

A CHRISTIAN HUMANIST'S MIRROR TO PRINCES:
NICOLAS DE CLAMANGES AND THE RESTORATION OF
JUSTICE DURING THE FRENCH CIVIL WAR

The century marked by 1350-1450 was surely one of the worst 100 years in European history. If the Great Western Schism — when two (and then three) popes and colleges of cardinals competed for power — was not challenging enough, there was the Black Death that kept recurring, the Hundred Years War between the superpowers of England and France, the interfamilial tensions that kept crossing the English Channel, and a civil war in France, precipitated largely because of the mental instability of the king, Charles VI. While the attention of many churchmen and statesmen (as if there could be a difference in the Middle Ages) was focused on the highest echelons of the church's hierarchy and France's royal families, several voices sought to keep the Christian and the Frenchman focused on the welfare of the everyday person, the commoner, who had nothing to do with a papacy and a crown riddled with competition, but who suffered every day the effects of religious schism, national civil war, and the failures of justice, law and order.

This essay attends to one of the voices raised during this multi-layered confusion: that of Nicolas de Clamanges (ca. 1363-1437), sometime-papal secretary to Avignon, student and *magister* at the University of Paris, frequent correspondent of the powerful in the church and the crown, but above all humanist and reformer. The present effort is to identify, describe, and contextualize Clamanges' writings on the French civil war, paying particular attention to his advice to princes and his concern with the restoration of justice, law and order throughout French society, but especially in the countryside, from where he wrote a good number of his letters on the matter and witnessed firsthand the devastation of the civil war, while learning of the urban destruction from his many correspondents. (1)

(1) Parts of this article are drawn from papers given at the International Congress of Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo,