

Nicolas de Clamanges (c. 1363-1437), *Letter to Pope Benedict XIII*

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

France, Paris, dated 14 April 1395

10 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-10, complete (collation i<sup>10</sup>), one quire of 10 unbound leaves, ruled in pale gray ink (justification c. 160 x 98 mm.), written in brown ink in Gothic cursive script in single column on 32 lines, one 5-line initial in brown ink decorated with a wavy design left in reserve in the body of the initial, brown stains (water damage?) on ff. 1 and 7v-10v, otherwise in excellent condition, unbound, kept within a folded sheet of paper (no watermark) on which is a nineteenth-century inscription in brown ink "Paris" and "14 avril 1395" and in pencil "1073". Dimensions 215 x 145 mm.

This is a rare official epistle of the University of Paris to Pope Benedict XIII, advocating for resolution of the Western Schism, a critical moment when France's rector of the University and the royal council sought a peaceful resolution to the crisis of multiple popes. It is especially interesting as it shows how deeply intertwined theology and politics were and captures a moment in the face of one of the greatest crises in medieval Christendom. The letter was written on behalf of the University by the celebrated French humanist, Nicolas de Clamanges.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript is dated 14 April 1395 at the end of the text: "Placuit universitati die decimaquarta mensis aprilis anno domini millesimo CCC<sup>o</sup> nonagesimo quinto" (f. 10). Although the name of the author who drafted the letter on behalf of the University does not appear in the text, several contemporary chroniclers and manuscripts identify the author as the University's rector, Nicolas de Clamanges (see below).
2. A medieval shelfmark "C 69" is written in brown ink in the top margin on f. 1.
3. Belonged to Jean-Baptiste Ganiare, Baron de Joursanvault (1748-1792), French collector known for amassing an impressive collection of manuscripts, charters and historical documents; see MS 1073 in *Catalogue analytique des archives de M. le baron de Joursanvault*, published in 1838.

## TEXT

ff. 1-10, Nicolas de Clamanges (c. 1363-1437), *Letter to Pope Benedict XIII*, 14 April 1395, published in Du Boulay 1648, vol. 4, pp. 740-747, incipit, "Sanctissimo in christo patri domino Benedicto divina providentia sancte Romane ecclesie summo pontifici devota sue beatitudinis filia universitas studii parisiensis, devotum et humillimum cum filiali Reverentia obsequium.

Quoniam, pater beatissime, ante paucorum mensium spatium ad abolendum scisma nequissimum, quod catholicam coinquinat ecclesiam et letali jam tandiu vulnere sauciat ... Sed et id scire volumus vestram beatitudinem quod si quodquam urgentius fortasse dictum est, non tam propter vos dictum est, quem satis voluntarium non multis egere scimus stimulis, quam propter alteram partem quam fortasse remissiore et torpentem excitare oportebat altiori

voce.”; followed by the colophon, “Placuit universitati die decimaquarta mensis aprilis anno domini millesimo CCC° nonagesimo quinto” (f. 10).

This manuscript contains a letter, dated 14 April 1395, to Pope Benedict XIII from the University of Paris containing a deliberation to end the Great Schism, 1378-1417 (published in Du Boulay 1648, vol. 4, pp. 740-747; copied in Archives Nationales, J 518, ff. 25-27). The letter was written by Nicolas de Clamanges, rector of the University of Paris (1393-1395), who, together with Pierre d’Ailly and Gilles des Champs, had a year earlier prepared another letter on the same subject to the king and the princes, published by the contemporary chronicler Michel Pintoin. The 1394 letter to Charles VI was first prepared and drafted on June 6 to 8 and presented to the king as a booklet on June 30 (cf. *Chartularium*, Act no. 1683). Similarly, there are different versions of the 14 April 1395 letter to Benedict XIII. Moreover, Nicolas wrote two official letters on behalf of the University to Benedict, the first of which was written after Benedict’s election in November 1394. In 1395, Nicolas was again tasked with drafting an epistle, the one contained in our manuscript. It was the last letter he was asked to write in the name of the University.

Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, who was acting as regent of France due to King Charles VI’s bouts of insanity, had asked the University of Paris to draw up recommendations on how to end the Schism. France, long a supporter of the Avignon papacy, found itself in a delicate position. In 1392, King Charles VI suffered his first attack of madness, leaving the government in the hands of his uncles. Chief among them was Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, who became the kingdom’s guiding hand. Philip had to balance competing pressures: on the one hand, Benedict XIII in Avignon, who claimed to be the true pope; on the other, the Roman pope, Boniface IX, supported by powerful Italian and German factions. At the time, Benedict XIII had alienated many clergy through an aggressive fiscal policy that deprived them of much of the revenue from their offices. Philip the Bold, pursuing a conciliatory stance toward the Roman papacy in order to maintain good relations with the Flemish, was deeply committed to finding a resolution to the division. Philip turned to the University of Paris to propose a way out of the deadlock. After months of debate, the University of Paris put forward three possible solutions, outlined in the manuscript described here: the way (“via”) of compromise (allowing the rival popes themselves to negotiate an end to the Schism), the way of cession (deposing both popes simultaneously and electing a new one), or the way of a council (convening a general council to settle the matter).

In spring 1395, the royal council endorsed the principle of pursuing the way of cession. Louis of Orléans, who favored a more forceful policy serving his Italian interests, was sidelined by Philip the Bold. Detailed plans were drawn up to be communicated to Pope Benedict XIII by a great embassy of the Dukes of Berry, Burgundye, and Orléans, which left for Avignon on 14 April (Valois 1901, vol. 3, p. 44; see the *Journal* of Gontier Col, who acted as a secretary during the embassy, for details of the negotiations, published in *Amplissima Collectio*, vol. 7, col. 1479-1528). The University delegates who were part of the embassy carried a letter to Benedict, hastily sealed on the very day that they left (Valois 1901, vol. 3, p. 46, note 2); this is the letter copied in our manuscript. This letter contains another, even more explicit exhortation than the first letter, informing the pope that although the University did not wish to decry the other two “vias,” the way of cession was in every way the most suitable and honorable means of ending the Schism, “aptior, que melior, prestancior que vel expedientior” (f. 1v, lines 18-19; cf. Bell 1948,

p. 65). This letter written by Nicolas de Clamanges "is remarkable for the number of its quotations, which had been very sparingly used in the earlier letters; they are mostly biblical, but he includes several passages from the Latin Classics, three from Cicero, one from Juvenal and one from Virgil, an unusual proceeding in addressing the Pope" (Bell 1948, pp. 65-66). A version of the letter copied in a fifteenth-century manuscript in the Sorbonne (Paris, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne, MS 633) differs from the published version (cf. Bell 1948, pp. 66, 295, incorrect manuscript reference on p. 66, MS 112). The Sorbonne version has a more imaginative and metaphorical style and less aggressive tone, suggesting that it is the original draft by Nicolas, which was made more vigorous by the University (cf. Bell 1948, pp. 66, 295). The text in our manuscript is almost identical to the published version. Interestingly, our manuscript has the final "booklet" form, corresponding with that of the 1394 letter presented to the king. Moreover, there are two words written at the back of the booklet, at the bottom of the final page, f. 10v, which are now partly cropped, but appear to read "Correcta est" (was corrected). This might suggest that our manuscript contains the penultimate version of Nicolas' letter to Benedict.

Nicolas begins the letter with a formal address to the Avignon pope, "To the most holy Father in Christ, Lord Benedict, by divine providence supreme pontiff of the Holy Roman Church, his devoted daughter, the University of Paris, offers most humble and filial reverence and obedience." He then turns to the matter of the schism with very skillful rhetorical craftsmanship: "Since, most blessed Father, a few months ago it was commanded to us by the decree of the Most Christian King of the Franks, that we should seek out suitable ways of abolishing the most wicked schism which defiles the Catholic Church and has for long wounded it with a deadly injury, so that Holy Mother Church herself might easily and swiftly obtain the sweetness of joyful peace..." Combining emotional imagery (pathos), appeal to authority (ethos) and periodic sentence structure, Nicolas presents the quest for peace as both divinely ordained and urgently necessary.

Yet the carefully crafted proposals fell on deaf ears. Neither Benedict XIII in Avignon nor Boniface IX in Rome agreed to resign. The Schism continued for more than two decades until it was finally resolved at the Council of Constance (1414-1418). Nicolas, however, had impressed Benedict XIII with his literary talent and was named Papal Secretary on 13 November 1397.

Letters by Nicolas de Clamanges may be found in a four-volume collection of acts, papal documents, letters, and theological treatises concerning the Schism, originating at the Cîteaux Abbey (Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MSS 578-581), as well as in a fifteenth-century manuscript now at the Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 3132A (our letter on ff. 19v-29v). Other important contemporary sources providing material for further research are the compilations of Simon de Plumetot and Simon du Bosc, two Norman intellectuals who gathered reports of French kings' interactions with the papacy during the Schism (cf. Brabant 2011).

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