



A World of Paper: Louis XIV, Colbert de Torcy, and the Rise of the Information State

John C. Rule, Ben S. Trotter

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Historians and social scientists have long identified bureaucracy as the modern state's foundation and the reign of France's Louis XIV as a model for its development. *A World of Paper* offers a fresh interpretation of bureaucracy through a close examination of the department of the Sun King's last foreign secretary, Jean-Baptiste Colbert de Torcy.

Torcy, who served as foreign secretary from 1696-1715, is widely regarded as one of the most brilliant foreign ministers of the ancien regime. Building on the work of his predecessors, he fashioned a skilled team of collaborators as he managed the complex issues of war and peace during the turbulent final decades of Louis XIV's reign. John Rule and Ben Trotter examine Torcy's department to depict administrative structures as they emerged through the circulating stream of paper that connected his office with provincial administrators and diplomats abroad. They explore the collection and centralization of information during Torcy's tenure through the creation of a modern state archive, discreet intelligence gathering, and the surveillance and management of the French mails. They also study the postal carriers, couriers, household officers of the royal court, genealogists hired for research, and an informal "brain trust" of experts, and advisors who carried vital information in and out of the department every day.

A remarkable reconstruction of the department of Jean-Baptiste Colbert de Torcy, *A World of Paper* demystifies bureaucracy and explores the ways in which the modern information state developed from his labours.

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