

**The Kinship among Men of the Republic of Letters:  
Christophe Dupuy and the Familial Paradigm for Scholarly  
Exchanges**

**by  
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As we begin these proceedings, we might for a moment stop to consider who we are: an eclectic group of seventeenth-century scholars of mixed gender, many of whom are raising families and almost all of whom are financed by an institution of higher learning. We publish our work in either French or English. We have relatively easy access to rich library collections and a plethora of scholarly journals, and we enjoy rapid personal interaction with other scholars by means of e-mail. In all this, we cannot fail to be struck by the extent to which our scholarly existence at the turn of the twenty-first century stands in contrast to that of our counterparts of the early seventeenth, eighty percent of whose production was in Latin, whose livelihoods, if they were not made from the legal or medical professions, most often depended on ecclesiastical patronage and consequently precluded marriage, and for whom research libraries were only beginning to be amassed and journals did not yet exist.

To be sure, face to face contact was prized then as it is today. Famous in the annals of French intellectual gatherings are the almost 40 years of regular meetings of the Cabinet Dupuy, during which the brothers Pierre and Jacques opened their Parisian home and library to some of the most important scholars of their day. The reputation that the Dupuy brothers earned for brilliance placed them at the very pinnacle of the intellectual life of Paris in the first half of the seventeenth century and helped make their gatherings the most celebrated in Europe. However, when we consider *who* participated in this life of the mind or what happened when personal contact became more problematic, the extent of the distance we have traveled in 350 years leaps out at us. For one thing, communication via letters sent through the regular mail services was painfully slow and often hazardous, but it formed the

primary link between intellectuals separated by distance, before being supplanted by the Journal at the end of the seventeenth century. It is this role of correspondence as the primordial instrument of communication between scholars that has prompted a number of modern researchers to begin publishing the extant collections of letters in the hope of better understanding how this network of thinkers functioned.

The men who participated in this scholarly life — and this was indisputably a male-only domain — referred to their collectivity as the *République des Lettres*, taking the name from the Latin *res publica* or the “public affair/concern.” Whatever the “public” nature of their undertakings, the absence of an established institution prepared to serve as a public forum for the latest work being done in science, history, law, and *belles lettres* seems, almost ironically, to have resulted in transforming this “public concern” into a remarkably non-public conception of scholarly relations, as seen in the proliferation of private academies. Yet perhaps such an explanation does not do justice to the situation, for it leaves us unable to account for a certain number of concerns chronicled in the letters: what forces tended to influence a man’s intellectual viewpoint, what topics did these men prefer *not* to discuss, how deep was their loyalty to each other, and even what influence might women have wielded in this society utterly closed to their active participation.

When one reads the correspondence of Christophe Dupuy in Rome to his younger brothers, the famous Pierre and Jacques in Paris, one is repeatedly struck by the very domestic nature of the interactions that link these and other members of the *République des Lettres*. This is the era of which Philippe Ariès has written that “l’État est encore géré comme un bien familial,” (Chartier 18) and Yves Castan has asserted that theirs was “une société fondée sur le dévouement de type familial et l’esprit de corps.” (Chartier 32) What we may in fact, then, be witnessing in Dupuy’s letters is a set of epistolary behaviors that owe their widespread acceptance among the scholarly community, as the correspondences of others such as Peiresc, Heinsius, and Gabriel Naudé clearly show, as

much to broader societal forces involving the family as to a difference of focus with the universities that would leave the most productive modern scholars of the day bereft of an institutional forum for interaction. If this is the case, it would appear to suggest the existence of a familial paradigm for the satisfactory functioning of scholarly interaction.

Recent research on families in the early modern period has revealed the extent to which the family operated so as to direct the focus of every member's daily existence toward the single-minded goal of furthering the family enterprise: adding to the family fortune or property, contracting desirable marriage alliances, assuring the transmission of the family assets to successive generations, and perhaps, over the span of several generations, managing to rise in the social hierarchy. What is quite remarkable when one reads the correspondences of these men of letters is the extent to which this same long-range purposefulness attributed to the details of daily life gives form to their epistolary enterprise, as well. We must not lose sight of the fact that these letters were the lifeline that joined scholars isolated from each other, and yet where we might expect to find pages filled with discussions of ideas, reproducing at a distance what transpired when they found themselves in each other's company, we find nothing of the sort. While these men were very eager to read the publications of their peers, discussing one's research or that of one's correspondent is not what these letters are all about. Rather they reveal a sense of one's duty to render crucial, yet fundamentally day to day services to fellow scholars in the hope that such efforts will, over the span of time, further the cause of learning.

The major portion of each letter of Christophe Dupuy to Jacques, his youngest living brother and usual correspondent, involves the enrichment of the brothers' library in Paris. He provides information on books he has encountered that might prove to be desirable additions to the research collection. He responds to Jacques' requests to acquire particular titles or the works of particular authors, and he updates him on the status of parcels of books he is sending from Rome or, conversely, receiving

from Paris, occasionally for the benefit of some fellow scholar. There are frequent references to the *mémoires* or *catalogues* apparently included in Jacques' missing half of the correspondence — which unfortunately vanished into some Roman black hole — and that listed books for which Christophe should be on the lookout. Christophe's network of correspondence permitted him to forward these lists on occasion to other scholars in Italy, who might find themselves better placed to acquire the desired volumes for the growing library in Paris.

In addition, these letters establish contacts between scholars. Letters of introduction are frequently imbedded in the regular exchange of correspondence, requesting that a scholar known to one brother and traveling into the territory of the other brother be shown library facilities and be introduced to anyone who might be able to be of assistance to him. Assistance sometimes involved dealing with matters of personal security, as scholarly travel was not without risk, and not only from the dangers of the road or the high seas. When Ismaël Bouilliau arrived in Florence in September of 1646, for instance, he learned that his recently published book on astronomy might cause him grief in Rome where not so long before Galileo had been made to suffer at the hands of the Inquisition. Thereupon he wrote to Christophe Dupuy to ascertain the wisdom of continuing his journey there. Dupuy consulted with a professor of mathematics at la Sapienza and wrote back warning that, given the tenor of Bouilliau's ideas and the current absence of a French ambassador in Rome, it was doubtless imprudent for him to risk a visit to the papal city. Bouilliau heeded his advice and never set foot in Rome. The result was that he never met Christophe Dupuy face to face, to Dupuy's great regret. Nevertheless, the two men kept writing to each other regularly over the next ten years, ever exchanging scholarly assistance, until Christophe's death, at the age of seventy-four, severed their correspondence.

As important to these men as rendering immediate aid to fellow scholars was sharing the news of the day, whether it concerned the depredations of Barbary pirates, outbreaks of plague, the military

fortunes of European or Turkish armies that might change the balance of political power within the Vatican or between France and its neighbors, or the political intrigues surrounding the election of a pope, the naming of a cardinal, or the conduct of French affairs at home and abroad. This concern with the daily progress of current events went beyond the curiosity understandably born of the comparative slowness of communication or even the necessity of such knowledge for developing the political stances these men took with regard to the growth of absolutist power in France. Political intrigue could affect scholarly careers and, depending on the political fortunes of one's patron, the likelihood of continuing one's research in a particular locale. Civil disturbances and war could upset not only travel to collections for scholars, but the regular delivery of letters and packages of books. Coupled with the threat of quarantines imposed for outbreaks of plague, which on at least one occasion delayed mail delivery from Paris for almost a month, pirates and bandits are a constant cause for fear and trustworthy contacts a constant necessity. Christophe Dupuy worries incessantly about the possible loss or theft of his precious shipments of books, for he would gather fifty to sixty books at a time before sending them, volumes he had often had assembled one page at a time to ensure obtaining the very finest copies.

To such chronic sources of worry, the Fronde added a fresh subject of concern. As Mazarin's extensive library, so patiently assembled by Gabriel Naudé, was sold off by order of the *Parlement de Paris*, Christophe Dupuy writes to Jacques, "Dittes moi je vous prie si pour acheter les livres de M. le Cardinal cela ne vous peut prejudicier." (unpublished letter, 18 mars 1652) With whom the Dupuy brothers might risk disfavor is not entirely clear. If the brothers were in fact trying to buy books from the library of the exiled minister, was it with or without the knowledge of Gabriel Naudé, for whom this was without doubt the most demoralizing period of his existence? With Naudé's connivance, they might be among those who were trying to save as much of the library as possible by buying it back clandestinely for eventual restitution to its owner, should he come back into power. Without it, they might simply be profiting from the current upheaval to

enrich their own library. In the former case, they risked alienating the *parlementaires*, members of the social class to which their family belonged; in the latter, they risked alienating the esteem of a long-standing friend and intellectual protégé. While either is conceivably possible in light of their interest in building research libraries, recent research suggests that during the Fronde, the Dupuys became, for reasons of familial loyalty, severe critics of ideas favorable to Mazarin's return to power and thus would not be likely to aid in the restitution of Mazarin's library. However, esteem and loyalty were crucial qualities in this system devoted to maximizing mutual aid, and they were not likely to treat lightly a possible rupture with a long-standing friend such as Naudé.

The interactions between scholars were built, in fact, on personal relationships, and like those within families, frequently lasted over a lifetime. Naudé, ten years younger than Jacques and twenty years younger than Pierre and Christophe, had attracted the attention of the Parisian brothers early in his distinguished career, becoming a regular at their daily gatherings, although they had, at first, judged him harshly for not knowing personally the people of whom he spoke in his *Avis pour dresser une bibliothèque*. During his twelve years spent in Italy in the service of the Cardinal de Bagny, he met frequently with Christophe, who was serving as the *procureur général* of the Carthusian Order in Rome. By the end of the Fronde and despite the opposing sides they may have found themselves on politically, Naudé was maintaining good relations with the brothers, contributing an *Epistola* to the memorial volume published in honor of Pierre in 1652 and writing a cordial letter to Jacques from Stockholm in September of that same year, only months before his own untimely death.

This spirit of loyalty over time, and loyalty to family, brought Nicolas Heinsius to the attention of the Parisian brothers, who had first met his father Daniel, the celebrated Dutch writer and disciple of Scaliger, almost thirty years earlier. Similarly, when the founder of international law, Hugo de Groot, was exiled from his native Holland, he came into contact with the Dupuy brothers for being an old family friend of le Président de Thou, with whom he

had maintained a twenty-year correspondence. To their kinship with Jacques-Auguste de Thou, *premier Président au Parlement de Paris*, Christophe writes in 1636 of owing the visit of an unnamed Spanish scholar, who had helped the distinguished historian acquire material for his famous study of late sixteenth-century France some thirty-five years earlier. His desire to meet Christophe was prompted not only by the latter's family connection with de Thou, but also because he was well aware of the friendship of Christophe's father, the *parlementaire* Claude Dupuy, with a number of French authors whom he either knew personally or whose works he had admired for years.

This importance of family ties should not be underestimated in the *République des Lettres*. Without doubt, the most significant intellectual ties that the Dupuy brothers maintained were, indeed, family ties, those to their de Thou cousins, whose motto was "pour servir autrui." As a young man, Pierre helped Jacques-Auguste de Thou in the correction of the manuscript of his *Historia Sui Temporis*, arguably the most important historical work to come out of the *République des Lettres*, admired by Voltaire and Gibbon and "rivalisant," as Antoine Coron has said, "avec les grands modèles — Salluste, Tacite — dans la recherche de l'impartialité, comme avec Tite-Live pour l'éloquence." (Jolly 105) However, the book encountered resistance early on. De Thou's critical role some years earlier in the formulation of the *Édit de Nantes* cost him support in certain quarters in Rome, and jealousy threatened to turn the *Congrégation de l'Index* against his book. Consequently, he enlisted the aid of his young cousin, Christophe Dupuy — on his first sojourn at the Vatican in 1603 — to champion the work, helping to retard its condemnation to the *Index* for tolerance toward Protestant ideas. Before his death in 1617, Jacques-Auguste de Thou designated Pierre as the guardian of his fabulous collection of books in the rue des Poitevins, the principal library in Paris until the 1640's. It was this library, which they were ever at pains to embellish, that Pierre and Jacques opened to the scholarly world, until in 1645 Pierre took over the prestigious post of *garde de la Bibliothèque royale*, formerly held by de Thou.

While the intellectual ties linking the Dupuy brothers and their de Thou cousins may have been “between men” only, it is significant to note that the blood ties that bound them together with the cement of familial loyalty were formed principally through their female relations. Jacques-Auguste de Thou was their mother’s first cousin since Christophe’s godfather and namesake, the father of Jacques-Auguste de Thou, was the brother of their mother’s mother, Barbe Sanguin, née de Thou. In the thirty years during which Christophe and Jacques exchanged letters regularly, the references Christophe makes to their father’s side of the family are notable by their rarity. Their mother, Claude Dupuy, née Sanguin, must have taken a crucial role in creating the intense fraternal bond among the brothers — accounting for the long-distance bibliophiles’ correspondence between Christophe and Jacques, as well as the celebrated collaboration between Jacques and Pierre in Paris — for she lived until her eldest sons were about fifty, whereas their father had died young, while they were all still children. Pierre and Jacques lived with their mother in her house until Pierre, at almost forty, inherited de Thou’s house and library. Christophe maintained a steady correspondence with his mother until her death, a correspondence which Jacques deemed worthy of preservation with the other family papers now at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Its subsequent disappearance is a sore loss since it deprives us of the fascinating possibility of gauging in greater detail the nature of her influence in the lives of her sons. Nevertheless, we are capable of gauging from Christophe’s correspondence with Jacques the extent to which the unmarried brothers took their most active interest in the careers and well-being of two of their nephews, the sons of their two sisters, Anne Board and Marie Genoud.

Furthering the family enterprise for the Dupuy brothers involved not only looking out for the younger generation, but committing themselves to the intellectual program championed by the family over the long term. The de Thous were of a class that believed strongly in the importance of the written word, and thus in history and historical precedent. Consequently, they were among the influential *parlementaires* who embraced the cause of



gallicanism, calling for the separation of powers temporal and ecclesiastical and, in so doing, developing both a strong base of support for the French monarchy and a tolerance in matters religious that strove to subordinate sectarian interests to the interests of the secular state. The Dupuys continued in this tradition, adding to it a belief in the preeminence of French over Latin as a vehicle of expression. In 1623 Pierre was charged by the king with researching documents establishing the rights of the French crown; subsequently Richelieu backed the eventual publication in 1638 of Pierre's *Traité des droits et libertés de l'église gallicane*.

As for Christophe in Rome, he accepted the principle of self-sacrifice to the family enterprise, for he, like Naudé and Peiresc, apparently found greater value to the cause of learning in the avoidance of discord among the family of scholars, whatever the cost. As a result, he watched the sacrifice of his own prospects of becoming a cardinal to the publication of his brother's book, without so much as a line of reproach, although after Pierre's death he did allow himself the comment to Jacques that they could have left mention of *that* book off of the list of his publications! (Dupuy 3, 129)

Nor was that his only brush with political intrigue. In 1642, as the health of Louis XIII worsened, the problem of his succession blossomed into a conspiracy against the power of Cardinal Richelieu, involving Gaston d'Orléans and Cinq Mars, the king's favorite. Then in June, the family learned that François-Auguste de Thou, son of the historian and friend of Cinq-Mars, had been arrested. Christophe was beside himself with anxiety, as were many in the scholarly community. This young cousin - witty, urbane, well-traveled and a spirited participant at the Dupuys' gatherings in the rue des Poitevins - had had the misfortune of knowing the principals in the conspiracy, so that despite his having argued against the treasonous agreement with Spain, he found himself caught in the web of the Cardinal's maneuvers. He was tortured and tried for having failed to reveal his knowledge of the conspiracy. For months the family and the larger intellectual

community kept alive the hope that de Thou's innocence would prevail, but Richelieu chose his judges carefully and, invoking a long-forgotten ordinance from the time of Louis XI, obtained his conviction: de Thou was beheaded in Lyons on September 12 in the company of Cinq-Mars. On the fifth of October, Christophe took up his pen and wrote one of his most poignant letters, for he had held out hope for so long, that the news of the execution had seemed unbelievable until "L'ami m'en vint donner l'avis, et devant qu'il me dist aucun mot, je reconnus à son visage qu'il me venait annoncer la perte que nous avons faite." (Dupuy, vol. 1, 83) The disgrace enveloped the family, costing their nephew Board his position in Rome and, save for the influence of the Barberinis on his behalf, almost costing Christophe his own post, as well. Such was the power of family solidarity, however, that it could resist even such overwhelming power as Richelieu had seen fit to exercise. Subsequently, Pierre and Jacques plotted their intellectual revenge, preparing an immense *dossier de réhabilitation* in memory of their cousin, which, in the words of Marc Fumaroli, constitutes "un réquisitoire d'une rare violence rétrospective contre l'arbitraire tyrannique du Cardinal-ministre." (Fortin de la Hoguette, x)

To judge the success of the Dupuy family enterprise by the standard of the long-term effects of their patient, daily efforts to further human understanding is, however, to go beyond their own writings, rich though they are as sources for studying the contemporary political scene, the history of ideas, and even the formation of French classical taste. For it is unquestionably through their library that they have had the greatest influence on subsequent generations of scholars. Upon Jacques' death, he bequeathed to the crown the de Thou library that the Dupuy brothers had so painstakingly enlarged over a forty year period. In so doing, he tripled the holdings of the centuries old royal library and founded what has come to be known as the Bibliothèque Nationale, for whose collections, if not for whose smooth operations, we are all deeply indebted.

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