I am suspicious of a priori ideas maintaining that the Schism only concerned intellectuals or the authorities, and not the people, the “common crowd.” That it was an affair above all of theologians, canon lawyers, and rulers, and that the simple folk cared about other things: this claim would have to agree with the facts reported in the sources. I have even heard it said that the Schism was a “false problem.” I do not believe it. To the extent that it touched people at the most profound level of their convictions, namely, their faith, it was a real problem. And in their daily lives as well. The poor priest worried about whether the benefice that he so wanted, and that he had solicited from one pope or the other, had any chance of being given to him, and how soon, and how much it would be worth. So that he could simply make a living.¹

As long as there were priests, the Schism was a lesser evil. Now we know that, except in cases very limited in time and in space, the continuity of priestly ordinations was assured. No region truly suffered a rupture in religious observance...It is therefore difficult to consider it as a religious event. It was rather an ecclesiastical and political phenomenon. That is how it was experienced...The Schism was an affair of learned clerics, or university scholars and of political elites near to the king and his council.²

As few other events did during the 14th and 15th centuries, the Great Western Schism affected the whole of Christian Europe. After 1378, every Catholic individual and community first had to decide whether to accept as pope either of the two (or, after 1409, three) individuals claiming to be the one, true successor of Saint Peter and Vicar of Christ on earth. Then, those who rejected neutrality had to make their choice and join the Roman, the Avignon, or (again after 1409) the Pisan obedience. At issue was the unific leadership of a universal institution; the

consequences of disagreement could not help but be universal as well. But agreement about the breadth of the crisis is not the same as agreement about its depth. As the opening quotations, taken from the works of Monique Maillard-Luypaert and Jean Favier respectively, suggest, there is no unanimity concerning whether all Catholics experienced the Schism’s shockwaves with equal force, or with much force at all. Maillard-Luypaert might be seen as representing the maximalist position, which sees the Schism as generating both severe practical problems and spiritual crises; Favier might be seen as representing the minimalist position, which sees the Schism as an administrative entanglement that, while a nuisance, did not jeopardize anything essential.

The purpose of this essay is not to answer definitively the question of to whom and how much the Schism mattered. Rather, its purposes are 1) to take stock of recent and older work on how the Schism played out in a variety of venues, and 2) to provide some direction for those about to conduct research into the local experiences of the Schism. To assess the Schism’s local impact requires one to draw selectively upon other historians’ research into the published and archival records of places as distant as Ireland and Cyprus. During the last century, historians have studied experiences of the Schism at a variety of levels, five of which are examined in turn here: the regional level, the diocesan level, the monastic and mendicant level, the urban level, and the university level. Because some of these levels nest within others, historians must always be aware that work relevant to their own might be found in places perhaps not immediately obvious: work on the consequences of the Schism for monastic and mendicant houses often can be found within diocesan studies, for example. Attention is given here to especially important discussions of methodology and source material and (in the notes) to published archival guides or source collections. Granted, the researcher might have no interest in the geographical localities to which these guides, collections, and discussions apply. Yet from them the researcher can still get a sense of the sort of documents that he or she is likely to encounter during research, the collections where these documents typically are housed, and the interpretive problems that these records pose.

I. Regional experiences

Few books, a century after their initial publication, continue to garner the sort of praise that Noël Valois’s La France et le grand schisme