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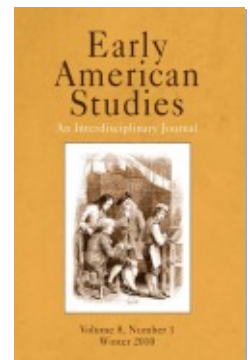
The Printer and the "Peasant": Benjamin Franklin and  
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# The Printer and the “Peasant”

## Benjamin Franklin and Pierre-André Gargaz, Two Philosophers in Search of Peace

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**ABSTRACT** As Franklin was trying to launch peace negotiations with Great Britain in the spring of 1782, an ex-convict named Pierre-André Gargaz brought him a plan for how to secure perpetual peace in Europe through a union of nations ruled by a representative council. Franklin had the treatise printed on his private press. This article traces the enduring relationship between these two “philosophes,” analyzes the evolution of Gargaz’s ideas and suggests Franklin’s influence on them, discusses the establishment and purpose of Franklin’s press at Passy, and demonstrates how this meeting changed Franklin’s view of himself as an independent printer under the ancien régime.

On his tranquil estate in the village of Passy, high on a bluff overlooking the Seine and the city of Paris, Benjamin Franklin was far removed from the carnage of the American Revolution. But the reports he received of innocent civilians being massacred, villages being torched, and American prisoners of war being abused in British jails were never far from his mind. Some of this news came from eyewitnesses: French soldiers, including Lafayette, who had fought in America, and the hundred or so captured American seamen who had escaped from English prisons and made their way to his door, weak and penniless. Sent to France by Congress at the outbreak of the war, when he was seventy, Franklin bore responsibility for raising the funds and shipping the military supplies necessary to sustain the conflict. As the death toll rose year after bloody year, with no resolution in sight, he despaired of living long enough to see the war’s conclusion. From time to time his rage at the wanton cruelty of the British and their allies found expression in private letters and articles for the press: the atrocities were unforgivable, the British thirst for blood was unquenchable, the king and his ministers, who were waging an

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unjust war against their own people, were diabolical tyrants. In 1779 Franklin and Lafayette drew up a "List of British Cruelties," which would serve as an outline for an illustrated children's book. More than once Franklin wrote to British friends a now-famous aphorism whose simplicity belies the passion that ran beneath it: "There never was a good war or a bad peace."

If there could be no bad peace, however, Franklin also knew that the absence of war did not necessarily make a peace "good." Signing an armistice was no guarantee of its durability; treaties were routinely violated. Underlying resentments between warring peoples, if left unaddressed, could easily reignite into conflict. The only peace worth striving for was one that had a chance of being permanent. He stressed these points to the British emissary Richard Oswald, who was sent in April 1782 to inform him that Great Britain (defeated the previous fall at Yorktown) might now consider negotiating a peace. The first element on Franklin's list of notes for a conversation with Oswald was the sentence: "To make a Peace durable, what may give Occasion for future Wars, should, if practicable, be removed." He cautioned Great Britain against negotiating a "mere Peace," which "would not produce half its Advantages if not attended with a sincere Reconciliation." The morning Oswald was to return to London, Franklin called a last-minute meeting to emphasize how important it was that England, which had "made War upon [America] unjustly, and has wantonly and unnecessarily done it great injuries," should take the initiative in making sure the peace would be "durable." After friends quarreled, he explained, "nothing tended so much to *conciliate* as Offers made by the Aggressor of Reparation for Injuries done by him in his Passion." Those reparations, to be effective, should appear to be voluntary, and given the nature of the injuries in this case, they would also have to be substantial. Franklin suggested several remedies Britain could propose, including the ceding of Canada, that might allow the Americans to begin the process of forgiveness and work toward reestablishing cordial relations. Regardless of these offers, however, Britain would have to acknowledge American independence before any negotiations could begin.<sup>1</sup>

It would be another three months before the British authorized a peace commissioner to negotiate on Franklin's terms. During that period of delicate diplomacy, a peculiar figure appeared at his door. "Very shabbily dressed," as Franklin would later recall ("all his dress together was not worth 5 s."),<sup>2</sup> he

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1. L. W. Labaree et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 39 vols. to date (New Haven, 1959–), 37:169–72, 178, 294–97 (hereafter cited as *Papers*).

2. Diary of John Baynes, entry of September 23, 1783, in *The Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, written by himself*. . . , 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1842) 1:453.

was admitted. When asked his business, the man announced in an unfamiliar accent that he had walked from a remote village in the south of France, seeking to publish a treatise he had written on an “infallible” way to establish and maintain a state of perpetual peace in Europe.

There was nothing unusual about a stranger, no matter how bedraggled, requesting an audience at the Hôtel Valentin. Franklin’s doors were famously open during the years he lived in Passy, and through them streamed men and women from all classes of society bearing projects, petitions, schemes, suggestions, inventions, and hard-luck stories. His reputation as a friend to humanity gave them the courage to visit, they would explain, and he never seems to have disappointed them. His personal financial accounts are filled with evidence of his charity, which he extended to writers as well as beggars: “a poor Irish Gentleman who came with a Project”; “a distress’d poet”; “a Poor Author, on Condition that he should not dedicate his works to BF.”<sup>3</sup>

Franklin soon learned, however, that Pierre-André Gargaz was no ordinary petitioner. Branded with the letters “GAL”—*galérien*, or galley slave—the fifty-two-year-old had recently completed a twenty-year sentence on a prison hulk off Toulon, condemned for a murder he maintained he did not commit. He had composed this treatise during his long years on the galleys. He must also have reminded Franklin of the letter he had sent to Passy three years earlier, to which he had received no reply. On July 10, 1782, while Franklin was still waiting for the British government to authorize a peace commissioner, he described this meeting and its consequences to the British statesman David Hartley. Gargaz’s status as an ex-convict was not mentioned:

There is methinks a point that has been too little considered in treaties, the means of making them durable. An honest peasant from the mountains of Provence, brought me the other day a manuscript he had written on the subject, and which he could not procure permission to print. It appeared to me to have much good sense in it; and therefore I got some copies to be struck off for him to distribute where he may think fit. I send you one enclosed. This man aims at no profit from his pamphlet or his project, asks for nothing, expects nothing, and does not even desire to be known. He has acquired, he tells me, a fortune of near 150 crowns a year (about £18 sterling) with which he is content. This you may imagine would not afford the expense of riding to Paris, so he came on foot; such was his zeal for peace and the hope of forwarding and securing it by communicating his ideas to great men here. His rustic and poor appearance has prevented his access to them;

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3. *Papers*, 31:4, 35:6.

or his obtaining their attention; but he does not seem yet to be discouraged. I honour much the character of this *veritable philosophe*.”<sup>4</sup>



It is tempting to try to picture Benjamin Franklin—whose own appearance was considered “rustic” by the French aristocracy—face to face with this threadbare *philosophe*. Prison records show that Gargaz stood about five feet three inches tall. He had blue eyes, a broken nose, an oval face, and the hair and beard that once had been light brown were now white.<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that Franklin would have been sympathetic; as a runaway apprentice, he too had walked hundreds of miles with only a few coins in his pocket, arriving in a metropolis where he knew no one. Nor is it surprising that by the time Franklin wrote that letter to Hartley, five or six weeks after Gargaz’s arrival, he would have found so much to admire. Gargaz, he learned, was committed to distilling complicated ideas into simple principles based on common sense. He was passionate about inculcating in the young a strong moral sense. He was devoted to the idea of civic improvement and had sent treatises on a wide variety of topics to men and women at the highest levels of society. Visionary or crackpot? Not everyone agreed, though many of Gargaz’s proposals are preserved among the papers of high-ranking ministers and intellectuals. Franklin must have been amazed to discover yet another interest they shared: each had devised a system of phonetic spelling. Incredibly, Gargaz had managed to publish his book on French spelling reform in 1773, while he was still in irons. He was a published author as well as an ex-convict when he presented himself at Passy.

Gargaz came to Franklin with hopes of patronage; he could not have known that the American minister had the capability to print his manuscript. A few years earlier, Franklin had set up a private press in order to produce official American forms and documents, most of which were single sheets. Franklin’s press at Passy was exempt from the scrutiny of the highly regulated French book syndicate, and as yet he had done nothing to challenge it. Gargaz’s arrival at Passy proved to be consequential for both the peasant and the printer. The treatise on perpetual peace came into Franklin’s life just as he had reason to be confident that America’s victory was certain and independence was assured. The confluence of these circum-

4. *Ibid.*, 37:607.

5. Ferréol de Ferry, *Pierre-André Gargas (1728–1801): Galérien de Toulon, réformateur de l’orthographe et de la condition pénitentiaire, inventeur des Nations Unies* (Paris, 2000), 21, 87.

stances seems to have inspired him to think of his press in a new way. His decision to print this pamphlet ushered in a brief but significant phase of his life as an independent printer in Old Regime France: issuing tracts of political philosophy by Frenchmen who were unable to publish them.

This essay will tell the story of these two “veritable philosophers” and their devotion to the causes of peace, conciliation, and the common good. Their relationship—more enduring than has been known—was enlivened by coincidences and made poignant by narrowly missed opportunities. The core of the story, Franklin’s printing a treatise by a galley slave, was first brought to light in 1922, when George Simpson Eddy published a dual-language edition of the pamphlet with an excellent though limited introduction based largely on the documents he found in the as-yet-unpublished papers of Franklin and Jefferson.<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Eddy, Auguste Aulard discovered some additional information in French archives, which he published in 1923.<sup>7</sup> In 2000 Ferréol de Ferry, of the Archives Nationales in Paris, published a remarkable biography of Gargaz based on a wealth of new documentation he discovered in Paris and Provence.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Ferry did not extend his search to libraries and archives in the United States, where a number of additional Gargaz manuscripts have come to light. This article builds on the work of Eddy and Ferry, filling in and enlarging the picture they sketched by integrating this newly identified material and locating the story in the context of Franklin’s life, focusing on both his diplomatic mission and new research relating to his activities as a printer at Passy.

#### PIERRE-ANDRÉ GARGAZ

Born in 1728, Gargaz was the only son in a relatively prosperous family of Thèze, a village in Haute-Provence situated in a fertile plain between the Durance River and the Alps.<sup>9</sup> At the age of sixteen he married a local girl; by the age of twenty-four he had witnessed the deaths of his three infant children and had lost his wife to complications from the third birth. Three years later, when his father died, the young widower inherited the family estate and made out a new will in favor of his mother and three sisters.

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6. P.-A. Gargas, *A Project of Universal and Perpetual Peace Written by Pierre-André Gargaz, a former Galley-Slave, and Printed by Benjamin Franklin at Passy in the Year 1782*, ed. George Simpson Eddy (New York, 1922).

7. Auguste Aulard, “Le Forcat Gargaz, Franklin et la Société des Nations,” *La Revue de Paris*, September 1923, 45–55.

8. Ferry, *Pierre-André Gargas*.

9. The biographical information presented here and the background on Gargaz’s various incarcerations in the following paragraphs is from *ibid.*, 21–56.

Managing several agricultural properties and working as a merchant, Gargaz became one of the most comfortable *propriétaires* of the village. His mother died in 1757, eight months after her husband. The following year, when the body of a local man was found floating in the Durance, Gargaz was accused of murder. The details are complicated and to some degree murky; what is known, however, is that certain men who had been feuding with Gargaz for more than a decade (including his late wife's brothers) stood to gain materially from his disappearance. Gargaz was charged and imprisoned. He languished in jail for two years, despite vigorous protests, while one of his adversaries took possession of his furniture. Finally, a confession under torture landed him a twenty-year sentence on the galleys. He was condemned on March 12, 1761.

Gargaz got an unwelcome education in vice among the "pack of vicious captives" he lived with during his five years on *La Reine*, off Toulon, and the fifteen years he spent on *La Duchesse*, anchored first off Marseille and then, as of 1774, off Toulon. Though he found among them "a few honest men who had the bad luck to be unjustly condemned by false depositions," most of the convicts bragged of their depravities and crimes. Shocked at their general immorality, Gargaz nonetheless winced at the excessive brutality of the punishments given to those who misbehaved or deserted. He would later decry the hypocrisy of a system that tortured men in captivity for acts that during wartime would bring them glory.<sup>10</sup>

By the time he joined their number, *galériens* were no longer required to row. An ordinance of 1748 had ruled that prison ships would remain at anchor off the coast. Convicts were forced to perform hard labor during the day; at night they were chained to their bunks. The better-behaved prisoners were given less onerous tasks. "Payols," recruited from among those with legible handwriting, worked in the *commissaire's* office and helped keep records and accounts. Some prisoners were employed in making small objects for sale; some were rented out as workers; some were put at the disposition of the chaplain. There is evidence that Gargaz worked for the chaplain during his final three years.<sup>11</sup> He had to have enjoyed a privileged position and extraordinary patronage since at least 1773, however. In that year his book on phonetic spelling, *Alfabet qonciliateur de l'ortographe. . . .*, was published in Marseille by one of the city's leading bookseller-printers, Jean Mossy, *imprimeur du roi et de la marine*. The convict promptly sent

10. *Ibid.*, 51–54.

11. *Ibid.*, 49. In 1782 the chaplain presented him with a "certificate of probity" attesting to his service during the last three years of his sentence.

copies to officials at Versailles, the governess of the royal children, and various academicians.<sup>12</sup> In July 1774, egged on by a response (now missing) from a certain “Luno de Boaz jermein” in Paris, he sent a copy to the great botanist and taxonomer Michel Adanson at the Académie des Sciences, addressing him in his role as a royal censor. Writing in his own phonetic spelling and giving his return address as simply “forsa a Tolon” (prisoner at Toulon), he begged Adanson to pay particular attention to the organizational system of rules and principles, which he felt sure would appeal to him. If Adanson would permit, Gargaz would send the manuscript of his “Disionere fransez” along with several other works and all “l’arjan nesere” (necessary money) to obtain a *privilège du roi* to have them printed. He was undeterred by the ensuing silence. In August he sent Adanson a second copy, this time with a letter explaining his system in greater detail and asking again for help in getting permission to publish his other works.<sup>13</sup>

Among those other works must have been an early version of what he would call his project of perpetual peace, which he seems to have drafted in 1773. In that year, according to his later account, he sent it to a high-ranking minister at Versailles.<sup>14</sup> That person was probably the finance minister Jean-François Joly de Fleury, to whom Gargaz also sent his book on phonetic spelling. (The book remains among Joly de Fleury’s papers; the manuscript does not.) In June 1776, he sent Joly de Fleury another treatise, this one an audacious plan for penal reform and the rehabilitation of prisoners. Entitled *Projet pour purger la France de toutes sortes de malfaiteurs* (*Project to rid France of all kinds of malefactors*), it called for abolishing prisons and disbursing convicts to parishes where, under strict supervision, they would work and be able to feed themselves. By changing locations annually, their sense of restlessness would be alleviated and they would be less likely to run away. Misbehavior would be punishable by death. Hoping to have his plan enacted immediately, Gargaz enclosed nine other copies and nine envelopes addressed to the chief magistrates of the *parlements* of various towns, who, he felt certain, were sure to advocate its swift adoption.

Despite the apparent lack of encouragement, Gargaz persevered. One wonders when he had the opportunity to copy these manuscripts, let alone compose them. On July 24, 1776, eleven days after sending his plan for

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12. *Ibid.*, 57–61.

13. Gargaz to Adanson, July 13 and August 28, 1774, unpublished manuscripts filed with Adanson’s copy of *Alfabet qonsiliateur de l’ortographe*, Princeton University Library, Rare Books Division.

14. *Mémoire* enclosed in Gargaz to Franklin, February 14, 1779, discussed below.



penal reform to Joly de Fleury, he sent his project of perpetual peace to no less a luminary than Voltaire. Giving as his return address "La Galere *La Duchesse*, Toulon," his one-sentence cover letter asked Voltaire for his thoughts on the enclosed "*Projet de Paix perpétuelle*." Why Voltaire? Had the convict read Voltaire's satiric verse "*La Tactique*," whose final couplet characterized the peace project of the abbé de Saint-Pierre (Gargaz's inspiration and model) as "impracticable"? If Gargaz had read the verse in the back of the 1775 edition of Voltaire's *Don Pèdre*, he would also have seen the author's note disparaging perpetual peace projects in general as "chimerical": one could as easily stop men from making war as stop a wolf from eating sheep.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of whether Gargaz knew the poem, the connection was not lost on its author, who was kind enough to respond. That response was in the form of an eight-line verse that evoked the final couplet of "*La Tactique*" but reversed the sense, replacing "impracticable" with the supremely flattering "bellissime": Voltaire, abhorring all conquerors, hoped that they would never again practice their terrible arts and "*qu'enfin l'équité nous amène à grands pas/La bellissime paix de Pierre-André Gargas*" ("that, finally, equity would lead us in great strides to the most beautiful peace of Pierre-André Gargas").<sup>16</sup>

It was just around this time that news of the American Revolution reached France. Translations of the Declaration of Independence appeared in the French press within weeks of its signing. Franklin's arrival five months later was also widely reported, which caused general speculation about the purpose of his mission. For more than a year, Versailles resisted the pleas of Franklin and his fellow American commissioners to recognize the insurgents and join them officially in defeating the British. Finally, in February 1778, France signed treaties of alliance and commerce with the United States of America and entered the war. For Gargaz, this news was disturbing. The American cause was noble, but the fact that his country had once again declared war against a neighbor made his project of peace all the more urgent.

Having had no success with his mailings to French government officials,

15. Voltaire, *Don Pèdre, roi de Castille, tragédie, et autres pièces* ([Geneva], 1775). Ferry was the first to point out the allusion to "*La Tactique*."

16. Gargaz printed both his letter and Voltaire's response on the title page of *Contrat social, surnomé union francmaçone* (Toulon, Year 5 [1797]), the last known version of his treatise on perpetual peace; see Ferry, *Pierre-André Gargas*, 68–69. Voltaire's response is also reprinted in Theodore Besterman, ed., *Les oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Oxford, 1975), 127:304.

Gargaz decided to send a new appeal to the famous American envoy. On February 14, 1779, signing himself with his prisoner number, “Forcat Numero 1336,” he addressed the following letter to Franklin in more or less conventional French:

Monsieur,

I believe that if the two manuscripts, here most humbly attached, were printed, together or separately, and announced to the public, they would spread a great deal in several Countries, by means of sale, and would be very effective in establishing a perpetual Peace between the United States of America, the English, and the French; and even between all the sovereigns of Europe and their neighbors. If you are of my opinion, I beg of you the kindness, Monsieur, of having them printed, announced, and distributed to the public as far as it would be possible for you to do so.<sup>17</sup>



Gargaz’s two enclosures—unknown to previous scholars<sup>18</sup>—were appeals to “Messeigneurs les Ministeres d’Etat.” The first, brimming with self-assurance, was a three-part plan for how to bring the British to their knees and win the War of American Independence as quickly as possible. The title translates as “Memoir to make known all the Power and Genius of the French Nation and the United States of North America, to destroy the Presumption of the English, and to Bring About an Advantageous Peace between these Three Nations.” The second manuscript—four densely packed pages written in the convict’s small, spindly hand—was a revised version of his peace project, illustrated with examples of international disputes dating from 1777 and 1778. It was entitled (in translation) “Fundamental Articles of a Project for Perpetual Peace, under the name of *union framacone*, between all the sovereigns of Europe and their neighbors; or, Circular letter, dedicated to all the veritable friends of all Countries, of all sovereigns, and generally of all the Human race, whatever country, nation, and religion they may be.” Because the manuscripts Gargaz sent to Joly de Fleury (1773) and Voltaire (1776) have never been located, this text is the first known version of his peace plan. It is also the only extant version that predates what Franklin printed in 1782, since the manuscript Gargaz carried to Passy has also been lost.

17. *Papers*, 28:540 (my translation).

18. The two enclosures were identified by the editors of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* and are described in *Papers*, 28:540–41n. They have not been noticed elsewhere.

Gargaz claimed no credit for having devised the basic concept. According to his introduction, the plan was "invented" by Henry IV around 1606 and revised by the abbé de Saint-Pierre, who had it published "in Cologne and Utrecht around 1712." He, Gargaz, was now pushing for its adoption. The substance of Gargaz's proposal will be described shortly.

Franklin endorsed Gargaz's cover letter, "Project of Universal Peace by a Galley Slave." As is true of so many of the unsolicited proposals and schemes he received, there is no indication that he ever responded. Moreover, in February 1779, Franklin was even more preoccupied than usual. On the twelfth of that month, at five o'clock in the evening (as he carefully recorded in the first entry of a short-lived journal), he received dispatches from America that transformed his mission: Congress was recalling his troublesome co-commissioners, Arthur Lee and John Adams, and had appointed him sole minister plenipotentiary to the French court. On February 14, the day Gargaz sent his packet to Franklin, Franklin sent a copy of his new credentials to Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs.

#### FRANKLIN SETS UP HIS PRESS AT PASSY

Franklin's appointment was a relief and a vindication. He was finally released from the burden of having to work with colleagues who were blundering, contentious, paranoid, and jealous. Neither Adams nor Lee was shy about expressing their hostility toward him; his tendency to ignore them only fueled their resentment. Until that moment, however, Franklin had not fully understood the reach of that resentment. In the same mail pouch that brought his letter of appointment from Congress, he also found private letters from Philadelphia warning him that Arthur Lee and his ally Ralph Izard (a Congressional agent who was then in Paris) were openly accusing him of treason and lobbying Congress to remove him. Rather than removing Franklin, however, Congress removed his co-commissioners.

Elated by the news of his appointment, and cognizant of the burden of work that would henceforth fall on his shoulders alone, Franklin soon began thinking about setting up a printing press that would save him and his secretary—his teenaged grandson William Temple Franklin—countless hours of laborious copying by hand. As the sole minister plenipotentiary, Franklin was required to issue all manner of official forms, receipts, and certificates. Printing them would not only save time, but also convey a greater legitimacy to the newly declared United States. Printing such items had been a mainstay of Franklin's early career; he had relied on such work from private clients and had also been a government printer in Philadelphia.

In France he would create a satellite government printing office, and he would design forms that conveyed the dignity and authority of a credible nation.

The passports that the French government required of every foreigner traveling through France, issued in the name of that person's ambassador, were the first official forms that Franklin printed. According to the short-lived journal of official activities that he began keeping on the evening of February 12, which he sustained for only about two weeks, he issued six handwritten passports during that brief period. Extrapolating from the references to passports in Franklin's papers, it seems reasonable to estimate that in the six years his press was operational he printed at least five hundred.

Franklin designed and printed many other forms and documents over the next several years. There were promissory notes (in triplicate) for loans made to escaped American prisoners; forms authorizing payments drawn on his banker, Ferdinand Grand; legal forms addressed to the French Admiralty court ruling on the validity of prize ships captured by American privateers; bonds for the owners of those privateers; and reprints of the congressional instructions to the ships' captains. The most spectacular form was a certificate for the royal treasuries, acknowledging receipt of the installments of the huge loans being granted to the United States by Louis XVI. These blank forms were printed on wove paper (as yet unknown in France) that Franklin ordered from the Whatman mill in England, customized with a strip of marbling down the center through which the forms would be indented to create a unique pair. The two principal type fonts displayed on the form were also unique, commissioned by Franklin from the premier typefounders of Paris. One of them, a sloped roman, was in fact a new letterform (midway between a roman and an italic) that had been designed by the French Academy a century earlier but had never been manufactured until Franklin commissioned a single 12-point font.

Franklin's decision to buy a press may have been inspired by a visit he received in the first week of his tenure as plenipotentiary, from the best maker of printing presses in Paris. Panier, "maitre menuisier en press," bore a letter of recommendation from one of Franklin's closest friends, the scientist Jean-Baptiste Le Roy. Begging Franklin's pardon for disturbing him in the midst of his "grandes Occupations," Le Roy explained that Panier was volunteering to go to America, where he had heard that there was a shortage of printing presses. Le Roy enclosed a certificate from the celebrated en-

graver Charles-Nicolas Cochin, attesting to the exceptional quality of Panier's work.<sup>19</sup>

Whether Franklin purchased his first press from Panier is not known; no record of its acquisition survives. What is known, however, is that a press was operational by the end of June, when Franklin printed invitations to a gala Independence Day celebration he hosted at Passy. Among the forty or so French and American guests who received those invitations were the two men who had lobbied Congress for his recall, Arthur Lee and Ralph Izard.

The record is more forthcoming when it comes to type, though much of the scattered documentation—faded, confusing, and in unfamiliar hands—lay unrecognized until recently. The story of Franklin's type, parts of which were summarized in a previous essay, will be explored in greater detail in a forthcoming study. Briefly, we now know that almost all the type Franklin used at Passy was not purchased, as had been supposed. It was made for him onsite at the Hôtel Valentinois by a master typefounder named Hémery, who called on Franklin a few days after Panier's visit in February 1779. Within a matter of months, Hémery had moved his foundry to the grounds of Franklin's estate and was on the American's payroll; within a year he would sell Franklin the entire operation, from the furnace down to the molds and matrices. Under Hémery's direction, the foundry cast type for two full years, employing between two and five workers. By the middle of 1781, when the operation ceased, Franklin owned a complete set of type in a variety of faces—nearly 8,000 pounds' worth—ranging from *double canon* (56-point) to *non pareil* (6-point), including borders and ornaments.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE SPRING OF 1782

In April 1782, when the British first showed signs of accommodation, Franklin's press operated with a new urgency. Around the time that Richard Oswald was sent to confer with Franklin, the American learned that Parliament had finally agreed to his demand for a full-scale exchange of prisoners, after years of stubborn refusal. The British calculated that eight or nine ships could accommodate the 1,100 Americans held in British and Irish jails. Franklin was asked to send that number of ships' passports "leaving the proper blanks, to be filled up, as the Circumstances may require, & you will please to let them be full & adequate to the purpose, for which they are

19. Le Roy to Franklin, February 18, 1779, in *Papers*, 28:568–69.

20. Ellen R. Cohn, "The Printer at Passy," in Page Talbott, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World* (New Haven, 2005), 235–72.

intended.”<sup>21</sup> He printed them, though their numbers were small, and sent them immediately.

Right after Oswald returned to London, the press at Passy issued an elaborate hoax designed to influence the discussion about British reparations. This two-sided broadside purported to be the supplement to a certain March issue of the *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*. Franklin imitated the form of that newspaper down to the last detail, including authentic-sounding advertisements based on his knowledge of the Boston environs. The two pieces it contained were among the most vitriolic he ever wrote. They gave full vent to his rage against the massacres of innocent Americans—farmers, women, children, unborn infants—and accused the British of naval practices far worse than piracy. He sent copies to the Netherlands and London, hoping the articles would get reprinted in the press. We now know that both of them were reprinted in London.<sup>22</sup>

Did Franklin write the articles, set the forms, and print the sheets in a matter of days? It is possible that he had assistance. We know that Mathew Carey was in France throughout 1782 and worked briefly for Franklin as a printer. In his *Autobiography* Carey described the purpose of Franklin’s press as “reprinting despatches from America and other papers.” Nothing Franklin issued fits the description of “despatches from America”—unless one considers the fictitious articles from the “*Boston Independent Chronicle*.”<sup>23</sup>

It was two months after issuing the “Supplement” that Franklin “got some copies to be struck off” of Gargaz’s pamphlet. Was Carey involved in that project? There is no indication that his French was up to it. Neither was Franklin’s. Composing a passport was within the minister’s reach, but typesetting, proofreading, and correcting forty-six pages of dense French text would have been impossible for him to do accurately. Whoever printed that pamphlet was surely French. Just as surely, that printer did not use his own equipment. The type is unquestionably Franklin’s—instantly identifiable by the distinctive “fancy italics” displayed on the title page and used as subheadings throughout. This face was one of those commissioned by

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21. *Papers*, 37:153.

22. *Ibid.*, 184–96.

23. The year 1782 is not self-evident, since Carey states in his *Autobiography* that he went to France in 1779. There is no question that he misremembered the date; see *Papers*, 38:326–28. As for Carey’s statement that the Passy press reprinted dispatches from America: he might also have been thinking of Congress’s ordinance relative to prizes and instructions to privateer captains, two lengthy American documents that were probably reprinted at Passy in the spring of 1782. Carey may have assisted with those as well.

Franklin and was unique to him. He used it in almost everything he printed. One ornament appears on the title page, however, that appears nowhere else in his Passy presswork: a royal emblem, featuring a fleur-de-lis and a crown. As Gargaz intended to send his pamphlet to the king and his ministers, this ornament (which Franklin may have inherited from Hémery) was a savvy touch.

#### ENTER GARGAZ

When Franklin described Gargaz's arrival at Passy in his letter to David Hartley of July 10, 1782, he said that the author had brought his manuscript "the other day." It was longer ago than that. Gargaz himself wrote that he went to the Hôtel Valentinois on May 26. That reference is in an undated, unsigned, and previously misidentified draft of a letter addressed to Louis XVI. Written in the first person, as though by Franklin, the manuscript is in Gargaz's unmistakable hand and remains among Franklin's papers. It is obviously the model of a letter that Gargaz hoped Franklin would send the king, enclosing one of his pamphlets. The "filosofe," as he now styled himself, was leaving nothing to chance. A translation follows:

To the King.  
Sire,

The 26th of last May, the philosopher [*filosofe*] Gargaz presented me with one of his works, enclosed, which is entitled, Conciliator of all the Nations of Europe or Project of a universal and perpetual peace between all the sovereigns of Europe and their neighbors. I read and examined this work several times, with all possible attention and impartiality. The means that this philosopher proposes to establish and maintain his system are so easy to put into practice; so useful for the happiness of all Nations; so interesting for all the officers and clergy employed in the Military; so advantageous to all the Nobility; and finally, so consistent with the pacific and benificent views of YOUR MAJESTY, that I felt obliged in good conscience to pay it homage. If You adopt them, as I hope, out of a paternal goodness towards the People, I will esteem myself one of the happiest mortals, and this day will be remembered for the Glory of all sovereigns, of all their principal Ministers, and of the whole Human race.<sup>24</sup>

Franklin never sent any such letter. On the other hand, Gargaz did manage to obtain an audience with Vergennes, which can only have been through the American's good offices. According to Gargaz's later account,

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24. The letter in its original French is in *Papers*, 37:614 (my translation).

Vergennes accepted a pamphlet and pronounced the welcome opinion that he saw no reason why it could not be published.

When was the pamphlet actually printed? We know it was before July 10. Early July is the most likely guess, based on two slender clues. On June 28 Franklin received a delivery of a half ream of paper whose dimensions correspond to the size of the pamphlet's sheets.<sup>25</sup> If Gargaz drafted the letter to Louis XVI as soon as the pamphlets were ready (as is likely), then his reference to the "26th of last May" (as opposed to last *month*) suggests July as the probable month, rather than June.

One has only to read Franklin's journal of the peace negotiations to understand why a month could easily have elapsed between when Gargaz delivered his manuscript and when Franklin had it printed. The minister's life was a nerve-wracking series of face-to-face meetings and diplomacy by mail. Would-be British negotiators came and went, vying for influence with both Franklin and the French. Franklin, on his own, had to take their measure, weigh possibilities, and devise strategies. He had summoned the other Americans whom Congress had appointed to serve with him as peace commissioners, but none was able to join him immediately. Throughout it all he continued the regular work of the commission, securing new loans from the French, dealing with dispatches from Congress, and handling mercantile and maritime affairs. He reviewed (or delayed reviewing, to their author's despair) page proofs for the second volume of Hilliard d'Auberteuil's *Essais historiques et politiques sur les Anglo-Américains*, and, while recovering from a bout of the flu in June, wrote a long-postponed scientific paper for a friend. Still, the British were stalling. "I do not know why the good work of peace goes on so slowly on your side," Franklin lamented to Hartley in the same letter in which he enclosed Gargaz's pamphlet. His patience had reached its limit. The morning he wrote that letter, he delivered to the British an ultimatum, outlining four articles that were "necessary to be granted" in any peace treaty, and an equal number that he deemed "advisable." He then broke off diplomatic relations and simply waited. His strategy was ultimately successful, but it would take many more weeks before the British capitulated and peace negotiations commenced.

Under the circumstances, Gargaz's passionate commitment to creating a mechanism for peaceful conflict resolution (one that the community of nations would to some extent adopt a century and a half later) must have resonated deeply with Franklin. The treatise he carried was entitled *Concili-*

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25. My thanks to James Green of the Library Company of Philadelphia, who examined the pamphlet and measured the size of the sheets.



*ateur de toutes les nations d'Europe, ou Projet de paix perpétuelle entre tous les souverains de l'Europe et leurs voisins.* This “project of perpetual peace” called for all European sovereigns to be content with their existing borders, to focus on the glory that comes of doing the most good for their subjects, and to settle international disputes through a Perpetual Congress—in a later version he would call it the United Nations—to which they would each send one delegate. Decisions would be based on majority rule; in the case of a tie, the president of the Congress would prevail. The president would be chosen on the basis of a simple, indisputable system of hierarchy that would also serve to guide nations through encounters that could potentially escalate into conflict: hereditary sovereigns, because they were “lieutenants of the Supreme Being,” would take precedence over elected sovereigns. Within those two groups, the pecking order would be determined by age. Families honored their elders, Gargaz reasoned; why not nations? The delegate of the oldest sovereign would be president of the council. (Their ages were a matter of public record. Gargaz had found them in an almanac, the *Etrennes mignonnes de Paris* for 1778.) This was an earnest attempt to solve what Gargaz knew had been a serious problem: endless arguments about protocol and primacy that had historically derailed negotiations and ignited violence on land and sea.

Gargaz outlined eight articles called “Infallible Means for establishing and maintaining a perpetual peace,” and thirteen “Objections” to peace followed by “Responses.” He had tried, as others before him had, to anticipate and eliminate all factors that induced men to want to wage war. In France, for example, the nobility had few employment options open to them other than careers in the military. Why not allow them to engage in arts and trades? Many people advocated war “to make money circulate.” Gargaz pointed out the horrors inflicted by this circulating money. Why not spend it instead on public works projects? Standing armies, which he believed should be fully maintained in times of peace, could be usefully employed in these projects. His list of suggestions included building roads, irrigating arid regions, building dikes to prevent rivers from flooding, constructing food storage facilities to eliminate famine, establishing a foster care system for children of unfit or absent parents, creating a disaster relief fund for victims of storms, fires, and epidemics, and digging canals sixty feet wide and thirty feet deep through the isthmuses of Panama and Suez.

It is little wonder that Franklin found much to admire in Gargaz’s manuscript, and little wonder that Vergennes was willing to humor them both. Though parts of it were “in some respects chimerical,” as Franklin would

later write,<sup>26</sup> many of the suggestions were extremely sensible. The idea of freezing the map of Europe was one that Vergennes had advocated for years. And the suggestions for public works projects sound absolutely Franklinian. In fact, because they were *not* present in Gargaz's 1779 proposal, they raise the question of whether the text printed at Passy was identical to the manuscript Gargaz carried with him from the south of France, or whether it may have benefited from discussions the two men had at Passy.

We know that Franklin and Gargaz had at least one more meeting after May 26, presumably after the American had been able to give the manuscript a careful reading. Our only evidence of this conversation is in the form of hitherto unnoticed jottings on the address sheet of an unrelated letter that was evidently sitting on Franklin's desk, sent from Germany on June 19. When Franklin reached for his pen, the two men were not talking about sovereignty, economics, human nature, or the Suez Canal. They were comparing notes about phonetics. Franklin wrote a series of French word endings that sound similar: "é, ai, ait, ais, ois, oient." Beneath them, Gargaz indicated how they would be rendered in his phonetic spelling system. The Frenchman then gave an example: he would spell "ils mangeroient" as "iz manjeren." Franklin tried his own hand at Gargaz's system, writing, "il fezet."

Did Gargaz revise his manuscript one final time before it went to press? Unless he had found a good copy editor in Provence, it is likely that someone—possibly Franklin—arranged for him to get help polishing his language. Compared to the 1779 manuscript, which is only half as long and presented in the form of an address, *Conciliateur de toutes les nations d'Europe* is presented as a book with distinct sections. The writing is better, it is more streamlined (Gargaz removed his personal analyses of contemporary international conflicts), and certain idiosyncratic elements in his proposal have been either altered or eliminated.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Franklin's Letter of Recommendation for Gargaz, May 22, 1783, Franklin Collection, American Philosophical Society.

27. For example, Gargaz had originally suggested that the Perpetual Congress be called a "union framaçone," explaining that he was using the word "freemasons" (franc-masons) as a general term for "all men truly of probity, enlightened by the noble simplicity of human reason, and from any nation or religion." He proposed that the council convene at his own port city of Toulon (because it was close to Asia and Africa), in the commodious Croix de Malte inn (where the emperor of Germany had lodged in 1777), and meet every morning at nine o'clock. In the 1782 pamphlet he changed the name of the council, proposed as its city the more central Lyon, and focused only on its organization and procedures without specifying any meeting time or place.

The 1779 manuscript comprised only a general preface addressed to the ministers of state and five "Fundamental Articles." *Conciliateur* has a series of prefatory statements consisting of almost all new material. On the verso of the title page is a two-paragraph comment on the "infallibility" and universality of his proposal, which he expected would spread throughout the world and "extinguish the conflagration of War which at this moment is blazing [in America]." This was followed by an eloquent definition of peace, which ended with a paragraph stressing many of the points about durable treaties that Franklin had been trying to impress on the British: "In order that [peace] may be firm and lasting, it is absolutely necessary that its terms be just, that they cause no marked injury to any one, that the honor of all be found thereby conserved, and that every one may be able to glory in having consented cheerfully and with full knowledge, to all the conditions inserted in the final Treaty." Next came a petition to the king, an elaborately argued plea for Louis XVI to adopt his humble project, especially as it "would not cost anything": the cost of maintaining this peace would be insignificant compared to the ruinous expenditures of making war. This was followed by a circular letter to readers. As for the substance of the proposal, it was now presented in two sections. The number of articles was expanded from five to eight (the names were changed from "Fundamental Articles" to "Infallible Means," which was not necessarily an improvement), and the concluding section, "Objections and Replies," was wholly new.

Trying to gauge Franklin's influence on *Conciliateur*, in the absence of the manuscript Gargaz brought from Provence, is a complicated as well as speculative exercise. First, and most obviously, one must locate the elements in *Conciliateur* that differ from what was in Gargaz's 1779 proposal. Second, one must try to identify and discount those elements that were derived from the work Gargaz said he used as his model: the peace project of the abbé de Saint-Pierre. It is at this point in the investigation that a researcher's admiration for Gargaz turns into something closer to amazement. To draft his proposals for reforming the alphabet and the penal system, all the galley slave had needed—besides native intelligence and the time to reflect—were paper, ink, and a quill. For his perpetual peace project he needed access to someone's private library, a great deal of time to read, and extraordinary dedication.

The abbé de Saint-Pierre, known as a devoted humanitarian, was not known for his brevity. His magnum opus was *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe*, 1,385 pages of text that filled three thick octavo volumes. The first two appeared in 1713, and the third was published three years later; the place of publication on all three was given as Utrecht. Was

that the edition that Gargaz read? The question is important, because the various editions of Saint-Pierre's work differ greatly. In the 1779 manuscript he sent to Franklin, Gargaz stated that the abbé's work was based on a proposal by Henry IV and was published in Cologne and Utrecht around 1712. The first edition of the abbé's work did indeed appear in Cologne in 1712, while France and England were negotiating an end to the War of Spanish Succession, but it was issued anonymously.<sup>28</sup> The author's name was first revealed in the third volume of his *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe*, in a "Note from the Bookseller to the Reader" that also specified the first edition's year and place of publication. This volume must have been the source of Gargaz's information. What of Henry IV? Volume 1 of *Projet* advertised itself as being based on the king's proposal. By volume 3, however, Saint-Pierre had learned that Henry's project was actually written by his chief minister, the duc de Sully. Gargaz himself added Sully's name to his 1782 treatise. From this bibliographic evidence alone, it seems likely that Gargaz had access to the three massive volumes of Saint-Pierre's *Projet* and reread them over time. One wonders how he would have felt if he had known that the abbé published an "Abridgment" in 1728—a mere 227 pages in length, and substantially revised as well as abridged—and that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at the request of Saint-Pierre's nephew, published a twenty-one-page abstract of that abridgment in 1761, after the abbé had died.

The difficulty with *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* is not only its length. The writing is rambling and repetitive, and to make matters more confusing, the argument revises itself as it proceeds. Even the most basic elements of the plan, such as the number of Fundamental Articles, change dramatically from volume to volume, and sometimes even within volumes. (The number of Fundamental Articles ranges from twelve to twenty-four depending on where one looks in the *Projet*, but the Abridgment, which is commonly cited in summaries of the abbé's work, contains only five.) "I am not afraid of being a poor writer provided I be a good citizen," the author is quoted as saying.<sup>29</sup> Saint-Pierre occasionally addresses his readers directly, sympathizing with their struggles and exhorting them to persevere. Midway through volume 2, for example, in a section of Objec-

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28. [Abbé de Saint-Pierre], *Mémoires pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe*, 3 vols. (Utrecht, 1713–16). This work is hardly ever mentioned in the literature on Saint-Pierre.

29. Elizabeth V. Souleyman, *The Vision of World Peace in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century France* (New York, 1941), 77.

tions and Answers, Objection 57 postulates: "This work is too long; the Reader has forgotten at the end what he learned at the beginning." (Answer: it may be too long for excellent minds, but it is probably too short for mediocre ones. Do you find it boring? Bear in mind its importance. What is an hour, more or less?) Objection 63 presents and answers the proposition "There are in this Work a great number of repetitions, which is displeasing." This section is listed in the Table of Contents as "Trop de repetitions." Later, a section entitled "Recapitulation" begins, without evident irony, "If ever there were a work in need of recapitulation it is this one." Rather than recapitulate, however, the abbé launches into an explanation that is not an overall summary. The burden of comprehension falls to his dedicated readers, who are urged to reread as many sections as necessary, as many times as are required.

Gargaz plowed through sections called Discourses, Propositions, Considerations, Inconveniencies, Advantages, and a set of seventy Objections with Answers. He read historical analyses, reviewed three categories of articles (Fundamental, Important, and Useful), evaluated moral, economic, and political arguments. The concepts he adopted are to be found throughout all three volumes. Of the ideas he did adopt, he occasionally quoted Saint-Pierre verbatim, but he often made substantial changes. He also added ideas of his own. Saint-Pierre advocated a "European Union" to adjudicate disputes, but he went further to specify a five-member central council and complex systems of rotating leadership and voting. Gargaz's system of deference according to age and his simple view of majority rule obviated the need for many of the complicated and highly regulated provisions specified by the abbé. Gargaz agreed that every country should send one delegate to the central assembly, and that this delegate should be at least forty years old. He adopted Saint-Pierre's stipulation that the status quo be preserved as far as boundaries were concerned. The two men differed on other issues too numerous to detail here, including standing armies and the best method of replacing deceased or belligerent sovereigns. In general, Gargaz steered clear of complexity and overregulation. He appealed to the highest moral good in sovereigns and their subjects and favored a simple system that made sense to him in a deeply personal way.

What about the public works projects that Gargaz proposed? I find no equivalent in the work of Saint-Pierre. The abbé argues what so many others had also observed, that arts, sciences, and education can flourish in times of peace, and that social improvements are difficult to achieve in wartime because of the scarcity of resources and the inefficiency of the bureaucracy. Gargaz's catalog of practical suggestions for alleviating human suffering and

improving living conditions is different in its emphasis and focus. The similarity of his vision and Franklin's is striking. "What repeated follies are these repeated Wars," Franklin wrote to Hartley after they had concluded the definitive peace treaty in the fall of 1783. "How many excellent things might have been done to promote the internal welfare of each Country; what Bridges, roads, canals, and other usefull public works, and institutions tending to the common felicity might have been made and established with the money and men foolishly spent during the last seven centuries by our mad wars in doing one another mischief."<sup>30</sup> He wrote similarly to Sir Joseph Banks around the same time. "What vast Additions to the Conveniences and Comforts of Living might Mankind have acquired, if the Money spent in Wars had been employ'd in Works of public Utility. What an Extention of Agriculture even to the Tops of our Mountains; What Rivers render'd navigable, or join'd by Canals; what Bridges, Acqueducts, new Roads and other public Works, Edifices and Improvements, rendering England a compleat Paradise, might not have been obtain'd by spending those Millions in doing Good which in the last War have been spent in doing Mischief! in bringing Misery into thousands of Families, and destroying the Lives of so many Thousands of working People who might have perform'd the useful Labour."<sup>31</sup>

#### GARGAZ RETURNS TO PROVENCE

Gargaz spent the rest of his life pursuing two aims: clearing his name and promoting his proposal for perpetual peace. He was successful in neither. After leaving Paris he returned reluctantly to his native village, where he at least was allowed to teach, though for a pittance. (He never recovered his property.) After two years he managed to secure a teaching post in Salon, a lively city in the vicinity of Arles, Aix-en-Provence, and Avignon. Despite numerous certificates of good conduct and character from municipal and religious authorities, his successive applications for letters of rehabilitation were denied. They were marked either "*Cela ne se peut*" ("that cannot be") or "R.A.F." (*rien à faire*, "nothing to be done").

On March 2, 1783, Gargaz wrote to Franklin pleading for assistance. He first, however, congratulated the minister on having secured the preliminary peace treaty (which he had read about in the *Courrier d'Avignon*), and, convinced that Franklin had indeed worked hard and "very usefully" to achieve

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30. Franklin to David Hartley, October 16, 1783, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

31. Franklin to Sir Joseph Banks, July 27, 1783, British Library.

that peace, Gargaz expressed confidence that he would also work to see the project for perpetual peace adopted. He warned Franklin, however, that the Roman Catholic priests of his parish had strongly objected to two aspects of his project: his reference to hereditary sovereigns as "lieutenants of the Supreme Being" (a title reserved for the pope), and the fact that he proposed to unite *all* sovereigns, even those of the Turks. Franklin should take the necessary measures to make sure that no Catholic priest stopped him from succeeding in the establishment of said peace.

Franklin responded on May 22 by sending Gargaz a strong letter of recommendation to present in his own defense.

Sir,

The Bearer Pierre André Gargaz is Author of a very humane Project for establishing a perpetual Peace. This has interested me much in his Behalf: He appears to me a very honest sensible Man, & worthy of better Fortune: For tho' his Project may appear in some respects chimerical, there is Merit in so good an Intention. He has serv'd faithfully 20 Years as a Gally-Slave, and now requests Letters of Rehabilitation, that he may enjoy for the Rest of his Life the Douceurs that State would be attended with. If this Request of his is not improper, & you can assist him in procuring such Letters You will do me a most sensible Pleasure. He will show you authentic Certificates of his good Conduct. With great Esteem, [etc.]<sup>32</sup>

Some months later, during a discussion about the fragility of treaties, Franklin gave a copy of Gargaz's *Conciliateur* to a visitor. He had been talking about how improbable it was that any of the peace plans he had seen involving a European council of delegates could succeed; full participation was too unlikely. As for Gargaz's plan, which he said "came to me in rather an extraordinary manner, and which seems to me to contain some very sensible remarks," the author "took as many copies as he wished for, and gave several away; but no notice whatever was taken of it."<sup>33</sup>

Being ignored only made the "filosofe" more determined. In March 1785, to judge by the available evidence, he reappeared in Paris, this time bearing a revised version of his project entitled *Union souveraine, tendant a établir le paix perpétuelle entre tous les Souverains d'Europe et toutes les nations qui en sont connues* (Sovereign Union, tending to establish perpetual peace between all the sovereigns of Europe and all the nations that are known to them.)

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32. Franklin's Letter of Recommendation for Gargaz, May 22, 1783, Franklin Collection, American Philosophical Society.

33. Diary of John Baynes, entry of September 23, 1783.

This version was longer by half than its predecessor, incorporating new ideas into the core of the plan and adding numerous literary quotations, some of which were sayings attributed to “Anonymous” but were probably written by the author himself. He also included a list of Eight Moral Virtues that most tutors conveyed to their pupils but that should be taught to “all the people.” His route was the same as before: he first called on Franklin and then applied to Vergennes, who once again said that he saw no reason why the manuscript could not be published. Expecting to have his permission any day, an elated Gargaz then wrote to Franklin asking whether he would be kind enough to accept the dedication.<sup>34</sup> (Dedications functioned as endorsements, and could not be printed without the consent of the dedicatee.) Though he generally refused such requests, the doctor agreed. When *Union souveraine* was published the following August, probably in Avignon, the following statement was prominently displayed: “To Benjamin Franklin L.L.D. Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America. This Work, of which he deigned to approve the intention, is respectfully dedicated by the Author.”

We owe our knowledge of this publication to Ferréol de Ferry, who discovered the only known text—a set of page proofs—at the Archives Nationales. One would have expected to find at least one copy among Franklin’s papers, but there is none. It seems that Franklin never received it, despite Gargaz’s best efforts.

In August 1785 Gargaz proudly bundled three hundred copies of *Union souveraine*, addressed them to Franklin at Passy, and shipped them on the coach from Avignon to Paris, whereupon they were promptly seized as illegal publications. Avignon, then papal territory, was notorious for publishing pirated works and was closely watched by the book inspectors.<sup>35</sup> The fact that the printer’s name was left off the title page, and the place of publication was given as The Hague, must have made the inspector suspicious. Turning to where the privilege was customarily printed, he found instead a “*copie de l’approbation*,” a note dated March 15, 1785, from Vergennes to Pierre-Charles Laurent de Villedeuil, Minister of the King’s Household, saying that as far as his department was concerned, “there is nothing that could hinder its distribution.” The names of both ministers were misspelled. Years later Gargaz would naively demand compensation from the book syn-

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34. Gargaz to Franklin, [April 1785], Franklin Collection, American Philosophical Society.

35. My thanks to Professor Robert Darnton for suggesting this point.



dicare for his loss, asking five sous per copy, or "whatever other price you think fair."

Even if the pamphlets had not been destroyed, Franklin would not have received them. As the package was making its ill-fated trip northward, the American was halfway across the Atlantic Ocean. Gargaz had no idea that his patron had finally received permission from Congress to return to the United States, and had left in mid-July.

What could not be sent by coach could, it turned out, be carried by hand. Gargaz set off again for Paris, this time determined to deliver copies of *Union souveraine* to the royal family, the nine members of the *conseil d'état du Roi*, and the twenty-nine foreign ambassadors. All of them, including Franklin's successor, Thomas Jefferson, received from the author the same instructions: keep the brochure if you want to adopt a union among all the sovereigns, return it to me if you do not. Jefferson never returned the brochure—a good sign as far as Gargaz was concerned. Less encouraging was the fact that Jefferson never answered either of Gargaz's follow-up letters. (Gargaz told Jefferson that because only six "detractors" had returned the pamphlet, there had to be forty-eight "approvers." He would be willing to disclose the names of those six if Jefferson needed them, but it should be understood that they were not bad men; they were simply ignorant, like children five or six years old.)<sup>36</sup> Why Jefferson never mentioned either Gargaz or the pamphlet in any of his letters to Franklin, whose name was on it, is a mystery.



Until recently, the story of Pierre-André Gargaz and the American ministers to France was thought to end here, with Franklin's departure and Jefferson's indifference. Evidence has recently surfaced, however, that reveals Franklin's continued regard for the philosopher from Thèze. In September 1787, after emerging from a four-month assembly in Independence Hall, Franklin sent Gargaz the proposal for a national union that he and his fellow delegates had crafted and that James Bradford had printed for general distribution: *The Constitution, as Formed for the United States, by the Foederal Convention, Held at Philadelphia, in the Year 1787*. Or at least, he tried to.

Franklin sent many of these pamphlets across the Atlantic—to Jefferson, to the duc de la Rochefoucauld, with whom he had collaborated on a French edition of the thirteen state constitutions, to the Italian legal philosopher Gaetano Filangieri, and to various other friends. "It is a singular Thing in

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36. J. P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 36 vols. to date (Princeton, 1950–), 9:99–100, 175.

the History of Mankind,” he wrote to one of them, “that a great People have had the Opportunity of forming a Government for themselves.”<sup>37</sup> To his banker and close friend Ferdinand Grand, with whom he had evidently discussed Gargaz’s peace proposal years earlier, he dismissed his former skepticism about a united Europe. “If [this constitution] succeeds,” he wrote, “I do not see why you in Europe might not carry the Project of good Henry 4th into Execution, by forming a Federal Union and One Grand Republick, of all the different States and Kingdoms by means of a like Convention, for we had many Interests to reconcile.”<sup>38</sup> Franklin sent several copies of the Constitution to Ferdinand Grand for distribution. One of them was to be forwarded to the south of France. He inscribed it: “M. Gargas, who propos’d the Union of the States of Europe.”

Just as Gargaz’s *Union souveraine* never reached Franklin in 1785, this inscribed copy of the U.S. Constitution never reached Gargaz. In this case the problem was not the book police; it was Ferdinand Grand. The banker never forwarded it. Three years after Franklin’s death, an unidentified American received this copy from the hand of Grand’s associate Antoine Gauthier and brought it back to the United States.<sup>39</sup>

Even if Grand had forwarded this copy of the Constitution, it still would not have reached its intended recipient. Gargaz was back on the galleys, seized for not having proper relocation papers. An inventory of his rooms, taken at the time of his arrest, revealed some furniture, a violin, many manuscripts, and a library of some one hundred volumes. While Franklin was at the Constitutional Convention, Gargaz had a hearing before the Ministers of the Marine. The verdict was familiar: R.A.F.—*rien à faire*. His bail was extended until 1788. When he next revised his Project of Peace, in Year 3 of the republic, citizen Gargaz argued two objectives: to establish a perpetual peace and to make sure that no citizen sentenced by a municipal court could be held in prison longer than two weeks.

In 1796, six years after Franklin died, Gargaz saw the publication of the final version of his peace project, now entitled *Contrat social, surnomé union*

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37. Franklin to Count Castiglione, October 14, 1787, Franklin Collection, Library of Congress.

38. Franklin to Ferdinand Grand, October 22, 1787, Franklin Collection, Library of Congress.

39. He wrote on the flyleaf: “This copy of the Constitution of the U.S. was sent by Doctor Franklin to M. Gauthier and addressed ‘to M. Gargas, who proposed the Union of the States of Europe.’ M.G: gave it to me, in the month of September 1793”; emphasis in original. The pamphlet is now in the Harnett Library of the University of Georgia.

*francmaçone*. It was in this text that he introduced the term "United Nations," which he appears to have coined. He also introduced a modified form of his phonetic spelling, explaining in a note on the title page that he had eliminated all silent letters. *Contrat social* met with outrage. It was denounced by numerous officials as seditious, incoherent, and undermining the foundations of the Republic, especially in regard to the new orthography. The author died in 1801, at the age of seventy-three, in a grim military hospital in Toulon where for the last years of his life he had worked as a janitor.<sup>40</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

It has long been assumed that Franklin set up his press at Passy primarily as an "amusement," a form of "relaxation" from the ardors of his mission. Before information came to light about when that press was established and where the type came from, most scholars and biographers saw no reason to doubt that this would be the case, especially since many of the surviving imprints do not bear dates. The charming bagatelles—among the most famous imprints from Passy—were written by Franklin throughout his mission for the delight of his closest friends. Why shouldn't he have printed them as soon as he wrote them? Surely, as William Temple Franklin implied in his 1818 edition of his grandfather's writings, printing these bagatelles was the reason Franklin had acquired his "small set of types."<sup>41</sup>

Research over the last decade has shown otherwise. Franklin's press was no plaything. The evidence strongly suggests that he did not print those bagatelles until 1784, long after the peace was signed. While his country was at war, his printing office was reserved for official business. It also served a symbolic function. The authoritative forms and documents Franklin printed were given to the French Admiralty Court, the border patrol, banks, merchants, and the finance officials at Versailles, where not even the king's printer would have been able to produce anything as innovative as the loan certificates. The United States of America, as represented by Benjamin Franklin and as seen through the authority of his typography, was no longer a collection of colonies, but an independent nation.

One must ask whether there might also have been a symbolic aspect to Franklin's deciding to print Gargaz's pamphlet at the moment when the United States was poised to win British acknowledgment of that independence. The American diplomat had deliberately retained his "rustic" dress

40. Ferry, *Pierre-André Gargas*, 135–54.

41. Cohn, "The Printer at Passy," 237–40.

so as to play on the French aristocracy's fascination with his provincial origins. Philadelphia, as they all knew, was no Paris. But neither was Paris Philadelphia, in two key respects of which Franklin was tremendously proud: social mobility and freedom of the press.

As the final peace negotiations with Great Britain got under way in the spring of 1783, Franklin would get to see firsthand what it took to push a book manuscript through the hoops of censors' reviews and permissions. That book was a French translation of a volume Congress had issued in 1781: the thirteen state constitutions with their declarations of rights and the other founding documents of the country. It was only at the insistence of Foreign Minister Vergennes that *Constitutions des Treize Etats-Unis de l'Amérique* was published; even so, the book authorities grumbled.

Franklin's arranging to have Gargaz's treatise struck off for private distribution would have raised no eyebrows with the book syndicate, especially since it contained nothing offensive. Still, the fact that he *could* print it at will made the point that if he had been at home, he or anyone else could have *published* it at will. It also conveyed the message that worthwhile ideas deserved a hearing, regardless of how humble their source. That message was spelled out in type that belonged uniquely to Benjamin Franklin, and by extension, to the United States.

Franklin printed one other book-length pamphlet while in France, six months after Gargaz's *Conciliateur*. Just after signing the Preliminary Peace Treaty on November 30, 1782, he decided—with no apparent prompting—to print a work of political philosophy that had twice been banned by the French censors: *Petit code de la raison humaine*, written by his late friend Jacques Barbeau-Dubourg. Nearly ten years earlier Franklin had arranged to have that work published in London, at Dubourg's request. It was dedicated to Franklin and, among other things, praised Pennsylvania's legislation on freedom of religion. Now Franklin himself printed it "in respect for [Dubourg's] Memory."<sup>42</sup> He never would have done such a thing in 1779, when Dubourg died. In December 1782, however, America having just won the war, Franklin was willing to assert himself in ways he had not allowed himself when a supplicant. He had angered his generous French hosts by signing a separate peace; now he went one step further and quietly tweaked their noses.<sup>43</sup>

Why did Franklin decide to print Gargaz's pamphlet? Because it was important, because it deserved an audience, because he admired and empathized with Gargaz. But ultimately, he printed it because he could.

42. *Papers*, 38:567.

43. Franklin's involvement with the book of the American constitutions and Dubourg's treatise is the subject of a forthcoming study.