Feast And Famine:

Conspicuous Consumption in the Avignon Papacy

by

Gena Merrill

Mentor: Carol Lansing

Seminar director: Harold Marcuse

History Honors Seminar, 1997-98.

Carol-
this is a
huge thank you
for all your help, support
and enthusiasm during the
last 3 years. You have helped
make my time here interesting and
fun. Thanx so much,
Gena

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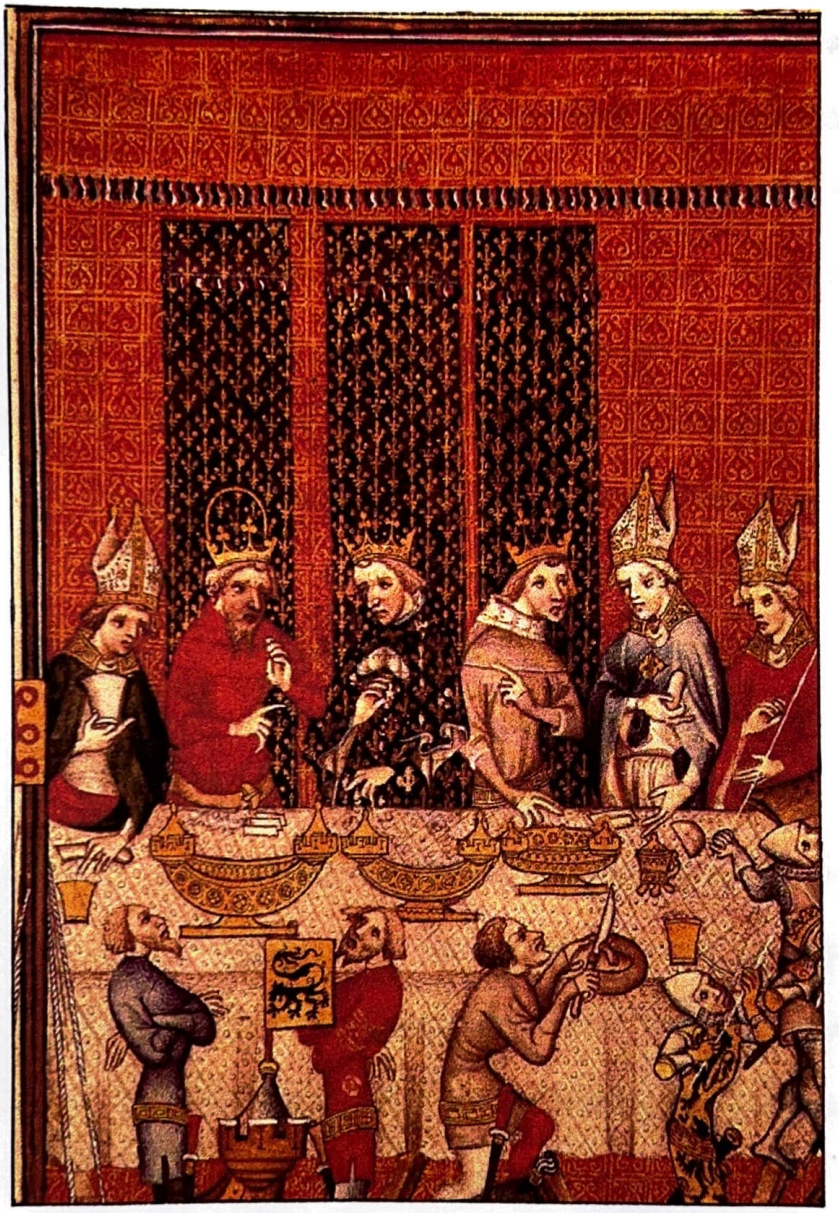

Figuer 1. The feast of Charles V of France for Emperor Charles VI. (Divonne, Maillard)

During the reign of Pope Clement VI (1342-1352) his cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi hosted a grand feast with Clement as the guest of honor. This feast was a very ostentatious affair. In the eyes of a twentieth century historian it seems innappropriate in the context of fourteenth century famine and disease. Europe was struggling to survive. So why would someone host such a lavish display while so many others were dying? I will argue that the answer is that feasting was a tool used by the wealthy and powerful to display their wealth and power and their position in the social hierarchy of the middle ages. Feasting was also an intrinsic part of the Christian religion and therefore was common practice for the upper class of the secular world and the spiritual one. Contemporaries of Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast were not likely to have remarked on this feast as anything out of the ordinary. While some did disapprove of a papal lifestyle of excess, this feast was remarkable to men of the time only for its grandeur, not for its timing.

This paper will explore the context for this feast that seems so out of place from a twentieth century viewpoint. What were the conditions Europe was facing in the mid-fourteenth century? Why was the papacy in Avignon and how did this affect the displays of power the curia chose to use? Who was criticizing the popes and what were they saying? What role did feasting play in medieval society? These will be the questions this paper will answer in order to understand how Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi could host such a feast in a time of dearth.

Life in the middle ages was difficult for everyone, but the mid-fourteenth century was more difficult than most. Those of high as well as low status suffered during this period. This was particularly true for the popes. During the centuries after the adoption of Christianity by Constantine, the papacy gradually accrued power and influence in the secular world. By the eleventh century Pope Gregory VII had hit the pinnacle of papal power and claimed to have the ultimate authority on earth. He came into conflict with temporal rulers because of this claim. In the thirteenth century Pope Boniface VIII again came into conflict with temporal leaders as he attempted to expand and enforce the power of the pope as monarch. He was physically imprisoned and beaten by the king of France's men, demonstrating that the popes had claimed more power than they exercised. This weakness was evident in the papacy's move to Avignon. They were driven from Rome by civil war, which they could do nothing to control, and challenged by two governments, those of France and England, who were becoming quite powerful. The papacy was effectively ostracized.

While the papacy struggled the rest of Europe was suffering problems of its own. Famine devastated Europe in 1315 as the result of bad weather and continued to be a problem for three consecutive years. It recurred off and on for the rest of the century. Bad weather destroyed crops and drowned draft animals. Fields could not be ploughed and little seed existed to plant in those that could. Such crops as could be harvested often rotted before they could be used, leaving people starving before the new crop could ripen.

Then, in 1347 the Black Plague made landfall in Italy when traders and soldiers fled the disease in the Crimea, taking ship for Europe. This virulent disease spread quickly and carried off as much as one hundred percent of the population in some areas. People were weak from lack of food and the disease had no barriers to its destructive power. People were so afraid of catching the disease that they let dead bodies rot in the street rather than risk infection to bury them.

The papacy was not immune to this crisis and it played its part in comforting the grieving by issuing universal absolution to some towns so that the dying would not lose their chance to go to heaven. But not all looked on the papacy as beneficent. Before and during the fourteenth century many people questioned the extravagant lifestyle of those living at the papal court. Groups of dissenters grew around strong leaders who shared a similar belief: The pope should live in poverty as Jesus and his apostles had. The authority of the pope was questioned because he strayed from what these groups believed was the one true way to salvation; poverty. The pope, his cardinals and curia functionaries adopted temporal wealth and pleasure and not the life of apostolic poverty and therefore they could not be saved and did not have the authority to run the church. The literati of the time also felt that the papacy was too excessive and had strayed from their rightful place as God's servants on earth. During the fourteenth century men like Petrarch and Dante voiced their feelings in their writing.

Critics of papal excess criticized feasting by the popes and their court. But feasting had been too important a tradition in the temporal and religious world to be given up. Throwing feasts for many guests was a way to show power and influence and put others in one's debt. Feasting commemorated special events such as battles won and weddings celebrated.

Feasting became a part of Christianity when Jesus broke bread with his apostles the night before he was crucified. Feasting to commemorate his birth and his parents, and eventually other saints, became a part of the medieval calendar. Feasting and fasting became intrinsic to Christianity. Only those outside orthodox Christianity would try to stop the servants of God on earth from practicing this basic Christian office, especially when it was held more for personal glory than for the glory of God.

One such feast was held by Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi during the reign of Clement VI as pope. This feast was notable to modern historians for its juxtaposition to the hunger and death that were ravaging the continent. To contemporaries it was remarkable for its magnificence, which can be seen by the detail with which it was recorded. To this historian it seems an odd time to be feasting friends while so many others were dying, but did contemporaries who knew of the meal ever question it? It seems they did not. It would have been unusual if they had and would have aroused suspicion of heretical ideas. Feasting was an integral part of life for the élite of the middle ages. One more feast, no matter how fabulous, would not raise many eyebrows.

The magnitude and timing of Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast gives us a clue into the place of feasting in medieval society. Despite the criticism of the pope's lavish lifestyle he did not abstain from this feast because feasting was too valuable a tool to be eschewed no matter what the circumstances outside. Feasting, along with other displays of wealth, were used to show one's place in the power structure of medieval society.

In order to understand how feasting functioned as a tool of wealth and power it is important to know the etiquette and ritual that went along with it. Power and wealth were displayed not only through the grandeur of the setting and the elegance of the food, but through the smooth performance of the event by those who served it. Panters cut the bread used as trenchers. Cupbearers made sure no one had an empty cup. Carvers knew how to carve any meat and did so in front of the guests. The cook, the steward and the chamberlain all played their part in the effective display without ever being seen. And social etiquette was honed to a fine point when it came to the seating arrangements and who got the best quality salt and bread.

Chapter 1

The Move To Avignon

Before the famine and the plague descended on Europe, the papal court moved from Rome to Avignon. This move was the result of pressures outside the curia and forced the pope to separate himself from his seat of power. The popes of Avignon used feasting as a tool, long employed by popes to demonstrate their wealth and power, as a continuation of, or connection to, that power based in Rome. The fourteenth century was such a troubled time for the papacy that they needed feasting and other displays of wealth and power to bolster their status and lay claim to the power their position as Christ's vicar had always held.

The reasons behind the papal move to Avignon were complex. Political maneuvering by the king of France came into direct conflict with the papacy under Boniface VIII. Their quarrel culminated in the movement of the entire curia from its ancestral seat of power in Rome to Avignon. It was Pope Clement V in 1305 who moved court. The move, originally meant to be temporary, lasted for about seventy years[1]. The move was precipitated not so much by Clement as by his predecessor, Boniface VIII (1294-1303).[2] Boniface was the last in a series of popes to promote papal monarchy: The idea that the pope is the ultimate head of all matters temporal and spiritual.[3] What Boniface failed to calculate was the reaction of the centralizing governments in Europe, especially that of Phillipe le

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[1] G. Mollat, The Popes of Avignon: 1305-1378, (Thomas Nelson and Sons Publishing, London) 1963 pg. xvii.
[2] Joseph Lynch, The Medieval Church; A Brief History, (Longman, London) 1992 pg. 320.
[3] Warren Hollister, Medieval Europe, a Short History 7th ed., (McGraw-Hill inc. New York) 1994 pp 234-235

Bel (the fair) of France. Phillipe countered Boniface's declaration of sovereignty with his own declaration that Boniface was a heretic.[4] Phillipe called Boniface to trial and eventually captured him at his palace at Anagni. Boniface was freed by locals in the town but died soon afterward.[5] The capture of a pope by a secular ruler symbolized the limits of papal influence on the monarchs of Europe.

The authority the pope wielded, from the time of the first pope, was based on the belief that the popes were the direct successors of St. Peter, called the Bishop of Rome, to whom Christ had given the keys to heaven, symbolizing the leadership of the church. As the early church evolved in the middle ages, canon lawyers trained in the writings of the bible and the church fathers, gave that voluntary belief system a legal definition, calling the pope the "universal bishop" of the church.[6]

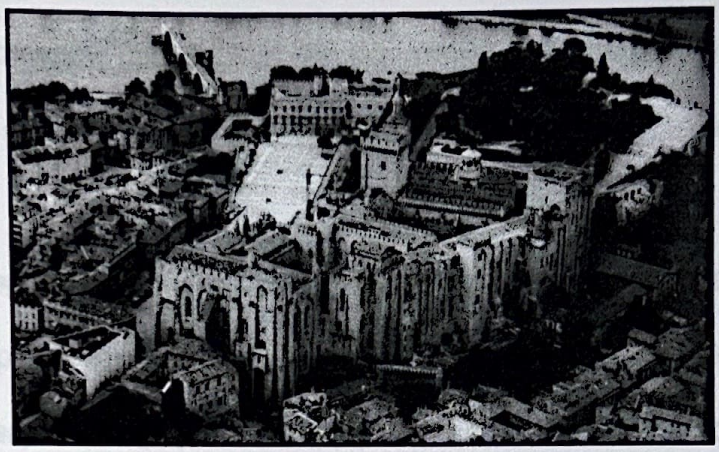

Figure 3 Papal palace in Avignon (Holmes)

Over time these lawyers created a papal law court, separate and distinct from those courts presided over by lay leaders. They also formed a complex

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[4] Jeffrey Russell, A History of Medieval Christianity: Prophecy and Order, (Harlan Davidson inc. Illinois) 1968 pg. 169.
[5] Hollister, pg 235.
[6] Lynch, pg. 315

bureaucracy that worked to realize the pope's theoretical authority in practice.[7] The pope's authority became so effective that in the eleventh century Gregory VII claimed to have power even over secular rulers and stated that he could depose them from their thrones. As one historian put it, " the popes of the high middle ages emerged in no small measure as sacral monarchs, true successors of the Roman Emperors."[8] The popes took on numerous titles, wore fancy regalia, and paraded around their domain with impressively outfitted cortèges. They took their role as the head of God's church very seriously, however they interpreted it.[9]

Although Gregorian reforms and papal leadership of the crusades had helped to define papal power, by the time Boniface VIII came to be pope the prestige of the papacy was largely drained away. Papal power had split into two realms: one based on spiritual power and the other on temporal power. The spiritual power stemmed from the custody of the keys of heaven and the temporal power from possession of fiefs over which the popes were lords and which produced wealth for the popes.[10] It was their power over the papal states and their control of church offices and tithes that was challenged by rising secular monarchies. The untimely end of Boniface VIII was a clear example of that.

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[7]Lynch, pg. 315
[8]Francis Oakley, The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages, (Cornell University Press, Ithica) 1979. pg. 27
[9]Oakley, pg 27.
[10]Oakley, pg. 28

Boniface attempted to enforce the tenets of papal monarchy against the rising power of the centralizing governments of Phillipe IV of France and Edward I of England. These two monarchs were preparing to do battle with each other over contested territory in the south of France. To finance their war they taxed the clergy of their respective countries, but canon law protected clergy from taxation by lay rulers. In response to this affront, Boniface issued *Clericis Laicos*, a document that stated in no uncertain terms that the clergy was not to be taxed by lay rulers.[11]

Both rulers forced their clergy to choose between their pope and their nation, showing them just how powerful the earthly kings had become. Phillipe even imprisoned a bishop and denied the papal courts jurisdiction in the case, which went against canon law. He also circulated forged papers which gave the impression that the pope criticized the French people. Phillipe then called the first meeting of the *Estates General,* where he condemned Boniface as a heretic and a sodomite, and called for Boniface to stand trial. Then Phillipe sent his adviser William of Nogaret to Italy. William actually captured Boniface, who died soon after.[12]

Boniface's successor Benedict XI died after one year as pope. He was followed by Clement V (1305-1314),[13] who took a more conciliatory stance with Phillipe. He agreed to be crowned in Lyons rather than Rome, and he became

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[11]Lynch, pg. 321
[12]Lynch, pg. 322
[13]Lynch pg. 323

involved in peace negotiations between France and England.[14] Clement was assailed by many difficulties that ultimately led to the move of the papal court to Avignon. First, Phillipe threatened to reopen the suit against Boniface which had not been resolved before his death. Second, Clement had to appease Phillipe who had been named general of the crusade Clement hoped would soon leave for the Holy Land. Third, the territories around the Papal States were in a state of civil war as the Guelfs and the Ghibellines (rival factions for power) battled with each other in the streets.[15]

Clement was a French pope and a majority of the cardinals were also from France, so Clement had no trouble convincing the court to move out of Italy where they felt like foreigners and outsiders. Clement settled in a small monastery in Avignon. Although Avignon was not in France, but in the Holy Roman Empire, it was a French speaking area and only a river's width away from the French King's territory, so the French cardinals felt more comfortable there.[16] At the same time, Avignon was in a papal fief. The lords of the fief were the kings of Sicily and the pope felt he could trust them as protectors. Avignon was a town on major trade routes and well suited, after the construction of a splendid papal palace, to privacy and security for the popes[17]. Although this move was expedient for Clement, it was an exile from Rome in that it became unsafe for the papal court to reside there. This, along with Phillipe's stance

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[14] Mollat pg.xvii
[15] Mollat pp xvii-xxi
[16] Lynch pp 323-324
[17] Mollat pg. xix

toward the papacy, clearly revealed that the status and prestige of the papacy had diminished since Boniface's declaration.

In the face of such adversity, hosting a feast would have been a clear signal from the papacy that it maintained power and status. What more appropriate time for the popes to use feasting as a tool of social status?

Chapter II

Europe in the Fourteenth Century

Not long after Clement V settled the papacy in Avignon life became very difficult for the people of Europe and remained so for almost the entire century. People starved to death from almost one hundred years of periodic famine and they died in droves of the Black Plague. It is often hard to separate the numbers

Figure 4 Coffins of the dead (Holmes)

that died of famine and those that died of plague, but the population of Europe declined by a very large percentage in the fourteenth century. The contrast between Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast and the devastation of Europe is important

in that it suggests the purpose of feasting. Even though the pope's flock was dying, the need of the papacy to prove its place in the power structure of society demanded displays of wealth such as feasting.

The Great Famine of the fourteenth century was brought on by a combination of bad weather, severe rain at the wrong point in the growing season and an animal disease that killed off much of the livestock used to plough the heavy soils of Europe. As a consequence of livestock deaths, many crops could not be planted and those that could were often rained out before they could be harvested.

The first wave of famine hit Europe between 1315 and 1322, but for many

Figure 5 The Dance of Death (Holmes)

years afterward harvests were poor and people went hungry. The years 1330-1334, 1344, 1349-1351, 1358, 1360, 1371, 1374-1375, and 1390 were all years of meager harvests and unquenchable hunger.[18] Starvation affected people from the French Atlantic to Russia and from England to Italy. No area of Europe was spared famine.[19]

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[18] Harry A. Miskimin, The Economy Of Early Renaissance Europe, 1300-1460, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978) p. 26

[19] Miskimin, p. 25

Many factors came together to plunge Europe into famine. The population of the continent had steadily increased through the thirteenth century and had leveled out at a record high by the beginning of the fourteenth, so food supplies were stretched to the limit. In 1315-17 heavy rains fell during the summer growing season, destroying crops and drowning livestock. Floods devastated fields and pastures and rotted stored grain, leaving little food for people or livestock and little seed for the next year's crop. In areas of lighter soil the land was actually washed away, leaving no topsoil to plant in, while those areas of heavier soils had vital nutrients leached from them that inhibited plant growth in later seasons.[20]

At the same time a series of devastating livestock illnesses, called murrains, killed off great numbers of both draft beasts and food animals. In parts of Europe that depended on animal husbandry the cost of these diseases was devastating. Also hard hit were those rural areas that depended on draft animals to plough the thick, heavy soils that would grow their food crops. Some heavy soils required oxen teams of up to eight animals just to plough a field. In these cases the death of just two of the oxen could keep a town from growing its food for the next year. Poor grain harvests, meadows too damp to cut for hay, and damp conditions that rotted hay before it could dry all led to poor nutrition for domestic animals and left them more susceptible to the murrains.[21]

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[20] William Jordan, The Great Famine, Northern Europe In The Early Fourteenth Century (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996) p. 12, 24 and .31

[21] Jordan, pp. 35 and 37

Sheep were also affected by diseases brought on by bad weather. By the fourteenth century sheep had become a very important source of income. They produced the sought-after wool that fueled the thriving textile industries of England, Flanders and Italy, and they provided a common source of food for people of all ranks of society. Persistent rains during the early years of the fourteenth century brought on liverfluke; an infestation of parasitic worms in sheep. The deep, long-lasting cold of the winter of 1317-18 caused huge numbers of sheep to die and the mortality of newborns was very high.[22]

All these things combined to create a time of hardship for everyone, especially for those least able to afford to pay the high prices for food, and prices got very high. In the first three years of the famine prices for food rose as much as 800 percent.[23] In Paris the price of wheat went up to five times its previous level.[24] In England, at the beginning of the famine, the price of salt doubled from what it had been a decade before. The rains had washed away many of the pools used to collect it and thus salt was scarce.[25] The rains affected the growing of grapes, and those that did grow were of poor quality, thus wine prices went up as well.[26]

Because of the Murrains and drowning, meat prices went up. Sheep, horses and cattle were especially hard-hit by illness and weather, so people substituted pork for those other meats. Pigs were apt to survive the weather or

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[22] Jordan, pg 37
[23] Jordan, p.50
[24] Miskimin, pp. 25-26
[25] Jordan, pp. 52-54
[26] Jordan, p. 52

the famine because they could eat anything and were often kept in forests, less affected by the weather than fields, to forage for themselves. But with the rise in consumption of pigs their numbers dwindled.[27] Rabbits and fowl were also substituted for mutton and beef. They, too, were easy to maintain because of the limited dietary needs, but the chickens that were raised did get less to eat and therefore produced fewer eggs.[28] Along with eggs, the price of other animal products went up, such as cheese, butter, grease and fat.[29]

[27] Jordan, pp. 55-56
[28] Jordan, p. 56
[29] Jordan, p. 58

Figure 6 Burying the dead (McKay, Hill, Buckler)

It is difficult to judge the singular impact of the famine's devastation of Europe because, as often happens during times of starvation, sickness descended on the people of Europe and caused more devastation. In 1347 the Black Plague made its landing on Italian soil, brought in by Italian merchants and soldiers trading and fighting around the Black Sea. Not long after its landing in Italy the plague moved up into France and the rest of

Europe reaching Avignon in 1348 and covering Spain, Egypt, Eastern Europe, France, Germany, the Low Countries, Russia, England and Scandinavia.[30]

The Black Plague is often called the bubonic plague after the large blisters or *buboes* that developed under the arms or in the groin of the victim. But modern study of contemporary descriptions of the disease indicate that the bubonic form of the disease often brought on the pneumonic form which was the most virulent. This form of the plague, like pneumonia, was transmitted through coughing and sneezing, making it much more contagious than the bubonic form. Lacking modern medical knowledge it was almost always fatal.[31]

The first wave of the plague was the most virulent. It is estimated that it killed 1/3 to 1/2 of the population of some parts of Europe. In southern France the pre-plague population has been estimated at about 350,000-400,000. By 1410 this had dropped by a third or a half. In areas of Tuscany the population dropped by seventy percent. Though scholars of England's population believe that a pre-plague estimate of 3.7 million is low, the number had plummeted to 2.2 million by 1377, at least a forty-one percent drop. In German records from the time, of 170,000 place names mentioned, 23 percent disappear from the records, indicating the death or migration of the entire population of each community. Like the famine, the plague returned repeatedly throughout the century, about once every ten years. There was seldom a time that plague was

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[30]Geoffrey Marks, The Medieval Plague: The Black Death of the Middle Ages, (Doubleday & Co., New York) 1971, pp. 47-49

[31]Herlihy, pg 34.

not killing someone, somewhere in Europe during the second half of the fourteenth century.[32]

The famine discussed above, coming as it did before the plague, and the factors that brought it on played a pivotal role in the lethality of the plague when it hit Europe. The plague alone would not have carried off so many people if they had not been weakened by harsh weather leading to famine. The steady growth of the population of Europe in the thirteenth century had begun to level off by the beginning of the fourteenth. Soil exhaustion caused a decline in crops even before the famine, slowing growth, and it contributed greatly to the crop failures that caused the famine.[33]

Population numbers cannot give a reader a true feel for the devastation and fear brought on by the plague. Many contemporary authors, such as Boccaccio, left writings that give a more personal view of the tragedy. Boccaccio was a Florentine man born in 1313. In 1348 he wrote a story for himself and some of his young friends who fled to the Tuscan countryside to escape the ravages of the plague in their town. To entertain themselves they told stories to each other, which Boccaccio wrote down and called the Decameron. In the introduction to this work he described the condition of Florence as it suffered from the first wave of the plague. He wrote that the illness was sent by God to punish the wickedness of man, a common sentiment of the time. He described the appearance of the disease as black spots that moved from the underarm or

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[32]David Herlihy, *Ecological Conditions and Demographic Change*, in One Thousand Years: Western Europe in the Middle Ages, ed. Richard DeMolen, (Houton Mifflin Co., Boston) 1974. pp. 33-34
[33]Herlihy, pp, 35-36

groin over the rest of the body. "Neither a doctor's advice nor the strength of medicine could do anything to cure this illness," wrote Boccaccio. He compared the spread of the disease to the way fire spreads to dry and oily things. He was astonished by the strength of the plague as it passed from one to another even through infected garments. He related how he watched two pigs grapple over the infected cloak of a dead man only to have fits of convulsions and quickly die. Boccaccio also told of the different reactions people had to the fear of the disease. Some retreated into spirituality, praying constantly and foregoing any pleasure. Others did the opposite and hedonistically partook in every carnal pleasure. Still others fled to the country. Fear of the disease kept neighbor from helping neighbor: The sick were abandoned and few would bury the dead, leaving them to rot on public streets.[34]

Another Florentine, Matteo Villani (d. of plague 1363) also described the plague in his town. Matteo wrote after the first wave of the plague and had communication with travelers from other lands. His writings tell of the spread of the disease from Asia into Europe and how it was brought in. They describe the spread of the disease throughout Europe and relate that three out of five people in Florence died and that the same number had died "throughout the entire world." He, too, told of the great cruelty of those afraid to catch the illness from sick friends and relatives.[35]

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[34]Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron trans. and ed. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (W. W. Norton & Co., New York) 1977. pp. 3-8

[35]Matteo Villani in Readings in Western Civilization, vol. 4, ed. Julius Kirshner and Karl Morrison, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago) 1986. pp. 448-451

Paris was also ravaged by the plague. Jean de Venette, a Parisian monk, wrote of how the young died in this sickness and how the priests fled, refusing to perform the last rites over the dead, and how Pope Clement VI gave universal absolution to some towns and cities so that those who died could enter into God's kingdom.[36]

The fourteenth century was one of incredible struggle for the people of Europe. Starvation and plague were a fact of life for everyone in Europe for a hundred years. Those that survived dealt with hardship and grief. It was a strikingly austere time when merely getting enough to eat was a frightening uncertainty. Survival from one day to the next was left in God's hands even more so than usual and fear was everywhere. It is this atmosphere of fear and death that makes the lavish feast given by one cardinal in the papal curia so unbelievable to a twentieth-century historian. Despite all the hardship of the fourteenth century feasting was still employed by the wealthy because it served too valuable a purpose to put it aside.

[36] Kirshner and Morrison, pp 455-457

Chapter III

Mounting Criticism of the Papacy

Before and during the Avignon papacy the popes and their curia suffered attacks against their legitimacy by many groups. Heresies grew up around charismatic leaders who questioned the pope's authority as head of Christ's church. The power of the pope was said to be null because he did not embrace an apostolic life style. Learned men from the early thirteenth century through the mid-fourteenth, and beyond, spoke out against the popes through writing, adding their voices to the growing discontent with the lavishness of the papal court. According to critics of the papacy, no true authority could come from one so spiritually bereft as the pope, and he was spiritually bereft precisely because he lived lavishly, far from the examples of Christ and his apostles.

Once the popes moved to Avignon dissenters could also fault them for leaving their traditional sources of power. Peter had given the keys to God's kingdom to the bishop of Rome. Later popes would claim that because they were the descendants of that first Roman bishop, the source of their authority was that gift. Their authority was tied to Rome. This separation from the source of their power left the popes more vulnerable to criticism. Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast (and others like it) was a sign that despite appearances, the papacy was as prestigious as ever. But despite papal efforts, groups of people still rallied around the cause of spirituality through poverty.

Two of the earliest groups to espouse a doctrine of apostolic poverty were the Cathars and the Waldensians. The Cathars, formed by the late twelfth century, were a very popular sect in the south of France and northern Italy who pursued an ascetic lifestyle in order to be purified. They called those members who had eschewed all ownership and all earthly favor *perfecti*, or the perfect ones: The ones who are living the life of Christ.[37]Valdes, too, proclaimed poverty to be preferable to wealth in seeking God's favor. His followers, the Waldensians, maintained this view despite their persecution by the Inquisition.[38]

Inquisitor's records are a source of ample information about many sects that opposed the wealth of the church in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Bernard Gui was a papal inquisitor in the fourteenth century who interviewed many accused heretics from different sects. In his writings on the pseudo-apostles, in the 1320's, he clearly outlined the tenets of this heretical order. The pseudo-apostles sought to return to the state of poverty in which the apostles lived with Christ. Only through voluntary poverty could one attain perfection. Their initiation rights included vows of apostolic poverty for each member.[39]

The pseudo-apostles taught that the popes no longer wielded authority because they had forsaken their faith in Christ, both in their wealth and their corruption. Gui writes,

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[37] The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval Europe, ed. George Holmes, (Oxford University Press, Oxford) 1988. pg. 330

[38] Jeffery Russell, A History of Medieval Christianity: Prophecy and Order, (Halan Davidson, Arlington Heights) 1968. pg. 145

[39] Heresies of the High Middle Ages 2nd ed. trans. and ed. by Walter Wakefield and Austin Evans, (Columbia University Press, New York) 1991. pg 404.

"They (the pseudo-apostles) teach that all the authority once confirmed on the Roman Church by our Lord Jesus Christ has become utterly void and has ceased to exist because of the wickedness of prelates."[40] The pseudo-apostles claimed that the church of Rome had become fruitless and rejected. And because of this the pope had no authority to declare them heretics or to demand that they give up their ways of poverty.

To the pseudo-apostles the life of apostolic poverty was not only perfection but God's will as well. They believed that the pope had no power to perform the holy offices of the sacraments unless he lived in complete poverty as Peter had.[41] This was a pointed attack against the papacy and its wealth and power; one that shows that contemporary non-élites were very aware of the state of the papal court and that they questioned the legitimacy of papal claims to authority.

Along with the pseudo-apostles, the Beguins viewed the wealthy papacy as straying from God's word. This group, too, was accused of heresy because of their strong conviction of the need for poverty. They too felt that poverty equaled perfection and that it was God's will that all Christians be poor. Hadewijch of Brabant, a thirteenth century Beguin writer, sent a series of letters to a young Beguin instructing her on the ways of spirituality. Hadewijch warns her young friend of the sickness that comes with plenty and tells her, "We must forgo

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[40]Wakefield and Evans, pg. 405.
[41] Wakefield and Evans, pp. 405-406

everything if we are to be and to have everything."[42] She goes on to decry the state of the world saying that everyone loves themselves more than God and that they strive for riches and to be God.[43] The Beguins lived communally in "little houses of poverty." Some begged from door to door, displaying their vow of poverty for all to see. The Beguins, like the pseudo-apostles, believed that the pope had no authority to denounce their order or to give the Friars Minor (the Franciscans) sanction to gather foodstuffs for later use, which was contrary to the rule of St. Francis.[44]

Marsilius of Padua (1275-1342), rector of the University of Paris, also spoke out in criticism of papal claims to temporal power and the curia's accumulation of wealth. In his work *Defensor Pacis,* published in 1324, Marsilius attacked the doctrine of papal monarchy by writing that neither the pope nor any other church official should sit in judgment or have rulership over anyone. He based these claims on the life of Christ whom, he wrote, did not come into the world to dominate men or to judge them or to wield temporal power, but rather as a "subject as regards the status of the present life."[45]

He felt very strongly that it was wrong for the pope to act in judgment of others, especially those who were living closer to God's word than he was himself. Marsilius quoted many scriptures that spoke of the meritorious nature of

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[42]Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, (Oxford University Press, Oxford) 1986. Pg. 190.
[43]Petroff, pp. 189-192.
[44] Wakefield and Evans, pp. 414-417
[45] Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, as it appears in Patrick Geary's, Readings in Medieval History, vol. II (Broadview Press, Ontario) 1992. pg. 205 and 208.

poverty. He felt that because no man could be blessed except Jesus, others must earn their blessing, and poverty was one way to earn that blessing. Poverty was a virtue.[46]

Marsilius went on to describe how this virtue was linked to the denial of ownership. Only by taking the vow of the wayfarer (i.e. Jesus), that is, renouncing ownership of anything either alone or with others, could one live the virtue of poverty.[47] Those who succeeded in living that virtue he called perfect persons, not unlike the pseudo-apostles and the Beguins. The perfect person should renounce all ownership not only because Christ taught them so, but because it made them more contemptible in the eyes of other men, which was a fuller denial of earthly honor.[48] Marsilius stated his case using intricately worded dialectic (a form of discourse used by only the most educated men of the time), thus wielding a very powerful weapon against the power and splendor of the papacy. According to Marsilius, papal excess voided the papacy's function on earth and carried the popes farther and farther from their role as the shepherds of God's people. One could not shepherd when one no longer carried the moral authority to teach.

Perhaps the most influential group to support the idea of apostolic poverty was the Spiritual Franciscans. They were an offshoot of the Franciscan order, a spiritual group accepted by the church, dedicated to poverty, preaching and

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[46] Geary, pg. 217
[47] Geary, pg. 219
[48] Geary, pg. 221

charitable acts done outside the cloister.[49] The Franciscans strongly believed that no member should own property either individually or as a group. This belief was challenged by the Conventuals (the other Franciscans) who believed that some property ownership was necessary to survive. These two groups denounced each other and got into bitter struggles over doctrine, the spirituals claiming that poverty was the dogma of the church.[50] The Spiritual Franciscans felt that by living in poverty they were living the way of life that Christ and his apostles instituted. They identified their rule with the gospel and felt that their doctrine of absolute poverty was above the power of the pope to change it.

Pope John XXII (1316-1334)[51] rejected the ideas of the Spiritual Franciscans. He fought back against the insinuations by the Spiritual Franciscans that the papacy was far from God's word and that it had no authority. In his bull *Ad conditorem canonem* he undermined the position of the Spiritual Franciscans by stating that it was charity (giving to the poor) and not poverty (the denial of worldly goods) that was the basis for a perfect life.[52] He also issued a papal bull entitled *Quorundam Exigit*, which told the Spiritual Franciscans that they had to bow to the authority of legitimate superiors.[53] *Quorundam* also gave the Franciscan Order permission to gather and store food for future use.[54] This went against the Spiritual Franciscans' belief in absolute

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[49]Hollister, pp. 207-208.
[50] Decima Douie, The Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticalli, (University Press, Manchester) 1932. pg. 155.
[51] Yves Renouard, The Avignon Papacy; 1305-1403, (Faber and Faber, London) 1970. pg. 136
[52] Douie, pg. 160.
[53] James Heft, John XXII and Papal Teaching Authority, (Edwin Mellon Press, Lewiston) 1986. pg. 23
[54] Haft, pp. 21-23

poverty and brought out the true crux of the problem. Who was the legitimate authority to which they were supposed to bow? Who could make rules changing their ways of life? According to the Spiritual Franciscans and many others, the pope no longer held that power.

Along with the numerous heresies attacking the power and wealth of the papacy, members of the literati wrote scathing commentary about what they felt was the unholy state of the papacy. Walter von der Vogelweide, a German mercenary knight who wandered from court to court in the thirteenth century and was employed by the Holy Roman Emporer Frederick II in his war with the papacy,[55] wrote numerous scathing critiques of the papacy. About the practices of the popes he wrote in the early thirteenth century:

> St. Peter's chair is filled today as well
> as when 'twas fouled by Gerbert's sorcery;
>
> For he consigned himself alone to hell,
> While the pope thither drags all Christentie.
> Why are the chastisements of heaven delayed?
> How long will thou in slumber lie, O Lord?
>
> Thy work is hindered and they word gainsaid,
> thy treasurer steals the wealth that thou has stored.

[55]Kirshner and Morrison, pg. 360.

Thy ministers rob here and murder there, and o'er thy sheep a wolf has shepherd's care.[56]

This attack quite bluntly stated that the popes themselves, with their corrupt ways, were dragging Christians into hell. Because Frederick employed Vogelweide to write attacking the popes we can be sure that he could write with little concern for the consequences. He had a powerful protector.

Dante Alighieri, writing in the early fourteenth century, was perhaps the most widely read of the papal critics discussed in this chapter. His work, The Divine Comedy was a common addition to personal libraries. Dante organizes his version of hell in a series of concentric circles leading down to the very bottom, with each circle the home of increasingly severe sinners. Dante chose to put a series of popes into the eighth circle of hell, which is second from the bottom. This positioning is an indication of the severity of their sins in Dante's eyes.

In canto XIX the pilgrim Dante meets Pope Nicholas III, whom Dante places in hell for his acts of simony and nepotism, is (ironically) stuffed upside-down into a baptismal font with the soles of his feet on fire. When Dante approaches Nicholas, Nicholas mistakes Dante for Boniface VIII, who is to succeed him in his torment. Nicholas is amazed that Boniface has left the wealth and power of the church before his time. Dante explains that he is not Boniface, but chastises Nicholas because his greed as a pope crushed the good in the

[56] Kirshner and Morrison, pg. 377

world and exalted the depraved. He accuses the Church of Rome of playing whore to kings because it often worked for the good of secular rulers rather than the good of its flock. Finally he calls Nicholas an idolater, creating a God of gold and silver.The pilgrim Dante was speaking to Pope Nicholas III, but by the prophesy that Boniface VIII, and later Clement V, would follow him, the author Dante was making a strong statement directly to the papacy: its ways of wealth and power were contemptible and would only land the popes in hell.[57]

In 1350 Petrarch made known his opinion of the declining moral condition of the papal court. Petrarch, a man famous in the fourteenth century for his knowledge of the classics and his writing, hated the papal court at Avignon, where he worked under the patronage of Cardinal Giovanni. He called the papal court the New Babylon.[58] In his letters published in his book *Liber Sine Nomine,* Petrarch's feelings about the popes' lifestyles were made very clear. In letter five he wrote, "Here are enthroned the heirs of the fishermen--once poor, now remarkably forgetful of their origins. ...to see rich feasts in place of sober fasts...".[59] And in letter ten he compared the popes of Avignon to Nimrod, the son of Noah who built Babylon, in their power and to Cambryses, the king of Persia who subjected the Egyptians, who "...worn out by feasting and surfeited by the slaughter of his men, was reduced from haughty lordship to wretched poverty,".[60]

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[57] Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, trans, Mark Musa (Penguin Books, New York, 1971) pp. 242-244.
[58] Norman Zacour, Petrarch's Book Without A Name, (Toronto, Pontifical Institute Of Medieval Studies, 1973) PP 14-16
[59] Zacour, p. 59
[60] Zacour, pp. 71-73

Ordinary people in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were aware of the lifestyle and practices of those in the upper reaches of the papal court. Some people joined heretical sects based on adoption of apostolic poverty,a direct reaction to the accumulation of wealth and power by the church. These groups questioned the pope's authority based on their perception of his lack of spirituality. These attacks troubled the papacy and inquisitors were appointed to convert them back to the truth or to hand them over to secular powers as traitors. Reaction is less clear in regard to the intellectuals, who could also be condemned for heresy, and who, in their own way, were spreading their discontent with the papal court through their writings. We must remember, however, that although heretical groups and some scholars attacked the papacy, the majority of society was firmly rooted in the belief that the pope was the vicar of Christ and the true leader of the church.

While these critics claimed the papacy had lost its authority because of its wealth, the papacy fought to prove its continuing authority by proclaiming that charity was the basis for spirituality, not poverty. Papal feasting, at which the poor were often guests and from which the leftovers were given to the poor, was considered a very appropriate means of displaying papal charity.

Chapter IV

The Traditional Feast

Figure 7 A feast for Charlemagne (Divonne, Maillard)

In an atmosphere of such intense criticism and at a time of such tribulation, why would Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi host such a lavish affair and invite the pope? The cardinal and the pope were aware of both the criticism and the plague, but they feasted anyway. Feasting certainly played a part in the Christian religion and the ceremonial life of the upper class. In the middle ages it

was seen by some to be the duty of those in high places to hold feasts. Feasting could bolster support, create indebtedness and display power through wealth. All of these uses were very important to the papacy in its exile in Avignon.

Feasting had a long tradition in medieval society. Intimately tied to wealth and power, it was used to display the wealth and power of the participants. The ideal of the feast was one of love and fellowship, and even if that was not always the truth, feasting was important as a symbol of wealth and power and ties of mutual dependence as host and guest profited from the feast. Thomas Nashe, writing in the eighteenth century, summed up the duty of the nobility in regards to feasting:

> It is the honor of the Nobility
> To keepe high dayes and solumne festivals:
> Then, to set their magnificence to view
> To frolick open with their favorites,
> And use their neighbours with all curtesie[61].

Feasts appear in the records of many great noble houses. In 1257 The king of Scotland was asked to feast with the king of England. This dinner included so many people that a tent had to be set up in the courtyard to accommodate them all[62]. Royal weddings were always cause for celebration and feasting was an integral part of that celebration. When Edward III of England

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[61] Thomas Nashe, *Summer's Last Will and Testament in Works* vol. 3 cited by Bridget Henisch in Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society, (Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania) 1976. pg. 56

[62] [62] William Edward Mead, The English Medieval Feast, (Houghton Mifflin, Boston) 1931. pg. 181

Figure 8 William the Conquerer feasts before the battle of Hastings (Divonne, Maillard)

married Phillipa of Hainault in 1329 a huge feast was held for the bride when she entered her new city and was crowned Queen[63].

Others besides the papacy were giving feasts during the difficult years of the famine. In 1348 a London vintner threw the most memorable feast of the year. This middle class merchant had enough status in London society to host five kings, Those of England, France, Scotland, Denmark and Cyprus, as well as the Black Prince, the heir to the English Throne. This was undoubtedly not an average meal and was a clear display of the power and clout of the rising merchant classes[64].

From very early on in the Roman-Christian world, members of the church in high standing feasted. These feasts might have been feasts more in an emotional sense than a physical one, like that of Jesus' last supper. Others included a wide range of food and drink and were attended by many people.

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[63]Mead, pg 181.
[64]Mead, pg, 182.

Even St. Augustine, one of the church fathers, feasted. In an interesting side note, in the fifth century St. Augustine was invited to one such feast. From this feast we learn something of the symbolism of one of the most popular dishes at a medieval feast: the peacock, dressed in all its feathered finery. During this feast a peacock was presented to Augustine who, rather than offend his host by refusing to eat it because he had avoided eating meat for some time, chose to do an experiment to test the everlasting qualities of the peacock that had caused it to be adopted by the church as a symbol of everlasting life. He saved the meat of the peacock to see whether it would rot. Augustine found that the meat did not rot but eventually dried out, proving the lasting quality of the peacock and shedding some light for us on why this bird was such a favorite at the medieval table because of its symbolic association[65].

Feasts for important Christian figures soon became part of the yearly calendar. Mary and Joseph each had their feast day. The saints each had a day of commemoration and the calendar had so many feasts that only the most important were celebrated by all, such as John the Baptist and St. Nicholas[66]. Events from the life of Christ were also celebrated with feasting: Christ's nativity, his resurrection, and Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras[67]. It is clear that feasting was not new to Christians in the middle ages. There were many reasons to set a table full of food and dine with friends and family. Another feast in the papal court would not, of itself, be a cause for concern to anyone.

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[65] Henisch, pg. 29.
[66] Henisch, pg. 51.
[67] Henisch, pg. 38.

There are many accounts of feasting among members of the curia. The pope in particular, as the highest member of the church, was often feasted by his hosts as he toured within the domains of the church. He also hosted feasts for family members on special occasions. One such occasion was the wedding of the nephew of Innocent IV (d.1254). Innocent had fled to Lyons while in conflict with Frederick II. After Frederick's death he traveled through his native land of Lombardy on his way back to Rome. While there he paused to throw a lavish feast in celebration of the marriage. This feast was chronicled by Salimbene, an Italian monk who chronicled much of the history of the papacy during his lifetime. Salimbene wrote:

Figure 9 The role of the servants (Mead)

> At that wedding feast there was an immense variety of food served in a huge number of courses, and all kinds of the very best wines. Each of those courses cost many marks. This was the grandest and most elaborate wedding I have ever seen, both with respect to the guests and the courses of food, so much so that if the Queen of Sheba had seen it she would have marveled.[68]

[68] *Chronicle of Salimbene de Adem*, Joesh Baird, Medieval Renaissance Texts and Studies, (Binghamton, New York) 1986. pg. 454.

This was clearly not an everyday meal, but a display of the wealth and power of the highest member of the church, and by association, the church herself. Innocent was making a statement that many of his predecessors had also made: the Christian Church is powerful and I too, as pope, am powerful.

Feasting was also inextricably linked to the Christian religion. Jesus himself "feasted" with his apostles on the night before his crucifixion. The *agape* (or love feast) had been at the core of Christianity long before it was adopted by Constantine in the fourth century AD. Food and Christianity were linked from the beginning. Who would, therefore, question those of the highest ranks of God's servants on earth as they used food as a communion with their brothers, just as their savior had hundreds of years before. Therefore the popes could use feasting as a powerful message of the connection between brotherhood and papal power, an association which could nullify the criticism leveled at the papal lifestyle.

When the power and the religion melded in the form of papal feasting no questions were asked about why the pope feasted his contemporaries, or they him. Despite the loud protestations by heretics, and their questions about the legitimacy of the pope, and through him the rest of the curia, only those groups

Figure 10 A fast made into a feast (Mead)

seriously felt that feasting by and for the papacy should stop. It supported the pope's claims to power as the head of the Christian church. Few Christians would truly wish to see their spiritual leaders lose power and prestige. Feasting had been part of the Christian world too long for anyone to separate it from other church practices even if the rest of Europe was dying of hunger and disease. The act of hosting a feast conferred far too much status and power for the popes and their curias to stop using them. The pope could combine the power of the

agape with a lavish ceremony to ensure a very powerful statement with their feasts.

Chapter V

A Papal Feast in Avignon

Figure 11 Presentation of a refeathered peacock (Divonne, Maillard).

What was special about Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast? If feasting was common why does this one stand out? From this historian's perspective this feast was striking because of its excess in a time of such hardship, as well as for the detail in which it was recorded.

Looking back at the fourteenth century from today one can see the disparity in life style between the very wealthy papal court and those who were

crushed by famine and sickness. It is not unreasonable for people in the twentieth century to expect their leaders to tighten their belts along with them in times of trouble, but was that the case in the fourteenth century? We have no way of knowing. Perhaps it was not. Perhaps people would have felt uncomfortable to see their spiritual leaders in a less-than-powerful position.

There is a sign, however, that contemporaries did find this feast unusual: It was chronicled in such detail. My research has shown that most feasting did not attract such intense scrutiny. This feast was outstanding to people in the fourteenth century for its lavishness. It was an incredible display of wealth and prestige.

Cardinal Annibaldi was an Italian cardinal in a mostly French curia. His position as a minority would be uncomfortable and it would behoove him to show his status vis-à-vis the other cardinals. And how better to do that than publicly put the pope in his debt. The gift of hospitality as well as the other gifts given to the pope put him very much in Annibaldi's debt.

Let us now look in detail at this unusual feast[69]. Because the author did not date his account of the feast it is not possible to say with certainty that the feast occurred after the plague hit Europe, but it did occur during the years of famine. If, as I suspect, the feast did take place in the years of plague as well, its timing would be even more questionable by twentieth century standards.

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[69]Agostino Paravacini-Baliani, *La Cour des Papes au XIII Siècle*, (Hachette) pp 161-164. Translation by G. Merrill.

The anonymous author's account reads:

The pope arrived with sixteen cardinals. After washing his hands and blessing the *mensa* he was seated at the table at the head of the room, and sat in the papal chair decorated like two others in the church and the dining room.

When he had come from washing his hands he was served by four chevaliers and twelve squires. The ornament of the room where our lord dined with sixteen cardinals and twenty prelates and other laymen of high rank is as follows: There was one table where twelve young clerks (the oldest being twelve years) all nephews of the pope who had a narrow connection by paternity, came and went as they were supposed to. They were instructed by the knights and the squires.

They served the tables in the aforesaid dining room. The room was decorated like this. At the top of the room the walls were covered with very fine fabric of gold and silk from floor to ceiling; in the middle, behind the chair (of the pope) a very rich piece of samite silver-gilt from top to bottom, from floor to ceiling and replicated on the chair: it was a thing very noble to see, one has never seen such a beautiful color. The entire room was covered in very fine and grand hangings decorated with a variety of stories. Those at the table had rugs at their feet. The way the tables were covered defies imagination: the cloths were very dignified and rich.

The dinner consisted of three times nine dishes, twenty seven, of such a variety that I do not have the memory to desire to write about them all;... But for all of them it is important to know that they were all expensive, good, the best, and very good tasting.

After the first three dishes came a tray containing meats only from the hunt: a very large stag that looked alive, but it was cooked, a boar, roe deer, hare and rabbits. They all looked alive but were cooked. It took all the squires to carry the tray and they were accompanied by the chevaliers with various instruments. I think that the music, mixed with the elation of the people, must have resounded all the way to Avignon.

Then came the fourth service, and after that the clerks and squires of Cardinal Annibaldi. One of the clerks said to our seigneur (the pope) "Sainted father, there is over there a white destrier, very beautiful and noble; and here, two rings and a covered chalice. The Cardinal begs your saintliness to accept these things". Our Seigneur took the ring-a very big sapphire and a very big topaz- and put it on his finger; then he took the chalice and ordered that one was to take the horse. The chalice he gave to one of the chevaliers who was acting as server. One would say that the horse had the value of four hundred florins of gold, the ring one hundred fifty florins of gold and the chalice of one hundred florins of gold.

With that done the clerks and squires of Cardinal Annibaldo approached the sixteen cardinals and gave each of them a ring rich in

diverse gems; they did the same for the prelates and the chevaliers who were found in the dining room. The twelve clerks each received a belt and a purse valued at twenty five florins each; and each one also received a silver belt valued at three florins each.

Then came the fifth service; and after this men brought in a fountain, in the middle of which could be found a small tower, and on this tower was a column from which spurted wine from five sides: from the first came the *vernaccia*, from the second, Greek wine, from the third, the wine of Beaune, from the fourth the wine of Saint-Pourcain, and from the fifth the wine of the Rhine. All around, at the edge of the fountain could be found pea hens that looked as if they were alive but were cooked, with their tails made to look like a wheel, and also pheasant, partridge and crane and all sorts of birds from the hunt. This service, like the first, arrived with the sound of instruments, mixed with that of the diners.

After that came the sixth service, then the seventh. After the seventh three large destriers entered the dining room, one by one; They carried arms and entered in this manner: This first entered on a lightly armored horse, a banner in hand and wearing the arms of Cardinal Annibaldo, and the others followed after one by one. And when they were all in the dining room they started acting out a tournament.

After this came the eighth service. Then six fencers entered the room. In fear they brandished their épées. In front of the pope's table they

began a game of fencing unusual and savage; they fended off more than thirty men fighting together. The fight went on for a long time. Then they left the room.

Next came the ninth service. One could hear the clerks singing but could not see them; voices of all sorts, strong, less strong, medium, small, and child-like, with a gentleness that quieted the entire room, because the attentive ears made all tongues quiet who spoke, because of the sweetness of the melody.

When the song was ended and the last service cleared away, the fruits arrived along with more diverse things. Two trees were brought to the pope's table: one was all in silver with apples, pears, figs, peaches and grapes of gold; the other, green like the Laurel, also had fruits of all colors and these fruits were very fine candied fruits...

The *vernaccia*, the Greek wines, that of la Rochelle, of Beaune and Saint-Pourcain and the Rhine were served in abundance. They were the finest wines that one could acquire.

The fruits were again served at the table when the master of music of the cardinal (Annibaldo) arrived with a group of companions armed with instruments; they were thirty in number and carried torches armed with bells, they entered and danced very lightly around the room; after dancing around the tables two or three times they left.

The pope got up from the table and in a joyful mood returned to his chamber accompanied by the aforementioned cardinal and those who had dined with him... The cardinal called a squire and said to him, "Bring here the wine and candied spices". And it was done... and he gave the wine and candied spices to the pope, the cardinals, and those others who were in the room with him. After the wine and spices our seigneur (the pope) raised himself from his chair and went to the window overlooking the garden, the lawns and the river Sorgue. The cardinal Annibaldo ran to the door and said to a squire there, "Go and run, and make it so that the people pass over the bridge of the river Sorgue: so that those inside perceive them". And it came into the view of the pope, and it pleased him.

The chevaliers and squires got up from the table, and one heard anew instruments. Charmed by the different melodies they began to dance in the halls and rooms and even outside on the lawns. Others came to watch then dance their beautiful dances...

Finally the pope went to rest...And after he had rested he rode back to his palace of the Bridge of the River Sorgue.

Chapter VI

The Mechanics Of Feasting

Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast proclaimed his status and prestige. To do this effectively, a feast had to follow elaborate rules of etiquette which prescribed intense attention to social rank. The well-oiled workings of a feast involved ceremony and timing, and a large cadre of servants in order to display their host to the best advantage. A host had to plan his guest list carefully and show proper deference to the appropriate guests. Everything from the raised platform on which the guest of honor sat to the quality of the salt he was served proclaimed the status of both the guest and the host. A careful look at the mechanics of feasting will show how power could be manifested through a gathering together of people to enjoy a meal.

In medieval society one's position on the social ladder determined where one was seated at a feast and even the quality of what one ate while there. The seating arrangements for guests at a dinner were prescribed in contemporary social manuals, although seating could get tricky as we will see later. According to *The Boke Of Nurture*, quoted in Madeleine Cosman's Fabulous Feasts, there were five classes of dinner guests at an English table[70]. The first class consisted of the highest social ranks; popes, kings, emperors, cardinals, and archbishops. These men were of such lofty stature that they could dine alone, but if

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[70]Madeleine Cosman, Fabulous Feasts: Medieval Cookery And Ceremony, (New York, George Braziller, 1976) pg. 106

Figure 12 A panter cuts the king's trencher (Henisch)

illuminations are to be believed they rarely did. They are most often pictured dining with another of equally lofty status[71].

The second and third classes were each seated at tables separate from the other classes and lower than that of the first class. The second class included bishops, marquis, viscounts, and earls. The Mayor of London, chief justices, barons and mitered abbots were considered of the third class. The fourth class included knights, cathedral priors, and doctors of divinity, while the

[71] See fig. 1

lowest class were the squires, doctors of law, ex-mayors, preachers, rich merchants, and gentle men and women[72]. It is obvious from this list that dinner parties for which etiquette manuals were devised only harbored the high end of the social scale.

Before the feast began, the host, in this case Cardinal Annibaldi, had a monumental task to perform in order to show his good manners to his guests. He had to devise a seating arrangement. For Cardinal Annibaldi the choice of who would sit in the place of honor would have been simple. The pope outranked everyone there by a good margin and should obviously have the high seat. But what about the other cardinals? They were all essentially of the same rank, coming from noble families and holding prestigious places in the papal court. So how was our host supposed to seat them so that they would not feel insulted by their place at table? One solution lay in the use of numerous tables. Often the highest ranked guests would sit at a separate table from those of lower ranks. In the case of this feast Cardinal Annibaldi could have seated the pope by himself, or perhaps with himself, while providing a separate table for the other cardinals, and another for the young clerks. Whichever method the Cardinal chose, social ranking was sure to be displayed.

One tenet of feasting etiquette ensured that the status of the guests would be considered when the table was set for the feast. Since no cook could satisfy every guest's taste for salt, it was brought to the table to be used at the diner's whim. One's social status determined the quality of the salt served. The finest

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[72]Cosman, pg. 107

salt came from a very tedious process which involved drying sea-water soaked peat, burning it to ash, dissolving the ash in water then evaporating the water by boiling. This produced a fine, white salt. This was the salt served to a host and his special guests. Another type of salt was extracted from dried pools of sea-water on the west coast of France, equivalent to our modern sea salt. But unlike our modern equivalent, it was not well filtered of sand and debris so it was known as black salt and was not considered very high quality. This would have been served to the other four classes of dinner guests[73].

Bread, too, was a tool used to displayed one's status. Flours were ground to different textures and from different grains. Wheat was the most prized, and the most honored guests at a feast found abundant amounts of the freshest white bread, made from wheat, at their place. But bread could be made from a mixture of grains or without wheat entirely. This bread was second class fare and would be the benchmark of the other feast guests. The lowest form of bread was made from dried beans, peas, or bran and would not even appear on a nobleman's table. This would be peasant fare and would be found in alms houses. White bread was so prized by the social elite that it came to be known as *paindemaine*, from the Latin *panis domini*, "lord's bread"[74].

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[73]Bridget Henisch, Fast And Feast; Food In Medieval Society. (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976) pp. 161-3
[74]Henisch, pp. 155-9

Figure 13 A woman making waffers (Henisch)

Manners of both guests and host at a feast were another aspect of feasting etiquette that could differentiate status. In the middle ages it was felt that one's outward actions betrayed one's inner self[75]. The author describing Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi's feast tells us that the meal was started with a benediction given by the pope himself[76]. This was the standard way meals began and it created an atmosphere for the meal that was intended to remind the diner that all food came from God's bounty. A truly well mannered individual did not take it for granted. Taking the food served by a host for granted was the height of bad manners, and bad manners were a sign that your worth was low. Men who shoveled in their food and never put their knife down for a moment, grabbing seconds without a by-your-leave, were vilified in social commentary of the time. These behaviors were considered bad manners and indicated the depravity of the one displaying them[77].

So the pope opened the feast with a benediction and all the guests were reminded, however subtly, to mind their manners. One can imagine the table of young boys, assuredly looking forward to the spectacle of the feast, remembering not to grab for the first delicious dish put before them. And one can see Clement offering the dish to his neighbors before partaking of it himself.

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[75]Henisch, pg. 190
[76]Bagliani, pg. 161
[77]Henisch, pg. 191

After all, gratitude to God for the meal before him could best be expressed through generosity to others[78].

Before any of the guests sat down at the table or heard the benediction they had washed their hands. An unwashed hand at the dinner table was a sign of an unschooled, uncouth person who did not belong anywhere near the table of a nobleman. The patience to await hand washing was exemplified by Jesus and those that wished to show themselves truly Christian could do no less[79]. To make the task of washing before and after meals a little more alluring a generous host would provide water scented with sage, rosemary or chamomile to refresh and stimulate his guests. Cardinal Annibaldi undoubtedly provided just such scented water, and he most likely had his squires cover the sleeves of the pope with towels to avoid splashing the guest of honor and destroying his happy mood.

After a guest's hands were washed it was his turn to show his manners. One way to display one's manners was in the amount of food one ate. In the case of women, peasant-like manners of gobbling down food were severely frowned upon. She should appear as if she had only a passing interest in the food put before her. She should never over-eat, or at least never show that she had. The same held true for men. It was considered gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, to overindulge at table, and any sign that a guest had allowed his gluttony to get the better of him was the worst sort of bad manners. A belch, a

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[78]Henisch, pg. 191
[79]Henisch, pg. 165

patting of a full stomach or a bursting at the seams was not permitted in polite society. One might discretely loosen a belt before the meal if one thought they might indulge a little too much in the festivities to come[80].

In describing cardinal Annibaldi's feast our author did not bother to describe the efforts of the cadre of servants responsible for getting the food from the kitchen (often in an outbuilding of the living quarters) to the table. For an event of this importance Cardinal Annibaldi had twelve squires and four knights to attend to his guests. The number and rank of these servants would have been another display of a host's prestige.

A few of these servants performed special duties at the feasting table. The chevaliers were most likely in charge of the more important tasks. One would have had title of *panter*. He would be responsible for cutting the trenchers, bread slices used as plates, as well as cutting the bread that went with the meal and creating new trenchers when sumptuous sauces made one too soggy to use[81]. Normally one made one's own trencher after one sat down to eat, but it was considered courteous to have them prepared for guests[82]. We can assume that Cardinal Annibaldi had his panter prepare them for everyone at his feast. A good host would do no less, especially for a guest as important as the pope.

Along with the panters, the cupbearers worked closely around the table pouring wine for the guests and making sure their goblets were full. At Cardinal

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[80]Henisch, PP 196-7
[81]Cosman, pg. 28
[82]Henisch, pg. 160-1

Annibaldi's feast these servants had the task of transporting the elaborate wine fountain to the dining hall to amaze the guests with the five varieties of wine flowing from its tower. And afterward, in the pope's chamber they poured the same five varieties for the guests to drink while they ate their sweets.

By far the most important, and therefore prestigious job around a banquet table was that of carver. At our host's table this job would have been done by one of the chevaliers. This man would do much more than carve, however.

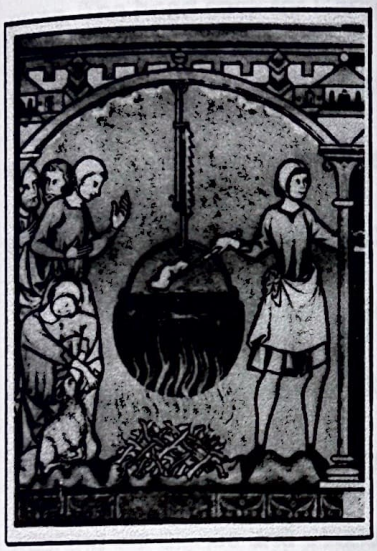

Figure 14 A chef uses a cooking fork (Henisch)

Everything one could do to meat was done by the carver, and at big banquets he did it at table in front of the guests and his master. It could be a very nerve-wracking job. Finesse and grace had to be shown and intimate knowledge of each beast to be carved. Even meat pies had special cuts dependent on whether the pie was hot or cold and the carver had to know it all. According to Henisch a virtuoso performance by a carver could wring applause out of the banquet's guests[83].

As all of this elaborate service was going on in front of the guests there was much happening out of their view to make sure that the feast went off without a hitch. Two servants acted in very important roles but were probably never seen by the diners, the steward and the chamberlain. The steward's job was that of supervisor. He was in charge of the food service. It was his job to

[83]Henisch, pg. 197

make sure that the food went to the table in the right order and not until it looked its best.[84] The chamberlain was in charge of tasting[85]. If a dish was unpalatable the chamberlain would not let it be served to the dinners.

Most important of all was the job of cook. In his hands lay the responsibility of maintaining his master's social power (at least during a feast). He was the creative genius. It was a good cook who could make ordinary mutton interesting. But it was the superb cook who could create a meal fit to set before a pope. The head cook for Cardinal Annibaldi's feast, with some help of course, used great amounts of creativity in his incredibly lavish meal. With the help of exotic spices and a wide range of sauces he could make everyday meats like rabbit and partridge into exceptional food.

Along with the cooks, the kitchen boys were most often found actually preparing food. Illustrations exist showing weary young boys turning spits, stirring the contents of large cauldrons, and tending fires. Menial tasks such as washing the dishes and pounding the spices, bought in their natural state, were also the domain of the kitchen boys[86].

Much more went into a feast than simply providing guests with a lot of food. To create a truly memorable display of wealth and power a host had to adhere to strict conventions of social status. He was also responsible for finding and employing the best possible servants to wait on his guests. Feasting, done properly, would have been a very effective tool to display the power of the

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[84]Cosman, pg. 31
[85]Cosman, pg. 31
[86]Henisch, pp. 65 and 75

papacy at a time when papal authority was being questioned and God was punishing the whole world for its sins.

Conclusion

In this work I have examined the role of feasting in the papal court at Avignon during the reign of Pope Clement VI, who reigned from 1342 to 1352. This was a troubled period for the papacy. In 1307, Clement's predecessor, Clement V, moved the papacy away from its traditional seat of power in Rome to Avignon. The move was an exile for the papal court. Phillipe le Bel, the king of France, was particularly troublesome for Clement V because he demanded a trial of the previous pope, Boniface VIII, with whom Phillipe had had a fierce battle of wills. At the same time warring factions made the papal states a very dangerous place to be. During a tour of Europe in which Clement V dealt with many problems of his office, he decided to stop for a while in southern France. His stay was meant to be a temporary one, but the papacy was unable to return to Rome for seventy years.

The reign of Clement VI took place during a time of hardship for the people of Europe. In 1315-17 the first in a series of famines hit most of Europe. Cycles of famine recurred with regularity throughout the fourteenth century, creating food shortages that led to starvation, affecting all of western Europe. These famines were caused by shifts in weather patterns that brought great amounts of rain in the middle of the growing season, drowning crops and washing away good soil. Those crops that were harvested often rotted before they could be used, leaving little or no seed for the next years planting.

The famines were accompanied by devastating livestock illnesses that weakened and killed a great number of animals. Some of these animals were used to draw a heavy plough through the thick European soil, and when they died there was no way for the farmers to till their fields, even those who had seed to plant. Other livestock were raised as food and their sickness and death added to the problems of starvation caused by crop failures. Despite their hunger, many people avoided eating those animals who had survived the illnesses out of fear that the animals would poisen those who ate them.

Then, in 1347 soldiers and merchants returning from the Crimea brought the Bubonic plague to Italy. This disease radiated throughout Europe at an alarming rate. Within a year it was in Avignon, in two it was in northern France, in three it had made it to England and spread to eastern Europe.

In some areas up to seventy percent of the population died. In others, entire villages died and disappeared from the records. The overall estimates for the mortality rate in Europe for the first wave of the plague range from one third to one half of the entire population. This disaster too, recured as cycles of plague persisted throughout the fourteenth century.

The experience of plague and famine intensified concerns about morality. Many adopted an ascetic lifestyle, believing that only strict adherence to God's word would save them. Others felt that only sensual pleasure would keep them safe from the plague and fell into a hedonistic life of carousing, eating and drinking, taking no heed of their business affairs or even their families. People

were so scared of the disease that they refused to expose themselves long enough to bury the dead. Even some priests refused to give last rights to plague victims, leaving them to die with no hope of eternal life in heaven.

The pope, as the head of the church, was ultimately responsible for his priests when preists were chastised for neglecting plague victims, so he too was attacked. This was not the first time the papacy had attracted criticism. The very legitimacy of the pope as leader of the Christian church had been questioned since the twelfth century. Heretical groups including the Cathars, the Waldensians, the Pseudo-apostles and the Beguins all felt that true salvation came only through emulation of the apostolic tradition of poverty. Even an offshoot of the Franciscan order, the Spiritual Franciscans, felt that poverty was essential to salvation. Since the pope lived in wealth and not in poverty, these groups believed that he had no authority as head of the church and that his office was meaningless.

It was in the face of famine, plague and criticism of papal wealth, that Cardinal Annibaldo Annibaldi hosted a very grand feast for Clement VI. This feast was unusual, even at the time, for its grandeur. It was recorded in even more detail than coronation feasts for kings. The author, whose name we do not have, was so amazed by the spectacle before him that he wrote down almost every detail.

Nine courses of food were served by sixteen servants. Each course consisted of three types of meat or game. In most cases our author records the

fashion in which each dish was served, including whether birds were served with their feathers reattached. In between each course was entertainment to while away the time during which one's food could digest. This entertainment included gift-giving. The pope received a gold chalice, rings of gold and precious stones, and even a war horse. Every guest received something from Cardinal Annibaldi. Even the lowest ranked guests received gifts. The twelve nephews of the pope each received a belt and a purse. Other entertainment included singers, mock sword fights and even a mock battle on horseback, performed in the dining hall.

I have argued that Cardinal Annibaldi held this lavish meal because feasting was simply too effective a tool for displaying wealth and power to be discontinued, despite the condition of the pope's flock. Feasting had been a part of upper class society since classical times, and probably before. Feasting was used in the middle ages by kings and rich merchants to display their power and bring others into their debt. Christ shared a meal with his apostles on his last night that inspired the *Agape* or love feast practiced by early Christians. Feast days for Christ's birth and for the saints became part of the Christian calendar.

Both secular and religious society utilized feasting for their own ends. Kings used it to display power and Christians used it to proclaim brotherhood. Brought together in the power of the pope, feasting made a strong statement about papal power both in the secular and religious worlds.

In order for the feast to fulfill its social and political purpose traditional rules had to be followed. Servants who served at a feast had a variety of duties. These duties ranged from the panter who cut the bread to the chamberlain who had charge of every aspect of the feast. These men had to know and perform their jobs well in order for the feast to run smoothly and display their master in his best light. A well-run feast was an efficient tool for the pope, or one of his cardinals, to use to display the power, and therefore the legitimacy, of the papacy.

Figure 15 The kitchens at Fontevraud abbey (Author's photo)

In examining this opulent feast we see the inherent contradictions in the medieval papacy. The pope functions as the head of Christ's church and leader of his flock. He is the moral center of a very influential religion. As such he has acquired considerable wealth and prestige, and a certain amount of temporal power; In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the curia had worked effectively to build a

true papal monarchy, with extensive jurisdiction and fiscal power, and an effective bureaucracy to exercise them. This went against some of the tenets of the Christian religion. Jesus and his followers lived poorly and humbly. How could the papacy reconcile being Jesus' representative on earth while living so unlike Jesus? These questions haunted the papacy for centuries, and in the sixteenth century helped spur the Protestant revolution.

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