

REVUE

# Voltaire



**VOLTAIRE DANS  
LE MONDE GERMANIQUE**

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**20**

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V20 · IV. Historians and politicians in an unpublished manuscript of Voltaire · Guido G. Beduschi

# REVUE Voltaire

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# VOLTAIRE DANS LE MONDE GERMANIQUE

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Bengesco	Georges Bengesco, <i>Voltaire. Bibliographie de ses œuvres</i> , Paris, Librairie académique Perrin, 1882-1890, 4 vol.
BnC	<i>Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale. Auteurs : t. 214 ; Voltaire</i> , éd. H. Frémont et autres, Paris, 1978, 2 vol.
BV	M. P. Alekseev et T. N. Kopreeva, <i>Bibliothèque de Voltaire : catalogue des livres</i> , Moscou, 1961.
CL	Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister et autres, <i>Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique</i> , éd. M. Tourneux, Paris, Garnier, 1877-1882, 16 vol.
CN	<i>Corpus des notes marginales de Voltaire</i> , Berlin/Oxford, Akademie-Verlag/Voltaire Foundation, 1979- [8 vol. parus].
D	Voltaire, <i>Correspondence and related documents</i> , éd. Th. Besterman, OCV, t. 85-135, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1968-1977.
<i>Dictionnaire général de Voltaire</i>	R. Trousson et J. Vercauteren (dir.), <i>Dictionnaire général de Voltaire</i> , Paris, H. Champion, 2003.
<i>Encyclopédie</i>	<i>Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres</i> , Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751-1765, 17 vol. ; <i>Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques, avec leur explication</i> , Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1762-1772, 9 vol.
Ferney	George R. Havens et Norman L. Torrey, <i>Voltaire's catalogue of his library at Ferney</i> , SVEC, no 9 (1959).
Fr.	Manuscrits français (BnF).
<i>Inventaire Voltaire</i>	J. Goulemot, A. Magnan et D. Masseur (dir.), <i>Inventaire Voltaire</i> , Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Quarto », 1995.
κ84	<i>Œuvres complètes de Voltaire</i> , [Kehl], Société littéraire typographique, 1784-1789, 70 vol. in-8o.
M	Voltaire, <i>Œuvres complètes</i> , éd. L. Moland, Paris, Garnier, 1877-1882, 52 vol.
n.a.fr.	Nouvelles acquisitions françaises (BnF).
OCV	<i>Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire / The Complete Works of Voltaire</i> , Oxford, Voltaire Foundation [édition en cours].
OH	Voltaire, <i>Œuvres historiques</i> , éd. R. Pomeau, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1957.

- OUSE *Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation.
- SVEC *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation.
- VST R. Pomeau, R. Vaillot, Ch. Mervaud et autres, *Voltaire en son temps*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd., Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1995, 2 vol.
- W75G Voltaire, *La Henriade, divers autres poèmes et toutes les pièces relatives à l'épopée*, Genève, [Cramer et Bardin], 1775, 40 vol. in-8o [édition dite « encadrée »].

*Varia*



HISTORIANS AND POLITICIANS  
IN AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT OF VOLTAIRE<sup>1</sup>

Guido G. Beduschi  
University of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College

The Library of the Sorbonne holds an unpublished manuscript of a single sheet, containing the copy of a text of Voltaire and some original notes of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1665-1746), marquis of Torcy, secretary of state for foreign affairs under Louis XIV and nephew of *Le Grand Colbert*.<sup>2</sup> Voltaire's text was taken from a lost letter, dated 29 May 1740 and addressed to Louis François Armand de Vignerot du Plessis (1696-1788), 3<sup>rd</sup> duke of Richelieu and Marshal of France. The duke of Richelieu, great-grandnephew of Cardinal Richelieu, and man of considerable influence at the French court, corresponded with Voltaire for over fifty years, sign of their longstanding friendship.<sup>3</sup> The duke of Richelieu, or one of his secretaries, copied the contents (or an extract) of Voltaire's original letter to the duke on a sheet of paper bearing an earlier text, which the letter describes as "*notes de la main de m. le m. de torci*". The manuscript is pasted inside a first volume of the *Istoria delle Guerre avvenute in Europa e particolarmente in Italia per la Successione alla Monarchia delle Spagne* (*History of the wars which happened in Europe, and Particularly in Italy, for the succession to the Spanish monarchy*), written by the Florentine count-marquis Francesco Maria Ottieri (1665-1742).<sup>4</sup> Torcy's notes, in fact, concern the

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- 1 I am very grateful to William O'Reilly, Antonella Alimento, Damien Charlotin, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. Thanks are also due to Emma Spary for her paleographic expertise, and the editors of the *Revue Voltaire* for all the assistance.
- 2 For an in-depth study of Colbert de Torcy's activity within the emerging French bureaucratic monarchy, see John C. Rule and Ben S. Trotter, *A World of Paper. Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy and the Rise of the Information State*, Montreal/Kingstown, McGill-Queen's UP, 2014. See also Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System*, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- 3 The first known letter dates from 1722, the last from 1778. See *OCV*, vol.132: *List of letters: alphabetical* (1976), pp.479-81. On Voltaire's side, however, the friendship was not completely disinterested: see *VST*, vol.1, p.236.
- 4 Paris, Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne (BIS), Salle de Réserve, Magasin A316 (RIC 3 = 57), Francesco Maria Ottieri, *Istoria delle Guerre avvenute in Europa e particolarmente in Italia*

contents of Ottieri's *Istoria* and were listed by the former minister while reading the book, which he had previously borrowed from Voltaire<sup>5</sup>; they consist of a brief list of the contents of the book (page numbers and short summaries), with which the French minister disagreed. Voltaire's letter, in fact, had the dual function of presenting the duke of Richelieu with both Ottieri's book, and Torcy's accompanying notes.

The full transcription of the manuscript is given below, followed by three analytical sections. The first considers Ottieri's historical work, and the historian's attitude to historical sources. The second focuses on Voltaire as historian; it compares his historical writing with Bolingbroke's views on history, and argues that the works of both writers imply an early eighteenth-century demand for an authoritative voice on modern history (embodied by Torcy, in Voltaire's case, and by Bolingbroke himself, in that of the Tory minister). Finally, the third section concerns Voltaire's historical sources for the *Siècle*; it considers a quarrel between Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle and Voltaire regarding the latter's use of Torcy's manuscripts as primary sources for his history. Each of the three sections examines Voltaire's historical method, in order to investigate his understanding of authoritative sources for the history of recent events.

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#### THE MANUSCRIPT<sup>6</sup>

[verso]

P[ou]r M. Le Duc De Richelieu<sup>7</sup>

---

[recto]

ces notes [*inkblot*] de la main de m. le m. de torci, a qui j'avais prete ce livre et que j'avais prie de marquer les faits qui ne se trouveraient pas conforme a la verite, dont personne ne pouvait estre aussi bien instruit que lui qui etait ministre et secretaire detat des affaires estrangeres pendant le cours de cette negotiation

---

*per la Successione alla Monarchia delle Spagne*, Roma, Rocco Bernabò, *et al.*, 1728-56, 8 vol. The book's binding is decorated with the coat of arms of the 3<sup>rd</sup> duke of Richelieu, tooled in gold.

5 Voltaire reported this fact in his *Supplément au Siècle de Louis XIV*, *OCV*, vol.32c (2012), p.316.

6 The original spelling and punctuation have been retained. The spelling of the letter does not appear to be Voltaire's, which suggests that whoever copied its contents from the original must have changed the spelling. For each of Torcy's annotations, the relevant passage of the *Istoria* has been given in a footnote.

7 This note on the verso of the leaf is in a different and unknown handwriting.



il ma remits le livre avec les endroits quil na pas trouve vrais qui sont ici et ce  
 petit nombre de faute apres un examen aussi important ma paru devoir rendre  
 le livre dun prix inestimable ++++++++  
 ce 29 mai 1740

P 119<sup>8</sup>. Ljn[ten]tion du f[eu] R[oi] n'a jam[ai]s [été] de f[air]e tomber d[e] Sa  
 fam[il]le R[oyal]e la Succe[ssi]ôn d'Esp[agn]e  
 131<sup>9</sup> Les dégouts q[ue] le P[ap]e J[nnocent] XII reçeut de l'Emp[ereu]r  
 n'entrèrent en rien de ce qui regarde la Suc[cessi]on d'Esp[agn]e  
 134<sup>10</sup> P[ortocarre]ro ni aucun au[tr]e Min[istr]e Esp[agno]l n'ont été gagez  
 par la fr[anc]e  
 152<sup>11</sup> Le M[aréch]al d'har[cour]t n'eút p[as] d'arg[en]t a r[e]p[an]dre & ne  
 rendit p[as] un S[ou]

- 8 Following the treaty of Ryswick, Louis XIV returned to Spain the Spanish Netherlands and Catalonia. Ottieri, explains that “*la mira sua* [of the king of France] *era unicamente di agevolare al suo sangue la successione di Carlo II, onde egli potesse poi appagare l'animo suo, con diventare l'arbitro dell'Europa.* [The only aim (of the king of France) was to engineer the succession of Charles II so that it passed to his blood, whence he could have the satisfaction of becoming the arbiter of Europe.]” (Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol. I, pp. 118-9).
- 9 According to Ottieri, Innocent XII had several reasons to be displeased with H.R.E Leopold I; moreover, the pope was turned against the Habsburgs by cardinal de Janson. “*avvenne, che Innocenzo cominciò a poco a poco, credendolo interesse della Santa Sede, de' suoi sudditi, e anche per rapporto alla tranquillità d'Italia, ad avere una maggiore propensione verso il Re di Francia, che verso l'Imperatore; donde poi in gran parte addivenne, che nella successione delle Spagne fosse preferito all'Arciduca il Nipote del Re Cristianissimo.* [it happened that Innocent began little by little, believing that it was in the interest of the Holy See, of his subjects, and also with respect to the tranquillity of Italy, to have a greater inclination towards the king of France, than towards the emperor; hence, it then largely happened, that in the Spanish succession, it was preferred the grandson of the Most Christian Majesty to the archduke.]” (*ibid.*, p. 131).
- 10 “[Cardinal Portocarrero] *non era in quel tempo [in 1697] guadagnato dalla Francia, come fu indi a poco, quando divenne nemico scoperto, prima dell'Almirante [Juan Tomás Enríquez de Cabrera, Admiral of Castile], e susseguentemente della Regina [Maria Anna of Neuburg].* [Portocarrero was not, at that time, in the pay of France, as he would be shortly thereafter, when he openly became an enemy first of the admiral of Castile, and later of the queen.]” (*ibid.*, p. 134).
- 11 “*Arrigo Marchese di Harcurt [Henry d'Harcourt] [...] essendo stato ben istruito del modo, con cui si doveva contenere, e provvisto de' mezzi opportuni, cominciò dal primo giorno del suo privato ingresso a Madrid [in 1697], a spargere denaro in somme considerabili ad ogni genere di persone, affettando generosità, anche nel pagare gli artigiani, e nel comprare le robe da' mercanti, non che nel regalare quelli, che potevano al suo intento giovare.* [Henry d'Harcourt, being well instructed in how to behave, and provided with appropriate means, began, from the first day following his private entrance in Madrid, to distribute considerable sums of money to all kinds of people, exhibiting generosity with ostentation even in paying artisans, and buying things from merchants, as well as in making presents to those who could have been beneficial to his intentions.]” (*ibid.*, p. 152).

153<sup>12</sup> ne fit pas vn pas p[ou]r La conserva[ti]ón des govern[ement]s des P[ays] b[as] & de Mil[a]n a lElect[eu]r ni a V[au]d[e]m[on]t

205<sup>13</sup> Art[icle] de Monterey f[au]x.

les fr[anç]ois evoyoient de March[andi]ses aux J[n]d[es] co[mm]é les au[tr]és N[at]ions S[ou]s le nom des Esp[agno]ls. P 211<sup>14</sup>

P 235<sup>15</sup> Offres f[ai]tes par Harc[our]t de révnir Le P[ortug]al a L Esp[agn]e et rendre le R[oussi]l[l]on

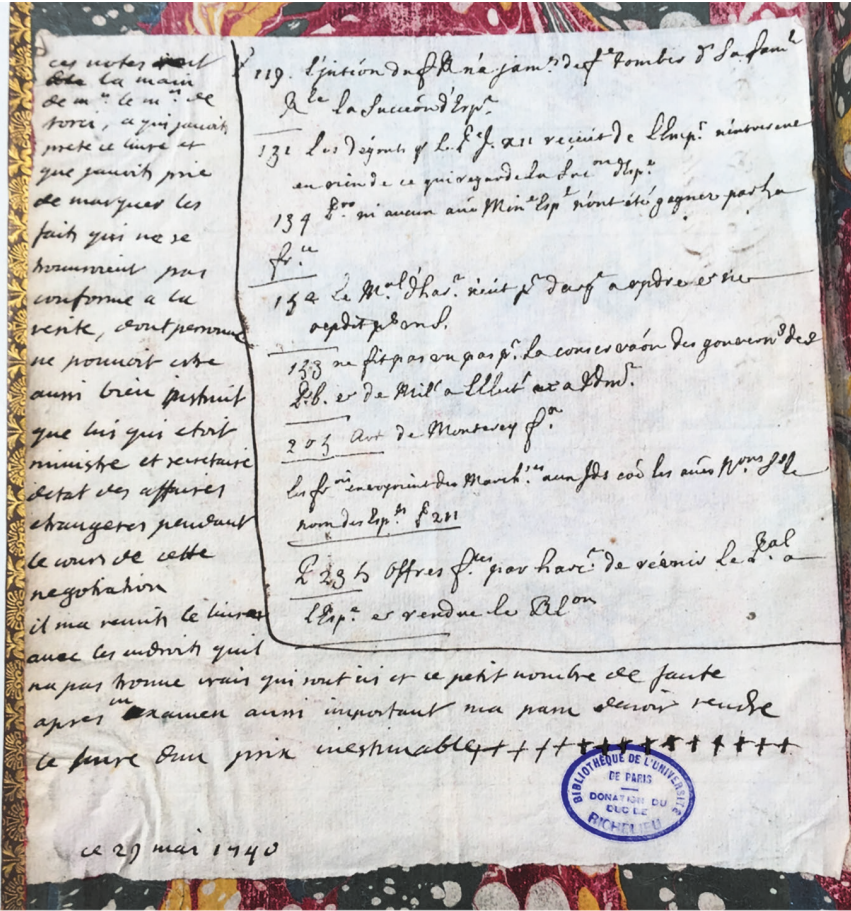
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12 “*Procurò [Harcourt] sopra tutto di rompere le pretensioni, e le misure del Ministro Cesareo [Ferdinand Bonaventura I, count of Harrach] circa il far torre il governo di Fiandra all'Elettore di Baviera [Maximilian II Emanuel, elector of Bavaria], e quello di Milano al Principe di Vodemont [Charles Henri of Lorraine, prince of Vaudémont]. I due Governatori non erano per certo amici della Francia, anzi nella guerra passata [the Nine Years' War] erano stati suoi nemici [...]; ma troppo peggio sarebbe stato, che nella Fiandra fosse andato un Principe della Casa Palatina, legata strettamente coll'Imperatore in più modi, e in Milano l'Arciduca Carlo. [Henry d'Harcourt managed to refute the claims, and frustrate the scheme of the imperial minister, of having the government of Flanders removed from the elector of Bavaria, and that of Milan from the Prince of Vaudémont. The two governors were certainly not friends of France, on the contrary in the previous war, they had been her enemies [...]; but it would have been much worse if a prince of the House of Palatinate, strictly tied to the emperor in many ways, had gone to Flanders, and archduke Charles to Milan.]” (ibid., p.153).*

13 “*[I Grandi di Spagna e i Ministri] tratti dalle cortesie e compiacenti maniere del medesimo [Harcourt], dai suoi discorsi, [...] e da altri motivi, tanto più efficaci, quanto meno saputi, molti di loro si raffreddarono, alcuni si ritirarono dal partito Cesareo, e altri, tra' quali fu il primo conte di Monterrey [Juan Domingo de Zuñiga y Fonseca, count of Monterrey], si gettarono scopertamente al partito Franzese: E siccome il Conte era una delle migliori teste del Regio Consiglio, così il suo esempio, e le sue operazioni fecero poi grandissimo pregiudizio all'Imperadore. [Among the grandees of Spain and the ministers, who had been seduced by the polite and complacent manners of Harcourt, by his speeches, (...) and by other factors, all the more effective since less known – many cooled, some abandoned the imperial faction, and others, including the first count of Monterrey, rushed to the French side: and since the count was one of the best heads of the Royal Council, so his example and his actions later inflicted the greatest damage on the emperor.]” (ibid., p.205).*

14 Thanks to Harcourt's skilful diplomacy: “*non solo gli si permise, ma furono accettate volentieri ne' porti della Spagna quante galee, e vascelli, piacque [al Cristianissimo] di mandarvi, che [...] avrebbero in altro tempo, e in altra congiuntura data grandissima suggezione al Governo, e non si sarebbero volute accettare [...] ne per ragione di stato, ne del traffico nell'Indie, che fin allora non si era mai voluto accordare a' Franzesi, i quali dipoi vi s'introdussero, negoziandovi sotto coperta degli Spagnuoli con danno gravissimo del Cattolico, defraudato da essi nel pagamento de soliti dazj, e delle gabelle. [not only was His Most Christian Majesty allowed to send as many galleys and vessels as he wished to the Spanish ports, but these were willingly accepted, which (...) in another time and situation would have greatly intimidated the (Spanish) government, and would have not been willingly accepted (...) for reasons of state, and of the trade with the West Indies – that, until then, had always been denied to the French. Afterwards, the latter entered into trade themselves, negotiating under Spanish cover and inflicting the greatest damage on His Catholic Majesty, deprived by them of the payment of the usual taxes and duties.]” (ibid., p.211).*

15 In a private meeting with the queen of Spain, Harcourt enumerated the advantages that would derive from the succession of Philip of Anjou: “*Oltre le suddette proposizioni [...], ne furono fatte altre in vantaggio della Nazione Spagnuola, avendo il Cristianissimo esibito di restituire la Contea di Rossiglione alla Spagna, e di unire le sue armi alle loro per la conquista del Portogallo, e di altre Provincie, sottrattesi dal dominio del Cattolico dopo la morte di Carlo V. [Besides the abovementioned proposals (...), some others were made to the advantage of the Spanish nation, His Most Christian Majesty having expressed the intention to return*



1. A copy of a letter from Voltaire to the duke of Richelieu (29 May 1740), written in the margin of earlier notes by Colbert de Torcy, in BIS (RIC 3= 57).

### OTTIERI'S ISTORIA

Voltaire chronicled the political events of the period from 1696 to 1700 in chapters 16 and 17 of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*.<sup>16</sup> In particular, chapter 17 narrates the death of Charles II of Spain (1700), and the king's last will and testament. In late 1728, a detailed historical account of the years 1696-1700 had already been offered by Ottieri in the first volume of his history of the

the County of Roussillon to Spain, and to unite his armies with theirs in order to reconquer Portugal, and the other provinces, which had been taken from the dominions of His Catholic Majesty after the death of Charles V.]” (*ibid.*, p.235).

16 The *Siècle* is divided into 39 chapters; of these, the first 24 cover Louis's life, and offer an exhaustive account of his 72-year reign.

Spanish succession. However, a few weeks after its publication, the first volume had been withdrawn, and placed on the Index of Prohibited Books. In 1735, Voltaire borrowed Ottieri's book from the *Bibliothèque du Roi* as part of his research for the *Siècle*,<sup>17</sup> but later he managed to purchase a copy of his own.<sup>18</sup> In that period, he was drafting the *Siècle de Louis XIV* – which he had started in 1732.<sup>19</sup> Considering Ottieri's *Istoria* an “extremely” rare book,<sup>20</sup> sometime between the year 1735 and 1740 he lent his own copy to Colbert de Torcy, interested in his opinion.<sup>21</sup> In fact, by lending the book to Torcy, a minister under Louis XIV and a protagonist of the events narrated by Ottieri – events which, at that time, he was himself narrating in the *Siècle* – Voltaire was seeking corroboration of the veracity of the book's contents.<sup>22</sup>

In mid-1739 Voltaire moved to Brussels with his companion, Émilie du Châtelet and, later that year, published an outline and the first two chapters of his *Siècle*.<sup>23</sup> By 1740, he had, most likely, finished using Ottieri's history as a source of information for the *Siècle*, when he decided to give his copy of the book to the duke of Richelieu, together with Colbert de Torcy's notes, which represented a guarantee of sorts for the veracity of the book's contents. As stated in the copy of Voltaire's letter to Richelieu which accompanied the book and

17 See the list of books borrowed by Voltaire from the *Bibliothèque du Roi*. *OCV*, vol.11B (2019), p.331. Voltaire freely translated into French a passage from Ottieri's *Istoria* (concerning a papal letter to Charles II of Spain), and inserted it in the *Siècle*. *OCV*, vol.13B (2015), p.303. For other references to Ottieri's *Istoria* in the *Siècle*, see *OCV*, vol.13A (2015), p.206; vol.13B, p.291, 294, 300-303.

18 *OCV*, vol.13B, p.294, n.12. Years later, Voltaire expressed interest in purchasing the remaining volumes of Ottieri's *Istoria*. In October 1755, Nicolas-Claude Thieriot (1697-1772), who often provided Voltaire with books, wrote to the *philosophe* that he had received in Paris the rest of Ottieri's *Istoria* (“*la suite de l'histoire du Comte Ottieri*”), in five volumes of (D6529). In his response, Voltaire asked Thieriot for a catalogue of his books in English and Italian, but only when he had “*toutte l'histoire d'Ottieri*”. If he was preferred to other customers – Voltaire continued – he would pay Thieriot “*sur le champ*” (D6570). However, Ottieri's volumes do not figure in BV, nor in George R. Havens and Norman L. Torrey, “Voltaire's catalogue of his library at Ferney”, *SVEC* 9 (1959).

19 *VST*, vol.1, p.660.

20 Voltaire, *Supplément au Siècle*, *OCV*, vol.32c, p.316.

21 In his letter of 4 August 1738 to Frederick II, Voltaire wrote: “*Mr de Torcy m'a juré qu'il ne savoit rien du testament du Roy d'Espagne Charles second*” (D1574). This would imply that, at the time, the *philosophe* had already discussed the matter with the former minister.

22 Marc Serge Rivière, “Voltaire's use of eyewitnesses' reports in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, with special reference to the *Mémoires de Torcy*”, *New Zealand Journal of French Studies*, no.2 (1988), p.5-26.

23 These chapters are printed in the *Recueil de pièces fugitives en prose et en vers*, Paris [Rouen], 1740 [1739]. The work was immediately seized by the authorities, and on 4 December 1739 condemned to be burned by the *parlement* of Paris. Overestimating the influence of his protectors, Voltaire had assumed the role of historiographer of Louis XIV. However, his praise of the Sun King was perceived by the authorities as an obvious critique of the mediocrity of his successor. *Arrêt du conseil d'État qui ordonne la suppression de feuilles imprimées sous le titre de Recueil de Pièces fugitives, en prose et en vers (par M. de V...)*, Paris, de l'Imprimerie Royale, 1739; *VST*, vol.1, p.373, 381; *OCV*, vol.11A (2019), pp.100-5.

notes: “[Torcy] ma remits le livre avec les endroits quil na pas trouve vrais qui sont ici et ce petit nombre de faute apres un examen aussi important ma paru devoir rendre le livre dun prix inestimable”. In the Spanish question, Torcy had played a crucial role: as France’s minister of state for foreign affairs he was, in fact, the architect of the Bourbon succession to the Spanish throne, and of the Treaty of Utrecht.<sup>24</sup> The former minister embodied, in Voltaire’s eyes, an expert of recent political history – of those events that he had not only directly witnessed, but which, sometimes, he had also shaped, with and by his political activity. As Voltaire wrote to Richelieu, Torcy’s authority stemmed from the fact that: “personne ne pouvait estre aussi bien instruit que lui qui etait ministre et secretaire detat des affaires estrangeres pendant le cours de cette negotiation”.

Francesco Maria Ottieri was born in Florence in 1665 into an old family of imperial vassals.<sup>25</sup> Having reached the age of majority, he undertook a long journey across Europe, during which he visited France, England, the Low Countries, Germany, Austria and Hungary. Having returned to Italy, he settled in Rome and started a family. He first entered the Roman court of queen dowager Marie Casimire of Poland as Master of the Chamber,<sup>26</sup> and eventually, in 1721, the papal court of Innocent XIII, as Master of the Horse – an honorific office which Ottieri would retain for the rest of his life.<sup>27</sup> In 1716, he had begun work on a multi-volume account of European history, with a particular focus on Italy, from the year 1696, eventually reaching the year 1725. When, in 1729, the *Istoria*, was placed on the Index of Prohibited Books (as mentioned above), the author was suspended from office, and forced to flee Rome to avoid arrest.<sup>28</sup> The reason for the harsh repression of the volume, which Ottieri had dedicated to pope Benedict XIII, was prompted by the reaction of the French cardinal Melchior de Polignac (1661-1741),<sup>29</sup> although imperial authorities in Rome, Naples and Vienna were not pleased either.<sup>30</sup>

Cardinal de Polignac was, at that time, the representative of the king of France in Rome, but before that he had been his representative in Poland – and his activity there was recounted in Ottieri’s book. In recounting the Polish

24 See J.C. Rule and B.S. Trotter, *A World of Paper*, pp.124-32 and 371-3.

25 The only biography of Francesco Maria Ottieri was written by his son Lottario: Lottario Ottieri, *Vita di Francesco Maria Ottieri*, Roma, per Generoso Salomoni, 1758.

26 F.M. Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol.I, pp.164-5.

27 *Ibid.*, pp.xix-xx.

28 The decree, issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Index, condemned the *Istoria* for “*expressiones offensivas, et iniuriosas*” against princes, ministers and nations. *Decretum Sacrae Congregationis* (Roma, 10 February 1729).

29 Francesco Valesio, *Diario di Roma*, eds Gaetano Scano and Giuseppe Graglia, Milano, Longanesi & C., 1979, 6 vol., vol.IV, pp.1014-5.

30 Giuseppe Ricuperati, *L’esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone*, Milano/Napoli, R. Ricciardi, 1970, pp.380-1.

royal election of 1697, the historian portrays the cardinal as an incompetent diplomat, who was unable to secure the throne for the French candidate, the prince of Conti.<sup>31</sup> Once the cardinal had dispatched a copy of the *Istoria* to Paris, several other passages were found to be as offensive and provocative towards the late king Louis XIV and his ministers.<sup>32</sup> However, following the mediation of Ottieri's father-in-law, the well-connected marquis Maidalchini, the historian was eventually pardoned and, just under two months later, reinstated to his Roman office. Ottieri continued to write and revise his history for the rest of his life, but decided not to publish the remaining volumes, which would be printed by his son Lottario, ten years after his death in 1742.<sup>33</sup>

In the *Istoria*, Ottieri did not cite his historical sources. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions, such as when the historian referred – usually in a polemical tone – to the work of the Venetian Pietro Garzoni (1654-1735),<sup>34</sup> whose history had been printed in Venice, ten years before the *Istoria*.<sup>35</sup> In one case, he also revealed the reason behind his habit of not reporting the sources:

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Senator Pietro Garzoni gave the public information about this treaty in the second book of his history [...], consequently we are obliged to him for it. We have in that part violated our first intention, and the rules of he who writes the history of his own times, which is that he is not obliged to report justifications of what he is saying, and even less report the documents of the contemporary writers; but [...] I convinced myself to depart from the convention this once, and the teaching of those who gave the precepts to the historian, distinguishing from those who, writing of the facts of the preceding centuries, to be believed must attach the documents, and texts, or indicate at least from where he obtained this information, whereas he who recounts the facts that take place in his own times deserves to be believed, because one must certainly believe that he had seen himself, or learned from wise and informed men, everything he is recounting.<sup>36</sup>

31 F. M. Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol. I, pp. 186-8.

32 In the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome is a manuscript by cardinal Neri Corsini (1685-1770), concerning the injurious passages of Ottieri's *Istoria*. *Mss. Corsini*, 2520, pezzo n.9. See Silvia Grassi, "Le implicazioni politiche di un'impresa editoriale: la *Istoria* della Guerra di Successione Spagnola di F. M. Ottieri", in Vittor Ivo Comparato, Eugenio Di Rienzo and Silvia Grassi (eds), *L'Europa nel XVIII secolo. Studi in onore di Paolo Alatri*, Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1991, 2 vol., vol. I, pp. 535-49, at pp. 542-6.

33 The remaining seven volumes of the *Istoria* were published by Lottario Ottieri between 1752 and 1756. Ermete Rossi, "La disgrazia di uno storico", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, no. 12 (1944), pp. 35-52, at pp. 52-3.

34 For an example of this, see *Istoria*, vol. I, p. 78.

35 *Istoria della Repubblica di Venezia, ove insieme narrasi la Guerra per la Successione delle Spagne al Re Carlo II*, Venezia, appresso Gio. Manfrè, 1716.

36 "Il Senator Pietro Garzoni diede al pubblico la notizia di questo trattato nel libro secondo della sua *istoria* [...], onde a lui se ne dee l'obbligazione. Abbiamo in quella parte contravvenuto

Moreover, in the book's preface, Ottieri also suggested that, by citing his sources, he would have exposed the names of the people who had provided him with documents and memoirs against their wishes.<sup>37</sup> The reader was simply supposed to trust his historical narrative. Unlike other historians, such as Garzoni, Ottieri claimed not to suffer from political constraints.<sup>38</sup> His family origins, as imperial vassals, did not require, in fact, any other obligation but "*un vassallaggio lontano*", which allowed him to compose his history "*in piena libertà*."<sup>39</sup> However, according to his son Lottario, his connection to the Habsburgs made him, in the eyes of many, "*un uomo troppo politico*", and delayed his integration into the papal court.<sup>40</sup>

As was the case for Voltaire after him,<sup>41</sup> Ottieri's usual omission of direct references to his historical sources was criticised. Following the condemnation of the *Istoria* in 1729, Giusto Fontanini (1666-1736) wrote to the cardinal de Polignac to justify his collaboration with Ottieri.<sup>42</sup> Having said that he was not aware of Ottieri's intention to publish the book, and that he did not approve of its contents, Fontanini claimed that he had even, in vain, suggested to the author that he cite the sources of his work: "*allegare i fonti, donde si cavavano le narrazioni*".<sup>43</sup> Fontanini's suggestion would imply that the insertion of the sources would have prevented the history from being refuted as fabrication and slander – but also justified Ottieri, and alleviated suspicions of a political intent behind his work.

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*al primo nostro proposito, e alle regole di chi scrive la storia de' suoi tempi, che non è obbligato di portare le giustificazioni di ciò, che dice, e tanto meno di produrre i documenti degli scrittori contemporanei; ma [...] ci siamo indotti a dipartirci per questa fiata dallo stile comune, e dall'insegnamento di chi diede i precetti all'istorico, con far distinzione, da chi, scrivendo i fatti de' secoli antecedenti, dee per esser creduto allegare le scritture, e i testi, o denotare al meno donde ricavò le notizie, laddove quegli, che narra i fatti seguiti a suoi tempi, merita fede, perchè si dee certamente stimare, che abbia veduto da se stesso, o saputo da uomini savi, e informati tutto ciò, che racconta.*" (F.M. Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol.II, pp.58-9).

37 F.M. Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol.I, p.xxii.

38 By political constraints are meant the limitations imposed by a government on the work of the historian. Ottieri suggested that the historical narrative of Pietro Garzoni and Camillo Contarini (1664-1722) had been constrained by the Venetian state: "*Ne tralascio infinite altre [operazioni], che io ho avuto modo senza suggezione di narrare, laddove essi [Garzoni e Contarini] [...] per esser Nobili d'una gran Repubblica, o non vollero; o non seppero raccontare. [I omit innumerable other examples, which I could recount freely, whereas Garzoni and Contarini [...] for being nobles of a great republic, either did not want to, or were not able to tell.]*" (*ibid.*, p.xxxi-xxxii).

39 "a distant vassalage", "in complete liberty" (*ibid.*, p.xxii).

40 "an overly political man" (L. Ottieri, *Vita di Francesco Maria Ottieri*, p.9).

41 See below, n.71.

42 In the preface to the *Istoria*, Fontanini is presented as one of the book's revisers. F.M. Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol.I, p.xxiv.

43 "to attach the sources, from where the narratives were taken". Fontanini's reply to Polignac, dated 11 February 1729, was published in Domenico Fontanini, *Memorie della vita di Monsignor Giusto Fontanini, arcivescovo di Ancira, canonico della Basilica di S. Maria Maggiore e abate di Sesto*, Venezia, appresso Pietro Valvasense, 1755, p.126.

At the dawn of the French Revolution in 1789, Condorcet published his biography of Voltaire,<sup>44</sup> which suggested that the prolific writer had been the promoter of an eighteenth-century “revolution” in the way of writing history – until then developed by a select few members of Voltaire’s “school”, British historians David Hume, William Robertson and Edward Gibbon.<sup>45</sup> However, as stated by Nicholas Cronk, Voltaire’s histories, which during his lifetime were as popular as his works of theatre and poetry, are today “no longer widely read”.<sup>46</sup> Voltaire inaugurated a new kind of history, which could be described as Enlightenment “philosophical history” – in contrast to the “classical”, or “neoclassical”, history of authors such as Francesco Guicciardini and the earl of Clarendon.<sup>47</sup> As a “philosophical historian”, Voltaire did not focus exclusively on politics and warfare in his works, but also on religious, scientific and artistic (particularly literary) matters, pioneering an early form of cultural history.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, unlike other Enlightenment writers, the largest part of Voltaire’s historical writing is “devoted to the modern world”, rather than to the history of ancient and medieval times.<sup>49</sup> Voltaire explored in his histories “the defining characteristics of the modern world (the benefits of trade, the scientific

44 Condorcet’s *Vie de Voltaire* was originally published in the Kehl edition, *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (1784-89, 70 vol.). On this edition, see Linda Gil, *L’Édition Kehl de Voltaire. Une aventure éditoriale et littéraire au tournant des Lumières*, Paris, 2018, 2 vol., esp. chap.8: “L’édition des Lumières: un nouveau modèle éditorial pour les *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*”, vol.II, pp.1173-271; L. Gil, “De l’hommage à l’éloge: contribution à l’édification du mythe du ‘patriarche’ par Condorcet. L’édition de Kehl et la *Vie de Voltaire*”, *Revue Voltaire*, no.11, 2011, pp.153-66.

45 Nicolas de Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire*, Yverdon, de l’Imprimerie de la Société littéraire-typographique, 1789, pp.94-5. See also Pomeau, preface to Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, Paris, coll. “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade”, 1957, p.8. Condorcet’s “most prolific writing was as a eulogist and biographer, and he had a continuing interest in the idea of ‘a life’”. His *Vie de Voltaire* was an effort, mostly unsuccessful, to defend Voltaire against the charge of political insincerity.” (Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard UP, 2001, p.207).

46 Nicholas Cronk, *Voltaire: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2017, p.64.

47 Philip Hicks, “Bolingbroke, Clarendon, and the role of classical historian”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, no.20, 4, 1987, pp.445-71, at pp.469-71.

48 Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, New Haven/London, Yale UP, 1993, p.176. Arnaldo Momigliano argued that what is today considered « modern historiography » emerged from the combination, in the work of Edward Gibbon (1737-94), of the methodological advances, and attention to sources, of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century antiquarian historians (such as Le Clerc, Mabilion and Muratori), with the themes of enlightened historical writing, such as culture, trade and religion, as opposed to genealogy and warfare. Arnaldo Momigliano, “Gibbon’s contribution to historical method”, in Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography*, London, Harper & Row, 1966, pp.40-55; see also: Momigliano, “Eighteenth-century prelude to Mr. Gibbon”, *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1980, pp.249-63.

49 As compared to, for instance, Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, Amsterdam, Chez Jaques Desbordes, 1734. Montesquieu’s



revolution, religious toleration)", or "the flourishing culture of France during the previous century", as he withheld a utilitarian vision of history.<sup>50</sup>

In the *Siècle*, Voltaire is the first European historian fully to draw attention to figurative arts; as argued by Francis Haskell, he embraced the notion that the study of history could be of "philosophical value only if it concentrated on the worthwhile achievements of humanity [*such as laws, arts and sciences*], rather than on the essentially trivial ambitions of kings and courtiers". Arts were converted into a "yardstick" for the measurement of civilisation, instead of a "highly desirable addition" to the power of a state.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, arts and sciences are not integrated in the main substance of the *Siècle*, but are instead confined to a kind of supplement.<sup>52</sup> Despite the author's "noble pronouncements" to turn the spotlight on "*l'esprit des hommes*", in the *Siècle* much space is devoted to Louis XIV's military campaigns, and court politics – similarly to those "classical histories" of Larrey, Limiers and La Hode, of which Voltaire was so critical – and less to seventeenth-century French culture.<sup>53</sup> This certainly reflects Voltaire's own views on modern history. In a letter to the crown prince of Prussia, the future king Frederick II, dated 5 August 1738, Voltaire confessed that, in writing the *Siècle*, he had started to believe that: "*tout s'est fait entre les couronnes à peu près comme je vois se traiter toutes les affaires entre les particuliers*". In modern European politics, he continued, "[c]hacun a reçu de la nature l'envie de s'agrandir; une occasion paraît s'offrir, un intrigant la fait valoir; une femme gagnée par de l'argent, ou par quelque chose qui doit être plus fort, s'oppose à la négociation; une autre la renoue; les circonstances, l'humeur, un caprice, une méprise, un rien décide". With a certain sense of bitterness, he

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work would inspire Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London, Strahan & Cadell, 1776-89, 6 vol.

50 N. Cronk, "Voltaire, historian: constructing contemporary history in the Enlightenment", *Leverhulm Trust Newsletter* (January 2014), p.4. Cronk is referring to the *Lettres philosophiques* (1734, first published in English in 1733) and the *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), respectively.

51 F. Haskell, *History and its Images*, pp.201-2.

52 *Ibid.*, p.206.

53 M.S. Rivière, "Voltaire's use of Larrey and Limiers in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*: history as a science, an art and a philosophy", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, no.25 (1989), pp.36-7. This was noted by some of Voltaire's contemporaries, including La Beaumelle, who wrote: "*Il n'y parle que de guerres, conquêtes etc.; il détaille les malheurs des hommes, et ne dit pas un mot de leurs mœurs*" (p.37). Cf. Voltaire's programmatic introduction to the *Siècle*: "*Ce n'est pas seulement la Vie de Louis XIV qu'on prétend écrire; on se propose un plus grand objet. On veut essayer de peindre à la postérité, non les actions d'un seul homme, mais l'esprit des hommes dans le siècle le plus éclairé qui fût jamais. /Tous les temps ont produit des héros et des politiques: tous les peuples ont éprouvé des révolutions: toutes les histoires sont presque égales pour qui ne veut mettre que des faits dans sa mémoire. Mais quiconque pense, et ce qui est encore plus rare, quiconque a du goût, ne compte que quatre siècles dans l'histoire du monde. Ces quatre âges heureux, sont ceux où les arts ont été perfectionnés, et qui servant d'époque à la grandeur de l'esprit humain, sont l'exemple de la postérité.*" (OCV, vol.13A, p.1.)

concluded: “[i]l semble qu’il y ait un génie malin qui se plaise à confondre toutes les espérances des hommes, et à jouer avec la fortune des empires” (D1574).

It has been argued that viscount Bolingbroke inspired Voltaire’s historical writing with his *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, published posthumously in 1752 but in circulation since 1738.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, there exists an “undeniable similarity in their view of the study of history”; while their “predecessors [...] were concerned primarily with ancient history, [...] both Bolingbroke and the younger Voltaire were interested in modern history”.<sup>55</sup> To the *philosophe*, “the study of modern times was more precise than the study of ancient history, because sources were more numerous and more reliable”. Moreover, Voltaire considered that modern history, rather than ancient history, was “best placed to offer us instructive examples”, as “he want[ed] to teach the lessons of free thought and religious tolerance, and he turn[ed] to modern history for telling examples to prove his point”.<sup>56</sup> Along these lines, Voltaire and Frederick the Great’s *Anti-Machiavel* (1740) is therefore “full of real examples, taken from [modern] history”, as the authors sought to transfer François Fénelon’s attack on Machiavelli “from the realm of classical fantasy to the real historical circumstances of modern European monarchies”.<sup>57</sup> Yet, Voltaire came to realise that he was facing specific difficulties that his colleagues, who engaged with distant periods, and the ancient historians, did not encounter. As he wrote for the entry “Histoire”, in Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*: “*Mais en se modélant en général sur ces grands maîtres [Livy, Tacitus, Polybius], on a aujourd’hui un fardeau plus pesant que le leur à soutenir. On exige des historiens modernes plus de détails, des faits plus constatés, des dates précises, des autorités, plus d’attention aux usages, aux lois, aux mœurs, au commerce, à la finance, à l’agriculture, à la population. Il en est de l’histoire comme des Mathématiques & de la Physique. La carrière s’est prodigieusement accrue. Autant il est aisé de faire un recueil de gazettes, autant il est difficile aujourd’hui d’écrire l’histoire*”.<sup>58</sup> Although the information concerning recent events was copious and available to many via the gazettes, modern history was an activity for a select few, as it required

54 G.H. Nadel, “New light on Bolingbroke’s letters on history”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, no.234 (1962), p.556. Cf. John Mackinnon Robertson, *Bolingbroke and Walpole*, London, Unwin, 1919, pp.63-4.

55 G.H. Nadel, “New light on Bolingbroke’s letters on history”, p.556.

56 N. Cronk, “Voltaire, historian: constructing contemporary history in the Enlightenment”, p.4.

57 Isaac Nakhimovsky, “The enlightened prince and the future of Europe: Voltaire and Frederick the Great’s *Anti-Machiavel* of 1740”, in Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky, Richard Whatmore, *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2017, pp.44-77, at p.49.

58 Voltaire, “Histoire”, in Diderot and D’Alembert (eds), *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Neuchâtel [Paris], Chez Samuel Faulche & Compagnie, 1751-72, 28 vol., vol.VIII, p.225.

skills, expertise, and reliable sources – such as those Voltaire was convinced he had found in Colbert de Torcy.<sup>59</sup>

#### TORCY AS SOURCE OF THE *SIÈCLE*

In the *Siècle*, Voltaire makes direct reference to Colbert de Torcy as one of his favourite sources of information concerning French foreign policy.<sup>60</sup> He does so, for instance, when discussing the supposed existence of a Bourbon scheme, which would have – through the use of corruption – secured the Spanish throne for the duke of Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV.<sup>61</sup> This wide-spread view was, according to Voltaire, erroneous:

*On s'est cru obligé de faire connaître la simple vérité d'un fait jusqu'à présent obscurci par tant de ministres et d'historiens, séduits par leurs préjugés et par les apparences qui séduisent presque toujours. Tout ce qu'on a débité dans tant de volumes, d'argent répandu par le maréchal d'Harcourt,<sup>62</sup> et des ministres espagnols gagnés pour faire signer ce testament, est au rang des mensonges politiques, et des erreurs populaires.*

The question had significant political implications, as the existence of French bribes implied that the last will and testament of the long infirm, and manipulable, Charles II of Spain, was not valid. Voltaire, in order to refute such allegations, revealed his authoritative source in early editions of his work: “*Le marquis de Torcy, qui gouvernait alors les Affaires étrangères en France, a rendu un témoignage authentique à cette vérité, par un écrit que j'ai de sa main*”.<sup>63</sup>

In 1752, a year after the first edition of the *Siècle* appeared, the matter was raised again, when Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle published in Frankfurt an unauthorised, and fully annotated, reissue of Voltaire's history.<sup>64</sup> One of the

59 Voltaire denounced booksellers' practice of presenting such works as “*Histoire fidèle du temps*”, when – according to him – they merely contained selected information from gazettes and almanacs: “*De ces sortes de livres il y en a environ cinquante mille en Europe, et tout cela passe comme le secret de blanchir la peau, de noircir les cheveux et la panacée universelle.*” Article “Charlatan”, in *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, OCV, vol.40 (2009), p.42.

60 In the 1775 edition of the *Siècle* (the last to be overseen by the author), Colbert de Torcy is mentioned several times either in a footnote or directly in the text. Torcy's account influenced, for instance, Voltaire's view on the Peace of Ryswick of 1697. See OCV, vol.13b, pp.294-5 (n.12). On Voltaire's use of sources in the *Siècle*, see M. S. Rivière, “Voltaire's use of eyewitnesses' reports in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*”.

61 This direct reference to Colbert de Torcy disappears in the 1756 edition of the *Siècle*. That year, in fact, Torcy's memoirs had been published in The Hague, and Voltaire considered the reference in the *Siècle* superfluous. OCV, vol.13b, p.305 (n.60).

62 Henry d'Harcourt (1654-1718), French ambassador to Madrid from 1697.

63 Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, OCV, vol.13b, p.90 and variant to line 532.

64 Voltaire and La Beaumelle, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV par M. de Voltaire [...] nouvelle édition augmentée d'un très grand nombre de remarques, par M. de La B\*\*\**, Francfort, Chez la Veuve

many footnotes inserted by La Beaumelle, refers, in fact, to a passage in the *Siècle* concerned with the absence of French bribes in the matter of the Spanish succession; in it, La Beaumelle outspokenly accuses Voltaire of suffering from the same prejudice that he had attributed to other historians, by questioning his correct understanding of the source he mentions – Torcy. As he wrote: “*On serait curieux de voir les propres paroles du marquis de Torcy. L’auteur qui les a eues pourrait les avoir mal comprises. On lit mal quand on lit avec préjugés.*”<sup>65</sup> Voltaire responded to La Beaumelle’s accusations the following year, with the *Supplément au Siècle de Louis XIV*; in it, he confirmed the historical narrative set out in the *Siècle* – namely that Louis XIV did not have recourse to corruption in Spain, or betray the Partition Treaties with England and the Netherlands (1698, 1700), in order to acquire the Spanish monarchy for the House of Bourbon. Once more, Voltaire reported his source of information, but this time with greater precision, as he even provided the location of Torcy’s manuscripts:

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*L’auteur du Siècle cite M. le marquis de Torcy alors ministre en France. Il atteste le témoignage authentique de ce secrétaire d’État; un La Beaumelle nie ce témoignage; il demande où il est. On répond, non à lui, mais à tous lecteurs, que ce témoignage se trouve dans les mémoires manuscrits de M. de Torcy, lesquels sont entre les mains de sa famille. On ne les confiera pas à La Beaumelle sans doute; mais ce manuscrit est assez connu. Un autre témoignage du marquis de Torcy se trouve encore écrit de sa main à la marge de l’histoire italienne de Louis XIV, par le comte Ottieri imprimée à Rome, et de laquelle la Beaumelle n’a jamais entendu parler. Cet ouvrage est extrêmement rare. Le cardinal de Polignac étant à Rome eut le crédit de le faire supprimer. M. de Voltaire procura la lecture de son exemplaire à M. le marquis de Torcy. Ottieri comme tous les autres historiens, imputait à Louis XIV le dessein de rompre le traité de partage et de faire tomber dans sa maison toute la monarchie d’Espagne. M. de Torcy réfute en peu de mots cette erreur si accréditée; et dit expressément que Louis XIV n’y a jamais pensé. Ce volume de comte Ottieri précieux par sa rareté et plus encore par la note du marquis de Torcy, a été donné par M. de Voltaire à M. le maréchal de Richelieu, qui le conserve dans sa bibliothèque.*<sup>66</sup>

The first source revealed in the *Supplément* is the manuscript of Torcy’s memoirs, which, three years later, would be published “*pour servir à l’Histoire*”.<sup>67</sup>

Knoch & J.G. Eslinger, 1753, 3 vol. The book cost La Beaumelle six months’ confinement in the Bastille, seemingly at Voltaire’s instigation. Claude Lauriol, *Études sur La Beaumelle, Vie des Huguenots*, no.42 (2008), especially « La Beaumelle et ses éditions annotées de Voltaire », pp.237-49.

65 Voltaire and La Beaumelle, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol.II, p.73.

66 *Supplément au Siècle*, OCV, vol.32c, pp.316-7.

67 Colbert de Torcy, *Memoires de M de \*\*\* pour servir a l’histoire des négociations depuis le traité de Riswick jusqu’à la paix d’Utrecht*, La Haye, 1756, 3 vol. Voltaire generally regarded

The second source, on the other hand, consists of some notes penned by Torcy, concerning, and contained in, Voltaire's first volume of the *Istoria* by Francesco Maria Ottieri. Once it had been presented to the duke of Richelieu in 1740, Voltaire's copy of the book and Torcy's notes were kept in the Richelieu family's library for almost two centuries, before they were donated, in 1933, to the Library of the Sorbonne.<sup>68</sup> As transcribed above, Torcy's notes concern, in total, only eight passages from Ottieri's 449-page volume: on the existence of French bribes; on Harcourt, the French ambassador in Madrid, not being provided with the necessary financial means to support the Bourbon cause; and with reference to the existence of French ambitions for the Spanish throne, words eventually paraphrased, in Voltaire's *Supplément*, into "*Louis XIV n'y a jamais pensé*".

In 1767, Voltaire returned once more to the content of Torcy's notes<sup>69</sup> – again to answer La Beaumelle's accusations of political insincerity. In the *Mémoire présenté au ministère*, he denounced La Beaumelle for having sent him ninety-five anonymous letters, and, not forgetting the 1752 unauthorised edition of the *Siècle*, he responded for a second time to his accusations. After having expounded on La Beaumelle's bad faith, Voltaire again referenced his source, which still supported his view of French non-involvement in Charles II's last will and testament:

*Toutes les cours restaient encore persuadées que Louis XIV avait dicté dans Versailles le testament que Charles II, roi d'Espagne, signa dans Madrid. L'auteur du Siècle n'avait alors pour garant du contraire que quelques mots de la main de M. le marquis de Torcy, qu'il conserve encore: La cour de Versailles n'y a eu aucune part. Ces mots sont en marge avec d'autres réponses à plusieurs questions.*<sup>70</sup>

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the secret memoirs of courtiers with suspicion: "*Les mémoires secrets des contemporains sont suspects de partialité; ceux qui écrivent une ou deux générations après, doivent user la plus grande circonspection, écarter le frivole, réduire l'exagéré, et combattre la satire.*" (OCV, vol.13c, p.2). This seems not to affect Torcy; Voltaire had "no reservations regarding the integrity and reliability" of Torcy, to whom he gave "pride of place amongst the officials who served Louis XIV in the latter part of his reign". M.S. Rivière, "Voltaire's use of eyewitnesses' reports in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*", p.10.

- 68 The book is part of the large donation of family papers made by the eighth and last duke of Richelieu (1875-1952). See Bibliothèque interuniversitaire Sorbonne, « Collections patrimoniales », <http://www.bibliotheque.sorbonne.fr/biu/spip.php?rubrique196> (accessed on 24 December 2019).
- 69 Voltaire alluded to Torcy's notes in 1770, apparently quoting what may or may not have been a genuine letter of 1762 to Damilaville: "*M. de Torcy fut le premier qui m'apprit, par une seule ligne en marge de mes questions, que Louis XIV n'eut jamais de part à ce fameux testament du roi d'Espagne Charles II, qui changea la face de l'Europe.*" Article "Ana, anecdotes", *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, OCV, vol.38 (2007), p.319.
- 70 *Mémoire présenté au ministère, et qui doit être mis à la tête de la nouvelle édition qu'on prépare du Siècle de Louis XIV* (1767), OCV, vol.65A (2011), pp.90-1, 96.

Voltaire's claim that, in 1767, he was still in possession of Torcy's notes, raises the question as to whether, at that time, he possessed another manuscript by the minister on the subject, which was not the one he had given to Richelieu in 1740. This argument can be further supported by the absence of any mention of "Versailles" in the notes considered in the present article.

Overall, historical sources are seldom reported in Voltaire's histories. Nevertheless, if someone questioned the veracity of their content, as was the case with La Beaumelle, it would seem that he was ready to respond to the accusation by reporting the source. Voltaire explained his choice of not reporting his sources in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764): "*Je n'aime point à citer; c'est d'ordinaire une besogne épineuse; on néglige ce qui précède et ce qui suit l'endroit qu'on cite, et on s'expose à mille querelles*".<sup>71</sup> The justification is hardly convincing; in fact, by omitting his historical sources in order to avoid *querelles*, concerning their selection and use, Voltaire did not save his histories from criticism. Some of his contemporaries, or close contemporaries, were well aware of the implications of such a choice, in relation to the veracity of historical works. The Scottish historian William Robertson, for instance, confessed that: "as [Voltaire] seldom imitates the example of modern historians, in citing the authors from whom they derived their information, I could not with propriety appeal to his authority in confirmation of any doubtful or unknown fact".<sup>72</sup>

In the first half of the eighteenth century, politicians were sometimes considered experts of recent political history, according to a long-standing tradition whereby retired men of action often turned into historians.<sup>73</sup> "Man of action" is here taken to mean an "aristocratic politician [...] now retired, who wrote a truthful account of contemporary politics and war for men of similar station".<sup>74</sup> Philip Hicks termed the historians-politicians as "classical historians", in contrast to the later eighteenth-century "philosophical historians". Viscount Bolingbroke belonged to this first category, aiming to justify his political career with a book of recent history, considering himself a new earl of Clarendon, who – fallen out of favour and exiled to France – had written a detailed history of the English Civil War, *The History of the Rebellion*.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, "Bolingbroke was not writing for any wider distribution [...]. Like Clarendon, [he] wrote for a band of intimates and for a posthumous audience. [...] [Bolingbroke's] full

71 Article "Bien, tout est bien", *Dictionnaire philosophique*, OCV, vol.35 (1996), p.421.

72 William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, London, W. and W. Strahan, 1769, 3 vol., vol.1, p.392.

73 Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words*, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard UP, 2009, p.43.

74 P. Hicks, "Bolingbroke, Clarendon, and the role of classical historian", p.447.

75 *Ibid.*, p.469.

history [...] like any true classical history, would not be given immediately to the public but left to them posthumously after manuscript circulation among friends”.<sup>76</sup> Voltaire shared a similar view of expertise in political theory, as he believed that prince and minister possessed the “unique authority to write about the mysteries of statecraft”.<sup>77</sup> This is reflected by the manuscript presented here – which shows Voltaire in pursuit of some sort of corroboration (from Torcy) of the veracity of the material (Ottieri’s *Istoria*) he had collected for his *Siècle de Louis XIV*.

During the same period, however, the idea that a historian of modern times could not possibly be a person involved in politics was also emerging, in parallel with greater methodological accuracy.<sup>78</sup> The authority on modern history was, rather, the non-politician, like Voltaire himself, or Ottieri, who did not need to defend, by their historical writings, any previous political activities. With his *Istoria*, a book concerning recent European history, opposed by both Versailles and Vienna, but appreciated by the erudite scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori,<sup>79</sup> Ottieri distanced himself from the previous generations of writers, such as Bolingbroke. In fact, like Voltaire, Ottieri wrote his book of recent history to inform a wide and varied readership, whom he addressed plainly in the preface to his work; it is the “*informazione del pubblico*”, which motivated the ill-fated publication of his work in 1728.<sup>80</sup>

Eighteenth-century readers were informed of events taking place in Europe and other parts of the world by a growing number of printed media, such as the first daily gazettes.<sup>81</sup> This stream of information concerning current affairs in turn stimulated the emergence of a new kind of historical writing concerning the recent past, which was methodologically more accurate and paid more attention to the nature of historical sources. Consequently, Voltaire, in writing

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.455-7.

<sup>77</sup> I. Nakhimovsky, “The enlightened prince and the future of Europe”, p.49, n.22.

<sup>78</sup> During the seventeenth century, the idea that the statesman “who had witnessed the making of history, was also the person, who could describe history most vividly and credibly” was increasingly undermined by scholarly scepticism, regarding the trustworthiness of any historical source (historical Pyrrhonism). Partly in response to this critique, eighteenth-century historians “argued for a more professional approach to the past and history writing increasingly became an academic enterprise.” Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “Relics of the past: antiquarianism and archival authority in enlightenment Germany”, in Filippo de Vivo and Maria Pia Donato (eds), *Scholarly Practices in the Archives, 1500-1800*, special issue of *Storia della Storiografia*, no.68/2 (2016), pp.69-81, at p.70-1. See also Anton M. Matytsin, *The Specter of Skepticism in the Age of Enlightenment*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 2016, chap.10.

<sup>79</sup> E. Rossi, “La disgrazia di uno storico”, pp.35-53; G. Ricuperati, *L’esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone*, pp.380-1.

<sup>80</sup> F.M. Ottieri, *Istoria*, vol.1, p.xvi.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Tony Claydon, “Daily news and construction of time in late Stuart England, 1695-1714”, *Journal of British Studies*, no.52 (January 2013), pp.55-78.

his *Siècle de Louis XIV* in the 1730s, obtained information from, and checked the reliability of, other sources with a former politician, Colbert de Torcy, who had witnessed many of the events the writer was recounting.<sup>82</sup> Like Bolingbroke, Voltaire considered politicians to be experts of modern history; however, this view could give rise to bias in his historical narrative, as denounced by some contemporaries, such as La Beaumelle. It is also the accusation of political insincerity that, over the course of more than two centuries, consigned Voltaire's histories to oblivion.<sup>83</sup> The truly authoritative voice of the early eighteenth century on modern history was in fact the non-politician, Francesco Maria Ottieri, who held honorific office at the Papal court, and whose history was opposed by French and Austrian authorities. And Voltaire diverged too, since, unlike Bolingbroke, he had no previous political career to defend in his historical writings.

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82 To some extent, however, Torcy constitutes a special case, as “rarely does [Voltaire] put such implicit faith in one eyewitness to the extent of not verifying the materials in other sources.” (M.S. Rivière, “Voltaire’s use of eyewitnesses’ reports in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*”, p.21. See above, n.67.)

83 Condorcet defended Voltaire from the accusation of political opportunism, for example, when the latter supported Russian over Turkish despotism: “*Comblé des bontés de l’impératrice [Catherine the Great], sans doute la reconnaissance animait son [Voltaire’s] zèle ; mais on se tromperait si on imaginait qu’elle en fut l’unique cause. [...] il voyait dans la destruction de l’empire turc, des millions d’hommes assurés du moins d’éviter sous le despotisme d’un souverain [Catherine], le despotisme insupportable d’un peuple ; il voyait renvoyer dans les climats infortunés qui les ont vu naître, ces mœurs tyranniques de l’Orient qui condamnent un sexe entier à un honteux esclavage.*” Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire*, p.140. Cf. E. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p.329, n.64.