

The Thirteenth-Century Letter-Collections Named after Petrus de Vinea and their Importance for the Rise of the Late-Medieval State

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Founded in 1819, the Monumenta Germaniae Historica edit both narrative and documentary sources concerning medieval history. The narrative sources include annals, chronicles and other historiographical works. They are grouped together in a series called Scriptorum. The documentary sources include both charters and letters, but not inventories and accounts. Charters form a series called Diplomata, letters a series called Epistolae. Sections for Urbaria or Compota were never planned, a deplorable fact, because this means that till today social and economic history is somewhat neglected at the MGH. One might speculate about a conscious disregard for social and economic phenomena when contrasted with political history. But the explanation is probably much simpler: For the history of the medieval empire there are almost no inventories and accounts, contrary to England, France, Aragon and even various principalities within the empire which at least from the 13th century onwards do have quite a number of such sources.

The letter-collections named after Petrus de Vinea have been on the programme of the MGH ever since their foundation in 1819. The contents of the collections were called *dictamina*, later also *epistole*. The translation letter or Brief is somewhat misleading, as the *dictamina* were primarily *mandata*, i. e. orders issued by the imperial administration, and included also many *privilegia*, perpetual concessions of rights granted by the rulers. The founding-fathers of the MGH – there were no founding-mothers at that time – expected a lot of additional source material on Emperor Frederick II (d. 1250) whom Petrus de Vinea had served, but also for Frederick's sons Conrad IV (d. 1254) and Manfred (d. 1266), because from the contents it has always been clear that about one fifth of the letters were dated after 1249, the year when Petrus de Vinea was imprisoned by his emperor and died. The charges against Petrus remain unclear, either treason because he had negotiated with the Roman curia not only for his master but also for himself, or corruption because Petrus had been too greedy and had permitted himself to be bribed too often. At any rate it is clear that Petrus de Vinea cannot have compiled the letter-collections himself. They have only been named after him, already in the thirteenth century, because Petrus was a widely admired *dictator*, – *dictare* meaning to devise *dictamina*, texts –, we might call him today a renowned public relations advisor. The problem

is, however, that the dates of the letters are never sure. The collections usually only copied the central parts of a *dictamen*. As a rule, they did not copy the introductory parts which named the issuer and the addressee. Nor did they copy the final parts in most cases which announced the seal and gave the date. So one of the major tasks of a critical edition is to find out who sent the various texts to whom and when. Whilst in the nineteenth century the MGH failed, this was done by a Frenchman, Jean-Louis-Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, who published editions of all extant thirteenth-century Staufer charters and letters, the *Historia diplomatica Friderici secundi*, six volumes in eleven parts, Paris 1852-61. Later on the German *Regesta imperii* founded by Johann Friedrich Böhmer, continued by Julius Ficker and Eduard Winkelmann 1881-1901 and supplemented by Paul Zinsmaier in 1983, calendared these texts in a supposedly chronological order. So one could have argued in about 1900 that the job was done.

Yet there remained, and still remains today, a problem. Both Huillard-Bréholles and Böhmer-Ficker-Winkelmann-Zinsmaier did not sufficiently distinguish between genuine documents and texts merely extant in letter-collections where we do not really know when and by whom they were issued, to whom they were sent, and whether they were authentic at all or mere stylistic exercises, models to be used in chanceries throughout Latin Europe where people might want to formulate texts on similar subjects. The question is even more complicated as the compiler may have had an authentic text which he embellished or expanded to tackle additional problems, to impress readers with his rhetorical skills, or to use the *dictamen* for teaching at schools or universities. So a truly critical edition of the letter-collections has to present only the *dictamina* extant in the collections, and this not in a chronological order artificially devised by the modern editor. On the contrary, the edition has to follow the manuscripts, primarily because the medieval compilers certainly had their reasons on how to arrange their *dictamina* according to subject or contents. Therefore, although nearly all *dictamina* extant in the collections named after Petrus de Vineia have been edited, a truly critical edition of the letter-collections themselves remains a desideratum.

There is an eighteenth-century edition based on the most widely disseminated form of the collections, the manuscripts which usually arrange 366 letters in six books. This edition was published by Johann Rudolf Iselin in 1740, and it was reprinted with an important introduction by Hans Martin Schaller in 1991, and in 2014 this edition was used as the basis for better texts by a team of Italian editors headed by Edoardo d'Angelo and Fulvio Delle

Donne. This team has checked Iselin's edition with primarily one good manuscript from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. So the new Italian edition definitely represents a step forward. But the history of the letter-collections themselves, how they were compiled and how they were used, cannot be ascertained without checking as many manuscripts as possible, establishing classes of manuscripts and studying their relations. Only such a truly critical edition can serve as a basis for the historical interpretation both of the letter-collections themselves and of the *dictamina* them. That has been and still is the MGH project since 1819. Quite a number of prospective editors have died since the nineteenth century. I have succeeded to Hans Martin Schaller (d. 2005), and I do not know what the bets are on whether I will finish until my retirement in 2022. Generally speaking, there are two reasons for these two centuries of remarkably slow progress, if progress is not a euphemism in this context at all, the large number of the extant medieval manuscripts and the many different forms of the letter-collections.

More than 200 manuscripts with Petrus de Vineia are known, from the later thirteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century. That is the second-largest group of letter-collections extant from medieval times. Only the letter-collections compiled by Peter of Blois in the second half of the twelfth century have been copied more frequently, leaving us with about 280 medieval manuscripts, also with different *dictamina* in different arrangements. The contents of these letters referred mostly to personal or private affairs. This meant that Peter of Blois was primarily useful for clerics who would have to ask for jobs, thank for gifts, carry on ecclesiastical administration in the service of bishops and the like. The letter-collections named after Petrus de Vineia refer mostly to public affairs, although about one fifth of the letters is private correspondence between Petrus de Vineia and his friends, some of them also high officials and courtiers such as Archbishop James of Capua. The bulk of the letters in Petrus de Vineia, however, deals with Frederick II's conflicts with the papal curia, with organising military campaigns and informing the public about their good or bad successes, with congratulating the relatives of those who had been killed in action, with appointing judges and provincial administrators both in the kingdom of Sicily and in the imperial parts of Italy, demanding reports from them, carrying out visitations to ensure good administration, and finally with informing the public about events at court, thanking people for good services and so on. These contents explain why the letter-collections named after Petrus de Vineia were so widely used throughout Latin Christendom. Rulers, princes and communes would use the *dictamina* in the collections whenever they got into trouble with popes, waged war, imposed

taxes, appointed judges, appealed to fellow-rulers for help and so on. The letter-collections might be used in chanceries and at schools or universities to train young people for future service. Petrus de Vineia was definitely devised for secular authorities, for what came to be called the *status publicus*, the state in the modern sense. The inevitable counter-part were letter-collections for ecclesiastical authorities, especially for the Roman curia. At about the same time, and partially apparently by the same people who compiled Petrus de Vineia, five great letter-collections were formed for the Roman curia and those who wanted to do business there. These were the collections named after Thomas of Capua (d. 1239), the collections wrongly attributed to Marinus de Ebulo (d. 1286) in the sixteenth century, the *Epistole et dictamina Clementis pape quarti* (d. 1268), and the two collections compiled by Richard of Pofi and by Berard of Naples in the second half of the thirteenth century. Taken together, the number of extant manuscripts may equal or even surpass the number of manuscripts for Petrus de Vineia. But for the Roman curia there were these five competing collections, for the secular side there was only Petrus de Vineia, and so Petrus de Vineia remains second only to Peter of Blois as far as the number of extant manuscripts is concerned.

Next to the sheer number of manuscripts to check the second problem of any critical edition of Petrus de Vineia is created by the different forms how these letters are arranged. Some manuscripts group them into five books (15 manuscripts), others into six books (109 manuscripts). The only difference is, however, that the manuscripts with six books have a separate Book IV with *littere consolatorie*, letters on how to express concern about deaths of members of the ruling family, of the court, the administration or the armed forces. The other five books are more or less identical in both classes of manuscripts, the first three on Frederick II's disputes with the papacy (I), on warfare (II), and on taxes from subjects and help from allies (III), the last two on justice (IV or V) and on privileges (V or VI). Both forms can vary considerably in their size, between 133 and 477 letters. Therefore Hans Martin Schaller has suggested to distinguish four basic forms, a small one in five books, a large one in five books, a small one in six books, and a large one in six books. A closer look has revealed meanwhile that there are many subgroups, and the whole classification merits critical revision as soon as not only the place of a *dictamen* but also its text has been compared with other manuscripts. There are even two manuscripts which have first Petrus de Vineia in nine books and then, for the Roman curia, Thomas of Capua in five books. Furthermore, there are 38 manuscripts with large numbers of letters usually found in Petrus de Vineia which are not organized by books. Of course this does not mean that there is no organising principle at all.

Yet each of these manuscripts has to be studied in detail on how the letters were arranged. The MGH have decided to start with the largest and apparently latest collection, the big one in six books, 477 letters extant in 12 manuscripts. The edition will follow the arrangement of the letters in these manuscripts with a new numbering, revising the present system for quotation which is based on Iselin's 1740 edition. At a later stage 80 letters may be added which are only to be found in other classes of manuscripts (for details see Hans Martin Schaller, *Stauferzeit*, 1993). You can see two examples from the MGH-edition which I prepare, one letter from Book III, on sending the Franciscan Elias of Cortona as imperial envoy to an unidentified king, and one letter from the last book, a draft which is probably authentic from 1245 but was never issued, on turning Austria into a kingdom. This latter dictamen is also to be found in a Bohemian collection attributed to a certain Henricus Italicus, second half of the thirteenth century. In collaboration with Richard Psík I hope to find out the relationship between Henricus Italicus and Petrus de Vineia, especially whether Henricus Italicus had direct access to material from the late Staufer chancery or whether he just copied from the collections named after Petrus de Vineia.

Fortunately, a closer study of the manuscripts has revealed that the task of preparing a truly critical text is not as difficult as one might assume in view of all the above-mentioned complexities of the tradition. It is true that the so far anonymous compiler or compilers of the letter-collections did change their texts. We can see this when texts are extant independently from the letter-collections. Examples are a few originals for imperial encyclicals, some copies made by recipients of privileges in copy books or the chronicles such as Matthew Paris. Furthermore, there is an anonymous letter-collection at Innsbruck compiled in the 1250s, parallel to or even earlier than Petrus de Vineia, apparently by a member of the royal chancery of Conrad IV (d. 1254), Frederick II's son. This Innsbruck compilation has 208 letters, and 42 of them are also in Petrus de Vineia (see Josef Riedmann, *Deutsches Archiv* 62, 2006). These *dictamina* have not been reworked as many times as their later versions in the compilations named after Petrus de Vineia. In sum, we can distinguish an earlier text (A-text), more close to the supposed original, and a later text (B-text) or several later B-texts, often embellished or revised, for many of the *dictamina* in Petrus de Vineia. The earlier form is documented by independent traditions such as the Innsbruck compilation. The later form has been reworked by the compilers of Petrus de Vineia. Apparently, the letter-collections in five books are fairly close to the original text, which is an argument for thinking that the compilations in five books are fairly early. The letter-collections in six books have frequently a more revised text.

So they must have been later. The last ones, which also have the greatest number of *dictamina*, were probably compiled at the university of Paris under King Philip the Fair of France (r. 1285-1314), at a time when Philip quarrelled with Pope Boniface VIII and Philip's court imitated letters of Frederick II to argue against the Roman curia. The letter-collections in six books dominate the medieval tradition and will be used by the MGH edition in the section Epistolae which I prepare. For many of the relevant *dictamina* there will be a second edition in the section Diplomata in chronological order with the A-text, the text closer to the supposed originals: see Diplomata 14, Die Urkunden Friederichs II., ed. Walter Koch and others, vol. 4 to 1222 (2014), and Diplomata 17, Die Urkunden Manfreds, ed. Christian Friedl (2013).

The major profit to be expected from truly critical editions both of the letters and the letter-collections named after Petrus de Vineia is twofold: In the first case the editions serve as a basis for discussions on the authenticity of the imperial propaganda and on details of imperial politics and administration during the central thirteenth century, because so far too many letters have been taken as authentic too rashly. Secondly, and this is important, the letter-collections themselves can be seen as a kind of handbook, extant in different versions, on how to rule, govern and administer a state. Petrus de Vineia is a very early handbook on administration, dating from the formative period of what later became the early modern and modern state. So far there has been a vivid discussion primarily in connection with Frederick II himself. There were Italians who praised the kingdom of Sicily under Frederick II as "un stato modello" (Antonio Marongiu, Uno "stato modello" nel medioevo italiano, 1963, a very influential paper), there were Germans who hailed Frederick II as the first truly modern ruler (Ernst Kantorowicz, Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite, 2 vols., 1927/31, several reprints since 1963), but there were also others who severely criticised Frederick II for his despotic bureaucracy (Thomas C. Van Cleve, Emperor Frederick II, 1972) and as having been the first totalitarian dictator similar to Hitler or Stalin (David Abulafia, Frederick II, 1988, German translation 1991, which the MGH refused to publish as being too derogatory). Even his contemporaries, the popes and some mendicant chroniclers such Salimbene of Parma criticized Frederick as being oppressive not only for the church but also for his subjects who would not dare and breathe without their ruler's special permission. It is also true that Louis IX of France (d. 1270) rendered justice to his subjects in less haughty manners and in less elaborately obscured language as Petrus de Vineia, the *logotheta* and *magne imperialis curie iudex*, did under Frederick II. The success of the letter-collections named after Petrus de

Vinea, however, should make us think about the many crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Latin Europe, schisms, diseases, wars and revolts. Perhaps Frederick II just failed in the thirteenth century because he was a bit too early. His subjects were not yet confronted with all these crises, and so they refused to accept Frederick's rigid and inevitably corrupt bureaucracy. A few decades later the same rigid administration which Frederick copied from the Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Normans in southern Italy and Sicily was apparently seen as the only possible means to cope with religious, social and economic disasters. Several decades after Frederick II people accepted his solutions as the best choice for maintaining peace and justice, *pax et iustitia*. A methodologically important first study of how the letters in Petrus de Vinea were used by later chanceries is the book by Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval*, 2008. The language of Petrus de Vinea was considered to be a model for nearly 200 years. It became unpopular only during the fifteenth century Renaissance as the humanists preferred classical antiquity. Yet the bureaucratic state did not relinquish its pretensions to care for all subjects, both their physical and spiritual well-being, and we might even draw parallels not only to totalitarian regimes but also to the welfare state, an English loan word from German Wohlfahrtsstaat, sociální stát, still popular in many parts of Europe.