

Late-Medieval France: A Nation under Construction

A study of French national identity formation and the emerging of national consciousness, before and during the Hundred Years War, 1200-1453



Job van den Broek
MA History of Politics and Society
Dr. Christian Wicke
Utrecht University
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“Ah! Douce France! Amie, je te lairay briefment”¹

-Attributed to Bertrand du Guesclin, 1380

Images on front page: The kings of France, England, Navarre and the duke of Burgundy (as Count of Charolais), as depicted in the *Grand Armorial Équestre de la Toison d’Or*, 1435-1438.

¹ Cuvelier in Charrière, volume 2, pp 320. “Ah, sweet France, my friend, I must leave you very soon.” Translation my own.

Abstract

Whether nations and nationalism are ancient or more recent phenomena is one of the core debates of nationalism studies. Since the 1980's, modernism, claiming that nations are distinctively modern, has been the dominant view. In this thesis, I challenge this dominant view by doing an extensive case-study into late-medieval France, applying modernist definitions and approaches to a pre-modern era. France has by many regarded as one of the 'founding fathers' of the club of nations and has a long and rich history and thus makes a case-study for such an endeavour. I start with mapping the field of French identity formation in the thirteenth century, which mostly revolved around the royal court in Paris.

With that established, I move on to the Hundred Years War and the consequences of this war for French identity. I discuss the war in three parts. In the first part, the Edwardian War (1337-1360), I use the chronicles of Jean le Bel and Jean Froissart to argue that an initially feudal struggle quickly matured into a more 'national' conflict after the French suffered several crushing defeats. In the second part, the Caroline War (1369-1380), I mainly study the *Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin* by Cuvelier, in which a more profound 'love for the kingdom' can be found. In the third part, the Lancastrian War (1415-1453), I show that nation construction took a new course in the fifteenth century. Also in this chapter, I argue that Jeanne d'Arc became the link that connected the constructed/emerged identity of the preceding centuries, that was until then limited to the nobility, to the common populace.

In the end, I conclude that although the medieval French nation and nationalism differ greatly from the modern French nation, it can rightfully be called a nation.

Key words: France, nations, nationalism, modernism, perennialism, ethnies, Hundred Years War

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Chapter I: Introduction

Et bien que celle nacion soit forte et fière et cruele contre ses ennemis, selon que le nom le ségnifie, si est-elle miséricors et débonnaire vers ses subgets et vers ceus que elle soumet par bataille. Car ils ne se combatoient pas anciennement tant pour accroistre leur royaume et leur seigneurie, comme ils faisoient pour aquerre la gloire de victoire, et ne fut-elle pas sansi raison dame nommée sur autres nascious.²

“(…) this nation is strong and proud (-) and [it] has not without reason been appointed above other nations.” This small text indicates a strong awareness of the superiority of this nation and a quick look would fool most readers with some knowledge in nationalism studies in making them believe this text is a relatively modern expression of nationalist sentiment. It is not. The quote is from the introduction of the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, a vernacular³ translation of the official chronicle of the history of France and its kings. In the chronicle, the entire history of France and its kings is narrated, from the first, semi-legendary Frankish kings from the fifth century up to the reign of Charles V (r.1364-1380), when the *Chroniques* received their final form. In it, all major events in the history of France were discussed: the baptism of Clovis, the reign of Charlemagne, the ascension of the Capet dynasty, the crusades and, the wars between Philippe Auguste (r.1180-1223) and finally, the first part of the Hundred Years War. Being the official court chronicles, a certain degree of bias and pro-French propaganda can be found, especially in versions after 1337, the start of the Hundred Years War.

As the introduction of the *Grandes Chroniques* is the oldest part of the chronicle, the aforementioned quote is probably written in the later decades of the thirteenth century, half a millennium before the rise of nationalism and national consciousness in France -according to Eugen Weber, that is.⁴ Weber argued in his *Turning peasants into Frenchmen* that a “unity of mind and feeling” only emerged in France in the late nineteenth century.⁵ This national unity could only be achieved by either being constructed by the central state, or by an “exogenous

² Viard, J.M.E., ed. (1920). *Les Grandes Chroniques de France, Tome Premier*. Paris: Société de l’Histoire de France.

Translation: “And although this nation is strong and proud and cruel against her enemies, as is signified by her name, so is she merciful and easygoing towards her subjects and towards those who she has subjugated by battle. Because they[sic] do not only fight for both expanding their kingdom and their lordship, but also for acquiring the glory of victory and has this lady not without reason been appointed above other nations”
Translation by myself.

³ The language spoken by the general population, in medieval context usually any language that was not Latin and in this case the numerous dialects of old/middle French.

⁴ Eugen Weber, *Turning Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁵ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 95.

shock” -or by a combination of both.⁶ This exogenous shock was for Weber first and foremost the industrial revolution, which is regarded by many fellow modernist scholars on nationalism as a key event that led to the formation of nations and the rise of nationalism.

Although there are numerous modernist theories, for example Gellner’s modernism⁷, Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’⁸ and Hobsbawm’s ‘invented traditions’⁹, all modernist approaches have two propositions in common: First, nationalism is a modern phenomenon¹⁰ and second, nationalism is a product of modernity (i.e. modern developments, such as industrialization, bureaucratization, secularization, democratization and so forth), not from previously existing kinship ties.¹¹ If one is to take a rigid definition of nationalism, let us say an ‘ideological movement’ or phrasing it in such a way that nationalism is by definition predetermined by modernity, this might be true. Ideological movements, the so-called ‘-isms’, are indeed hard to find before the nineteenth century. The same goes for nations defined by modern principles. Take for example Liah Greenfeld’s definition based on popular sovereignty and equality¹² or Anthony Smith’s definition of nation: “A named human population, sharing an historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights for all members.”¹³ No historian would argue that ‘nations’ defined as such preceded the modern era.

Thus, if one is to define ‘nation’ by fundamental aspects of modernity such as popular sovereignty or a single economy, the absence of modernity would immediately mean an absence of ‘nation’. But if the interdependence between the nation and modernity is already presupposed in the definition, how could a nation be anything but modern? A modernist would agree that it consequently could not, but the problem remains that this definition of ‘nation’ cannot be applied to the “nacion” in the *Grandes Chroniques*. For medievalist Rees

⁶ Tomasso Pavone, “The Conditions for Emergence of National Identity: The Narrative of Eugen Weber’s Peasants into Frenchmen,” *Princeton University*. Accessed on 21 June 2020.

https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/tpavone/files/eugen_weber-_peasants_into_frenchmen_critical_review.pdf

⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1983).

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm et al., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

¹⁰ A nuance should be made that the definition of “modern” is not the same with every author, as some even take the 1600’s as starting point.

¹¹ John Breuilly, “Modernism and Writing the History of Nationalism,” in *Writing the History of Nationalism*, ed. Stefan Berger and Eric Storm (London: Bloomsbury Academic), 61.

¹² Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992),

¹³ Anthony Smith, “Opening Statement: Nations and their Pasts,” (Lecture given during the Warwick Debates on Nationalism, Warwick University, Coventry, 24 October 1995).

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/gellner/Warwick.html>

Davies, this very problem was the result of a mere “definitional exercise”¹⁴, which only led to an artificial distinction between the modern and the pre-modern nation (called ‘ethnie’ by Smith). He therefore argued for “understanding past societies on their own terms and through the language and concepts they deploy”, instead of by modern criteria.¹⁵

This is usually the position taken in the perennialist approach, a theory often regarded as the opposite of modernism.¹⁶ Although perennialist often disagree about the extent of continuity of nations, they usually agree upon the fact that pre-modern nations did exist. The extent to which varies greatly, from finding nations all the way back to the 7th century B.C. (Steven Grosby¹⁷) to arguing that the main European nations already emerged in the middle ages (Adrian Hastings¹⁸). The perennialists agree with Davies that ‘past societies should be understood on their own terms’ and therefore use a less restricted definition that can be altered depending on the time period it is applied to.

Working with a flexible definition of nations and nationalism is not only reserved to perennialists. A modernist solution for the definitional problem of the term ‘nation’ in medieval texts has been offered by Greenfeld, who reduced it to a merely linguistic issue by stating that ‘nation’ could have different meanings in the medieval context, often indicating little more than extended lineage.¹⁹ Despite this being a valid claim, it is too easy. Reacting to Greenfeld, Davies argued that, although it is indeed true that “nacion” was applied to entities such as a university community, it was

also true that ‘nacio’ was often used in medieval documents with a meaning which surely corresponds to the connotations of the word in ordinary parlance today. Thus when the first and last native prince of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (d.1282) referred on more than one occasion in his letters to ‘nostra nacio’, it would surely be a form of pedantry not to translate the phrase as ‘our nation’.²⁰

It appears to be that modernists and perennialists use definitions and notions of nation that contradict to such an extent that they could as well be writing in a different language. For perennialists, no fixed definition exists and therefore, pre-modern nations can be found. For

¹⁴ Robert Rees Davies, “Nations and National Identities in the Medieval World: An Apologia,” *Journal of Belgian History* 34, No. 4 (2004): 569

¹⁵ Davies, “Nations and National Identities,” 570

¹⁶ Daniele Conversi, “Mapping the Field: Theories of Nationalism and the Ethnosymbolic Approach,” in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism: History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, ed. Athena Leoussi and Steven Grosby (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 15.

¹⁷ Steven Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

¹⁹ Greenfeld, nationalism, 4-5.

²⁰ Davies, “Nations and National Identity,” 570.

the modernist, nation is pre-defined by modernism and thus the one cannot exist in absence of the other. To make matters more complicated, both approaches often use a contradicting theory explaining nations. Perennialists often (but not always) take a primordial position, stating that nations come from a “significance of vitality which man attributes to, and is constitutive of, both nativity and structures of nativity”, which includes ethnic factors as family, lineage and territory.²¹ Modernists, on the other hand, often prefer a constructivist approach (again, not always), meaning that they regard nations and nationalism as a construct, not the result of a natural process.

Few exceptions exist, the best known probably Smith’s theory of ethnosymbolism in which he accepts the existence of pre-modern identities that influenced modern-nation building, while still upholding the conviction that nations are distinctively modern.²² These pre-modern societies should not be regarded as nations but merely as ‘proto-nations’, or ethnies, as Smith labelled them. These ethnies would have some aspects of modern nations, such as shared memories and a shared ethnic descent.²³ However, lacking the more modern aspects of Smith’s definition of nation, these ethnies were not nations -yet. Although Smith is strictly speaking still a modernist, his acceptance of the influence of the ethnic origins of pre-modern societies also gives him a pronounced primordialist and even a perennialist view. Smith has been criticised by both modernists, such as John Connor who accused Smith of being ‘speculative’²⁴, and by perennialists, who refute Smith’s conclusion that despite its pre-modern origins, a nation is a modern phenomenon.

Clearly, the current debate within nationalism studies fails to come up with a definitive answer to what our anonymous monk meant when he used the term ‘nacion’ in the *Grandes Chroniques*. Modernists would designate it as an anomaly or claim that it could indicate any group of people, as Greenfeld argues. Perennialists would accept it as being meant as ‘nation’, but without addressing some of the valid critique brought forth by the modernists, leaving the disagreement unresolved and thus the question ultimately unanswered. Therefore, I would like to take the task upon myself to find out whether the late-medieval France from the *Grandes Chroniques* and thereafter could indeed rightfully be regarded as a nation, and if it exists, whether it did in combination with nationalism -not as an ideology as in modern times, but as a sentiment experienced by all contemporary Frenchmen.

²¹ Steven Grosby, “Territoriality: The Transcendental, Primordial Feature of Modern Societies,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 1:2, 144 in Conversi, *Theories of Nationalism*, 20-21.

²² Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

²³ Smith, *Nations*,

²⁴ John Connor, “The Timelessness of Nations,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10: ½, 35-37.

My aim is not to only use one theory or approach, but to prove the existence of a medieval French nation by taking a constructivist-perennialist approach, without excluding primordialism from the start. Only modernism is inapplicable on this case-study, as the presumption of modernism that the nation is inherently modern is incompatible with the hypothesis of this study, being that late-medieval France was an emerging nation. However, it might very well be the case, would I be unable to find substantial evidence for a medieval French nation, that I end up with a modernist conclusion. My research question for this study is twofold: “Did a French nation already emerge during the later middle ages (1200-1453), and if so, was this emergence accompanied by some form of early nationalism?” Considering that France was for the majority of this time period interlocked in a 116-years long war with England, the extent to which this conflict influenced possible nation-formation will also be studied.

Such an extensive case-study has already been done multiple times for the case of medieval England, in which Adrian Hastings built a convincing case for the English nation to have emerged in the middle ages.²⁵ However, Hastings took a mostly primordialist approach. For France, there is Eugene Weber’s iconic but modernist *Turning Peasants into Frenchmen*. The study that comes closest to arguing for the emergence of a French nation in the medieval era is Collete Beaune’s *La Naissance de la Nation France*. In spite of the title indicating differently, Beaune does not venture on providing a direct answer to the question whether medieval France was indeed a nation, let alone claiming a nationalistic presence. I hope to achieve this by combining empirical evidence, some of which can already be found in Beaune’s work, with several theories of nationalism, most notably Smith’s theory of ethnosymbolism, but with a more constructivist and perennial approach; also applying Hobsbawm’s *invented traditions* on medieval France. This, in my view, combines the best of both worlds: the nuanced, primordial-modernist approach of Smith merged with constructivist-perennialism using modernist theories. I will not make the classic modernist mistake of pre-defining the terms nation and nationalism, but for the sake of the argument, as definition for ‘nation’ I will use Smith’s definition which has been mentioned above. Although this definition seems to be presupposed by modernity at first sight, Davies already indicated that this could not be entirely true. For nationalism, any definition presupposing an ideological movement is *a priori* inapplicable on any pre-modern era. Therefore, I go with

²⁵ Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*.

Greenfeld's conclusion that the only foundation of nationalism is the nation and that nationalism is the subsequent "style of thought" related to the nation.²⁶

As regards to the structure of this thesis, I will start by mapping the field of French identity in the thirteenth century, before moving to the Hundred Years War and its effects on this identity. The war will be discussed in three parts; which coincides with the threefold division often used by historians to divide the Hundred Years War: the Edwardian War (1337-1360); the Caroline War (1369-1380) and the Lancastrian War (1415-1453). Finally, I will end with the conclusions. The thesis will take the form of a causal narrative, in which the consequences of the events of the Hundred Years War on French identity will be studied.

²⁶ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 3-4.

Chapter II: French National Identity in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Century

No study into medieval French identity, or any medieval identity, could leave out the enormous impact of Christianity. Although some argue that nationalism has been the secular replacement for religion, Christianity and ‘national’ identity have for long been intertwined. In few countries has this connection been stronger than in France, where especially the perceived connection between God and king was particularly strong. The origins for this ‘sacred bond’ can be found in the thirteenth century. A major source of the beginning of this connection, both for contemporary Frenchmen as for our current understanding of this phenomenon, is *The Grandes Chroniques de France*. Originally a history of the French people until the reign of Philippe Auguste (r.1180-1223), written in Latin, the Grand Chronicles were popularized when they were translated into the vernacular language. The popularity of these Chronicles shows a clear interest in ‘national’ history by medieval Frenchmen. But it was not only history that was written in the Chronicles. The Chronicles were used for mythification of French kings and history, as well thereby effectively *constructing* a history and national identity, based on what Hobsbawm calls ‘invented traditions.’ This mythification -or constructing of identity- was done in two ways: by blood and by faith.

The Trojan myth

The first part of constructing a French identity, the *mythification of the blood*, was achieved by establishing non-existing links between French nobility and the great heroes of antiquity.²⁷ According to the very first chapter of the Chronicles, the French kings are direct descendants of the Trojans:

[L]i rois de France, par les quex li roiaumes est glorieus et renommez, descendirent de la noble ligniée de Troie.²⁸

But this invented Trojan ancestry was not limited to the king. Colette Beaune conducted extensive research on the fabricated Trojan ancestries of medieval Frenchmen. She concluded that most French histories in the late middle ages began with the myth of the destruction of

²⁷ Certain influences from early renaissance should not be underestimated.

²⁸ Viand, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, volume I, 4. “The kings of France, by whose doings the kingdom is glorious and renowned, descend from the noble lineage of Troy.” Translation my own.

Troy and that in this same period, nearly every noble house of France propagated an imagined ancestry traced back to ancient Troy. This meant, irrelevant of the credibility of this ancestry, that French nobility and their king were now connected by a thousand years old ‘invented’ bloodline. In this way, the French ancestry had become more than just a sum of its parts; more than a melting pot of Gauls, Romans and Germans brought together by subsequent foreign conquests and mass migrations. Instead, the French ethnical heritage became linear in this new narrative: Trojans had become Gauls, Gauls had become Franks and Franks had become French. The ‘French’ were now a race that had existed throughout history and was destined for greatness. Beaune calls this the “ennoblement of a collectivity”, which was based on nothing more than an invented myth of ancestry.²⁹ The reason for choosing Troy over any other classical ancestry was probably not random nor incidental. In pre-renaissance Europe, many classical myths had been forgotten and the story of Troy was by far one of the more popular surviving myths as it had become a ‘parallel to the fall of men’, giving it a distinctively Christian meaning.³⁰ Many of the chivalric qualities which were held in high regard in a medieval society were thought to have already been present in Trojan blood and provided proof for the elevated status of France over the other European kingdoms and realms. Moreover, the besieged city of Troy provided an exemplary metaphor for France during the Hundred Year’s War, a comparison made by multiple contemporary writers and poets.³¹ This was the kind of identity one expects to find in an *ethnie*.

Royal symbolism

In addition to the ethnical, mythical Trojan heritage, the second mythification of French history was applied to ancient heroes closer to home and was not done by blood or ancestry, but by faith and more *civic* means.³² Using the stories of the early Merovingian dynasty, the *Grandes Chroniques* carefully constructed a historical legend in which the special place of the French kings before God is explained. This process began in the thirteenth century and marked a decisive change in how ‘France’ was perceived, as until approximately 1200, what is now called France could hardly be labelled as a single entity. Not only was the power (and most of the prestige) of the French king limited to Paris and its

²⁹ Beaune, *Naissance*, 227.

³⁰ Timothy Arner, “The Trojan War in the Middle Ages,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2016.

³¹ Amongst others the famous Christine de Pisan and Martin Lefranc, see chapter IV.

³² Civic was for Smith the opposite of ethnic and one of the major differences between the pre-modern, ‘ethnic’ *ethnie* and the modern nation. The apparent construction of a more ‘civic’ identity in the middle ages is something Smith would probably be reluctant to acknowledge.

surroundings, the king was also formally subordinate to both the pope and the Holy Roman emperor, the nominal successor of the Roman emperors. Both would however be side-tracked at the turn of the thirteenth century.

Over the course of several decades, jurists at the royal court worked to prove the independence of France from the Empire, which was finally recognized in the papal bull *Per Venerabilem* (1202). From then on, it was said that the king of France was “rex superiorem non recognoscens”; ‘not recognizing a king superior to him’.³³ When French kings came into conflict with the papacy a century later, four additional pieces of evidence were ‘found’ (or fabricated) to prove the independence of France: The *Donatio Constantini*; the eviction of the last of the Merovingians with consent of the pope; the statute of the *Regnum Franciae* of Charlemagne and, again, the Trojan origins of the French.³⁴ As a result, the defence of “the honour and independence” of the kingdom became subject of many theoretical and judicial treaties written under Philippe le Bel.³⁵

The legitimacy of France was not only derived from judicial arguments and long forgotten or made-up (constructed) treaties. A process of mythification and cultification of the kings was began in the thirteenth century as well. The kingdom was given a saintly founder, in the form of Clovis I (r.466-511). Although never officially canonized by the Catholic Church, Clovis became the subject of a ‘national’ myth.³⁶ This myth told the story of the Holy Spirit descending from heaven, holding a vial of oil which was used for the baptism of Clovis. The same vial of oil, later named the Holy Ampulla, was then used for all royal coronations -or at least that is what was believed at the time. However, no historical proof has been found of the Holy Ampulla existing before the Ordo of 1250, which drastically altered the coronation ceremony and added a lot of symbolism and decorum.³⁷ From 1250 onwards, the coronation ceremony became more important and more restricted. Always taking place in Reims, with all royal regalia (ampulla, sword, sceptre, Oriflamme) being brought there by elaborate processions, it became a sacral ritual, in which the

³³ Innocent III, *Per Venerabilem*, Papal Bull, 1202.

³⁴ Beaune, *Naissance*, 42.

³⁵ George Picot, *Documents Relatifs aux États-Generaux et Assemblées réunies sous Philippe le Bel*. (Paris, 1901), 8.

³⁶ Interestingly, the stories of Clovis I do not only have a religious aspect. Until around 1300, many stories were told about Clovis, not all very ‘Christian’ nor ‘French’. After 1300 however, most stories of Clovis’ internal struggles disappeared and only his wars against the pagan Visigoths (Germanics!) remained. In this way, the history of Clovis was adjusted for its purpose: presenting him as the saintly founder of France. Inappropriate behavior or civil wars did not fit into this new narrative.

³⁷ Jaques Le Goff, “A Coronation Program for the Age of Saint Louis: The Ordo of 1250,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early modern Monarchic Rituals*, ed. János Bak (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 46-57.

connection between God and king was affirmed. Within a generation, the French came to believe that all these myths and traditions were ancient customs and although some were, most of the coronation ritual was nothing but a constructed, invented tradition.

Reinforced by all the decorum surrounding the monarchy, the French kings were elevated to the rank of almost a demi-God. Beaune even points out that from Louis VIII (r.1223-1226) onwards, French kings were seen as saints.³⁸ The canonization of Louis IX (r.1226-1270), ‘the greatest of all French kings’, only further supported the sacral position of the kings of France, and by the end of the thirteenth century, the kings of France were attributed the ability to perform miracles.³⁹ Guillaume de Nogaret (1260-1313), statesman and councillor of Philippe IV (r.1285-1314) noted that

C’est une verité prouvée et connue dans le monde entier que les rois de France [sont] des princes saints et très Chrétiens.⁴⁰

It is not really surprising that these words were uttered by a councillor of Philippe IV, as Philippe was the first king to permanently adopt the honorary title *le roi très Chrétien*: “The most Christian king”, a title that would become part of the official style of the French kings at the time of Charles V (r.1364-1380) and stay until the French Revolution. This symbolism did not only serve a religious purpose: it was political as well. The coronation ceremony, the anointment with oil from the Holy Ampulla, and the title “Most Christian king” all had two main purposes: Establishing a direct relation between God and king (effectively eliminating the pope from the equation; Beaune calls it “propaganda”⁴¹) and showing the exceptional position of French kings in the temporal world. Through this, it served yet another purpose: it legitimized the position of the king, albeit legitimized by God, not yet by the people. In order to strengthen the connection between king, country and its people, the king started to act as an intermediary between his subjects and God, the main object of medieval loyalty. This was, together with the aforementioned symbolism, achieved by a simple means: redirecting prayers, comparable to what saints are supposed to do in Catholic theology. A prayer for the welfare of the king was not only considered as addressed to the king himself, but through him to the kingdom as a whole, because good fortunes for the king meant good fortunes for

³⁸ Beaune, *Naissance*, 224.

³⁹ Marc Bloch, *Les Rois Thaumaturges, Étude sur la Caractère Surnaturel de la Puissance Royale* (Paris: A. Collin, 1961), 129-130.

⁴⁰ Guillaume de Nogaret in: Edgar Boutaric, *Documents relatifs à la histoire de France sous Philippe le Bel* (Paris 1861), 68. “It is a proven truth, well-known in the entire world, that the kings of France are saintly and most-Christian princes.” Translation my own.

⁴¹ Beaune, *Naissance*, 210.

France⁴² and good fortunes for France would mean good fortunes for God, as France was considered by contemporary Frenchmen to be “God’s garden on earth”.⁴³ Pope Clément V (r.1305-1314) even encouraged the faithful to “pray daily for the king or the kingdom”. This constructed connection signified that not only the king of France, but France as a whole should be considered as *Très Chétien* and spiritually superior. Notion of this spiritual superiority of France and the French before the eyes of God is given by Jacques de Vitry (1180-1240):

Il y a beaucoup de nations chrétiennes, parmi elles, la première est la France et les français sont purs Catholiques.⁴⁴

The *Grandes Chroniques de France*, discussed before, gives a more elaborate and literary account:

Car onques puis que elle fu convertie et elle commença à servir à son créateur, ne fut heure que la foi n'y fust plus fervement et plus droilement tenue que en nule autre terre: par elle est moutepliée, par elle est soustenue, par elle est-elle deïëndue. Si nule autre nascion fait à sainte Eglyse force ni grief, en France en vient faire sa complainte, en France vient à refuge et à secours; de France vient l'espée et le glaive par quoi elle est vengiee, et France, comme loiale fille, secourt sa mère à tous besoins; elle a tousjours la selle mise, pour lui aidieret secourre.⁴⁵

Even pope Clément V was very clear:

Dieu choisit-il le royaume de France entre tous autres peuples⁴⁶

The councillors of Philippe le Bel did not waste time to use this newly constructed position of France to their advantage. In many treaties written in the early 1300’s, France was positioned as the most Christian nation, the foundation of the church and the king was compared to an Archangel, who drew his sword against the forces of evil.⁴⁷ All of this was still very

⁴² Ibid., 79.

⁴³ Gervais de Bus, *Le Roman de Fauvel*, ed. Alexandre Langfors (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1914-1919), Volume I, 45.

⁴⁴ Jacques de Vitry, in Marie-Madeleine Martin, *Histoire de l’Unité Française* (Paris: Égloff, 1948), 157. “There are many Christian nations, of these, the primary is France and the French are pure Catholics.” Translation my own.

⁴⁵ Viard, *Grandes Chroniques*, 8. “Since she has been converted and she has started serving her creator, the faith has not been [as] fervently and rightly upheld in any other country: by her [France] it [faith] has multiplied, by her it has been supported, by her it has been defended. When any other nation hurt or discontented the Holy Church, [The church] went to France to complain, went to France to seek refuge and help, from France came the knife and the sword by which it [the church] was avenged and France, as a loyal daughter, helped her mother in all needs. Also, for always, she is the only possibility for help and safety.” Translation my own.

⁴⁶ Pope Clément V, in Bloch, *Les Rois Thaumaturges*, 105-110. “God chose the Kingdom of France between [sic] all other peoples.” Translation my own.

⁴⁷ Picot, *Documents Relatifs*, 40-41; Pierre Dupuy, *Histoire du différend d’entre le pape Boniface VIII et Philippe le Bel, Roy de France* (Paris, 1655), 241-242.

theoretical and perceived only by the intellectuals and the (literate) elite of the kingdom, although they tried hard to convey this message to the general populace, for example by translating the *Grandes Chroniques* into the vernacular in order to “invite the masses into history”, as Smith said during the famous Warwick Debates on nationalism.⁴⁸ Perhaps the most obvious of these attempts is this very popular prayer that was created for this single purpose the fourteenth century:

Dieu sauve le roi et nous mêmes en ce monde, que notre roi vive dans l'éternité et nous avec lui. Que le roi règne, que la France exulte!⁴⁹

God was not the only receiver of this kind of prayer. Over the course of time, the French had adopted a great number of patron saints.⁵⁰ Of these patrons, Saint-Denis would become the most prominent, mostly due to the close historical ties between the royal family and the Abbey of Saint-Denis, ten kilometres outside of Paris. Saint-Denis is another example of a national myth being constructed as such. Just a minor saint until the mid-twelfth century, he was quickly elevated to the position of principal patron by Sugèr, abbot of Saint-Denis and a very influential advisor to Louis VI (r.1108-1137).⁵¹ In order to support Saint-Denis's newly acquired position of principal saint of the kingdom, a fitting narrative was needed. This was quickly fabricated by making him the converter of Clothilde, Clovis's wife, who in turn had converted her husband, making Saint-Denis and not Saint-Rémy the spiritual father of all French Christians. In addition, the banner of Saint Denis (the so-called *Oriflamme*) and the battle cry that went with it (“*Montjoie Saint-Denis*”) became two very powerful symbols of the house of Capet and the kingdom of France, allegedly attributed to Charlemagne himself.

A pattern seems to develop. All that was to become symbols of France and its monarchy, began its life as a simple tradition, only to be picked up somewhere in the twelfth or thirteenth century, attributed to Clovis or Charlemagne, complemented with some convenient, invented myths or traditions and presented as an eternal symbol of France, in order to construct an artificial connection between God, king and country(men). There are

⁴⁸ Smith, *Warwick Debates*.

⁴⁹ “God save the king and ourselves and this world, that our king will live in eternity and we with him. For when the king reigns, France will exult!”-Beaune, *Naissance*, 80. Translation my own. This is the first time the maxim “God save the king” (or Domine, salvum fac regem in latin) was named. This sentence would later on become the official prayer of the French monarchy and be set on music. One particular version, by André-Danican Philidor l'Ainé, was slightly adapted by Georg Friedrich Händel for his version: indeed, the version that would become the now famous anthem of the United Kingdom.

⁵⁰ Saint-Rémy (the Baptist of Clovis); Saint-Martin de Tours; Saint-Louis, Sainte-Geneviève (mostly in Paris), Saint-Denis and many more.

⁵¹ Gabrielle Spiegel. “The Cult of Saint Denis and Capetian Kingship,” *Journal of Medieval History*, No.1 (1975): 45.

many more examples to name, such as the *Fleur-de-lys* (apparently given to Clovis by an angel as a symbol of his victories), the position of Paris, and so forth and so on.

But what does this all mean? One might be inclined to conclude that French identity in the late thirteenth-early fourteenth century looks a lot like an *ethnie*, as it covers the literal meaning of ethnosymbolism: a shared, (but constructed) ancestry (*ethno*), combined with sacral symbols (*symbolism*). Is this it, or was early fourteenth century France more than just an *ethnie*? Smith and any modernist would probably deny this, but one could also take the more perennialist approach and use Davies's medievalist definition of nation: as it was defined by its contemporaries.⁵² By doing so, the existence of a French nation in 1300 could simply be proven by the occurrence of the term 'nation' in the *Grandes Chroniques*. This, I deem too easy, for the simple reason that 'nation' could still hold very different meanings, as Greenfeld correctly explained.⁵³ Even if one is to take only 'nation' as 'a certain amount of sovereign land' which Davies preferred, this still causes massive problems for thirteenth-century France. There are ample indications that with 'nation' or even with the term 'France', only the regions and domains under direct control of the king were meant. For most of the middle ages, this narrow definition would come down to just Paris and the Ile-de-France.⁵⁴

A second problem is the extent to which this early 'French identity' reached. I made clear that around 1300, at least the king and the higher nobility had some sense of a (constructed) national awareness. However, it is not so clear whether the average late thirteenth-century peasant had any notion of the judicial-theoretical debates at the court. Even the mythification and sanctification of the French kings was probably something not universally known outside of the Paris region and the Ile-de-France, albeit most Frenchmen at the time probably did at least have some notion of the king being special, but this does not justify attributing a national awareness to these peoples. The only way these people were influenced by an idea of 'defending the kingdom' is by being levied, which seldomly happened, or by having to pay taxes and therefore Beaune concluded that for most people, defending the kingdom in the early fourteenth century meant little more than paying taxes.⁵⁵ That this view was also held at the court at the time is clear: 'propagandists' at the court claimed that "everyone should pay what the king demanded for the common defence".⁵⁶

⁵² Davies, "Nations and National Identities," 570.

⁵³ Greenfeld. *Nationalism*, 7-9.

⁵⁴ Beaune, *Naissance*, 312.

⁵⁵ Beaune, *Naissance*, 235.

⁵⁶ Martin, *Histoire*, 151-158.

Additionally, the third and final problem with the way France was perceived, is that the constructed identity was used as a means, not as a purpose as such. Serving the king and France had become almost synonymous for serving God, as prosperity for the king (God's lieutenant on earth), often meant peace, stability and relative justice in the country; and vice versa. Add to this that by 1300, many believed that France was the closest thing to paradise on earth due to it being *Très Chrétien* and being chosen by God, leading to the perception that defending this country was a holy mission. One was not defending the nation of France; one was defending God's own garden on earth. This is perhaps best illustrated by the contemporary meaning of the Latin term *Amor Patriae*. In modern times, *Amor Patriae* would be translated as "love for the fatherland". Although this was probably the literal translation in thirteenth century France as well, by 'fatherland', a medieval writer did not mean France or any temporal region, but the celestial and divine fatherland: Heaven.⁵⁷ Abélard, the famous twelfth-century poet, articulated it as follows:

La patrie que nous appelons de nos vœux, c'est la Jerusalem celeste et sur cette terre de Babylone, nous ne passons qu'un long exil.⁵⁸

Having considered this all, none but Davies's very loose definition of nation can be applied to early fourteenth century France. Indeed, a new narrative was constructed, based on an invented ancestry and a semi-mythical relation between God, king and country. In a sense, the theories of both constructivism and Hobsbawm's *invented traditions* can easily be applied to this time period, as I have shown. Be that as it may, the narrative of France was far from complete in the early fourteenth century and not commonly known outside of Paris and the higher echelons of society. A French nation and nationalism might have emerged in the thirteenth century, but if it did, it was of a very different nature than a modern nation and modern nationalism. The narrative of France as the most Christian kingdom and its king as a saint, so carefully constructed over the course of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, would soon be put to the test.

⁵⁷ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 97; Beaune, *Naissance*, 325-327.

⁵⁸ Abélard, in: Ernst Kantorowicz, *Die Wiederkehr Gelehrter Anachorese im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1937), 99. "The fatherland that we call in our wishes is celestial Jerusalem and on this land of Babylon [the temporal earth], we live only in a long exile." Translation my own.

Chapter III: A Problem Emerges (1328-1360)

In 1328, Charles IV (r.1322-1328), King of France and Navarre, died. He was the last direct heir of the Capetian dynasty and died childless. This presented the kingdom of France with a serious succession crisis. It was quickly decided by the peers of France that the throne would pass to the count of Valois (Philippe VI; r.1328-1350), the closest male heir to the now distinct Capet dynasty. The reasoning for choosing Valois over Isabella of England⁵⁹, who was a more direct heir to the last Capetian, was simply that “the kingdom of France was too noble to be passed to a female”.⁶⁰ Although this might have been the official reason given by the *pairs de France*, the main reason probably was that accepting Isabella’s claim meant considering Edward III Plantagenet (r.1327-1377), king of England, as heir to the throne of France.

Such a threat of the English obtaining the throne of France was considered ‘extremely undesirable’.⁶¹ The origin of the animosity between France and England is not hard to explain: ever since William the Conqueror, duke of Normandy, had become king of England, the English Plantagenet dynasty held considerable amounts of land in France. Nominally, they held these lands only as feudal vassals of the French king, but in reality, these lands should be considered as having either been independent or part of what is sometimes labelled the ‘Angevin Empire’ in modern historiography.⁶² For the majority of the thirteenth century,

⁵⁹ Daughter of Philippe IV, see family tree in appendix B.

⁶⁰ Jean le Bel, *The True Chronicles of Jean le Bel, 1290-1360*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 55. For this chapter, most primary source material comes from the two main sources of the early Hundred Years War: The Chronicles of Jean le Bel (1359) and those of Jean Froissart (±1400). Of these two, Froissart is by far the most famous and could even be regarded the most well-known medieval ‘historian’. Both are however also very different. Le Bel was a knight and clearly favored the King of England. Froissart, on the other hand, was not a knight himself and appears to take a more neutral approach. Although both chronicles overlap for the first 21 years of the War (1337-1358) and Froissart actually just copies parts from le Bel for his chronicle, both are still rather different in both detail and approach. Le Bel takes the more classic approach, telling the story from a typical knight’s perspective. Froissart, despite starting off in the same fashion as le Bel, developed his own style more and more and adds more eyewitness reports and dialogue to his chronicle, especially in the second book and onwards. For both works, both the original French text (provided by the French National archives and the online Gutenberg project; exact referencing can be found in the bibliography) and an English translation are used, in order to prevent translation issues. When referencing le Bel and Froissart in this study, the English translations are being referred to. For le Bel, I have used the translation by Nigel Bryant (Cambridge University Press, 2014) and for Froissart the translation by Geoffrey Brereton (Penguin Classics, 1978). Because both translations are not literal translations, the original French manuscripts (if available) and texts have been consulted for every quote, in order to provide a quote by Froissart and le Bel, and not a quote of their respective translators. The footnote will refer to the translations.

⁶¹ Nathan Daniels, “The Problem with French National Identity in the Late Middle Ages,” *Ex Post Facto*, No. 19 (2010): 11.

⁶² Guus Pikkemaat, *Eleonore van Aquitanië: Een Bijzondere Vrouw in het Zomertijd der Middeleeuwen* (Soesterberg: Uitgeverij Aspekt, 2013), 183.

French kings had preoccupied themselves with reconquering these lands for the crown and expelling the Plantagenets; with varying degrees of success. In 1328, the year the last direct Capetian died, the English king still held most of the duchy of Gascony in southwestern France.⁶³

At first, Edward III, having become king of England just the year before, accepted the Count of Valois as the rightful king of France and did homage to Philippe VI in 1329 for his fiefs of Aquitaine and Gascony.⁶⁴ However, tensions rose as pressure was applied to Edward from many sides to pursue his ‘birth right’ and in 1337, Edward declared war on France. The Hundred Years War had begun, but the first few years passed without much action.

Sluys, Tournai, Crécy and Calais

In the early years of the war, it was regarded by most contemporaries as a feudal feud between two kings claiming the same throne. A clear indication of this can be found in the composition of the French armies of the early war, of which both le Bel and Froissart provide ample evidence. At the (sea)battle for the coast of Sluys⁶⁵, le Bel names the presence of “French, Normans, Gascons, Bretons, Germans and Genoese”, commanded by an Italian mercenary captain going by the Frenchified name of “Barbevaire”.⁶⁶ Two things immediately stand out: the presence of many foreigners and the fact that to le Bel, Normans, Gascons and Bretons were apparently not part of the same group of peoples he called ‘French’, again giving evidence for the case that ‘France’ at the time mostly meant the region around Paris. Froissart only named Normans and Picards as separate entities from the French and by Picards, he probably referred to modern-day Belgians.⁶⁷ Despite having the majority both in ships and in soldiers, the French were defeated at Sluys.

⁶³ See map II.

⁶⁴ Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. Geoffrey Brereton (London: Penguin Classics, 1978), 55-56. Interestingly enough, Le Bel, Froissart’s principle source for this pre-war era, does not tell about Edward doing homage. This could be because of le Bel’s bias towards Edward (“The kingship [of France] should rightfully have passed to him [Edward III]”, le Bel pp.65), as Edwards homage did undermine his claims to the French throne as he clearly accepted Philippe’s rule by doing homage. However, perhaps even more interestingly, Froissart tells us that he believes that Edward did not complete his homage: “I believe that King Edward paid homage with words and a kiss only, without putting his hands between the hands of the King of France (-). The King of England refused on that occasion, on the advice he was given, to proceed further with his homage (-).” (Froissart, *Chronicles*, 55). It definitely seemed like Edward and his advisors were already considering pushing his claim to the throne of France.

⁶⁵ Modern-day ‘Sluis’ in the Netherlands, close to the Belgium border.

⁶⁶ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 86.

⁶⁷ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 62. It should also be noted that with *Picards*, Froissart probably meant people living in what is currently the border region between France and the French-speaking part of Belgium, which was in 1340 still a part of the Holy Roman Empire.

After Sluys, the English went to besiege the city of Tournai and it is during this siege that for the first time, the war seemed to have become more than just ‘a war of two kings’. Le Bel writes:

Le Roy Philippe de France, qui moult envis souffroit le meschief que ses gens enduroient dedens Tournay, et véoit le honte et le despit qu'on luy faisoit, envoya par sout son royaume, et prez et loing, si fort et estroit commandement que nul n'osa demourer, viel ne joeune, que tous ne venissent à son mandement à Arras, là où il estoit et les attendoit, hors mis ceulx qu'il avoit envoyé en ses fertresses. Si venoient de jour en jour les ungs aprez les aultres, et ainsy qu'ilz venoient, il les véoit logier en villes champestres qui sont entour Arras, par devers Doway.⁶⁸

Here, something very peculiar happens. The king of France seemed to realize that the people he is responsible for are suffering. He also noted that his honour was being violated, which is of course still a very medieval notion appearing uncountably often in these sources and which I will revisit later. Nevertheless, Philippe still decides to act and to scramble soldiers from all corners of France -and these soldiers responded to the call of their king. These calls-to-arms appear multiple times in both le Bel and Froissart, always with seemingly massive response. They have been presented almost as a medieval version of the *Levée en masse*, the (nationalistic⁶⁹) conscription during the Revolution. Medieval levies were in reality very difficult to muster and even more difficult to retain.⁷⁰ It is therefore quite possible that with “all men without fail”, le Bel did not mean all men literally, but more or less ‘all men who were supposed to fight’, i.e. nobles and professional soldiers.⁷¹ This would match the findings in the previous chapter, in which I showed that French identity was still very much limited to the elite. The exact number of soldiers that showed up is uncertain, but it could not have been very impressive, as the French proved unable to break the siege of Tournai.

After Tournai, six years of relative peace passed, only disturbed by a ‘proxy war’ in Brittany.⁷² The Hundred Years War resumed in 1346, when the French launched an offensive

⁶⁸ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 89. “King Philip of France, very unhappy to have his people suffering so in Tournai and to see the shame and disgrace that were being inflicted upon him, sent a strict and urgent command throughout his kingdom, near and far, that all men without fail, young and old alike, except those he'd stationed in his fortresses, should come at his bidding to Arras where he was awaiting them. Day by day they streamed in, and as they arrived, he saw them billeted in the country towns and villages between Arras and Douai.” Translation by Nigel Bryant.

⁶⁹ In the 1790's, for the first time, hundreds of thousands of conscripts were raised to ‘protect France’.

⁷⁰ Helen Nicholson, *Medieval warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300-1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 120. “[medieval French] Town levies provided troops of unreliable quality: They were reluctant to assemble, anxious to get home or to run away when battle was joined.”

⁷¹ This view is further supported by Froissart, who refers to “*Gens d'Armes* [fighting men]” when he describes the same event (Froissart, *Chronicles*, 72) instead of Le Bel's less specific “*que nul n'osa demourer, viel ne joeune*”.

⁷² This so-called ‘War of the Breton Succession’ (1341-1365) started as a succession war much alike the Franco-Anglo wars, but quickly degenerated into a proxy war, in which the French and English would fight

into English-controlled Gascony and laid siege to the fortress of Aiguillon. Realizing that the majority of the French forces was now in the south, Edward invaded Normandy and ravaged the rich lands of the province unopposed. As a response, the king of France assembled a mighty army. This army was not very ‘French’, as can be derived from its composition: according to several sources, it had three kings in its ranks⁷³, “Twelve thousand Genoese and auxiliaries”⁷⁴ and lords and knights from all over Europe looking for adventure and gold.⁷⁵ But the soldiers of the French army were not all nobles or foreigners: Froissart also mentions the presence of “countless volunteers from the district”.⁷⁶ Although these volunteers did not actually participate in the devastating battle of Crécy, in which this “magnificent army”⁷⁷ was utterly annihilated by the numerically inferior English, they were there nonetheless, voluntarily and quite bloodthirsty, as Froissart describes vividly:

Quand ils durent approcher leurs ennemis, à trois lieues près ils sachèrent leurs épées et écrièrent: ‘A la mort, à la mort!’ Et si ne véoient nullui.⁷⁸

So, although they did not play any role of significance in the battle, there was still a significant popular force present, willing to fight their enemy and prepared to die for ‘it’. The question that now remains is what exactly they were willing to die for. Their king? Their country?

This kind of loyalty and willingness to fight in the common populace (i.e. non-nobles) is not unique in the early war. Both Froissart and le Bel told the story of the citizens of Calais (which Edward went to besiege after his victory at Crécy).⁷⁹ Calais was defended with persistence and only surrendered when the city was starving. Jean de Vienne, the commander of Calais, gives us some insight in where his loyalties were: He surrendered saying that he and his men had done their uttermost best to “avoid any shame or loss to us or to him [the

each other for 20 years, regardless of any peace treaties between the major powers. Whether this should be called the English or French ‘Vietnam’ of the Middle Ages is still up for debate (Jean Delumeau, *Histoire de la Bretagne*. Toulouse: 1969).

⁷³ The kings of France, Navarra and Bohemia.

⁷⁴ According to Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 179. Numbers in medieval chronicles are often exaggerated, so their number was probably less than 12.000. Despite this, the Genoese probably still formed a significant part of Philippe’s fighting force.

⁷⁵ Bertrand Schnerb. “Vassals, Allies and Mercenaries: the French Army before and after 1346,” in *The Battle of Crécy, 1346*, ed. Andrew Ayton and Philip Preston (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 265–272.

⁷⁶ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 87.

⁷⁷ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 179.

⁷⁸ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 87. “When they came within ten miles of the enemy, they drew their swords and shouted: ‘to the death, to the death’. Yet they hadn’t seen a soul.” Translation my own, based on Brereton. Brereton however translates *à la mort* with “kill”, while the literal translation would be “to the death”.

⁷⁹ Froissart also tells us an interesting story of early English ethnicism: After having taken Calais, Edward III ordered Calais to be “repopulated with pure-blooded English” (Froissart, *Chronicles*, 110), identifying an English notion of ethnic differentiation between the English and the French.

king of France], (...) we served our lord as faithfully as we could”.⁸⁰ Froissart attributed such loyalty to the Calaisiens as well, stating that “They had lost everything for the sake of the King of France.”⁸¹ Loyalty was mostly felt toward the person of king and not to an abstract idea of ‘nation’. This is more complex than it seems, as the thirteenth century *invented traditions* had made the king a symbol of the abstract entity of France and thus loyalty to the king automatically transferred to the underlying idea of ‘France’. Question that remains is to what extent the volunteers at Crécy and the citizens of Calais were aware of these subtleties.

Simultaneously with the battle of Crécy and the siege of Calais, a French army under the Duke of Normandy (the future Jean II, r.1350-1364) was besieging the fortress of Aiguillon in Gascony. Hearing the news of the disaster at Crécy, the French immediately lifted the siege of Aiguillon to face this threat in the north. The way in which both le Bel and Froissart described these events tell us a great deal about how chivalric honour and keeping the kingdom safe were intertwined at the time. Both Chroniquers cannot stress enough that the French returned to “defend the kingdom”, which was considered “more honourable” than taking Aiguillon. Apparently, at the court, there was not only a notion of defending the people (Tournai) but also of defending the kingdom, although it is still mostly connected to principles of honour and chivalry and not to *amor patriae* in the modern sense of the term. Even more noteworthy in le Bel’s description of the events around Aiguillon is that he clearly considered the fortress not to be a part of France, although it formally was. Le Bel writes multiple times that the French left Aiguillon and “returned to France”.⁸² This is again a strong indication that the term “France” was applied not to the kingdom as a whole, but to only parts of it -probably the Île-de-France.

At the same time, there was some intensive diplomacy between Flanders and the kings of France and England. Flanders was at this time part of the Kingdom of France but economically dependent on England.⁸³ As a result, the Flemish were rather pro-English in the early war, but they only dared to openly support Edward when he styled himself ‘King of England and of France’, for this meant that the Flemish would not break their oath of loyalty to their lord: the king of France. Apparently, although never having been French in the cultural sense of the word, they still found themselves too much bound to the kingdom of

⁸⁰ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 200-201.

⁸¹ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 110.

⁸² Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 185-187. Why le Bel did this is unclear, but it definitely tells us that not all parts that were formally part of the kingdom of France were actually considered as “French” by contemporaries.

⁸³ Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1987), 48. The Flemish economy was based on the processing of wool, which was mostly imported from England.

France and its king to openly defy it. This sense of loyalty and ‘belonging to something’ was even stronger with the count of Flanders, who was, according to Froissart, “entirely French at heart”.⁸⁴ This matches the findings from the previous chapter, in which it was concluded that a sense of French identity existed, but mostly in the higher echelons of society.

Poitiers, Paris and the provost

Except for the sea battle of Winchelsea (1350), the decade after 1346 did see few acts of war.⁸⁵ Only in 1356, the Prince of Wales, heir to the English throne, invaded French-held parts of Gascony.⁸⁶ In reaction to this invasion, King Jean II of France assembled a large army at Chartres. This army was already much more ‘French’ than his father’s army at Crécy⁸⁷ and the only non-French known to have been present was a small detachment of Germans under command of three German counts.⁸⁸ A sense of urgency was felt throughout the kingdom and when the king called upon “nobles and non-nobles alike”⁸⁹ to join him in defending the kingdom, the response was so massive that it elicited Le Bel to wonderingly say that the king of France had “an army big enough to do battle with the rest of the world.”⁹⁰

It was not enough. The subsequent battle of Poitiers⁹¹ would end in an even bigger catastrophe than a decade before at Crécy. Froissart attributes to the fallen the honour of having done their duty “so loyally to their king that their heirs are still honoured for it and the gallant men who fought there are held in perpetual esteem”⁹², but this was nothing but propaganda, as events after the battle showed that the average Frenchman did not really hold the fallen of Poitiers “in perpetual esteem”.⁹³ It was however at the battle itself that some remarkably clear expressions of national consciousness can be found, on both sides of the

⁸⁴ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 100.

⁸⁵ Due to the Black Death, which made waging war virtually impossible.

⁸⁶ This happened as a reaction against the French siege of Breteuil, held by the Navarrese allies of the English. In Froissart description of the siege of Breteuil, certain noteworthy expressions of national loyalty were omitted. Froissart recalls that the Navarrese in Breteuil literally shouted “*Saint-George, fidélité et Navarre*”, explicitly stating loyalty and their nation in the same sentence, in an interesting combination with the English patron saint of Saint George (Ibid, 121).

⁸⁷ David Nicolle, *Poitiers, 1356 : The Capture of a King* (Oxford: Osprey, 2004), 76.

⁸⁸ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 129 and Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 227 do not provide exact numbers, but their number is estimated to have been somewhere between a couple of hundred to a thousand men (François Bériac-Laine and Chris Given-Wilson, “Les Allemands à la Bataille de Poitiers (1356),” *Francia. Forschungen zur Europäischen Geschichte* 43, No. 1 (2016): 353–365.)

⁸⁹ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 226. It was not uncommon to call non-nobles to arms, but they rarely came in large numbers as has been discussed before.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 226.

⁹¹ See map IV.

⁹² Froissart, *Chronicles*, 138.

⁹³ Why Froissart would do this, is uncertain, but it could be that he genuinely believed this, as he was usually in the company of lords and princes who might have thought like that.

battlefield. The prince of Wales commanded his men to advance “in the name of God and St. George” while the French charged exclaiming the French battle cry of “Montjoie Saint-Denis!”⁹⁴ Later in the battle, Jean II forwarded his banners in the name of “God and Saint-Denis”⁹⁵ The most principal of these banners was the Oriflamme and both Le Bel and Froissart mention the presence of this banner on the battlefield⁹⁶ with Froissart even labelling it “the King’s master-banner and the banner of France.”⁹⁷ That the Oriflamme takes such a prominence in describing the battle⁹⁸; That carrying the Oriflamme was considered one of the greatest honours in the kingdom and that the carrier of the Oriflamme was supposed to fight to the death (in contrast to other nobles or soldiers, who were never supposed to actually die⁹⁹), means that at least those around the king were aware that they were fighting for something bigger: for the kingdom, symbolized by the Oriflamme. Froissart’s description of the Oriflamme being the “King’s master banner and the banner of France” is yet another indication that by this time, king and kingdom had almost become synonyms for each other and that loyalty to the king went further than just loyalty to a person. It did not help the French, as by the end of the day, the flower of France’s chivalry was either dead or captured and Jean II, king of France, was captured by the English.

The disaster of Poitiers had several consequences. At first, the French army was destroyed, which meant that English could freely roam the kingdom and pillage every penny out of it. Secondly, in order to raise the ransom money for the king and all captured nobles, taxes were raised to levels never seen before and the currency was debased.¹⁰⁰ This debasing of the currency was extra painful, as *du bonne monnaie*, or “good money”, was introduced by Louis IX and had since been a relatively stable currency, used around the kingdom and with the king’s face stamped on it.

Finally, the capture of the king and most of this councillors and confidants almost led to a complete collapse of government. This led to sharp criticism by le Bel, who denied the

⁹⁴ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 136-137.

⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 138.

⁹⁶ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 227; Froissart, *Chronicles*, 140.

⁹⁷ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 140.

⁹⁸ The contrast with Crécy, where the Oriflamme was present as well, could not be bigger. Both Froissart and le Bel barely mention its presence at Crécy.

⁹⁹ Colette Beaune argues that nobody expected soldiers to die in battle, especially young, noble ones. Being captured was not considered shameful, as long as one had fought bravely and had put up a fight before surrendering. Fleeing, however, was considered cowardly (Beaune, *Naissance*, 329).

¹⁰⁰ Beaune, *Naissance*, 144. This debased currency came to be known as “*moutons*”, which literally means ‘sheep’. This name is probably derived from the *agnus dei* on the coin, but quickly became symbol for the devaluation of money in France.

Valois kings the title of ‘noble king’ he gave to Edward III because of their inability to oppose the English threat:

Si doit ester tel prince qui ainsy se gouverne moins amé de ses gens; et est grand pitié et dommage quant, par mauvaiz conseil, le royaume de France, qui tout le monde avoit surmonté de honneur, de sens, de clergie, de chevalerie, de merchandise, et de toutes bontez, est ainsi triboulé et à tel meschief alé par ses anemis et par luy-meismes, que celluy que en doit ester sire est pris et prez que tous les seigneurs et chevaliers du pays sont mors et emprisonnez; bien croy que par miracle de Dieu le soeuffre.¹⁰¹

Le Bel was not the only one at the time who openly criticized the way France was governed. In Paris, the three estates (Clergy, nobility, and commoners, which were in 1358 representatives from the 12 most prominent cities of France) assembled and in much of the same fashion as would happen some four centuries later, the third estate quickly broke away and formed a provisional government in Paris.¹⁰² The third estate was very dissatisfied by the government, for they had paid enormous amounts of taxes to support the Poitiers campaign and thus defend the kingdom, only to find themselves threatened and taxed even more.¹⁰³ They called the nobles who had fought at Poitiers cowards because so many of them had allowed themselves to be captured, and saw that the kingdom, despite all the money, was still “ill-defended”.¹⁰⁴ This is interesting, as for nobles, being captured was not regarded as dishonouring but as an annoyance at worst, while the commoners apparently expected them to die for the cause of the kingdom.¹⁰⁵ For the Third Estate, the problem was thus not that they had to pay taxes, which they expected to as it was their duty to the kingdom,¹⁰⁶ but that the money raised with these taxes did not lead to the expected successes.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the Third Estate took matters in their own hands, assuring the Duke of Normandy that they only wanted to properly protect the kingdom,¹⁰⁸ showing indications of at least a sense of a need to defend the kingdom, albeit probably more for personal safety-purposes than for reasons of

¹⁰¹ Le Bel, *Chronicles*, 168. “Any prince who governs like this should be less well loved by his people; and it’s a great pity and shame that the kingdom of France, which had surpassed all others in honour, wisdom, learning, chivalry, trade and prosperity, should have been brought by poor governance into its present troubled state, in which its enemies and its own shortcomings have led to the one who should be its lord being now a captive and almost all the lords and knights of the land being killed or imprisoned. It’s a wonder that God allows it!” Translation by Nigel Bryant.

¹⁰² Although they claimed to be the provisional government of France, their power never really extended beyond Paris.

¹⁰³ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 232.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 232.

¹⁰⁵ Beaune, *Naissance*, 329.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 235.

¹⁰⁷ This notion was the major reason for Beaune to conclude that “Being a nationalist mostly meant paying taxes” in the first half of the Hundred Years War (*Naissance*, 235).

¹⁰⁸ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 149-150.

actual nationalism. This might have been the first time in French history that the Third Estate had taken matters into their own hands and created some sort of popular sovereignty, making a more modern definition of nationalism, such as Greenfeld's popular sovereignty-dependent definition, applicable on France.

Looking for allies, the Third Estate found one in Charles II of Navarre (r.1349-1387), another claimant to the throne of France. Charles hastened to Paris and he made a proclamation.

Le Bel:

Quant il [Charles II] fut à Paris, il fit assembler toutes manières de gens, clerks, nobles et lays, et les sermonna moult sagement et bellement, soy complaignant des griefs et des villanies qu'on luy avoit fait à tort; et dist que nul ne se doubta de luy, car il voloit vivre et morir en deffendant le royaume de France, et le devoit bien faire, car il en estoit extrait et de père et de mère de tous costez; et monstra par plusieurs pions, que s'il vouloit calengier la couronne, on trouveroit par plusieurs causes qu'il en estoit plus prochains que cil qui estoit en Angleterre en prison, ne que le roy d'Angleterre n'estoit.¹⁰⁹

In this quote, a notion of nation and even a blink of nationalism can be found. Although one would be naive to believe any word of what Charles said (he did not receive the nickname 'the Bad' without reason), the reason that he said it must have been because it was apparently what the citizens of Paris wanted to hear and because what he said, made sense (Froissart even adds that the citizens of Paris "listened to it with approval"¹¹⁰). This means that proclaiming the willingness to live and die defending a kingdom, which comes rather close to what a modern nationalist would be willing to do, was considered a rather normal thing to do, at least for a nobleman. It was his duty, as it was the duty for those poor soldiers to die in the trenches during World War I. The only difference seems to be that in 1358, this duty did not yet extend beyond the nobility and perhaps the Parisians, who had always been the most profound defendants of the kingdom.¹¹¹ Still, it should be kept in mind that 'defending the kingdom' was primarily a matter of honour and love for the king rather than nationalism or a special love for the kingdom. One could call this 'royal patriotism'.

¹⁰⁹ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 234.

¹¹⁰ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 150.

¹¹¹ Viard, *Grandes Chroniques*, Volume V, 240. In the *Grandes Chroniques*, the Parisiens are attributed to be "*Prêts à mourir pour la couronne défendre (-) car je [le roi] sais bien qu'ils [Parisiens] ne me lairront mie, ne mort, ne vif entre mes ennemis.*" ("Ready to die for defending the crown (-) because I know too well that they won't leave me, neither death nor alive, with my enemies"; translation my own). -Which they sort of did, when they rebelled after the king was taken instead of helping the man. The special connection between Paris and king was henceforth lost after the events of 1358 (Beaune, *Naissance*, 111).

The insurrection in Paris did not last long, as the citizens became increasingly agitated by the actions of the provisional government. Ultimately, Etienne Marcel, the provost of Paris and head of the insurrection, was killed by a mob that raised the banner of France to the cry of “Up with the king and the duke” and “Death to the provost and his friends, they have betrayed us”¹¹², again showing signs of strong loyalty to the king and perhaps through him, to the nation. After all this mischief, le Bel took stock of the current state of France, which proved to be remarkably opposite in almost every single way to the description from the *Grandes Chroniques*:¹¹³

Si le doit-on raconteur pour très-grande merveille que le plus grand et le plus noble pays du monde fust en telle manière gasté et foulé, et ou plus fort de tout le royaume. (-)Ainsy le noble royaume de France, le plus noble des nobles, qui soloit ester le refuge de seureté et de paix, estoit adoncques sans justice foulé et confondu.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Froissart, *Chronicles*, 159-160.

¹¹³ See chapter II

¹¹⁴ Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 232 and 240. “It should be accounted a true wonder that the greatest, most illustrious land in the world should have been wasted and pillaged thus, in the very heart of the kingdom. (-) And so it was that the noble kingdom of France, the noblest of the world, which had always been a sanctuary of peace and security, was now a lawless, confounded ruin.” Translation by Nigel Bryant.

Chapter IV: Turning the Tide (1360-1380)

In 1360, four years after the disaster at Poitiers, a temporary truce was agreed upon, which came to be known as the Treaty of Bretigny. With this treaty, France seeded the provinces of Poitou, Saintonge, Armagnac, la Marche, Périgord and many other provinces that made up the ancient fief of Aquitaine proper (see map II). In 1364, Jean II died in captivity in London, making his son Charles, the Duke of Normandy, the new king of France. Charles V (r.1364-1380) became king of a deeply divided, pillaged and instable kingdom which was on the brink of collapse. But new hope slowly emerged, in which indications of an emergence of national sentiment of some sort can be found.¹¹⁵

The Salic Law

When Philippe VI de Valois ascended the French throne in 1328, he did so because he was chosen by the *Pairs de France* as the most suitable candidate and because females could not inherit the kingdom.¹¹⁶ However, at the time it was not specified why exactly a female could not inherit. The fact that the French royal family had made Jeanne de Navarre renounce her claims to the French throne in 1318 clearly shows that succession to (or at least through) a female was possible (for how can one renounce something if it was not theirs in the first place?). This means that the ‘ruling’ of 1328 which excluded women was probably just what it seems like: a weak excuse, created because no better alternative for averting a Plantagenet monarch was available. This invented excuse still needed a more formal foundation when Edward III challenged the claim of Philippe of Valois and started the Hundred Years War in 1337. For decades, jurists at the French court searched for a judicial foundation for the exclusion of women in the succession of France, to little avail. It was only during the reign of Charles V that an answer was found in the form of the so-called ancient Salic law.¹¹⁷

According to modern historians, the Salic laws were a set of laws written down between the 6th and 8th centuries in the several Germanic kingdoms which had succeeded the Western Roman Empire after A.D. 476.¹¹⁸ Although intensive research has shown that the

¹¹⁵ Richard Vernier, *The Flower of Chivalry: Bertrand du Guesclin and the Hundred Years War* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2007), 58.

¹¹⁶ See Le Bel, *Chronicle*, 55 in chapter III.

¹¹⁷ Beaune, *Naissance*, 265. Beaune shows that both the *Grandes Chroniques* and other contemporary sources make no mention of the Salic Law at all until it suddenly appears around 1365-1370. In subsequent versions of the *Grandes Chroniques*, the Salic Law is then indeed attributed to Pharamond and seemed to have always existed and remembered.

¹¹⁸ Hermann Conrad, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte* (Karlsruhe, C.F. Müller, 1962), 159-163.

Salic Law did not explicitly forbid female succession¹¹⁹, it still had its value for it reduced women to “merely furniture”.¹²⁰ Obviously, furniture could not inherit anything so neither could women.

In the years following the rediscovery of this ancient law, an entire cult was constructed around it in order to give it the status needed for keeping Edward and the English at bay. The law was quickly attributed to Pharamond, the semi-legendary first king of the Franks, establishing a brand new and probably completely fabricated line between the first king and the first law.¹²¹ Soon, it was referred to as the ‘fundamental law of the kingdom of France’ and it received the same sacral treatment and invented history as had been bestowed on the monarchy, all of its symbols and the coronation ritual in Reims in the century before. The first known copy of the law (made in the 1350’s) was summarized by contemporary chronicler Richard Lescot as follows:

Les premiers rois encore païens l’édicèrent. Puis elle fut amendée par Clovis le premier roi de France chrétien, baptisé par Saint Remi, par Childebert et Clotaire. Et ces trois rois lui ajoutèrent un prologue: ‘Vive le Christ qui aime les Franks!’ Charlemagne, roi des Franks et empereur romain y ajouta trente-neuf chapitres. Louis le Pieux son fils en ajouta beaucoup d’autres.¹²²

Perhaps needless to say, no historical proof exists of Clovis, Childebert, Clotaire, Charlemagne nor Louis the Pious having been involved with the Salic Law. Nevertheless, for most of the history of the kingdom of France, the mythical origins of the law were firmly believed.¹²³ In later, early-fifteenth century versions, constructed history turned into outright fraud when it was added to the Salic law that “*Mulier vero in regno nullam habeat portionem*”; ‘A female shall have no part [of a succession] in the kingdom’.¹²⁴ Although this

¹¹⁹ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 101 and Beaune, *Naissance*, 264-269.

¹²⁰ Beaune, *Naissance*, 264.

¹²¹ Ibid, 266.

¹²² Richard Lescot, *Chronique (1328-1344) et continuation (1344-1364)*, ed. J. Lemoine (Paris, 1867), 135. “The first kings, who were still pagan [i.e. Pharamond] dictated it. Then, it was amended by Clovis, the first Christian king of France and by Childebert and Clotaire. And these three kings gave it a prologue: ‘Long live Christ who loved the Franks!’ Charlemagne, king of the Franks and Roman emperor [sic] added thirty-nine chapters to it. Louis the pious, his son, added many more.” Translation my own.

¹²³ Even today, the Salic law causes issues in French royalty. When Philippe d’Anjou, younger son of Louis XIV, became king of Spain, he was forced to renounce all his claims to the French throne as a result of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714. With Louis XVI beheaded in 1793 and the last direct French Bourbon having died in 1883, the descendants of Philippe d’Anjou suddenly became the heirs to the French throne by virtue of the Salic law. Up to this day, there are two claimants to the French throne as a result of this: the first being Louis d’Anjou, descendant of Philippe and the first male heir to the throne as his family claims that renouncing the throne is forbidden by the Salic law, declaring the treaty of 1714 void. However, a cadet branch of the house of Bourbon, the house of Orléans, also claims the throne by declaring the Salic law void as a result of the French Revolution of 1830, in which the Bourbon branch was replaced with the cadet branch of Orleans.

¹²⁴ Beaune, *Naissance*, 271. “A female shall have no part [of a succession] in the kingdom”. Translation my own.

did not stop the French from believing in the law, at the end of the fifteenth century, when the Hundred Years War was won, this faith would have become almost a patriotic sentiment. Jean-Phyrrus Angleberme, an early sixteenth century chronicler, noted that defending the Salic law during the Hundred Years War was to “fight for one’s country, like a Roman soldier”,¹²⁵ making the Salic law a symbol for the entire country and apparently something worth fighting for, as a ‘common duty’ in Smith’s definition of nation.

Du Guesclin and his chanson

The primary task of Charles V after his ascension to the throne was to keep his kingdom together and to regain the territory lost at Brétigny. The first threat did not come from the English, as there was a truce, but from the Navarrese of Charles the Bad. Charles, still claiming the French throne, launched an invasion from his fiefs in Normandy and soon threatened to disturb the coronation of Charles V in Reims. The French, realizing the danger the Navarrese king posed, sent out their new royal captain to stop him: Bertrand du Guesclin.

Of lower noble but still humble background, du Guesclin had distinguished himself in the civil war in Brittany, where he had fought for the French claimant and had won some resounding victories.¹²⁶ He soon rose to be captain of the French forces in Brittany and Normandy and would eventually become *Connétable de France*, the highest military position, being directly subordinate to the king. He reconquered most of the territory lost at Brétigny and was regarded by many as the ‘finest knight that had lived in a hundred years’.¹²⁷ He was celebrated by many, but most famously by an author named ‘Cuvelier’, from whom is known nothing more than his name, although his *Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin* was probably commissioned by someone important at the French Royal court, as it is greatly biased towards the French. For that reason, many modern scholars have labelled certain parts as outright propaganda.¹²⁸ Notwithstanding, Cuvelier is the most important source still

¹²⁵ Jean-Phyrrus Angleberme, *De Lege Salica*, (Paris, 1517).

¹²⁶ Amongst others Fougarey, Rennes, Dinan and his successful guerilla campaigns.

¹²⁷ Vernier, *Chivalry*, 15.

¹²⁸ For Cuvelier, I mainly used the very recent translation by Nigel Bryant (2019). It is one of the few translations available in English and by far the most modern. It makes use of the most complete surviving manuscript of the *Chanson du Bertrand du Guesclin*, which is split between Paris and Montpellier. However, Bryant often uses other manuscripts and/or different editions to fill gaps or eliminate very obvious errors made by Cuvelier. Because Bryant did not aim for a purely scholarly translation, not all these cases are annotated or referred to in footnotes. In addition, Bryant replaced some contemporary sayings with more modern alternatives, in order to improve readability. This means that he sometimes takes liberty in translating and he does not always indicate when he does so. In order to prevent quoting or referencing Bryant instead of Cuvelier, all references of this study have been double-checked with the very first modern reprint of the *Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin* by Ernest Charrière (1839), who literally copied the Paris-Montpellier manuscript and retained both Cuvelier’s errors and the original, old/middle-French language. In cases of (slightly) different interpretations by Bryant and

available on du Guesclin and his *Chanson* gives the modern reader a great insight into fourteenth-century thinking, habits and, most importantly for this study, into contemporary perception of identity in the higher echelons of society. Richard Vernier has even argued that the *Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin* was the first French history to present the cooperation between Charles V and Du Guesclin as a “partnership between two patriots, moved by the same passion for France”.¹²⁹

Sent by the king to prevent the Navarrese from reaching Reims, du Guesclin intercepted the Navarrese army at Cocherel.¹³⁰ Cuvelier’s description of the subsequent battle is almost drenched in what would appear to be patriotic or nationalistic sentiment to the modern reader. Before the battle, Du Guesclin gave a speech to boost morale, saying that

Qui pour seigneur en bataille mort prent, Dieu a de lui pitié, où gloire si l’atent; car on se doit combater aventureusement pour sa terre defender; Caton le nous aprent. S’il en y a nul de vous qui se sente noient ester en péchié mortel, je vous pri honnement as cordeliers s’en voit confesser errament, car Dieu dist un parler escriptureusement que pour un pécheur en mouroit plus de cent.¹³¹

In this speech, all topics of fourteenth century French identity perception of the nobility come together. The focus is still on obtaining glory and adventure (chivalry), complemented with typical medieval piety. The aim is not yet to die for one’s nation, but for one’s lord; in this case Charles V. However, a tentative but certainly emerging notion of ‘fighting for one’s country’ can also be found. Again, with the reference to Cato, Du Guesclin consciously hinted to a form of nationalism that would only be understood by those with some knowledge of ancient literature, being the elite. Still, while the identity construction in the thirteenth century had been very theoretical, Du Guesclin’s speech was rawer, more emotional and with one single purpose: boosting his men’s morale. The fact that Du Guesclin regarded the notion of ‘fighting for one’s land’ important enough to refer to in this short speech, tells us much about how important it was considered to be by his soldiers, as he appealed directly to their most primitive fighting instincts. A couple of pages later, describing the capture of the Capital

Charrière, I gave the latter one preference over the former, because it (obviously) stays much closer to the original text. Remaining errors are therefore a result of either Cuvelier not having its facts straight or a copying error made between 1380-1839.

¹²⁹ Vernier, *Chivalry*, 79.

¹³⁰ See map IV

¹³¹ Cuvelier, in Charrière, *Chanson I*, 153. “God has pity on any man who dies in battle for his lord, and is waiting for him in glory! And Cato teaches us that a man should fight courageously to defend his land. So if any of you feels himself to be stained with mortal sin, I pray you to go quickly and make confession to the friars; for according to the Scriptures, God says that a single sinner will cost the lives of a hundred and more.” Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 104.

de Buch in the aftermath of Cocherel, Cuvelier himself also expressed an unprecedented notion of *amor patriae* in the modern sense of the term:

“Hardiz fu le castal, homme de grant vaillance; Se bien éüst amé le royaulme de France, de la chevalerie fust la flour et la branche; Mais pour l’amour d’Engloiz moru-il à viltance dedens une prison, où poi ot de plaissance.”¹³²

These expressions of ‘love for the kingdom’ by Cuvelier are not incidental. At the siege of Meulan¹³³, Cuvelier credited Charles V with having lamented on his kingdom:

Or est bien li roiaulmes de France confundus; Or est li rois mes pères, li nobles, licremus, par dedens Engleterre prisonnier retenus, ou servage du roy qui nous est malostruz, qui déüst par raison bien ester à nous tenus. Bastre le déüssiens et il nous a batus; Et avec tout ce a nos chasteaux tolus, et y tient ses Engloiz don’t je sui bien confus, et cil qui me déüssent ester amis esléuz a l’encontre de moi sont si fort esméuz que ne sai où aler pléüst au roy Jhésus. Que je ne say où aler, se ne me sui repus. Ahy! Noble royaume, quant revendras-tu sus? Ahy! Noble fleur de lys, yrès-vous toute jus? Ahy! XII per de France, qu’estes-vous devenus?¹³⁴

What is being displayed here, whether it was truly said by Charles or was invented by Cuvelier, cannot be labelled any differently than a profound love for a country in distress. No more subtle links, no more ‘royal patriotism’: this is clearly about feeling sincerely sorry for a kingdom ravaged by 30 years of armed conflict, symbolized by the ever-present fleur-de-lis. In Cuvelier’s mind, Du Guesclin played the role of the ‘national [sic] hero’, although Vernier stresses to add to this that regarding this part of the war as a ‘war of liberation’ would be “utterly anachronistic”.¹³⁵

After Meulan and Cocherel, Du Guesclin returned briefly to Brittany for the dramatic *grande finale* of the civil war which had ravaged the duchy for decades. At the battle of Auray, the English claimant killed the French claimant Charles de Blois and captured Du Guesclin, who would only be ransomed months later. With the war in Brittany over, the

¹³² Cuvelier, in Charrière, *Chanson I*, 172. “Had he loved the kingdom of France, he would have been the flower and branch of Chivalry, but thanks to his love for the English, he died a wretched, miserable death in prison.” Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 115.

¹³³ Both Cuvelier (or Charrière?) and Vernier say ‘Melun’ instead of Meulan. The siege of Meulan took place in April 1364, while no siege of Melun is known during the life of Du Guesclin.

¹³⁴ Cuvelier in Charrière, *Chanson I*, 127-128. “The kingdom of France is done for! The noble, feared king my father is a prisoner in England, at the mercy of a king who treats us cruelly indeed, when he should rightly be on the receiving end! We should be beating him, but the reverse has happened! And that’s not all: he’s seized our castles from us and installed his English who are giving me such grief; and those who should be my closest friends have turned against me that I can see no clear resort. Would to God that I might be avenged and the king my father returned! Ah, noble kingdom, when will you rise again? Ah, noble Fleur-de-lis, are you forever laid now? Twelve peers of France, where are you now?” Translation by Nigel Bryant with some minor changes by myself, as Bryant appears to either have used another manuscript than Charrière here or just took some liberty in translating.

¹³⁵ Vernier, *Chivalry*, 36.

Navarrese beaten after Cocherel and the truce with England still maintained, France was now relatively at peace -relatively, for bands of unemployed mercenaries and freebooting English were still pillaging the French countryside. This would become Bertrand's task for the years to come: getting rid of these Free Compagnies, as they were called, by taking them to Castile to participate in yet another civil-war-having-turned-Anglo-Franco-proxy-war.¹³⁶ Du Guesclin swiftly conquered most of Castile for the French claimant but was ultimately defeated and captured by the Prince of Wales at Nájera. Bertrand was then brought to Bordeaux, capital of English-controlled France. After having established his ransom at 60.000 gold dublons (an enormous amount), du Guesclin apparently said that if the kings of France and Castile would not pay for him,

je péusse trouver n'a filaresse en France qui sache fil filer qui ne gaignast ainçois ma finance à filer qu'elles ne me vosissent hors de vos las geter.¹³⁷

Whether or not du Guesclin said these words himself or have been apocryphally attributed to him by Cuvelier is still subject of debate, but at least one other contemporary chronicler refers to the event in much the same fashion.¹³⁸ To deduce from this small anecdote that Du Guesclin was considered a 'national hero' by his contemporaries would be jumping to conclusions that are most likely anachronistic, as would be any conclusion stating that every peasant girl in France was indeed ready to "spin away" for Du Guesclin. Nevertheless, it does indicate a broader popular awareness and approval of Du Guesclin's deeds, making it hard to believe that the entire Hundred Years War was solely a matter of the nobility and that peasants were only *turned Frenchmen* in the late nineteenth century, as Weber argued.

When eventually ransomed, Bertrand briefly returned to Spain to round up the Civil War. Not long thereafter, he was appointed *connétable de France*, the highest military office of the kingdom, with the noble task of "restoring happiness in France and restoring the fleur-de-lis to its rightful place".¹³⁹ During his campaigns to recover the territories lost at Brittany (1370-1380), under the battle cry of "Dieu chez nous! Montjoie! Guesclin! Notre-Dame et il rois de France!"¹⁴⁰ Du Guesclin reconquered virtually all French losses of the three preceding

¹³⁶ The Castillian Civil War, in which Enrique de Trastamara was supported by the French against his half-brother Pedro 'the Cruel' of Castille, who had some years before changed his allegiance from France to England.

¹³⁷ Cuvelier in Charrière, *Chanson II*, 12. "Every wool-spinning woman in France would sit at her wheel and spin away to raise the cash! They'd all want to free me from your clutches!" Translation by Nigel Bryant.

¹³⁸ Pero Lopez de Ayala, *Crónica del rey don Pedro y del rey don Enrique, su hermano, hijos del rey Alfonso onceno* (Buenos Aires: Secrit. 1994-1997).

¹³⁹ Cuvelier in Bryant, *Song*, 336-346.

¹⁴⁰ Cuvelier in Charrière, *Chanson II*, 182. "God be with us! Montjoie! Guesclin! Our lady and the king of France!" Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 349.

decades. This was partially a result of Du Guesclin's superior strategy and tactics, but definitely also because many cities 'turned French' voluntarily'.¹⁴¹ A modernist sceptic would simply call this good business: the French clearly held the upper hand so changing allegiance to the winning side was only a matter of common sense. Contemporaries, however, had a different narrative. Cuvelier, as always, is the most outspokenly pro-French, but Froissart also provides some very clear examples.

In both Cuvelier and Froissart, the siege/liberation/turning of La Rochelle and Poitiers (both in 1372) take an important part in the description of the events of 1370-1380.¹⁴² In Cuvelier, the number of references to the Fleur-de-lis during the siege of Poitiers is enormous. The bishop of Poitiers had "à la fleur de lis du bon païs Francour li retraioit le cuer, ce dit, et nuit et jour."¹⁴³ As soon as Bertrand and the French army arrived at Poitiers, the citizens of the town gathered for deliberation. Words were exchanged and a citizen by the name of 'Foqueré' said according to Cuvelier that

Je lo que cilz Englois soient tous hors bouté et au duc de Berry nous serons acordé.
Car la proverb dit par vraie auctorité: Nature fait le cerf tracier ou bois ramé.¹⁴⁴

So Cuvelier compares the returning of Poitiers to France to a natural process, claiming that there was some natural, unconscious connection between the citizens of Poitiers and the kingdom of France. Although Cuvelier does not explain this connection, it is not hard to imagine that perceived ethnic kinship and perhaps even the symbols of the kingdom connected Poitiers to the kingdom. Attributing this perceived connection to nature testifies to an outspoken primordial view, even more because Cuvelier repeats this metaphor when he writes that "Bien voient les bourgeois que nature les maine a enamer la fleur de lis très souveraine."¹⁴⁵ This is all crucial, as it shows that certain connections between burghers and the kingdom, signified by the ever-present fleur-de-lis, went deeper than just allegiance, as modernists would claim. It was genuine sentiment, or at least perceived as such by Cuvelier. The same sentiment was felt by the English, who concluded that

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*, Volumes 1-4 (London: Faber & Faber, 2011-2015).

¹⁴² This could be an indication that Cuvelier functioned as a source for Froissart or vice-versa, as both authors were probably fairly well-known by their contemporaries.

¹⁴³ Cuvelier in Charrière, *Chanson II*, 257. "Day and night, his heart was leaning anew to the fleur-de-lis of the fair land of France." Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 392.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 261. "I say we kick the English out and come to terms once more with the duke of Berry [who was nominally in charge of the siege]. As the old saying rightly goes, nature will always draw the deer back to the woods!" Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 393.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 264. "They [the English] could see the burghers being drawn by nature to honour the noble fleur-de-lis once more." Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 395.

Vraiment cil villain sont François retourné; qui les aroit ouvers ainsi c'un porc lardé, on aroit en leur cuer la fleur de lis trouvé.”¹⁴⁶

Again, Cuvelier makes a connection with nature, but this time more subtle by referring to the heart of the burghers of Poitiers, making an abstract observation that would not be out of place in a romantic, nationalist text from the nineteenth century. Finally, when du Guesclin enters Poitiers, the citizens of Poitiers are given one final pro-French line by Cuvelier, who made them say

He! Noble fleur de lis, honnourer vous doit-on, car vous estes la fleur de consolacion que Dieux tramist sà jus à Clovis le baron!¹⁴⁷

by which Cuvelier carefully constructed a connection between the surrender of Poitiers and the invented story of Clovis receiving the fleur-de-lis from God.

At La Rochelle, the siege unfolded not much differently. Froissart, being much more to the point than Cuvelier, only notes that the mayor of La Rochelle was “a good Frenchman at heart”¹⁴⁸, again making the connection between heart -which above all else symbolized love in the middle ages- and France. Cuvelier, being more outspoken pro-French, again pulls every trick of symbolism, culminating in a pages-long rant on the glory of the French army and the beauty of the fleur-de-lis:

La noble fleur de liz [sic] de loial cuer amons, et pour ce, si vous plait, nous y retournerons. (-). Voient les fleurs de lis en peinture notrée, et bacines qui lors furent de soie ouvrée, et tunicles roiaux dont l'euvre fu parée; oient trompes sonner à moult haut alenée. Adont ont par tenrour mainte larme plorée, et dient haultement: 'Fleur de lis esmerée, vous soiez par deça moult très bien retournée! Trop mieulx que ce lupart estes de nous amée. (-) Bien viengnent nos signeurs de France proprement, et bien viengne la fleur de lis qui dignement fu transmise du ciel au roy Clovis le gent! Douce fleur odorable sentant bien souefment, bien devons l'eure amer et le jour ensemment que visiter venez vostre dolante gent qui en grande cremeur a vescu longuement en l'ombre d'un lupart qui nous monstre la dent; bien devons aouer le Roy de firmament quant à no droit seigneur en tournons ensemment.' Ainsi dient la gent con vous oiez présent, et furent à genoulz les mains jointes souvent ainsi qu'en le moustier devant le sacrement: Montjoie, roy Charlon! En criant haultement.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 264. “These villains [the Poitevins] have all turned French! Cut them open like fatted pigs and you’ll find the fleur-de-lis stamped on their hearts!”. Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 395.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 268. “Ah, noble fleur-de-lis, you are worthy of all honour, for you are the flower of consolation sent by God to the great lord Clovis!” Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 397.

¹⁴⁸ Froissart, *Chronicles*, 182.

¹⁴⁹ Cuvelier in Charrière, *Chanson II*, 275-281. “But truly, we love the fleur-de-lis with loyal hearts, which is why, if it please you, we wish to return our allegiance to the king of France. (-) And seeing the fleur-de-lis emblazoned on the array of silken banners and gorgeous tunics, and hearing the mighty blast of trumpets, they were moved to floods of tears and cried aloud: “Ah, gracious fleur-de-lis! You are welcome back indeed! You’re dearer to us by far than the leopard! (-) Welcome, our true lords of France! And welcome to the Fleur-de-lis, the sweet and fragrant flower sent as a blessing from heaven to great king Clovis! Bless the day and hour you came to visit your unhappy people, who’ve long been living in fear under the feet of the snarling leopard

Reading this, one could almost feel the sentiment of love for the fleur-de-lis, for the king and thus probably for the kingdom. Even though this scene might never have taken place in real life, the sentiment transferred to the reader by Cuvelier is still drenched in patriotic sentiment that goes much deeper than Anthony Smith's *ethnie* or anything a modernist is willing to acknowledge having taken place before the nineteenth century. This sentiment is completed with the final words Cuvelier attributes to Du Guesclin, who died at Chateauneuf-du-Randon on the 13th of July, 1380:

Ah! Douce France! Amie, je te lairay briefment! Or veille Dieu de gloire par son commandement que si bon connestable aiez prochainement de coi vous vailliez mieulx en honnour plainement.¹⁵⁰

[the English]. And we should worship almighty God for seeing us return to our rightful lord!' So said the people, kneeling with clasped hands as if in church before the sacrament. And the children were uttering heartfelt cries of 'Montjoie! King Charles!' Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 401-403.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 320. "Ah, my sweet beloved France, I must leave you very soon: may it please glorious God to see that you have a worthy Constable who'll raise you to ever greater honour!" Translation by Nigel Bryant, *Song*, 419.

Chapter V: Panic, Paris and *la Pucelle* (1380-1453)

When du Guesclin and Charles V died in 1380, the English had lost most of their French territories and only held Calais in the north and Bordeaux in the southwest. The Hundred Years War, it seemed, was about to end after 40 years of combat. However, internal problems and a weak king (Charles VI ‘the mad’, r.1380-1422) would prove to be almost fatal for the French cause. Both Charles VI and his English counterparts Richard II (r.1377-1399) and Henry IV (r.1399-1413) would spend most of their reign dealing with internal revolts and rebellions. The brothers of Charles VI had *de facto* taken over the country and governed in his name, getting increasingly in each other’s way, culminating in the assassination of one of them, Louis d’Orléans, in 1407. This led France to the brink of a civil war between the *Armagnacs* (supporters of Louis) and the *Bourguignons*, the supporters of the house of Burgundy. The political vacuum in France was exploited by Henry V of England (r.1413-1422), who had inherited a largely stable England. He invaded France in 1415, crushed the French royal army at Agincourt in the same style as his predecessors had done at Crécy and Poitiers and conquered most of northern France in a matter of years. In 1420, Charles VI signed the treaty of Troyes, in which he disinherited his own son in favour of his son-in-law, Henry V. Both Charles VI and Henry V died in 1422, leaving the throne disputed between the sons of the two late kings.

In need of a new narrative

It was during this time, when all hope seemed lost for the French, that France entered a next phase of identity construction. Although the connecting of the existing narrative to the common populace would only really take off with the emergence of the mysterious ‘maid of Lorraine’, its foundations were laid during the dark days of the English occupation. Paris, Saint-Denis, Reims and virtually all royal domains were now controlled by the English or their allies. This meant that all places that had played such a pivotal role in the invented, sacred position of the kings of France were now under English control. To make matters even worse, the duke of Bedford, the regent for the English king in France, increasingly started to appropriate the royal symbols of France. Now, not only the throne of France, but also all its symbols, so carefully constructed over the past centuries, were no longer undisputedly ‘French’.

These events urged the court of Charles VII (r.1422-1461) to swiftly construct a new story and a new identity. As Collette Beaune shows, Saint Denis, the ancient patron saint of France and its monarchy, was dropped by Charles and replaced by Saint Michel, ‘captain of the *Miles Caelestis* and standard-bearer of God’.¹⁵¹ The choice for Saint Michel was a very deliberate one, as the story of the good Archangel Michel defeating Satan proved to be a perfectly fitting metaphor for the struggle the French themselves were facing against the English. This metaphor was only strengthened when Le Mont Saint Michel, a small island-abbey off the coast of Normandy dedicated to Saint Michel, was never occupied by the English, despite being surrounded by English-occupied parts of France.¹⁵² So the choice for Saint Michel was first and foremost an anti-English one, and it can hardly be considered an incident that the symbol the French attributed to Saint Michel -a white cross- was a perfect contrast to the English red cross of Saint George, that other dragon slaying saint. For the occasion, Saint Michel was also militarized: before 1420, Saint Michel had always been depicted and been described having beaten the dragon-devil with a crucifix while after that year, Saint Michel suddenly acquired a sword, armour and a banner, which -not surprisingly- sported a field *semé-de-lys or*.¹⁵³ This indicated yet another, seemingly minor but greatly relevant change: this time, not the story of the king was changed to fit into the narrative of the Saint, but the story of the saint was changed to fit into the royal narrative. Instead of the king (and the kingdom) being in service of Christendom, Christendom was now used in service of the king and the kingdom, with the ‘end’ and ‘mean’ discussed in the first chapter having switched places.

Saint Michel was not the only saint that received an ‘upgrade’ in status during the exile of Charles VII. Many saints with origins or strong support in the Poitou and Limousin (the new heartland of France after Paris had fallen) were elevated to patron saints during this time. The most prominent of these, except for Saint Michel, was Sainte Catherine. She was made the new patron of prisoners (a reference to large parts of France being held ‘prisoner’ by the English) and the patron of soldiers, based on a wonky reference to her assumed help during the battle of Bouvines.¹⁵⁴ Her most important sanctuary was located in Fierbois, just south of Tours. To prove the success of promoting Sainte-Catherine as the new patron saint

¹⁵¹ Beaune, *Naissance*, 165.

¹⁵² See map IV.

¹⁵³ Beaune, *Naissance*, 200. *Semé-de-lys or*, a heraldic term, literally meaning “littered with golden fleur-de-lis”.

¹⁵⁴ Georges Duby, *27 Julliet 1214. Le Dimanche de Bouvines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 184. The battle of Bouvines (1214) started to play an ever increasing role in the French national consciousness at this time, as it was the first major victory the French had achieved against the English and it had directly led to the expulsion of the English from large parts of France.

of France, Colette Beaune has done extensive research into the origin of pilgrims visiting Fierbois. Her results are intriguing: until 1407, most of the pilgrims came from the centre-west, i.e. from the surrounding region. Between 1407 and 1429, the number of pilgrims from Anglo-Burgundian controlled parts of France greatly increased and after 1430, pilgrims came from all over the kingdom.¹⁵⁵ The royal propaganda had succeeded in creating a saint and sanctuary that appealed to all inhabitants of the kingdom, whether under English occupation or not. In this way, peoples from all over the country came there and familiarized themselves with the invented story of Sainte Catherine and thus with the national narrative constructed by the court.

The Maid of Orléans

No matter how well Charles VII and his councillors succeeded in re-inventing a new French identity, the military situation still seemed desperate. The English and their Burgundian allies hold the entirety of northern France and Gascony in a firm grasp that did not seem to be weakening. In 1428, they began sieging Orléans, a city only second to Paris in size, wealth, and prestige. Whether the fall of Orléans would have meant the end of the French rump-state (also nicknamed ‘the Kingdom of Bourges’) is still heavily debated amongst historians,¹⁵⁶ but it would definitely have been yet another major setback for Charles and the anti-English resistance.¹⁵⁷ It was at this moment, with the lessons of du Guesclin forgotten and the flower of chivalry crushed in the muddy fields between Azincourt, Tramecourt and Maisoncelle, that new hope emerged from the most unexpected source imaginable in a medieval society. Christine de Pizan, one of the few female intellectuals of her age, introduced this new hope as the re-emergence of the sun and a new spring:

L’an mil CCCCXXIX [1429]
 Reprint à luire li soleil.
 Il ramene le bon temps neuf
 Qu’on [n’] avoit veü de droit oil
 Puis long temps, dont plusers en dueil
 Orent vesqu; j’en suis de ceulx.
 Mais plus de rien je ne me dueil,
 Quant ores voy ce que [je] veulx.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Beaune, *Naissance*, 169.

¹⁵⁶ See Sumption, *Hundred Years War*, Volume III, 231.

¹⁵⁷ This resistance was in parts of northern France very real. Many Frenchmen were not content with the Anglo-Burgundian occupation and resentment increased every day, most notably in Normandy and Champagne (Sumption, *Hundred Years War*, 512).

¹⁵⁸ Christine de Pizan, *La Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc (1429)*, ed. and trans. Angus Kennedy and Kenneth Varty (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1977). “*In 1429 the sun began to shine again. It brings back the good, new season which had not really been seen for a long time—and because of that*

I will revisit the writings of de Pizan later, but this new hope was of course Jeanne d’Arc, arguably the most famous historical figure brought forth during the Hundred Years War. She was born, probably in 1412, in the village of Domrémy, close to the border between France and the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁵⁹ Raised in a not particularly rich nor poor family, she was destined to live the life of the average peasant girl in fifteenth-century France. However, the quickly deteriorating political situation of France in the 1420’s opened an opportunity for her that nobody would ever have imagined to be possible. In 1428, Jeanne d’Arc somehow convinced the local lord; the duke of Lorraine and eventually the queen of Aragon¹⁶⁰ that she was sent by God to ‘save the king and the kingdom of France.’ Jean de Metz, one of Jeanne’s early companions, recalls that she claimed that

Personne, ni rois ni ducs, ni la fille du roi des écossais peut sauver le royaume de France. Le seul espoir, c’est moi.¹⁶¹

Jeanne’s primary goal was to claim the kingdom for its rightful heir, Charles VII.¹⁶² In this quote, however, she presented herself as the last resort, or literally “the only hope” for the kingdom. It is hard to deny an indication of an emerging national consciousness in such a quote.

Why all the nobles were so eager to believe this peasant girl claiming to be told by ‘the voices of God’ to go to France and end the siege of Orléans is still a topic hotly debated amongst modern historians. What is certain, is that Jeanne could be very convincing, as she did not only convince these worldly lords and ladies, but also the theologians of the University of Poitiers, where she was sent by Charles VII to examine whether she was really sent by God or was just delusional, sent by the devil or just a witch. It has been argued that it was not really Jeanne herself, but merely the total desperation of the royal court that barely had anything more to lose that led to her ‘appointment’.¹⁶³ Anyhow, within a matter of

many people had lived out their lives in sorrow; I myself am one of them. But I no longer grieve over anything, now that I can see what I desire.” Translation by Kennedy and Varty.

¹⁵⁹ See map III.

¹⁶⁰ The mother-in-law of Charles VII

¹⁶¹ *Procès en Nullité de la Condamnation de Jeanne d’Arc*, ed. Pierre Duparc (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1977-1988), Volume III, 277 “Nobody, neither kings nor dukes nor the daughter of the king of Scotland could save the kingdom. The only hope am I.” Translation my own. Many of the quotes attributed to Jeanne are derived from the nullification of her trial, in which the persons closest to her were interviewed by the inquisition in order to find out whether Jeanne had truly been a witch and a heretic or had she been unlawfully executed.

¹⁶² Said by Jeanne multiple times: “The voices told me to go to France, to relieve Orléans, to bring Charles to Reims and have him crowned”. (Taylor)

¹⁶³ Larissa Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

months, she had convinced the entire royal court of her abilities and was given an army to lift the siege of Orléans.

The first semi-legendary act by Jeanne took place at the aforementioned sanctuary of Sainte Catherine in Fierbois. Allegedly, Jeanne found the sword of Sainte Catherine behind the altar of the church of the abbey and used this sword in all her campaigns.¹⁶⁴ Realizing the potential of this event for the royal propaganda, court officials lost no time to dramatize the story. Although in reality, Jeanne probably just found a sword left there by a knight, as happened commonly¹⁶⁵, the royal propaganda succeeded and already in 1430, the first pilgrims arrived to pray for “the virgin and the kingdom”.¹⁶⁶ Here, again, a difference with the late thirteenth century can be detected. While in 1300, the pope recommended ‘praying for the king or the kingdom’ as both were seen as intermediaries to God, the connection between the kingdom and God is now no longer necessary: one could also just pray for the kingdom, making it an end and not a means.

After extensive preparations and being trained as a field commander, Jeanne left for Orléans. Her army was rather large, and Taylor argued that

The army increased in size every day as interest in the maid spread. Now there could be fought for God and Fatherland and the spirits were raised of those who had little interest in fighting for a weak Dauphin [Charles VII] with no money.¹⁶⁷

Taylor is of course no expert in nationalism studies, so this quote should be taken with a grain of salt. Still, it remains true that Jeanne’s army gathered a large number of men unusually fast. After the disasters of Crécy, Poitiers and -more recently- Azincourt, where the ideals of chivalry were crushed by some peasants with a longbow, few soldiers enlisted expecting to obtain glory or honour on the battlefield. So what exactly did they register for, if it was not glory nor money (both of which the Dauphin did not have)? The definitive answer to this question will probably forever be buried with the soldiers who uttered them, but could it have been anything else than them being inspired by Jeanne, who gave them new *élan* to fight for the survival of all they knew: the royal house of Valois, Saint Michel, chivalry, honour -so basically, *France*? Perhaps the clearest illustration of fighting -and dying- for this

¹⁶⁴ Beaune, *Naissance*, 169.

¹⁶⁵ In the middle ages, it was quite common for a knight to leave his sword or part of his armour in a church as a gift to the patron of said church. In fact, Jeanne would do this herself, when she left a sword given to her by a Burgundian knight in the abbey church of Saint Denis. (Taylor, *Jeanne d’Arc*, 142).

¹⁶⁶ Jean-Baptiste Fourault, *Sainte Catherine de Fierbois*. (Tours, 1887), 14.

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, *Jeanne d’Arc*, 98.

newly emerging cause is given by the Bastard¹⁶⁸ of Vaurus, who was captured and decapitated by Henry V in 1422. His final words were:

Je préfère mourir injustement pour garder ma foi que de vivre en l'ayant rompue.
Nulle mort qu'on subit pour l'État n'est honteuse ni miserable.¹⁶⁹

Regardless of the exact reasons for enlisting, fact remains that Jeanne succeeded better in convincing the common people to enlist than had most commanders before her. With this large army, Jeanne went to Orléans and in the meantime, she sent a letter to the English, threatening to “drive them out of France”¹⁷⁰, leaving no doubt about her intentions. Having arrived in the city, she lost no time and urged the French to attack. Within a matter of days, she had rallied the French troops and lifted the siege of Orléans. For the first time in years, the French had achieved a major victory. It truly was a symbolic victory and it would become the very first event that would be celebrated annually in both Orléans and other regions of the kingdom.¹⁷¹ This made it the first ‘national holiday’ of France and the fact that its significance was recognized in cities as far as Poitiers¹⁷², indicates a connection between French regions that had not been shown before. Moreover, it was not unique: the liberation of Paris in 1437 would be celebrated in numerous cities and villages as well.¹⁷³ Even more important at the time might have been the ‘Return of Normandy’, as it was called by contemporaries. More than any other region under Anglo-Burgundian influence, Normandy had resisted the occupation and inspired by Jeanne’s victories, a clear anti-English resistance emerged. In 1434 and 1435, large revolts took place which were coordinated with the royal court, as the nobility had often called for aid since the beginning of the occupation.¹⁷⁴ The reconquering of Normandy thus took only a year, with little to no destruction or resistance and was labelled “a liberation war” by the court chronicle of Charles VII.¹⁷⁵

This generally happy reception of the royal armies was not limited to Normandy. In the documents of the nullification of Jeanne’s trial, it is noted that in many villages and

¹⁶⁸ i.e. an illegitimate child of a noble.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Blondel, *Œuvres de Robert Blondel, historien normand du xv^e siècle*, ed. Alexandre Héron and Rouen Lestringant (1891-1893), vol. 2, 198-199. “I prefer to die unjustly for preserving my faith than to live having been broken. No death that one undergoes for the state is neither shameful nor miserable.” Translation my own.

¹⁷⁰ Joan of Arc, *letter 1: “Aux Anglais”*. 1429

¹⁷¹ Beaune, *Naissance*, 183.

¹⁷² Some 200 kilometers away, quite a distance in the Middle Ages.

¹⁷³ Beaune, *Naissance*, 183.

¹⁷⁴ Jouet, Roger. “La Résistance à la Occupation Anglaise en Normandie,” *Cahiers des Annales de Normandie*, No. 5 (1969): 790-792.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Chartier. *Chroniques de Charles VII, Roi de France*, ed. Auguste Vallet de Viriville (Paris, 1858), vol. 2, 233.

towns, Jeanne and the royal army were received as saviours.¹⁷⁶ The peoples of Reims, the city that had been the host of the sacred coronation ceremonies, were so rejoiced with the arrival of Jeanne d’Arc and their king that they went out the city gates to meet their king and the Maid leading his armies.¹⁷⁷ Jeanne would later address the citizens of Reims as “Loyal Frenchmen”, an honorary title she would also bestow upon the citizens of Tournai and Troyes.¹⁷⁸ In these letters, she urges the citizens to “stand fast, you loyal Frenchmen” and to maintain “the good cause of the kingdom of France”. Here, Jeanne seems to come very close to what could be labelled as nationalistic sentiment.

By then, Jeanne d’Arc had prevented Orléans from being taken, had her king crowned in Reims and had raised French morale once again. Not much later, she would be captured by the English and burned at the stake in Rouen. Still, her achievements were incredible, and she had become the symbol for the resurrection of France, which was acknowledged in many different ways. She had been elevated into the nobility and was the only person *ever* of non-royal blood who was allowed to field the royal coat-of-arms with the golden fleur-de-lys on a blue background, which was at the time the closest thing the French had to a national flag. The symbolic meaning of this needs no explanation. Christine de Pizan, discussed briefly before, wrote a 61-verse long poem on Jeanne d’Arc, exclaiming a patriotic sentiment never experienced before in the entire kingdom:

O quel honneur à la couronne
 De France par divine preuve!
 Car par les graces qu’Il lui donne
 Il appert comment Il l’apreuve,
 Et que plus foy qu’autre part treuve
 En l’estat royal, dont je lix
 Qu’oncques (ce n’est pas chose neuve!)
 En foy n’errèrent fleurs de lix.¹⁷⁹

In this verse, de Pizan unconsciously connects the ‘old’, thirteenth-century France to the new kingdom that was then being resurrected. Over the course of the Hundred Years War, people had started to believe that the war and the defeats were a divine punishment. Then, Jeanne’s

¹⁷⁶ *Nullité*, IV, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Ayroles, *La Vraye Jeanne d’Arc* (Paris: Gaume et cie, 1897), 84.

¹⁷⁸ Letters of Joan of Arc, #2 (Tournai), #3 (Troyes) and #5 (Reims). 1429.

¹⁷⁹ Pizan, *La ditié de Jehanne d’Arc*, verse XII. “And what honour for the French crown, this proof of divine intervention! For all the blessings which God bestows upon it demonstrate how much He favours it and that He finds more faith in the Royal House than anywhere else; as far as it is concerned, I read (and there is nothing new in this) that the Lilies of France never erred in matters of faith.” It is good to realize that de Pizan was raised at the court of Charles V and stood relatively close to the royal family. De Pizan should thus not be considered a representative example for her contemporaries. However, the love for king and country expressed in the ditié is still an exemplary example of (proto-)nationalist sentiment in the late middle ages.

miraculous and divinely-inspired acts formed new prove that God had not yet abandoned the ‘most Christian nation’. Jeanne is thus connected to the national identity of France as the recipient of God’s grace and, perhaps even more intriguing, the fleur-de-lys are metaphorically used as a symbol for the *collective body of the French people*.¹⁸⁰ While the extensive use of the fleur-de-lis by Cuvelier some 50 years before could still be regarded as just a symbol of the monarchy, de Pizan (a contemporary of Cuvelier!) used these in an entirely different context and made them the symbol of an entire ‘race’¹⁸¹. Not surprisingly, the myth of Troy, by which the construction of French identity had started in the early thirteenth century, is also referred to by de Pizan.¹⁸² This time however, both Achilles and Hector had been surpassed by an even greater hero: Jeanne d’Arc, the symbol of an emerging nation. Her contemporary, pope Pius II, summarized it as follows in his *memoires*:

Illud exploratissimum est, puellam fuisse, cuius ductu, Aureliani soluta est obsidio, cuius armis omnis terra subiecta est inter Bituriges, ac Parisios, cuius consilio Remenses in potestatem recepti sunt, & coronation apud eos celebrate, cuius impetus Talbotes fugatus, & eius caesus est exercitus, cuius audacia Parisiensis porta cremate, cuius solertia, atq. Industria res Francorum in tuto repositae sunt.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Daniels, *French National Identity*, 15.

¹⁸¹ ‘Race’ as in the definition of race provided by the *Grandes Chroniques* and discussed in chapter II.

¹⁸² Pizan, *Ditié*, verse XXXVI

¹⁸³ Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), *Comentarii Rerum Memorabilium* (Rome: Dominici Basae, 1584), 622. “This at any rate is beyond question that it was the Maid under whose command the siege of Orleans was raised, by whose arms all the country between Bourges and Paris was subdued, by whose advice Rheims was recovered and the coronation celebrated there, by whose charge Talbot was routed and his army cut to pieces, by whose daring the gate of Paris was fired, by whose quick wit and untiring effort the French cause was saved.” Translation by A. Gragg.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

From the monks of Saint-Denis that invented the stories of Clovis and Saint Denis to the royal propaganda of Charles VII, many court officials participated in an elaborate project with the purpose of constructing a coherent narrative that would connect the scattered pieces of the kingdom of France. At first, this narrative was rooted in the circles around the king -the court, the higher nobility, Paris and its surroundings- until later, when it spread to the rest of the country under pressure of 116 years of seemingly never-ending armed conflict. The exile of Charles VII forced the royal court away from Paris and the Île-de-France for years and proved to be essential for involving the rest of the kingdom in the constructed narrative of France.

This France was a monarchist, clerical and aristocratic kingdom; centred around the values of Christianity, chivalry and loyalty. Despite this, the intelligentsia at the court did not seem to be less skilled in inventing traditions than their nineteenth century colleagues. According to Hobsbawm, nations are largely based on these nineteenth century *invented traditions* and are thus modern inventions. But as has been shown, the inventing of traditions and the construction of national narratives already started centuries ago. The project of establishing a coherent national narrative in France started with the *Grandes Chroniques*, the ordo of 1250, the myths of Clovis, the Fleur-de-lys, the Salic law and all those elements that together constituted French identity in the late middle ages. The becoming of nations was (and still is) therefore a process that never ended. This process might have been rough and irregular, with changes in identity sometimes being a matter of months and sometimes a matter of centuries. This brings me back to the excellent argument made by Davies that has already been discussed in the introduction:

Nations are always in the state of becoming; they are never static. For that very reason we should not foreshorten their history to suit our contemporary terminological convenience. (...) National identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; as historians we should not privilege one of those dimensions.¹⁸⁴

Considering the results of this study, I would like to extend this argument to also include nationalism. This means that claims such as Weber's argument that most Frenchmen only became French (nationalists) in the late nineteenth century are too simplistic. Weber's proposition might have been true for some of the most remote areas of France's countryside,

¹⁸⁴ Davies, "Nations and National Identities," 568.

but already in the middle ages, even the most remote peasants still came into contact with the France that had been constructed at the court. They paid with coins decorated with the face of the king and they prayed for the wellbeing of the king and the kingdom. When the Hundred Years War broke out (which might very well have been the exogenous shock Weber argued was needed to turn *Peasants into Frenchmen*), many of them were directly or indirectly influenced by the events of the war. Take for example the volunteers Froissart recalls having been present at the battle of Crécy. They were non-nobles from the district, who realised very well what was going on, came to fight and were even willing to die for it. If this is not a primitive expression of nationalism, then what is it? One could of course argue that this primitive expression of willingness to die for the cause of the kingdom still lacks many aspects of modern nationalism as it has been defined in the introduction. However, as I already argued in the introduction, limiting nationalism to the way it appears in the modern world is a self-fulfilling prophecy or even circular reasoning: if nations and nationalism are defined by principles that are presupposed by modernity, how can nations and nationalism be anything but modern?

This reasoning brings me to Anthony Smith. Smith, as I have shown in the introduction, does acknowledge that nations have a certain ethno-symbolic origin that predates the modern era. Still, he holds on to a modernist definition and thus ultimately to the modernist notion that nations are a modern phenomenon. I have also shown in the introduction that this entire modernist argument could be labelled as nothing but a “definitional exercise”¹⁸⁵, but starting from there would only stall any academic debate. Instead, I have tried to debate the modernists with their own constructivist arguments and by showing that many aspects of their definitions can in fact be found in medieval France, making their distinction between modern and pre-modern ‘nations’ a purely artificial one, only made to “suit our contemporary terminological evidence”, as Davies argued.¹⁸⁶ It is time to let loose of the binary distinction between pre-modern and modern societies.

According to Smith, a nation is “a named human population, sharing a historical territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties of all members”.¹⁸⁷ Except for ‘a single economy’, all these elements can be found in late-medieval France: The French of the fifteenth century were a named human population and shared a historical territory. They also had common myths and

¹⁸⁵ Davies, “Nations and National Identities,” 570.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 568.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, *Opening Statement*.

memories, which had been carefully constructed over the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as I have shown in this study.

A mass, public culture was present as well: The Catholic church of France. After the disputes between the pope and Philippe le Bel, the pope lost most of his influence on France and a direct connection between God and the king was established, which was then used to further embed the narrative of the kingdom in a Christian tradition. Over the course of the Hundred Years War, this faith was more and more used to prove the superiority of the French (the ‘most Christian people’) and was adjusted numerous times to fit into the now emerging national narrative.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, Smith argues that one of the core principles of nations and nationalism is that the intelligentsia take the lead and “invite the masses into history”.¹⁸⁹ How is this phenomenon, that is apparently limited to modernism, different from what happened in the thirteenth century, when the intelligentsia constructed a set of traditions and invented an imagined history and then translated all of this from Latin into the Vernacular, basically *inviting the masses into history*? On top of that, the victory at Orléans gave France its first, annually celebrated ‘national holiday’, further amplifying the growing presence of a public culture.

Finally, ‘Common rights and duties’ are not hard to find either. As the war progressed, the French became ever more conscious of their duty of loyalty to their king, especially the nobles but a growing number of commoners as well, shown by the attraction of Jeanne d’Arc. Of course, laws could differ regionally, but so do many laws in the United States of America and no scholar in his right mind would argue that the contemporary United States are not a nation.¹⁹⁰

Hence, with all these boxes ticked, can the absence of a single economy in medieval France alone be used to justify denying her the label of nation? That would be a tad far-fetched, I would argue. *The French nation* might not have been born in thirteenth century France as some claim¹⁹¹, but the seeds for it had most definitely been planted. I would then add that it was in the fifteenth century that the seeds planted in the late 1200’s were brutally forced to come above ground in order to survive. Heroes such as Jeanne d’Arc and to a lesser extent Bertrand du Guesclin, aided by virtuous *chroniquers* such as de Pizan and Cuvelier, would slowly stir up a sense of ‘Frenchness’ in the inhabitants of the kingdom. At first, this

¹⁸⁸ Take for example the subtle arming of Saint Michel.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, *Opening Statement*.

¹⁹⁰ There are some, for example Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (London: Penguin books, 2012).

¹⁹¹ Davies, “Nations and National Identities,” 567.

was limited to the nobility, as for example Cuvelier's *Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin* was obviously aimed at the higher echelons of society, often of noble descent. Meanwhile, Jeanne d'Arc, being a simple peasant girl herself, also appealed to the average Frenchman or woman, albeit still through the medieval tradition of the Christian faith. But perhaps the most significant (although not well-noted) change in the relation between the French and their kingdom was the way this relation was perceived. In 1300, 'serving the king or the kingdom meant serving God' and nobody was willing to die for it yet¹⁹². It was a means, not a goal as such. A century later, this had turned around completely, as Christianity was then used in service of the kingdom instead of vice versa and dying for one's nation had become "neither shameful nor miserable".¹⁹³ In a way, this was the beginning of the secularisation process in which the faith in the nation, nationalism, would replace Christianity as the main source of devotion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a process most modernist argued started only after the French Revolution.¹⁹⁴

It would take another four centuries and multiple revolutions for the French nation and the subsequent nationalism to fully come of age, but to deny the existence of national awareness in late-medieval France would mean ignoring the entire part of the French identity that had been developed, invented or constructed before the events unfolding after 5 May 1789.¹⁹⁵ France in the fifteenth century was a nation, certainly different from a modern nation, but a nation nonetheless.

¹⁹² Beaune, *Naissance*, 329.

¹⁹³ Blondel, *Œuvres*, 198-199.

¹⁹⁴ Gellner, *Nationalism*, 22.

¹⁹⁵ First meeting of the Estates-General since 1614 and *de facto* the beginning of the French Revolution.

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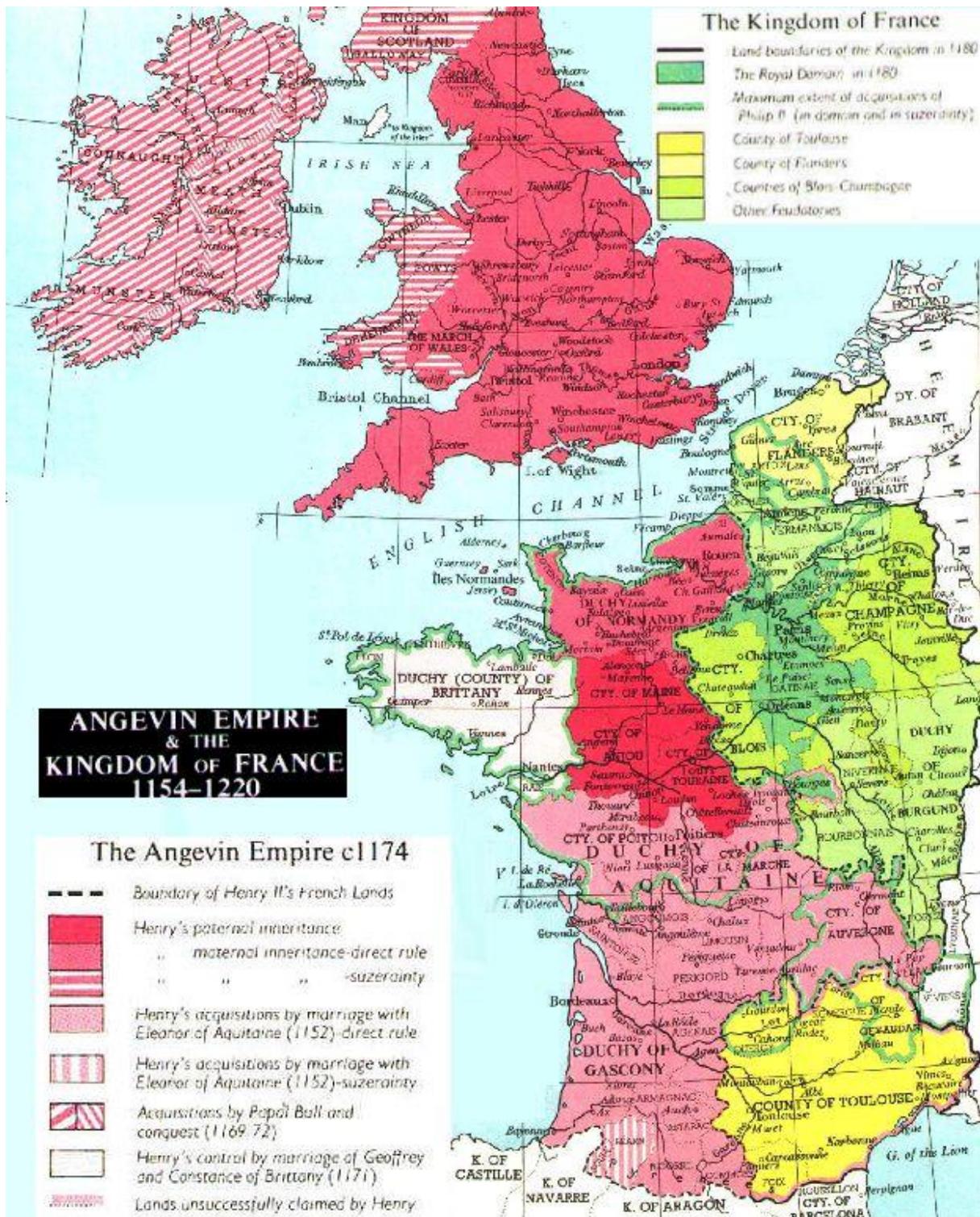
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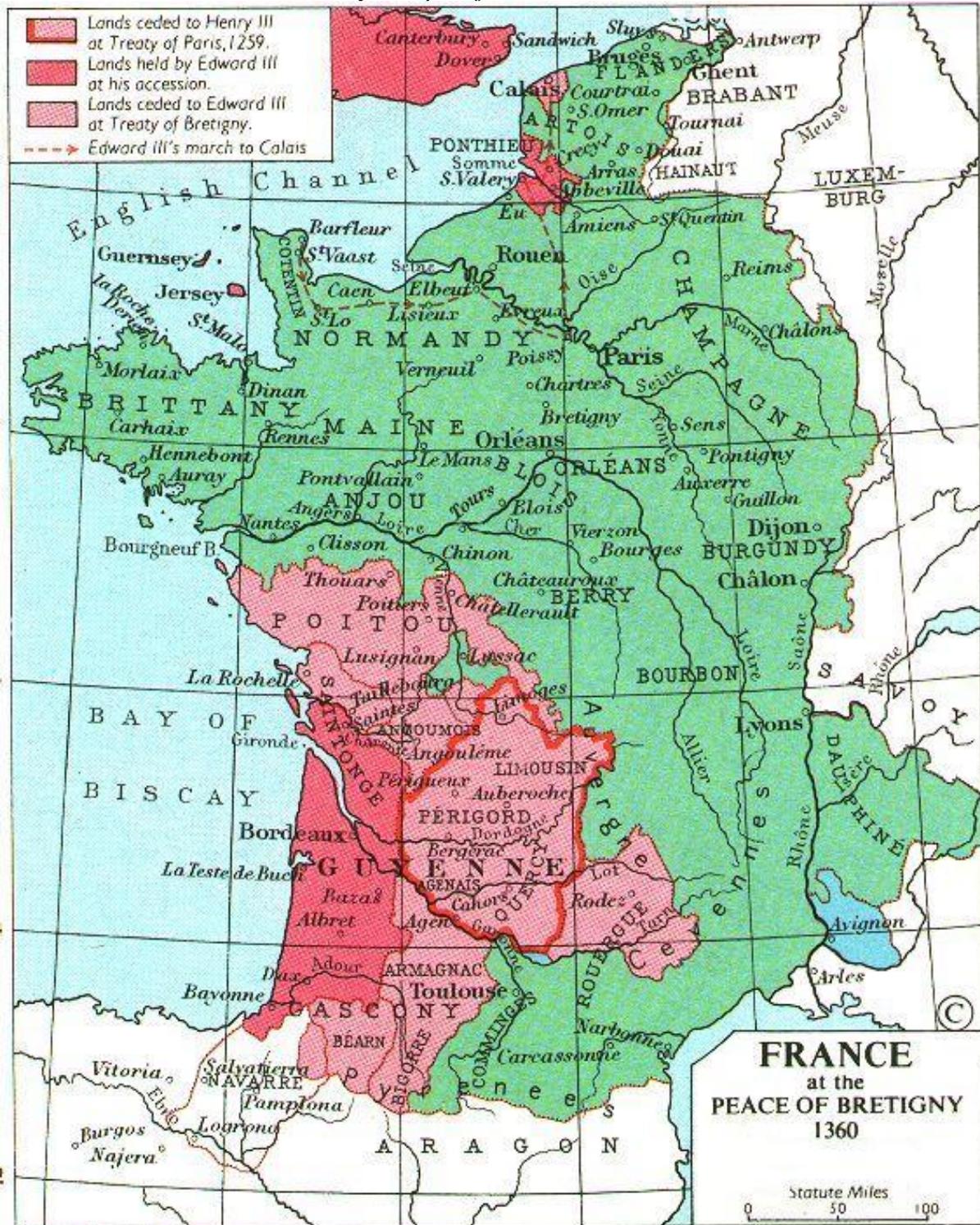
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Appendix A: Maps

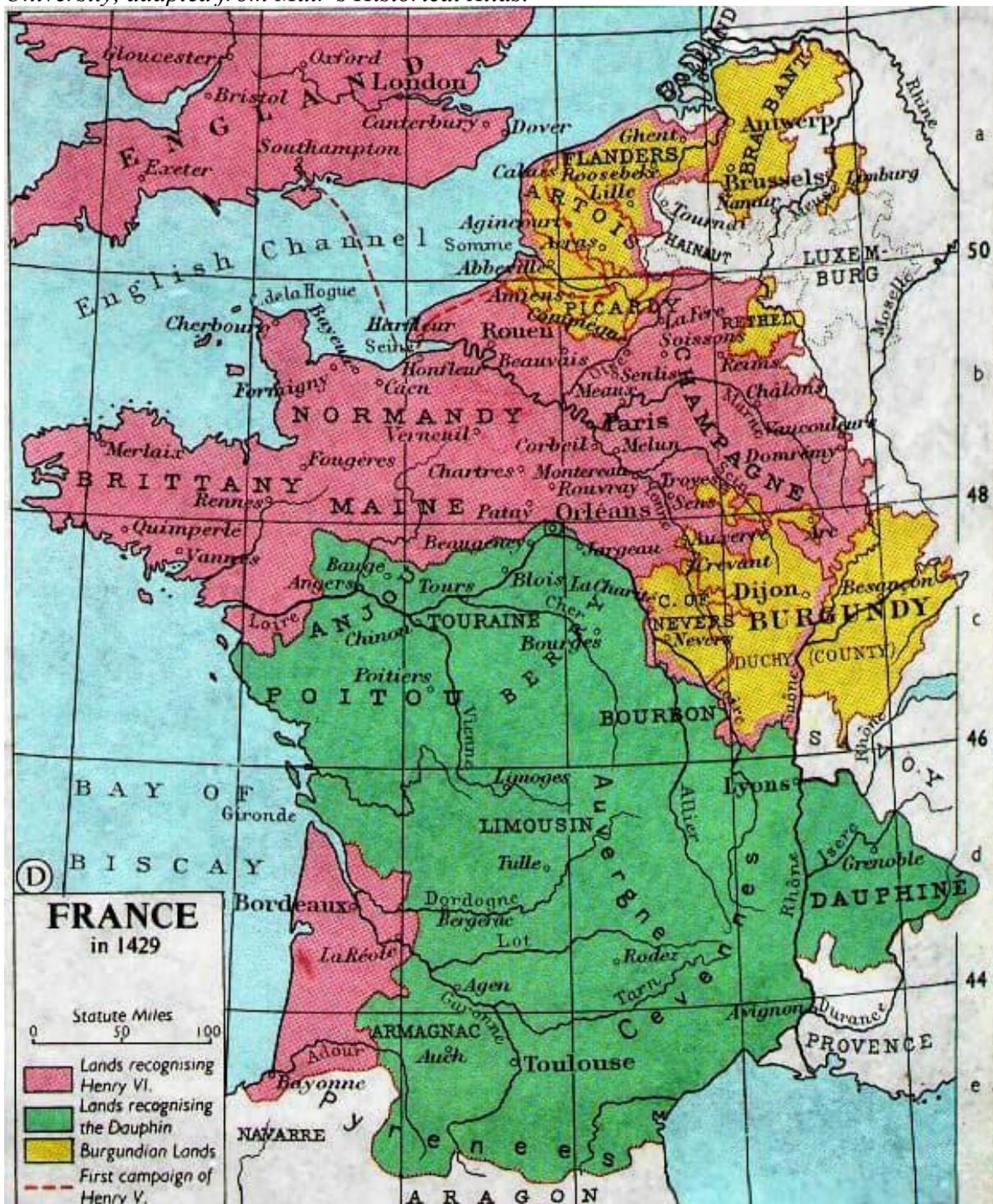
Map I: The Angevin Empire in 1174. Source: *Medieval Sourcebook, Fordham University.*



Map II: France at the treaty of Brétigny, 1360. Also shown is the situation at the outbreak of the War. Source: Brown University; adapted from Muir's Historical Atlas.



Map III: France in 1429, just before Jeanne d'Arc lifted the siege of Orléans. Source: Brown University, adapted from Muir's Historical Atlas.



Map IV: Major battles of the Hundred Years War. Source: made by author.



Appendix B: Family tree of the houses of Capet, Valois, Plantagenet and Lancaster.

Source: Royal Armouries, Leeds.

