

Diplomatics of Modern Official Documents (Sixteenth - Eighteenth Centuries): Evaluation and Perspectives

BERNARD BARBICHE

Abstract: The author looks at the science of diplomatics within the context of documents generated from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The study of documents according to set diplomatics categories was complicated by the sheer bulk of documentation due to two reasons—the decentralization of the chancery and the emergence of new types of documents linked to the development of the administrative monarchy. The author advocates the application of diplomatics methods to the study of these modern documents. He also presents several examples that underscore the importance of the form of the document in undertaking the decision processes and activities of an administrative body; also that text edition remains for our own time as well as for earlier periods, the ideal testing ground for the techniques of diplomatics.

About the author: Bernard Barbiche is Professor of Modern History and Diplomatics at the Ecole Nationale des Chartes, Paris.

DIPLOMATICS FOR THE MODERN ERA is still a young field, and few studies have been published on this period. Therefore, those available deserve attention. The causes of this historiographical situation are multiple: they are linked, on the one hand, to the origins of diplomatics itself, and on the other, to the amount of official documents.

When Jean Mabillon founded diplomatics in 1681 by publishing the *De re diplomatica*, he could only, by definition, consider the oldest periods. His main objective was to define the characteristics of official documents in order to single out forged ones. These had been abundantly produced in the first centuries of the Middle Ages. This initial trend has left an enduring mark on diplomatics. As a matter of fact, scholars and institutions who have since continued Mabillon's task have all, for various reasons, given priority to early times. Such was the case, in the eighteenth century, with erudite Benedictines, for the archives of their monasteries were particularly rich in documents from these periods; it is true as well of the Ecole des Chartes, founded in the full bloom of Romanticism, at a time when the Middle Ages were being rediscovered. The advance gained by the Middle Ages as well as the existing volume of editions on this period explain the limited space reserved for the modern period out of the total of works dealing with diplomatics. Moreover, we are still, today, in a situation where human resources and funds allocated to modern diplomatics in research programs are minimal.

Another factor has, in a manner of speaking, discouraged researchers: it is the increasing volume of documents which is quite evident from the end of the Middle Ages (fourteenth - fifteenth centuries). Let us take the example of French royal diplomatics. While exhaustive editions have been completed for the Middle Ages, such an attempt for the modern era is nearly doomed to failure.

This spiraling number of documents is due to two main reasons: the decentralization of the chancery and of the royal seals, and the emergence of new types of documents linked to the development of the administrative monarchy.

Until the fifteenth century, royal documents were sealed by the Chancellor of France, who held the great royal seal, and from the fourteenth century, the *Dauphin* seal, which authenticated all documents pertaining to Dauphiné. From the fifteenth century, due to the extension of the kingdom, the royal chancery, which had been unique until then, was not sufficient anymore. "Lesser chanceries" (*petites chancelleries*), which were like outlets of the Chancery, were then opened in the sovereign courts and even, in the middle of the eighteenth century, in lesser courts (*sièges présidiaux*). This evolution did not stop until the end of the Ancien Régime (a "lesser chancery" was still opened for the Parlement of Nancy in 1777). Documents sealed in these chanceries (known as *actes de petit sceau*) during the eighteenth century, most of them procedural and of no great historical interest, probably represented 90 percent of all letters patent sealed within the kingdom. Thousands of official documents were thus drawn up and expedited in the name of the King, while he had no personal knowledge of them.

Royal official documents sent on the personal order of the King were commonly called *actes en commandement*; a growing number of these escaped the control of the Chancellor and were expedited, from the reign of Henri II on, only by the *secrétaires d'Etat*. Some documents were authenticated either by a particular seal (the *sceau du secret*, secret seal, sometimes called *cachet* when it was used to close up the document), or by mere signatures: the King's, which was generally an imitation, and the genuine signature of the *secrétaire d'Etat*. New types of official documents came into existence. Personal or intimate letters could be written and sent by the King's cabinet with his personal seal, the *signet*. In the eighteenth century, the King even expressed his will in documents that were

neither sealed nor signed, by writing the word *bon* (good) on reports or memos presented to him by his ministers or by the heads of the principal administrations. At the end of the Ancien Régime, letters patent represented only a tiny percentage of the total number of the King's *actes en commandement*.

The rapid evolution of the documentary landscape makes it quite obvious that modern documents cannot be treated like the medieval ones, with the possible exception of the sixteenth century. This explains the situation of published works in this field. The only great scholarly work on early modern diplomatics is the doctoral thesis (*doctorat d'Etat*) of Hélène Michaud, *La Grande Chancellerie et les écritures royales au XVI^e siècle*,¹ which is important for its methodological innovation. For the following two centuries, the only first-hand research worth mentioning is the work of Michel Antoine on the King's Council.²

Manuals on diplomatics reflect what has been described above. The books of Arthur Giry³ and Alain de Boüard⁴ are either outdated or insufficient. Only Georges Tessier's manual, *Diplomatique royale française*,⁵ is really useful for the modern period. Yet, the modern period represents only 15 percent of the whole work, which, in spite of its qualities, does not give a clue to all the identification problems of the documents. The suggested typology is incomplete or unsatisfactory.

The editions or catalogs of these documents are scarce. The publication of *les Ordonnances des rois de France* was started at the beginning of the eighteenth century by order of the Chancellor de Pontchartrain and ran to the end of Louis XII's reign (i.e., 1514), thanks to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres,⁶ with the twenty-first volume being published in 1849. Under the auspices of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, the project was resumed in 1902. At present, only nine volumes have been brought out, covering the years 1515–1539.⁷ More than seven years remain to be done before Francis I's reign is completed. Catalogs have also been undertaken by the same institution. The *Catalogue des actes de François I*, which was published between 1887 and 1908, in ten volumes, is known to be incomplete.⁸ The *Catalogue des actes de Henri II*, after long years of preparation, started appearing in 1979. The first three volumes each correspond to one year of the reign (1547, 1548, 1549) and they all have an index.⁹ In 1991, the first two volumes of the *Catalogue des actes de François II*¹⁰ (whose short reign spanned seventeen months) were published. However, they will be hardly usable until the index is printed.

¹Hélène Michaud, *La Grande Chancellerie et les écritures royales au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1967) (*Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société de l'Ecole des chartes*, 17).

²Michel Antoine, *Le fonds du Conseil d'Etat du roi aux Archives nationales. Guide des recherches* (Paris, 1955); by the same author, *Le Conseil du roi sous le règne de Louis XV* (Geneva, 1970) (*Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société de l'Ecole des chartes*, 19).

³Arthur Giry, *Manuel de diplomatique* (Paris, 1894).

⁴Alain de Boüard, *Manuel de diplomatique française et pontificale* (Paris, 1929–1948), 2 volumes.

⁵Georges Tessier, *Diplomatique royale française* (Paris, 1962).

⁶*Ordonnances des rois de France de la troisième race* (Paris, 1723–1849), 21 volumes.

⁷*Ordonnances des rois de France. Règne de François Ier* (Paris, 1902), 9 volumes published.

⁸*Catalogue des actes de François Ier* (Paris, 1887–1908), 10 volumes (*Collection des ordonnances des rois de France*).

⁹Jean-Paul Laurent, Marie-Noëlle Baudouin-Matuszek, Anne Merlin-Chazelas, et al, *Catalogue des actes de Henri II* (Paris, 1979), 3 volumes published so far (*Collection des ordonnances des rois de France*).

¹⁰Marie-Thérèse de Martel, *Catalogue des actes de François II* (Paris, 1991), 2 volumes published so far (*Collection des ordonnances des rois de France*).

Of course, these three catalogs include only the King's *actes de commandement*. It would have been unthinkable to add in the letters patent expedited by the lesser chanceries. But even within these limits, extensive research had to be conducted. At least for the first two books, a thorough reading had to be done of all the registration books of France's courts and jurisdictions, whose task it was to verify and transcribe the royal documents to give them force of law. The author of the *Catalogue des actes de François II* adopted a different method in order to reach publication with less delays: the two volumes published so far include only the documents kept at the Archives nationales. Those from provincial archives will be given in the next volumes. It remains to be seen whether this new method represents progress. One cannot help but be discouraged by the fact that one whole century will have been necessary to complete the *Ordonnances de François I*. No one can foresee when the catalogs for the reigns of Henri II and Francis II will be completed. This should not be surprising, since only four persons, two of whom work half-time, are in charge of this work, which requires the greatest care both for the research of documents and for their archival and diplomatical description.

Under these conditions, the idea of applying the methods that were developed for the reigns of the Valois kings to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would be highly utopian. A whole armada of researchers would have to be available in order to list the official documents of the Bourbon kings with some hope of reaching a tangible result within a reasonable time frame. This is even more regrettable since computerized technical means are now available that would make such a project possible. One could then imagine the establishment of a data bank based on information gathered in French and foreign archives and libraries; this aim will remain inaccessible as long as manpower is not on a par with technology.

Since those catalogs cannot be achieved, it seems necessary to set a typology of royal official documents for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a development of Hélène Michaud's research. One could then establish at what date documents appear and disappear, as well as describe their characters and detail their evolution.

A detailed overview similar to the one just described for the royal official documents of the modern period could be presented for other fields of diplomatics. The administrative and judicial documents stemming from the king's representatives are often badly known. In this field, one should, however, mention the very useful contributions made by a growing number of archivists in the course of inventorying fonds:¹¹ one can only rejoice that the form of official documents is taken into account as part of the treatment of fonds, and that necessary attention is given to establishing typologies that offer precise definitions and allow the rigorous use of the proper vocabulary.

Outside France, papal diplomatics would benefit from more research on the modern period. This field offers two original aspects in comparison to the branch diplomatics of other powers: the universal scope of the Holy See and the stability of its institutions, since the Papacy did not experience political disruptions comparable to the revolutions taking

¹¹While not attempting to be all-inclusive, I will mention, as examples, the studies of diplomatics and the typologies given by Lucie Roux, *Archives départementales du Haut-Rhin, Répertoire de la sous-série 1 B (Conseil souverain d'Alsace)* (Colmar, 1963); Dominique Dupraz, *Archives départementales de l'Isère, Répertoire numérique de la sous-série 2 B (Supplément au fonds du parlement de Dauphiné)* (Grenoble, 1988); and Michèle Bimbenet, *Archives nationales. Châtelet de Paris. Répertoire numérique de la série Y*, volume 1 (Paris, 1993). On all these questions, one must read the special issue of the *Gazette des Archives* which focuses on judicial fonds and historical research (nos. 158–159, third and fourth semesters, 1992).

place in France and in most European countries. The recent *Manual of Papal Diplomatics*¹² by Thomas Frenz does take the modern and contemporary periods into account, in a lesser proportion, given the state of the bibliography. This represents a significant understanding of the necessity to extend research to the most recent periods.

Another field of modern diplomatics deserves to be explored—the study of seals. Until now, the main object of study has been medieval seals, which exist in a rather limited amount. The study of modern seals is made difficult specifically because of their state of conservation; consider the example of the royal official documents. Through time, the seals on letters patent became larger and the quality of the wax diminished, making the seals more and more fragile: very few are in a state of good repair. Moreover, these seals became heavier and heavier, and have often come loose from the documents they were hanging from. Other types of seals are even rarer. The “cachets” were often destroyed when the documents were opened, while stamped seals have been crushed to pieces. A study pertaining to all these seals would require investigations of a great variety of fonds. In spite of the foreseeable obstacles, such a project should be attempted. Such research would have to document the institutions and include the study of normative texts and chancery regulations. Let us add that the modern period saw new forms of authentication, which are derived from the seal and of the same nature, such as embossing presses and rubber stamps, which should also be taken into account. The recent undertakings of the Committee on Sigillography of the International Council on Archives and the remarkable glossary¹³ which has just been published are a necessary basis to any future research in this field.

In conclusion, a general evaluation of research in the field of early modern diplomatics is both disappointing and stimulating. One feels discouraged if one compares what has been done and what remains to be done. But, on the other hand, if the will is there and the necessary means available, the modern period offers an immense field of investigation. This research can combine traditional methods, which have received a general recognition and should not be left aside, and the resources offered by the latest information technologies. An approach paying attention to the form of the documents provides invaluable evidence regarding the decision processes and activities of an administrative body. Finally, text edition remains, for modern times as well as for earlier periods, the ideal testing ground for the techniques of diplomatics. Several concrete examples will illustrate these last two remarks.

A Concrete Example: The Solution To A Police Case In Eighteenth-Century Burgundy

The case we present here was found in the archives of the *intendance* of Burgundy and Bresse which are now kept in series C at the Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or. In box C 414bis, we find, among similar files, a three-page document in which we follow, step-by-step, a police case. (See figure 1.) Although of minor importance, this case

¹²Thomas Frenz, *Papsturkunden des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1986) (*Historische Grundwissenschaften in Einzeldarstellungen*, 2); by the same author, *I documenti pontifici nel medioevo e nell'età moderna*, Italian edition edited by Sergio Pagano (Vatican City, 1989) (*Littera antiqua*, 6).

¹³International Council on Archives, Committee on Sigillography, *Vocabulaire international de la sigillographie* (Rome, 1990) (Ministerio per i beni culturali e ambientali, *Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato*, Sussidi, 3).

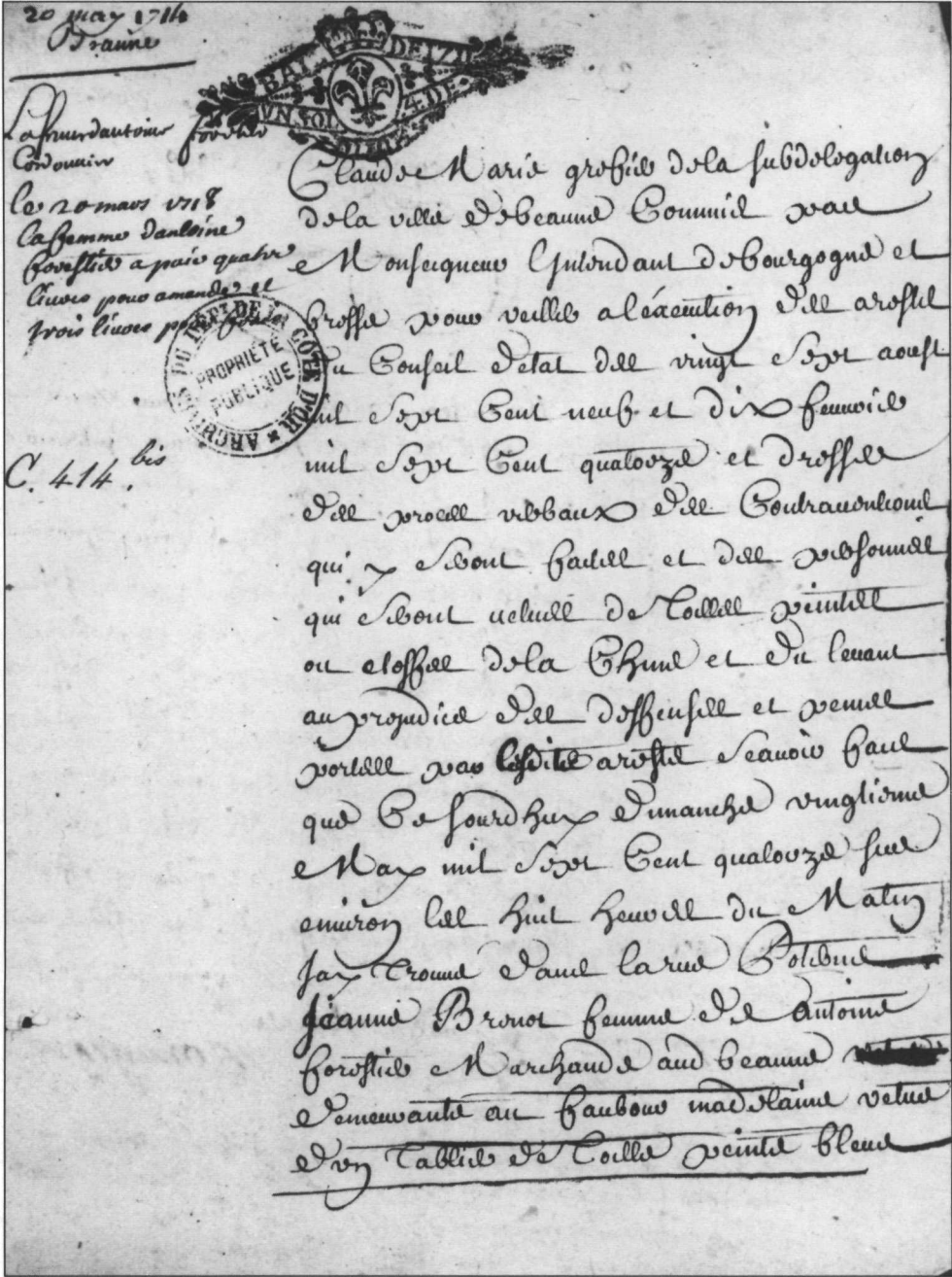


Figure 1. (Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or, Box C 414bis.)

apertures blanches blanches dont jay dressé
proposé acte que jay signé vous valent
et vous Beque de Baifon

[Signature]

Philippe Mongeoz auoir ala Cour Concl
D'roy subdoyé en l'aire de Consignes l'interdant
caution faire que de fondus vingt may mil
sur son qu'ilozz fut surroy l'le cinq heures
de l'heure en notre hotel ce pardevant nous fist
tellement M. Claude Marie notre greffier
lequel nous a proposé le procés verbal en dressé
vaux dressé par Jeanne Brion femme de
nomme Bonfils Cordier demourant au faubourg moir
qu'il a trouvé net et de l'abbé de l'abbé de l'abbé
suivant ledit procés verbal qu'il a fait et a fait
visible sans fautes qu'il a posé sur l'le sainte
evangelis en son doctoy nous nous sommes soufigné
et avons fait signé au d. Marie

[Signature] Moingon

subrogé au procés verbal des conclusions des 29
avril 1714
Les avoués souscrits selon leurs formes et
en conséquence l'ordonnance de la cour d'auvergne

Figure 1. (continued)

[illegible]

Figure 1. (continued)

kept the provincial administration busy for nearly four years, according to a scenario we can easily establish.¹⁴

The first two episodes take place in Beaune, the seat of a *subdélégation*, on Sunday, May 20, 1714. At approximately 8 A.M., Claude Marie, *greffier*, is out in the streets. He is in charge of enforcing two *arrêts du Conseil*, dated August 27, 1709, and February 10, 1714, which renew the traditional prohibition of wearing oriental fabrics.¹⁵ In the rue Poterne he meets Jeanne Brenot, the wife of Antoine Forestier, who happens to be wearing an illegal fabric (*vêtue d'un tablier de toile peinte bleue à petites fleurs blanches*). Marie draws up a report on this petty offense. At approximately 5 p.m., Claude Marie meets Philibert Mongeon, his *subdélégué*, who hands a report to him and certifies, with an oath sworn on the Bible, the truth of the reported facts. An official receipt of the report is written by the *greffier* and is signed by both men.

The case being investigated is then sent up to the *intendance* in Dijon. In addition to the initial report and the report of the *subdélégué*, we find on the same sheet the sentence given by Pierre Arnaud de La Briffe, *intendant de Bourgogne et Bresse*.¹⁶ This judgment, pronounced on December 18, is at the center of the case, since it states the sentence inflicted on the guilty party. The text is written by a clerk or secretary, but it is the *intendant* himself, in his own hand, who writes in the blank space the amount of the fine (four pounds, an unimportant sum) which Jeanne Brenot will have to pay. She will also have to bring her apron, the cause of the offense, to the *bureau des traites de la ville* (the local customs administration), so that it can be sent to the *bureau général de la douane de Paris*. The judgment also refers to a third *arrêt du Conseil* given on June 11, 1714.¹⁷

On March 18, 1715, the notification of the judgment is given to Jeanne Brenot and her husband at their home in faubourg Sainte-Madeleine by Henry Le Bault, process server. His writ is submitted to a last control procedure on the same day.

Did Jeanne Brenot bring the illicit apron, as the *intendant* had ordered, to Guillaume Nouderoy, *receveur des traites*, the day after the judgment's notification? In any case, she waited until March 20, 1718, three years later, to pay the four pound fine she had originally owed, plus three pounds for the costs. These sums, in accordance with the notification, were normally paid to the *greffier*, Claude Marie, who, on May 20, 1714, had drawn up the initial report. The case has then come full circle and it is closed by the same man who had initiated it.

We are faced with a simple, but exemplary case: only one document, on which six deeds are transcribed, enables us today to explore the way to a police and judicial decision.

¹⁴I express my warmest thanks to Mlle Marie-Anne Chabin, then conservateur at the Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, for drawing my attention to this interesting document and for sending me a photograph of it.

¹⁵Arch. Nat., E 807 B, fol. 231–236 (27 August 1709, “arrêt simple”) and E 1974, fol. 116 (10 February 1714). The year 1686 was the first time the prohibition against the import, making, sale, and wearing of fabrics painted and decorated in the Indies or in China, or imitated within the kingdom of France was introduced. But these “indiennes” were so popular that the royal administration, in spite of many reminders (including the two aforementioned “arrêts du Conseil”), proved unable to efficiently enforce this protectionist measure, which was eventually repealed in 1759.

¹⁶On Pierre Arnaud de la Briffe, “intendant” of Caen (1709–1711), then of Burgundy (1711–1740), see Michel Antoine, *Le gouvernement et l'administration sous Louis XV. Dictionnaire biographique* (Paris, 1978), 136–37.

¹⁷Arch. Nat., E 864, fol. 110–113. This new “arrêt” (simple) reinforces the réglementation. The King's will is expressed in order to “abolir entièrement le commerce et l'usage desdites étoffes et toilles qui causent un préjudice si sensible aux manufactures du royaume.”

The role of each person, and the extent and limits of their competence are clear. The clerk (*greffier*) can only report the facts. The investigation of the case comes under the responsibility of the *subdélégué*: he confirms his inferior's report, but he cannot make any decision, since everything is sent up to the *intendant*. If this high royal servant has to personally examine such minor cases and make decisions on them, one should not be surprised by the seven-month delay taking place between the initial report and the judgment. The *intendance* administration must be overburdened by the amount of petty cases. What is more surprising is the three-year delay between the notification and the payment of the fine: the only explication seems to be the indulgence (or the behavior) on the part of the *greffier*.

One should finally note a mistake that slipped into the writing of one of the deeds: in Claude Marie's report, Jeanne Brenot is simply qualified as a *marchande* (tradeswoman). The report signed by the *subdélégué* specifies her husband's profession; he is a *cordier* (rope-maker), but the clerk of the *intendant* turns him into a *cordonnier* (shoe-maker). Apparently, this slight contradiction raised no problem; administrative negligence is as old as administration.

The Critical Edition of Modern Texts: Overview of Problems

Even in the computer age, the critical edition of modern and contemporary texts represents a very important branch of historical research, both in France and abroad. The proportion of published texts is, of course, minimal compared to the amount of preserved sources; still, these collections of documents, memoirs, and chronicles constitute an important part of our libraries' resources, and new volumes are continuously added to the existing printed collections,¹⁸ while editing norms and guidelines are regularly published.¹⁹ Editors today have at their disposal models and references that enable them to fulfill their work with all the necessary rigor.

Things have not always been so, and the study of volumes published since the rebirth of historical study and its emergence as a science during the French July Monarchy shows that the editing method has continued to progress. During the July Monarchy, an intense publishing effort was accomplished, which led to the creation of private and public printed collections, some of which are still in existence and make up a great part of what we base our work on today. Historians still use and quote the following collections: "Petitot,"²⁰ "Mi-

¹⁸Because of limited space, I will mention only recent publications or works in progress on modern or contemporary texts. Some particularly spectacular examples, such as those originating in France, are the various series published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the end of the nineteenth century: *Recueil des instructions données aux ambassadeurs et ministres de France depuis les traités de Westphalie jusqu'à la Révolution française* (Paris, 1884), 35 volumes published to date; *Les origines diplomatiques de la guerre de 1870–1871. Recueil de documents* (Paris, 1910–1932), 29 volumes; *Documents diplomatiques français* (1871–1914) (Paris, 1929–1959), 43 volumes; *Documents diplomatiques français* (1932–1939) (Paris, 1963–1986), 32 volumes; *Documents diplomatiques français* (1956) (Paris, 1988), 5 volumes published to date. Very recently in Germany, the publication of a parallel series has been started, *Pariser historische Studien: Documents diplomatiques français/Französische Diplomatenberichte aus Deutschland*, volume 1, January 9–June 30 1920, by Stefan Martens and Martina Kessel (Bonn-Berlin, 1992).

¹⁹As examples, here again: *Zur Edition zeitgeschichtlicher Quellen*, in *AHF, Jahrbuch der historischen Forschung* (1975), 137–47; Paola Carucci, *Il documento contemporaneo: diplomatica e criteri di edizione* (Rome, 1987) (*Beni culturali*, 1); *L'édition des textes anciens (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle)*, edited by Bernard Barbiche and Monique Chatenet (Paris, 1990); Hans Bots, *Éditions de correspondances aux XIXe et XXe siècles, Méthodes et stratégies*, in *XVIIe siècle*, no. 178 (January–March 1993), 119–29.

²⁰*Collection des Mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France depuis l'avènement de Henri IV jusqu'à la paix de Paris conclue en 1763*, by C.B. Petitot and L.-J.N. de Monmerque (Paris, 1820–1829), 79 volumes.

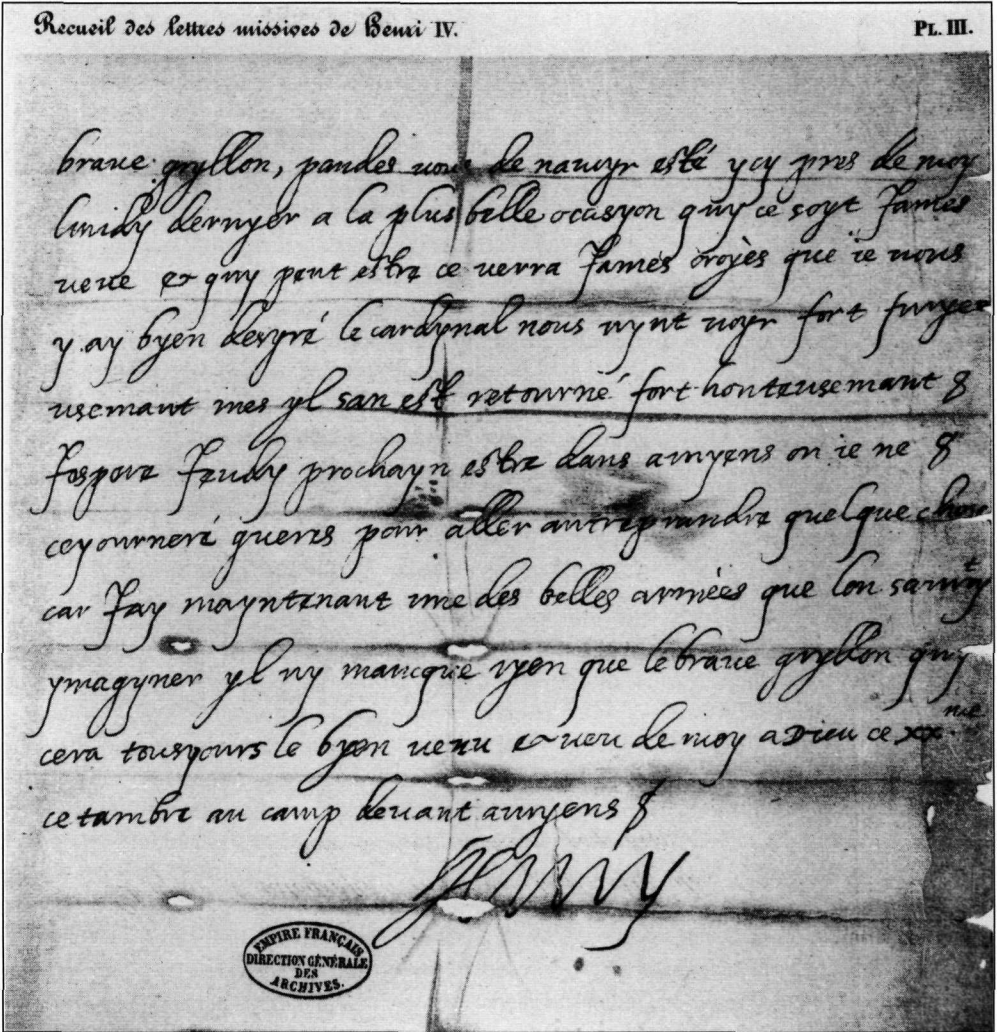


Figure 2. (Archives nationales, H III I²².)

chaud and Poujoulat,²¹ Société de l'Histoire de France²² or the *Documents inédits*.²³ But a rigorous method was only reached progressively. Michaud and Poujoulat, for instance, limited themselves to reproducing texts as they found them, based on the old seventeenth- and eighteenth-century versions, without attempting to enrich them with an index or footnotes. Only brief introductions give a short presentation of the works and their authors. From this perspective, the *Collection de documents inédits* bears witness to remarkable progress.

²¹Nouvelle collection des Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France, by Michaud and Poujoulat (Paris, 1835–1839), 32 volumes in 3 series.

²²The collection of the Société de l'histoire de France (founded in 1834) now numbers more than 500 volumes. The list of publications was brought out in 1984 on the 150th anniversary of the Société.

²³Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, published since 1835 by the Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques.

[1597.] — 20 SEPTEMBRE.

Orig. autographe. — Archives de M. le duc de Crillon.

Cop. — B. N. Suppl. fr. Ms. 1009-4.

Imprimé. — *Bouclier d'honneur*, par le P. BENING; Avignon, 1616, in-8°. — *Journal militaire de Henri IV*, par le comte DE VALORY; Paris, F. Didot, 1821, in-8°, p. 259.

A M. DE GRILLON.

Brave Grillon, Pendés-vous de n'avoir esté icy pres de moy lundy dernier à la plus belle occasion qui se soit jamais veue et qui peut-estre se verra jamais. Croyés que je vous y ay bien désiré. Le cardinal nous vint voir fort furieusement, mais il s'en est retourné fort honteusement. J'espere jeudy prochain estre dans Amiens, où je ne sesjourneray gueres, pour aller entreprendre quelque chose, car j'ay maintenant une des belles armées que l'on scauroit imaginer. Il n'y manque rien que le brave Grillon, qui sera tousjours le bien venu et veu de moy. A Dieu. Ce xx^e septembre, au camp devant Amiens¹.

Figure 3. (*Recueil des lettres missives de Henri IV*, J. Berger de Xivrey and J. Guadet, editors (Paris: 1843–1876), vol. 4.)

Let us consider, as an example, the famous *Recueil des Lettres missives de Henri IV*, edited by Jules Berger de Xivrey in seven volumes from 1843 to 1858, and later completed by Joseph Gaudet (1872–1876), who added two volumes. Whatever its merits, this classic collection, which is still used today as a primary source for any research on the Wars of Religion and on the reign of the first Bourbon King, is very flawed and its users do not always seem to be aware of this. It is, first, quite clear that the editor did not intend the content to be exhaustive: when examining a given manuscript which contained a group of letters by Henri IV, he published some in full and merely gave an abstract of others at the end of each volume, while totally omitting still others. The index is not exhaustive either. Moreover, some fabricated documents have been included among the authentic letters. The footnotes are quite brief: at the time, the working aids that help us today in identifying institutions, persons, and places did not exist. The edited documents are not numbered, which complicates giving a reference. But what mainly strikes the historian of today is the absence of any rigor in transcribing the texts. Obviously, Berger de Xivrey did not feel compelled to respect the spelling of the manuscripts he was publishing. (See figures 2–3.) Thus, when he published an autographed letter to M. de Crillon, dated 20 September 1597, including a facsimile,²⁴ he arbitrarily modified some letters: in *Gryllon*, *avoyr*, *y* becomes *i*; in *antreprandre*, an *a* becomes an *e*; *ocasyon* is transcribed as *occasion*. But the modernization of the spelling is only partial: *ycy* does not become *ici*, but *icy*; *ceyournéré* is not transcribed as *séjournerai*, but as *sesjourneray*. The editor

²⁴*Recueil des lettres missives de Henri IV*, vol. 4, 848; the facsimile is inserted between pp. 848–49.

intended to preserve an archaic appearance for his transcription by keeping or adding letters or groups of letters that remind the reader of sixteenth-century language, to such an extent that the published text is useless for the philologist and can be deceiving. The editor certainly had no idea of the grim consequences his method could lead to. Still, without any intention of deceiving his reader, he gave a printed collection that is not as trustworthy as is generally believed.

The attempt to be exhaustive when constituting a collection of documents, the search for footnoting as complete as possible, as well as absolutely rigorous transcriptions, have now become demands which every serious historian strives for. Yet, though it is far from being the case, it should still be a necessity for everyone to agree on a minimum number of common rules, especially concerning modern documents, on the use of accents, punctuation, or the utilization of capitals or minuscules. If it is now considered as an imperative, with rare exceptions, to respect old spellings, too many editors still believe in an excessive fidelity to the text and forget that publishing documents is not photocopying. It is to be noted that nothing keeps the editor from reproducing some examples from his document if he wants to show its original characteristics.

These principles have to apply to editions based on printed texts as well as on manuscripts. Let us give a precise example: In 1966, the late Dorothy Thickett gave an annotated critical edition of Etienne Pasquier's *Lettres historiques*,²⁵ a text for which no manuscript has been kept and which is known only from old editions, mainly that published in Amsterdam in 1723.²⁶ When comparing these two versions, one can point to the progress in method, but also at the obstacles that could have been avoided. Let us consider letter 10 of Book XI sent to M. de Sainte-Marthe (p. 260–262). (See figures 4–5.) The annotation, which did not exist in the 1723 edition, is extremely complete in the 1966 version. But the way in which the text was established can give way to criticism. The editor was correct in giving the document a title, but in doing so, she made two small mistakes: *edict* should be spelled without the *c*, which is superfluous, and the date “juillet 1585” needs no comma between the month and the year. Introducing paragraphs which underline the structure of the text, as well as getting rid of the diresis on the *u* in *venues* (line 1), is ingenious. However, keeping the old punctuation (comma after *besongné*, line 2; colon after Guise, line 3; comma after *mandé* and after the bracket, line 5; etc.) was not justified. Nor was there a need to scrupulously reproduce the capitals for the words *Manifeste* (line 4), *Catholique Apostolique Romaine* (line 9), *Minstres* (line 10), *Edict* (line 16), etc. Likewise, the following sign, &, a remnant of the old Merovingian ligatura, should have been transcribed as *et*.

In conclusion, a good critical edition can only be the result of a compromise: a blind fidelity to the model to be reproduced has to be proscribed in the same way as a systematic modernization. Spellings have to be scrupulously respected, but the same is not true about the punctuation or initial capitals or minuscules. The most difficult problem is that of accentuation. It can only be solved in the light of a study of the origin, the development, and use of accents and other auxiliary signs in the French language.²⁷ Borrowed from the

²⁵Etienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, edited by Dorothy Thickett (Geneva, 1966) (*Textes littéraires français*, 123).

²⁶*Les lettres d'Estienne Pasquier* (Amsterdam, 1723), 2 volumes.

²⁷On the history of spelling, one can consult the classical works by Ferdinand Brunot [*Histoire de la langue française des origines à 1900* (Paris, 1905–1953), 13 volumes] and by Charles Beaulieux [*Histoire de l'orthographe française* (Paris, 1927), 2 volumes]. For the early modern period, see the works by Nina Catach



Figure 4. (Les lettres d'Estienne Pasquier [Amsterdam, 1723]).

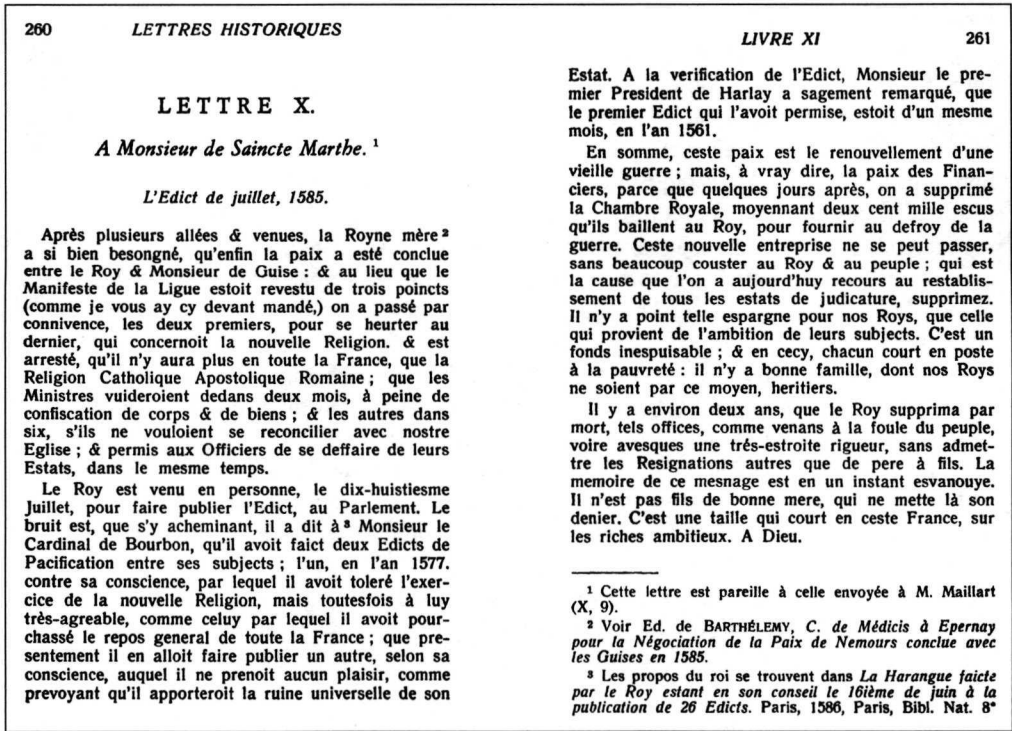


Figure 5. (Etienne Pasquier, *Lettres historiques pour les années 1556–1594*, edited by Dorothy Thickett [Geneva, 1966]).

Greek, accents were introduced into French from 1530 on by Renaissance humanist printers (mainly Robert Etienne and Jacques Dubois), who gave them a meaning quite different from the one they had had in Greek spelling. The interpretation of these signs evolved over more than a century. Thus the acute accent was placed on the closed final *e* (*severité*), but it was also used to designate the open *e* (*après, très*). The circumflex accent appeared in 1531 and was used to signal a diphthong (*boîs*), a former *e* within a word (*paîra, vû*), and eventually, but only in the seventeenth century, the replacement of an *s* (*tôt, toujours*). The grave accent was first used around 1530, but did not mark the distinction between the open *e* and the closed *e* until the 1670s, for which the acute accent was reserved from then on. Therefore, the system was given its general structure at the end of the seventeenth century, but numerous slight changes were introduced over the years: for instance, the first *e* of *poète* had a diaeresis until the end of the nineteenth century. Similar remarks can be made about other signs: thus the union dash, which was used until the nineteenth century after the adverb *très* to note the superlative *très-obéissant*, no longer exists in such a case.

Apart from these evolutions, it is to be noted that accents and other graphic signs were first used by printers and appeared much later in manuscripts. Moreover, their use was not simultaneous among all types of writings. Thus, *a* as a preposition was not noted with a grave accent in Gothic *bâtarde* until the second half of the eighteenth century, while the same accent appears in some Italian handwritings as early as the end of the sixteenth century. Finally, the same can be said about accentuation as about spelling: no general rule exists for sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century texts. Therefore, at a given date, the same word will not be accented in the same way on the same page, either manuscript or printed.

Under these conditions, it is extremely difficult to establish satisfactory and rational rules for accentuation in the critical edition of modern texts. The ideal solution would be to refer to the existing system at a given date. This is unfortunately impossible, for the reasons we have just presented: what should be done if one had to edit a text for which both a printed copy and an old printed edition exist? All the advice to be offered can only result in a compromise. It seems wise to apply the same rules to sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century documents as to medieval texts (very limited accentuation, only in the case of the acute accent on *e* to make the distinction between tonic *e* and atonic *e* in a monosyllable or on a final syllable, e.g., *né, armé*) and to restrict the present system to later documents.

The critical *apparatus*, although based on the same principles as for the edition of medieval texts, should not be applied with the same rigor and the same detail in the case of modern texts. There is no harm in abbreviating the textual history (it is, on the contrary recommended) and it is, in general, not necessary to give the lines a number. Variants of and critical notations about the constitution of a text can be set apart as a special series of footnotes if they are numerous. Otherwise, all footnotes, either historical, linguistic, or textual, can be grouped together in a single series. I will not go into further detail in this text, only reminding the reader that, in any case, an editor of old texts must combine three qualities: perseverance, rigor, and common sense.

[*L'orthographe française à l'époque de la Renaissance* (Geneva, 1968)] and by Mireille Huchon [*Le français de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1988) (*Que sais-je?*, no. 2389)]. Also by Nina Catach, *La ponctuation* (Paris, 1994) (*Que sais-je?*, no. 2818).