Articles

On the Uses of Authenticity*

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RÉSUMÉ Les spécialistes et les professionnels de plusieurs disciplines ont adopté le concept d'authenticité afin de mieux cerner les préoccupations émergentes au sujet de la préservation numérique des documents d'archives, mais l'authenticité elle-même demeure un point de controverse dans ces débats. Cet article présente un autre point de vue de l'impasse en examinant un moment similaire au début des temps modernes. Dans ces débats précédents, les différences d'opinion au sujet de l'authenticité sont devenues une façon efficace de renégocier l'ordre social. Des spécialistes ont proposé et évalué différentes notions de l'authenticité, adoptant de façon temporaire celle qui convenait le mieux à leurs besoins particuliers. En examinant ces conflits, l'article montre que les débats au sujet de l'authenticité peuvent servir de moyen pour inciter un changement social et il suggère qu'on peut se servir de cette connaissance de l'authenticité dans les discussions contemporaines au sujet de la conservation et de l'utilisation de données à codage numérique.

ABSTRACT Scholars and professionals across the disciplines have adopted the concept of authenticity to help focus growing concerns about the digital preservation of archival materials, but authenticity itself remains a major point of controversy in these debates. The present article offers an alternative view of the impasse by investigating a similar moment of disquiet in the early modern period. In these prior contests, disagreements about authenticity emerged as an effective way to renegotiate the social order. Scholars proposed and tested different senses of authenticity, vowing temporary allegiance to the one that suited their particular case. By examining some of these feuds, this article demonstrates that arguments about authenticity can function as a means of instigating social change, and suggests that this understanding of authenticity may productively be brought to bear on contemporary discussions about the curation and use of digitally encoded materials.

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Introduction

The adoption of new technologies for the transmission of information has stimulated important discussions about digitally encoded sources, especially regarding the suitability of traditional approaches for their interpretation and handling. Scholars and professionals alike have begun to examine the concept of authenticity as a way to come to terms with mounting anxieties about the digital preservation of archival sources. However, the protracted debates about the authenticity of digitized and "born-digital" materials indicate that there may be no simple solution to these recurring questions of reliability and trust. This article adds a historical perspective to the debate with an examination of a similar moment of unease about the relative value of sources. The recovery of documentary materials in the seventeenth century prompted a rethinking of established ways of understanding the world, and – in this climate – scholars devised multiple senses of authenticity and availed themselves of them all as they battled for social position. Challenging authenticity, then, was a mode of negotiation, for it allowed conventional assumptions to be brought under scrutiny. By revisiting some of the disputes of the early modern period, this article offers an exploration of the social function of arguments about authenticity that may serve to inform ongoing discussions about the curation and use of digitally encoded materials.

Recent research has noted that different disciplines, such as history, philosophy, law, music, art, and literature, use a customized notion of authenticity within their own discursive frameworks.[1] The definition of authenticity is thus malleable depending on the purpose for which the concept is being deployed. This flexibility is frequently cast as a weakness; as Robert Sokolowski observes, the boundaries of authenticity can collapse under scrutiny. Authenticity, he says, "becomes absorbed into things it should be distinguishable from. As we clarify what we mean by … various kinds [of other virtues], authenticity is seen gradually to dissolve into them."[2] But whether authenticity is a sustainable category is not the present concern. The ensuing exploration does not seek to investigate what authenticity *is*, but rather what authenticity *does*. Despite – or perhaps because of – the ambiguity identified by Sokolowski, authenticity

1 Heather MacNeil and Bonnie Mak, "Constructions of Authenticity," *Library Trends* 56, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 26–52; and Heather MacNeil, "Trusting Records in a Postmodern World," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 36–47. See also, Armando Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, ed. and trans. Charles M. Radding (New Haven, 1995), esp. Chap. 10, "The Illusion of Authentic History: Documentary Evidence," 236–50; and Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, "Diplomatic Sources and Medieval Documentary Practices," in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John van Engen (Notre Dame, IN, 1994), 313–43.

2 Robert Sokolowski, "Making Distinctions," *The Review of Metaphysics* 32 (June 1979): 656.

is habitually invoked in questions about sources and their origins, identity, and authority. The recurring and persistent appeal to authenticity suggests that the notion plays a critical role in experiments about how to understand the world, consequently inviting further study in this regard.

Over the last decades, scholars have begun to examine digitally encoded materials and explore how their accuracy or trustworthiness may be constituted, preserved, and communicated. Many investigations take as their point of departure the notion of documentary authenticity that was introduced to the study of contemporary records by Luciana Duranti and others in the 1980s.[3] This particular understanding of authenticity, founded in the discipline of diplomatics, quickly became a fixture in discussions about the creation, maintenance, use, and preservation of digital records. Further, it was adapted more generally for examinations of digitally encoded materials by those in the cultural heritage sector and the broader information community.[4] Because this approach continues to shape conversations about digitally encoded materials, the following section reviews the notion of authenticity as it is conceived and used as a part of diplomatics in the critical study of archival documents.

3 See, esp. Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Lanham, 1998), a collection of articles published in *Archivaria* between 1989 and 1992; the special issue of *American Archivist* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1996) on diplomatics and contemporary records, especially the articles by Olivier Guyotjeannin, Bernard Barbiche, Bruno Delmas, and Francis Blouin; and Paola Carucci, *Il documento contemporaneo. Diplomatica e criteri di edizione* (Rome, 1987).

4 Recently, see Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, Richard Ovenden, and Gabriela Redwine, with research assistance from Rachel Donahue, *Digital Forensics and Born-Digital Content in Cultural Heritage Collections*, CLIR Publication 149 (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2010); Ronald Jantz, "An Institutional Framework for Creating Authentic Digital Objects," *The International Journal of Digital Curation* 1, no. 9 (2009): 71–83; J.E.P. Currall, M.S. Moss, and S.A.J. Stuart, "Authenticity: A Red Herring?" *Journal of Applied Logic* 6 (2008): 534–44; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, "UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage" (October 2003, revised August 2006); Caroline Williams, "Diplomatic Attitudes: From Mabillon to Metadata," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 26, no. 1 (April 2005): 1–24; H.M. Gladney and J.L. Bennett, "What Do We Mean by *Authentic*? What's the Real McCoy?" *D-Lib Magazine* 9, nos. 7/8 (July/August 2003), http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july03/gladney/07gladney.html (accessed 1 July 2011); Abby Smith, "Authenticity and Affect: When Is a Watch Not a Watch?" *Library Trends* 52, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 172–82; Claes Gränström, Torbjorn Hornfeldt, Gary M. Peterson, Maria Pia Rinaldi Mariani, Udo Schafer, and Josef Zwicker, "Authenticity of Electronic Records: A Report Prepared for UNESCO," *ICA Study* 13, no. 1 (November 2002); Charles T. Cullen, Peter B. Hirtle, David Levy, Clifford A. Lynch, and Jeff Rothenberg, with additional discussion by Abby Smith, *Authenticity in a Digital Environment*, CLIR Publication 92 (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2000); and David Bearman and Jennifer Trant, "Authenticity of Digital Resources: Towards a Statement of Requirements in the Research Process," *D-Lib Magazine* 4, no. 6 (June 1998), http://www.dlib.org/dlib/june98/06bearman.html (accessed 1 July 2011).

Diplomatics and Authenticity

Diplomatics is the systematic analysis of documentary evidence. It offers a method of interpretation founded on the intimate study of archival sources, including their material, form, and the conditions of their production. As Leonard Boyle writes, a diplomatic examination "must take a full and firm account of the substance of the document and of all the circumstances surrounding that document." Only after a thorough analysis of both the external and internal elements of the instrument, he continues, "can its witness be evaluated properly, circumstantially, and fully."[5] Part of the work of diplomatists involves examining documents of purportedly common origins with a view to compiling a list of their common characteristics – including material, physical structure, style of script, system of dating, and orthography. From this careful investigation of surviving sources, documentary conventions particular to a geographical region or office can be identified, and typologies may be developed for records issued by an administrative body during a given period in time. The typology aids in the assessment of diplomatic authenticity – namely, the extent to which the construction of a document matches the recognized custom of assembling such materials. That is, if a document appears to have been executed in a manner in keeping with others produced by the same office, the instrument may be deemed authentic from a diplomatic point of view.

In diplomatics, there is no absolute standard or test of genuineness; the boundary that divides authentic documents from their inauthentic counterparts remains porous. Many sources with diplomatic irregularities may still be deemed genuine on the combined weight of their other characteristics. On the other hand, sources with many irregularities – and consequently judged spurious – can nevertheless carry some diplomatically authentic elements. Moreover, forged charters have on occasion been re-copied in their entirety or registered into collective lists; these later documents can be, on the whole, authentic from a diplomatic perspective.[6] Thus, a body of materials that has been deemed diplomatically authentic is a heterogeneous one, and may include sources with documentary inconsistencies or unreliable historical information. The designation of being diplomatically authentic indicates only that a particu-

5 Leonard E. Boyle, "Diplomatics," in *Medieval Studies: An Introduction*, ed. James M. Powell, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, 1992), 89. In general, see also, Olivier Guyotjeannin, Jacques Pycke, and Benoît-Michel Tock, *Diplomatique médiévale*, 3rd ed. (Turnhout, 2006).

6 See especially the tradition of cartularies, for instance, in Constance B. Bouchard, "Monastic Cartularies: Organizing Eternity," in *Charters, Cartularies, and Archives: The Preservation and Transmission of Documents in the West*, eds. Adam J. Kosto and Anders Winroth (Toronto, 2002), 28–29 and "Forging Papal Authority: Charters from the Monastery of Montier-en-Der," *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 1–17; Petrucci, 236–50; and Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 1994).

lar record *appears* to meet a measure of consistency with other similar documents of the same origin.

Despite the recent and overwhelming focus upon authenticity in discussions about digitally encoded archival materials, the chief goal of the discipline of diplomatics is not to determine whether records are genuine.[7] The exploration of authenticity constitutes only a single aspect of the work of diplomatists and historians, and one that is incidental to the broader endeavour of interpreting documentary evidence. Regardless of their status as genuine or spurious, documents have the capacity to be read as evidence of contemporary writing practices and of the society in which they were produced, used, and read. The value of sources therefore need not necessarily be fixed to their status as diplomatically authentic. As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak writes, "[all] documents should be seen as at once true and false (a construct). They should inspire a dialectic between those operations of language that represent events and the modalities of documentary fabrication and conservation."[8] Documents constitute complicated systems of signification and convey important information about past events, especially about how these events were understood, recorded, transmitted, and preserved. Because the sources are imbricated with cultural, political, and economic agendas, a thoughtful deployment of the tools of diplomatics can lead to fruitful explorations of documentary practice, administrative procedure, representations of power, and attitudes toward the written word.[9]

In an attempt to identify and disambiguate the ways in which a document might be useful for scholarly inquiry, diplomatists have isolated three types of authenticity that routinely emerge in discussions of archival materials: diplomatic, of course, but also legal and historical.[10] These different notions of authenticity operate independently of each other and have their own criteria of assessment that suggest how materials might be interpreted within a particular

7 Boyle, 90. A different perspective is offered in Luciana Duranti, sidebar on 'Diplomatics', in Kirschenbaum, Ovenden, and Redwine, 10.

8 Bedos-Rezak, 334. See also Heather MacNeil, *Trusting Records: Legal, Historical, and Diplomatic Perspectives* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2000), 64–71; and Wendy Davies, "Forgery in the Cartulaire de Redon," in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongreâ der Monumenta Germaniae Historica. München, 16.–19. September 1986* (Munich, 1988) IV, 274.

9 On the future directions and applications of diplomatics, see Heather MacNeil, "Contemporary Archival Diplomatics as a Method of Inquiry: Lessons Learned from Two Research Projects," *Archival Science* 5, nos. 1/2 (2005): 1–35, esp. 25ff; Michele Ansani, "Diplomatica e nuove tecnologie. La tradizione disciplinare fra innovazione e nemesi digitale," *Scrineum Rivista* 1 (2003): 1–18; and "Diplomatica (e diplomatisti) nell'arena digitale," *Scrineum* 1 (1999): 1–11; Olivier Guyotjeannin, "The Expansion of Diplomatics as a Discipline," *American Archivist* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 414–21.

10 Duranti, *Diplomatics*, pp. 45, 46, note 30; and Georges Tessier, "Diplomatique," in *L'Histoire et ses méthodes*, ed. Charles Samaran (Paris, 1961), pp. 671, 674–75. See also, Arthur Giry, *Manuel de diplomatique* (1894; repr. Hildesheim, 1972), 865–87.

domain. Authenticity is thus a way of making sources productive for a specific community of readers and users. As we shall see, each sense of authenticity is not only circumscribed by the boundaries of a given discipline, but also actively determines the limits of the usefulness and meaning of the source itself.

As explained earlier, a document may be considered diplomatically authentic, carrying all the signs befitting its time and place of creation, but might not be called legally valid or historically accurate. Although produced in a way that is in keeping with its contemporaries and therefore authentic from a diplomatic perspective, such a source might be inadmissible in a juridical context if, for instance, it had been procured in an unethical manner. In this case, the source would have no immediate value in the eyes of the law. Moreover, the same document might be historically inaccurate, perhaps transmitting an idealized or even fictional account of past events. Although the source would be of little use in a legal context and could not be employed as a reliable witness to a particular incident, it can still be of value in understanding contemporary documentary practices. Therefore, the assessment of the document as diplomatically authentic enables scholars to find ways to read, interpret, and use material that might be deemed inconsequential in other contexts.

Legal authenticity is a way of making sources productive in a juridical context; in this instance, authenticity is a status conferred upon materials by the legal system. Each source that is admissible in a juridical proceeding must have been demonstrated to be authentic according to legal code.[11] Following the rules of this specialized system of understanding, inconsistencies in a document can be explained in such a way that the irregularities have little or no affect upon the status of the source as a witness. For instance, despite transmitting factual errors or lacking certain diplomatic elements, a document may be deemed legally authentic if it is accompanied by the attestation of a competent authority. Legally authentic sources are therefore materials that have been established and recognized as such by the legal system. Because the parameters of legal authenticity are specific to a particular juridical tradition, the assessment of a document as legally authentic carries limited significance and usefulness outside the context in which the status was conferred, or, indeed, outside the discipline of law.[12]

Lastly, sources may fail to have any legal standing or meet the conventions of documentary form but still be meaningful if considered historically genuine in some capacity. Historical authenticity is based on the idea of a fidelity to an object, image, text, event, or attitude, and has a more general application to

11 MacNeil and Mak, "Constructions of Authenticity," 42. In general see, MacNeil, *Trusting Records*, 32–56. See a recent discussion of the admissibility of photographs in, Rodney G.S. Carter, "'Ocular Proof': Photographs as Legal Evidence," *Archivaria* 69 (Spring 2010): 23–47.

12 MacNeil, *Trusting Records*, 35.

materials that have not necessarily been generated by administrative activities. These sources might include cuisine, performances, personal papers, artwork, and other non-archival materials.[13] In this respect, historical authenticity is importantly different from its diplomatic and legal counterparts. Whether a source is an archival document, a narrative report, or an object of art, it may be called authentic if it is considered to convey a relatively accurate representation of an event, entity, or sentiment.[14] Historical authenticity thus need not refer directly to the content of the source; that is, historical authenticity can indicate faithfulness to authorial or artistic intent, to a moment or circumstance now lost, or even to a particular passage of time; it may denote whether a source represents the tastes, trends, and habits of the milieu in which it was produced or circulated.[15] Therefore, a document can carry factual inaccuracies and diplomatic irregularities but still be an eyewitness to the circumstances in which it was created. For example, a medieval charter that offers an account of a donation of land might be factually questionable – perhaps no such transfer ever took place – and spurious from a diplomatic point of view, yet the document can be valued as historically authentic insofar as it dates from the Middle Ages and reflects the spirit of that period. It is for this reason that Giles Constable observes, “Forgeries and plagiarisms … follow rather than create fashion and can without paradox be considered among the most authentic products of their time.”[16] Despite their problematic status as witnesses of a particular historical event, such sources can nevertheless provide insights into questions of kinship or patronage, contemporary documentary practice, and the broader political economy of the oral and written word.[17]

As the foregoing discussion has shown, the usefulness of written sources depends on the standards by which the materials are adjudged. Each mode of authenticity – among them, diplomatic, legal, and historical – allows a specific value to be conferred upon sources that is simultaneously confined to a

13 For instance, see discussions in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds., *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts* (Cambridge, UK, 1999); Peter Kivy, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Ithaca, 1995); G. Thomas Tanselle, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA, 1989); and Nelson Goodman, *The Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, 1968).

14 Duranti, *Diplomatics*, 47.

15 MacNeil and Mak, “Constructions of Authenticity,” 30–38. See also, G. Thomas Tanselle, “Thoughts on the Authenticity of Electronic Texts,” *Studies in Bibliography* 54 (2001): 133–36; and Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1969), 217–51.

16 Giles Constable, “Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages,” *Archiv für Diplomatik* 29 (1983): 2.

17 Recent studies of falsified documents from the Middle Ages include, Warren Brown, “Charters as Weapons: On the Role Played by Early Medieval Dispute Records in the Disputes they Record,” *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002): 227–48; and Bouchard, “Forging Papal Authority,” 1–17.

specific realm of understanding; as a particular sense of authenticity offers a framework in which to assess and evaluate materials, it also circumscribes the extent to which they may have significance. Far from being reified and static, authenticity in its general sense functions as a means of assigning import to sources; consequently, questions about authenticity force the prevailing system of judgment to be put under scrutiny.

The diverse ways in which materials can be understood was similarly debated in the early modern period, and it may prove worthwhile to position these earlier treatments in relation to current discussions about authenticity. In particular, the dispute in the seventeenth century between Daniel van Papenbroeck and Jean Mabillon about the genuineness of medieval charters is now routinely cited as a decisive moment for the study of archival materials, and thus drives much of the conversation about the authenticity of digitally encoded records. However, it is critical to be attentive to the context in which the disagreement took place, and, moreover, to note that the two scholars engaged in other key contests about authenticity. Indeed, in addition to codifying the idea of diplomatic authenticity, both Papenbroeck and Mabillon availed themselves of other notions of authenticity to propose alternative ways of understanding the world. An exploration of these debates will show that diplomatic authenticity was by no means conceived by early scholars as an absolute, and furthermore that the appeal to documentary authenticity was only one method among many of asserting privilege, therefore as much a form of social positioning as it was a development in critical methodology.

Authenticity and Change in the Seventeenth Century

The seventeenth century was a time of prodigious activity for scholars in northern Europe. After widespread battles for religious and political supremacy in both continental Europe and Britain – among them, the dissolution of monasteries in England and Wales, the Counter-Reformation, the Huguenot Wars, and the Thirty Years War – a number of documents and manuscripts that had once been held in various private, monastic, and princely libraries began to resurface. Scholars eagerly collected, catalogued, and edited the newly recovered materials, devising ways to interpret these sources from as early as the Middle Ages.[18] Hagiographers studying the literary genre of the lives or *vitae* of saints were early developers and proponents of methods of critical analysis; they sought to generate reliable editions that would protect the veneration of saints and the authority of the Church. The worship of saints

18 The salvaging of textual materials in England has been discussed recently in Nicholas Popper, "From Abbey to Archive: Managing Texts and Records in Early Modern England," *Archival Science* 10, no. 3 (September 2010): 249–66.

and other practices of the Church were under attack from Protestant opponents, of course, but also from Catholic reformers who disapproved of contemporary custom. In response to critics who argued that the *vitae* were products of superstition and idle fantasy, hagiographers began to formulate methods of analysis and interpretation for their disparate sources that attested to the lives of the saints, their work, and their miracles. The critical approaches employed by the hagiographical scholars were an important step in the refinement of the tools for historical scholarship. However, as the following discussion will show, these developments can also be understood in terms of a broader agenda of social negotiation involving a jockeying for primacy and prestige both within and without the Church.

In 1629, Jean Bolland was transferred from the Jesuit college in Mechelen to Antwerp to help complete an edition of the lives of saints that had been initiated by Heribert Rosweyde.[19] With the help of his collaborators, Godfrey Henschen and Daniel van Papenbroeck, Bolland supplemented the work begun by his predecessor, tracking down hagiographical evidence in any form, including narratives in chronicles, memoirs, letters, and charters, and subjecting all the materials to critical analysis. The scholars – Bollandists as they were called – determined which reports were the most trustworthy by examining the nature of the accounts, who was relating the stories, and what sources were cited. They eliminated obvious fabrications, corruptions, and interpolations, and clarified obscure passages. By collating different narratives about the same saints, the Bollandists presented a comprehensive and edited hagiographical history that drew upon a broad range of sources. This authoritative edition, the *Acta sanctorum*, offered a normative list of the names of saints and the details of their birth, death, and burial as well as their station in life, title to sanctity, their miracles, and the special rites or customs created in their honour.[20] The project carefully demonstrated the continuity of Catholic teaching and life as well as the contribution of Bollandists to Catholicism. At the same time, it established the Jesuits – a relatively new order, less than 150 years old – at the forefront of hagiographical scholarship.

19 See Heribert Rosweyde, *Vitae patrum* (Antwerp, 1615); and *Fasti sanctorum quorum vitae in belgicis bibliothecis manuscriptae* (Antwerp, 1607). For a recent discussion of Jesuit archives, see Markus Friedrich, "Archives as Networks: The Geography of Record-Keeping in the Society of Jesus (1540–1773)," *Archival Science* 10, no. 3 (September 2010): 285–98.

20 The sixty-eight printed volumes published in Antwerp and Brussels by the Société des Bollandistes from 1643 to 1940 are now available in the *Acta Sanctorum Database*, http://acta.chadwyck.com/ (accessed 1 July 2011). On the Bollandists and their work in general, see among others, David Knowles, "The Bollandists," *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (Toronto, 1962), 3–32; Aurelio Palmieri, "The Bollandists," *The Catholic Historical Review*, new ser. 3, no. 3 (October 1923): 341–45; Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Work of the Bollandists through Three Centuries, 1615–1915* (Princeton, NJ, 1922); and Robert Lechat, "Les 'Acta Santorum' des Bollandistes," *The Catholic Historical Review* 6 (1920–1921): 334–42.

Like the Jesuits, the Benedictine Congregation of St. Maur was a product of a reform movement, founded in part to pursue scholarship that would promote the glory of the Church and help secure her position in the changing cultural landscape.[21] Although the congregation was established only in 1618, it was a part of the Benedictine family, which had a rich genealogy that stretched back to the early Middle Ages when St. Benedict set out his influential rules for monastic life around 530. In an attempt to build an authoritative history of their order, Luc d'Achery and Jean Mabillon began assembling and organizing evidence of the achievements of the Benedictines. They generated an account of the origins of the order, documented its growth and development through the centuries, and explicated the lives of the saints that were of special interest.[22] Such work helped raise the profile of Catholic learning and also proposed a documented history of the Benedictine family that could be used to forestall potential assaults on the integrity of the order.

Despite the efforts of d'Achery and Mabillon to shore up the institutional record, the Bollandist Papenbroeck submitted a serious challenge to the Benedictine claims of privilege in 1675.[23] As he was conducting research for the *Acta sanctorum*, Papenbroeck found a document pertaining to the rights of the Benedictine order that he was convinced was spurious. He began to investigate other sources that shared the characteristics of this alleged forgery. Papenbroeck thus cast doubt upon a number of charters that recorded gifts to the Benedictines from the Merovingian king, Dagobert I, including those that witnessed the foundation of their oldest and most revered abbeys. Couched as the critical examination of sources for hagiographical study, Papenbroeck's questions were nevertheless a direct attack upon the rights of the Benedictines to the lands on which many of their congregations lived and from which they drew income.

The Benedictine Mabillon was appointed to formulate a response to the charges levied by his Jesuit counterpart. He compared the materials, inks, handwriting, orthography, and seals of some two hundred charters, laying out his research in the *De re diplomatica* (1681). Through this systematic exami-

21 In general, see Jean-Claude Fredouille, ed., *Les mauristes à Saint-Germain-des-Prés: Actes du colloque de Paris, 2 décembre 1999* (Paris, 2001); Pierre Gasnault, *L'érudition mauriste à Saint-Germain-des-Prés* (Paris, 1999); Yves Chaussey, *Les bénédictins de Saint-Maur*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1989–[91]); Maarten Ultee, *The Abbey of St. Germain des Prés in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, 1989); David Knowles, "The Maurists," in *Great Historical Enterprises*, 35–62; and the essays in *Mémorial du XIVe centenaire de l'abbaye de Saint-Germain-des-Prés* (Paris, 1959), especially Georges Tessier, "Saint-Germain-des-Prés et les Mauristes," 13–27.

22 Jean Mabillon, ed., *Annales Ordinis s. Benedicti*, 6 vols. (Lucca, 1745); and Luc d'Achery and Jean Mabillon, eds. *Acta sanctorum Ordinis s. Benedicti*, 3 vols. (1668; repr. Mâcon, 1935–), and with Thierry Ruinart for an additional 6 volumes.

23 Daniel van Papenbroeck, "Propylaeum antiquarium circa veri ac falsi discrimen in vetustis membranis," *Acta sanctorum, aprilis*, vol. II (Antwerp, 1675): 1–52.

nation of archival sources, Mabillon argued that the Benedictine charters were genuine. He furthermore counselled against the excessive criticism of sources, noting that inconsistencies in the language and style of the instruments may be owing to changes in local custom, and that subsequent corrections or interpolations could be legitimate revisions to the documents and need not undermine their authenticity.[24] Even as he was codifying the tools for the critical analysis of documents, Mabillon took pains to indicate that the boundary between genuine and spurious was a negotiable one. He acknowledged that any statement about the genuineness of a document could never be more than an informed opinion; absolute certainty about the authenticity of a source was impossible. As David Knowles observed, Mabillon understood that "the authenticity of a charter could not be proved by any metaphysical or *a priori* argument; a decision could be reached only after the expert had examined a whole series of different indications…. In consequence, the certainty attainable in a favourable case could be no more than a moral certainty."[25]

Papenbroeck and Mabillon thus cultivated a particular understanding of authenticity based on the close examination of a document and the comparison of that instrument with an array of similar sources. Through the rest of the seventeenth century and into the next, the two scholars and their successors continued to refine the structures that would grant meaning and importance to this particular notion of authenticity.[26] In addition to being a catalyst for the founding of a diplomatic science, the dispute about the genuineness of the charters was of central importance to the careers of Mabillon and Papenbroeck. The men were both able to establish their names as learned scholars and bolster the reputation of their respective houses by capitalizing on the publicity of the disagreement. Mabillon garnered widespread respect for himself and his community, even winning an assurance of protection for the congregation from the archbishop. Meanwhile, by inspiring his rival to write the *De re diplomatica*, Papenbroeck secured a place in history as having been a crucial participant in the birth of a discipline. The debate between Mabillon and Papenbroeck thus provided not only a significant impetus for the development of the important tools of historical scholarship, but also guaranteed enduring prestige for the two scholars and their houses.

Around the same time that he was engaged in the quarrel with Mabillon, Papenbroeck was embroiled in a highly publicized controversy about authen-

24 Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica libri VI* (Paris, 1681), I, 2.

25 David Knowles, *The Historian and Character, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, UK, 1963), 222–23. See Jean Mabillon, *Librorum de re diplomatica supplementum* (Paris, 1704), esp. 2–4.

26 For instance, Charles-François Toustain, René Prosper Tassin, and Jean-Baptiste Baussonnet, *Nouveau traité de diplomatique*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1750–1765); and Scipione Maffei, *Istoria diplomatica* (Mantua, 1727).

ticity that involved the origins and identity of yet another monastic order, the Carmelites.[27] The Carmelites believed that their roots could be traced back to ancient Israel; they argued that their forefathers had formed a community on Mount Carmel near the site of the cave of the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, and had lived there in unbroken succession.[28] If true, this story would make the Carmelites the direct descendants of the followers of Elijah and consequently one of the oldest and most prestigious orders. The Jesuits were relatively new by comparison, having only been established in the sixteenth century. Unlike other communities that could support their claims of heritage with relics or founding charters, the Carmelites had no material evidence of their ancestry. The story of their origins had been passed down orally from generation to generation, and the force of the legend depended on the presence of historical figures on Mount Carmel at a particular time.[29]

The Carmelites had already seen challenges to the integrity of their order in the scholastic disputes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; Papenbroeck re-opened these debates on the grounds that he could find no written evidence attesting to the existence of the Carmelitic community before the twelfth century. In this way, Papenbroeck cast doubt on the status of the Carmelites as a religious order and their claims of supremacy. Papenbroeck professed allegiance to a world view in which documentary evidence was rated more highly than living memory in the settlement of disputes. Meanwhile, his critics argued that received tradition should be valued according to its antiquity. Although Papenbroeck countered that even a universally recognized tradition "should be measured not by its relation to us, but by its relation to the facts,"[30] enough confidence was granted to the institutional memory of the Carmelitic order to offset what the Bollandist considered to be a grave documentary lacuna. Papenbroeck made no headway in his dispute with the Carmelites; his work was branded heretical by the Spanish Inquisition and placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1695.

The debate between the Bollandists and the Carmelites demonstrates that oral testimony continued to hold its own in a dispute, awarded at least as much respect as written documentation as a witness to "fact" even as late as the seventeenth century. At issue was not the authenticity of documentary evidence, but whether living memory continued to carry enough authority

27 Société des Bollandistes, *Acta sanctorum, aprilis* (Antwerp, 1675), vol. I, 767–99; vol. II, 33–41.

28 On the Carmelites in general, see Andrew Jotischky, *The Carmelites and Antiquity: Mendicants and their Pasts in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2002), especially Chap. 4, "The Development of Carmelite Historical Narrative, c.1240–1400," 106–150; and Elias Friedman, *The Latin Hermits of Mount Carmel: A Study in Carmelite Origins* (Rome, 1979).

29 Jotischky, 329.

30 Delehaye, 144.

to withstand contestation. In some respects, then, the quarrel between Papenbroeck and the Carmelites may be seen as a precursor to the question of legal authenticity. Namely, the argument about the origins of the Carmelitic order was also a dispute about the validity and relative value of different kinds of testimony. The disagreement, taken up by others in the spiritual hierarchy, explored what kinds of sources were considered adequate to substantiate claims of privilege, and, more broadly, what could be considered persuasive evidence in the adjudication of ecclesiastical matters.

A few years later, authenticity in its sense of historical fidelity was featured in the contest between Mabillon and Jean-Armand de Rancé, the abbot of the abbey of La Trappe.[31] Their dispute concerned the duties appropriate to the monastic profession, and was not primarily grounded in issues of diplomatic authenticity, as the one between Papenbroeck and Mabillon had been, or in the authority awarded to oral tradition and written documentation. Instead, the quarrel between Mabillon and Rancé was over what constituted historical authenticity. On one side of this debate was the revival of origins, embodied in an imitation of a lost past, and on the other, the reinterpretation of sources for contemporary contexts that took into account the passage of time and concomitant changes in attitude.[32] Latent in the discussion, however, was a fierce battle over dwindling resources.

Rancé had created a centre for extreme asceticism at La Trappe, a Cistercian abbey located about a hundred kilometres outside Paris. Its practices were modelled upon the examples of humility that had been set by the Desert Fathers. Under the supervision of Rancé, monks were encouraged to sever all familial ties, submit to rigorous manual labour, engage in acts of penitence, and maintain perpetual silence. La Trappe offered an experience characterized "by literal observance of the injunctions, even the details, of the foundational *Rule* [*of St. Benedict*] and the ascetical practices of western monachism."[33] Rancé believed that he was returning to the origins of monasticism and enacting the authentic eremitic life with this revival of austerity. In a series of three treatises, Rancé described and defended the extreme practices of La Trappe,

31 For instance, Blandine Kriegel, *La querelle Mabillon-Rancé* (Paris, 1992) and Henri Leclercq, *Mabillon*, vol. II (Paris, 1957), 503–74. For this and other controversies, see, Jean-Louis Quantin, "L'oeuvre mauriste et ses détracteurs," in *Les mauristes à Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, 59–84. On Rancé, see for example A.J. Krailsheimer, *Armand-Jean de Rancé, Abbot of La Trappe: His Influence in the Cloister and the World* (Oxford, 1974).

32 On reformation and renaissance, see Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1996), 3–4. Among others, Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, eds., *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1991); Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York, 1972); and Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1959). See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter (Cambridge, MA, 1993), especially 10–12.

33 John Paul McDonald, "Translator's Introduction," in Jean Mabillon, *Treatise on Monastic Studies* (Lanham, 2004), p. xi.

offering his interpretation of the provisions for monastic life that had been outlined in the seminal texts of St. Augustine and St. Benedict.[34] There was little place for scholarly activity in his vision, and he argued that the historical research conducted by Mabillon and the Maurists contravened the wishes of St. Benedict. Moreover, Rancé declared that the failure to adhere to the basic tenets of monastic life was a threat to the Church and the lax behaviour of the traditional houses had brought on such divisive schisms as the Reformation. His impassioned rhetoric, dramatic reforms, and claims of authenticity encouraged young monks from other orders to defect and join his movement.

The resources of La Trappe flourished at the same time that established communities were suffering the effects of the social, political, and religious instability of seventeenth-century France. In particular, the chief house of the Maurists was in financial trouble after a series of poor harvests, plagues, wars, and the rescinding of tax waivers. Furthermore, the Maurists had to endure the humiliation of having some of their members apply for transfers to La Trappe.[35] It was therefore no accident that Mabillon – by now distinguished as one of the finest scholars of his generation thanks in part to his dispute with Papenbroeck – was appointed to defend the Maurist commitment to scholarship, protect the diversity of the monastic family, and demonstrate the integrity of the Church.

Mabillon responded to Rancé's polemic with a defence of the place of scholarship in monastic life, drawing together relevant examples, documents, and scriptural passages in support of his argument. After re-examining the passages cited by Rancé, Mabillon added and explicated the relevant sections of canon and civil law, the writings of the Church Fathers, and theological, philosophical, hagiographical, and historical texts. In his *Traité des études monastiques* (1691), Mabillon observed that St. Jerome was a model scholar whose zeal for study complemented his fervent devotion: "What did he not read, and what labour did he not embark on and sustain to enrich the church with his excellent work?"; and St. Benedict himself had incorporated reading as a significant part of monastic duty, the *lectio divina*.[36] Mabillon noted that although returning to sources was important in any scholarly endeavour, paramount was their proper interpretation with reasoned criticism. He emphasized the importance of developing a broader context in which to locate evidence

34 In chronological order, *Traité de la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique* (1683); *Éclaircissemens de quelques difficultés que l'on formées sur le livre de la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique* (1685); and *La règle de saint Benoît, nouvellement traduite et expliquée selon son véritable esprit* (1689).

35 Ultee, 88; and Leclercq, 511–12.

36 Mabillon, *Treatise on Monastic Studies* for Jerome, I.15, p. 84; for the *Rule* of Benedict, I.7, pp. 37–40. On *lectio divina* in general, see Jean Leclerq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York, 1961).

and construe meaning, and remarked that a consideration of the age and authenticity of the materials could help in such an endeavour.

The disagreement between Rancé and Mabillon was not primarily focused on the authenticity of documents or on the relative significance of different sources, but instead on fidelity to a tradition. What constituted historical authenticity was thus at the crux of the debate between Rancé and Mabillon. Was historical authenticity honoured by fidelity to a moment suspended in time, or to an ongoing tradition that continued to evolve under the influence of broader social and cultural change? Rancé believed that historical authenticity was achieved through a return to origins. By means of a faithful imitation and literal re-performance of the customs of the Desert Fathers, he hoped to recapture an idealized lost state of spirituality and thereby establish La Trappe as a leading monastery. By contrast, Mabillon argued that the subsequent modifications to the early ascetic principles were an important part of the monastic tradition. He cited the work of respected authorities who had helped to develop and refine the rules for monastic life, and suggested that their later guidelines could be observed without jeopardizing the integrity of the vocation.

The treatises of Rancé and Mabillon were circulated both within and outside the monastic family, and the debate about historical authenticity was taken up for more general discussion. In engaging the wider community in a consideration of the monastic vocation, Mabillon was able to consolidate his reputation as one of the foremost scholars of his time, while Rancé affirmed his position as reformer and secured the good fortune of La Trappe into the next century.

Early forms of what may now be understood as documentary, legal, and historical authenticity were beginning to emerge in the early modern period with the development of scholarly tools and methods of analysis.[37] Although these devices had not yet been clearly articulated, each mode of authenticity resonated with contemporary thinkers in different ways. Scholars grappled with the various senses of authenticity, defining their respective parameters, criteria, and functions in an effort to give meaning to the newly discovered sources. In a world in which cultural values were in flux, emerging communities could use different notions of authenticity to reframe sources in order to

37 These notions of authenticity were, of course, not without antecedents. Explorations of medieval discussions about the authenticity of sources may be found in, among others, Derek Pearsall, "Forging Truth in Medieval England," in *Cultures of Forgery: Making Nations, Making Selves*, eds. Judith Ryan and Alfred Thomas, 3–13 (New York, 2003); Adam J. Kosto and Anders Winroth, eds., *Charters, Cartularies, and Archives: The Preservation and Transmission of Documents in the West* (Toronto, 2002); Constance B. Bouchard, *Holy Entrepreneurs: Cistercians, Knights, and Economic Exchange in Twelfth-Century Burgundy* (Ithaca, 1991); the essays in the five volumes of *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.–19. September 1986* (Hannover, 1988); and Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre, eds., *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, UK, 1986). Also, see note 6 above.

create a place for themselves in the social order at the same time that more established communities employed similar methods to fortify their reputations. Questioning the authenticity of sources, origins, and identity was an accepted means of challenging the status quo, used to stimulate change even if it did not guarantee a positive outcome. Whether a claim was disputed or defended by an appeal to authentic or spurious testimony, the quarrel itself was a sure way in which traditional relationships could be revisited. The debates about authenticity in the seventeenth century were thus not limited to the trustworthiness of documentary sources; they were perhaps more centrally about power, privilege, and prestige.

Authenticity and Change in the Twenty-First Century

As the foregoing discussion has shown, communities such as the Bollandists and the Maurists exploited the political and cultural instabilities of the seventeenth century to renegotiate their respective places in the social order. By raising questions about the authenticity of sources, rivals were able to affirm and indeed advertise their particular understanding of the world. A similar dynamic may be detected at the turn of the twenty-first century, as authenticity has re-emerged as a point of contestation. Marked by economic volatility and technological change, recent decades have seen a rethinking of values. Concerns about the authenticity and relative significance of digitally mediated sources have been propelled to the fore, fuelled in part by anxieties about the future of the cultural record. The continuing debates about the authenticity of digital resources[38] may therefore be understood as important struggles to locate these newer materials with respect to their traditional counterparts, position them within established disciplines of knowledge, and determine the status of those who use and care for them.

Indeed, debates about what we choose to accept as sources or acceptable surrogates thereof, whether it be in the context of archival science, law, art, history, or literary studies, are also bound up with the status of those who work with the different materials. For example, as it becomes resolved in light of advances in imaging technologies that a hand-copied or lithographic facsimile of a medieval manuscript is no longer appropriate to use for palaeographical investigation, the professionals who cared for the facsimile, the research based on the facsimile, and the scholars who conducted such exercises may now be understood in a different light.[39] Similarly, questioning authenticity can foster

38 Recently in Geoffrey Yeo, "'Nothing is the Same as Something Else': Significant Properties and Notions of Identity and Originality," *Archival Science* 10, no. 2 (June 2010): 85–116; Duranti, "From Digital Diplomatics to Digital Records Forensics," and Chris Duncan, "Authenticity or Bust," both in *Archivaria* 68 (2009): 39–66 and 97–118 respectively.

39 E.A. Lowe, *The Beneventan Script: A History of the South Italian Minuscule* (Oxford, UK,

a graceful relocation of confidence from a critical edition, once considered authoritative, to another that transmits the preferred reading; however, as a consequence, this shift will also reframe earlier work in historical terms. The flexibility of the notion of authenticity thus accommodates crucial modifications in perspective that are not limited to the perceived value of sources; these changes have consequences with respect to the disciplines of knowledge, as well as to society and culture at large. Questions about authenticity permit a review of the social order in light of new attitudes, insights, and discoveries, and should therefore be considered critical to the process of making and re-making the historical record.

Conclusion

By situating some of the debates of the early modern period in a broader political landscape, this article has shown that interrogations of the authenticity of sources were deployed as a way to aid the renegotiation of prestige. Seventeenth-century scholars questioned the relative value of sources; they considered the materials according to the rules of rival systems as they jockeyed for social standing. In the twenty-first century, debates about the authenticity of digitally encoded sources may likewise be read in this way. As emergent materials are incorporated into existing bodies of evidence that serve the fields of, among others, law, history, and cultural heritage, their relationship with the established canon is open for debate.

However, the disputes about the authenticity of digitally encoded sources are not only about how to understand these materials and ensure their accessibility over time; they are perhaps more importantly about the place of such sources in disciplines of knowledge and the social order, as well as the place of those who use them. Just as Daniel van Papenbroeck, Jean Mabillon, Jean-Armand de Rancé, and others employed notions of authenticity to explore diverse ways of appreciating sources and negotiating status, so too are current discussions about the authenticity of digitally encoded materials probing the significance of origins, history, and privilege for the twenty-first century. Questions of authenticity, then, are attempts to instigate change, and digitally encoded sources – like their forebears – will remain a point of convergence for such debates in years to come.

1914), vi–vii; and Bernhard Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Dáibhí ó Cróinín and David Ganz (Cambridge, UK, 2003), p. 1. For palaeography and the advent of photography, see Armando Petrucci, "La scrittura riprodotta," *Scrittura e civiltà* 8 (1984): 263–67; and the section on 'Das Zeitalter der Photographie,' in Ludwig Traube, "Geschichte der Paläographie," in *Vorlesungen und Abhandlungen* (Munich, 1909), I, pp. 57ff.

