II (1088–99), Urban IV (1261–64), Clement IV (1265–68), and Martin IV (1281–85).⁴⁷ Clement's Gascon ancestry, however, made him less acceptable than his predecessors, because of both his protracted stay in southern France and the intensification of regional separatism at the time.

Still, although fourteenth-century chroniclers as a whole were aware of the pope's wanderings in southern France, many of them treated Clement's sojourn in Avignon as temporary.⁴⁸ Even Villani regarded Clement's decision to remain in the Comtat-Venaissin as provisional.⁴⁹ The chronicle attributed to Henry of Rebdorf presents a suitable explanation for this state of affairs, arguing that during the conclave the cardinals had estimated that the archbishop of Bordeaux would immediately join them in Italy.⁵⁰ Jean de St. Victor – a Parisian monk who was closer to the Capetian court and perhaps also better informed – exonerated Clement from all guilt; he asserted that the proximity to the Capetian court had actually been forced on the pope and the cardinals, who 'almost violently were caught' by Philip the Fair and his ministers, a version echoed by Dino Compagni, as well.⁵¹ On the other hand, the Parisian-born priest Geffroy des Nès recognised the fact that in France, Clement enjoyed 'good wine, good food, and people who love him and are devoted to his service'.⁵² Some chroniclers from Germany, though, charged the Romans with responsibility for the pope's exile: because of their continuous attacks on their bishop, the inhabitants of Rome had actually forced Clement to live as a pilgrim in a foreign country, where he was generously compensated by Philip the Fair.⁵³

The understanding by some chroniclers of the reasons that led/forced the pope to remain in France is completely absent from sources written on the Italian peninsula. Italian chroniclers as

⁴⁶ S. Menache, *Clement V* (Cambridge, 1998), 247–278.

⁴⁷ S. Menache, 'Réflexions sur quelques papes français du bas moyen âge: Un problème d'origine', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 81 (1986), 117–130.

⁴⁸ *Chronique normande du XIV^e siècle*, ed. Auguste and Emile Molinier, 28. Dino Compagni, *Cronica*, 193; *Annales Forolivienses*, ed. Giuseppe Mazzatinti (*RIS*, n.s. vol. 22–2, Città di Castello, 1903), 63; Georgii et Iohannis Stellae, *Annales Genuenses*, ed. Giovanna Petti Balbi (*RIS*, n.s. vol. 17–2, Bologna, 1975), 72.

⁴⁹ Villani, *Istorie fiorentini*, vol. 1. viii, c. 81, 165.

⁵⁰ *Heinrici Rebdorfensis Annales imperatorum et paparum*, (*FRG*, vol. 4, Stuttgart, 1868), 552. Although there was a foundation of Augustinian canons at Rebdorf, Bavaria, the chronicle was in fact written by an anonymous writer in about 1346.

⁵¹ Jean de St. Victor, *Prima Vita*, 5–6; Dino Compagni, *Cronica*, 219–20.

⁵² Gefroi des Nès, 'La desputaison de l'église de Romme et de l'église de France', in: 'Un débat inédit du quatorzième siècle', ed. William Shepard, in: *Mélanges de linguistique et de littérature offerts à A. Jeanroy par ses élèves et ses amis* (Paris, 1928), 575 v. 37–40, 577 v. 99–101, 579 v. 158–60.

⁵³ *Monachi Fürstenfeldensis Chronica*, (vulgo *Volcmari*) [*Fürstfeld*] *Chronica de gestis principum a tempore Rudolphi regis usque ad tempora Ludwici imperatoris 1273–1326*, *FRG*, vol. 1, 42–3; John of Viktring, 349. According to Sprandel, 'we find [in the writing of Johann of Viktring] the closest approximation of a German national history'. Rolf Sprandel, 'World historiography in the late middle ages', 163.

a whole were much more critical and, one may also add, original or creative. Both Tolomeo da Lucca and Marco Battaglia — the latter an offspring of an aristocratic family of Rimini who joined the clergy — claimed that Clement, upon his election, had firmly decided to make his residence in the Viennois. The new pope further forced his own decision on the cardinals ‘almost compulsorily’.⁵⁴ The chronicle of Bologna tells a more peculiar story: that there were persistent rumours of Bertrand de Got’s imminent death and these rumours had actually brought about his election to the papacy. The choice of the archbishop of Bordeaux for the papacy was, therefore, just a subterfuge to gain time and thus free the cardinals from external pressure to end the interregnum.⁵⁵ At first reading, this story seems imaginary; it does not appear so fantastic, though, when evaluated in light of Clement’s real illness throughout his pontificate and the subsequent election, eleven years later, of Jacques Duèse. Pope John XXII’s election to the papacy, indeed, was due in large measure to his old age and the rumours that he himself had propagated about his precarious health. Whether the chronicle of Bologna transferred later motivations in regard to John XXII to Clement’s election or whether the rumours about Clement’s approaching demise already existed in 1305, it is difficult to ascertain.

In any case, there is further evidence of external pressure by the inhabitants of Rome for the pope to return to the city. They wrote a long letter to Clement, urging him ‘to come to Rome and establish his curia here, in the manner [that] his predecessors, high pontiffs, did’.⁵⁶ Dinus Silvestri, the representative of James II of Aragon in the curia, reported to his king about a delegation from Rome and Tuscany that presented an ultimatum to Clement barely six months after his coronation: ‘The pope must come to Rome, to his see, and hold his curia there; otherwise, the Romans will choose themselves an emperor’.⁵⁷

The calls for the pope’s return to Italy found a convincing supporter in Agostino Trionfo (c.1270-1328), an Augustinian friar and master of theology who was close to the king of Naples. Agostino, employing the convincing argument that there was no prophet in his own city, warned Clement against the bonds that could chain him to France and the danger of a schism that could threaten the whole of Christendom.⁵⁸ Still, some canonists did not hesitate to legitimise Clement’s policy fully: Although the Franciscan Alvarus Pelagius (c. 1275-1348) recognised that the pope could not in principle remove the apostolic see from Rome, he denied that the sanctity of the papacy depended on its location. The pope, he contended, had ordinary jurisdiction over all churches in the world, since no place sanctifies men, nor does Rome the pope. Moreover, wherever the pope is, there is the Roman church, since *Petrus* means the church. The

⁵⁴ Tolomeo da Lucca, *Secunda Vita*, 24; *Marcha di Marco Battagli da Rimini*, (1212-1354), ed. Aldo Francesco Mas-sèra (RIS, n.s. vol. 16-3, Città di Castello, 1912), 65. In a report to James II of Aragon, mention was made of the papal summons to the cardinals to come to the Comtat-Venaissin and their assumption that the pope would stay there for the remainder of the year (16 September 1305). *Acta Aragonensia: Quellen zur deutschen, italienischen, französischen, spanischen, Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte aus der diplomatischen Korrespondenz Jaymes II. (1291-1327)*, ed. Heinrich Finke, 3 vols. (Münster-Berlin, 1908-22), vol. 1, nos 130, 198-9.

⁵⁵ *Corpus chronicorum Bononiensium*, ed. Albano Sorbelli, 3 vols (RIS, n.s. vol. 18-1, Città di Castello, 1911), vol. 2, 270-1.

⁵⁶ *Flores historiarum*, ed. R. H. Luard, 3 vols (Rolls series, London, 1890), vol. 3, ad annum 1305, appendix 322.

⁵⁷ *Acta Aragonensia*, vol. 2, nos 341, 111-12.

⁵⁸ *Tractatus contra articulos inventos ad diffamandum sanctissimum patrem dominum Bonifacium papam sancte memorie et de commendacione eiusdem*, in Heinrich Finke, *Aus den Tagen Bonifaz VIII.* (Funde und Forschungen, Münster, 1902), no. 18, xci-xciii.

pope is not, therefore, obliged to stay in Rome, since he is not called the Roman pope, but the pontiff of the universal church.⁵⁹ Cardinal Jean le Moine and the canonist Jesselin de Cassagnes, as well, supported the claim that '*ubi est papa, ibi est Romana curia*'.⁶⁰ Support of the papal absence from Rome, however, was not fortuitous, and even less was it gratuitous. It was voiced, in the main, by clergymen who were close to the papal curia and who enjoyed its benefices. Alvarus Pelagius worked in the penitentiary, Jean le Moine was a cardinal, and Jesselin de Cassagnes was an auditor of causes.⁶¹

Contemporary sources thus clearly illustrate the diversity of opinion that prevailed with regard to Clement V and especially, the pope's absence from Rome. This diversity appears again and again in regard to almost every aspect of medieval history and allows us to reach some conclusions about the contribution of chronicles and the methodological challenges they pose to research. Any research of narrative sources raises the question of synchronism, more precisely the lack of synchronism between the event itself and the report of the event. In this regard, one may further ask, to what degree does a chronicle reflect the historical process? Or, rather, does it present an elaboration of a later perspective? In most cases, it is impossible to provide an unequivocal answer to this question, but one should be aware of the dilemma. Furthermore, chroniclers in most cases actually reported events and processes with which they had no direct connection but had learned about from a secondary or even a tertiary source. The question, then, remains as to the chroniclers' selection process and their use — sometimes misuse — of information. The inevitable conclusion is that, notwithstanding the relative wealth of narrative sources from the fourteenth century onwards, a parallel analysis of diplomatic documentation, letters, songs, treatises, etc., is imperative in order to obtain a broader and, no less important, a more balanced picture. These reservations do not invalidate the contribution of narrative sources to historical research: on the contrary. Chronicles still deserve full attention not only because they provide factual data, which in many cases constitute a unique source of information, but also, and perhaps primarily, because they constitute a genuine source for ascertaining prevailing attitudes among their authors, whether monks, merchants, notaries, and/or other members of the nascent bourgeoisie at a given time and in a given space. In this regard, prosopographical data, not only the chroniclers' national or regional affiliation, but also their socio-economic, cultural, and political background, is of cardinal importance for a better understanding of the attitudes and factors behind the different approaches expressed in their writing.

The question remains, to what degree may fourteenth-century chronicles be labeled history? If by history we mean 'a recorded narrative of past events', the definition found in popular dictionaries,⁶² it would seem that fourteenth-century chronicles deserve this designation. If, on the other hand, by history we mean to include additional criteria, such as an analytical and critical approach to past events,⁶³ then fourteenth-century chronicles do not appear to constitute an additional stage in the development of modern historiography. The differentiation between medieval chronicles

⁵⁹ Alvarus Pelagius, *De statu et planctu Ecclesiae*, in: N. Iung, *Un franciscain théologien du pouvoir pontifical*, Alvaro Pelayo (Paris, 1931), 111.

⁶⁰ On Jean le Moine's attitude toward the papal monarchy, see J. Gaudemet, 'Aspects de la primauté romaine du Ve au XVe siècle', *Ius Canonicum*, 11 (1971), 126–9. Jesselin also wrote a commentary on the *Clementinae*, which he finished in 1323. Fournier, 'Jesselin de Cassagnes, canoniste', *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 35 (1921), 348–61.

⁶¹ B. Guillemain, *La cour pontificale d'Avignon, (1309–1376), Etude d'une société* (Paris, 1962), 90–1, 349–50.

⁶² See, for instance, 'history', *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary*, 2 vols (New York, 1964), 599.

⁶³ Georg G. Iggers, 'The crisis of the conventional conception of 'scientific' history', in *New directions in European historiography* (Middletown, CT., 1984), 3–42.

and modern historiography, moreover, is not just a matter of semantics; it is an essential issue for a discussion of the historian's craft — or put another way, for debating the development of a scientific approach to historical analysis. To identify chronicles and history as components of the same continuum is not only problematic, it is ahistorical, as well. Chronicles should be seen as another manifestation of medieval life, with little, if any, reflective, analytical, or critical value. The gap between medieval chronicles and modern critical historiography underscores completely different ways of probing, understanding, reconstructing, and representing the past. For the modern historian, the differentiation among the myriad facets of human activity, whether politics or jurisprudence, religion or economics, constitutes a starting point for a critical reconstruction of the past.⁶⁴ For the medieval chronicler, as for his contemporaries, such a differentiation was unknown; accordingly, chronicles appear as an impressionistic mosaic whose different components are united and indistinguishable from one another. When writing about Clement V, the chroniclers could hardly differentiate among the politics, economics, religion, culture, or social norms of the times. Since reality as a whole focused the chroniclers' interest, details lost importance from the perspective of the whole picture. It is the historian who has to reassess the importance of such details and to reconstruct the historical puzzle accordingly. One may further question whether the chroniclers approached history as something external to them, or whether they were able to make a clear differentiation between past and present.⁶⁵ In this regard, chronicles pose the same problems as do other traditional texts that first have to be contextualised in order to be critically used in historical research. Chroniclers, moreover, approached the historical process from their own agenda, whether hidden or exposed, an agenda that medievalists have to discover and decipher. Using an eclectic approach and selecting their sources and themes through prisms of interests, ideology, or just prejudice, medieval chroniclers left for the critical modern historian the challenge to discern those agendas and selection codes.⁶⁶

If chronicles cannot be considered a reliable source of historical analysis, they still contain a precious store of information on the expectations and fears, emotions in general and prejudices in particular, at a given time and in a given space. In this regard, one must oppose any attempt to sterilise chronicles — that is, to glean only the historical facts they may provide — for then a precious source of information may be lost. Like any other human activity, historiography should be contextualised. Confusing chronicles and historiography seems to be an understandable mistake, like confusing collective memory and critical historiography. Still, when viewed from a modern, critical, historiographical perspective — chronicles seem to be not only different but also the opposite of modern historiography. Only by acknowledging these differences will it be possible to fully use the advantages inherent in medieval chronicles for modern historiography and these are indeed many.

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⁶⁴ Arnaldo Momigliano, *The classical foundations of modern historiography* (Berkeley, 1990), 155-6.

⁶⁵ Bernd Schneidmüller, 'Constructing the past by means of the present: historiographical foundations of medieval institutions, dynasties, peoples, and communities', in: *Medieval concepts of the past: ritual, memory, historiography*, ed. Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried and Patrick J. Geary (Washington DC, 2002), 167-92.

⁶⁶ Keith Winchshuttle, 'A critique of the postmodern turn in western historiography', in: *Historiography: a cross cultural perspective*, ed. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester, 2002), 271-85.