

**MEDIEVAL FRANCE
(987-1498): AVIGNON
PAPACY (1309-1378):
BABYLON CAPTIVITY
OF THE CHURCH**



MEDIEVAL FRANCE (987-1498): AVIGNON PAPACY (1309-1378): BABYLON CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH

Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how and why the Catholic Church transferred the papacy to Avignon, what role the French crown played in the Avignon Papacy during the fourteenth century, and how the years in Avignon ultimately hurt the Church's prestige in European society.

Subjects

European History, World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- [Papal Palace, Avignon](#)

Essential Questions

- Why was the papacy moved to Avignon, France in 1309? Why did Pope Clement V refuse to relocate to Rome when elected to the papacy?
- What role did the French crown play in keeping the popes in Avignon?
- Why did Pope Gregory IX move the papacy back to Rome in 1378? What were the consequences for the Church because of this move back to Rome?
- How did the Avignon Papacy period hurt the Church in the eyes of medieval Christians?

Academic Summary

Behold, archbishop, I have in my hand the power to make thee Pope if I will, and for this cause am come to thee; and, therefore, if thou wilt promise to grant me six favors which I shall ask of thee, I will do thee this honor, and to the end thou mayest be assured that I have this power," — he drew forth and showed him the letters and commissions from both one part of the college and the other. The Gascon, coveting the papal dignity, and seeing thus suddenly how with the king lay the power of making him Pope, as it were stupefied with joy, threw himself at his feet, and said, "My lord, now I know that thou loves me more than any other man, and wouldst return me good for evil; thou hast to command and I to obey, and always it shall be so ordered." The king lifted him up and kissed him on the mouth, and then said to him, "The six special graces that I ask of thee are these: the first, that thou wilt reconcile me perfectly with the Church, and procure my pardon for my misdeed which I committed in the capture of Pope Boniface. The second that thou wilt re-communicate me and my followers. The third article, that thou wilt grant me all the tithes of the realm for five years, in aid of my expenses which I have incurred for the war in Flanders. The fourth that thou wilt promise to destroy and annul the memory of Pope Boniface. The fifth, that thou wilt restore the honor of the cardinalate to M. Jacopo and M. Piero della Colonna, and restore them to their estate, and together with them wilt make certain of my friends cardinals. The sixth grace and promise I reserve till due time and place, for it is secret and great." The archbishop promised everything on oath upon the body of Christ, and, furthermore, gave him as hostages his brother and two of his nephews; and the king swore to him and promised that he should be elected Pope. And this done, with great love and joy they parted, and the king returned to Paris, taking with him the said hostages under cover of love and of reconciling them with M. Charles; and straightway he wrote in answer to the Cardinal da Prato and to the others of his party, telling what he had done, and that they might safely elect as Pope M. Raymond de Goth, archbishop of Bordeaux, as a trustworthy and sure friend. And as it pleased God, the matter was so urgently pressed that in thirty-five days the answer to the said mandate was come back to Perugia with great secrecy. And when the Cardinal da Prato had received the said answer, he showed it secretly to his party, and craftily summoned the other party, when it should please them to assemble together, forasmuch as they desired to observe the agreement, and so it was immediately done. And when the said parties were gathered together, and it was necessary to ratify and confirm the order of the said compacts with authenticated papers and oaths, it was solemnly done. And then the said Cardinal da Prato wisely cited an authority from Holy Scripture which was fitting to the occasion, and by the authority committed to him after the said manner, he elected as Pope the aforesaid M. Raymond de Goth, archbishop of Bordeaux; and this was accepted and confirmed with great joy by both parties, and they sang with a loud voice "Te Deum Laudamus," etc., the party of Pope Boniface not knowing of the deceit

and fraud which had been carried out, rather believing that they had as Pope that man in whom they most trusted; 375 and when the announcements of the election came abroad, there was great strife and disturbance between their families, forasmuch as each said that he was the friend of their party. And this done, and the cardinals being come forth from their confinement, it was straightway determined to send him the election and the decree across the mountains where he was. This election took place on the 5th day of June in the year of Christ 1305, when the apostolic chair had been vacant ten months and twenty-eight days. We have made so long a record of this election of the Pope, by reason of the subtle and fine deceit which took place, and for its bearing on the future, forasmuch as great things followed thereupon, as hereafter we shall relate, during the time of his papacy and of his successor. And this election was the cause whereby the papacy reverted to foreigners, and the court went beyond the mountains, so that for the sin committed by the Italian cardinals in the death of Pope Benedict, if they were guilty thereof, and in the fraudulent election, they were well punished by the Gascons, as we shall tell hereafter.

Giovanni Villani, Chronicle Florentine, 14th century

...Now I am living in France, in the Babylon of the West. The sun in its travels sees nothing more hideous than this place on the shores of the wild Rhone, which suggests the hellish streams of Cocytus and Acheron. Here reign the successors of the poor fishermen of Galilee; they have strangely forgotten their origin. I am astounded, as I recall their predecessors, to see these men loaded with gold and clad in purple, boasting of the spoils of princes and nations; to see luxurious palaces and heights crowned with fortifications, instead of a boat turned downward for shelter.

We no longer find the simple nets which were once used to gain a frugal sustenance from the lake of Galilee, and with which, having labored all night and caught nothing, they took, at daybreak, a multitude of fishes, in the name of Jesus. One is stupefied nowadays to hear the lying tongues, and to see worthless parchments turned by a leaden seal into nets which are used, in Christ's name, but by the arts of Belial, to catch hordes of unwary Christians. These fish, too, are dressed and laid on the burning coals of anxiety before they fill the insatiable maw of their captors.

Instead of holy solitude we find a criminal host and crowds of the most infamous satellites; instead of soberness, licentious banquets; instead of pious pilgrimages, preternatural and foul sloth; instead of the bare feet of the apostles, the snowy coursers of brigands fly past us, the horses decked in gold and fed on gold, soon to be shod with gold, if the Lord does not check this slavish luxury. In short, we seem to be among the kings of the Persians or Parthians, before whom we must fall down and worship, and who cannot be approached except presents be offered. O ye unkempt and emaciated old men, is it for this you labored? Is it for this that you have sown the field of the Lord and watered it with your holy blood? But let us leave the subject.

I have been so depressed and overcome that the heaviness of my soul has passed into bodily affliction, so that I am really ill and can only give voice to

sighs and groans.

Petrarch, Letter to a friend, approx. 1340

For Catholics around the world today, the image of the pope standing on his balcony addressing the faithful in St. Peter's Square is synonymous with the papacy itself. Vatican City, the pope's official home since its creation under the Lateran Accords in 1929, has been the de facto home to the pontiffs since the days of antiquity. For over a thousand years, it was the center of the Christian world, the place from where powerful men ruled over an empire stretching across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, an empire of souls larger and more powerful than any the world had ever seen. Over time, bits and pieces of that empire began to slip away from papal control either through the coming of Islam or through the Great Schism with Eastern Europe, but even in today's modern world, almost 1.2 billion Catholics look to Rome and Vatican City for guidance and doctrine. To see the pope sitting on his throne anywhere else is unthinkable, and yet for almost a century in late medieval Europe, that is exactly what happened. From 1309 to 1378, the center of the Catholic Church wasn't even in Italy. It was in southern France, in a small city called Avignon.

Fourteenth century Europe was a time of crisis, intrigue and power struggles. The Renaissance was beginning, and the re-flowering of European society was on its way. Trade was opening up and thus parts of Europe saw the rise of powerful merchants and families such as the Medicis of Florence who would come to dominate regional and international affairs over the next few centuries. The papacy was at its height in power and prestige, but there were signs that, now looking back, foreshadowed the demise and fracturing of papal authority. In the late 13th century, during the years of Boniface VIII's reign in Rome, the papacy began to feel pressure from French monarchs trying to increase their own power. King Philip VI believed that the Catholic Church's wealth in France should have been used to support his state (a charge repeated by monarchs in subsequent centuries), and the French crown summarily laid taxes and laws on Church funds in France. After Philip had one of the pope's diplomats arrested for inciting an insurrection in 1301, Boniface issued a papal bull (a formal statement) in which he reminded the king that he was the head of the church and threatened excommunication, an act that would strip the king of his opportunity to enter heaven and would doom him to the fires of Hell. The king, however, refused to back down. Eventually the conflict between the two boiled over until Philip was excommunicated. The king sent an army to "reason" with Boniface and to demand his resignation. The pope refused to yield, and he was beaten and tortured. Boniface died shortly after. Philip then arranged for the election of the chair of St. Peter to go to his own man, a French archbishop named Raymond Bertrand de Got.

De Got, known as Pope Clement V after his election, refused to go to Rome after his election (something Philip knew before the vote), choosing instead to rule from Avignon, today a city in southern France, but then a territory belonging to the papacy. Clement and the next six popes (John XXII, Benedict XII, Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V and Gregory XI; all former French cardinals) would turn a blind eye to French incursions on papal power and authority, even to the point of complicity in the arrest and execution of hundreds of members of the Knights Templar. By mid-century, many Catholics outside

France were clamoring for the return of the papacy to Rome and quoting Petrarch's words in referring to the church's time in Avignon as the "Babylon Captivity."

In 1378, when Pope Gregory XI died, two rival groups of cardinals elected their own popes, Urban V ruled from Rome while Clement VII ruled from Avignon. After a series of popes and anti-popes were elected over the next few decades, the Church eventually returned to Rome permanently in 1417 with the election of Martin V after the French crown withdrew its support for the popes in Avignon.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how and why the Catholic Church transferred the papacy to Avignon, what role the French crown played in the Avignon Papacy during the fourteenth century, and how the years in Avignon ultimately hurt the Church's prestige in European society.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how and why the Catholic Church transferred the papacy to Avignon in 1309.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain what role the French crown played in supporting the Avignon Papacy during the fourteenth century.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how and why the years in Avignon ultimately hurt the Church's prestige in late medieval European society.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How do Catholics see Pope's role in the Catholic Church? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Avignon Papacy and the Western Schism (20 min)
- Videos – The Avignon Papacy and the Babylonian Captivity (10 min for both)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about the Avignon Papacy (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/Advanced students should concentrate on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Why did the Catholic Church transfer the papacy from Rome to Avignon in the 14th century? What role did the French monarch play in the Avignon Papacy? How did the years in Avignon ultimately hurt the Church's prestige in European society? (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail how and why the Catholic Church transferred the papacy from Rome to Avignon in the early years of the fourteenth century, what role the French crown played in the Avignon Papacy and how the years in Avignon ultimately hurt the Church's prestige in medieval European society.

Extension

On tour: Papal Palace, Avignon

While on tour, students in Avignon will see the Papal Palace, home to the Avignon popes from 1309-1378. The palace is huge and extravagant, the very personification of the papacy in France during the 14th century. The palace's library, at over 2000 volumes, attracted early Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch. After the papacy returned to Rome, the palace lost its temporal and spiritual prowess, but not its beauty and majesty. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of the most visited sites in France.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/14cpetrarch-pope.asp
Petrarch: Letter Criticizing the Avignon Papacy (primary source) – from the Medieval Internet Sourcebook at Fordham University
- www.elfinspell.com/VillaniBk8d.html#sect80
Villani's Chronicle – Section 80: How Pope Benedict died and the new election of Pope Clement V (primary source) – make sure students are reading the right section. This primary source, written by Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani, is biased against the French crown and his handpicked pope in Avignon, but is nonetheless valuable in examining how the Avignon popes were seen by Europeans. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students.
- expositions.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/412/396
Avignon vs. Rome: Donte, Petrarch, Catherine of Siena (academic paper). From Thomas Renna, Professor Emeritus in History at Saginaw Valley State University (MI).
- www.avignon-et-provence.com/avignon-tourism/avignon-history/avignon-papacy.htm#.Uua6oxAo7cs
The History of Avignon: the time of the Popes (website)
- www.the-orb.net/textbooks/nelson/avignon.html
The Avignon Papacy, 1305-1378 (website). Basic, easy to read explanation of the Avignon papacy. Good place to start for all students and teachers.
- www.zum.de/whkmla/period/1ma/babcapt.html
Church History: The Babylonian Captivity (website)
- faculty.ucc.edu/egh-damerow/avignon_papacy.htm
Avignon Papacy (website). From Harold Damerow, Senior Professor of Government and History, Union County College (NJ).
- whc.unesco.org/en/list/228
Historic Centre of Avignon: Papal Palace (website) – from UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention
- [www.cathedral-irish.org/file.cfm?resourceid=19577&filename=Babylonian_Captivity_the_Great_Papal\(Western\)_UPDA](http://www.cathedral-irish.org/file.cfm?resourceid=19577&filename=Babylonian_Captivity_the_Great_Papal(Western)_UPDA)
Avignon Papacy and the Great Schism (PowerPoint) – from Cathedral High School (IN)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya_BL8nqkUk
The Western Schism (video)
- education-portal.com/academy/lesson/babylonian-captivity-of-the-church-and-the-decline-of-papal-authority.html#lesson
Babylonian Captivity of the Church and the Decline of Papal Authority (video)
- www.contunico.com/clips/10275-the-avignon-papacy

The Avignon Papacy (video)

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avignon_Papacy
Avignon Papacy – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Clement_V
Pope Clement V – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_IV_of_France
Philip IV of France – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/Avignon
On the Road: Avignon – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- [www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/medieval-britain-chaucer-canterbury-
tales](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/medieval-britain-chaucer-canterbury-tales)
Medieval England – Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/magna-carta-of-1215
Medieval England – Magna Carta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/medieval-britain-richard-the-lionheart
Medieval England – Richard the Lionheart
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/medieval-renaissance-venice-the-doge
Medieval Venice – The Doge: Merchant Rulers of the Republic
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/medieval-europe-black-death-of-1348
Medieval Europe – Bubonic Plague: Europe’s Black Death
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/dante-inferno
Medieval Europe – Dante’s Inferno
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/dante-paradiso
Medieval Europe – Dante’s Paradiso
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/dante-purgatorio
Medieval Europe – Dante’s Purgatorio
- [www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/medieval-venice-marco-polo-and-his-
travels](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/medieval-venice-marco-polo-and-his-travels)
Medieval Venice – Marco Polo’s Travels
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/medieval-venice-fourth-crusade
Medieval Venice – The Fourth Crusade
- [www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-fall-of-
constantinople-1453](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-fall-of-constantinople-1453)
Byzantine Istanbul – Fall of Constantinople 1453

Key Terms

- Antipope
- Avignon
- Babylonian Captivity of the Church
- Boniface VIII
- Clement V
- Excommunication
- Great Western Schism
- Papacy
- Papal Bull
- Petrarch

