

THE PARCHMENT OF CHINON – THE ABSOLUTION OF POPE CLEMENT V OF THE LEADING MEMBERS OF THE TEMPLAR ORDER

Chinon, Diocese of Tours, 1308 August 17th-20th

[\(view\)](#)

Original document formed by a large parchment folio (700x580mm), initially provided with the hanging seals of the three papal legates who formed the special Apostolic Commission *ad inquirendum* appointed by Clement V: Bérenger Frédol, Cardinal Priest of the titular church of the Most Holy Nereus and Achilleus and nephew of the pope, Étienne de Suisy, cardinal priest of St. Cyriac in *Thermis*, Landolfo Brancacci, cardinal deacon of St. Angelo. In a reasonable state, even though there are some big violaceous stains, caused by bacterial attack. The original one came along with a plain copy still kept at the Vatican Secret Archives, with the reference *Archivum Arcis, Armarium D 218*.

ASV, *Archivum Arcis, Arm. D 217*

The document contains the absolution Pope Clement V gave to the Grand Master of the Temple, friar Jacques de Molay and to the other heads of the Order, after they had shown to be repented and asked to be forgiven by the Church; after the formal abjuration, which is compelling for all those who were even only suspected of heretical crimes, the leading members of the Templar Order are reinstated in the Catholic Communion and readmitted to receive the sacraments. The document, which belongs to the first phase of the trial against the Templars, when Pope Clement V was still convinced to be able to guarantee the survival of the military-religious order, meets the apostolic need to remove the shame of excommunication from the warrior friars, caused by their previous denial of Jesus Christ when tortured by the French Inquisitor. As several contemporary sources confirm, the pope ascertained that Templars were involved in some serious forms of immorality and he planned a radical reform of the order to subsequently merge it into one body with the other important military-religious order of the Hospitallers. The Act of Chinon, a requirement to carry out the reform, remained however a dead letter. The French Monarchy reacted by initiating a real blackmail mechanism, which would have then obliged Clement V to take a final decision during the Council of Vienna (1312): unable to oppose the will of the King of France, Phillip the Fair, who ordered the elimination of the Templars, the Pope, heard the opinion of the Council Fathers, and decided to abolish the Order «con norma irreformabile e perpetua» (bull *Vox in excelso*, 22nd March 1312). Clement V however stated that this suffered decision did not amount to an act of heretic condemnation, which could not be reached on the basis of the various inquiries carried out in the years prior to the Council. As a matter of fact, a regular trial would have been required in order to pass a sentence, including also the statement of the defensive position of the Order. But, according to the pontiff, the scandal aroused by the shameful accusations against the Templars (heresy, idolatry, homosexuality and obscene behaviour) would have dissuaded anyone, from wearing the templar habit and on the other hand, a delay on a decision regarding these issues would have produced the squandering of the great wealth the Christians had offered to the Order, charged with the duty to help fight against the enemies of the Faith in the Holy Land. The attentive consideration of these dangers, together with the pressure of the French, convinced the Pope to abolish the Order of the Knights of the Temple, just like had happened in the past for much more important religious orders and for much less important reasons.

<http://asv.vatican.va/en/doc/1308.htm#top>>

[The main body of the document contains dense, handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a Latin manuscript. The text is arranged in several columns and is significantly faded and obscured by numerous stains, particularly in the center and right-hand side. The ink is dark, but the paper is heavily discolored and aged.]

[A section of text at the bottom of the page, possibly a list or index, featuring several entries. Each entry begins with a decorative initial letter, such as 'C' or 'E', enclosed in a circular or floral frame. The text following these initials is smaller and less legible due to fading.]

[The bottom-most section of the page contains a few lines of text, including what appears to be a signature or a date. The text is very faint and difficult to decipher. There are also some small, illegible markings and a small blue ink smudge on the right side.]