

Letter to the Editor

Brothman on Authorship: The Diplomatic Perspective

I read with extreme interest and increasing fascination the very fine article by Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," published in *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78-100. I am writing to clarify the diplomatic view of authorship, however, which is misinterpreted by Brothman. He writes that my "heavy emphasis on juridical status and legal competence . . . does not address the increasingly problematic nature of the social act of authorship or origination, action versus structure, in the parlance of social theorists. Ultimately, her perspective overestimates the power of individual intentionality and being as opposed to social and discursive determination" (p. 96, note 30, last paragraph).

First, I wish to point out that in the series on diplomatics, I did not express *my* view but the view of diplomatics, even if filtered through my understanding of it. My purpose was only to illustrate the concepts, principles and methods of a specific discipline. My personal view takes into account the approaches of all disciplines which form the body of knowledge of an archivist — or at least I hope it does.

Secondly and more importantly, the perspective of diplomatics is precisely the opposite of that alleged by Brothman. Diplomats emphasize the determinant influence of the juridical system on authorship or origination, and defines a juridical system as a social group organized according to a system of rules which, consciously or unconsciously, the group itself considers binding. These rules may be written or unwritten, and may be of any kind. I recognize that ancient European terminology can be misleading. Probably, if diplomats were formulating their terminology today, they would use the term 'social system'.

The reason why diplomatics does not deal directly with documents created by individuals as human beings rather than as juridical "persons," is that it attributes some power to individual intentionality when expressed in the purely private sphere of human life; such power would limit the validity of diplomatic criticism. However, diplomatics does deal with purely private documents by analogy, because its assumption is that the "structure" penetrates all aspects of human life and limits our inner freedom (*see* "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science," *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), p. 15, and

“Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science (Part II),” *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989-90), p. 5). Briefly: at every step diplomatics insists on “social determination,” and I certainly hope that my articles convey this essential point; otherwise, I would fear that I had misrepresented all the diplomatic thinking of three centuries, and had failed my readers.

Finally, I wish to congratulate Dr. Brothman for an article which offers a fresh view of the archival world, constitutes an important scholarly contribution to our professional literature, and is a joy to read.

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