IN SEARCH OF A LOST HISTORY OF THE PEASANTS: THE JACQUERIE AS CHRONICLED BY JEAN LE BEL AND JEAN FROISSART

By

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IN SEARCH OF A LOST HISTORY OF THE PEASANTS: THE JACQUERIE AS CHRONICLED BY JEAN LE BEL AND JEAN FROISSART

By

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The Jacquerie uprising of 1358 was only ever documented by chroniclers whose perspective was limited due to their social status. Chroniclers were often members of the clergy who were in the privileged position of writing for the nobility. With their patronage and biases in mind, it becomes easier to understand the limitations chroniclers are faced with when attempting to present a historical record. This thesis will examine the events of the Jacquerie as chronicled by both Jean le Bel and Jean Froissart in order to better understand the narratives of these chroniclers, as well as attempt to uncover some of the lost history of the peasants who were unable to present their own record of the rebellion.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The primary responsibility of chroniclers is to provide a record of history, although their writings do not necessarily reflect the reality of the events as seen from a modern perspective. One must firstly consider the audience the chronicler is writing for, as most depended on the support of a powerful patron or patroness, as was the arrangement with both Jean le Bel and Jean Froissart. The second consideration concerns the time period in which the chronicle is written. Although Le Bel and Froissart wrote about many of the same events, there were instances of retrospective recording. This retrospective documentation of events, in particular the popular uprising of the Jacquerie in 1358, does provide additional insight into the political biases and overall narrative projected by these respective chroniclers. However, Le Bel and Froissart were not alone in proceeding in this manner. According to Samuel K. Cohn, those responsible for documenting the events of the Jacquerie can be categorized into the following groups: the lay nobility, the monks at St. Denis who were tasked with recording the king’s official chronicle, other clergymen, and finally the written accounts from across Europe.1 In considering all of these sources, the differentiated narration of historical events and outcomes is no longer surprising.

It was once believed that there was no significant difference between the Vrayes Chroniques of Le Bel and Froissart’s Chroniques, as Froissart himself drew inspiration from Le Bel and proceeded to incorporate exact passages into his early writings.2 Nevertheless, Froissart does give credit to Le Bel in his introduction and even gives the title of Vrayes Chroniques to Le

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1 Samuel K. Cohn, Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France and Flanders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 143-44.

2 Nigel Bryant, introduction to The True Chronicles of Jean le Bel (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 1.
Bel’s work.³ While Froissart’s manuscripts ultimately endured and were referred to by historians over time as the most informative view of the fourteenth century, Le Bel’s own work fell into obscurity. It wasn’t until the nineteenth century that the sole surviving manuscript of Le Bel’s was discovered.⁴ It is through the comparison of these two chronicles that the differences, although subtle, begin to emerge. However, for all the interesting differences, we shall observe that these two chroniclers remain largely consistent as representatives of the nobility’s vested interests. Unfortunately, as there are no written accounts from the peasant members of the Jacquerie itself, as the peasant class were not literate, one must rely on the chroniclers to produce the information, whose affiliation was consistently aligned with the nobility against whom the peasantry was rebelling. Therefore, it remains difficult to reconstruct this lost history.

Apart from the words of the chroniclers, another source which lends an alternative outlook on the events, are the letters of remission that were published in the aftermath of the uprisings. While they provide a more intricate analysis of the classification of people involved, as well as identify any potential leaders, these are letters in which the accused, in an attempt to recover land, title, former status, etc. state their forced involvement in the uprising. As official court documents, these letters must be observed with the same level of circumspection as the chronicles. Such a study of the letters was the basis for nineteenth century French historian Siméon Luce in forming the first sympathetic interpretation of the events of the Jacquerie.⁵ Recovering the lost history of the peasants through documents such as these is not a self-evident process and is to a large degree, a matter of interpretation.

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³ Bryant, 1. According to Bryant, Froissart’s inspiration for the title came from Le Bel’s dedication to providing the truth in his writings; a style which Froissart embraced in his own Chroniques.
⁴ Bryant, 1.
My goal in this thesis will be to endeavor to recover the lost history of the peasants involved in the events of the Jacquerie. I propose to do this by examining the chroniclers Le Bel and Froissart, and exploring possible motives for their individual narratives. I will then look at the classification of the medieval peasant class and its role in society, followed by the historical context of events before the Jacquerie. The historical context will attempt to clarify the tumult experienced before and during the protests and the peasants’ likely responses to this upheaval. Due to the fact that Froissart would outlive Le Bel and continue to document consequential events of the fourteenth century, including the English Rising of 1381, I have included some pertinent background information relevant to events in England, as well.

I will finish the thesis with a textual analysis of passages from the chronicles of Le Bel and Froissart depicting the events of the Jacquerie. In examining the chronicles themselves, the focus will be on highlighting passages that bind the writings of Le Bel and Froissart together, as per their respective backgrounds and interpretations, as well as the passages that mark their differing motives. By looking at the possibilities and limitations of the writings of the chroniclers against the backdrop of the Black Death, the Hundred Years’ War, and the years of famine and drought that preceded the latter, my sight is set on recovering something of the lost history of the peasants involved in the events of the Jacquerie.
CHAPTER 2
A PORTRAIT OF LE BEL AND FROISSART AS MEDIEVAL CHRONICLERS

Recording events was not a novel endeavor for the Late Middle Ages, as it had been a common practice for monks to provide chronicles documenting the history of the world beginning with the Creation. These were usually written by multiple authors, often unknown, one successor following another. They often recorded events of a monarch’s particular reign, or offered warnings based on weather patterns or famine. These chronicles or annals were mostly written in Latin and oftentimes in flowery verses. Although Jean le Bel was a member of the clergy himself, his model for a chronicle did not follow those of his verse predecessors. He was one of the first to write in French instead of Latin and he broke with the tradition of writing in verse. Adamantly against these embellishments, he even criticized the practice in his introduction declaring rhymes to be ‘…full of nonsense and wild invention…”1 This statement shows Le Bel considered he was getting closer to something we today might call “objective” history by writing in prose rather than poetry, though we still see the degree to which his narration is shaped by concerns of medieval nobility.

An additional change Le Bel made was in the process of obtaining information. Le Bel made a meticulous effort to only record events of which he had witnessed, which marked the beginning of a new style of written history. This manner of documenting information first hand required a significant amount of travel, as well as connections. As canon of Liège, Le Bel was placed in the fortunate position of acquiring both.2 Having the appropriate connections brought

1 Bryant, 2.
2 Bryant, 3. Bryant notes that during this time, ‘…bishop-dukes and bishop-counts led armies into battle.’
Le Bel directly to the battlefield in an English campaign against the Scots.⁢³ Observing this backing of Edward III first-hand would lead to a lifelong dedication to Edward and recording of the English king’s deeds.

It is through this that one can establish the prominent theme of chivalry throughout his chronicle. In an era of renewed chivalry, Le Bel was determined to maintain these values which he held in such high regard. Edward III’s creation of the Order of the Garter in 1348, as well as France’s less-successful model, the Company of the Star in 1351 would have had a significant influence on the chronicler of the time. Nigel Bryant conjectures that Le Bel’s chronicle may have even been commissioned after the inspiring orders had been established.⁴ Written during a time of war, it is not surprising that the tone of Le Bel’s chronicle often reads as the recording of great deeds, especially those of King Edward.⁵

However, it is his testimony and recording of events that would influence and inspire Froissart to abandon his own works of poetry and continue this arduous task of recording the true history. When Le Bel died in 1370, Froissart had already enjoyed eight years of employment in the service of Philippa of Hainault, Queen of England and wife of Edward III. While in her service, he wrote poetry and songs in the style of courtly love.⁶ He was also given the opportunity to travel and do research for his future chronicles. When the queen died in 1369, Froissart returned to his birthplace of Hainault (present-day Belgium and homeland of both

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³ Bryant, 4. In 1327, Le Bel went to Scotland in the company of Sir John of Hainault, who would later commission the chronicle.

⁴ Bryant, 6.

⁵ Bryant, 7.

Queen Philippa and Le Bel) and acquired the patronage of Robert de Namur, who was the brother-in-law of Edward III.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1373, three years after the death of Le Bel, Froissart published his first *Chroniques*, inspired by the former’s attention to detail and prose. As it has already been mentioned, the first book of *Chroniques* was taken directly from Le Bel’s interpretation of the events of 1325-1350, as he experienced them.\textsuperscript{8} Marked similarities would continue on through his second book of *Chroniques*, up until Le Bel was no longer documenting. By the time Froissart embarked on exploring the events of the Jacquerie in his second *Chroniques*, unrest among the peasants in England was already forming.\textsuperscript{9} Although over twenty years had passed since the Jacquerie, Froissart would certainly be able to draw parallels and record his position regarding the present-day conditions in subtle ways.

Equally riveted by the deeds of the English court as Le Bel, this fascination would continue for the rest of his life. Upon his final visit to England in 1395, he was disappointed by the changes in the court of Edward III’s grandson, Richard II.\textsuperscript{10} It is perhaps here that Froissart first becomes more critical when discussing England’s government and ruling monarch.\textsuperscript{11} After Richard II’s deposition in 1399 and subsequent death in 1400, Froissart wrote in Book IV or his last installation of *Chroniques* pointedly about the changing fortunes in life, no matter one’s

\textsuperscript{7} Ainsworth, 11.

\textsuperscript{8} Ainsworth, 12.

\textsuperscript{9} Ainsworth, 12. The second *Chroniques* was written between 1378 and 1385.

\textsuperscript{10} Ainsworth, 15.

\textsuperscript{11} Froissart’s disapproval of Richard II’s policies is highlighted by George B. Stow, “Richard II in Jean Froissart’s *Chroniques*.” *Journal of Medieval History* 11, no.4 (1985): 333-345.
station.\textsuperscript{12} Nigel Saul, furthermore believes the death of such a monarch gave chroniclers an ‘opportunity to moralize.’\textsuperscript{13} The tone in which Froissart takes upon reflection of Richard’s death certainly seems to be a lesson to those who read his chronicle. It is possible that Froissart was disappointed in Richard II’s behavior, as it didn’t live up to the chivalry displayed in the deeds of his grandfather Edward III or his father, the Black Prince, both equally dazzling figures admired by the chronicler. It is true that Froissart’s perception of the young king had been much different in the records of the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381, as he admired Richard II’s bravery in meeting the mob. In analyzing the disenchantment Froissart experiences with the English court towards the end of his life, it would be interesting to see had Le Bel lived long enough, how exactly his interpretation would have differed, if at all.

We have seen in this portrait of Le Bel and Froissart as medieval chroniclers that there is a degree of liberty and flexibility in the manner in which history can be represented by the individual authors. We observe on the one hand, an allegiance to the idea of recording a history that is not “full of nonsense” (using Le Bel’s words above), but their allegiance to an ideal of chivalry connected with the fame of Edward III and his son the Black Prince, as well as to the newly founded Order of the Garter was common to both. In the long tradition of courtly-chivalric romance poetry, knights set out to overcome threatening challenges from opposing knights to dragons and monsters. Below we will consider the degree to which the chroniclers’ representation of the peasants in their chronicles may reflect such notions of the threatening

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Chroniques Livre III et IV. Livre IV.} §82. ‘Or considerez, seigneurs, rois, ducs, contes, prelatz et toutes gens de lignange et de puissance, comment les fortunes de ce monde sont merveilleuses, et tourment diversament!’

monster that we see in the romance poetry and which was such a central part of the chivalric self-understanding of medieval nobility.
CHAPTER 3
THE MEDIEVAL PEASANT

The figure of the medieval peasant itself carries the weight of past negative characterizations and generalizations made by the nobility through chronicles, songs, and poetry. This can be seen in the name ‘Jacquerie’, which over time has lost its initial relation to the uprising of 1358 but has become a commonly used term to describe any rebellion of the “upstart” lower classes. Cohn goes further in adding that ‘Jacquerie’ has not only become associated with a rebellion, but ‘any revolt that manifests excessive and gratuitous violence, appears to be spontaneous and leaderless, is usually comprised of peasants and arises from desperation and poverty.’

This notion of a ‘spontaneous and leaderless’ rebellion is a common theme that is repeated by nearly all of the chroniclers documenting the Jacquerie of 1358. Peasants had only ever been regarded in terms of simplicity, often through caricatures of witless and bumbling fools, which makes it natural for the chroniclers to have underestimated the leadership abilities of the peasantry. In this section and throughout my thesis as whole, I continue to be interested not only in the way the chroniclers’ own class determined preconceptions that drastically limit their representation of the peasant, but also how these very limitations might help us to uncover the lost history of the peasants themselves. We are able to see these limitations and biases especially in the events associated with the Jacquerie.

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1 Cohn, Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe, 143.

2 Paul Freedman, Images of the Medieval Peasant (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 133. Freedman highlights an entire section to the parody and satire in which peasants were commonly viewed. The character of a peasant often symbolized ‘how not to act…’ This characterization is especially found in the genre of French fabliaux.
The origin of the name ‘Jacquerie’ comes from the pejorative name Jacques, which was given to the peasants or ‘les gens du plat pais’ and later, to all members of an uprising.¹ It was also attributed to an article of clothing called a *jacque*, or a layer of outerwear which a peasant typically wore in battle, furthering the nobility’s comical view of the rustic, ever a popular theme in the French *fabliaux*.² When peasants take up arms in earlier romance poetry, as in the German poem Meier Helmbrecht (early thirteenth century), they are portrayed as ridiculous at best. Peasants as unarmed or armed only with rudimentary weapons are also mentioned by both Le Bel and Froissart in their accounts of the uprising. In strict opposition to the comical depiction is the portrayal of the peasant as beastly or other-worldly, although seldom violent unless assembled together.³ This imagery will contribute significantly to the chroniclers in their narration of the Jacquerie. Froissart especially will utilize animalistic descriptions in referencing the mob of peasants as ‘chiens esragiés.’⁴

In addition to having animal-like tendencies, peasants are represented in romance poetry as different in appearance from the nobility. These differences allude to a representation of what Freedman describes as “the other.” The example he uses is taken from Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain*, in which the knight Calogrenant describes a herdsman he encounters as “resembling a

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¹ According to Justine Firnhaber-Baker, one of the first recorded instances of this reference appeared in a remission of December 1358 in which the ‘people from the countryside’ were referred to as Jacques. See Justine Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie” in The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 57.

² Barbara W. Tuchman, A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 175. Tuchman describes this jacket as ‘armor,’ although the peasantry was not commonly among those who fought in battle, as it was a costly venture; perhaps this ‘armor’ was the only affordable item to offer protection.

³ Freedman, 157. Peasants as beasts is a theme that features heavily in epics rather than *fabliaux*.

Moor.”⁷ According to Freedman, this “other” in western medieval society is defined by minority populations such as lepers, Jews, and Muslims.⁸ Due to the fact that the peasants were Christians, it was difficult for the nobility to separate them from the fabric of their own society and belief system, even if the desire to categorize them as outsiders was present. Nevertheless, this majority population was still viewed as an inferior “other” in the traditional sense of the medieval order.

Satire and characterizations aside, the peasantry in both France and England in actuality varied widely in its social stratification. It would be impossible to define such a broad and diverse spectrum of medieval society, as differences among the peasantry can be seen not only in the two different countries, but across the varying regions in each respective nation as well. Inequality within the peasant community was common, corresponding to the various levels of freedom granted to them.⁹ Nevertheless, the image of an entire peasant population of French or English serfs persists even now in the modern mind. While serfdom was a reality of the western medieval world, this was not the only category of peasantry that existed.

On the other side of serfdom, there was another minority: peasants of social-climbing opportunism. The idea of rising above the peasant class seems to be an anomaly, but there are records of its existence. The most commonly cited source for a family rising above peasantry is the well-documented Paston family of Norfolk, England. Due to the existence of their family letters, historians have been able to analyze their ascent from peasantry to gentry.¹⁰ Although

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⁷ Freedman, 140.
⁸ Freedman, 15.
rare, if a peasant family did reach another level of economic stability and status, it was through the acquisition of land and, consequently, money from the rents that accompanied it.\textsuperscript{11}

For these families who were in the position of amassing properties, their lives could be quite comfortable in comparison with those lower in the ranks of peasantry. Among the goods a wealthier peasant may have had, included equipment and livestock such as a plow and plow-horses. They may have also been as fortunate as the ‘comfortable peasant of Normandy,’ who was in possession of two featherbeds.\textsuperscript{12} Similar to the aforementioned Paston family, this ‘comfortable peasant’ was an obvious exception. The majority of the peasants would simply follow the societal expectations of laboring, an inherited role with origins in the Old Testament.

The justification for the division of society into its Three Orders of: “…those who fight, those who pray, and those who labor…” is therefore one of a religious nature and was to be taken seriously.\textsuperscript{13} However, there is a complication in determining when this division began. For a society whose very origins came into being at Creation, this would mean that God had been responsible for the allocation of roles, a problematic condition when the shared lineage of all men to Adam and Eve is taken into account. The specifics of this rationalization would in fact be questioned in the years leading up to the English Rising of 1381.\textsuperscript{14} If man was truly equal at Creation, then there must be another event elsewhere in the Bible that led to God’s division of society. The event in question is derived from the story of Noah and his sons, particularly the curse upon Ham and his descendants, although it is more commonly known as the Curse of

\textsuperscript{11} Hilton, \textit{Bond Men Made Free}, 34.

\textsuperscript{12} Georges Duby, 518-19 as cited in Tuchman, \textit{A Distant Mirror}, 174.

\textsuperscript{13} Freedman, 22. Freedman also mentions that although there were different interpretations of medieval society, this model endured.

\textsuperscript{14} Freedman, 60. Freedman references the couplet used by John Ball in his sermon, “When Adam delf and Eve span, Who was thanne a gentelman?”
Noah. Ham’s betrayal in scorning his father resulted in a curse on Ham’s son Canaan. The curse dictated that Canaan would “be a servant of his brethren.”

With this religious reasoning, it became easier for the separation of the classes to be determined. In The City of God, Saint Augustine maintains the view that inequality was a necessity emerging from the concept of original sin. Despite the inferior status peasants were seen to have, there was still a restrained appreciation for the role of the peasant, as agricultural labor supported the whole of society itself. There was also a belief that their labor on earth would result in recompense by God in the afterlife. Whether this was truly believed or whether it was merely fabricated as a comfort to those who labored, it reiterates the importance of Christian beliefs for the different roles in western medieval society.

As the chroniclers’ representation of the peasantry was limited, one can only speculate how Le Bel and Froissart truly viewed them as a class and apart from the emotional events of the Jacquerie. Although the chroniclers do not give any general opinion about the peasantry as a class, their distaste for what they view as the radical actions of the lower classes in the rebellions is abundantly clear. For Le Bel and Froissart, the very structure of medieval society depended on the meticulously maintained order of ‘…those who fight, those who pray, and those who labor…’ that, if defied, could result in the very destruction of the world that they knew. Although there was a definitive boundary between the orders, they were mutually beneficial to one another. With this interdependence playing a vital role in their society, there also came an

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15 Freedman, 87.
16 Freedman, 98.
17 Freedman, 16. Freedman’s emphasis here is once again on the notion that the peasants were regarded as Christians, despite their position in society.
expectation to maintain a harmonious relationship. The events leading up to the Jacquerie tested this rapport in ways that would be consequential in the years that followed.

The reaction of the chroniclers to the unfolding of these events was largely based on the previously mentioned class-determined preconceptions of the nobility. As the outward concerns of the peasantry begin to merge into official history in the form of uprisings, the peasant is frequently rendered as the threatening “other” that Freedman refers to.\textsuperscript{18} Oftentimes, the chroniclers go beyond the classification of the “other” and verge into the beastly characterization, analogous to the dangerous foes faced by the knight in romance poetry and epics. It is through this representation, that the nobility can draw conclusions from the events based on their own cultural comprehension and references. These depictions therefore, show us the biases of the chroniclers more clearly and help us to better understand the lost or unrecorded history of the peasants.

\textsuperscript{18} Freedman, 15.
CHAPTER 4
THE ROAD TO REVOLT: THE BLACK DEATH AND THE HUNDRED YEARS’ WAR

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the beginning of the fourteenth century leading up to the Jacquerie was tumultuous and transforming for French society. The two major events which contributed significantly to the uprising were the Black Death and the Hundred Years’ War. This ongoing military conflict between France and England officially began in 1337, but was interrupted by the outbreak of the Black Death from 1348-49. While the pandemic halted the warfare, its arrival offered no respite to the battle-weary French and English. In this section, I will focus first on the implications of the Black Death with special regard to the economic situation in the years immediately following the outbreak. I will then continue with the impact of the Hundred Years’ War. The attention given to the war will primarily be on the aftermath of the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, just two years before the Jacquerie and an event which would have the greatest impact on the uprising.

The ramifications of these events, while glossed over by Le Bel and Froissart, ultimately reveal more about the condition and suffering of the peasants, as well as their potential motivation for revolt. In seeking the lost history of the peasants, it seems critical to scrutinize all of the historical variables as close as possible, as they would have played an important role in generating the tumult of the peasant uprisings. Both in the view of the chroniclers, as well perhaps as in the view of modern scholars, the vivid experiences of these events seem to consume all attention, thus obscuring important considerations for the possible reconstruction of a lost history.
Referred to by Froissart as an outbreak of *plague or the mortality*, the Black Death is often imagined as the ultimate catalyst in economic change of the fourteenth century.\(^1\) However, the events of 1348-49 cannot be entirely responsible for the massive economic and social upheaval that France as well as England would experience in the second half of the century. It is important to note here that in the aftermath of the outbreaks of plague, each country in Europe handled its circumstances differently. The focus here will once again be on France but indirectly also on England, as they were both involved in the Hundred Years’ War, and the English presence in France played an important role in the Jacquerie.

In order to make a comparison, the economic situation of both France and England needs to be examined from a perspective both before and after the Black Death. Both countries entered into the Hundred Years’ War in a similar economic situation, which made the stakes in trade domination even higher. However, there was a slight English advantage once the war reached France and the consequential devastation began to occur on French soil after 1346. The relative downturn in the French economic situation went hand in hand with climatic changes. The weather began to play a significant role in determining a successful harvest production and avoidance of famine.\(^2\) The comparative harvest and famine charts presented by Thompson in his *Economic and Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages (1300-1500)* provide valuable

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\(^1\) The Black Death was not a universally used term for the plague at this point in time and as there were several different outbreaks of plague covered in Froissart’s chronicles, it is understandable why it is only referred to as *a* plague in any particular reference: R. Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 4.

\(^2\) James Westfall Thompson, *Economic and Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages (1300-1500)* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1960), 381. Thompson makes it clear that although England had an advantage over France in regard to the war being fought on French soil, the weather would ultimately be the deciding factor in determining a successful harvest year.
information regarding weather conditions in both France and England and their immediate
effects on crop production in the years preceding and following the Black Death.

Thompson has recorded the years of both catastrophic weather, as well as its concurrent
impact on harvest production beginning in the early years of the fourteenth century with
significant famine in France. The chart continues with a recording of the universal famine in
1315-16, as well as marked periods of long winters and major drought. In reality, both countries
were suffering from either famine or drought as late as 1344, or right before the outbreak of the
Hundred Years’ War. It can be determined therefore that France and England’s populations were
considerably weakened both economically and physically long before the Black Death arrived in
the trade port of Marseille.

It is also crucial to mention that Thompson’s chart continues through the fourteenth
century with prolonged periods of famine and drought. In the year 1358-59 for example, there is
a recorded instance of famine in France, while 1377 in England marks a period of drought.\(^3\) In
considering the factors leading up to the rebellions in both France and England, the addition of
valuable, yet often overlooked information regarding weather and harvests must also be
examined. Outwardly, it is a straightforward assumption that the Black Death and the Hundred
Years’ War brought about episodes of popular revolt, but it may be that the combination of
severe weather, poor harvests and famine, along with the outbreak of plague and war led to the
definitive unrest. Thus, we see that long before the most striking, singular event of the fourteenth
century arrives in Europe in the form of the Black Death, the peasants have been suffering the
consequences of drought and famine.

\(^3\) The year of the Jacquerie being 1358 and the year of the Peasants’ Revolt in England being 1381.
The determination that weather and famine contributed significantly to these uprisings does not intend to diminish the impact of the Black Death on Europe as a whole, as well as on an individual level in both France and England. For the people experiencing the devastation first hand, their recordings of the number of dead expose the extent of death and suffering in their cities and villages alike. One such example is from Avignon, which was struck particularly harshly by the plague. The following is an excerpt from a letter sent from the papal court in Avignon:

To be brief, at least half the people in Avignon died; for there are now within the walls of the city more than 7000 houses where no one lives because everyone in them has died, and in the suburbs one might imagine that there is not one survivor.  

Although this description exaggerated, it is well-known that Avignon, struggling with accommodating the accumulating dead bodies, was required to open a new cemetery that quickly filled with the newly dead in a short period of time. According to Tuchman, as many as 11,000 bodies filled a single cemetery there in six weeks. While many of these statistics are accurate, chroniclers of the time, overwhelmed by the death and dying around them often inflated figures that would later become apocryphal claims surrounding mortality rates of the plague. One such example is from the *Chroniques de Froissart*, who himself was writing years after the first outbreak of plague in Europe. His words stating that “a third of the world died,” have been

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5 Horrox, 43. The cemetery was a plot of land purchased by the pope in haste to bury the dead.

6 Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, 94. She also mentions that the population of Avignon at this time was roughly 50,000.
discredited by historians in an attempt to settle on an accurate number of dead from the Black Death.\footnote{Tuchman, 94. According to Tuchman, the claim made by Froissart was in reference to the estimate made by St. John in Revelation.}

Historians have long argued about the approximate mortality rate of the Black Death not only on a worldwide scale, but also in Europe, as well as on individual levels in countries and cities. The fact is that no one can be certain how many died and relying on chroniclers for this information, as I will demonstrate later on when interpreting their analyses of the revolts themselves, can be risky. However, most historians agree that an appropriate estimate is that of twenty-five million people worldwide and 47-48 % of England’s population alone.\footnote{Horrox, \textit{The Black Death}, 3.} A highly populated city such as Paris, lost half its population, bringing it down to 50,000 or the size of Avignon before the outbreak.\footnote{Tuchman, 95.}

Whatever the true statistics are, the Black Death was a catastrophic pandemic whose impact would be felt throughout the subsequent generations. The implications beyond the immediate deaths would be far-reaching and encompass nearly every aspect of life: agricultural and therefore economic, religious, as well as social. These consequences have been recorded on a local level in parish registers as the fluctuation land value, the displacement of inhabitants, and clergy shortages. On a greater scale, they are recorded as religious movements throughout the country, such as the flagellant movement, as well as official government intervention with the Statute of Laborers.

Emerging from the Black Death, as well as the years of drought and famine that had preceded it, one would first be thankful to be alive. However, another response in the aftermath
was to address the reasons why a deadly outbreak had occurred on such a large scale. Such reactions would prompt the early social uprisings, which were predominately of a religious nature. When seeking out answers following such a traumatic event, it is not surprising that these consequent uprisings tended to be constructed predominantly along Christian lines. However, these early religiously based insurrections revealed many of the older and darker tendencies of past ages presenting themselves again, such as the persecution of Jews.\textsuperscript{10} The flagellant movement emerged in the most visibly penitential way in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death.\textsuperscript{11} Although the aim of the flagellants was primarily penitence, it was still a movement in which the acts of the people were recognized by a widespread audience. However, it has been strongly argued by Cohn that these moments of instability and upheaval of a strongly religious nature bear little resemblance to the popular, more starkly political rebellions later on in the century. He maintains that the ‘violence [that followed the Black Death] differed markedly from the organized social protests with assemblies, elected leaders, and concrete political and economic objectives…’\textsuperscript{12}

Whatever the implications of the post-plague violence on future social revolts may have been, the economic and agricultural consequences of the Black Death must be addressed, as they are directly responsible for the displacement of the peasantry throughout France and England. Having entered into the period of the Black Death in a precarious economic situation, the immediate aftermath provided peasants with opportunity. This opportunity came in the form of landowners desperate to retain labor for their fields at any cost. Suddenly realizing the worth of

\textsuperscript{10} See Horrox, \textit{The Black Death}, especially pp. 207-226.

\textsuperscript{11} Horrox., 150.

\textsuperscript{12} Cohn, \textit{Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe}, 88.
labor when in short supply, the landlords reduced the peasants’ rents or even eliminated them altogether for an agreed upon amount of time.\textsuperscript{13}

At first this provided the peasants the chance to choose their employer with care, often wandering until a suitable agreement could be made with a desperate landowner. Certain peasants amassed greater quantities of land and goods having absorbed vacant fields and dwellings into their own. In addition, prices of goods and livestock were drastically reduced and made more affordable. Thompson also makes reference to the English chronicler Henry Knighton’s account of the sudden convenience in the acquisition of goods: ‘…cattle, horses, sheep, were without owners… Sheep and cattle went wandering over fields and through crops, and there was no one to go and drive or gather them.’\textsuperscript{14}

Such occasions as this would provide peasants with a surplus of livestock and goods with no one to claim them as their own. However, there was an evident weakness even in such overabundance of land and goods, and this moment of prosperity would not last for long. With so many deaths, villages were often abandoned entirely where land was once farmed. According to Thompson’s chart, the years following the plague in France and England were also marked by ‘famine due to uncultivated fields.’\textsuperscript{15} The lack of productivity throughout both countries led to an increase in the price of goods and a higher cost of living. Peasants, guild workers and even priests began asking for higher wages.\textsuperscript{16} However, this new-found freedom of seeking out employment based on the higher wages offered was about to come to an end.

\textsuperscript{13} Thompson, \textit{Economic and Social History in the Later Middle Ages}, 383. The phrase Thompson uses is: ‘…according as they could agree with them,’ making it seem as though the power was being held by the peasants over the landowners, as they knew labor was hard to find.

\textsuperscript{14} Thompson, 382.

\textsuperscript{15} Thompson, 381.

\textsuperscript{16} Thompson, 389.
Government intervention was required in order to put an end to the chaos among the peasantry and working class in the period that followed the Black Death. There was a desire among the upper classes to return to the exact conditions of society prior to the plague. Although it would be impossible to achieve this aim in its entirety, legislation put forth by both England and France would make it known that there was an unmistakable intention to do so. Beginning as early as 1349, the English monarchy’s domination over the peasantry came in the form of an ordinance ‘requiring everyone to work for the same pay as in 1347.’

A lofty ambition given the well-known labor shortage throughout the country, this ordinance would later become part of the official Statute of Laborers in 1351.

This statute authorized by Parliament under the rule of Edward III would not only reduce wages but would also penalize those who sought out higher remuneration elsewhere. According to Lawrence R. Poos, the Statute of Laborers can be best summarized by the following excerpt:

Every man or woman, free or unfree, aged sixty years or younger and without land or a craft sufficient for self-support, must serve whoever required his labour. A lord has the preferential claim to the labour of his own tenants or villeins, but may retain only as much as labour for himself as is necessary. Imprisonment until sureties were given for their future observance, was the prescribed penalty for refusal to serve under these conditions. Any servant or labourer who, already in another’s service, left that service before the end of his agreed term was also liable to imprisonment. The wages of servants, labourers, and artisans must be no higher than had been customary in a given locality in 1346 or common years thereabouts. The prescribed penalty for anyone receiving excessive wages, or giving or offering them as an employer, was forfeiture of double the ‘excess’ (the ‘excess’ being the sum judged to have been received, given or offered, above the legal rates). All victuallers must sell their wares for ‘reasonable’ prices. Those who violated this provision would also be liable to forfeit double the ‘excess’ taken above ‘reasonable’ prices.

17 Tuchman, 120.

18 L.R. Poos. “The Social Context of Statute of Labourers Enforcement.” Law and History Review 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1983): 29. This excerpt has been classified as ‘three headings’ and have been taken from the official Statutes of the Realm document and translated from Latin by Poos.
While enforcement of the Statute would ultimately depend on the local authorities, and in due course be deemed ‘unenforceable,’ the outline of the statute itself illustrates the eagerness in which the aristocracy wanted to regain control over what was considered unacceptable behavior at the time.19

France also attempted to impose their own statute in 1351, but the legislation only applied to the region of Paris.20 In a similar effort to Edward III, Jean II of France was looking for a way to regulate wages. In addition to fixing the wages of peasants, the wages of the guilds were also fixed. This would play an important role in the Paris uprising of 1358 under Étienne Marcel who was reacting in direct response to the complaints of artisans.21 This bourgeois uprising, which was also in response to the lingering effects of the Battle of Poitiers, would in time be linked to the Jacquerie itself by some historians, a notion that I will examine more closely in the next chapter. It seems fair to say, with all of the disruption connected to drought, famine, and plague that we have already observed, that such an effort to forcibly restore order was just as likely to create more disorder and tumult.

The Hundred Years’ War, (a misnomer due to the fact that it lasted around 116 years and was comprised of several separate wars) was the result of a dynastic and territorial dispute.22 This dispute resulted in several Anglo-French conflicts in the years leading up to the Hundred

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19 Tuchman, 120. Tuchman uses the word ‘unenforceable’ to describe the harsh demands made by the Statute of Laborers.

20 Thompson, 391. Thompson continues to say that unlike England’s Statute of Laborers, the French statute has been far less studied.

21 Thompson, 392-94.

22 Here, once again we have the modern terminology for a medieval event, as the term ‘Hundred Years’ War’ did not make an appearance until 19th century France as ‘Guerre de Cent Ans’: A. Curry, The Hundred Years’ War, 1337-1453 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 5.
Years’ War, the primary disagreement being the question of English sovereignty in Gascony. It was a defining event of the late Middle Ages in terms of not only warfare, which produced technological advances as the conflict evolved, but also for the political and national identities of the two countries, which had been previously and inextricably linked since the Norman Conquest of 1066. The image of a proud English army with its own distinctiveness on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 is a common reference point in which England officially emerges with its own identity. However, according to Jonathan Sumption, this political separation across the channel was already taking place as early as the beginning of Edward III’s reign in 1327, a decade before the years of their major military conflict.

The emergence of this English dominance in the early years of the war was especially felt in France, as most of the fighting and attacks took place on French soil. However, it was more than the development of their identity that propelled the English army forward, but rather, a development of military prowess. These newly acquired skills had been learned through a series of wars against the Welsh and the Scots in previous years beginning with Edward III’s grandfather Edward I in Wales. Although their competence was attained through their own devastating losses against their enemies, the English were then able to use what they had learned against the unsuspecting French. These techniques would have devastating consequences not only for the French armies, but also for the peasants of France, which is important in considering possible motives for the Jacquerie.

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24 Sumption, 38.

25 Sumption, 58.
Among the techniques perfected by the English in the 1340s and 1350s was the gradual replacement of infantry troops with longbowmen and fast-moving riders called *hobelars* that made up the raiding forces. According to Sumption, it was the use of archers that was particularly effective in securing a victory at the Battle of Crécy in 1346. Another benefit of these archers and *hobelars* was that they were significantly less expensive to employ. Not only did they require less equipment, but they were more importantly, in the service to defend without the prerequisite of a knighthood. With the English involved in wars against both Scotland and France simultaneously, this would prove advantageous.

The heavy losses for the French began in the early years of the war before the Black Death and would continue on through the 1350s. The Battle of Crécy in 1346 and the siege of Calais in 1347 were especially demoralizing for the French, as it resulted in great civilian losses and the establishment of an English-occupied Calais. Not only did the people of Calais suffer during the eleven-month siege, but the peasants of the surrounding countryside were also subject to another English innovation: the *chevauchée*. A technique synonymous with the Black Prince, a *chevauchée* was ‘a large-scale mounted raid’ and according to Sumption, was another English strategy borrowed from the Scots. These *chevauchées* would prove disastrous to the French countryside and result in significant loss of life and property, even the destruction of entire

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26 Sumption, 67. Sumption also mentions that the major victories of the 1330s and 1340s were won through the skills of the English and Welsh archers.

27 Sumption, 67.

28 The English would continue to occupy Calais until 1558.

villages. These raids would continue throughout the war, but the emergence of the free companies and gradual breakdown of chivalric society would prove even more devastating to the peasants’ way of life.

Free companies were men, often knights, who led groups of soldiers in pillaging and raiding the countryside, which often led to the capturing of castles and towns. These brigands or routiers emerged in the aftermath of the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, and other periods of truces, when soldiers no longer had stable employment to depend on. They were from different countries, often mercenaries or comprised of ‘English and Navarrese.' The Battle of Poitiers placed France in an exceptionally difficult situation, as King Jean II had been taken prisoner by the Black Prince. This capture would lead not only to an unstable political situation in Paris, but to an eventual breakdown of societal structure in the countryside, as well. With the king and many lords imprisoned in England and the king’s son, the Dauphin attempting to maintain control in the city, the conditions were ideal for an uprising.

What made these raids on the countryside so different from the chevauchées? After all, they both resulted in the destruction of land and significant loss. The questionable tactic of the chevauchée aside, it was still a part of warfare and organized during a time of war. The free companies, on the other hand were unpredictable and ungoverned. It was through these anarchic conditions, that the seeds of revolt were sown. In the introduction to his chapter dedicated to the

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30 Curry, *The Hundred Years’ War*, 41.


32 Brown, 271.

33 Brown, 271. Charles of Navarre, a claimant to the French throne through his grandfather, Louis X would become embroiled in a civil war with the Dauphin while Jean was imprisoned in England. These events had a major role in the uprising in Paris.
aftermath of the Battle of Poitiers, Siméon Luce refers to the pillaging of the routiers as the ‘ruin of French chivalry of the fourteenth century,’ and the ‘oppression of the lords’ leading to the ‘hatred of the nobility by the peasants, especially after this defeat.’ Luce argues that it is through this defeat, that we see the decay of societal roles and the emergence of the Jacquerie, the frequent cruelty of which thus continued an already long-established pattern.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the roles in French medieval society were dependent on one another and relied on this cooperative relationship in order to continue to thrive. After the defeat at Poitiers with many lords held as prisoner with exorbitant ransom fees, there was no one to protect the peasants from the routiers, and in addition, the peasants and those not a part of the nobility were still expected to pay for the release of these lords, as well as the king himself. While the chroniclers do mention the presence of free companies and the lawlessness of the countryside, the suffering of the peasants is largely ignored. With their land in ruins and their livelihoods endangered, however, their hostility and violence towards the nobility can no longer be considered arbitrary and random, as Le Bel and Froissart will render it in their accounts of the Jacquerie.

At the end of the third chapter, I suggested that the traditional relationship between the nobility and peasant was to be tested by the traumatic events of the fourteenth century as never before. In the latter part of this chapter, we have seen the nobility failing to meet its traditional obligations to protect the peasants from the destruction and lawlessness during and immediately following the warfare. This failure seems to create unprecedented misery for the peasantry with


35 Luce, 36.
the nobility failing to recognize its own complicity in the suffering that would lead up to the
events of the Jacquerie.
CHAPTER 5
THE EVENTS OF THE JACQUERIE AS CHRONICLED BY LE BEL AND FROISSART: A CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF CRUCIAL PASSAGES

In examining the chronicles, it is important to acknowledge the fine line between chronique and histoire. As Ainsworth reminds us, ‘the boundaries between chronicle and history are none the less still somewhat vague,’ and this is especially true when taking the fourteenth century mindset of both Le Bel and Froissart into consideration.¹ On the other hand, it would be extreme to take Guy Fourquin’s advice and only rely on sources that are ‘more reliable’ in order to uncover the history of popular rebellions.² One of the central considerations of this thesis has been that the chroniclers are significantly limited by the class-determined assumptions of the nobility that was also behind their production. However, this does not mean that they are without historical value for us. We endeavor to extract historical worth from the chronicle precisely by understanding when and where representation and events seem to be based on the preconceived notions and biases.

In this section, a close textual analysis of the passages in the chronicles of Le Bel and Froissart dealing directly with the involvement of the peasants in the Jacquerie, I will endeavor to substantiate many of my considerations in the previous sections in order to get closer to the lost history of the peasants during the uprising. The specific passages in question address a number of different themes that are present in both chronicles, and also highlight the possibilities and limitations suggested by the authors themselves. As I’ve already explored the probable motives and possible models for the peasants in the previous chapter, these topics will relate

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back to their own condition and suffering at this time, which were not addressed as such by the chroniclers. For example, among the themes referred to and repeated are the question of leaders and leadership, the weapons used by the peasants, their specific targets, and the possible collaboration with the merchant uprising in Paris. In addition, I will also highlight the passages that show the chroniclers’ partiality in using themes of chivalry to further their own narratives. We shall observe that the general tendency of the narration goes in the direction of casting the peasants as dangerous foes to be overcome, somewhat as knights overcome giants and dragons in romance poetry.

From the beginning of their documentation of the Jacquerie, both Le Bel and Froissart introduce the general geographical location of the uprising, but their emphasis is on the lack of leadership with the insistence that the people were “sans chief”:

**Le Bel:**
Assez tost aprez, environ à Penthecouste, avint une merveilleuse tribulation en plusieurs parties du royaume de France, en Biauvesis, en Amyinois, en Brye, en Partois, en France et en Valois jusques à Soissons, car aucunes gens des villes champestres s’assemblerrent en villages, partout, sans chief…

**Froissart:**
Assés tost apriés le delivranche dou roy de Navare avint une merveilleuse grande tribulation en plusseurs parties dou royaumme de Franche si comme en Biauvesis, en Brie, sus le rivierre de Marne, en Laonnois, en Valois et tout jusques à Soissons; car aucunes gens de villes campestres sans chief…

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Soon afterwards, around Pentecost, a mysterious affliction broke out in many parts of the realm of France, in the regions of Beauvais, Amiens, Brie, Perthois, Île de France, and Valois as far as Soissons. Some rural people had assembled in their villages but nowhere with a leader.

Le Bel’s reference to Pentecost, followed by the phrase ‘une merveilleuse tribulation,’ could in fact, be an allusion to his own superstitious nature of how these events came to pass, as if they did indeed come out of nowhere. Froissart, on the other hand, draws a conclusion by mentioning the political event of the King of Navarre being set free, which could have been motivation for these people to take action, although that would imply a direct collaboration with the merchants of Paris. Whatever the case, by dismissing the notion of leadership, it deprives the peasants of an agency, of a strategy or a specific aim, and instead presses them in the direction of being the savage “other.”

What we have in the passage above is the notion of an uprising ‘sans chief’ – without a leader. What we have in the passage below is a sort of spontaneous uprising among a large group of people who seem to act as one. Although the chroniclers would never admit to their suffering or appear to take their side, there is a mention of the motivation behind the peasants’ revolt in the words: “destruiroit” and “honnissoient” or in English, the destruction and disgracing of the kingdom. This most certainly refers to the recent pillaging of the French land by the English mercenaries and *routiers*, of which the chroniclers were well-aware of:  

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5 Froissart’s chronicle states: D’autre part, où pays de Normendie, sus le marinne, ravoi une autre plus grant compagnie de pilleurs et de robeurs dont Robers Canolles estoit mestre et cappittaine, qui en telle maniere conqueroient villes et castiaux et roboient tout le pays et ne trouvoient qui lor destourbast. p. 135.

6 Le Bel: At first there were not a hundred of them, saying that the nobles, knights, and squires were ruining and disgracing the kingdom, and it would be good if they were all destroyed. Each one said:

“He speaks the truth; he speaks the truth. Shame on him who allows them to live!”

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Laonnais, in the fief of Coucy and round Soissons. They began when some of the men from the country towns came together in the Beauvais region. They had no leaders…
Froissart:
…et ne furent mies C. homme ly premier et dissent que tout li noble del
royaumme de Franche chevalier et escuier honnissoient et traïssoient le
royaumme et que ce seroit grans biens qui tous les destruiroit. Chacun d’iaux
dist:

—Il dist voirs: honnis soit par qui ce demoura qu’il ne soient tout destruit.7

The similar quotation at the end of both accounts, ‘Honnys soit par qui il demourra/Honnis soit par qui ce demoura,’ bears a striking resemblance to the motto of England’s Order of the Garter: ‘Honi soit qui mal y pense’ or ‘Shame on him who thinks evil/ill of it.’ A chivalric order founded by Edward III ten years prior to these events, this would have been an admired topic of discussion for those chroniclers devoted to the revival of chivalry, such as Le Bel and Froissart. The theme of chivalry will play an important role in the narration of the Jacquerie as it unfolds according to the chroniclers. Indeed, in this case we seem to observe the possibility that – quite contrary to the intentions of the chroniclers – the peasants themselves have adopted the motto that previously belonged to the nobility as an organizing principle for their action.

To serve as a contrasting narrative, the following passage from Le Chronique normande du XIVe siècle depicts a more sympathetic view of the peasants’ plight and even references recent abuses the peasants endured at the hands of the knights:

Lors fut fait ce mandement à pluseurs chevaliers, et ceulz qui forteresses avoient
s’assemblerent ensemble pour savoir comment ilz pourroient acomplir le mandement du
regent, car li pluseurs n’avoient mie pourvoiance pour les chasteaux garnir. Et eurent
conseil que ceulz qui pourvoiace n’avoient en prenissent sur leurs hommes. Par ce
conseil prindrent aucuns des biens de leurs hommes oultrageusement, tant que les paisans

7 Froissart: …and at first they numbered scarcely a hundred. One of them got up and said that the nobility of France, knights and squires, were disgracing and betraying the realm, and that it would be a good thing if they were all destroyed. At this, they all shouted:

“He’s right! He’s right! Shame on any man who saves the gentry from being wiped out!”
Throughout Le Bel’s and Froissart’s recordings of the Jacquerie, there is no mention of these people as ‘paisans’ or peasants as there are in this version put forth by the anonymous author, believed to be a provincial knight in *La Chronique normande du XIVe siècle*. Here, the chronicler has offered a more sympathetic view of the peasants’ situation in light of recent events, giving an account of their grievances leading up to the rebellion. Instead of immediately entering into the descriptions of violence, there is a more supportive outlook of the situation faced by the peasants. He goes so far as to state the acts of the knights seizing the goods of the peasants as ‘oultrageusement’ or outrageous. He also makes a reference to the societal roles that had been betrayed by the knights seizing the property of the peasants; the very men who were supposed to protect them, ‘qui les devoient garder.’ That being said, the anonymous chronicler does continue with a description of the rebellion and includes many of the same descriptive words used by Le Bel and Froissart, such as cruelty in order to describe the violence committed by the peasants. Nevertheless, the fact that any reasoning at all is put forth is striking when compared with the biases of the nobility presented by Le Bel and Froissart.

In addition to the lack of leadership, the peasants are also characterized by the Le Bel and Froissart as being ill-equipped or ‘sans armeures.’ Due to the fact that the peasantry had a

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Those knights with fortresses gathered together to decide how to implement the regent’s order; some did not have the means to supply the provisions for their castles. So they were advised to take the provisions from their own men. They followed this counsel and outrageously took the goods from their own men. Thus these peasants [*paisans*] were mortified that the knights who were supposed to protect them had decided to seize their property.
particular role to fulfill in society, they were often forbidden or discouraged from bearing arms or participating in military campaigns. When they did so, they tended to be ridiculed, as in the previously mentioned example of the German romance Meier Helmbrecht. Freedman gives us another example of this type of portrayal with a peasant attempting a joust armed with a “…rake rather than a lance. A straw basket functions as his shield, and a beehive topped with a heraldic shoe serves as his helmet.” In the passage cited below, both chroniclers make note of the peasants as a ‘band’ without weapons, except those of a rudimentary nature, ‘bastons ferrez et de coustiauxx’, which was a common perception on the part of the nobility of the peasant attempting battle:

Le Bel:  
Ainsi premierement s’en alerent, sans aultre conseil, sans armeures que de bastons ferrez et de coustiauxx en la maison d’ung chevalier; si briserrent l’ostel et le tuerent, et sa femme et ses enfans, et puis ardirent l’ostel.¹⁰

Froissart:  
Lors se queillirent et s’en allerent sans autre consseil et sans nulle armure, fors que de bastons fierés et de coutiaux, premiers à le maison d’un chevalier qui priés de là demouroit. Si brisierent le maison et tuerent le chevalier, la damme et les enfans, petits et grans et ardirent assés…¹¹

In the above passage and in others I look at below, the targets of the peasants appear to be a kind of reversal of the chivalric aggression that had been directed at them in the form of the raids of previous years that I described in the previous section with reference to tactics used in

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⁹ Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 179. The image Freedman gives is from a 16th century drawing by Hans Burgkmair called: *Peasant Tournament*. The image is featured on page 180 of the book.

¹⁰ Le Bel: Thus, without further advice and without weapons other than iron bats and knives, they first went to the house of a knight, broke down his door, killed him, his wife, and children, and then burnt the house.

¹¹ Froissart: They banded together and went off, without further deliberation and unarmed except for pikes and knives, to the house of a knight who lived nearby. They broke in and killed the knight, with his lady and his children, big and small, and set fire to the house.
the Hundred Years’ War. It is interesting to consider that the nobility itself might have provided more or less violent examples for the use of the peasantry in the latter’s identification and treatment of its targets. Although the targets may not have been as specific as those outlined in the English Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, in which one of the events included the peasants of St. Albans destroying a paving ‘constructed from mill-stones which had been confiscated from the abbey’s tenants,’ the French peasantry still set their sights on the castles of the nobility from whom they had received the worst abuses in the recent years of the war. They do so, by attempting to destroy the property of the local nobility and threaten the knights and their families who may be inside the castles, as we see in this notation by the chroniclers:

Le Bel:
Aprez, ilz alerrent à ung fort chastel et firent pis assez, car ilz prirent le chevalier et le loyeren à une estache moult fort, et violerent devant ses yeulx la dame et la fille, puis tueren la dame enchainte et la fille, et puis le chevalier et tous les enfans et ardiren le chastel.\(^13\)

Froissart:
…car il prissent le chevalier et le loyeren à une estache bien fort et violerent le damme et le fille li plisseur, li ungs apriés l’autre, voyant le chevalier; puis tueren la damme, qui estoit enchainte et le fille apriés et tous les enfans et puis le chevalier et ardiren et habatiren le castiel.\(^14\)

Interestingly, the stress here is that the hostility is towards the nobility and not the monarchy.

The peasants of the Jacquerie show this partiality by using banners with the fleur-de-lys, which

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\(^13\) Le Bel: Next, they went to a strong castle and did much worse: they captured the knight, tied him up with a strong rope, and raped his lady and daughter before his eyes. Then they killed the lady, who was pregnant, the daughter, and then the knight and all his children, and then burnt the castle.

\(^14\) Froissart: Next they went to another castle and did much worse; for, having seized the knight and bound him securely to a post, several of them violated his wife and daughter before his eyes. Then they killed the wife, who was pregnant, and the daughter and all the other children, and finally put the knight to death with great cruelty and burned and razed the castle.
would show support for the king. In rising up against the nobility, but not the king, the peasants spare themselves the accusation of treason and we observe, in fact, that the charge of treason was excluded from all letters of remission. It is interesting however, that neither Le Bel nor Froissart mention any such banners in their chronicles. Highlighting any support of the king the peasants may have had would be consistent with their general endeavor to represent the peasantry as an unruly mob or wild animals without any kind of plan or direction other than to destroy.

The targets of the peasants are quite premeditated, but the emphasis of the chroniclers falls not on premeditation but rather on the level of violence with which the actions are carried out. There is a particular emphasis on the women and children involved in this violence, which is highlighted whenever possible, as we observe in the passages here:

Le Bel:
Ainsy firent ilz en plusieurs chasteaulx et bonnes maisons, et tant multiplierent qu’ilz furent bien VIm; et partout là où ilz venoient, leur nombre croissoit, car chacun les suivoit qui estoit de leur oppinion; siques chevaliers et dames, escuiers et damoiselles s’enfuioient partout où ilz pouoient, en portant souvent à leur col leurs petis enfans X ou XX lieues loing, et laissoient les manoirs et chasteaulx. Ainsy ces gens assemblez sans chief ardoient et roboient tout et murdrissoient gentilz hommes et nobles femmes, et leurs enfans, et violoient dames et puchielles sans misericorde quelconques.

15 According to Tuchman, A Distant Mirror, 177, the decision to fly the banner with the fleur-de-lys was made by Guillaume Cale, the supposed leader of the Jacquerie. He also took on the “Montjoie” battle cry, which was used by the French monarchy.


17 Le Bel: They did the same with many other castles and good houses. And their numbers multiplied, reaching more than six thousand. Everywhere they went, their numbers increased, because anyone with the same views followed them. As a consequence, knights, ladies, esquires, and maidens fled anywhere they could. They left their manors and castles, often carrying their little children on their shoulders for ten, even twenty leagues. Thus these leaderless people gathered together, burnt, and robbed everything and murdered gentlemen, noble ladies, and their children; they raped ladies and virgins without any mercy whatsoever.
Froissart:
Enssi fissent il em pluisseurs castiaux et bonnes maisons et moutepliierent tant qu’il furent bien. Vim. Et partout là où il venoient, leurs nombres croissoit car chacuns de leurs samblanche les sieuvoir: siques chacuns chevaliers, dammes, escuierz et leurs femmes enfuioient et emportoient lors petits enfans à lors colps dis lieuwes ou .XX. lieuwes loing, là où il se pooient garandir et laissoient leurs maisons toutes quittes et leur avoir. Et ces meschans gens, assemblés sans cief et sans armures, roboient et ardoient tout et tuoient tous gentils hommes qu’il trouvoient et efforchoient et violoient touttez dammes et pucelles sans pité et sans merchy enssi comme chiens esragiés.¹⁸

In Froissart’s account in particular, we see his reference to the peasants as animals, and more specifically as mad dogs or ‘chiens esragiés’, consistent with the depiction of peasants as wild animals. The fact that he emphasizes the pack mentality guiding them to commit acts without knowing why, reinforces the idea that the peasants were simply following through on the notion that all nobles must be killed, but they lacked a clear ideology, direction, or agency behind their revolt. When Froissart says that, ‘wherever they went their numbers grew, for all the men of the same sort joined them,’ we are reminded that the chroniclers viewed the peasant participation as a motivation on the basest, animal-like level, simply joining in because the others were partaking. However, as we have been observing, it seems worthwhile to consider that the success and strength of the numbers of those involved in the rebellion call for further explanation than Le Bel and Froissart give us, but which they nevertheless indirectly suggest. There are indirect signals of a unifying principle in Le Bel’s use of ‘de leur opinion’ and Froissart’s use of ‘de leurs samblanche.’ This unified group and their consequent successes seem to be at odds with

¹⁸ Froissart: They did similar things in a number of castles and big houses, and their ranks swelled until there were a good six thousand of them. Wherever they went their numbers grew, for all the men of the same sort joined them. The knights and squires fled before them with their families. They took their wives and daughters many miles away to put them in safety, leaving their houses open with their possessions inside. And these evil men, who had come together without leaders or arms, pillaged and burned everything and violated and killed all the ladies and girls without mercy, like mad dogs.
the notion that the peasants were lacking a strategy that would be consistent, however generally, with leadership and a plan.

The emphasis on their animal-like brutality and the chroniclers’ insistence on casting the peasants in the mold of beastly or other-worldly is reiterated, varied, and underscored by the chroniclers in the subsequent two instances:

**Le Bel:**
Certes entre les crestiens ne serrasins n’avint oncques rage si desordonnée ni si dyablesse, car qui plus faisoit de maulx et de vilains faiz, telx maux que seulement creature humaine ne les debvroit penser sans honte et vergongne, il estoit le plus grand maistre.  

**Froissart:**
Certes, oncques n’avint entre Crestiens ne Sarrazins telle forsenerie que ces meschans gens faisoient; car qui plus faisoit de maux ou plus villains fais, telz fais que creature hummainne [ne deveroit] oser pensser ne regarder, chilz estoit li plus prisies entre yaux et li plus grans mestrez.

In this first instance, by categorizing their actions as worse than the acts of violence that took place during the Crusades, or that of ‘crestiens’ and ‘serrasins’, both Le Bel and Froissart have put a new religious turn on their rendering of the peasants as ‘other.’ The deeds of the Jacques in the previous passages, as we saw, placed them in a sub-human category, as the acts of animals, rather than of humans. Here, the suggestion seems to be made that the peasants precede in a manner that puts them at odds with Christianity itself, and thus with the Christian conception of the world and social order that I examined in the section on the peasantry above.

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19 **Le Bel:** Certainly, among Christians, even Saracens, there has never been such uncontrolled, diabolical madness. He who dared commit the greatest evil and the vilest deeds – such evil a human creature could not even think of without shame and disgust – was deemed the greatest master.

20 **Froissart:** Their barbarous acts were worse than anything that ever took place between Christians and Saracens. Never did men commit such vile deeds. They were such that no living creature ought to see, or even imagine or think of, and the men who committed the most were admired and had the highest places among them.
In the second instance below, we observe that the chroniclers have chosen to omit certain events involving ladies, ‘les horribles faiz ne les inconveniens que faisoient aux dames.’ Nevertheless, they both include the episode of forced cannibalism, ‘mengier par force’, which becomes one of the most apocryphal stories to come from the Jacquerie. The inclusion of such an act can once again be connected to the reoccurring animalistic imagery the peasants have evoked:

Le Bel:
Je n’oseroie escrire ne raconter les horribles faiz ne les inconveniens que faisoient aux dames; mais, entre les aultres deshonnestes faiz, ilz tuerent ung chevalier et le mirent en haste et le rostirent, voyant la dame et les enfans. Aprez ce que X ou XII eurent enforcié la dame, il luy en vouurent faire mengier par force, puis ilz le firent morir de male mort.21

Froissart:
Je n’oseroie escripre ne racompter les horiblez fais et inconvenables qu’il faisoient as dammes més entre les autres desourdounnés et villains fais, il tuerent .I. chevalier et bouterent en .I. hastier et le tournerent au feu et le rostirent, voyant le damme et ses enfans, apriés ce que .X. ou .XII. eurent le damme efforcie et violee et les en vorent faire mengier par force; et puis les tuerent et les fissent morir de malle mort.
Et avoient fait .I. roy entr’iaux qui estoit, si comme on disoit adont de Cleremont en Biauvesis et le eslisirent le pieur des pieurs. Et l’appelloient le roy Jake Bon Homme.22

Le Bel has chosen not to mention the leader here until the end of the chapter, whereas Froissart has introduced the ‘roy’ or ‘king’ of the group after describing the most horrendous acts of the

21 Le Bel: I would not dare write or tell of their atrocious deeds or of the indecorous things they did to ladies. But, among other indecent acts, they killed a knight, put him on a spit, and roasted him with his wife and children looking on. After ten or twelve of them raped the lady, they wished to force feed them the roasted flesh of their father and husband and made them die by a miserable death.

22 Froissart: I could never bring myself to write down the horrible and shameful things which they did to the ladies. But, among other brutal excesses, they killed a knight, put him on a spit, and turned him at the fire and roasted him before the lady and her children. After ten or twelve of them had violated the lady, they tried to force her and the children to eat the knight’s flesh before putting them cruelly to death. They had chosen a king from among them who came, it was said, from Clermont in Beauvaisis; and they elected the worst of the bad. This king was called Jack Goodman.
uprising. This is perhaps a technique to further illustrate the wickedness of this man and cast a villain in his narrative. Despite the previously repeated insistence that the rebels were ‘sans chief’, it is curious that a leader here emerges, perhaps not coincidentally in the midst of such horrific violence. Interestingly, the name of the leader given is that of ‘Jake Bon Homme’ or *Jacques Bonhomme*, making a reference to the pejorative title given to peasants. However, the only documented name of any known leader was that of Guillaume Cale and this name is only mentioned in the letters of remission. Sumption describes Cale as ‘a rich peasant from the village of Mello, south of Clermont…’ He also posits that Cale had joined forces with local noblemen and soldiers, and that he couldn’t have depended on the support of the peasants alone.

The idea of collaboration among peasants acting over a wide region is one that is accepted to some degree by the chroniclers as well, though never in terms of any kind of coordination or collective agency. We can see this in the following passage in which the influence of different regions is evident. The chroniclers here note the wide range of activity by men “of the same mind”:

*Le Bel:*

Ilz ardirent et abastirent en Byauvoisis plus de LX bonnes maisons et forts chasteaulx, et se Dieu n’y eust mis remede par sa grace, le mischief fut si multiplié que les communaultés eussent tous les nobles destruit, et saintte Esglise, et toutes riches gens par tous pays, car en celle maniere faisoient celles gens ou pays de Brye et de Partoys, sur la riviere de Marne, et convint tous les nobles

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23 See Siméon Luce’s *Histoire de la Jacquerie*, as his primary focus is on the role of the letters of remission in the aftermath of the uprising.


25 Sumption, 329.
hommes, chevaliers et escuiers qui eschaper poeurent, dames et damoiselles, affuir à Myaux en Brye l’ung aprez l’autre, en pure chemise aucuns.  

Froissart:  
Il ardirent ou abatirent bien, où pays de Biauvoisis et environ Corbie et Amiens et Mondidier, plus de .LX. bonnes maisons et fors castiaux. Et, se Dieux n’y eeuist mis remede par sa grace, li meschiefs fuist si moutepliés que toutes communautez eeuissent destruit gentilz hommez, Sainte Eglise après et touttez rices gens par tous pays. Car toute en telle maniere si faittes gens faisoient ens où pays de Brie et de Partois; et convint touttez les dammes et les dammoiselles dou pays et lez chevaliers et escuiers qui escaper leur pooient, affuir à Miaux en Brie, l’un aprïés l’autre, em pur lor cotez, enssi que elles pooient ossi bien la duçoise de Normendie et fuisson de hautez dammes comme autrez, se elles se volloient garder de y estre viollees et efforchies et puis aprïés tuees et mourdries.  

The “rightful” resolution of the “wrongful” uprisings here becomes visible with the reference to God’s intervention, ‘Dieu n’y eust mis remede par sa grace…’ Obviously with religion playing a vital role in their daily lives, this statement would be a reflection of a just and expected outcome on the part of the chroniclers. However, it is also an indication that the beliefs of a religious nature are directly associated with what is seen as the “natural order” of society and as the kind of history that is worth recording. When they mention God’s intervention and the act of setting things right, the obvious implication is that the peasants upset a natural order that had its

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26 Le Bel: They destroyed and burnt more than sixty beautiful homes and strong castles in the Beauvaisis. So much had the mischief multiplied that had God not remedied matters by His grace, the commoners would have destroyed all the nobility, the Holy Church, and all the rich throughout the entire country, because these people did the same in the regions of Brie, Perthois, and along the banks of the Marne. It behoved all the noblemen, knights, and esquires, who could escape, [along with] their ladies and maidens, to flee to Meaux in Brie; one after another, they fled, wearing only their nightshirts.  

27 Froissart: Those evil men burned more than sixty houses and castles in the Beauvais region round Corbie and Amiens and Montdidier. If God had not set things right by His grace, the mischief would have spread until every community had been destroyed and Holy Church afterwards and all wealthy people throughout the land, for men of the same kind committed similar acts in Brie and in Pertois. All the ladies of the region, with their daughters, and the knights and squires, were forced to flee one after another to Meaux in Brie as best they could, in no more than their tunics. This happened to the Duchess of Normandy and the Duchess of Orléans and to a number of other great ladies, like the humbler ones, as their only alternative to being violated and then murdered.
foundations in God’s creation of the world. Neither Le Bel, nor Froissart mention however, that the rules of an orderly society had been continually disregarded by the nobility in failing to protect the peasants, as was their traditional duty, nor the degree to which the violence of the peasants may have reiterated patterns of violence inflicted on the peasantry by the nobility in previous years.

In the passages from the chronicles of Le Bel and Froissart that we have examined thus far, we have in particular observed some references being made to a collaboration among rebelling populations over a wider-spread area, which seems to suggest some kind of organizational capacity if not some kind of organizational structure within the rebellions, which would stand at odds with the chroniclers’ continuing efforts to render them as lacking such an organizational capacity in their animalistic savagery. The passages below also make reference to a unifying principle, though they do so in differing ways, indicative of the different historical situations in which the two chroniclers are writing:

Le Bel:
On se doibt bien esmerveillier dont ce courage vint à ces meschans gens en divers pays loing l’ung de l’aultre et tout en ung mesme temps, se ce ne fut par le pourchas et conseil d’aucun de ces gouverneurs et recehepeurs de maletotes qui ne voulsissent pas que la paix se feist ou royaume, par quoy ilz fussent osezt de leurs offices. Aucuns souspechonnoient l’evesque de Laon qui estoit et fut tousjours malicieux, et sur le prevost des marchans pour tant qu’ilz estoient d’une secte, et d’ung accord, et du conseil du roy de Navarre. Je ne sçay s’ilz en furent coulpables, mais je m’en tairay à tant et parleray du remede que Dieux y envoya.28

28 Le Bel: One must marvel at how such boldness came to these wicked people all at the same moment, separated from one another and scattered in various places, if it had not been instigated and advised by some of those governors and tax collectors, who did not wish for peace in the kingdom because they would lose their offices. Some suspected the bishop of Laon, who was and has always been spiteful, and the provost of merchants, since they were of the same party, shared the same ideas and received aid from the king of Navarre. I do not know if they were guilty and will not dwell on it; instead, I will speak about the remedy God sent us.
Froissart:
Toutte enssamble mannierrre de si faittez gens se maintenoient entre Paris et Noyon et entre Paris et Soissons et entre Soissons et Hen, en Vermendois et par toute le terre de Couchi. Là estoient li grant maufeteur et essillient que en le terre de Couchy que en le terre de Valois, que en l’evesquet de Laon, de Soissons et de Senlis…°

Le Bel’s political commentary is crucial, as it openly displays the differences between the two chronicles. Le Bel, who was writing at the time of the uprising would have had more immediate access to information concerning the key figures and coinciding events of the time, whereas Froissart in writing about thirty years after the Jacquerie took place, might be expected to have been less concerned with making specific connections between events of political upheaval. For all the differences here and elsewhere that distinguish the perspectives of Le Bel and Froissart from each other, both nevertheless concur in considering that, although the uprisings were taking place throughout the kingdom and therefore had to involve a common cause and organization, they did not believe the peasants capable doing these things on their own. Le Bel specifically mentions two powerful men, ‘l’evesque de Laon’ and ‘le prevost des marchans’ as the only possible way the peasants could have organized a revolt on such a large scale.°

Le Bel continues with his accusation of a collaboration in the next passage. There is an emphasis once again, on the lack of agency among the peasants, especially when he reinforces that the Jacques wouldn’t never have acted ‘sans le confort d’aucuns aultres certainement’ or ‘without the encouragement of others.’ This idea that the peasants couldn’t have acted of their own volition plays a role in the chroniclers’ determination to emphasize collaboration:

° Froissart: Other wicked men behaved in just the same way between Paris and Noyen, and between Paris and Soissons and Ham in Vermandois, and throughout the district of Coucy….

° Le Bel’s mention of ‘l’evesque de Laon’ and ‘le prevost des marchans’ refers to the Bishop of Laon and the Provost of Merchants, Étienne Marcel, although Le Bel never uses his name in the chronicle.
Le Bel:
Comment eust on poeu penser que telles gens eussent osé encommencier celle dyablerie, sans le confort d’aucuns aultres certainement, il est à croire mesmement ou royaume de France. Par semblable maniere manda le sire de Coussy gens partout où il le poeut avoir; si courut sus ses voisins, et le destruit, et en pendi, et fist morir de male mort tant que merveil le seroit à recorder; et avoient ces meschans gens ung chappitaine qu’on appelloit Jaque Bonhomme, qui estoit un parfait villain et vouloit adevenir que l’évesque de Laon l’avoit enhorté à ce faire, car il estoit de ses hommes. Le seigneur de Coussy aussy n’amoit pas ledit evesque.31

As there is no corresponding passage of Froissart’s to compare with Le Bel’s rendering, in this case, we may assume as we have done above, that Froissart may not have been familiar with political specifics of the Jacquerie and these specifics may not have been as important to him, resulting in him leaving out this passage entirely. Le Bel once again mentions the Bishop of Laon as a prime suspect in the collaboration, once again taking away from the peasants’ agency. This assumption also has its roots in the traditional views of the peasantry during this time. Freedman sums it up with: “Peasants were supposed to be stupid, an enduring image of the countryman common across boundaries and time.”32 This would no doubt be a characterization with a lasting legacy and would influence Le Bel’s belief that the uprising itself could not have taken place without the interference or guidance of the nobility.

The climax of the Jacquerie, which comes at the fortified city of Meaux, are recorded below in the last passages from the chroniclers to be cited in this thesis. Noblemen and women

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31 Le Bel: How can anyone think that such people could have dared to begin to perform such diabolic acts without support from others? Can one believe it, that such help could have even come from within the kingdom of France? In a similar way, the lord of Coucy sent his soldiers everywhere he could; they attacked their neighbors, destroyed them, hanged them, and had them killed by such miserable means that would be unimaginable to record. And these wicked men had a captain called Jacques Bonhomme, who was nothing but a lout, who let on that the bishop of Laon encouraged him to do this, since he was one of his men, and also the lord of Coucy did not like this bishop. 

32 Freedman, Images of the Medieval Peasant, 150.
have fled in order to seek refuge from the rebellion. The following passages describe in
detail the violent end the peasants faced at the hands of the knights ‘sans pité et sans merchi’,
perhaps unintentionally recollecting the similar way in which the *chevauchées* or raids had been
conducted on peasant lands:

**Le Bel:**
Et ces gens d’armes, quant ilz eurent tué ceulx qu’ilz trouverrent, ilz se retirèrent, 
puis bouterrent le feu en la ville, et l’ardiren jusques au marchié, et priren tout ce 
qu’ilz trouverrent, car il leur sembla que les gens de la ville fussent de leur 
adverse partie, puisqu’ilz avoien laisse entrer ceulx de Parys ainsy. 
Ces seigneurs, dames et damoiselles, demournèrent longuement en ce marchié à 
grand mesaïse, aprez ce que celle belle aventure leur fut avenue, laquelle fut mout 
belle pour eulx et pout toute crestienté, car s’elle fut tournée au contraire, ces 
gens n’eussent jamais esté reboutez, ains fussent tousjours multiples en orgueil et 
leir dyablerie, et s’enforçhassent de jour en jour contre les nobles, et tant se 
fussent eslevez par le monde, se Dieu n’y eut mis remede par sa saintte 
misericorde, France especialment estoit deffait. Quant le prevost des marchans 
sceuren ces nouvelles et ceulx de sa secte, ilz firent semblant d’en ester 
courouchiez; mais oncques personne qui y alast ne fut corrigée ne punie par 
eulx.33

**Froissart:**
Briefment, il en tuerent ce jour plus de .VIIm. ne j [alain] n’en fuist nulx escappés se il 
les volsissent avoir cachiés plus avant. 
Et quant li gentil homme retournerent, il bouterent le feu en le dessous terraine 
ville et l’ardiren toutte et tous les villains dou bourch qu’il peurent ens clore. 
Depuis ceste desconfiture qui enssi fu faitte à Miaux, ne se rassamblerent il nulle 
part car li sirez de Couchy avoit grant fusion de gentils hommes aveccq lui, qui 
les mettoient affin partout où qu’il les trouvoient sans pité et sans merchi.34

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33 *Le Bel:* When the soldiers had killed all those they could find, they pulled back and then set the town on fire, 
burning it as far as the Marché, and they took everything they could find. They saw the townsman as their 
adversaries, since they had let those from Paris enter. These lords, ladies, and maidens had lived long enough in this 
Marché in great discomfort before this great fortune arrived, which was not only very sweet for them but for all 
Christianity. Had it gone the other way, these people would have never been stopped; instead they would have 
continued multiplying in pride and in their diabolic acts, and day after day they would have become stronger against 
the nobility. And many others [like them] would have arisen everywhere had God not remedied matters through his 
divine mercy. Certainly France would have been defeated. When the provost of merchants and his cronies heard the 
news, they made a show of being enraged, but no one who had supported [the Jacques] was reprimanded or 
punished by them.

34 *Froissart:* They exterminated more than seven thousand Jacks on that day. Not one would have escaped if they had 
not grown tired of pursuing them. When the nobleman returned, they set fire to the mutinous town of Meaux 
and burnt it to ashes, together with all the villeins of the town whom they could pen up inside. After that rout at Meaux, 
there were no more assemblies of the Jacks, for the young Lord de Coucy, whose name was Sir Enguerrand, placed
Le Bel mentions earlier that ‘bands of men slipped out of Paris, gathered together in a prearranged place – fully six thousand of them – and headed for Meaux’, drawing once again a political conclusion and associating the Jacquerie with the uprisings of the merchants of Paris. Froissart also mentions the people coming from Paris to Meaux when they heard that a large number of noblemen and women were gathered there, but does not connect the events in a political way. Le Bel ends his chapter with a preview of the events to come in Paris by mentioning the Provost of Merchants (Étienne Marcel) as one of the key figures. The next chapter will in fact link the uprising in Meaux with the unrest in Paris.

Regarding modern scholarship, it is debatable whether or not the Jacques were in collusion or even, communication with the Provost or other leaders of the Paris rebellion. In his chapter on the uprising, Raymond Cazelles argues that because the occupations of the rebels are so varied in the letters of remission, the Jacquerie cannot be classified as a peasant rebellion.\textsuperscript{35} However, even if certain members of the rebellion were artisans and tradesmen such as those Cazelles has highlighted, it is fair to say that they could have also suffered from the years of famine, drought, plague and war.\textsuperscript{36} This in no way minimizes the suffering of the peasants, but adds a certain justification to their cause, as the misery had reached a larger part of the population by the time of their uprising. Furthermore, the presence of artisans in the letters of

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\textsuperscript{36} Cazelles, 76. Cazelles lists the occupations found in the letters of remission as: ‘shoemakers, coopers, masons, sellers of eggs, poultry, cheese, butchers and cartwrights.’
remission does not necessarily indicate communication between the Jacques and the rebels involved in Paris.

The violence at Meaux does present a complication, as both groups were heavily involved in the fighting that took place there, as the chroniclers imply. The descriptions that are provided for us however, illustrate the event as a scene of disarray with men coming in from Paris and mixing with the Jacques. In the passage above in Le Bel’s interpretation of the Meaux episode, he also mentions that the people of the town of Meaux itself had let the Parisians in, ‘puisqu’ilz avoient laisse entrer ceulx de Parys ainsy.’ It is very likely that when the Parisian rebels heard word of the peasants marching on Meaux, they decided it would be an opportune time to attack, with extra men and arms for their cause.

How the Parisians heard of the uprising in the countryside once again opens the debate on collaboration and communication between the bourgeois and the peasants. Sumption, for example insists on the communication between the two groups as the explanation for the joint uprising at Meaux. He states that Guillaume Cale, as leader of the Jacquerie ‘sent a delegation to the leaders of Paris.’ Encouraged by the attacks on the nobility, Étienne Marcel and Cale would exchange messages in order to organize a more effective raid.37 This argument strengthens the idea of Cale as a leader of the Jacquerie and one who was taken seriously by the Parisians. The notion presented by the chroniclers of the peasants as randomly attacking is strongly challenged by both Sumption and Cohn. Cohn also refutes the idea of the bourgeois rebels leading the Jacques by stating that, ‘…although the Jacques and Parisians communicated and for a brief

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37 Sumption, *Trial by Fire*, 331.
moment were involved in military operations against the nobility in the Île de France and at Meaux, bourgeois leaders do not appear to have led the peasants. 38

As the chroniclers have attempted to take away from the peasants’ agency through their beliefs that they could have only been acting under the instruction of someone in a position of power, historians now agree for the most part, that this isn’t the straightforward case Le Bel and Froissart present it as. In relegating the actions of the peasants to random acts of violence, it greatly diminishes the previous years of suffering as a result of famine, plague, as well as the war and abuses at the hands of the routiers, or indeed their own landlords, as we see with the example from the Chronique normande. These are the circumstances which would have been neglected the most by Le Bel and Froissart in their attempt to draw attention to the nobility’s concerns and fixation on the notion of chivalry. As we have seen through the textual analysis of their writings, the history of the peasants in the Jacquerie is obscured and often distorted in order to fit the biases of the chroniclers.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Although I have chosen to highlight the Jacquerie from the perspective of two specific chroniclers, there are still other chronicles that I did not explore, including the official king’s chronicle or *La Chronique de règnes de Jean II et Charles V*, the chronicle of the abbey of Saint-Denis, the chronicle of Jean de Venette, and the English chronicle, *The Anonimalle Chronicle*. In a larger study, these would provide more information for comparing views on the uprising. However, with the length of this thesis, I chose to focus specifically on Le Bel and Froissart, who share a connection with their style, as well as their patronage. Their chronicles also provide insight into the limitations of chroniclers writing for the nobility.

Whilst searching for a lost history, such as the story of the peasants involved in the Jacquerie, the primary importance is to remember these limitations and preconceptions of those responsible in recording the events. While Le Bel’s decision to write a history in prose was an innovation at the time and Froissart’s later decision to abandon his own poetic style in favor of Le Bel’s model were admirable attempts at the documentation of history, the partialities of the chroniclers are still present. The idea of a recorded history is introduced to us through these chronicles, but the focus is taken away from the peasants experiencing the events and is placed on the intended audience instead. While the nobility is favored through this lens, we are still able to identify an ideology of the peasants through the very perspective Le Bel and Froissart are offering.

When the uncovering of such an ideology or motive depends on the interpretation of the chronicles with their biases in mind, it is also essential to examine the conditions of the peasants at the time. I have done so through the detailed analysis of the peasantry in Chapter 3, which emphasizes the varying degrees of the peasant class, the order of society, and the
nobility’s stereotypical view of the peasants. The differences among the peasant class are unnoticed by the chroniclers in their determination to cast the peasant as the villain or the “other”, based on their class-determined preconceptions. Chapter 3 also explains the significance of social structure in French medieval society. The concept of maintaining an order was essential to the balance of their society, yet what we see is the abandonment and neglect of these roles by the nobility during the Hundred Years’ War. The reluctance on behalf of the nobility to accept their complicity in the uprising is also crucial to understanding the events from the point of view of the chroniclers, in which the years of the peasants’ suffering is entirely disregarded.

Considering all of the traumatic events experienced by the peasants in the years leading up to the revolt, their ideology although obscured by the chroniclers is evident to those aware of the historical background. The drought, poor harvests, famine, and plague by the peasants would have led to immense misery for the peasantry, although largely ignored by the nobility. The chevauchées and violence by raiding routiers continuously carried out on the peasants and their land during the Hundred Years’ War adds another significant amount of distress to an already weak and suffering population. Having observed all of these conditions, the resulting situation of an uprising no longer seems surprising or random as the chroniclers have stated. Whether or not these acts were fulfilled by the peasants through an existing ideology, the importance here is on their conditions and the understanding of the suffering they experienced.

Going further, it is possible that the acts of violence by the Jacquerie during their uprising were based on the very model they had seen in the violence of the chevaliers and routiers in previous years. While Le Bel and Froissart focus on the importance of upholding chivalry, they seem oblivious to the abuses of the chevaliers in the years leading up to the Jacquerie. The emphasis for the chroniclers is nevertheless on the extent of the violence carried out by the
peasants, perceived as a disruption to the natural order, an order which had already been unsettled by the nobility. We have also seen the stress the chroniclers place on the idea of the peasants being leaderless and unaware of their actions. This assumption takes away from the peasants’ agency and any possible ideology.

The limits of the chroniclers are demonstrated in examples such as the one above in the instance of leaderless men attacking at random. With such limitations and preconceived notions, it has been difficult to attain the lost history of the peasants, but through their exclusions and biases, the history becomes clearer. It is often in what they do not include that tells us the most about the situation facing the peasants at the time. While the Jacquerie appears to exist only as an insignificant moment in the chroniclers’ heroic tales of Edward III and the Hundred Years’ War, the very inclusion of such an event validates its importance.

Although the Jacquerie lasted little more than two weeks and was geographically limited to the countryside surrounding Paris, it was during this time that the traditional order of French medieval society was challenged from an unexpected direction. While previous peasant concerns were dismissed by Le Bel and Froissart, it is only when the power of the nobility is undoubtedly questioned that we see the emergence of the peasant in the chronicles. It may be fair to say that it is the first example of the peasant being included in the historical record in French vernacular, albeit in a negative way. The chroniclers’ limitations and biases still necessitate the need to categorize the peasant as the “other”, but the peasants themselves have become increasingly difficult to ignore as their actions have a direct impact on the lives of the nobility. The Jacquerie therefore marks the beginning of a long history of the peasants’ struggle to become recognized in the face of an oppressive order of society.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Kramer is a candidate for a master’s degree in French and Francophone Studies at the University of Florida, to be awarded in August 2018. Originally from Maine, she received her bachelor’s degree in 2013 from the University of Maine in French and German. Jennifer also spent two semesters in Angers, France where she studied at the University of Angers. Here she developed an interest in medieval history, which she hopes to continue to pursue in the future.