

JEAN MABILLON'S MIDDLE AGES:
ON MEDIEVALISM, TEXTUAL CRITICISM, AND
MONASTIC IDEALS*

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This chapter focuses on Jean Mabillon, one of the most prominent connoisseurs of medieval texts in the late seventeenth century, a founding father of textual criticism and the discipline of diplomatics. The main concern lies with his approach to medieval texts, but the chapter rests also on an interest in the challenges implied in considering this approach as a matter of medievalism. The interrogative point of departure is taken from Leslie Workman's conception of medievalism and its provocative amalgam of academic and popular culture: 'The *study* of the Middle Ages on the one hand, and the *use* of the Middle Ages in everything from fantasy to social reform on the other, are two sides of the same coin'.¹ Workman's definition of medievalism as related to the *study* of the Middle Ages seems straightforward. Viewed in this light, Mabillon comes across as a full-blooded medievalist insofar as he studies medieval texts. Nonetheless it seems worthwhile to keep open the question: is Jean Mabillon a medievalist and is his study of medieval texts an example of medievalism?

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¹ Workman L.J., "The Future of Medievalism", in Gallant J. (ed.), *Medievalism: The Year's Work for 1995* (Holland, MI: 1999) 12, Workman's italics. See also Utz R. – Shippey T. (eds.), *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman* (Turnhout: 1998), which is specifically concerned with the *use* of the Middle Ages, in Workman's sense. For a methodological deliberation which has been an inspiration in this context see Petersen N.H., "Medievalism and Medieval Reception: A Terminological Question?", in Fugelso K. (ed.), *Defining Medievalism(s)*, *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009) 36–44.

What do we study when we turn our attention to Early Modern medievalism, or Early Modern conceptions of the Middle Ages? Do we trace the terminological denominations of the period which extends from, roughly, the sixth to the fifteenth century? Do we investigate questions and concepts related to periodization and to historiographical ambitions to impose structure on history? Or do we pursue the ways in which Early Modern people handled this period? That is, do we consider their methods, the extent to which they regarded the Middle Ages as something other than their own time, the tools with which they bridged the gap between past and present? This essay traces some of these aspects in selected texts by Jean Mabillon.

Jean Mabillon

Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) was a towering figure in the learned world of the late seventeenth century. With Saint-Germain-des-Prés as his *point de repère*, he roamed the erudite circles of Paris, conversing with scholars, both monastic and secular, such as the philologist Charles Du Cange, the orientalist Barthélemy d’Herbelot, and the numismatist Jean Foi Vaillant.² Mabillon was a scholar, and he was a monk. Like his contemporaries Le Nain de Tillemont and Leibniz he sought to reach the perfect balance between critical scholarship and religious certainty.³

Born in humble circumstances, Mabillon began a theological education in Rheims in 1644 after adolescent signs of intellectual potential, and entered the Maurist monastery of Saint Remy in 1653.⁴ His

² On the members of this group and their meetings at Saint-Germain-des-Prés twice a week, see Barret-Kriegel B., *Les Historiens et la Monarchie*, 4 vols. (Paris: 1988) I, *Jean Mabillon* 52–59, and Neveu B., “Mabillon et l’historiographie gallicane”, in Hammer K. – Voss J. (eds.), *Historische Forschung im 18. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: 1976) 32.

³ *Ibid.* 29.

⁴ The Maurist branch of the Benedictine Order, one of many monastic reform initiatives in the early seventeenth century, spread from the congregation of Saint Vanne in Lorraine into France. The congregation took their name from Benedict of Nursia’s disciple Maurus, who allegedly brought the Rule of Benedict to France and it received papal approval in 1621. The congregation was characterized by its strict adherence to the Rule in asceticism and silence but has above all become known for its dedication to study. King P., *Western Monasticism* (Kalamazoo: 1999) 287–294. The congregation saw a significant expansion under Richelieu’s general reform of the French monasteries in the 1630s, Mellot J.-D., “Les Mauristes et l’édition érudite:

monastic trajectory took him through several locations which, with hindsight, seem of formative or indicatory significance. From 1656 on, he was at Nogent, where he engaged in an excavation of the church in order to find the grave of the former abbot of the monastery, the medieval chronicler Gilbert of Nogent;⁵ from 1662 on, he was at Saint-Denis, where he was left in charge of the collections of manuscripts, crucifixes, and relics; and finally in 1664 he arrived at the Maurist headquarters of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where he was to stay. The Parisian monastery was the home of Maurist textual criticism, and Mabillon became assistant to the director of its editorial enterprise, Luc d'Achery.⁶ In this capacity he participated in the preparation of the critical edition of the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, *Opera omnia Bernardi*, the first volume of which was published in 1667. In 1690 appeared Mabillon's revised version of the edition, which later entered *Patrologia Latina* and thus became the standard Bernard edition until Leclercq, Rochais, and Talbot's *Sancti Bernardi Opera* (1957–1977). He was a collaborator on the Maurist corpus *Acta Sanctorum O.S.B.*, the first volume of which appeared in 1668.⁷ Moreover he produced, among others, a liturgical history,⁸ a treatise which opposed the use of monastic prisons⁹ and another in favour of restraint in the dating of relics,¹⁰ and works on the history of the Benedictine Order.¹¹

In the course of the years 1667–1703 Mabillon journeyed in France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Italy; he traversed monastic

un gallicanisme éditorial", in Hurel D.-O. (ed.), *L'Érudition et commerce épistolaire: Jean Mabillon et la tradition monastique* (Paris: 2003) 74.

⁵ Barret-Kriegel, *Jean Mabillon* 18–21.

⁶ The Maurists published the works of, among others, Augustine (1679–1700), Ambrose (1686–1706), Jerome (1693–1706), and Gregory of Tours (1699).

⁷ This work was carried out in parallel with an *Acta Sanctorum*, published by the Antwerp Jesuits, the Bollandists, which elicited a methodological treatise by Daniel Papebroche: *Propylaeum Antiquarium circa Veri ac Falsi Discrimen in Vetustis Membris* (1675). Mabillon's *De re diplomatica* countered Papebroche's work, and eventually Papebroche deferred to Mabillon, Knowles D., *The Historian and Character* (Cambridge: 1963) 222–23. Edelman ascribes the late seventeenth-century surge in text-critical endeavours to, among other things, the fact that the decrease in confessional turbulence left historians, most of whom were ecclesiastics, free to engage themselves in manuscript study rather than polemic, Edelman N., *Attitudes of Seventeenth-Century France towards the Middle Ages* (New York: 1946) 59.

⁸ *Liturgia gallicana* (1685).

⁹ *Réflexions sur les prisons des ordres religieux* (1693).

¹⁰ *Eusebii romani ad Theophilum gallum epistola de cultu sanctorum ignotorum* (1698), a fictive letter addressed to a Protestant.

¹¹ For example *Annales ordinis S. Benedictini* (1703).

archives, collected information about the history of the monasteries, and copied charters. The use of charters as a source for monastic history was a novelty, and it soon became evident that many of them were unreliable and had been forged either in the Middle Ages or later in order to acquire land or prestige.¹² It was his work with these documents that led to Mabillon's identification of sets of criteria which might be used in assessing the authenticity of historical texts. These criteria were presented in his main work *De re diplomatica* (1681), and were to establish him as the father of diplomatics. In *De re diplomatica*, Mabillon describes how the authenticity of a text must be evaluated on the basis of features such as material, seal, script, grammar, style, allusions to contemporary events, and references in other works to the work in question. Some of these things had been treated by Francesco Petrarca and Lorenzo Valla, but Mabillon's approach was partly more systematic, partly characterized by that neutrality, in stark contrast to Valla's polemical rhetoric, which the Maurist himself promoted. It makes sense that Mabillon's criteria were developed in the age of Descartes, who was to become his posthumous neighbour, monument-wise, in the Church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Terminologies

Although the idea of a middle age between the golden age of Antiquity and the present had been current for several centuries, the seventeenth century was still to some extent struggling to find its terminological footing. The development has been charted with diligence by Jürgen Voss,¹³ who has demonstrated that in seventeenth-century France there is a frequent use of terms such as *moyen âge*, *moyens temps*, *medium aevum*, *media saecula*, and *media aetas*, but with varied implications. For example, Furetière (1690) has no entry on the Middle Ages *per se*, but touches upon the concept under the entry for 'moyen': 'On dit aussi, qu'un Auteur est du *moyen âge*, pour dire, qu'il n'est ni ancien, ni nou-

¹² Knowles, *The Historian* 221–222.

¹³ Voss J., *Das Mittelalter im historischen Denken Frankreichs* (Munich: 1972) 63–74. See further his account of the seventeenth-century appraisal of the Middle Ages, 126–137, including the question of the definition and judgement of 'Gothic' architecture, 134–137, and of the way in which the Middle Ages fare in a rhetorical historiography the main aim of which is to demonstrate the continuity and glory of the French monarchy, 139–143.

veau'.¹⁴ The dictionary of the French Academy (1694) is more chronologically specific: 'On appelle "Auteurs du moyen âge" les Auteurs qui ont écrit depuis la décadence de l'Empire Romain jusques vers la fin du dixième siècle, ou environ'.¹⁵ This degree of precision, however, seems rare for the time. Sometimes conceptions of the 'middle' are combined with that of *infimus*, lowest; *infimum aevum*, *infimum saeculum*, and so forth.¹⁶ *Infimus*, the superlative of *inferus*, may have a neutral meaning, the latest, but may also imply a qualification, as is clear in the description in Furetière of its French equivalent *la basse latinité*, 'la basse Latinité, la corruption de la langue Latine'.¹⁷ It is sometimes employed to distinguish between the time of Charlemagne as the middle and what is presently known as the high Middle Ages as the latest age,¹⁸ as for instance in Charles Du Cange's dictionary of middle and late Latin: *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* (1678).¹⁹ Summing up Voss's comprehensive study in a few words we may conclude that in Mabillon's world, *moyen âge* and related terms are generally used to distinguish between authors, artists, works of art, or language from different periods rather than as a term which denominates a period in its own right. People and artefacts are defined as medieval in order to be situated within a diachronic span, not to be characterized *per se*; and the defining terms belong in the realm of periodization rather than conceptualization.

Given the nature and age of the documents that led Mabillon to write *De re diplomatica*, we might assume that the work abounds in terms with medieval implications. But this is not the case. The full title of the work is: *De re diplomatica in libri VI: In quibus quidquid ad veterum instrumentum antiquitatem, materiam, scripturam & stilum; quidquid ad sigilla, monogrammata, subscriptiones ac notas chronologicas; quidquid inde ad antiquariam, historicam, forensemque disciplinam pertinet, explicatur & illustratur.*²⁰ As

¹⁴ Furetière Antoine, *Le dictionnaire universel* (The Hague – Rotterdam, Arnout & Reinier Leers: 1690; photographic reprint, Paris: 1978) 'moyen'.

¹⁵ Quoted from Voss, *Das Mittelalter* 64. Voss comments on the untypical specificity on p. 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 393–406.

¹⁷ Furetière, *Le dictionnaire universel* 'bas'.

¹⁸ Voss, *Das Mittelalter* 68–69.

¹⁹ Voss, following Edelman, identifies the implied definition of medieval authors in Du Cange's *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* (1678) as authors who write between 270 and 1346, Voss, *Das Mittelalter* 67.

²⁰ Paris, Charles Robustel: 1709; first ed. Paris, Jean-Baptiste Coignard: 1681. Illustratively, the *Journal des sçavans* referred to *De re diplomatica* as 'Introduction à l'étude de

sole chronological marker the title thus gives the rather indefinite *vetus*. This seems to be representative for the treatise, and in his instructive *Belegliste* Voss lists only three occurrences from *De re diplomatica* of terms with implications of medieval.²¹ Speaking of seals, for example, Mabillon refers to several ‘inferioris ætatis hominum epistolas’ that he has seen,²² and in the passage on chronological indicators, he treats the ways in which dates are indicated by ‘mediæ & infimæ ætatis homines’.²³ Generally, when in need of specific temporal indications, the Maurist employs either years or centuries or the reigns of kings or popes.

Periodization and Other Kinds of Structure

While notions of the Middle Ages may be useful for the identification of a particular period, they are, as we saw in the examples from Furetière, above all profitable with regard to periodization. The need to structure time is treated with a keen hermeneutical sense by Mabillon’s contemporary Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet in the *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* (1681) written for his pupil, the Dauphin. The work traces, in Augustinian vein, the providential cohesion of the history of the Church as opposed to the fluctuations of profane history. At the beginning Bossuet takes his reader soaring in time and space

Comme donc en considérant une carte universelle vous sortez du pays où vous êtes né, et du lieu qui vous renferme, pour parcourir toute la terre habitable que vous embrassez par la pensée, avec toutes ses mers et tous ses pays; ainsi, en considérant l’abrégé chronologique, vous sortez des bornes étroites de votre âge, et vous vous étendez dans tous les siècles. [...] dans l’ordre des siècles il faut avoir certains temps marqués par quelque grand événement auquel on rapporte tout le reste. C’est ce qui s’appelle *époque*, d’un mot grec qui signifie *s’arrêter*, parce qu’on s’arrête là, pour considérer comme d’un lieu de repos tout ce qui est arrivé

l’Antiquité, et en particulier de France’, Voss, *Das Mittelalter* 169. This chimes in with Voss’s observation that *antiquité*, while originally denominating either the Greek and Roman past or the past more generally, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was transferred to the field of national and regional history, *Ibid.* 73.

²¹ *Ibid.* 402.

²² Mabillon, *De re diplomatica* 41 (book I, chapter IX).

²³ *Ibid.* 179 (book II, chapter XXIV); Voss, *Das Mittelalter* 402.

devant ou après, et éviter par ce moyen les anachronismes, c'est-à-dire cette sorte d'erreur, qui fait confondre les temps.²⁴

We shall keep Bossuet's words in mind as we turn to the ways in which Mabillon structures history and classifies texts. The Maurist was likewise in need of organizational markers as he, in Bossuet's words, also extended himself through the centuries. This comes across in various forms. Although Mabillon himself would see the historiographical and the monastic dimensions in his *oeuvre* as intertwined, we shall look at these two registers separately. In the brief text "Avis pour ceux qui travaillent aux Histoires des Monasteres",²⁵ he offers a manual for those who wish to write the history of a monastery on the basis of its archive. The text is a treasure; from the insider tips of an experienced archive-scholar (when transcribing documents, use good paper and good ink, do not make any abbreviations and remember to write in a large script and with ample margins),²⁶ to ideas as to the structure of the history that is to be composed on the basis of the *mémoires* collected in the archive. The history of small monasteries can be organized chronologically according to the different abbots; the history of large monasteries may be organized thematically in different books which treat the monastery in general, the abbots, other significant and saintly inmates, and so on. This distinction between chronological and thematic structuring is noteworthy; it attests to Mabillon's view of the historiographer as one who must organize the presentation of the past on the basis of his archival finds as well as to flexibility with regard to the parameters for this organization, adding a dimension to the idea of historiographical *narratio*.²⁷

For an examination of the monastic register of Mabillon's approach to the structuring of history and of the way in which he positions medieval authors in this structure, we shall turn to his manifesto on monastic studies, written as an answer to views voiced by the Trappist

²⁴ Bossuet J.-B., *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, in: *Bossuet: Oeuvres*, ed. B. Velat – Y. Champallier (Paris: 1961) 667, Bossuet's italics.

²⁵ Mabillon Jean, "Avis pour ceux qui travaillent aux Histoires des Monasteres", in Thuillier Vincent (ed.), *Ouvrages posthumes de D. Jean Mabillon et de D. Thierry Ruinart, benedictins de la Congrégation de Saint Maur*, 3 vols. (Paris, François Babuty: 1724) II, 91–95.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 94.

²⁷ See e.g., Cicero, *De inventione* I, XIX.27–XXI.31 and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Ad Herennium* I, VIII.13–IX.16; see further Landfester R., *Historia magistra vitae: Untersuchungen zur humanistischen Geschichtstheorie des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts* (Geneva: 1972) 84–89.

reformer Armand-Jean de Rancé (1626–1700).²⁸ Godson of Richelieu and an ecclesiastic proficient in Greek, Rancé had basked in the Parisian *salons* and been chaplain to Louis XIII's brother Gaston d'Orléans, before, in the early 1660s, withdrawing from the world to the Cistercian monastery of La Trappe, which he made the pivot of an austere reform. Rancé presented his monastic world-view in the work *De la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique* (1683). Here he took up, among many issues, the Benedictine *topos* of manual labour and reading as the remedy to idleness. His views on study appear in Questions IV–VI, a mere eighteen pages out of the seventy-page chapter on manual labour: they were to resonate in the ecclesiastical world and colour, most often indeed taint, the view of Rancé both in his time and afterwards. The reformer, in short, denied the value of study in the monastery, his principal argument being that '[...] le dessein de Dieu en suscitant des Solitaires dans son Eglise, n'a pas esté de former des Docteurs, mais des penitens [...]'.²⁹ Six years later Rancé added fuel to the fire with an edition of the Rule of Benedict, interpreted according to its proper spirit, *La Règle de Saint Benoist nouvellement traduite et expliquée selon son véritable esprit* (1689), claiming that studies were inconsistent with the Rule of Benedict which both Cistercians and Maurists were bound by. The crux is the question of the nature of the *lectio divina* mentioned in Chapter 48 of the Rule.³⁰ Rancé has no doubt that monks read to gain piety, not knowledge, and only if one has received a *toute évidente* vocation from God to that effect should one engage in scholarly reading.³¹

²⁸ The principal works on Rancé and his reform are: Bell D.N., *Understanding Rancé: The Spirituality of the Abbot of La Trappe in Context* (Kalamazoo: 2005), Krailsheimer A.J., *Armand-Jean de Rancé: Abbot of La Trappe* (Oxford: 1974), and Waddell C., "The Cistercian Dimension of the Reform of La Trappe", in Elder E.R. (ed.), *Cistercians in the Late Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo: 1981) 102–161.

²⁹ Rancé Armand-Jean de, *De la sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique* (Paris, François Muguet: 1683) II, 292 (chapter XIX, question IV). In a later text he added that on the Day of Judgment Christ would not enquire about theology but about the monks' obedience and humility, Rancé Armand-Jean de, *Réponse au Traité des études monastiques* (Paris, François Muguet: 1692) 281 (part II, chapter VIII).

³⁰ 'Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina', *Regula Benedicti* XLVIII.1; Fry T. – Horner I. – Baker I. (eds.), *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville: 1981) 248.

³¹ Rancé Armand-Jean de, *La Règle de Saint Benoist nouvellement traduite et expliquée selon son véritable esprit*, 2 vols. (Paris, François Muguet: 1689) II, 279–281 (chapter XLVIII).

The Maurist Vincent Thuillier gives a vivid – and much later – account of the commotion throughout the monastic and ecclesiastical world which Rancé's work and its alleged singularity caused, and narrates how Mabillon only after nine years gave in to immense pressure from those around him and published his *Traité des études monastiques* (1691).³² The Maurist could not but protest; his monastic zeal was to a large extent invested in pious scholarly pursuits.³³ The *Traité* is a composite work in three parts. The first part lists the ways in which study had been incorporated in monastic life by, for example, Benedict and Bernard ('On voit encore à Citeaux plusieurs de ces petites cellules, où les copistes & les relieurs de livres travailloient')³⁴ and had been encouraged by popes and councils. The allusion to Bernard is a heavy argument since he is the main figure of the Cistercians and since Rancé understood his reform at La Trappe as Bernardine.³⁵ The second part of Mabillon's treatise describes the kinds of studies and disciplines in which monks might usefully engage. The third part embraces the first two in an overall monastic perspective, with an exposé on the knowledge of truth and the love of justice as the primary goals of monastic study. The appendices include, among other things, a *Liste*

³² Thuillier, *Ouvrages posthumes* I, 365–366. Mabillon's treatise was not the final word. In March 1692 appeared Rancé's *Réponse au Traité des études monastiques*, answered in September the same year by Mabillon's *Réflexions sur la Réponse au Traité des études monastiques*. Louis XIV's niece, Mme de Guise, who was a friend of both men, brought about a meeting, and in May 1693 Mabillon visited La Trappe. A letter written by Rancé the same day expresses his admiration for the Maurist, Krailsheimer A.J. (ed. and transl.), *The Letters of Armand-Jean de Rancé*, 2 vols. (Kalamazoo: 1984) II, 211–212, and a few weeks later Mabillon recounts to a friend how, during his visit, he and Rancé gave assurances of their mutual respect and eventually knelt and embraced each other; letter to Claude Estienne, 15 June 1693 (in Thuillier erroneously '1673'), Thuillier, *Ouvrages posthumes* I, 417–418.

³³ The Maurist Antoine Mège had already reacted against Rancé's *De la sainteté* and the abbot's view on religious studies in his *Commentaire sur la Règle de saint Benoît, où les sentimens et les maximes de ce saint sont expliqués par la doctrine des Conciles, des SS. Pères* [...] (Paris, la veuve d'Edme Martin, Jean Boudot, and Etienne Martin: 1687), which in turn spurred on Rancé's own commented translation of the Rule of Benedict, see Bell, *Understanding Rancé* 271–272. Later followed another Maurist response in Edmond Martène's *Commentarius in regulam S. P. Benedicti* (Paris, François Muguet: 1690).

³⁴ Mabillon Jean, *Traité des études monastiques* (Paris, Charles Robustel: 1691) 55 (part I, chapter X).

³⁵ See, for an early indication, letters of 30 April and 30 May 1663, Krailsheimer, *The letters of Armand-Jean de Rancé* I, 20–21. Rancé's contemporary biographers were at pains to represent him as *un autre Bernard*, see for example le Nain Pierre, *La vie du reverend père Dom Armand Jean le Boutillier de Rancé*, 3 vols. ([s.l.], Florentin Delaulne: 1715) II, 387 and III, 213–214.

des principales difficultez, qui se rencontrent dans la lecture des conciles, des Peres, & de l'histoire ecclesiastique par ordre des siecles, listing historical quandaries such as: How many bishops were present at the council of Arles?³⁶ Did Bernard of Clairvaux preach in French or Latin?³⁷ Did the council of Basel act in good faith with regard to Jan Hus?³⁸ – as well as a rich and varied *Catalogue des meilleurs livres avec les meilleures éditions. Pour composer une Bibliothèque ecclesiastique*.

Mabillon's prescription of the ideal monastic curriculum is significant. First, unsurprisingly, there is Scripture. Then come *les saintes Peres*. These should be read in the collections made by monks; such as the Augustine anthology collected by abbot Eugippius in the sixth century, or the assemblage of moral matters, excerpted from 'most of the ancient fathers' by the monk Defensor (of Ligugé).³⁹ The works of the Fathers are divided into five broad themes: the interpretation of Scripture, the dogma of faith, Christian morality, the discipline of the Church, and monastic morals and discipline. Mabillon goes through each of the five, listing the Fathers who have dealt with it. For example, as authors who have treated dogma specifically, he mentions Augustine, Bede, Hrabanus Maurus, Anselm of Canterbury, and Bernard of Clairvaux. The chapter on monastic morals and discipline is by far the most comprehensive. It is organized in different themes; for instance, insight into monastic rules may fruitfully be acquired through the five volumes of ascetic texts compiled by the Maurists,⁴⁰ and the stance of the Fathers as to discipline may be found in recent compilations.⁴¹ But the most important books for monks are those by Bernard of Clairvaux: 'Ils trouveront dans cette lecture tout ce qu'ils peuvent chercher ailleurs, la solidité, l'agrément, la diversité, la justesse, la briéveté, le feu, les mouvemens [...]'.⁴² The chapter on the Fathers is followed by another on ecclesiastical councils, canon law, and civil law, and then one on scholastic theology – here Mabillon takes a critical stand, seeing in scholasticism a forerunner of casuistry. Then follows the study

³⁶ Mabillon, *Traité des études* 410.

³⁷ Ibid. 422; a question with which scholarship is still concerned, see Kienzle B., "The Twelfth-Century Monastic Sermon", in Kienzle B.M. (ed.), *The Sermon*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge Occidental 81–83 (Turnhout: 2000) 287–288.

³⁸ Mabillon, *Traité des études* 423.

³⁹ Ibid. 173–174 (part II, chapter III).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 180 (part II, chapter III).

⁴¹ Such as Louis Thomassin, *Ancienne et nouvelle discipline de l'église* (1678–1679).

⁴² Mabillon, *Traité des études* 181 (part II, chapter III).

of sacred and profane history, philosophy, and *belles lettres*. To sum up, Mabillon has an eye on chronology, but his overview is principally arranged according to a hierarchical structure of fields and themes. This means that scholasticism ranks after contemporary theology and that the thirteenth-century chronicler Matthew Paris comes before Tacitus. Like Bossuet the Maurist charts history; his organizational device, however, is not epochs but degrees of saintliness and edificational value.

Truth and Method

In the introduction to *De re diplomatica* Mabillon states: 'It would be most astonishing, if no falsifications or corruptions were to appear in such a variety of autographs or authentic texts and samples, which have been transmitted to us from such a long sequence of years, by the hands of so many different nations'.⁴³ The text which the seventeenth-century reader has before him is separated from its origin by a barbed-wire entanglement of temporal distance and a multitude of intermediaries. The statement echoes humanist viewpoints and comes across as a commonplace within the context of textual criticism. At the same time, we must bear in mind the monastic tendency to treat predecessors as a kind of contemporaries in the spirit, and there is a thought-provoking tension between the distance which is epitomized in this statement, and which has a resonance in Mabillon's preface to the revised edition of Bernard's works,⁴⁴ and the immediacy, indeed vividness, of the Bernardine message described in the chapter of readings from the Fathers. Here we shall linger over the topos of inaccessibility.

⁴³ 'At valde mirum esset, si in tanta autographorum seu authenticorum & exemplorum varietate, quæ ex tam longa annorum serie, per tot diversarum nationum manus ad nos transmissa sunt, adulterina aut vitiosa nulla reperirentur', Mabillon, *De re diplomatica* 1. A supplementary perspective to this distance between the seventeenth-century reader and the medieval text is offered in Voss's survey of ways in which medieval features were still present in seventeenth-century French society: the nobility still had a role to play, churches were still built according to Gothic principles, tournaments were still held, medieval literary forms were still cultivated, Voss, *Das Mittelalter* 126–127.

⁴⁴ '[...] ut multo ac longo labore [...] tum ad faciendam non tam voluminum, quam foliorum hac illacque dispersorum collectionem, ac variantium lectionum delectum; tum ad sanandos locos male affectos et ad obscura penetranda; tum denique ad instruendam genuinorum operum censuram', "Præfatio generalis" II *Patrologia Latina* 182, 13–14.

The route by which the scholar may penetrate this tangle and get at the authentic core is *critique*, a concept much in vogue at the time. Stemming from the adjective κριτικός, discerning or judging, *critique* has partly an aesthetic function associated with the appraisal of a work of art according to its fulfilment of particular rules or its ability to please,⁴⁵ partly a scholarly function related to the examination of ancient texts, living on in the scholarly disciplines of, for example, textual or literary criticism.⁴⁶ The epidemic growth of critique is attested to by Mabillon: ‘Rien n’est aujourd’huy plus à la mode que la critique. Tout le monde s’en mesle, & il n’y a pas jusqu’aux femmes qui n’en fassent profession’.⁴⁷ Another indicator is that it merits mockery (in 1691) by La Bruyère: ‘La critique souvent n’est pas une science, c’est un métier, où il faut [...] plus de travail que de capacité, plus d’habitude que de génie [...]’.⁴⁸ Somewhat in opposition to this bleak portrayal, critique was a perilous enterprise; Richard Simon’s seminal examinations of the Bible in the second half of the seventeenth century led to his expulsion from the Oratory.⁴⁹ Mabillon too met with opposition because of his critical methods. Fellow Maurists accused him of disrespectful handling of monastic truths and demanded that he retract his claims that the Benedictine Order had experienced a number of crises caused by the weight of its material possessions, or that an interdict be laid upon him.⁵⁰ One of the cruxes in this complex is the way in which,

⁴⁵ Furetère, *Le dictionnaire universel* ‘critique’; Dens J.-P., *L’honnête homme et la critique du goût: Esthétique et société au XVII^e siècle* (Lexington, KY: 1981) esp. 59–93.

⁴⁶ Burke P., *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: 1969) 50–69.

⁴⁷ Mabillon, *Traité des études* 290 (part II, chapter XIII). In his reply to Mabillon’s treatise, Rancé, cunningly, picks on exactly this point, stating that the fact ‘que cette Critique est un desordre, & un dérèglement si général’ proves that it should not be attempted by monks who must be secluded from the sentiments, behaviour, and actions of the world, *Réponse au Traité des études monastiques* 329 (part II, chapter XIII).

⁴⁸ *La Bruyère: Les Caractères*, ed. L. van Delft (Paris: 1998) 155.

⁴⁹ Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678–1685) and *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (1689). Mabillon may have had Simon in mind when he wrote that disentangling the genealogies of the Scriptures and pointing out embarrassing chronological issues is not the same as knowing them, *Traité des études* 385–386 (part III, chapter I).

⁵⁰ See Barret-Kriegel B., “Brièves réflexions sur quelques règles de l’histoire”, in Grell C. and Dufays J.-M. (eds.), *Pratiques et concepts de l’histoire en Europe XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: 1990) 85–96. In 1678 Mabillon’s fellow Maurists Antoine Mège and Philippe Bastide brought before the General Chapter the claim that ‘un homme qui n’a jamais écrit d’histoires et qui n’a fait que des préfaces ne doit pas usurper le nom et la qualité d’historien’, Barret-Kriegel, “Brièves réflexions” 86–87. Unsurprisingly, the three Maurists were reconciled during the conflict with Rancé. Barret-Kriegel, “Brièves réflexions” 86, see also Bell, *Understanding Rancé* 271–272.

at this point and with Mabillon as a key figure, the work of textual criticism and the writing of monastic history is brought into interaction. Seen in a wider perspective, the conflict between Mabillon and his fellow Maurists revolves itself into a clash between conceptions of truth. There is the historiographical concern with truth, of classical origin, which to some extent implies a blending of erudition and historiographical narrative,⁵¹ and an idea of truth which relies more heavily on notions of religious tradition.⁵² His adversaries Antoine Mège and Philippe Bastide state that the primary aim of the historian must be to tell the truth and that Mabillon has dishonoured the Order 'par une critique très injuste',⁵³ and while their understanding of *critique* is probably less technical than his, it is remarkable that they swoop down on exactly the tool with which Mabillon unearthed what he saw as the truthful core from a heap of the correct and the falsified.⁵⁴

Significantly the level-headed Maurist maintains a critical approach also when it comes to critique: it is often abused to take liberties and employed not only on human science but also on the dogma of faith. People misapply it to make statements about religious affairs with more confidence than a Council; 'Les siècles précédens ont péché par un excès de simplicité & de credulité: mais dans celui-cy les pretendus esprits forts ne reçoivent rien qui n'ait passé par leur tribunal'.⁵⁵ But if carried out correctly critique resembles the endeavours of a judge. Mabillon sums it up in four key points. First, 'que la chose soit de la compétence de celui qui juge'.⁵⁶ This means that a good critic must be well-versed in the things he is examining. As an example Mabillon mentions the grammarian who is not at all competent to deal with theological questions. Second, 'que le Juge apporte tous les soins & toutes les diligences nécessaires pour s'éclaircir & s'instruire dûment

⁵¹ While prevalent in the sixteenth century (see Landfester, *Historia Magistra Vitae* 94–108), in the seventeenth century this principle by and large gave way to a rhetorically flavoured historiography, mirrored in Furetière's definition of *histoire* as 'Description, narration des choses comme elles sont, ou des actions comme elles se sont passées, ou comme elle se pouvoient passer', Furetière, *Le dictionnaire universel* 'histoire'.

⁵² Tavad G., *La tradition au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 1969) 19–53.

⁵³ Barret-Kriegel, "Brièves réflexions" 86. This charge must be seen against the backdrop of Luc d'Achery's programmatic statement at the Maurist General Chapter in 1648 that the editorial programme had as its aim the honour and glory of the Order, Mellot, "Les Mauristes et l'édition érudite" 75.

⁵⁴ See Mabillon, *Traité des études* 291–292 (part II, chapter XIII).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 291 (part II, chapter XIII).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

du fait dont il s'agit'.⁵⁷ Third, 'qu'il ne juge que sur de bonnes preuves'.⁵⁸ Fourth, 'qu'il soit sans préjugés & sans passions'.⁵⁹ Thus may the critical scholar penetrate the layers of potential falsification, error, and opaqueness by which he is separated from the text before him. Behind the critical acumen, however, appears the ground which Mabillon has in common with Bastide and Mège: 'Il ne s'agit que de recueillir & de conserver fidelement le déposit de la Tradition'.⁶⁰

Conclusion

By way of conclusion let us return to the struggle between Mabillon and Rancé. Barret-Kriegel draws up the fronts of the *querelle* in a categorical vein: the humblest of the humble against the proudest of the proud, the peasant's son who was born with nothing against the nephew of the superintendent to whom nothing was denied, he who sought the light of the spirit against him who wanted the annihilation of knowledge, he who wished to perfect himself against him who fancied himself distinguished.⁶¹ She claims that Mabillon won the contest but that this was a pyrrhic victory, and sees *De re diplomatica* as the swan song of the Colbert era and its predilection for science,⁶² draw-

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 293 (part II, chapter XIII). He later stated that critique is a bulwark against blindness, superstition, doubtful miracles, and ill-founded visions, *Réflexions sur la Réponse au Traité des études monastiques* (Paris, Charles Robustel: 1692) 224; Neveu, "Mabillon et l'historiographie gallicane" 65.

⁶¹ Barret-Kriegel, *Jean Mabillon* 145.

⁶² Ibid. 113–114. According to Barret-Kriegel, Rancé won because he gained a literary afterlife. Chateaubriand's *Vie de Rancé* (1844) plays a significant role in this argumentation, and Barret-Kriegel ties her conclusion to Roland Barthes's essay on Chateaubriand's *Vie*, stating that Rancé was to be exalted as an *écrivain français*, and that Barthes, via Chateaubriand, constructs Rancé's life as a literary act *par excellence*, condensing literature into a matter of isolated subjectivity, *Jean Mabillon* 143–144. But in fact Barthes says about Rancé '[...] sa conversion religieuse n'en a pas moins été un suicide d'écrivain', Barthes R., "Chateaubriand: *Vie de Rancé*", in id., *Le degré zéro de l'écriture suivis de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: 1972) 106–120, esp. 118, see also "Écrivains et écrivains" (1960), in *Essais critiques* (Paris: 1964) 147–154. Other scholars have been at pains to stress Mabillon's significant *Wirkungsgeschichte*, see, for example, Edelman, *Attitudes of Seventeenth-Century France* 57 and, for a Benedictine perspective, Knowles, *Historian* 227. Contrary to Barret-Kriegel, Bruno Neveu and Jean-Dominique Mellot underline the public and royal sympathy with the Maurist projects because their work was seen as addressing the Gallican past as opposed to the works

ing the fronts between two different tempers and between love and hatred of knowledge. But in her admiration for the scholarly outlook of Mabillon she seems to disregard the fact that both he and Rancé were above all monks. Each of them sought what he considered the most fruitful way to monastic perfection, Mabillon through an extension, Rancé through a contraction of horizons. Thus the controversy was concerned less with science than with the question of the proper administration of the monastic legacy and the best access to the edifying messages of the texts of the Christian tradition. There is a marked difference between their approaches to this legacy, crystallized in their handling of Bernard of Clairvaux. On the one hand, we have the Maurist who edited the medieval Cistercian's works with a mixture of critical diligence and fond admiration; the man who may be considered the executor of the authorial legacy of the medieval abbot. On the other hand, we have the Trappist who reformed his monastery in austere vein out of deference to, among others, Bernard of Clairvaux and regarded himself as primary executor of the abbot's ascetic and monastic legacy. For Mabillon, there is an obligation to carve out the correct version from a tangle of manuscripts and variants by dint of critically informed toil. For Rancé, what is not there to take is not a licit object for the attention of the monk. But what is there for the taking serves the legitimization of his reform and the edification of his monks. In their respective approaches to Bernard, the two monks seem to be epitomes of Workman's double definition of medievalism. Mabillon studies the Middle Ages, Rancé uses them.

Nonetheless, I suggest that Mabillon's is not a clear-cut case of medievalism. He does not operate with a pronounced concept of the Middle Ages, largely speaking not even with the term Middle Ages, and he does not see himself as a medievalist but above all as an adherent to the monastic tradition. However, I also suggest that we can choose to treat him, heuristically, as a medievalist, reading across his *oeuvre*, as sketched in this chapter, in pursuit of the ways in which he approaches the texts from the Middle Ages and viewing him as one

of the Jesuits, Neveu, "Mabillon et l'historiographie gallicane" 27–81 and id., *Érudition et religion aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: 1994) 179; Mellot, "Les Mauristes et l'édition érudite" 73–88. Like Barret-Kriegel, Lawrence focuses on personalities and comes down on Mabillon's side: 'Rancé displays all the blind rigidity of the self-appointed dogmatist; and the chief merit of his shrill polemic was that it provoked the great monk-scholar Jean Mabillon to write his magnificent apologia for monastic scholarship', Lawrence C.H., *Medieval Monasticism* (Harlow: 2001) 33.

example within the spectrum of Early Modern Medievalism. Such a reading displays a medievalist profile of a double nature. On the one hand, Mabillon urges monks to embrace, with monastic zeal, the fire, diversity, and agility of Bernard of Clairvaux; and with regard to spiritual *Anrede* he considers the medieval texts immediately accessible. On the other hand, he stresses the gap between reader and manuscript and the layers of obscurities and errors which cloud the genuine version; and he exhorts his readers to scrutinize the medieval manuscripts with a cool and balanced critique. To a modern reader, Mabillon may come across as a Janus-faced medievalist who addresses monks and scholars in turn; but Mabillon saw these two sides as intertwined strands in the monastic search for knowledge of truth and love of justice – as he was at pains to demonstrate in his conflict with Rancé.

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