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► **To cite this version:**

Emmanuelle Chapron. The “ Supplement to All Archives ”: the Bibliothèque Royale of Paris in the Eighteenth-Century. *Storia della storiografia*, 2015, 68 (2), pp.53-68. halshs-01487298

HAL Id: halshs-01487298

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01487298v1>

Submitted on 11 Mar 2017

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Emmanuelle Chapron, « The « Supplement to All Archives » : the Bibliothèque Royale of Paris in the Eighteenth-Century », *Storia della storiografia*, 68/2, 2015, p. 53-68.

The « supplement to all archives »: the Bibliothèque royale of Paris in the eighteenth century

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English abstract

In the early modern period, libraries were probably the most important place of work for historians. They were used as a kind of archive, where historians could find all sorts of records, be they original documents or copies. Based on the case of the Royal Library in eighteenth-century Paris, this study aims to investigate the chain of documentary acts which gave it a para-archivistical function – which it retains to this day. First of all, I will discuss the constitution of scholars' and bureaucrats' private collections and their incorporation in the Royal Library from the final decades of the seventeenth century onwards; then the various operations of classifying, cataloguing and filing that blurred the initial rationales of the 'archive avatars' developed by previous owners; finally the uses of this peculiar material, be they documentary (by scholars or royal officials) or pragmatic (by families wishing to clarify their genealogy or private individuals involved in court cases).

In the early modern period, libraries were probably the most important place of work for historians. They were places where scholars went to look not just for the printed works and handwritten narrative sources they needed, but also for all sorts of other records produced during the everyday activities of secular and ecclesiastic institutions¹. Mediaeval charters, ambassadors' reports, ministerial correspondence and judicial records can still all be found in Ancien Régime libraries, be they original documents or copies. The fact that they are kept there has nothing to do with the ordinary life of archives belonging to a given administration; it is the result of two successive operations. First, these items were generally part of large individual or family collections, compiled by royal officers or scholars for use in their everyday activities. In turn, a certain number of these collections were later donated to central

¹ Historiography has put into proper perspective the opposition between scholarly history which turned to the source, and eloquent history which was considered to be less in compliance with the rules of scholarship. C. Grell, *L'histoire entre érudition et philosophie. Étude sur la connaissance historique à l'âge des Lumières* (Paris: PUF, 1993). I would like to thank Maria-Pia Donato, Filippo de Vivo and Anne Saada for their time and precious comments.

‘national’ libraries, at a time when these were being institutionalised as central repositories and became the ‘natural’ place for the conservation of collections whose high political or intellectual value required that they be preserved². Hence, from the final decades of the seventeenth century onwards, the Bibliothèque Royale de Paris incorporated several dozen private libraries belonging to scholars and senior government officials, which were rich in ancient manuscripts, transcribed texts and extracts from archival repositories: in such a way, as lawyer Armand-Gaston Camus, archivist of the Assemblée Nationale in revolutionary France later said, it came to form «the supplement to all archives and charter repositories»³.

« Archival turn » is the term now commonly used to describe the new interest that historians are showing for past modalities of selecting, classifying and transmitting the documents that they use in archives⁴. Resulting from a partnership between historians and archivists, the history of the ‘making of archives’ will help achieve a better understanding of how history was written – and still is⁵. Historians’ increasing reflexivity with regard to their own documentary practices, however, has had comparatively less impact on the history of libraries. The first reason for such a neglect is undoubtedly due to a certain conception of the historian’s profession, which is essentially conceived as a work *on* archives and *in* archives. In France, today historians are still heirs to the ‘big divide’ which resulted from the debates, during the second half of the nineteenth century, between the former Royal, later Imperial, Library and the National Archives. At a time when the historian’s profession was being redefined around the use of authentic, unpublished sources, archivists educated in the recently created École des Chartes (1821) availed themselves of the founding law on archives of Messidor Year II to claim that archives were the true repository of all «true sources of national history»⁶. Notwithstanding the archivists’ claim, the Imperial Library did not give up all its treasures and maintained its status as repository of the historical

² F. Barbier, "Représentation, contrôle, identité: les pouvoirs politiques et les bibliothèques centrales en Europe, XV^e-XIX^e siècles", *Francia*, 26, (1999): 1-22.

³ A. G. Camus, "Mémoire sur les dépôts de chartes, titres, registres, documents et autres papiers... et sur leur état au 1^{er} nivôse de l’an VI", cited in F. Ravaisson, *Rapport adressé à S. Exc. le ministre d’État au nom de la commission instituée le 22 avril 1861* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1862), 298-299.

⁴ For a recent review, F. de Vivo, "Cœur de l’État, lieu de tension. Le tournant archivistique vu de Venise (XV^e-XVII^e siècle)", *Annales HSS*, 68, (2013): 699-728.

⁵ É. Anheim, O. Poncet, "Présentation", *Fabrique des archives, fabrique de l’histoire*, special issue of *Revue de synthèse*, 125, (2004), 1-14. See also *De l’Ancien Régime à l’Empire. Mutations de l’État, avatars des archives*, eds. B. Delmas, D. Margairaz and D. Ogilvie, special issue of *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes*, 166, (2008) and *Une histoire de la mémoire judiciaire de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, eds. O. Poncet and I. Storez-Brancourt (Paris: École des chartes, 2009).

⁶ The law dated 7 Messidor Year II (25 June 1794) is considered to be the founding act of the National Archives. F. Hildesheimer, "Les « monuments de l’histoire nationale », documents d’archives ou manuscrits de bibliothèques?", *Archives et nations dans l’Europe du XIX^e siècle*, eds. B. Delmas and C. Nougaret (Paris: École des chartes, 2004), 113-127. L. J. Moore, *Restoring Order, The École des Chartes and the Organization of Archives and Libraries in France, 1820-1870* (Duluth: Litwin Books, 2008).

records it had acquired in the Ancien Régime and during the Revolution⁷. Yet, its function changed as emphasis shifted toward providing access to printed books for a wider public. As a result, the mass of documents it contained that might easily be described as archival items fell into a sort of forgotten area in the mental landscape of contemporary historians.

The way in which we nowadays write the history of libraries provides a second reason. In this field, primacy is given to ancient manuscripts and printed books; this means that library and information experts tend to forget the diversity of written and non-written material contained in libraries – exotic objects, collections of antiques, scientific instruments – and the various uses they had⁸. Whilst monographs devoted to early modern national libraries mention private collections that have been bequeathed or purchased, they offer little insight into the political or intellectual rationale behind these acquisitions. Yet, as I shall claim in this article, the way these collections were sorted, classified, inventoried and even – at some point – returned into public archives, helps throw light on the slow and mutually dependent emergence of archival and library institutions in early modern States⁹. The concentration of the history of reading on private contexts, and the lack of sources on reading in public libraries, add to our poor understanding of how libraries were used as archives. In this article I wish to redress this problem, taking France as a case study.

I. « ALL OF THE STATE'S SECRETS »

1782 saw the publication of an *Essai historique sur la bibliothèque du Roi et sur chacun des dépôts qui la composent, avec la description des bâtiments, et des objets les plus curieux à voir dans ces différents dépôts*¹⁰. Its author, Nicolas Thomas Le Prince, who was employed in the Bibliothèque royale as caretaker of the legal deposit, devised his book as a visitor's guide for the curious and for those travellers who came to admire the library. He walks the reader through the rooms, describes the paintings, and discusses the various 'sections' of the library's administrative organisation (printed books, manuscripts, prints and engravings, deeds and genealogies, medals and antiquities); last but not least, he

⁷ Article 12 of the law dated Messidor Year II specifies the documents to be deposited within the National Library: « charters and manuscripts belonging to history, to the sciences and to the arts, or which may be used for instruction ». The 1860s debates on the respective perimeters of the two institutions led to just a few ad hoc exchanges.

⁸ Even if some of these components have been properly examined. T. Sarmant, *Le Cabinet des médailles de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: École des chartes, 1994).

⁹ See the procedures adopted in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany: E. Chapron, *Ad utilità pubblica. Politique des bibliothèques et pratiques du livre à Florence au XVIII^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2009), 224-261.

¹⁰ N. T. Le Prince, *Essai historique sur la Bibliothèque du Roi, et sur chacun des dépôts qui la composent, avec la description des bâtiments, et des objets les plus curieux à voir dans ces différents dépôts* [Historical essay on the King's library and on each of the repositories of which it is comprised, with the description of the buildings and of the most curious objects to be seen in these various repositories] (Paris, Bibliothèque du roi, 1782).

provides details on the private collections which have been added in time to the huge manuscripts holdings. To describe these collections, Le Prince consistently used the word '*fonds*', which is still used in modern archival jargon to indicate the entire body of records originating from an office or a family. This is accurate because the collections originated precisely from families and, as we shall see, it reflects the closeness of archives and libraries at the time. For eighteen of these collections (followed by a dozen smaller collections, more rapidly presented), Le Prince provides all available information on the identity of the former owner, the history of the collection, the conditions under which it became part of the Bibliothèque royale and the material description of the volumes (binding, *ex libris*). He pays little attention to the literary part of these collections, although most were rich in literary, scientific and theological treasures. For the most part, he focuses on listing the resources that each offered prospective historians, on the nature and number of original documents and charters, and on the quality of copies.

In other words, Le Prince's presentation invited the reader to consider the Bibliothèque royale primarily in its role as a 'public repository', in the sense of a place designed to preserve authentic archives, deeds and legal instruments which may be needed as evidence for legal purposes¹¹. The very use of the term 'repository' (*dépôt*) to designate the library's departments, whilst not unusual, is sufficiently systematic in his book to be meaningful. Like the word '*fonds*', which he used for the single collections, the term derives from the field of archives, usually called 'public repository' at this time¹². Alongside the minutely detailed enumeration of all authentic items it preserved, Le Prince repeatedly underlines the Bibliothèque Royale's role as a repository for 'reserve copies'. The copies made in Languedoc at Colbert's orders and brought together in the Doat collection acquired in 1732, for instance, made it possible « to find an infinite number of deeds which might have been mislaid, lost or burned », especially as « these copies made and collated by virtue of letters patent can, if so required, replace the very acts from which the copies were made »¹³. In his notes on the collection of Mégret de Sérilly, the Franche-Comté intendant who sold it to the king in 1748, Le Prince points out that, because of a fire at the Palais de Justice in 1737, « the original documents used to make these copies [the registers of the Cour des Aides up until 1717] were partly burned or seriously damaged, to the extent that the copies now replace the originals, and by virtue of this disastrous accident have now become priceless »¹⁴. At the same time,

¹¹ F. Hildesheimer, "Échec aux archives: la difficile affirmation d'une administration", *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 156, (1998), 91-106.

¹² "Dépôt public", *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 35 vols. (Paris: Briasson, 1751-1780), 4: 865.

¹³ Le Prince, *Essai historique*, 267.

¹⁴ Le Prince, *Essai historique*, 214.

the library description stresses the existence of numerous old notarial instruments, fallen into abeyance and henceforth devoid of legal value, but now of documentary interest and for this reason made available to scholars. Le Prince goes as far as dressing a somewhat imperfect yet innovative work tool for future historians: a long « list of the charters, cartularies etc. of French churches and other documents from the various collections in the manuscript department »¹⁵. Finally, he further signals valuable materials to historians, as in the Duchesne collection that allegedly contained « an infinite number of records which have not yet been used and which might usefully serve those working on the history of France and on that of the kingdom's churches »¹⁶.

Hence, due to this mix of 'living' and 'dead' archives, of authentic instruments and artefacts, the Bibliothèque royale held a singular place in the monarchy's documentary landscape. It differed from the 'political' repositories which came into being in the second half of the seventeenth century, initially in the care of Louis XIV's senior officials and later, at the turn of the century, in a more established form in large ministerial departments (Maison du Roi, Foreign Affairs, War, Navy, General Control of Finances) the main scope of which was to gather documentation that might assist political action¹⁷. Around the same period, the Bibliothèque royale increased considerably by incorporating numerous private collections. The latter originated in the intense activity of production, copy and collection of political documentation carried out in scholarly and parliamentary milieus between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Senior State officials collected documents for their own benefit, that is, not just papers relating to their own work (as was the custom through to at least the end of the seventeenth century), but also any kind of documentation likely to inform their activities in the service of the monarchy. The poor state or even total abandonment in which the archives of certain institutions were left explains the considerable facility with which old records and registers could find their way into private collections¹⁸. The major part of the collections was nevertheless made up of copies or extracts¹⁹. Powerful and erudite aristocrats and officials such as Louis-François Morel de Thoisy or Gaspard de Fontanieu hired small groups of clerks who were tasked with copying – « *de belle main* » and on quality paper – all the documents they deemed to be of

¹⁵ I. Vérité, "Les entreprises françaises de recensement des cartulaires", *Les Cartulaires*, eds. O. Guyotjeannin, L. Morelle and M. Parisse (Paris: École des chartes, 1993), 179-213.

¹⁶ Le Prince, *Essai historique*, 333.

¹⁷ Hildesheimer, "Échec aux archives".

¹⁸ For example, M. Nortier, "Le sort des archives dispersées de la Chambre des comptes de Paris", *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 123, (1965), 460-537.

¹⁹ This is also the case with scholarly collections, such as that of Étienne Baluze. In the bundles relating to the history of the city of Tulle (now Bibliothèque nationale de France [BnF], Baluze 249-253), Patricia Gillet calculated that 42% of the documents were copies made by or for Baluze, 21% were originals, 10% were authentic old copies, the rest being printed documents, leaflets, work papers and letters addressed to Baluze (P. Gillet, *Étienne Baluze et l'histoire du Limousin. Dessesins et pratiques d'un érudit du XVII^e siècle* (Genève: Droz, 2008), 141).

potential use²⁰. They also copied original documents of their collections, when they were ancient and badly legible, so as to produce properly ordered and clean copies, bound in volumes, whilst the original documents were kept in bundles.

These collections were not repositories of curiosities; they were strategic resources for personal political survival and for the defence of the State's interests, at a time when the king's Trésor des Chartes had definitively fossilised in a collection of ancient charters and acts, and the monarchy had no central premises in which to store its modern administrative papers²¹. In the 1660s, when Hippolyte de Béthune gifted to the king the collection created by his father Philippe, a diplomat in the service of Henri III and Henri IV, Louis XIV's letters of acceptance underlined the fact that the collection contained « in addition to the two thousand original documents, all of the State's secrets and political secrets for the last four hundred years »²². Similarly, the collection compiled during the first half of the seventeenth century by Antoine and Henri-Auguste de Loménie, Secretaries of State of the Maison du Roi (the King's Household), constituted a veritable administrative record of the reigns of Henri IV and Louis XIII. To facilitate their work at the head of this tentacular office, father and son collected a vast quantity of documents relating to the provinces of the kingdom, to the functioning of royal institutions and to the sovereign's domestic services since the Middle Ages, in addition to the documents drawn up during the course of their duties²³. Despite the establishment of administrative repositories at the turn of the eighteenth century, this type of collection continued to be assembled until the French Revolution. Thus, Guillaume-François Joly de Fleury, attorney-general at the Paris parliament (1717-1756), installed the Parquet archives and a large collection of handwritten and printed material in his mansion²⁴.

Scholarly collections had close links with these 'political' collections. A certain number of scholars, often with a legal background, moved in royal and administrative circles, participated in the creation of 'professional' collections, and gathered significant amounts of documents for themselves. Caroline R. Sherman has shown how, since the Renaissance, erudition became a family business for the Godefroys, the Dupuys or the Sainte-Marthes. The creation of a library made it possible to transmit 'scholarly capital'

²⁰ Morel de Thoisy, counsellor to the king, treasurer and wage-payer at the Cour des Monnaies, gave his library to the king in 1725. On the clerks he employed, BnF, Clairambault 1056, fol. 128-156. The *Mémoire sur la bibliothèque de M. de Fontanieu* (sold in 1765 by its owner, maître des requêtes and intendant of Dauphiné) mentions « the work of four clerks he constantly employed over a period of fourteen or fifteen years » (published in H. Omont, *Inventaire sommaire des portefeuilles de Fontanieu* (Paris: Bouillon, 1898), 8-11).

²¹ O. Guyotjeannin and Y. Potin, "La fabrique de la perpétuité. Le trésor des chartes et les archives du royaume (XIII^e-XIX^e siècle)", *Revue de synthèse*, 125, (2004), 15-44.

²² L. Delisle, *Le Cabinet des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque impériale* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1868), 268.

²³ C. Figliuzzi, "Antoine et Henri-Auguste de Loménie, secrétaires d'État de la Maison du Roi sous Henri IV et Louis XIII: carrière politique et ascension sociale" (École des chartes, thesis, 2012).

²⁴ See D. Feutry's exemplary study, *Un magistrat entre service du roi et stratégies familiales. Guillaume-François Joly de Fleury (1675-1756)* (Paris: École des chartes, 2011), 15-35. The Joly de Fleury collection became part of the Library in 1836.

from one generation to the next: sons were trained by copying documents, filing bundles, making tables and inventories, and compiling extracts²⁵. Their collections were by no means disconnected from political stakes, as these scholars were involved simultaneously in compiling collections, caring for extant repositories, and defending royal interests. During the first half of the seventeenth century, brothers Pierre and Jacques Dupuy were employed to inventory the Trésor des Chartes and to reorganise Loménie de Brienne's collection, from which they were given the original documents as a reward for their work²⁶.

II. PRIVATE COLLECTIONS IN THE KING'S LIBRARY.

The rationale behind the integration of a certain number of collections into the Bibliothèque royale from the 1660s onwards was obviously connected to these collections' political nature. Following the chronology established by Le Prince, the first wave of acquisitions coincided with the period in which Jean-Baptiste Colbert extended his control over the Bibliothèque royale. As Jacob Soll has pointed out, Colbert based his political action on the creation of an information system extending from the collection of data 'in the field', through their compilation and organisation, and onto their exploitation²⁷. His own library was an efficient work tool, a vast 'database' enhanced by documents collected in the provinces or copied by his librarians. The Bibliothèque royale was part of this information system. As early as 1656, while in Cardinal Mazarin's service, Colbert placed his protégés and friends there, including his brother Nicolas whom he placed in charge as head librarian. In 1666, the newly designated Controller-General of Finances ordered the books to be moved into two houses neighbouring his own in rue Vivienne. It was during the period between these two dates that the first collections of manuscript documents came into the library²⁸: the Béthune collection, gifted in 1662 by Hippolyte de Béthune, who considered that « it belonged to the king alone », and the Loménie de Brienne collection, which Jean-Baptiste Colbert recovered for the Bibliothèque royale after Mazarin's death²⁹. In the library Jean-Baptiste Colbert employed scholars, such as the historiographer Varillas, to collate his own copy of the Brienne collection, based on a comparison with the originals in the king's Library, to explore the resources of the royal

²⁵ C. R. Sherman, "The Ancestral Library as an Immortal Educator", *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 35, (2007) (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0035.003>).

²⁶ S. Solente, "Les manuscrits des Dupuy à la Bibliothèque nationale", *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 88, (1927), 177-250. I might also cite the case of Étienne Baluze, Colbert's librarian and professor of canon law at the Collège de France: see *Étienne Baluze (1630-1718). Érudition et pouvoirs dans l'Europe classique*, ed. J. Boutier (Limoges: PULIM, 2008).

²⁷ J. Soll, *The information master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's secret state intelligence system* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).

²⁸ The Dupuy bequest, in 1656, concerned just the library and not the collection of original documents. Whilst it is true, as J. Delatour points out, that the Dupuys inaugurated the practice of making bequests to the Bibliothèque royale, the devolution of their collection to their cousin Jacques-Auguste de Thou, the historian's son, took place in the tradition of passing on scholarly capital to one's descendants.

²⁹ The collection was transferred to Richelieu by Henri-Auguste de Loménie, and then passed on to Mazarin's library.

collections and to organise anthologies « of all matters which might be a subject of dispute between France and foreign powers »³⁰.

It was essentially under the leadership of Abbott Bignon (1718-1741) that the Bibliothèque royale developed in this direction. After Gaignières' collection in 1715, Louvois' (1718), de La Mare's (1718), Baluze's (1719), and then Mesmes' (1731), Colbert's (1732), Lancelot's (1732) and Cangé's (1733) were either presented to or purchased by the Library. This acceleration ran parallel to the increasing authority of the royal establishment, which had come to coordinate the activities of the Collège royal, the royal academies, the *Journal des Savants* and the royal printing house and thus became somewhat of a « point of convergence for research »³¹. The idea that the purpose of the Bibliothèque royale was to conserve documentary corpuses relating to State interests would appear to have been widely shared by the intellectual and political elites. The initiatives of attorney-general Guillaume-François Joly de Fleury are indicative of this mind-set. Vigilant as he was on the repositories under his responsibility (Trésor des Chartes, archives of the Paris Parliament), he also took care to bring rich collections of historical material to the Bibliothèque royale³². In 1720, he made a considerable and personal financial effort to buy the collection of the Dupuy brothers, put up for sale by Charron de Ménars' daughters, because the Royal Treasury did not have enough funds to make the purchase. Yet, although « these manuscripts contain an abundance of important documents that the King's attorney-general cannot do without in the defence of the domain and rights of His Majesty's Crown », Joly de Fleury always saw them « less as his heritage, more as property which can only belong to the king, and considering himself lucky to have been able to conserve them, he always believed that His Majesty's library was the only place where they could be kept »³³. In 1743, he informed Chancellor d'Aguesseau of the importance of Charles Du Cange's collection, which included copies of the Chambre des Comptes memorials that had been destroyed in the Palais de Justice fire in 1737³⁴.

The function of conserving the monarchy's ancient archives can be seen on an almost daily basis in the purchases made by the royal librarians. Abbott Bignon and the library's custodians made use of their

³⁰ On Varillas' work, S. Uomini, *Cultures historiques dans la France du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 368-375.

³¹ F. Bléchet, "L'abbé Bignon, bibliothécaire du roi et les milieux savants en France au début du XVIII^e siècle", *Buch und Sammler. Private und öffentliche Bibliotheken im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1979), 53-66.

³² D. Feutry, "Mémoire du roi, mémoire du droit. Le procureur général Guillaume-François Joly de Fleury et le transport des registres du Parlement de Paris, 1729-1733", *Histoire et archives*, 20, (2006), 19-40.

³³ BnF, Archives administratives, Ancien Régime [now Arch. adm., AR] 59, 270. The collection was finally bought by the Library in 1754.

³⁴ P.-M. Bondois, "Le procureur général Joly de Fleury et les papiers de Du Cange (1743)", *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 89, (1928), 81-88. The memorials are registers containing transcriptions of the letters patent relating to the administration of the finances and of the Domain. On the death of Du Cange (1688) the collection was dispersed; it was later reconstituted by his grand-nephew Dufresne d'Aubigny. It became part of the Bibliothèque royale in 1756.

networks to attract donations and to find interesting manuscripts on the market. Between 1729 and 1731, among other historical items, they bought a collection of remonstrances of the Paris Parliament addressed to the king between 1539 and 1630 (almost certainly a copy, bought for 30 *livres tournois*), a collection of Philippe de Béthune's negotiations in Rome in the 1600s (bought from a bookseller for 20 *livres tournois*), and forty volumes of accounts of inspections to forests in the 1680s (bought for 1,000 *livres tournois* from a private individual)³⁵. This representation of the Royal Library as repository of state-sensitive papers was to be found in scholarly circles, although it did not elicit unanimity in a community which fostered the Republic of Letters' ideal of the free communication of knowledge. Upon the death of Antoine Lancelot (1675-1740), former secretary to the dukes and peers of France, secretary-counsellor to the king and inspector of the Collège royal, Abbott Terrasson wrote to Jamet, secretary to the Lorraine intendant, regretting that Lancelot had bequeathed his collections « to the abyss (to the king's library) », and added that « It would have been better shared among his curious friends[, but] you know as well as I his quirky habit of donating to the king's library, which he felt to be the unique repository in which all curiosities should lie »³⁶.

The Bibliothèque royale thus acted as a vast collector of papers relating to the monarchy, authentic documents or artefacts, which should not be allowed to fall into foreign hands³⁷. This acquisition policy raised three questions. The first concerned remuneration for the documents produced in the State's service. This was a lively subject of debate in negotiations relating to Colbert's library at the end of the 1720s. Abbot de Targny and academician Falconet, experts appointed by the king, refused to give an estimate for « modern manuscripts », i.e. « State manuscripts ». According to Bignon, experts would argue on the basis of « natural law, by virtue of which I believe that ministers' papers belong to the king and not to their heirs »³⁸. His argument is consistent with the measures taken as from the 1670s to seize the papers of deceased senior government officials. But this position was by no means self-evident when faced with an heir who wished to make the most out of his capital³⁹. Indeed, in Colbert's case as in others, the transfer of papers was eventually not the result of an actual purchase, but of a gift in return for which the king either offered a reward of a substantial sum of money or granted an office. When he sold his

³⁵ BnF, Arch. adm. AR 65, 101, 137.

³⁶ G. Peignot, *Choix de testaments anciens et modernes* (Paris: Renouard, 1829), 418.

³⁷ When there were rumours that the de Thou library was to be put up for sale, the library's caretaker, Abbot de Targny, told Abbott Bignon how « important it was to take steps to ensure that [the manuscripts] are not lost to the king's Library ». A few days later he let it be understood that he did not believe « they should be seen to be too eager to acquire [them]. It is enough that we be persuaded that the King will not suffer should they pass into foreign hands » (BnF, Arch. Adm. AR 61, 89, 21 September 1719, and 92).

³⁸ BnF, ms. lat. 9365, 188. Bignon to Targny, 10 October 1731.

³⁹ Before the experts were appointed, he demanded 150,000 pounds for the government papers and 300,000 for the ancient manuscripts. BnF, ms. lat. 9365, 312.

library in 1765, Gaspard de Fontanieu made a point of stating that the papers relating to his intendancies of Dauphiné and to the Italian army should not be considered as having been sold, but as gifted, « seeing his personal productions as the fruit of the honours bestowed upon him by His Majesty through the different employments with which he had been entrusted; and for this reason being persuaded that the said productions belonged to His Majesty »⁴⁰.

Secondly, the confluence of old administrative documentation in the Bibliothèque royale raises the question of its relations with the existing archives of ministries. The competition was not as evident as it might seem, in so far as the function of those archives was not so much to preserve the memory of past policies, as to make available the documentation required for present and future political action. As for the old Trésor des Chartes, it was reduced to purchasing sets of documents linked directly to the king, and such opportunities were very infrequent⁴¹. Only the creation of the foreign affairs repository in the Louvre (1710) would appear to have had an effect on the management of documentary acquisitions. From this moment on, a portion of the acquisitions were destined or brought back to this repository, for instance from the Gaignières bequest (1715) or from the Trésor des Chartes de Lorraine (1739)⁴². Errors in destination were evidence of the uncertainty surrounding the exact boundaries of both institutions: in 1729, papers relating to the history of Burgundy collected by Maurist Dom Aubrée were taken to the Louvre repository, but in 1743 they were found to be « still on the floor, having not been touched since; these manuscripts are in no way of a nature to be kept in this repository where they will never be used, and their proper place is in the king's Library »⁴³. Finally, distribution was not retroactive: in 1728, Foreign Affairs officials were sent to the Bibliothèque royale « to make copies of what was missing at the repository, in order to have a full set of documents from previous ministries »⁴⁴. Interestingly, rather than requesting the originals preserved in the library, they made copies: their aim was to have complete sets of records in the ministry of Foreign Affairs, rather than originals, which they were happy to leave in the library.

Tensions sometimes arose in relation to the 'youngest' collections, filled with documents that were still sensitive. In 1786, Delaune, secretary to the Peers, asked to borrow Antoine Lancelot's portfolios which contained items relating to the Peerage. He wanted to compare them with the boxes at the Peerage

⁴⁰ Fontanieu's library bill of sale published by Omont, *Inventaire sommaire*, 4.

⁴¹ Guyotjeannin, Potin, "La fabrique de la perpétuité". No study has yet been done on these eighteenth century entries.

⁴² P. Lauer, *Collections manuscrites sur l'histoire des provinces de France* (Paris: Leroux, 1906), xv-xxiii.

⁴³ BnF, Arch. adm. AR 65, 290.

⁴⁴ BnF, Arch. adm. AR 65, 92bis, Angervilliers to Bignon, 9 November 1728.

repository and copy the items which were missing⁴⁵. When consulted in relation to this request, Abbot Desaulnais (custodian of the printed books department in the Bibliothèque royale) very coldly responded that the portfolios assembled loose sheets for which there was no accurate inventory. This would not however be a reason to refuse the loan, were it not for the fact that among the documents were « essential items which are missing from the Peerage repository and which M. de Laulne [Delaune] claims were removed from this repository by the late M. Lancelot ». The secretary had already examined these files and had made notes, but « I did not want him to make copies, in order to allow you the pleasure, in different circumstances and where so required, of obliging the peers, whilst conserving at the repository whatever may be unique »⁴⁶.

This reluctance to allow people to make copies of documents kept in the Bibliothèque royale draws attention to a third aspect of this documentary economy: the idea that copying reduced the value of the original, because the copy was itself not without value⁴⁷. The price of the copy was calculated according to the cost of producing it (in paper and personnel), to the nature of the items copied, and, above all, to the use to which it could be put. During negotiations relating to Colbert's library, one memorandum pointed out:

how important it is for the King and for the State to prevent the said manuscripts from being removed, even if they are only copies. The copy made from the records of the Trésor des Chartes is extremely important, both because it may be unique, and because it contains secrets that must not be made [known] to foreigners, who are eager to acquire these sorts of items so that they might one day use them against us⁴⁸.

III. THE « TASTE FOR ARCHIVES » IN LIBRARIES⁴⁹

The representation of the Bibliothèque royale as a public repository corresponds to the perception and documentary practices of its contemporaries. This is especially true of the Cabinet des Titres et Généalogies, which was a real resource centre for families, and of the manuscript section of the Library, which was frequented by all sorts of people. The registers of books loans and requests for documentation submitted to the secretary of State of the Maison du Roi (who formally supervised the Library) throw

⁴⁵ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 296.

⁴⁶ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 296.

⁴⁷ This aspect also appears in Le Prince's *Essai historique*, in relation to the Brienne manuscripts « that we rightly regard as being very precious[, but which] would be of another value entirely, if copies did not exist elsewhere, which are themselves merely ordered copies of Dupuy's manuscripts ».

⁴⁸ BnF, ms. lat. 9365, 313, "Mémoire sur la bibliothèque de M. Colbert", 15 December 1727.

⁴⁹ A. Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

considerable light on these practices which reveal three types of relationship with the library: instrumental, evidentiary and scholarly⁵⁰.

First and foremost, the Bibliothèque royale constituted an immense documentation centre for agents of the monarchy. Requests concerned the preparation of reference works, such as the *Traité de la police* published between 1705 and 1738 by Commissaire de La Mare – in 1721 he asked for the Châtelet registers « which were in the cabinet of the late Abbot Louvois and are now in the King's library » –, the publication of the *Ordonnances des rois de France* prepared by lawyer Secousse on the orders of chancellor d'Aguesseau, and the diplomatic memoirs of Le Dran, senior official at the foreign affairs archive in 1730, who consulted ambassadors' reports⁵¹. The library's resources were also mobilised in relation to more pressing affairs: in 1768, it was Ripert de Monclar, attorney-general at the parliament of Provence, commissioned to establish the king's rights over the city of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, who asked for relevant documents to be searched⁵². In a certain number of cases, recourse to clean and well-organised copies of major collections undoubtedly sufficed, or at least meant that the work was more rapidly completed.

The 'public repository' function likely to produce evidentiary documents is more evident in requests from families wishing to clarify their genealogy, or from individuals wanting to produce decisive evidence in a court case. The Bibliothèque royale was called upon in handwriting verification procedures and forgery pleas, for which parties had no hesitation in asking to borrow ancient documents⁵³. In 1726, Mr. de Varneuille, cavalry officer in Rouen, asked to borrow the deeds signed in 1427 and 1440 by Jean de Dunois, the 'Bastard of Orleans', to help one of his friends « to support a plea of forgery which he made against the deeds used as evidence against him in his trial »⁵⁴. In 1736, the count of Belle-Isle, in proceedings against Camusat, auditor of accounts, demanded that Philippe-Auguste's original cartulary be produced⁵⁵. This conception of the library was so self-evident that some people asked for 'legalised' copies. To such requests, Amelot, secretary of State of the Maison du Roi at the end of the eighteenth

⁵⁰ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, AR 123 (lending register, 1737-1759) and 124 (1775-1789).

⁵¹ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 4, 25, 27, 29. N. de La Mare, *Traité de la police, où l'on trouvera l'histoire de son établissement, les fonctions et les prérogatives de ses magistrats, toutes les loix et tous les réglemens qui la concernent*, 4 vols. (Paris: Cot, Brunet, Hérisant, 1705-38). *Ordonnances des rois de France de la 3e race, recueillies par ordre chronologique*, 22 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1723-1849). The numerous memoirs of Le Dran remained unpublished and are now kept in the Foreign Affairs Archive (Paris).

⁵² BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 56, 57.

⁵³ On these procedures, A. Bérroujon, "Comment la science vient aux experts. L'expertise d'écriture au XVII^e siècle à Lyon", *Genèses*, 70, (2008), 4-25.

⁵⁴ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 299.

⁵⁵ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 35.

century, replied that « the custodians of this library having sworn no legally binding oath, they may not issue authenticated copies », and that the librarian could only certify extracts⁵⁶.

Obviously, the collections were widely used by scholars. Latin, Greek and French manuscripts from the royal collections were the most frequently borrowed documents, but State papers from Louvois, Colbert, Béthune and de Brienne, along with the charters collected by Baluze and Lancelot, were also used for historical or legal works. The registers of book-loans give us an idea of scholars' work methods. Borrowing from the imagery used by Mark Hayer, who compares ways of reading to the way animals nourish themselves, in the registers we can easily identify historians as hunters, grazers, and gatherers⁵⁷. Abbot de Mury, doctor from the Sorbonne and previously tutor to the Cardinal of Soubise, was a grazer; as from May 1757, he borrowed the entire set of registers of the Paris parliament (probably in the copy of the Sérilly collection incorporated into the library in 1756), at an average rate of one volume per month. Abbot de Beauchesne was a hunter, borrowing on the 9th February 1753 the inventory of the Brienne manuscripts and returning four days later to borrow four sets of documents from this collection⁵⁸. The count of Caylus might be a gatherer, as he borrowed successively one volume taken from a Baluze carton (March 1740), a treatise about the mummies from the Colbert manuscripts (January 1750) and two greek inscriptions from the Fourmont collection (December 1751) for his *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines* published between 1752 and 1767⁵⁹.

To what extent did the fact of putting documents into the library lead to new ways of thinking about, and using, these collections? We must first consider the fact that it was already relatively easy to access these documents within close circles of scholars and bureaucrats. During the period he owned the Dupuy collection, between 1720 and 1754, attorney-general Joly de Fleury never refused to lend volumes to his Parisian colleagues such as the lawyer Le Roy who was preparing a work on French public law (never published), or Durey de Meinières, first president of parliament, who borrowed a large part of the collection at a rate of three to four manuscripts every fortnight, to complete his own collection of parliamentary registers or ambassadors' reports⁶⁰. The repository at the king's Library did not really

⁵⁶ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 56, 93, 29 April 1781, in response to a request from the count of Apremont, asking for a legalised copy of the Treaty of Münster.

⁵⁷ Quoted in *Les défis de la publication sur le Web: hyperlectures, cybertextes et méta-éditions*, eds. J. M. Salaün and C. Vandendorpe (Paris: Presses de l'ENSSIB, 2002).

⁵⁸ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 123, 45, 48 and following. None of these scholars seems to have ever published any historical work.

⁵⁹ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 123, 7, 42, 44. A.-C.-P. de Caylus, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines*, 7 vols. (Paris: Desaint et Saillant, 1752-1767).

⁶⁰ The correspondence with Durey de Meinières is a good observatory for copying practices which are a constitutive element of collections. BnF, Joly de Fleury, 2491, letter dated 29 August 1746: « I spent part of the afternoon verifying the three volumes that you were kind enough to lend me this morning. I have most of them in my mss from Mr. Talon and the rest in my parliamentary

facilitate consultation and copying because permissions were still left to the librarians' discretion, particularly as the possibility of borrowing manuscripts was called into question on several occasions during the course of the century. The rapidity with which scholars got hold of the manuscripts acquired by the library may be as much a sign of newly announced availability as of any continuity of use. Hardly three months went by between the purchase of the *Chronique de Guillaume de Tyr*, a late thirteenth century manuscript from the Noailles collection, and its loan to Dom Maur Dantine on 14 January 1741⁶¹. Had the monk had the opportunity to look at it before, in Maréchal de Noailles' library, or was its acquisition by the Library a boon, at the time when he was taking part in the great Benedictine undertaking of *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, the first volume of which appeared in 1738?

The opposition between public library and less public repositories should thus not be exaggerated. The Mazarine gallery where the manuscripts were kept was not open to the public, even though amateurs were allowed in to admire the splendour of the decor and contents. Le Prince's *Essai historique* also stated that the custodians « do not indiscriminately release every kind of manuscript »⁶². In some cases, putting documents into the library was meant to protect them from prying eyes, as was the case with four handwritten memoirs on the Regency, deposited in the library in 1749 « to thereby ensure that none of them become public »⁶³. The uses to which documents were to be put were also carefully controlled. In 1726, minister Maurepas was against the idea of lending three volumes from the Brienne collection in order to provide evidence of the king's sovereignty over Trois Évêchés in a trial: « I feel that their intended use is a delicate one, it being a question of the king's sovereignty over a province, evidence of which is said to be contained in the manuscripts ». He feared exposing them to the risk of contradiction by the opposing party⁶⁴.

IV. LIBRARY PLACEMENT

Putting documents into a library implies not only that their consultation was to be ruled by that institution, but also that they were integrated into the library's intellectual organisation. Le Prince's presentation suggests that collections maintained an independent existence in the Library's manuscripts

registers »; 11 May 1748: « I believe I have the last five which are letters and negotiations from Mr de Harlay de Beaumont in England in 1602, 1603, 1604 and 1605. It is so that I can be sure that I beg you... to be kind enough to lend them to me ».

⁶¹ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 123.

⁶² Le Prince, *Essai historique*, 151.

⁶³ BnF, Arch. adm. AR 65, 304. They contain a regency project written by first president Mr. de Harlay, a memorandum by chancellor Voisin on the Regency and a chronicle of the Regency.

⁶⁴ BnF, Arch. adm. AR 65, 67, Maurepas to Bignon, 17 August 1726.

department: « these collections or repositories are divided by *fonds* and bear the names of those who left them or sold them to the king »⁶⁵. The existence of numerous small rooms around the Mazarine gallery made it possible to keep entire collections in their own separate spaces, such as Colbert's State papers which were placed in two rooms, or the 725 portfolios transferred from Lorraine, which were kept in two others⁶⁶. The collections were not actually merged into the Bibliothèque royale; they were progressively absorbed during various operations of inventorying, classifying, cataloguing and filing, which blurred the initial rationales of the work tools and quasi-archives – or 'archive avatars' – developed by their previous owners⁶⁷.

Two trends coexisted throughout the eighteenth century: the first consisted in integrating new acquisitions into a continuous series of 'royal' numbers; the second in preserving the identity of the collections acquired. The permanent hesitation between, on the one hand, a complete cancellation of the previous order into an new and integrated classification, and on the other, what was to become the principle of the archival integrity (which holds that the records coming from the same source should be kept together) is a core problem of archival management, which had its echoes also in the Bibliothèque royale. The major undertakings of cataloguing and verification tendentially favoured unification of the various collections. The Béthune manuscripts, received in 1664 and still noted as separate in 1666, were renumbered in the catalogue compiled in 1682 by Nicolas Clément, who broke up the unity of the original collection⁶⁸. After this date, only a small portion of the acquired manuscripts were added to the catalogue. In 1719, at the time of the verification of holdings following the appointment of Abbot Bignon, the manuscript repository appeared to be made up of an 'old fonds', organised by language (Greek, Latin, etc.), and of a 'new fonds' which juxtaposed part of the private collections which had been acquired over the previous forty years, from Mézeray (1683) to Baluze (1719)⁶⁹. Incorporations into Clément's framework continued, but in the mid-1730s the rapid growth in the number of collections, combined with the confusion caused by repeated insertions of new items within the catalogue, led to a reform of the principle guiding incorporation. From this date onwards, « collections composed of a fairly considerable number of volumes were kept intact and formed separate fonds », whereas those acquired singly or in

⁶⁵ Le Prince, *Essai historique*, 156.

⁶⁶ Respectively BnF, NAF 5427, 118 and Peignot, *Collection*, 415. Map in J. F. Blondel, *Architecture française*, 4 vols. (Paris: Jombert, 1752-1756), 3: 67-80.

⁶⁷ The formula, coined in B. Delmas, D. Margairaz and D. Ogilvie, eds. *De l'Ancien Régime à l'Empire*, is particularly apt for a period when archival theory and vocabulary were still fluid.

⁶⁸ Pierre de Carcavy, "Mémoire de la quantité des livres tant manuscrits qu'imprimez, qui estoient dans la Bibliothèque du Roy avant que Monseigneur en ayt pris le soing [1666]", published in Jean Porcher, "La bibliothèque du roi rue Vivienne", *Fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Île-de-France. Mémoires*, 1, (1949), 237-246. BnF, NAF 5402, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum...* [1682].

⁶⁹ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 65, 7bis. Only the Brienne collection remains intact within the old fonds.

small groups were put into the New Acquisitions series⁷⁰. Among these new acquisitions was the Sautereau collection⁷¹, added in 1743 and made up of the thirty-five volumes of the inventory of acts of the Grenoble Chambre des Comptes.

This general principle did not mean that the collections had been incorporated in one fell swoop by the royal institution. Of course, the most prestigious collections maintained their integrity. The 363 volumes of the Brienne collection, magnificently bound in red Morocco leather, were never absorbed into the royal series. Colbert's State papers, acquired in 1732, were for the most part organised into homogeneous collections which preserved their individuality: the Doat collection (258 volumes), made up of copies of deeds which president Jean de Doat had ordered done in Languedoc; the collection of copies brought together by Denis Godefroy in Flanders (182 volumes) ; and a collection of more than five hundred volumes of Colbert's work files (the *Cinq cents de Colbert*)⁷². To arrange Étienne Baluze's « literature papers », the librarians requisitioned, from his heir, the seven armoires in which Baluze had kept his papers and correspondence. After an unsuccessful attempt by Jean Boivin to reclassify this material in a totally new order, Abbot de Targny went back to a system close to the original⁷³.

New collections were more often than not reorganised according to the overall rationale of the Bibliothèque royale and of its departments. I will give just one example, that of the library of Gaspard de Fontanieu, former intendant of Dauphiné, sold to the king in 1765. In addition to printed documents and manuscripts, it contains a large collection of fugitive pieces which included both manuscripts and printed documents (366 volumes), and a series of portfolios of original deeds, copies from the Bibliothèque royale and diverse repositories, work notes and printed items relating to historical documents (881 volumes). As one contemporary memoir explains, these three collections (manuscripts, collected works and portfolios) « have between them a link which is intimate enough for them not to be separated »⁷⁴. In particular, the to-ing and fro-ing between the two constitutes a « sort of mechanism [which] offers a prodigious facility for research ». However, integration into the library led to a dual alteration to the collection's intellectual economy. First of all, as had already been the case with Morel de Thoisy's and Lancelot's libraries, sets of fugitive items were sent to the printed books department, whilst the portfolio

⁷⁰ L. Delisle, *Inventaire des manuscrits latins* (Paris: Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 1863), 3. The oriental, Greek and Latin manuscripts were allocated new numbers as independent series, retroactively including private fonds (BnF, NAF 5412, 5413-5414).

⁷¹ BnF, NAF 5427, 1.

⁷² In addition there were volumes and bundles which were combined and bound in the middle of the nineteenth century, thus becoming what is known as the *Mélanges Colbert* collection. The six thousand manuscripts were divided among the existing linguistic series.

⁷³ Without managing to locate all items after the mess caused by the move, whence the existence of an « Uncertain armoires » category. For more on these operations, see Lucien Auvray, "La Collection Baluze à la Bibliothèque nationale", *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 81, (1920), 93-174. On the armoires, BnF, Arch. adm., AR 61, 92.

⁷⁴ Cited in Omont, *Inventaire sommaire*, 8-11.

series remained in the manuscripts section⁷⁵. Secondly, the portfolios were partly split, and the printed documents were removed and transferred to the printed books, something that twenty years later Le Prince was to describe as « unfortunate »⁷⁶.

The ultimate librarians' device to blur the continuity between the old collections and the new was the renumbering of manuscripts. Yet, whilst this operation gave the librarians absolute discretionary power, Le Prince hints on several occasions at the existence of concordance tables which made it possible to navigate from old numbers to new, even if there is no evidence to show that these tables were available to scholars⁷⁷. Also very striking were the vestiges of the old 'book order' in the new library configuration. It could be seen in the way volumes were designated, for example in the registers of loans. Even when they were allocated a new number in the royal series, manuscripts frequently appeared under their original numbers. The collection of copies of the Louvois dispatches appeared under n° 24 in the Louvois fonds entered in the Bibliothèque royale in 1718. It became ms. 9350 (A.B) in the royal series but was listed as « vol. 24 n° 9350 A.B. Louvois manuscripts » when borrowed by Mr. Coquet in 1737⁷⁸. The old book order thus retained a practical significance for both scholars and librarians. It had even more meaning in that the instruments used for orientation within the royal collections often dated back to before the acquisition, since they had been redacted by scholars for their private use: to identify manuscripts from the Brienne collection which would be useful for their research, in 1753 Abbot de Beauchesne and Abbot Quesnel borrowed the two volumes of the inventory kept in the Louvois fonds, whilst Cardinal de Soubise used the catalogue from the Lancelot fonds⁷⁹. In some ways, these collections continued to constitute a library sub-system within the royal establishment.

Paris' Royal Library is probably a borderline case. The power of the institution and the absence of any central royal archives combined to make it a para-archival entity recognised as such by its contemporaries. Further research is needed to assess the peculiarity of the French case in comparison to other similar institutions. Nonetheless, this case study serves as a reminder that in Paris and elsewhere, in the early modern era the 'taste for archives' was significantly developed in libraries – as it still is today. The

⁷⁵ The collections were then distributed by theme within the printed document fonds: see the *Catalogue des livres imprimés de la bibliothèque du roi*, 6 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1739-53). The Lancelot portfolios were transferred back to the manuscript department in the 19th century (BnF, NAF 9632-9826).

⁷⁶ In the nineteenth century, Champollion-Figeac once again separated the original items from the copies, bound in six volumes following on from the collection.

⁷⁷ Le Prince, *Essai historique*, 155-156.

⁷⁸ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 123. There are numerous examples. See also « ms de Gagnière n° 131 et nouveau n° du Roy 1245 » borrowed by Dom Duval in 1741.

⁷⁹ BnF, Arch. adm., AR 123, 45-46. The first is the Le Tellier-Louvois 101 and 102 manuscript, now ms. fr. 4259-4260.

renewed attention historians are paying to the history of documentary corpuses, along with the historicisation of scholarly practices, will help to renew questions relating to the history of libraries, just as they have done for the history of archives.

(translated from the French by Christopher Hinton)

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