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Public Administration and the Library of Jean-Baptiste Colbert

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The library of Jean- Baptiste Colbert grew up with the man himself. Born in 1619, from 1645 to 1651 he was assistant to Michel Le Tellier, secretary for the army. From 1651 to 1661 he served as financial intendant for Cardinal Mazarin, and from 1661 to 1683 he was a minister for Louis XIV. During the early years of his career, Colbert's library was modest. He employed several individuals who probably attended to the collection on a part-time basis. In 1663 Colbert appointed the mathematician and scholar Pierre Carcavi to oversee his library. In 1667 Carcavi became a keeper for the Royal Library and Etienne Baluze succeeded him as Colbert's personal librarian. Under Baluze the library grew enormously. When Colbert died in 1683, his library contained 23,000 books and 5,212 manuscripts.¹ His library passed to his son, the marquis de Seignelay, and Baluze continued to be its librarian until 1700. In 1732 the Colbert family sold the library to Louis XV for 300,000 pounds. This essay examines the relationship between Colbert's administrative career and the growth of this remarkable collection.

In his treatise on European libraries published in 1680, Pierre LeGallois states, "The library of Monsieur Colbert contains a large number of rare books and manuscripts. Here one sees all the manuscripts concerning France, among them the negotiations for the treaty of Munster, the twenty eight conferences of the Pyrenees, and copies of all the charters of the kingdom."² By then Jean-Baptiste Colbert was approaching the end of his career as the most important and most powerful minister of France. Twenty years earlier his library had barely existed, but at the time LeGallois made his survey it stood shoulder to shoulder with the best in Europe. Yet when we compare LeGallois's description of the "Colbertine," as it was later called, with others of similar rank and parentage, one difference stands out. LeGallois has singled out the Colbertine for its collections on France: in contrast, other collections are usually praised for the antiquity of their Greek and Latin manuscripts, the beauty of the collections, or the breadth and depth of learning exhibited by the selection of titles.

I submit that the Colbertine was a response to the needs of a powerful minister of state who was creating the mechanisms of a centralized absolute monarchy. As we examine the steps Colbert used to create his library and the many times it was used to provide information on the problems of government, we see the emergence of a collection that functioned in many ways as a national archive and a national library. This is not to claim that Colbert did not indulge in the propensity of the period to create a library of beauty and reputation. Like others of his class, he bought Greek and Latin manuscripts as an investment. He also took pleasure in participating in the world of letters and sciences of his day.³ He enjoyed the company of men of wit and learning, and he shared their values concerning the intrinsic worth of books. His basic goal,

however, was to have a working collection to support the public administration of the realm.

The Colbertine was one more step in an attempt to manage and preserve the necessary documents for royal administration. Until the thirteenth century the French king carried in his retinue all of the charters and titles that defined the obligations of vassals, towns, and churches, which were consequently the legal source for royal revenues. Tradition states that Richard the Lion Hearted defeated Philip Augustus in 1194 at the battle of Breteuil and took with him this entire collection of documents. Philip Augustus for fiscal reasons had to reconstitute these documents, and he placed them for security in the Sainte Chapelle in Paris.⁴ The foundation of a Royal Archive (*Tresor des Chartes*) in the Sainte Chapelle was a first step in maintaining the documentary record of monarchical government and rights.

Most royal documents from the medieval period were contracts between the king and individuals or corporate groups. The king would state the articles of the agreement in the charter, affix his seal, inscribe a brief minute into the register of the Chancellor, and then give it to the other party of the contract. The second party of the contract - vassal, church, guild, or town - would repeat all the same articles in another document, affix a seal, and place it in the Royal Archive. From time to time the keeper of the Royal Archive would prepare registers of all the documents.⁵ The Parlement of Paris and the Court of Accounts (*Chambre des Comptes*) also acquired many documents and placed them in their archives. All royal *ordonnances* had to be registered in the Parlement in order to have the force of law. The Court of Accounts was the main auditing body for royal finances and also administered the royal domain.

At the beginning of the early modern period (ca. 1500) in France the documentation for royal administration was dispersed throughout many depositories. Copies might be found in town or church archives, which had received a charter from the king, courts of accounts, or *parlements*, as well as in the Royal Archive. The Royal Archive was more or less well maintained until the death of Louis XI in 1483. Thereafter the archive fell into disarray. Those who served in government retired from office and kept the documentation of their office as a private collection. The king was frequently forced to request charters from the archives of the Parlement of Paris or the Court of Accounts because copies in the Royal Archive were missing.⁶ In 1582 the charge of the Royal Archive was given to the procurator general of the Parlement of Paris. The procurator general used this post to augment his own income and completely neglected its maintenance.⁷ Much of the material disappeared from the archive. Jean Du Tillet removed several of its registers in the sixteenth century.⁸

Several ministers and kings made attempts to preserve the records of government, but for the most part their attempts were to no avail. In 1554 Henry II issued an edict to conserve the documents of the comptroller general, but the edict was revoked six months later.⁹ When Cardinal Richelieu became secretary of war in 1616, he found no administrative dossiers for his ministry. The same was true for foreign affairs and finances. Richelieu issued orders for

the preservation of documents for the various ministries. While some order was brought into the procedures, the documents disappeared after his death.¹⁰

Jean-Baptiste Colbert

Jean- Baptiste Colbert was the financial and administrative genius who lifted the government of Louis XIV out of the quagmire of government for personal profit. This allowed the young monarch freedom of action and gave the government of France a degree of stability that had not been possible since the reign of Henry IV (1598-1610). When both Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu died in 1643, France was left with the minority government of Cardinal Mazarin and the mother of the five-year-old Louis XIV. This was a time of war with the Hapsburgs and revolts in France. Colbert worked during this period (1651-1661) as the personal financial manager for the properties of Cardinal Mazarin. Colbert began his service to Louis XIV in 1661, the year of Mazarin's death and the beginning of Louis XIV's personal reign. Louis XIV had a desire to govern and in theory he became his own first minister. Colbert took charge of government finances in 1661 as intendant of finances. Although Louis did not relinquish his role as head of government, he gradually turned more of its responsibilities over to Colbert. In 1664 Colbert became superintendent of royal buildings and in 1669 he became secretary of state for the navy, galleys, and the royal household. In essence he controlled every aspect of government except the army and foreign affairs, the two areas in which Louis himself took the greatest interest. As superintendent of royal buildings he assumed control of the Royal Library.

The image of Colbert as a disinterested public servant devoted to the interests of Louis XIV and of France has been his reward in the historiography of the old regime. This reputation is not undeserved. He reformed many areas of the royal government, including finances, the navy, the criminal code, the slave code, the national forests, and the state of support for learning and the sciences. He promoted commerce and manufactures and generally opposed unnecessary expenditures whether for festivities or for war. He worked long hours and protected revenues from theft and misuse. He was not, however, above the practice of using his power to promote his own interests and those of his family and supporters.¹¹ When Louis XIV assumed the government in 1661, Colbert undertook a campaign of incrimination against Nicolas Fouquet, then superintendent of finance. He charged Fouquet with embezzlement, had him imprisoned and tried, and eventually assumed the powers that Fouquet formerly held. He did not do this without political manipulation and some backhanded intrigue. It has been charged that Colbert in fact simply resumed some of the financial malpractices of which he had accused Fouquet.¹² He also conspired to bring over to his party those literati and scholars who had supported Fouquet with their pen.¹³

It can be argued that, given the instability of the royal government in 1661, only power politics would work. Louis XIV was only twenty-three years old, the

country had been through six years of civil war, and peace had just been concluded with Spain in 1659. Colbert placed relatives and supporters in positions of power where he could. He began the processes of reform by building his own party. Perhaps it would be better to say that he created the power of the royal administration and his own power at the same time. Lacking the sources of information he needed to carry out his reforms and projects, he also initiated the work of creating such a resource as his personal library, independent of the various government agencies.¹⁴

In a study of 200 seventeenth-century personal libraries, Henri-Jean Martin states that financiers were not book collectors. The major collectors were the “robe nobility,” that is, men of the legal profession.¹⁵ Colbert was first and foremost a man of the financial community. His contacts and outlook were shaped by this community. During the Fronde of 1652 Cardinal Mazarin was at a safe distance from Paris when the Parlement of Paris seized and sold his library. When it appeared that Mazarin was returning to power in 1654, Colbert, as his financial manager, worked to restore all of his confiscated property, including his library. Colbert's approach was that of a steward. Mazarin allowed him 19,000 pounds to repurchase as many volumes as possible, but Colbert induced many of those who had purchased books from the collection to donate them to the library as a way of returning to Mazarin's favor. He then seized the collections of three counselors of Parlement who had been charged with the sale of the library but had in fact simply added many of the library's volumes to their personal collections. Having saved most of the 19,000 pounds, Colbert then proceeded to buy the collection of Leonor d'Estamps Valencay. This restored Mazarin's library to around 25,000 volumes.¹⁶

In 1656 the position of keeper of the Royal Library became vacant. The obvious choice for the position was Gilles Menage, a man of scholarly and literary credentials. Colbert used his influence to have the position given to his brother, Nicolas Colbert, a person of no particular merit.¹⁷ Not all of his evaluation of books was in terms of monetary value or self-interest. Writing in 1659 to his brother Charles, who was an intendant in Alsace, he thanked him for the parcel of books, and then requested that he search out the works of John Huss and Jerome of Prague in some of the Protestant cities of Alsace.¹⁸

While still employed as Mazarin's financial steward, Colbert wrote to him in 1656 to warn him that several members of the Parlement of Paris were searching their registers for a precedent that would provide Parlement with the legal means to block an *ordonnance* of the king. Colbert went on to suggest that Mazarin appoint someone to conduct research on the precedents of the Parlement of Paris that were being used to encroach on royal rights and powers. Mazarin's reply is enlightening. He encouraged Colbert to undertake the necessary research, but then went on to complain that it was strange that no one had kept a register of royal precedents whereby the powers of the Parlement might be curtailed.¹⁹

The Colbertine: The First Years

Mazarin's injunction may well have set in motion some principles by which to build a library. Colbert's brother, Nicolas, and the Abbe Bourzeis began to collect documents of a political nature and to organize them into a working library for Jean-Baptiste. In the summer of 1661 Nicolas had copies made for the Colbert library of original documents that supported the right of Louis XIV to nominate candidates for the bishopric of Arras.²⁰ Also at this time Pere le Cointre and M. Varillas were doing research for Colbert, presumably in other collections, on the reign of Henry IV.²¹ Colbert's needs exceeded what could be found in Paris. In 1662 he sent letters to a number of provincial intendants to gather information on the state of the royal forests.²² Many acres had been alienated or leased at rates ruinous to the king. In 1663 Colbert wrote instructions to all intendants to prepare maps and statistical profiles for each province in France.²³ His attempts to gather information in this way were not always well received. The population was suspicious that the information would be used for purposes of taxation. In one case Colbert had to send a *lettre de cachet* to the president and procurator general of the Parlement of Dijon to force them to turn over papers in its archive.²⁴

By the year 1663 the notion of forming a personal library to meet his administrative needs had crystallized in Colbert's mind. Not only did he address requests for documents to provincial administrators, but he also stipulated that documents be copied on a certain type of paper that could be bound into uniform volumes for his library. He also urged on Louis XIV the creation of commissions to search for documents. In June he wrote to the president of the Court of Accounts in Aix to have copies made of all documents relating to the king's interest in benefices in the area of Provence.²⁵ In July he likewise wrote to the president of the Court of Accounts at Dijon. Colbert stated that after examining a list of documents forwarded to him by the president, he found many that would be useful to have. He also enclosed an example of the type and size of paper he used for the manuscript books in his library and asked that this paper be used in making all copies.²⁶ In August Colbert wrote to Louis XIV to inform him that, according to the treaty of Munster, many rights over three bishoprics (Metz, Toul, and Verdun) had been ceded to the monarchy of France. He recommended the creation of a commission to search the archives of the churches and abbeys of these areas for documents.²⁷

The Colbertine under Pierre Carcavi (1663-1667)

Pierre Carcavi became the coordinator for these projects and many others.²⁸ There were, however, two projects of major significance begun under Carcavi that deserve consideration. One was to copy the documents of political importance from the Royal Archive and the other to copy documents from the major archival depositories in the south of France.

As has already been noted, the Royal Archive had been in decline since the end of the fifteenth century. In 1655 Pierre DuPuy, keeper of the Royal

Library, published a lengthy book entitled *Treatise concerning the rights of the King*. In this book he made many claims for the rights of the French king in Hapsburg lands. Appended to the end of his treatise is an appraisal of the sorry state of the Royal Archive and the need for restitution.²⁹ Making claims on behalf of the French king would be difficult without good documents, as DuPuy well knew. Colbert knew this work and was familiar with his opinion of the Royal Archive.³⁰ The Royal Archive, moreover, was administered by the general procurator of the Parlement of Paris. Colbert's predecessor, Nicolas Fouquet, had been both superintendent of finance and general procurator, but Colbert held only the finance position. When Colbert needed a document from the Royal Archive, he had to prepare a request to the current procurator, Achille de Harley III.³¹ In order to improve his own access to documents in the Royal Archive, Colbert had Carcavi initiate steps to copy relevant materials. Under the direction of Carcavi, a number of individuals began a project that lasted nine or ten years. When it was completed in 1673, the Colbertine held seventy three volumes of documents copied from the Royal Archive.³²

The second major project begun under Carcavi was instigated by Jean de Doat, the president of the Court of Accounts in Navarre. In 1664 Doat approached Colbert with the idea of making copies from the major archives in the south of France. Doat had the necessary training in the law and in diplomatics to recognize documents of importance to the king. Between 1665 and 1670 a group of copyists working under Doat's instructions copied enough documents to fill 258 volumes. Doat searched the archives of cities, churches, courts of accounts, and *parlements*. He would prepare a list of documents that he sent to Carcavi and later to Baluze. Sometimes these lists were passed along to Colbert, but it was usually Carcavi or Baluze who marked those documents to be copied. The commission given by Colbert to Doat explicitly states that he is to search for documents relevant to the rights of the king.³³ Although the commission says that they are to be placed in the royal library, they in fact became part of Colbert's library.

Lothar Kolmer in a detailed study of the Doat Collection shows that Colbert had very specific political reasons for wanting these copies.³⁴ The status of the southern provinces had for centuries been contested. The kings of England and the Spanish Hapsburgs had pretensions in the area. There were small counties that did not even recognize the sovereignty of the French king. The Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659) had settled the conflict with Spain for the time being. It was Colbert's concern, however, that the area would be contested again in the future, and he wished to be prepared with concrete documentation to show Louis XIV's claims in the area. Kolmer points out that Colbert insisted that every copied document be sealed by a notary to authenticate the exactness of the copy. In this way the copies could be used in future negotiations even if the territories were themselves being occupied by a hostile power and the other side had access to the originals.

Emotions ran high as a result of Doat's work. When the commission came to Carcassonne to ask to see documents, some of the nobility, out of fear of

Louis's intentions, began a riot, and one of the clerks was stabbed.³⁵

The Colbertine under Etienne Baluze (1667-1700)

Etienne Baluze succeeded Pierre Carcavi in 1667 as librarian for the Colbertine. Baluze greatly expanded the scope of the library. While Carcavi had concentrated on the creation of a quasi-government archive, Baluze sought to broaden the scope of the Colbertine and to make a collection for scholars. Baluze did not abandon those projects begun by Carcavi: he carried them out and coordinated others of a like nature. Baluze convinced Colbert of the wisdom of acquiring Latin and Greek manuscripts. He also actively canvassed bookstores, purchased private collections, and corresponded with foreign scholars to acquire books for the collection. While all of this was done in a spirit of disinterested scholarship, and Baluze was a passionate scholar, the book collection, as we shall see, became an important reference source for much of the information Colbert demanded of Baluze. Colbert did support the work of many of the erudite historians of the period,³⁶ and his library was at their disposal, but his well-selected collection of books likewise served his needs as administrator and adviser to the king.

In the realm of building a collection of documents Baluze was instrumental for a number of projects. He and Pierre Clairembault periodically collected documents from the various agencies of government and added them to Colbert's collection.³⁷ Baluze continued to oversee the transcription of documents from the Royal Archive and to seek out documents in southern France once Doat had ended his work there. Colbert himself initiated a project to copy documents from the conquered lands of the Spanish Netherlands, but Baluze carried out much of the daily contact.

Writing to Colbert in 1671 Baluze, referring to the work of making copies of documents from the Royal Archive, said: "The present procedure for copying documents from the Royal Archive is to note in the margin of the registers those items you find of interest and to have them copied. The former procedure established by M. Carcavi was to note documents on the establishment of nobility, marriage contracts of the great nobility, treaties of peace or alliance, concessions made to the Pope, privileges accorded to foreign merchants, to churches, to provinces, to cities, and to various guilds"³⁸ From this we see that Colbert did not want a complete duplication of the Royal Archive for himself. There were key documents that automatically qualified for inclusion by their effect on royal rights and powers. Others were selected by Colbert.

The work of Doat in southern France came to an end because of the high costs: yet there were still considered to be many documents in various archives in the southern provinces of France that would support the claims of royal rights. When Baluze needed some particular evidence or became aware of documents in certain archives of the southern provinces, he would direct letters of instruction to the intendant of Languedoc, Henri D'Aguesseau, or to the treasurer of the Generality of Montpellier, Boudon. In 1676 he asked D'Aguesseau to obtain a copy of the document dissolving the marriage contract

of Louis XII and Queen Jeanne. He indicated to D'Aguesseau that it existed in the archive of the Bishop of D'Abby.³⁹

Of particular concern to Baluze and Colbert was any evidence supporting the authority of the provincial councils of the clergy. This was part of Louis' strategy to counter the claims of the papacy. Baluze wrote to both D'Aguesseau and Boudon to make copies of various provincial councils.⁴⁰ Baluze, however, was having difficulty in obtaining documents in this manner. In 1677 Foucault wrote to Baluze that Doat had obtained all of the readily accessible documents and that those left were being jealously guarded by the abbeys.⁴¹

It must have occurred to Colbert and Baluze that another project similar to the one carried out by Doat between 1665 and 1670 was needed. Armed with a commission from the king, a forceful individual would be able to extract from the archives those documents inaccessible to Doat some years earlier. In 1679 Colbert wrote to Boudon to inquire if there were documents of interest to the king in the church and city archives of Carcassonne, Toulouse, and Provence.⁴² The following year D'Aguesseau proposed that Boudon send inventories from various archives to Baluze, who would in turn mark those to be copied for Colbert's library.⁴³ Boudon wrote to Colbert to obtain a commission. Colbert sent a commission that empowered Boudon to copy all documents that "were judged necessary for the preservation of the rights of the crown and were beneficial to history."⁴⁴ Boudon made an attempt to revive Doat's project, but in the end he did not succeed. One can only speculate that opposition to his demands was too great.

At the end of the War of Devolution (1665-1668) Louis XIV acquired rights over cities and counties formerly possessed by the Spanish along the border with the Netherlands. Although the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle stated Louis's claims in general terms, his specific rights could only be worked out with an exact knowledge of the specific rights transferred to him. According to the treaty no documents could be removed from the rightful owners in the conquered cities. In October 1668 Colbert wrote to Denis Godefroy to make copies from the archive of the Court of Accounts in Lille, to hire as many copyists as he needed, and to proceed with all possible haste.⁴⁵ The fine print in the treaty was being adjudicated by a set of commissioners from both sides of the conflict. In January 1669 Colbert wrote to Godefroy, "I understand that you continue to give your greatest effort to find and copy all the documents necessary to justify the demands which are being made in the name of the king by his commissioners and those of his catholic majesty, in the execution of the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle."⁴⁶ Godefroy had been called in to meet the immediate needs of the negotiation of claims, but his work in Lille and surrounding cities continued for another ten years. He produced many documents of interest to Colbert and forwarded them to Baluze. From the beginning it was understood that he was making copies for Colbert's library.⁴⁷

Colbert was constantly seeking information about other countries with whom France carried on trade. In many respects his views of economic forces determined his thinking on power relationships. He thus sought every opportunity to develop commerce and manufactures within France and to

diminish the economic and naval hegemony of his neighbors. Such a policy demanded knowledge about trade, sea routes, borders, foreign manufactures, foreign navies, and the clauses on trade in numerous treaties. This type of material did not lend itself to the kind of systematic collecting that Doat had carried out in southern France, or Godefroy in the Spanish Netherlands, or others in the Royal Archive.

On the other hand, Colbert took care to have all of this material in his library carefully organized. In 1666 he had an index made of all the manuscript maps and printed maps contained in the library,⁴⁸ and a table of all treaties and alliances contained in various volumes.⁴⁹ M. Varillas wrote to Colbert that he and M. de St. Real had found a document stating that during the minority of the king of Spain, the Kingdom of Naples would be under the power of the pope and that the pope would be the guardian of the young king. Colbert sent the letter to Carcavi for future reference.⁵⁰ Likewise, when Colbert de Terron wrote to Jean-Baptiste Colbert to advise him that the best atlas of the seas had been printed by Pierre Goos in Amsterdam in 1666, Colbert instructed Baluze to be certain that it was in his library.⁵¹ In a number of instances Colbert wrote to Baluze to set aside maps for his use. These were either maps of France, such as the maps and plans for the canal of the two seas, or maritime maps.⁵² Baluze would periodically update the lists of maritime maps in the collection and forward the list to Colbert when so instructed.⁵³ One of the major collections in Colbert's library concerned naval affairs in England.⁵⁴ In 1677 Colbert wrote to Baluze to furnish him with a portfolio of treaties from his library dealing with English affairs.⁵⁵ Maps and treaties were some of the basic documents used by Colbert in formulating commercial policy, but for that same reason they were frequently in demand for use by engineers and diplomats.

The Rights of Louis XIV

In many respects Colbert's personal library was an instrument of public administration, but in formulating his policies Colbert had constant need to defend and even strengthen the rights of the monarchy. In the seventeenth century the distinction between the public good and the private person of the king was still very much blurred.⁵⁶ The concept of the state as a set of abstract powers divorced from an individual awaited the next century. Colbert had recourse to documentary sources in all areas concerning Louis's rights. The most noticeable areas needing documentary support were the financial base of the royal domain, Louis's rights with respect to the Hapsburgs, and Louis's rights with respect to the pope.

In theory the king of France was supposed to raise all of his revenues from the royal domain. Books have been written on just what constituted the royal domain. On the one hand, the king was a property owner. In feudal law this involved all manner of rights received as lord of estates. On the other hand, the king was a public sovereign responsible for the *res publica*. This included all property held in common such as rivers, forests, and so on. The king raised

revenues from the royal domain by leasing these rights to tax farmers and other individuals. Ever since the 1630s these rights had been leased at very low rates, so that in 1661 the revenues from the royal domain were but a small fraction of their real value.⁵⁷

According to French legal theory the domain was inalienable and could be retrieved from the tax farmers at any time. The problem was that no one in government knew exactly what constituted the domain and on what terms it had been leased. Those who had obtained good terms for the royal domain had a vested interest in maintaining this ignorance.⁵⁸ In the 1650s Nicolas Fouquet had attempted to create a Register of the Royal Domain (Terrier General). In 1655 he established eight intendants of charters who were to go into all the provinces collecting registers, titles, and charters. These documents were to be placed in a "Hotel des Chartes" in Paris. The edict establishing the hotel and the intendants was revoked,⁵⁹ but the sovereign chamber appointed to hear appeals continued to function. The project was opposed by the Court of Accounts of Paris, but it was also opposed by many others who did not wish to validate their titles.⁶⁰ For all practical purposes the design to create a Register of the Royal Domain was abandoned.

When Colbert became intendant of finance in 1661, he did not attempt to revive the register. It certainly would have been unpopular. Colbert's first mission, however, was to restore the finances of the kingdom, and such a register would have been extremely useful. As noted above, he did request copies of documents from a number of the courts of accounts and he undertook the large projects of copying documents from archives in the south and from the Royal Archive. Included in these projects were papers on the royal domain.⁶¹ A private library of these types of documents was much less visible than a "Hotel des Chartes."

In 1666 Colbert did resume the project of a register just for the area around Paris. Gradually intendants in various provinces of France began to collect the documents for a Register of the Royal Domain.⁶² From the early 1670s Baluze was directed to help construct this register. Some of this material made its way into Colbert's library,⁶³ although other parts became part of Baluze's personal collection.⁶⁴ In 1682 Colbert wrote a rather nasty letter to Baluze. He pointed out that Baluze had been working on the register for seven or eight years and had very little to show for the effort. Then Colbert said, "If you wish to continue in my employment, you would do well to show more diligence and success in this work."⁶⁵

Louis XIV went to war rather frequently with Spain and the German Empire. In the seventeenth century kings went to war to obtain their "just claims" against fellow monarchs. Wars may have been fought with men and cannon, but there was a whole trade in resurrecting these "just claims," which derived from the interpretation of past treaties and the search for old charters and titles that would establish a prior claim.

In 1665 Louis XIV went to war with Spain when Philip IV died. Louis was married to Philip's daughter; since Louis had never received the dowry stipulated in the marriage contract (1659), he claimed certain lands in the

Spanish Netherlands according to the law of devolution. Colbert supported work on several treatises to justify the rights of the French queen. Antoine Bilain and the Abbe Bourzeis wrote several such treatises using materials from the Colbertine.⁶⁶ Their works included the *Treatise on the Rights of the Queen of France in Brabant, Namur, and Other Seigneuries of the Low Countries*, and the *Treatise on the Rights of Marie Therese in the Provinces of the Low Countries*.⁶⁷ In 1666 Colbert asked Herman Conringus, a professor at the University of Helmstadt, to write a treatise in support of the queen's rights. Conringus accepted the proposal on the condition that his work remain anonymous and that Colbert provide him with the proper documents to support his arguments. He told Colbert that without adequate documentation his treatise would not influence opinion in the German Empire. Colbert ordered Carcavi to send the requisite documents to Conringus, but Carcavi could not find all of the documents because the Abbe Bourzeis and Antoine Bilain had borrowed them for the preparation of their treatises.⁶⁸ As we follow the correspondence of Colbert, we frequently see him writing to Baluze, Godefroy, or others close to him to do research on a treaty or a set of claims.⁶⁹

Defining the rights of the king in the temporal affairs of the church dated back to the twelfth century and earlier. Defining these rights usually set the power of the king against that of the pope in making decisions about filling vacant ecclesiastical offices or collecting revenues from vacant positions within the church. Baluze went to great lengths to build up the collections on canon law for Colbert's library. Baluze was himself a strong defender of the Gallican church and prepared many treatises for Colbert's policies with the church.⁷⁰

In the 1670s Colbert addressed a number of requests to Baluze to do research on the provincial councils of the clergy. His questions concerned the authority of the king and that of the pope in authorizing these assemblies and the status of their decisions in canon law. In 1670 Baluze wrote to Colbert to apologize for his slowness in preparing a memoir on this subject. He went on to give an opinion on several points of canon law and then said that “the king could easily use the authority of these councils to oppose the enterprises of the court of Rome.”⁷¹ Later that year Baluze sent Colbert a detailed description of the early assemblies and how the king fixed the subjects of discussion and reviewed the decisions made therein.⁷² Baluze prepared memoirs made up mostly of citations from books on canon law.⁷³

Colbert also wrote frequently to Baluze requesting information on the practices of the church and not just on royal rights. In 1668 he asked Baluze to investigate the early heresies of the church and to cite the authorities that condemned these heresies.⁷⁴ In 1672 Colbert requested a memoir from Baluze on the sanctification of saints. The government was trying to regulate which days could be observed for the celebration of saints. Colbert wanted to know the practices of the early church with respect to saints, the opinions of the church fathers, and of the four general church councils. He also wanted to know in what era festivals for saints became common and whether these festivals were recognized by the pope or by church councils.⁷⁵

In 1675 the right of the Regale became a pressing issue for Louis XIV.

This right gave revenues from vacant bishoprics and benefices to Louis, but it was being contested by Pope Clement X and later Innocent XI. Colbert requested research and memoirs on the subject from the Abbe Gallois. Baluze collaborated with Gallois on the work, although it was the Abbe Gallois who actually wrote the principal memoirs for Colbert.⁷⁶ In one memoir he wrote for Colbert, Gallois included a bibliography of fourteen books that were cited as the best authorities on the subject and he also made references to acts found in the Court of Accounts at Nancy.⁷⁷

Clientele of the Colbertine

Colbert had a residence in Sceaux, just south of Paris, and a residence in Paris just behind the present location of the Bibliotheque Nationale. Three important libraries all came together at the latter location. As executor of Mazarin's will, Colbert placed the Mazarin Library in temporary quarters in rue Richelieu, close to his residence. In 1665 he purchased the Hotel Bautru de Serrant on rue Vivienne for his own library, and in 1666 he also moved the Royal Library to rue Vivienne, almost next door to his own.⁷⁸ The Academy of Sciences met in the Royal Library, and the *petite academie* met in Colbert's library.

Many individuals used these collections, whether they were engaged in a project for Colbert or for personal reasons. Besides the creatures of Colbert (i.e., Carcavi, Baluze, Gallois, Chapelain, Bourzeis, and many others who prepared reports Colbert needed to deal with specific administrative problems), there were also members of his family who used the collection. His son, the marquis de Seignelay, had assumed the daily administration of the French navy and made frequent demands on the library. Colbert's brother, the marquis de Croisy, who was ambassador to England and later secretary for foreign affairs, borrowed maps and documents. In 1672 Colbert was negotiating a commercial treaty with England; when he found some of the necessary documents and maps missing from his library, he wrote to Croisy to demand their immediate return.⁷⁹ Seignelay requested construction site plans and maps from Baluze on a number of occasions between 1676 and 1689. In 1676 Seignelay was concerned with the defense of the French naval ports and arsenals against the Dutch. He asked Baluze to send to him the site plans for the ports of Rochefort, Brest, Le Havre, Toulon, Dunkerque, and Marseilles, as well as the maps of the coast of France prepared by De Clerville and De La Favoliere. He also asked Baluze for a new inventory of all the maps in Colbert's Library.⁸⁰ In 1672 Baluze complained to Colbert about the disorder in the library because so many volumes were missing from the shelves due to the frequent use by others. Colbert asked Baluze to prepare a report every three months on materials borrowed from his library.⁸¹

It is difficult to trace the work of the minions of Colbert. Under the office of comptroller there were five bureaus, four of them located in Paris carrying out the daily work of financial administration. Just how frequently they needed documents from Colbert's collection we do not really know. After 1670 the accounts for the royal household and some papers dealing with commerce were

sent to locations other than the Colbertine. A note from Baluze stated that, although he was having the financial records of the administration bound and the binding costs were being charged to Colbert's library account, these materials did not return to the library once bound.⁸² In 1671 Colbert wrote to Baluze to remove to another location all the budgets and financial accounts as well as administrative papers on the royal forests.⁸³

Conclusion

Boislisle tells us that when Louis XIV assumed control of the government in 1661, none of the ministries of government had an archive. When his reign ended in 1715 every ministry had an archive.⁸⁴ Within this broader perspective Colbert's library may be seen as the first step in this process. As noted above, France was itself unstable in 1661 and the prospects for a strong government very uncertain. It was only natural for Colbert to create his own working collection of documents and books. By the 1670s, however, stability had come. Louis had easily vanquished Spain abroad and his foes at home. Two things happened with respect to Colbert's library at this point. First, Colbert took the first steps in creating some archives for the ministries outside of his own collection. Second, the Colbertine assumed more the character of a personal collection for Colbert himself.

Sometime around 1680 Pierre Clairembault, working under Baluze, began to organize a departmental archive for the navy. At about the same time Colbert began a separate collection of papers for the royal household. The household papers included items on buildings, parks, furnishings, and the arts and sciences.⁸⁵ These initial steps were firmly established by Colbert's successor, the comte de Pontchartrain. In the same period Colbert's nephew, Torcy de Colbert, created the archive for foreign affairs, and Michel Chamillart created the archive for the army.⁸⁶

Colbert himself matured greatly as a book collector during his tenure as minister to Louis. In the 1650s he treated book collections as so many commodities. Later his concern was to build a collection of documents for public administration. In 1672 in a letter to the intendant at Riom, Colbert said, "The pleasure of forming my library is practically the only one I allow myself amid all the work placed on me by my duties to the king."⁸⁷ Colbert continued to seek out collections of charters and state papers, even while his interests turned to the pleasure and grandeur of his collections of ancient manuscripts and books.

Libraries in the seventeenth century have been depicted as havens for reflection and scholarship. Men and women of that period, however, were aware of the political implications of historical erudition. The library of Jean-Baptiste Colbert went beyond historical erudition. Colbert, like his predecessors, Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin, helped create the foundation of absolute monarchy in France. Just as the men who served under Colbert furthered that process, so Colbert's library also served a crucial role in that process. Within the seventeenth-century world view, Hobbes notwithstanding,

power could not be its own *raison d'être*, as it often is today. It required precedent, authority, and legitimacy. It also required administrators informed about peoples, places, finances, and the technical details of everyday life. The rationalization of government decision-making based on systematic information in many ways had its inauguration under Colbert.⁸⁸

Notes

1. Denise Bloch, "La Colbertine," in *Colbert 1619-1683* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, 1983), p. 424. The most complete overview of Colbert's library is Denise Bloch, "La Bibliothèque de Colbert," in *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, vol. 2, *Les bibliothèques sous l'ancien régime 1530-1789* (Paris: Promodis, 1988), pp. 157-179.
2. Pierre LeGallois, *Traité historique des Plus belles bibliothèques de l'Europe* (Paris: E. Michallet, 1680), pp. 125-126.
3. *Mercurie galant*, October 1677, in Jean Baptiste Colbert, *Lettres, instructions, et mémoires*, 7 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1861-1873), vol. 5, p. 560.
4. Henri Bordier, *Les archives de la France* (Geneva: Megariotis Reprints, 1978), p. 120.
5. Leopold Delisle, *Catalogue des actes de Philippe-Auguste* (Paris: A. Durand, 1856), p. xxvi.
6. A. N. Boislisle, *Correspondance des contrôleurs généraux des finances*, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1874), vol. 1, p. i.
7. Bordier, *Archives*, p. 143.
8. Delisle, *Catalogue des actes*, p. xvi.
9. Boislisle, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. ii.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Daniel Dessert and Jean-Louis Journet, "Le Lobby Colbert: Un royaume ou une affaire de famille?" *Annales ESC* 30 (1975): 1303-1329.
12. *Ibid.*
13. E. Stewart Saunders, "Politics and Scholarship in Seventeenth-Century France: The Library of Nicolas Fouquet and the College Royal," *Journal of Library History* 20 (1985): 1-24.
14. Boislisle states the same opinion (*Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. vii).
15. Henri-Jean Martin, *Livres, pouvoirs et société à Paris au XVII^e siècle (1598-1701)*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 924-925.
16. Gabriel Jules Cosnac, *Mazarin et Colbert*, 2 vols (Paris: Pion et Nourrit, 1892), vol. 1, pp. 417-419, 450-452.
17. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 75.
18. Colbert to Charles Colbert, 2 May 1659, *Lettres*, vol. 1, pp. 341-342.
19. Colbert to Mazarin, 30 August 1656, *Lettres*, vol. 1, pp. 251-252. Collecting copies of documents was not unusual in this period. Members of the legal profession acquired them as a sort of legal library.
20. Abbe Colbert to J. B. Colbert, 3 June 1661, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fols. 8r-10r.
21. Abbe Colbert to J. B. Colbert, 27 June 1661, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 20r.
22. Colbert to Chamillart, September 1662, *Lettres*, vol. 4, pp. 184-185.
23. Colbert to the Intendants, September 1663, *Lettres*, vol. 4, pp. 27-43.
24. Colbert to Mauroy, 1 June 1663, *Lettres*, vol. 4, pp. 203-204.
25. Colbert to d'Oppède, 22 June 1663, *Lettres*, vol. 5, p. 243.
26. Colbert to Duguey, 17 July 1663, *Lettres*, vol. 4, pp. 532-533.
26. Colbert to Louis XIV, 23 August 1663, *Lettres*, vol. 2, pp. 11-12.
28. Pierre Carcavi, "Mémoire des manuscrits que j'ay faits pour Monsieur, depuis l'année 1663 jusqu'à présent" (12 February 1666), cited in Delisle, *Catalogue des actes*, p. xlv.
29. Pierre DuPuy, *Traitez touchant les droits du roy* (Paris: A. Courbe, 1655).
30. Colbert to Baluze, 22 September 1670, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 11k.
31. Colbert to Baluze, 6 November 1679, *Lettres*, vol. 6, pp. 349-350.
32. Leopold Delisle, *Le Cabinet des manuscrits de La Bibliothèque Imperiale*, 4 vols. (New York: Franklin, 1974-1977), vol. 1, p. 440.

33. Commission for Doat, *Lettres*, vol. 5, pp. 563-564, note 4.
34. Lothar Kolmer, "Colbert und die Entstehung der Collection Doat," *Francia* 7 (1979): 463-489.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 471.
36. Delisle, *Catalogue des actes*, p. xliv.
37. Boislisle, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. vii. Boislisle says they formed the "Cinq Cent," the "Melanges," and the "Volumes verts" of Colbert.
38. Delisle, *Cabinet*, vol. 1, p. 440.
39. D'Aguesseau to Baluze, 22 August 1676, BN MSS. Baluze 371, fol. 1r-2r.
40. D' Aguesseau to Baluze, 22 August 1676, BN MSS. Baluze 371, fols. 1r-2r; Boudon to Baluze, 20 November 1677, BN MSS. Baluze 371, fols. 17r-18r; Boudon to Baluze, 2 December 1678, BN MSS. Baluze 371, fols. 38r-39r.
41. Foucault to Baluze, 17 November 1677, BN MSS. Baluze 371, fols. 9r-10r. 42. D'Aguesseau to Colbert, 14 April 1679, *Lettres*, vol. 5, pp. 563-564; Boudon to Colbert, 10 September 1680, *Lettres*, vol. 5, p. 409.
43. Delisle, *Cabinet*, vol. 1, pp. 441-442.
44. Commission for Doat sent to Boudon, 1679, *Lettres*, vol. 5, pp. 563, 564.
45. Colbert to Godefroy, 19 October 1668, *Lettres*, vol. 5, p. 274.
46. Colbert to Godefroy, 11 January 1669, *Lettres*, vol. 5, p. 276.
47. Delisle, *Cabinet*, vol. 1, p. 442.
48. "Table alfabétique des cartes et plans de divers royaumes, diverses provinces et villes, tant manuscrits que imprimées qui sont en différents volumes et recueils de la bibliothèque de Monseigneur en novembre 1666," BN MSS. Baluze 102, fols. 75r-152r.
49. "Table alfabétique de traittez de paix et alliances entre divers roys et princes, qui sont en différents volumes de la bibliothèque de Monseigneur," BN MSS. Baluze 100, fols. 200r-224r.
50. Varillas to Colbert, no date, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 4Or.
51. Colbert de Terron to J. B. Colbert, 6 May 1669, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 75r.
52. Colbert to Baluze, no date, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 70r.
53. Baluze to Colbert, 13 January 1672, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 121r.
54. These collections were put together by a Mr. Killingsworth and may be found as follows: BN MSS. Melange Colbert 39, 40, 48, 53.
55. Colbert to Baluze, 10 September 1677, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 219r.
56. See Herbert H. Rowen, "L'état c'est à moi: Louis XIV and the State," *French Historical Studies* 2 (1961): 83-104.
57. Jean Jacquart, "Colbert et la reformation du domain," in *Un nouveau Colbert* (Paris: SEDES, 1985), p. 153.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
59. Boislisle, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. v.
60. Victor B. Flour de Saint Genis, *Histoire documentaire et philosophique de l'administration des domaines*, 2 vols. (Havre: Annales de l'Enregistrement, 1903), vol. 2, pp. 433-434.
61. "Inventaire et classement des comptes du domaine effectués à l'entrée en charge de Gabriel Argoud, gardes des livres en la chambre des comptes par Jacques Bernard et autres conseillers maîtres, 1676," BN MSS. Melange Colbert 32, fols. 96-101. Note in Colbert's hand, "à M. l'abbé Gallois pour ma bibliothèque."
62. Jacquart, "Colbert," p. 157.
63. Colbert to Baluze, 7 July 1678, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 221r.
64. "Recueil de plusieurs édits, déclarations, réglemens, arrests, anciens terriers et autres titres et pièces servant à l'éclaircissement des droits seigneuriaux de la province de Dauphiné," BN MSS. Baluze 244-247.
65. Colbert to Baluze, 25 June 1682, *Lettres*, vol. 2, p. 153.
66. "Abrégé des raisons contre la renonciation insérée dans le contrat de mariage de la Reine," BN MSS. Melange Colbert 29, fol. 596. In margin in Colbert's hand, "bibliothèque à M. l'abbé de Bourzeis."
67. Chapelain to Colbert, 11 February 1667, *Lettres*, vol. 5, pp. 619-620.
68. Chapelain to Colbert, five letters between September 1666 and April 1667, *Lettres*, vol. 5, pp. 615-623.

69. Colbert to Baluze, 6 November 1679, *Lettres*, vol. 6, p. 349.
70. Jacqueline Rambaud-Buchot, "Baluze, Bibliothecaire et Canonist," in *Etudes d'histoire du droit canonique* (Paris: Srey, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 332-342 (a number of reports written by Baluze for Colbert on ecclesiastical issues are listed on p. 338).
71. Baluze to Colbert, 26 April 1670, BN MSS. Baluze 179, fols. 144r-145r.
72. Baluze to Colbert, 29 October 1670, BN MSS. Baluze 179, fols. 124r-126r. 73. "Des conciles provinciaux tenus en France depuis le concile de Trente et de leur necessite," BN MSS. Baluze 179, fols. 127r-135r; "A qui appartient le droit d'assemblee les conciles provinciaux," BN MSS. Baluze 179, fols. 136r-144r.
74. Baluze to Colbert, 17 August 1668, *Lettres*, vol. 6, p. 436.
75. Colbert to Baluze, 25 November 1672, *Lettres*, vol. 6, p. 98.
76. Baluze to Abbe Gallois, 20 March 1675, BN MSS. Baluze 177, fol. 73r; Baluze to Colbert, 2 August 1675, BN MSS. Baluze 177, fol. 23r (marginal notes to Abbe Gallois).
77. Colbert to Gallois, 1675, *Lettres*, vol. 6, pp. 102-103; "Memoire au Roy sur la Regale," *Lettres*, vol. 6, pp. 103-113; "Liste des auteurs qui ont traite de la Regale," *Lettres*, vol. 6, p. 441.
78. *Colbert 1619-1683*, pp. 379, 401, 542.
79. Baluze to Colbert, 29 July 1672, *Lettres*, vol. 7, p. 63, n. 2.
80. Seignelay to Baluze, 8 February 1676, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 298r; Seignelay to Baluze, 22 September 1676, BN MSS. Baluze 362, fol. 302.
81. Colbert to Croisy, 8 September 1672, *Lettres*, vol. 6, pp. 306-307.
82. "Livres relies pendant l'annee 1670 (etc ...)," BN MSS. Baluze 100, fol. 4 and following.
83. Colbert to Baluze, 16 March 1671, *Lettres* vol. 7, p. 52.
84. Boislisle, *Correspondance*, vol 1, p. iii.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. viii-ix.
86. *Ibid.*, p. iv.
87. Colbert to de Marle, 29 November 1672, *Lettres*, vol. 7, p. 68.
88. James King makes this argument in *Science and Rationalism in the Government of Louis XIV 1661-1683* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959).