Portraits of Revolt: Reinterpreting the Jacquerie of 1358

In 1358 the countryside of northern France neared ruin. Castles torched, homes ransacked, the nobles fled before a score of rural insurgents. Neither a spontaneous response to post-Black Death exasperation nor an explosion of peasant mania, the Jacquerie uprising seized the regions of Beauvais, Picardy, and the Île de France for the short span of May and June. Despite the brevity, the Jacquerie boasts extensive recognition in the accounts of medieval chroniclers and royal letters of remission, carving a place of infamy in the aristocratic canon of medieval France. From this trove of information arose a meager array of modern scholarship, the last monograph a product of nineteenth-century historiography, and the few modern explorations concerned not with the Jacques but the scope of Parisian involvement. The literature of the Jacquerie remains muddled, the contours obscure, with little academic consensus on the source of discontent, the purpose of the uprising, or the composition of the Jacques. Warped by the passionate language of chroniclers and mired in modern structures of revolt, the Jacquerie requires a reorientation of meaning: both in the language of the event and in modern constructs of medieval dissent. Through a dissection of near-contemporaneous sources and deconstruction of poor historiographical models emerges a paradigm of revolt which illuminates the Jacques as independent actors, not without leadership, organized around the communal ties of rural life to challenge the structures of aristocratic authority.

From the initial account of Jean le Bel to the histories of modern scholars, the Jacquerie remains rooted in a conflict of language. Unlike the letters of the English Uprising of 1381 or the diaries of the revolt of Ciompi, the Jacquerie revolt lacks existing documents produced by the insurgents.[[1]](#footnote-1) Historians must instead rely on sources dated decades after 1358, written after years of reflection, and shaped more by the legacy than the motivations of the revolt. The surviving literature splits into two groups: chronicles – written by monks, nobles, and even a solider – and letters of remission issued by the French crown. Until the influential Siméon Luce – the premier scholar of the Jacquerie – studied remissions in the late-nineteenth century, knowledge of the Jacques stemmed primarily from the vitriolic and chivalric tales of Jean Froissart’s *Chronicles –* an account which lingers into contemporary histories. However unreliable, chronicles provide a level of insight into the motivations and social realities of the Jacquerie unfound in remissions.[[2]](#footnote-2) A new model of the revolt cannot form until a cross-textual analysis of the class-determined assumptions embedded in the language of two paramount texts: Froissart’s *Chronicles* and Jean le Bel’s *True Chronicles*. Restricted by biases and limited in scope, Froissart and le Bel alone are not enough to uncover the nature of the revolt. Additional chronicles, such as the *Chronique normande* and the work of Jean de Venette, coupled with the royal letters of remission, must follow in analysis to weave together a comprehensive illumination of the failings of current historiography.

A compilation of often inaccurate, contradictory, and prejudiced details, chronicles occupy vital roles in revealing the socio-political order targeted by the Jacques. From these narratives emerge a story-telling cemented in modern prejudice, narratives which deny political agency to the Jacques and create in its place a model built on a mad other.[[3]](#footnote-3) While all medieval chroniclers emphasize the senseless brutality of the revolt, two, in particular, bear the responsibility for the lingering prejudice: Jean Froissart and his once-lost source Jean le Bel. Neither contemporaneous nor wholly original, the *Chronicles* compiles tales of the Hundred Years’ War drawn from aristocratic eyewitness and official records, constructing a model rooted in the boundaries of social expectations. Even so, Book One of *Chronicles* stems not from Froissart’s investigative work, but mirrors “the true chronicles formerly brought together by the wise and venerable Sir Jean le Bel, canon of St. Lambert of Liège” – a text lost to historians until the early twentieth century.[[4]](#footnote-4) Le Bel, however, pursues an alternative framing device, choosing instead to antagonize individual actors, such as Étienne Marcel, Robert le Coq, and Charles II of Navarre, as wreaking havoc on social order.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Despite differences in the orientation of the revolt, the chroniclers wield similar language to construct a near-identical scene:

Le Bel:

It was not long after, around Pentecost, that a terrible upheaval struck many parts of the kingdom, around Beauvais and Amiens, in Brie, in Perthois, in the Île-de-France and in Valois as far as Soissons. Inhabitants of the country towns – initially fewer than a hundred – started gathering in villages everywhere, led by no one.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Froissart:

Not long after the King of Navarre had been set free, there were very strange and terrible happenings in several parts of the kingdom of France…in the region of Beauvais, in Brie and on the Marne, in Valois, in Laonnais, in fief Coucy and round Soissons…they and had no leaders and at first they numbered scarcely a hundred.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Froissart and le Bel utilize slight inversions of hierarchical relationships to illustrate the depravity of the Jacquerie. The concept of a force “led by no one” preys on notions of order and authoritative roles to render the Jacques as little more than a spontaneous riot. Scenes of horrific bloodshed lend weight to the ascribed disorder of the Jacquerie as the insurgents “tried to force [a lady and her children] to eat the knight’s flesh before putting them cruelly to death.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Rather than a model of intelligent design, governed by agential behavior, the Jacquerie of Froissart and le Bel can only exist in an environment of social collapse.

On the inherent nature of the Jacques, the chronicles exist in agreeance yet depart in figurative meaning. [[9]](#footnote-9) Post-Luce scholarship on the Jacquerie – dominated by Raymond Cazelles, Samuel Cohn, Jr., and Justine Firnhaber-Baker – recognize Froissart’s liberal use of le Bel without acknowledging a critical gap in style. Far from an “almost verbatim”[[10]](#footnote-10) recreation of the *True Chronicles*, Froissart departs in form and framing, presenting the Jacquerie as symptomatic of the nobility’s failure to uphold aristocratic values. It is a passive structure of power in which socio-political actors must adhere to class hierarchies lest the hazards of neglect force into creation a depraved inversion of reality marked by the slaughter of nobles.[[11]](#footnote-11) As such the revolt denotes little meaning from the Jacques; the revolt’s existence more punishment than an assault on power structures. Not unlike the story-telling of Froissart, le Bel’s conception of historical fact rests on a belief in the “illustrious prowess” of the nobility. [[12]](#footnote-12) Even as so the Jacques are not products of a waning warrior ethos, but pawns manipulated by the power-hungry nobles and bourgeois -- men not ignored by Froissart but coopted into critiques of the elite’s unchivalric behavior in the regions affected by the Jacquerie.

The discrepancies between the figurative meanings of the *Chronicles* and the *True Chronicles* expose an aristocratic partiality that reveals the societal realities of the Jacquerie. In the moments before the Jacquerie, Froissart invokes a colorful example of the social inversion which spawned the uprising, splitting from le Bel’s version of the murder of Charles of Normandy’s three councilors by men of Étienne Marcel, Provost of the Merchants of Paris. Struck down before Charles, the Dauphin of France, Froissart attributes the deaths not to Marcel, but the constructs of political power – or rather the decline in aristocratic power – which permitted the bourgeois and Provost’s rise to authority: “The nobles and the prelates began to grow tired of the institution of the Estates and left the Provost of the Merchants and some of the burgesses of Paris to go their own way.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Froissart emphasizes the weariness of the nobles and prelates by raising the victims of murder from two, as recorded by le Bel, to three, as to increase the severity of the aristocracy’s unchivalrous passivity. Consequently, the text illuminates the contours of power in which the Jacquerie operated: Noblemen could no longer be relied upon to conduct the responsibilities of their station, thus planting the seeds for political and social change.

As the dynamics of politics shifted towards the Third Estates, Froissart amplifies the inversion of social order which foreshadows the marching Jacques. In this new order is a vacuum of elite power, symbolized by the powerless Charles of Normandy, heir to the Kingdom of France, whose “robe was splashed with [the] blood” of his councilors.[[14]](#footnote-14) Embroiled in the Hundred Years’ War, the nobility of France were no strangers to bloodshed – so long as it landed on a suit of armor. For the blood to spoil the Dauphin’s robes desecrates the garment as a symbol of court and social station, and renders the encounter a slight against the chivalric tenet of martial prowess.[[15]](#footnote-15) This small detail, coupled with the importance of the Jacques’ leadership, sets the groundwork for future imagery of inverted order; for as the “leaderless” Jacquerie raged, nobles dressed only in their robes laid dead across northern France.

From le Bel and Froissart emerges a fragmented portrait of medieval constructs of authority, its orientation of the Jacquerie’s motivations incomplete, mendable only through a convergence of outside chronicles. Though subject to similar shortcomings, chronicler Jean de Venette provides a corrective to Froissart’s romanticism of aristocratic virtue, ascribing an agential and sympathetic justification to the Jacquerie: “seeing the wrongs and oppression inflicted on them on every side… the nobles gave them no protection but rather oppressed them as heavily as did the enemy.”[[16]](#footnote-16) A contemptuous narrative, developed across the years 1340 to 1368 by an anonymous provincial knight, *Chronique normande du XIV e siècle* provides the most complete picture of aristocratic betrayal. Under the order of the Dauphin, knights of the Île de France and the Beauvaisis gathered provisions required to blockade Paris – then controlled by Étienne Marcel; some, however, lacked the necessary means to garrison the castles.[[17]](#footnote-17) The *Chronique normande* expounds the Dauphin’s orders:

The councilors advised [the knights] to take the supplies from their own men… by this advice they took from their men outrageously, until the peasants said that the knights who were required to guard them had dared seized their property. For this mistreatment, a marvelous score of peasants charged against the knights and all the nobles and even their own lords.[[18]](#footnote-18)

From this account emerges economic implications not found in Froissart or le Bel. The abuse of the feudal relationship, coupled with the threat of brigands in a time of war, amplified the economic anxieties of the peasantry described by the *Chronique normande*. Yet little else in the way of taxes, dues, or levies appear in the text; rather, an emphasis on cracks in the normative socio-political relationships of medieval France forms the basis of revolt. Behind the chroniclers’ prejudice is a crisis of aristocratic legitimacy rooted in the betrayal of the feudal relationship between lord and serf. The failure to protect villages from war-time pillagers, and then the collusion with the Dauphin in seizing peasant property, formed a socio-political plight on two fronts.[[19]](#footnote-19) A return to the oldest chronicle, that of le Bel, reveals that no matter how disparaging and prejudice the interpretation, a targeted assault on nobles -- and a rejection of the aristocracy’s legal authority – bridges the chronicles. In a fabricated speech, le Bel claims that the Jacques “declared that the nobles, knights, and squires were a disgrace and bringing the kingdom to ruin, and that it would be a good deed to destroy them all.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Despite this righteous the cause for revolt, medieval chroniclers operated within a narrative framework marred by disgust and rooted in a denial of peasant agency. It is a model which includes systematic explanations as more an afterthought than a central feature; an obscuration of a dynamic movement by which rural inhabitants sought to reorientate structures of power.

Modern histories do not escape the prejudicial denial of the peasants’ organizational capabilities and political aims established by the chronicles. Instead of making claims of insanity, scholars reorientated the Jacquerie from a non-noble revolt to a rebellion co-opted by elites. Siméon Luce, through the first extensive study of letters of remissions, and the last thorough exploration of the Jacquerie, contextualized the violence within a sympathetic frame which points to “the decadence of French chivalry” as the central cause.[[21]](#footnote-21) Each subsequent scholar builds – in some manner – on the foundations set by Luce. Raymond Cazelles asserted that the Jacquerie was a rural assault on Dauphin-aligned nobles instigated by Froissart and le Bel’s villain, Étienne Marcel.[[22]](#footnote-22) Cazelles’ theory constructed the Jacques as townsmen, clergymen, and artisans; a distinctly non-peasant revolt designed to heighten Marcel’s power, nor further the insurgents’ political agency. David Bessen forwards Cazelles’ research with a twist, presenting Charles II of Navarre as the mastermind behind the Jacquerie in a plot to destabilize the crown, and crushed the Jacques when the insurgents grew too unruly.[[23]](#footnote-23) The most recent scholarship on the Jacquerie – that of Justine Firnhaber-Baker – concurs with Cazelles and Luces, pointing to Marcel as the instigator, though departs in presenting the Jacques as a body of amorphous motivations. To the insurgents and the observers, the Jacquerie does not fit into a “single, immutable interpretation,” and neither should its goals be confined to Marcel’s political objectives; rather the revolt possessed a fluid array of meanings dependent on time and the participant.[[24]](#footnote-24) Despite leaving numerous routes of meaning open, including an assertion of political and social consciousness argued by this paper, Firnhaber-Baker falls victim to a narrow assumption inherited from medieval chroniclers and maintained by fellow contemporaries: the peasants involved in the Jacquerie lacked the ability to organize a movement with identifiable leaders, clear targets, and conscious socio-political aims.

Where soldiers went, violence followed – an examination of the inciting causes for revolt illuminates the geography, and therefore the composition, of the Jacquerie. Across the fourteenth century, a trend of peasant resistance struck France and neighboring kingdoms as the soldiers of the Hundred Years’ War assaulted non-combatants. In 1346, Henry, Earl of Lancaster, launched a ferocious *chevauchée* near Poitiers– a tactic replicated less than ten years later in 1355 by Edward, Prince of Wales, in the Languedoc and central France, scorching the countryside. Such attacks proved disastrous for the inhabitants of northern France as the royal army departed Normandy for Poitiers, leaving the north vulnerable to the pillaging of English opportunists, independent bands, and the army of Charles II of Navarre.[[25]](#footnote-25) French soldiers were not better; the Languedoïl’s Estates General assembly authorized an ordinance in 1355 which permitted communities to resist pillaging troops, and in the months before the Jacquerie in May 1358, the Dauphin let his army loot Chartres, as attested to by the *Chronique normande*.[[26]](#footnote-26) The severity of the peasants’ plight resonates in the records of Robert Lescot, continued by an anonymous chronicler, which asserts that by May 1258, “since the plundering was everywhere and no-one was around to oppose the brigands and enemy troops, the fields [of the Île-de-France] now lay barren.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Among these “enemy troops” were the Navarrese who captured the strongholds of Arpajon and Montlhèry in March of 1358, and pushed further into the Île-de-France to capture Corbeil, Sens, and Château-Landon by April. The encroaching forces stretched northward and eastward, engendering animosity as nobles failed to protect the people of the countryside from torches and blades, consuming over 150 villages around Amiens, Paris, Soissons, and St. Dizier.[[28]](#footnote-28) Within these corridors of revolt, which extend into north-east regions of France, the identity of the insurgents is unmistakably rural: the largest clusters sit in the spaces between towns -- like Paris and Soissons or Amiens and Compiègne – amidst open country [*plat pays*], farmlands, and villages.

To the chroniclers, the Jacquerie emerged from the countryside a band of armed peasants. Jean de Venette highlights the etymology of the Jacques, revealing that “men sent to the wars who bore arms in rustic fashion of peasant were given the name Jacques Bonhommes by those who mocked and despised them, and thus lost the name peasant.”[[29]](#footnote-29) It is a mockery turned threat; a transformation of the countryfolk into political actors. Descriptors beyond “Jake Bonhomme” also remain rural in connotation.[[30]](#footnote-30) For le Bel, the insurgents were “inhabitants of the country towns;”[[31]](#footnote-31) for the *Chronique des quatres premiers Valois, Chronique normande*, and the *Chronique des règnes de Jean II et Charles V*, the insurgents were “paysans” and “gens de labour.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The latter chronicle asserts that while members of the bourgeois did indeed participate in the Jacquerie, rural peasants comprised the majority of the insurgents, and constructs the Parisian bourgeois as a separate, though concurrent, event.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Yet the identity of the Jacques remains indistinct due to a limited exploration of remissions. Cazelles and Bessen operated on the premise that the Jacques were not primarily peasants – an assertion based on a limited array of remissions sampled by Luce.[[34]](#footnote-34) Moreover, such remissions were expensive, a price increased by its permanence in the royal chancery, offering legal recognition unachievable by the majority of the insurgents besides those nearer to the bourgeois class.[[35]](#footnote-35) A more significant limitation of Luce’s sample, which includes only fifty-four of the 146 documents linked to the Jacquerie in the JJ series, is the nature of the pardons. The chancery contains remissions issued to individuals and communities not covered by the Dauphin’s general pardon – situations unique and specific; evidence of the exceptions, not the primary recipients of royal grace.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Distinct vocabulary reveals more distance between the bourgeois revolt in Paris, Charles of Navarre’s assault upon the crown, and the Jacques’ march on the nobility. Participants of Marcel’s revolt stirred under the “prompting and encouragement” of the Provost, went against “his royal majesty,” and wore hoods dyed half-red, half-blue – a recurrent symbol of the movement which does not appear in remissions for the Jacques.[[37]](#footnote-37) Within Parisian remissions is also a distinct local identity; nearly all are bourgeois of Paris, and only one individual hailed beyond the city’s limits.[[38]](#footnote-38) A shift in frame provides additional distinctions: the chancery rendered Marcel’s revolt a “grans traison, rebellions, conspiracions armée, chevauchées, invasion et desobessiances” – an affront to the loyal subjects and the crown of the Kingdom of France.[[39]](#footnote-39) The extent to which the Parisians resembled a “chevauchées” or an “invasion” manifests in the crown’s emphasis on militaristic sophistication. The Parisians boasted sergeants, captains, and divisions, and wielded “a great quantity of siege engines, war-cannons, crossbows with windlasses and other artillery” stolen from the Louvre.[[40]](#footnote-40) No remission issued to a Jacques resembles such a level of arms, nor ascribes military roles, despite the peasant’s organization. This attention to a moment of “grans traison” contrasts “the time of the terror” which defined the Jacquerie – a shift in vocabulary framed within a conflict solely between the “men of the countryside” and the “nobles of the realm.”[[41]](#footnote-41) For the Navarrese, the chancery orientates the assault as a rebellion against “the crown of France” at a time in which Charles II and “other enemies of ours … [joined] to wound and damage… our subjects and our realm.”[[42]](#footnote-42) It is an indictment of treason – an allegation thrown at the Jacques, though never a basis for punishment in the remissions – and renders the Navarrese, like the Parisian revolt, a separate conflict in objective, threat, and political space.

Although the remissions emphasize distinctive identities for each event, scholarship continues to operate under models of cooptation. [[43]](#footnote-43) Only David Bessen’s theory of Navarrese control, with the Jacquerie being more a civil war between the bourgeois and nobility than a revolt, lacks support in modern research. Samuel Cohn stresses that neither remissions nor chronicles mention nobles as the Jacques’ leaders; Bessen’s theory simply lacks the evidence and sense.[[44]](#footnote-44) Rather it is one of Luce’s theses, which pins Étienne Marcel as the mastermind and instigator of the Jacquerie, that withstood future histories.[[45]](#footnote-45) Raymond Cazelles emphasized the same thesis, pointed to the same attack on the Marché at Meaux, and asserted towns of rural artisans as Marcel’s co-conspirators.[[46]](#footnote-46) It is no wonder Cazelle carried the torch; the influential article “La Jacquerie : un mouvement paysan ?” draws nearly all its primary source references from Luce’s sampled documents. Within recent histories, the narrative remains stagnant, an echo of poor methods. Justine Firnhaber-Baker maintains that there is “substantial” evidence for Raymond Cazelles’ thesis; the Jacquerie not a shapeless terror but a military venture planned by Marcel.[[47]](#footnote-47) By constituting the Jacquerie as an organ of Marcel’s military ventures, Firnhaber-Baker presents the Jacques as beholden to a service beyond agential pursuits.[[48]](#footnote-48) The remissions and chronicles suggest otherwise.

Beyond critical differences in language, framing, and narrative and visual motifs, the remissions splinter the political unity between the Jacquerie and Marcel’s Parisians. Scenes of potential collaboration fall apart amidst established narrative. Cazelles, for example, points to the remission of Jehan Herssent as a definite point in Marcel’s attempts to stir the village of Châtres against the crown.[[49]](#footnote-49) Without reference to “the terror” or “men of the countryside,” the remission lacks the crown’s language on the revolt; moreover, Herssent’s crime transpired “around the day of Saint John-Baptist last passed” – 24 June, two weeks after Charles II slaughtered the Jacques at Clermont, marking the traditional end of the Jacquerie.[[50]](#footnote-50) Perhaps a late outburst, the remission speaks more to Marcel’s attempt to prepare Paris for the Dauphin’s siege, which occurred only days later on 29 June, than a chance to instigate a branch of the Jacquerie. No medieval city was independent of the surrounding countryside, and Paris was no exception. Only one remission features the language of the Jacquerie and Marcel, but when coupled with the Provost’s letter, shreds any sort of personal responsibility for the revolt. Caught in “the time that the men of the countryside rose and did several terrors against the nobles of the realm,” Hue de Sailleville fled to Paris to seek “the Provost of the Merchants” and put an end to Jacquerie.[[51]](#footnote-51) Marcel’s letter, written to the communes of Picardy and Flanders, echoes Hue de Sailleville’s fear, as the Provost declared that “ we would have rather died than approved these deeds and the manner in which they were committed by some of those people” and “the evil things they did…against us.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Aside from Hue de Sailleville, no other remission issued to a Jacque makes note of Parisian-engineered peasant revolts, let alone the Parisian rebellion itself. Although it is possible to read Marcel’s denunciation of the peasants as a means to distance the Parisians from the violent attacks on the nobility, or admittance to his inability to control the Jacques, the deployment of three hundred Parisian troops against the peasants renders the Provost an opposing force with incompatible aims. Picardy and Flanders did house agents sent by Marcel, though under strict orders to leave the nobles unharmed. [[53]](#footnote-53) As demonstrated by Jehan Herssent, Parisian agents in the surrounding countryside is less a sign of – or a link to – the Jacquerie than evidence of Marcel’s attempts to turn France against the throne. And in the eyes of the crown, the distinction is clear: the military-advanced Parisians marched against the king in a resistance distinct from the pan-regional Jacquerie of the countryside.

If not a branch of the Navarrese invasion, or a tool of Parisian usurpation, the Jacquerie must be understood on its own terms: the peasant. A rejection of peasant agency -- inherent to established paradigms of popular revolt -- obscures the role of collective action in favor of individual leadership. For the Jacques, the topic of leadership remains a contradiction first set by contemporary chroniclers. Jean le Bel’s tale of a leaderless mob negates a later entry on the “captain of these miscreants, a perfect villain known as Jimmy Goodfellow.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Other chronicles, most notably the *Chronique des quatres premiers Valois*, point instead to Guillaume Cale, a figure which occupies a symbolic, yet verifiable, space as the representative of the Jacques. Only a few chronicles reveal glimpses into Cale’s responsibilities and objectives, glimpses which are vague, indefinite – contradictions to the established conception of Guillaume Cale, “principal peasant leader” of the Jacquerie.[[55]](#footnote-55) This emphasis on individual leaders stunts Jacquerie historiography: Luce, Cazelles, and Bessen’s theories of a cooptated rebellion operate on a similar commander-in-chief principle. To emphasize peasant agency, a new model must turn to the remissions which, while acknowledging Cale’s role, construct a system of pluralistic and localized leadership. Within the chancery are more than eighteen references to a *captaine* – individuals from communities far beyond the regions which mention Cale (Catenoy, La Presle, Mello, Pont-Saint, Montataire, and Maxence) and the Parisian countryside.[[56]](#footnote-56) Information on these individuals remain spares, but possess a common theme: through assemblies, peasants elected captains from their own communities. In Jaux, for example, the inhabitants elected Jean le Grant and Estienne Nolon – two individuals without a noted occupation – as captains instead of a figure from traditional structures of power, such as a soldier, mayor, or clergyman.[[57]](#footnote-57)No authority outside the *villes* forced upon villagers a cause for mobilization or a guiding ideological force; these “leaderless” forces seemed as such because leadership came from within and by individuals who resembled their neighbors.

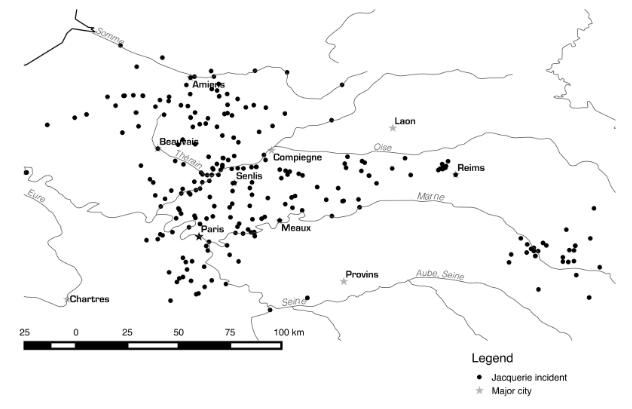
Without an organizational, high-commanding body of captains, the Jacquerie mobilized around rural assemblies. No peasant army unified under a single banner marched across the fields of France; rather individual cells – comprised of villages, settlements, or towns – moved under the umbrella of the Jacquerie against localized objectives. Of the remissions issued to the Jacques, individuals were the primary supplicants; even so, that’s only 107 individuals compared to the thirty-nine communal pardons which housed numerous insurgents, and the Dauphin’s general pardon which encompassed a vast portion of the Jacques. Out of the samples, thirty referred to assemblies or the act of assembling, and it is through such meetings that the peasants selected leaders and decided objectives: Jehan Hullot, Jehan Faquet, and Jehan de Blacey, for example, led “men of the countryside against the nobles of the realm and knocked down their fortresses.”[[58]](#footnote-58) The latter of these remissions indicate an assembly of neighboring villages in which “several habitants of the *villes*” partook in “conspiracies, alliances and plots against the nobles and clergy for their destruction.”[[59]](#footnote-59) The formation of clustered Jacques, on the basis of a shared threat or vendetta, indicates deliberate strategy and intimate knowledge of the chosen objectives. In the northeast of France, five *villes* attacked the nobles responsible for pillaging the area.[[60]](#footnote-60) The case of Mennency, south of Paris, is nearly identical: neighboring villages joined forces to march on the castle of Villers.[[61]](#footnote-61) Nor were the meetings unique to clusters: remissions issued to Montaidier, Songy, Saint Verain, and a “ville de la chapelle en champagne,” among numerous other*s*, collaborate assemblies as a fundamental mechanism of a local community’s anger.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Across the fifteenth century developed a culture of resistance that wove into France a web of revolt. From the trials of the Black Death in 1348 emerged a rejection of passivity, a pathway to new social realizations.[[63]](#footnote-63) The Rouennais refused to recognize King John’s taxes in 1355, the Parisian bourgeois protested new taxes in 1357, and commoners from Arras to Toulouse attacked collectors, royal officials, and wealthy bourgeoises.[[64]](#footnote-64) For the Jacquerie of 1358, the spark for mobilization was not the crown’s monetary policies nor was it an exasperated explosion of post-plague violence: the nobility of France failed to uphold a social contract, and the Jacques sought punishment. Long disfigured by the expressive accounts of Jean Froissart and Jean le Bel, and stunted by poor historiographical methods, the Jacquerie transformed into a mindless, leaderless mass of brutes. Modern models proved similarly inadequate.

In 1894, Siméon Luce sampled a handful of remissions to depict the Jacques as a cohesive movement under the leadership of the Parisian Étienne Marcel – a model of cooptation forwarded by Raymond Cazelles in the 1970s and Justine Firnhaber-Baker in the 2010s. Despite asserting the principal beats of a Parisian-led Jacquerie, Firnhaber-Baker contends a new model which holds the Jacquerie as a fluid movement dependent on the observer – both a reckoning of aristocratic passivity and a bourgeois revolt against the crown.[[65]](#footnote-65) A study of the remissions – beyond those provided by Luce, which several historians did not pursue – demonstrates that while fluidity occupies a key space in forming a model for the Jacquerie, it is found in an agential system of leadership, not meaning. Elected from the local community, the captains of the Jacquerie, who emerged from the stock-and-file ranks, organized with precision an assault on the nobles of France. To the principal legal apparatus of the kingdom, and in the eyes of contemporary chroniclers, the Jacques represented a separate event free from outside agitation; a series of peasant revolts characterized under an umbrella of anti-noble sentiments. Neither Étienne Marcel nor Charles II of Navarre coopted the men of the countryside against the crown, for the Jacquerie was peasant in origin and function.

Appendix

Appendix A: Map of Jacquerie outbursts as recorded in remissions and chronicles.



Source: Firnhaber-Baker, Justine. “The Eponymous Jacquerie: Making Revolt Mean Some Things.” In *The Routledge History of Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, edited by Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers, 61. New York: Routledge, 2017.

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1. Justine Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie: Making Revolt Mean Some Things,” in *The Routledge History of Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, ed. Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Samuel K. Cohn. Jr., *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1425* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. When asked to arm the people of France, Napoleon answered he “did not wish to be the leader of a jacquerie” – a response codified in French dictionaries as the Jacques’ legacy. See *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, Émile Littré, (Paris: 1864), s.v. “Jacquerie,” https://www.littre.org/definition/jacquerie. For a more recent usage, see Catherine Kiluchi, “L’élection de Donald Trump, une « jacquerie » contemporaine,” *Slate FR*, November 13, 2016. https://www.slate.fr/story/128408/election-donald-trump-jacquerie-contemporaine. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. Geoffrey Brereton, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Group, 1978), 37; Samual K. Cohn, Jr., *Popular Protest in Late-Medieval Europe: Italy, France and Flanders, Manchester Medieval Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)*,*143. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cohn, *Popular Protest,* 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jean le Bel, *The True Chronicles of Jean le Bel, 1290-1360*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Froissart, *Chronicles*, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Froissart, *Chronicles*, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gerald Nachtwey, “Scapegoats and Conspirators in the Chronicles of Jean Froissart and Jean Le Bel” in *Fifteenth-Century Studies 36*, ed. By Barbara I. Gusick and Matthew Z. Heintzelman (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 104. Note that Froissart’s patron Robert of Namur, Lord of Beaufort and Knight of the Garter, desired a collection of valorous deeds. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cohn*, Popular Protest*, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Nachtwey, “Scapegoats and Conspirators,” 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jean le Bel, *The True Chronicle*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Froissart, *Chronicles*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Nachtwey, “Scapegoats and Conspirators,” 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jean de Venette, *Chronique*, in *Popular Protest*, ed. Cohn, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cohn*, Popular Protest*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Chronique normande du XIV e siècle,* ed. A. Molinier and E. Molinier (Paris: Librarie Renouard, 1882), 127-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Chronique normande*, 127-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Le Bel, *True* *Chronicles*, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Siméon Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie d’après des documents inédits*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1894), 31-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Raymond Cazelles, “La Jacquerie fut-elle un mouvement paysan ?,” *Comtes rendus des séances de l’Académie des inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 122 (1978): 665. https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai\_0065-0536\_1978\_num\_122\_3\_13514 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. David Bessen, “The Jacquerie: Class War or Co-Opted Rebellion?,” *Journal of Medieval History* 11 (1985), 43-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Justine Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie: Making Revolt Mean Some Things,” in *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt,* ed. Justine Firnhaber-Baker and Dirk Schoenaers (New York: Routledge, 2016), 68. Firnhaber-Baker is also set to release in 2021 the first monograph of the Jacquerie since Siméon Luce published *Histoire de la Jacquerie* more than 100 years ago. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Justine Firnhaber-Baker, “Soldiers, Villagers, and Politics: Military Violence and the Jacquerie of 1358,” in *Routiers et mercenaires pendant la guerre de Cent ans,* ed. Guilhem Pépin, Françoise Laine, and Frédéric Boutolle (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2016), 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Firnhaber-Baker, “Soldiers, Villagers, and Politics,” 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Robert Lescot, *Chroniques*, in *Popular Protest*, trans. Cohn, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie,” 61. See Appendix A. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Jean de Venette, *The Chronicles of Jean de Venette*, trans. Jean Birdsall (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *The Anonimalle Chronicle*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927), 41-2, trans. Cohn, *Popular Protest*, 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Froissart, *The True Chronicles*, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois (1327-1393)*, ed. Siméon Luce (Paris: Librarie Renouard, 1894), 71; Chronique normande, 127; *Chronique des règnes de Jean II et Charles V*, ed. Roland Delachenal (Paris: Librarie Renouard, 1916), 177-188, trans. Cohn, *Popular Protest*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Chronique des règnes*, 167. “And everywhere, there was hardly a village, town, or other place in Langue d’Oil that had not revolted against the gentlemen either out of sympathy with the Parisians, who despised the nobles so much, or because of the uprising [*mouvement*] of the people.” Here, the two conflicts are tied by a shared hatred for the nobility but are notably distinct. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cazelles, “La Jacquerie: un mouvement paysan ?,” 665. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Paris, Archives nationales, JJ 86, fol. 206v. http://himanis.huma-num.fr/himanis/index.php/ui/pages/chancery/171?feedback=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Archives nationales, JJ 86, fol. 78, no. 239, trans. Cohn*, Popular Protest*, 192-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. AN, JJ 86, fol. 238r. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. AN, JJ 86, fol. 207r. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. AN, JJ 86, fol. 371r. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. AN, JJ 86, fol. 323r-324v; Archives nationales JJ 86, no. 346, ed. Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie*, 266-268. See AN JJ 86, fol. 191r; AN JJ 86, fol. 124v-125r; and JJ 86, fol. 102, no. 308, ed. Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie*, 261-263 for more notable examples of this framing. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Paris, Archives nationales, JJ 90, fol. 217r. http://himanis.huma-num.fr/himanis/index.php/ui/pages/chancery/179?feedback=1. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The past decade boasts a new-found interest in the Jacquerie not seen since French historians explore the event in the 1960s and 1970s. Justine Firnhaber-Baker, as the dominant modern expert on the subject, leads this change, though consensus on the nature of the Jacquerie is far from being reached. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Cazelles, “La Jacquerie : un mouvement paysan ?,” 660-662. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie,” 62-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. “Thinking about the Jacquerie as a military undertaking, begs the questions in the service of what or whom?” Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie,” 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Cazelles, “La Jacquerie : un mouvement paysan ?,” 662. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. AN, JJ 86, no. 230, ed. Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie*, 263-264. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. AN, JJ 90, no. 288, ed. Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie*, 253-254. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Étienne Marcel, Letter to the Communes of Picardy and Flanders, trans. Cohn, *Popular Protests*, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Le Bel, *True Chronicles*, 237. A translation of Jacques Bonhomme. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Cale commanded only a small force near Clermont – a considerable distance from the pan-regional cells of revolt, *Chronique des règnes*, 167, *Chronique premiers Valois,* 158; Even Cale’s band of Jacques rejected his calls for retreat, undermining the extent of his leadership, *Chronique premiers Valois*, 71; Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Douglas James Aiton. “’Shame on him who allows them to live’: The Jacquerie of 1358” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2007), 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. AN, JJ 86, no. 257r-258v. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. AN, JJ 86, fol. 210v, AN, JJ 86, fol. 180r-181v, AN, JJ 86, fol. 189v. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. AN, JJ 86, fol. 189v, AN, JJ 86, fol. 255r-256v. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., fol. 255r-256v. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. AN, JJ 86, fol. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. AN, JJ 86, fol. 319r, AN, JJ 86, fol. 207v, AN, JJ 86, fol. 269r, AN, JJ 86, fol. 455r, AN, JJ 86, fol. 270v, AN, JJ 86, fol. 279r. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty,* 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Firnhaber-Baker, “The Eponymous Jacquerie,” 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)