InterPARES Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Sample Typology:
The Records of the Papal Chancery, IXth-XVIth Centuries

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1. Privileges

1.1. PRIVILEGES: GENERAL

Definition	Distinguishing Characteristics

• A Privilege is a juridical act issued to grant land, titles, and rights, initially bestowed to a church or a monastery, or later to a sovereign. These acts are considered of permanent validity, of juridical and/or political value.	• Medium: papyrus; later parchment.
	• *Minuscula diplomatica* script.
	• Privileges issued between 819 and 1110 are written in *curiale romana*. The act is written in low case letters, with the exception of the superscription and the indication of the date which are in larger size. The *Benevalete* is inscribed in capital letters.
	• Name of the pope or words that need to be emphasized within the act are written in bold letters.
	• The Privileges present the most complete system of authentication. They usually include:
	    • the sign of the cross handwritten by the pope within the *rota*
	    • sometimes the legend of the *rota* inscribed also by the pope
	    • pope's subscription
	    • the *Benevalete* monogram
	    • the incipient 'E' of the formula '*Ego subscripsi*' autographed by the pope.
	    • seal of lead, or silver or gold
	• Privileges were the predominant type of act from the IX Century to the XII Century.

1.2. PRIVILEGES: TYPES

Type, Definition, Dates	Means of Validation and Other Distinguishing Characteristics

1.2.1. Solemn Privileges
 	
• Privileges with a solemn character, as indicated by:
    • type and size of the script
    • the layout of the text
    • silk ribbon affixing the seal
    • a corroboration indicating the means of validation
• Use of solemn privileges becomes rare after the mid-XIIIth Century.
	• Means of validation:
	    • *Rota*: Two concentric circles drawn under the tenor of the document, on the left side of it or in the center, opposite to the monogram *Benevalete*. The inner circle is divided by a cross and contains four quarters. The names of the apostles Peter and Paulus, the name of the pope and his rank, or simply the name of the pope are inscribed in the inner circle. Between the two circles the pope marked, at the very top, the sign of the cross. Around the circle he inscribed a sentence (called legend) that represented his conception about his mission.
	    • *Benevalete* formula (or valediction): The usual formula that concludes a letter. The papal chancery transformed this formula in a means of validation. The *Benevalete* was written in capital letters, on the very bottom of the act, by the pope himself. Thus it was considered a subscription. As time went on, the form and the size of the *Benevalete* have been abbreviated to become a monogram.
	    • Subscription of the Pope, which was written between the *rota* and the *Benevalete*.
	    • Seal affixed with golden and porphyry (red) silk ribbons, sign of the papal authority.

1.2.2. Simple (Non-Solemn) Privileges • Privileges lacking any or all elements to indicate solemn character. • Not used after the end of the XIIth Century.	• Seal affixed with strips of hemp. • Distinguishing characteristics include absence of the *rota* and the formula *Benevalete*.

2. Letters

2.1. Letters: General

Definition	Distinguishing Characteristics
• Letters are acts of temporary validity, generally containing an order or granting a privilege.	• The script of the Letters developed into a special writing, called '*bullatica*', used until the XVIIIth century. The text is surrounded by an increasing number of ornamental elements.

2.2. Letters: Types

Type, Definition, Dates	Means of Validation and Other Distinguishing Characteristics
2.2.1.Litterae responsoriales • A response to a request addressed to the Pope. • VIth Century to VIIIth Century.	• The acts are written in *curiale romana* script, a type of letter developed from the Latin writing. The use of this script had two purposes: confer a particular character to the document, and reinforce the authenticity of the document because this type of letter was difficult to forge.

2.2.2. Epistolae consistoriales • The Pope is the author of the act, but the act is issued following a collegial decision taken in the *Consistorium* (assembly of the cardinals convoked by the Pope). • VIth Century to VIIIth Century.	• Written in *curiale romana*, as above. • The collegial character of the act is mentioned in the text.
2.2.3. Decretales [or Litterae consistoriales] • Relate to decisions taken in the *Consistorium* (the council of the cardinals) and refer to issues of the canonic law: canonisation, constitution, convocation to a general council, confirmation of consistorial decrees. They relate to specific situations, but because they are considered of universal application they are notified as exempla. These letters do not have, initially, an official character because they refer to a particular issue of the canon law; as the decision taken in a specific case can be generalised and applied to similar situations, they acquire the status of a law. • VIth Century to VIIIth Century.	• Written in *curiale romana*, as above. • Use of lead seal (indicating that these acts are considered of permanent validity, of juridical and/or political value.) • Includes list of the cardinals present at the council, the personal sign of the cross handwritten by each cardinal, and witnesses of their presence. • Presence of the *rota* (indicating solemnity of the act.)

2.2.4. Litterae gratiosae [or Litterae Graziosae, or Litterae de Gratia] • Acts that offer an advantage, or confer a benefit or a position, and are issued by the pope as benevolent acts. • First appearance in XIth or XIIth Century.	• Medium: parchment. • Script: *minuscula diplomatica* with elongated characters. • Use of lead seal (indicating that these acts are considered of permanent validity, of juridical and/or political value.) • Silk ribbons affix the seal. • May have salutation of the form '*in perpetuum*' (indicating solemn character.)
2.2.5. Litterae executoriae [or Litterae de justitia] • Executive orders given by the pope • First appearance in XIth or XIIth Century.	• Medium: parchment. • Script: chancery type script in *minuscula diplomatica* with squared letters. • Use of lead seal (indicating that these acts are considered of permanent validity, of juridical and/or political value.) • Hemp strips affix the seal (indicating lack of solemn character.) • Salutation of the form '*salutem et apostolicam benedictionem*' (again, indicating lack of solemn character.) • Absence of subscription (not required for orders having the status of a law.) • Document ends with the chronological date. • Sometimes featured multiple seals (i.e., one seal added by the author for validation, and one by the addressee to confirm receipt or the execution of the act.
2.2.6. Litterae patentes • First appearance at beginning of XIth Century.	• Medium: parchment • *Litterae patentes* closed with a seal of lead, but they could be open without taking off the seal.

2.2.7.Litterae clausae	• Medium: parchment.
• Letters relating to political, administrative, or secret diplomacy issues that had to remain secret, or personal letters. • First appearance at beginning of XIth Century.	• Use of lead seal (indicating that these acts are considered of permanent validity, of juridical and/or political value.) Distinct from *Litterae patentes* in that the *Litterae clausae* cannot be opened without cutting or breaking the seal. • With the exception of the seal, no other means of validation are present on the document. • The name of the addressee is inscribed of the verso of the document to be read without opening it.

2.2.8.Solemnes	• Different type of script for the entire first line.
• Acts of administrative character. • First appearance at beginning of XIVth Century.	• Use of lead seal (indicating that these acts are considered of permanent validity, of juridical and/or political value.) On rare occasions, a gold seal might be used. • Name of the pope or a word that needs to be emphasized within the act are written in bold letters.

2.2.9.Cedula	• Use of a secret seal inscribed directly on the parchment (or paper).
• Confidential letters or various notifications of temporary effect, for example convocations to the Holy See.	

2.2.10. Breves	
• Simplified form of Letters aimed for fast transmission, written and transmitted directly by the secretaries and sent without the knowledge of the author; or confidential letters or various notifications of temporary effect. • First become frequent during the XVth and XVIth Century.	• The characteristic seal used for the *Breves* is the red wax seal or the secret/personal seal of the pope (*annulus Piscatoris*), which is inscribed directly on the parchment (or paper). • Little care is given to the script. The types of letters used are various, such as: small gothic, humanist or modern writing. • Begin with an entitling that consist of several elements: the name of the pope and his rank, the addressee, identified by the qualification of his position instead of his name. • Salutation formula: '*salutem et apostolicam benedictionem.*' This formula can be replaced by '*ad perpetuam rei memoriam*' (or 'for the perpetual memory') in permanent acts such as a treaty of peace. • The text is usually short. • The topical date is followed by the announcement of the type of seal. • Name of the writer concludes the document. • Some diplomatists identify the *Breves* with *Mandamenta* because of the formula of request or order '*mandamus*' included in the disposition of the act. • Beneficiary writes the document himself (in order to avoid the heavy taxes imposed by the chancery and to speed up the procedures of transmission), and submits to the pope.
2.2.11. Supplicatio	
• A request, or an act generally established by the beneficiary validated by the '*sola signatura*' of the pope.	• Little care is given to the script. The types of letters used are various, such as: small gothic, humanist or modern writing. • Not sealed • Beneficiary writes the document himself (in order to avoid the heavy taxes imposed by the chancery and to speed up the procedures of transmission), and submits to the pope. • The original is signed by the pope, and an approval formula is added (e.g., '*Fiat ut petitur*' written and initialized by the pope, or '*Placet motu proprio*,' or '*Motu proprio*' handwritten and initalized by the pope, etc.) • Boüard states that this form of petition (*Petitio*) is at the origin of all the *Litterae gratiosae* and *executoriae*.

2.2.12. Motu proprio • Simplified forms of Letters aimed for fast transmission, written and transmitted directly by the secretaries**.** The '*Motu proprio*' are administrative acts, resolutions issued spontaneously by the pope, and not requested. • First become frequent in the XVIth Century.	• Little care is given to the script. The types of letters used are various, such as: small gothic, humanist or modern writing. • Initial formula in the form '*Motu proprio*' (from which derives the name.) • Entitling contains the name of the pope and the indication of his rank. • No salutation formula. • Concludes with the formula '*Placet motu proprio*' followed by the pope's signature (initials). • Not sealed. • Written in Italian beginning with the XVIth century. • Beneficiary writes the document himself (in order to avoid the heavy taxes imposed by the chancery and to speed up the procedures of transmission), and submits to the pope. • Approval formulae as with *Supplicatio* (e.g., '*Fiat ut petitur*' written and initialized by the pope, or '*Placet motu proprio*,' or '*Motu proprio*' handwritten and initalized by the pope, etc.)