

RESEARCH WHITEPAPER · v1.0

The Capture Sequence

*Templar suppression, official-story inversion,
and the judgment reading of famine and plague
(1307–1351)*

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Status: provisional assistive note. Hard confidence cap 75%. Epidemiology is not theology.

Abstract

Between 1307 and 1351, Latin Christendom watched a papal military order inverted into a heresy file, a papacy relocated under French pressure, then a split in apostolic succession, then mass famine, then mass plague. This paper does not argue that God authored the weather or *Yersinia pestis* as a courtroom sentence on Philip IV. It argues something narrower and documentable: the sequence is exactly the shape a fourteenth-century Christian was trained to read as judgment, and the political acts that precede it are exactly the shape of a sacred record being seized by a crown and countersigned by a constrained pope.

Medieval history-writing already rewrote the past as a normal craft. What is distinctive here is not that chronicles were recast, but that a living institution's official status was publicly reversed, the Church's own succession then forked, and nature then delivered the two disasters their Bible already named as covenant blows. Contemporaries had language for this. Later legend polished it. The underlying shock does not require the polish.

0. Method and cap

Three layers are kept separate. Mixing them is how this subject becomes folklore.

Layer A — acts. Arrests, bulls, deaths, harvest failure, epidemic mortality. Dated.

Layer B — reception. What chroniclers, popes, kings, and popular religion said the acts meant.

Layer C — later construction. The one-year summons legend, Satanic Templar kitsch, “the Church was invented in Avignon.”

This paper stays in A and B. C is marked when it appears. No claim is made that the Latin Church of 1200 was “original Christianity,” or that a single hidden doctrine was extinguished with Jacques de Molay. Those are separate theses. They are not required for the capture-and-judgment reading to be historically intelligible.

Confidence cap: no conclusion in this note is carried above 75%. The remaining 25% is reserved for missing archives, torture-contaminated testimony, later interpolation in chronicles, and the ordinary fact that disaster theology can be projected onto any bad decade.

1. Rewriting was already the craft

From roughly 900 to 1300, Latin historical writing treated older narratives as stock to be recast. New patrons, new borders, new monastic claims produced new usable pasts. Charter forgery was common in monastic archives; a large share of early medieval royal diplomas surviving in later cartularies are medieval fabrications or heavily interpolated

texts. The “true” past, in that culture, was often the past that matched divine order or present right, not the oldest surviving membrane.

So a thirteenth-century clerk did not need a conspiracy theory to know that records move. What he was not accustomed to seeing was a *still-living* papal order, armed and banking across Christendom, turned into an official anti-Church in a single coordinated dawn, then ratified by the pope who was supposed to be its shield.

2. Peak claim, then royal capture

The thirteenth century is the high-water mark of papal monarchy, not its origin. Innocent III (d. 1216) acts as arbiter of kings. Boniface VIII issues *Unam Sanctam* (18 November 1302): submission to the Roman pontiff is declared necessary for salvation. Within months Philip IV of France answers with process, propaganda, and force. In September 1303 Guillaume de Nogaret and Sciarra Colonna seize Boniface at Anagni. The pope is freed but dies in October. The next durable settlement is Clement V, a Gascon, crowned away from Rome, resident at Avignon from 1309.

The theological picture is therefore not “states invent the Church.” It is: the Church claimed to stand over princes; a prince broke that claim in public; the papacy then lived inside the prince’s strategic geography. Capture is the right word for the second move. It is the wrong word for the entire preceding millennium.

3. The Templar inversion (1307–1314)

3.1 Acts

14 September 1307: Philip’s secret order to bailiffs. 13 October 1307, Friday: simultaneous arrests across France, sequestration of houses and chests. November 1307: Clement V, attempting to recover jurisdiction, issues *Pastoralis praeeminentiae* directing other princes to arrest Templars and hold goods for the Church. 1310: fifty-four Templars who had recanted earlier confessions are burned outside Paris as relapsed heretics. 22 March 1312, Council of Vienne: *Vox in excelso* suppresses the order — not as a clean heresy conviction of the corporation, but because its name is now infamous. 18 March 1314: Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master, and Geoffroi de Charney are burned on the Île aux Juifs.

3.2 The official story that replaced the old one

The dossier Philip circulated — denial of Christ, spitting on the cross, indecent reception kisses, idol worship (the “head”), secrecy — was assembled from a handful of hostile ex-members, then inflated under torture. Outside France, proceedings were slower, less bloody, and often produced acquittals or weak findings. England, Aragon, and Cyprus did not reproduce the Paris theater. A church council majority at Vienne was unconvinced that the order as such was heretical. Clement suppressed it anyway, under French pressure, and directed remaining assets toward the Hospitallers (many of which secular princes intercepted).

That is official-story inversion. An order created by papal privilege, financed by crusade piety, used as a treasury and a diplomatic instrument, is rewritten as an anti-Christian sect. The rewrite is performed by a king and countersigned by a pope who, on the Chinon evidence later recovered from Vatican archives, had already privately absolved the leadership of heresy in 1308 while still being unable to save the institution.

3.3 What a contemporary could reasonably conclude

He did not need to believe every article of the dossier. He only needed to notice: the same apostolic authority that had blessed the red cross now declared the red cross infamous; the mechanism was royal arrest plus tortured speech plus papal ratification; property moved. That is enough to believe that the written sacred past of an institution can be seized.

4. Avignon and the split record (1309–1417)

Seven popes at Avignon (Clement V through Gregory XI) are later counted as legitimate by Catholic lists. The damage is reputational and structural, not a vacancy of the chair: fiscal extraction, French complexion of the Sacred College, absence from Rome, the “Babylonian Captivity” language already used by critics in the century itself (Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena).

1378 breaks the single record. Urban VI in Rome, Clement VII in Avignon; after 1409 a third line at Pisa. Each line issues bulls, creates cardinals, and treats the others as anti-popes. Saints stand on more than one side. Kingdoms choose obedience as foreign policy. For forty years there is no uncontested public answer to the question “who is the Church that writes the Church’s history?” The Council of Constance ends the split by eliminating claimants and electing Martin V — which is itself an admission that ordinary succession had failed as a self-authenticating machine.

5. The judgment stack: 1314 → 1315 → 1347

5.1 Calendar

Date	Event	Layer
13 Oct 1307	Mass arrest of Templars in France	A — act
12–14 May 1310	Burnings of recanting Templars, Paris	A — act
22 Mar 1312	Vox in excelso: order suppressed	A — act
18 Mar 1314	Molay and Charney burned, Paris	A — act
20 Apr 1314	Clement V dies, Roquemaure	A — act
29 Nov 1314	Philip IV dies after a hunt	A — act
1315–1317	Great Famine, northern Europe (local tails into the 1320s)	A — act
1347–1351	Second pandemic plague reaches the Mediterranean and Europe	A — act
later retelling	Molay “summons” pope and king to God’s court within a year	C — legend

5.2 What 1314 already supplied

Geoffroi de Paris, a contemporary rhymed chronicler, gives Molay a last speech that is an appeal to God’s court, not a stage-curse with a forty-day clock. The polished formula — Clement and Philip cited to appear within a year — is a later literary tightening. It is not needed. Both men are dead in 1314. That is already, in the grammar of the age, a possible verdict.

5.3 Famine as the first covenant blow

The Great Famine is a climate and agrarian event: years of cold, wet summers at the onset of a cooler European regime, ruined harvests, livestock disease, urban grain failure. Physical cause is not a mystery. Theological reading

was immediate because Deuteronomy, the prophets, and liturgical litanies already named famine as a public answer to public sin. A population that has just watched a religious order destroyed by a Most Christian King and a pope does not need a new theory to attach hunger to that memory. They already have the theory.

5.4 Plague as the second

The Black Death is *Yersinia pestis*, moving along trade and military routes from Central Asian reservoirs into the Black Sea, then the Mediterranean, then inland Europe. Mortality in many regions falls in the 30–60% band. Priests die. Burial rites collapse. Flagellant columns form. Jews are massacred on well-poisoning charges in 1348–49. Chroniclers call it unprecedented. The Avignon curia itself counts the dead in the papal city.

Again: physical cause is not Molay’s speech. Reception is the point. Pestilence is the other named covenant blow. Stacked after a seized religious order, a dead pope, a dead king, and a famine, it completes a sentence the culture already knew how to parse.

6. Two sermons, same stack

The sequence does not decide the Templars’ guilt. It licenses two opposite homilies, both available in 1350.

Sermon I — the order was innocent. A king mocked a thing given to God, a pope ratified the mockery, property was eaten, God answered on the eaters and then on the people who watched.

Sermon II — the order was guilty. Christendom housed a corrupt military church for two centuries; the exposure was late; the blow that followed was on the whole body that had tolerated it.

Either homily treats the visible Church-and-crown machine as judged. That is why the stack “screams God punishing” even when the preacher cannot agree who the original criminal was. The institution that claimed to certify sacred history had just certified two incompatible histories of the same order, then failed to keep a single pope, then failed to keep the people alive. Judgment language is what that culture uses when certification breaks.

7. “Original Christian ways” — what the phrase can and cannot carry

By 1300 the Latin Church was already episcopal, propertied, court-bearing, crusading, and inquisitorial. Constantine is eight centuries earlier. The “primitive Church” of shared goods and no coercive jurisdiction is a theological weapon in this period (Spiritual Franciscans, Marsilius of Padua’s *Defensor Pacis* in 1324, later Wycliffe and Hus), not a snapshot of the twelfth century that Philip IV uniquely destroyed.

What *does* change in this window is the balance between papal claim and royal force, plus the public integrity of succession. Governments do not first invent the Church in 1307. They demonstrate that they can make the Church sign the destruction of its own instrument and then live as a neighbor of the French crown. That is control of the visible certifying office. It is not the invention of Christianity.

8. What this is not

Not a claim that the Middle Ages were fabricated by monks. That is a later chronology-denial literature and is outside this file.

Not a claim that Templars guarded a secret gospel whose suppression caused plague. No contemporary source requires that.

Not epidemiology. Famine and plague have physical mechanisms that do not wait on Paris burnings.

Not a court or doctrinal brief. No office is asked to rehabilitate anyone.

9. Working conclusion (capped)

A person alive in Latin Europe between 1307 and 1351 had sufficient public facts to believe three things at once:

1. The official past of a papal institution can be rewritten by a crown and a constrained pope.
2. The office that certifies that past can be geographically and politically captured, then split.
3. The disasters that follow arrive in the exact biblical order their religion already used for public judgment.

Those three beliefs do not require secret archives. They require the calendar, the bulls, the burnings, the harvests, and the burial pits. Later centuries added grails and curses. The fourteenth century already had enough.

Principal dated anchors

Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, 18 November 1302.

Arrest mandate of Philip IV, 14 September 1307; executions of 13 October 1307.

Clement V, *Pastoralis praeeminentiae*, 22 November 1307.

Chinon parchment (papal inquiry into Templar leadership), August 1308; Vatican Secret Archives publication of facsimile in the 2000s.

Clement V, *Vox in excelso*, 22 March 1312; *Ad providam* on transfer of goods, 2 May 1312.

Deaths: Clement V, 20 April 1314; Philip IV, 29 November 1314; Molay/Charney burning, 18 March 1314.

Great Famine of 1315–1317 (William C. Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 1996, remains the standard modern synthesis).

Plague arrival in Messina / western Mediterranean 1347; European peak 1348–49. Genomic work places the Second Pandemic strain in Central Asian reservoirs; this paper does not relitigate origin routes.

Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, 1324.

Western Schism, 1378–1417; Council of Constance, 1414–1418.

Document control

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