

Odyssey of a State Manuscript



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Abstract

A state document authenticated thanks to time and space.

Keywords: Pétain; Space; spatio-Temporal lag; Time

Introduction

During WWII, Marshal Pétain was president of the Council of Ministers of a government based in Vichy in the free zone. In December 1972 there was a long strike by garbage collectors. On the way back to my office, I picked up on a garbage heap close to the Parc Monceau (8th district in Paris), a portfolio for drawings. Inside, there were some engravings of the 19th century, a few

copies of the magazine « L'Artiste », and a typewritten document dated January 1st, 1942, to be published in the French Official Journal on January 4th, 1942 (Figure 1). Given that the text has handwritten corrections in ink, it deserves a due diligence through time and space in order to uncover the strangeness of a possible State document.

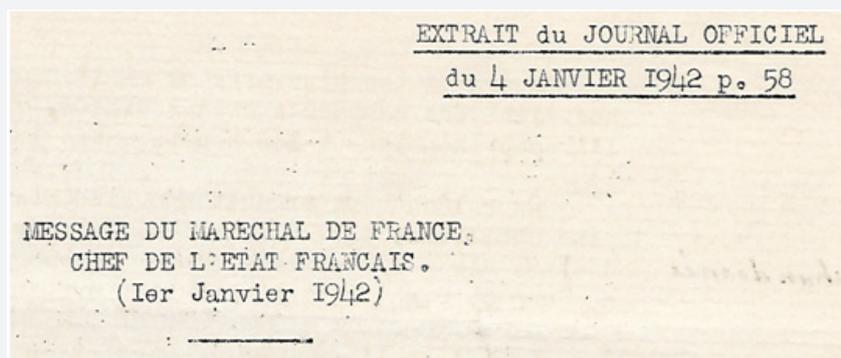


Figure 1: Heading of the document.

A Genuine document

The document has five pages on three watermarked sheets. It is in good condition for a « war paper » which usually gets yellow and brittle. It's obviously a genuine piece because the black ink went through the paper lower right (Figure 1). However, it was going to be kept in my own archives for over fifty years before making research. The document has been removed from the archives of the French government in Vichy; then it has been carried from Vichy to Paris; we don't know when and by who.

Ultimately in 1972, someone in Paris, who was ignoring that it is a historical piece, decided to throw it away (Figure 2).

Handwritten corrections

Four handwritten ink corrections in the left margins (Figures 3 -6), that make you wonder who made them and what for. Specifically, were they made by Pétain himself? Every word is important, and every correction conforms to subtle Pétain's dialectic. The sentence is strengthened when « attardée »

(lingered on) is replaced by « abandonnée » (abandoned) (Figure 3). The target is specified when « à l'étranger comme en France » (abroad and in France) is replaced by « à Londres comme à Paris » (in London as well as in Paris) (London means de Gaulle; Paris is in the occupied zone) (Figure 4). The Pétain's authority is

reminded when « enthousiasme » (enthusiasm) is replaced by « assentiment » (assent) (Figure 5). In order to remind that is Pétain who is speaking, « et de mieux comprendre la sienne » (and better understand his voice) is replaced by « et de mieux entendre la mienne » (and better hear my voice) (Figure 6).

VICHY-1942 >>> PARIS-1972 >>> CANNES-2022

Figure 2: Spatio-temporal following of the document.

(The red ink signals a crisis position)

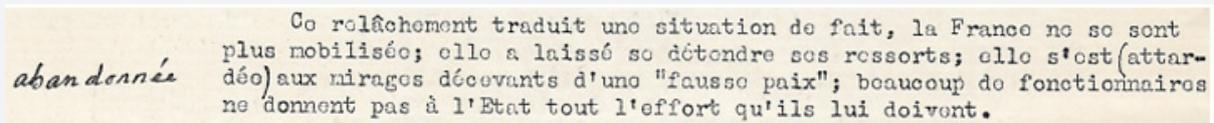


Figure 3: First correction on page 2.

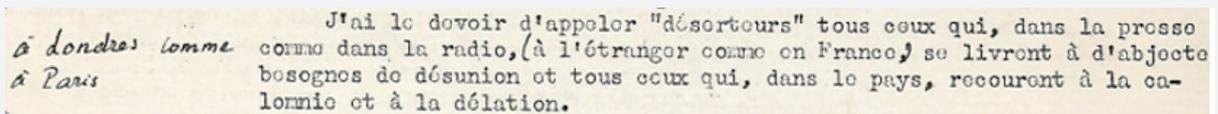


Figure 4: Second correction on page 2.

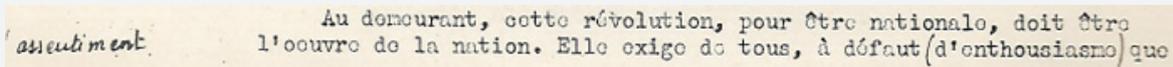


Figure 5: Third correction on page 2.

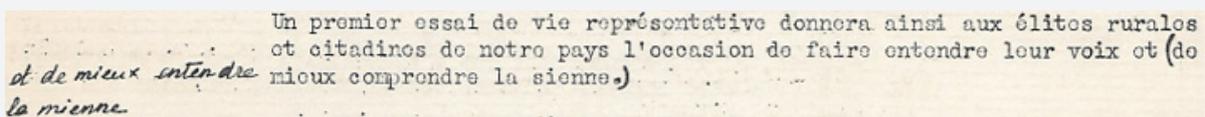


Figure 6: Fourth correction on page 3.

Pétain's writing

It was so until a hand written report titled « Les causes de la Guerre » (the causes of WWI) is featured in an auction of autographs as made around 1920 by Marshal Pétain, who was the head of the Army at the time the report includes 351 pages and 77 maps (Figure 7); however it was authenticated in 2008 by an autograph expert at Toulouse Court of Appeal (France), it gave rise to a quarrel among experts [1] ; a probable side effect resulting from a very sensitive subject. Ultimately the expertise has been confirmed in 2011 by Les Archives de France and the

document has been estimated by Sotheby's between 250,000 and 350,000 Euros. First remark about the shape of letters: Taking into account the age of Pétain and by comparing the message of 1942 and the report of 1920, letter by letter, allows confirming with no doubt that they have been written by the same hand. For example, lowercase letters « a », « n », « m », « p », and uppercase letters « L », « P », have the same shape, despite the 22 years that separate the two writings, as well as the circumstances (Figure 8). Second remark about the substance: the report and the corrections must have been written by both a great strategist and a wise politician; his name is Pétain.

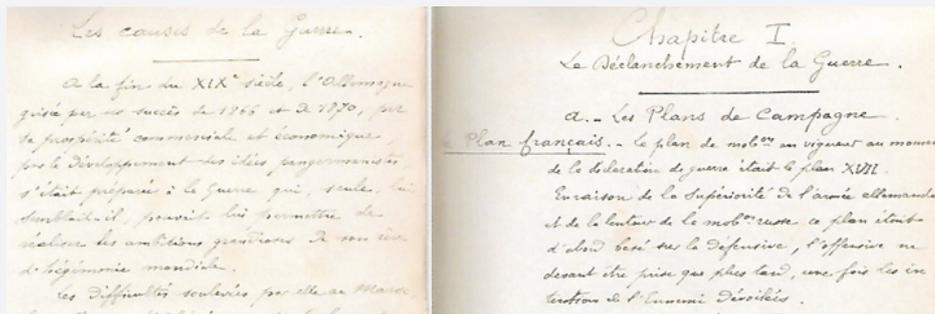


Figure 7: Extract of the 351-page report.

REPORT (PARIS-1920) <-----> MESSAGE (VICHY-1942)

Figure 8: The spatio-temporal lag between the origins.

A State documents

A detailed report about the Message of 1942 has been sent to the expert at Toulouse Court of Appeal: her answer is that the corrections of 1942 could have been done by Pétain. The expert did not have the document in hand to carry out a careful review, this is why she cautiously said, « could have been done by Pétain » instead of « have been done by Pétain ». Moreover, she added that, given it is a state document, it could be seized by the authorities, what is a thinly veiled confirmation of her expertise.

Conclusion

The message of 1942 with handwritten corrections is a historical document in which part of the Pétain's character is

put in light. A look back on (Figure 2) and remembering both the venue where the message of 1942 was picked up and that it was about to be destroyed, emphasize the remarkable role of time and space in authenticating with no doubt the report of 1920 as well as the message of 1942. Finally, it must be emphasized that it is the similarity of the two writings which made possible the attribution of the two documents to the hand of Pétain; it would not have been possible separately. After the war, Pétain will be condemned to death for collaboration with the enemy and the promulgation of anti-Jewish laws.

References

1. « La Dépêche du Midi » (2014) « La Guerre Mondiale », 351 handwritten pages and 77 maps, c. 1920, attributed to Pétain.



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