

Jean-Baptiste Colbert letters to Gabriel de La Reynie

Ms. Coll. 578

Finding aid prepared by Clémence Scouten.

Last updated on July 29, 2015.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2015 May 12

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Colbert, Jean-Baptiste, 1619-1683
Title	Jean-Baptiste Colbert letters to Gabriel de La Reynie
Call number	Ms. Coll. 578
Date [inclusive]	1667-1678
Extent	0.2 linear feet (1 box)
Language	French
Abstract	Jean Baptiste Colbert served as the French minister of finance under King Louis XIV and achieved a reputation for his work of improving French manufacturing and bringing the economy back from bankruptcy. The letters deal with a variety of subjects ranging from trade regulations, licensing, taxes, and imprisonment to simple requests for the expedition of certain orders.

Cite as:

Jean-Baptiste Colbert letters to Gabriel de La Reynie, 1667-1678, Ms. Coll. 578, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Jean Baptiste Colbert served as the French minister of finance under King Louis XIV and achieved a reputation for his work of improving French manufacturing and bringing the economy back from bankruptcy. He created a favorable balance of trade and increased France's colonial holdings by advocating the policy of mercantilism.

Gabriel Nicolas de La Reynie was selected to fill the new position of Lieutenant-General of the French Police in 1671. The duties of his post were vast, and by the end of his term he managed to transform Paris, improve tremendously urban law enforcement, restructure the Paris Police Force, reduce dueling, and increase state control over prostitution.

Scope and Contents

Signed from St. Germain-en-Laye and later on from Versailles, the letters deal with a variety of subjects ranging from trade regulations, licensing, taxes, and imprisonment to simple requests for the expedition of certain orders. The correspondence brings clarity to La Reynie's wide range of responsibilities, since his position entailed not only jurisdiction over the security of the city and its environs but also control of food supply and prices, elections of masters and wardens of the merchant guilds, publishing, printing, and book selling, and reports of surgeons. At the same time La Reynie was in charge of police organization, which he managed to restructure in order to improve its efficiency. It becomes evident from the letters that both Louis XIV and Colbert himself left to the Lieutenant of the Police a high degree of independence in his work. A large part of the correspondence puts Colbert in the role of the King's messenger to La Reynie, often reinforcing the confidence that the two had in each other, while demanding evidence, elimination of privileges, and even imprisonment of certain subjects.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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Source of Acquisition

Purchased, 1962.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- France--Politics and government--17th century

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- La Reynie, Gabriel Nicolas de, 1625-1709

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
1667.	1	1
1672.	1	2
1675.	1	3
1677.	1	4
1678.	1	5-6