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978-1-107-09293-8 - A Knight of Malta at the Court of Elizabeth I: The Correspondence of Michel De Seure, French Ambassador, 1560–1561

Edited by David Potter

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

French ambassadors in England

Anglo-French relations in the early modern period can be understood through a rich range of cultural artefacts and purely historical sources. Among the latter, the reports of French visitors, and especially of the resident ambassadors, have always featured prominently, though perhaps excessively pillaged for information on the inner politics of the country they were observing. Essentially devised to maintain a sort of dialogue between their masters, they provide sometimes very oblique insights into their host country.¹ The reports of Imperial and Spanish ambassadors (summarized in the great series of *Calendars*²) have in many ways shaped our understanding of high politics in the period but no equivalent was undertaken for French archives. However, the French publication of the despatches of Jean du Bellay, Charles de Marillac, and Odet de Selve have thrown a crucial light on Anglo-French relations in the first half of the sixteenth century.³ Meanwhile, the 1550s is clearly dominated by the extensive archives of the Noailles brothers during their embassies between 1553 and 1559.⁴

¹For an example, see D. Potter, 'Jean du Bellay et l'Angleterre, 1527–50', in Loris Petris, P. Galand, O. Christin, and C. Michon (eds), *Actes du Colloque Jean du Bellay* (Neuchâtel, 2014), pp. 47–66.

²G.A. Bergenroth, P. de Gayangos, M.A.S. Hume, and R. Tyler (eds), *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, Preserved in the Archives at Simancas and Elsewhere (1485–1558)*, 13 vols (London, 1862–1954); M.A.S. Hume (ed.), *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas*, 4 vols (London, 1892–1899).

³V.-L. Bourrilly and P. de Vaissière, *Ambassades en Angleterre de Jean du Bellay* (Paris, 1905); R. Scheurer (ed.), *Correspondance de Jean du Bellay*, II (Paris, 1969); J. Kaulek (ed.), *Correspondance politique de MM. De Castillon et de Marillac* (Paris, 1885), active and passive correspondence; G. Lefèvre-Pontalis (ed.), *Correspondance politique de Odet de Selve* (Paris, 1888), active correspondence only.

⁴René Aubert de Vertot (ed.), *Ambassades de Messieurs de Noailles en Angleterre*, 5 vols (Leyden, 1763); based on one of the most extensive French ambassadorial archives of the sixteenth century in AE, *Correspondance politique, Angleterre*, vols 9–20. For a discussion of the structure of the archives, see E.H. Harbison, *Rival Ambassadors at the Court of Queen Mary* (Princeton, NJ, 1940), appendix.

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Between that period and the equally rich correspondence of La Mothe Fénelon in the 1570s,⁵ however, there is something of a gap, with only fragments of the despatches from Paul de Foix thought to survive.⁶ As for Michel de Castelnau-Mauvissière, Fénelon's successor from 1575 to 1585, his correspondence is preserved only in parts.⁷ For one French ambassador, it seemed that nothing survived. Armand Baschet, in his survey and transcripts of French ambassadors' reports, thought that there was nothing to be found for Michel de Seure, who served as French ambassador from early 1560 to early 1562, a crucial period in the re-adjustment of relations between the two countries and Scotland.⁸ In fact, an incomplete series of de Seure's despatches from late 1560 onwards had survived, though in a later copy, and is presented in this publication along with his correspondence with the queen regent of Scotland.

Michel de Seure served as French ambassador at a difficult and turbulent time in Anglo-French relations, marked by the threat of Scottish–French claims to the English throne, the French military presence in Scotland, and the liquidation of that influence by

⁵C.P. Cooper and A. Teulet, *Recueil des dépêches, rapports, instructions, et mémoires des ambassadeurs de France en Angleterre et Ecosse pendant le XVI^e siècle: correspondance diplomatique de Bertrand de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon*, 7 vols (London and Paris, 1838–40). The original registers are in AN, KK, 1377–81. Letters to him, from 1572 to 1575, are printed in J. Le Laboureur (ed.), *Les Mémoires de Michel de Castelnau, seigneur de Mauvissière*, 3 vols (Brussels, 1731), III, pp. 265–465.

⁶Despatches of Paul de Foix for May–November 1562 are in BnF, fr. 6612, fos 34–147, and for March–November 1565 in fr. 6613, fos 2–57; copies from a register of de Foix for January 1565–July 1566, are in fr. 15888, fos 264–273; ditto for La Forest for July–September 1566 in fr. 15970–15971. The originals of de Foix's despatches from England in 1562 and 1565 were preserved in the archives of Claude de L'Aubespine at the château of Villebon and dispersed with much other material in 1835 (for a detailed inventory, see *Catalogue analytique de manuscrits et documents originaux . . . retrouvés dans un vieux château de province* (Paris, 1835)). The present author hopes in due course to complement the present study by an edition of Paul de Foix's despatches as ambassador in England.

⁷Mauvissière's despatches from 1578 to 1581 were copied into a register beginning with his 108th despatch (BnF, fr. 15973). Some of the original despatches to him were published in Le Laboureur, *Mémoires de Michel de Castelnau*, III, pp. 466–559; these seem to be derived from a Gaignières volume, BnF, fr. 17972, fos 33–386. There are further despatches from the court in *ibid.*, CC Colbert 337, printed in Teulet, vol. III. For publications of despatches of ambassadors later in the century, see P. Lafleur de Kermaingant, *L'ambassade de France en Angleterre sous Henri IV. Mission de Jean de Thumery, sieur de Boissise (1598–1602)* (Paris, 1886). The despatches to and from Christophe de Harlay between 1602 and 1605 are in BnF, fr. 3449–3513, and form part of his enormous archive.

⁸A. Baschet, 'List of despatches of ambassadors from France to England, 1509–1714', *Reports of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records*, 39 (1878), appendix 1, p. 618: 'Le chevalier de Seure nommé ambassadeur pour succéder à Gilles de Noailles à Londres y arriva dans les premiers jours de février 1560. Sa correspondance nous est restée inconnue.' Louis Paris published two of de Seure's letters from the L'Aubespine archives in Paris, *Négociations*, and Alexandre Teulet some related documents in Teulet, II, pp. 15–51.

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collaboration between the government of Elizabeth I and the Scottish opposition. His despatches thus provide an invaluable insight into this period.

Michel de Seure: the making of an ambassador

Michel de Seure,⁹ chevalier of Saint John of Jerusalem, was in fact one of the more unusual French ambassadors in Tudor England. His varied experience marks him off from the more mainstream envoys, most of them clerics, lawyers, or courtiers, such as Jean du Bellay, Charles de Marillac, Odet de Selve, Jean Pot, sieur de Chémault, Claude de Laval, sieur de Boisdapphin, and the Noailles brothers. He had travelled widely and gained extensive knowledge of the world; when he was being recommended to the Pope by the papal nuncio in France in 1577, the latter stressed the fact not only that was he high in royal favour and with a lively mind but also that he had travelled on his master's affairs throughout the whole world.¹⁰

What do we know of his background? Born in the *pays* of Brie française, he was certainly a nobleman but of rather obscure standing. John Eliot in the later sixteenth century remarked on the numbers and valour of the nobility of Brie and on the courtesy of the people in general.¹¹ Genealogies usually note that he was the son of Antoine de Seure, seigneur de la Ville-au-Bois (parish of Lumigny) in Brie, and that his mother was Louise Verdelot, the daughter of

⁹The spelling and pronunciation of his name are a problem. Usually given as 'Seurre' or 'Seure', he himself spelled it 'le ch^{lr} [cheualier] de Seure'. Clearly, sixteenth-century orthography, which did not distinguish between *u* and *v*, is a problem, and it is very likely that his name was pronounced 'Sèvre', as in the modern district of Paris. References to him as 'Seurre' in other sources probably derive from the erroneous idea that his place of origin was the town of Seurre in Burgundy. Italians wrote 'Sceura'; and the English referred to him as 'Seury' (Camden), 'Cievre' and 'Cerve' (*CSPF*, IV, p. 252), as well as 'Sevre' (as in Nicholas Throckmorton's letters). In Castelnau's *Mémoires* he appears as 'le chevalier de Saivre' (which would be close to 'Sèvre'). Here, the policy of referring to him as he spelled his own name – 'Seure' – is adopted.

¹⁰Antonio Maria Salviati to Tolomeo Galli, Paris, 19 September 1577, *ANG*, 13 (1975), p. 634: 'è a Sua Maestà gratissimo, et in questa Corte in buon concetto, et reputatione, si per essere conosciuto di buon spirito, come per sapersi che egli à quasi per tutto il mondo stato, et in diversi parti trattato gravissimi negotii di Sua Maestà'.

¹¹John Eliot, *The Survey or Topographical Description of France* (London, 1592), p. 15: 'Brye is woodie, but yet in a manner as fruitfull as *Champagne*, the firmament cleere, and the aire gentle and temperate, the riuers great, the people actiue and giuen to good husbandrie, the Nobilitie courteous, valiaunt, and manye; the townes welthy, the villages well inhabited, and to be breefe, they want nothing necessarye for mans life: corne, wine, cattell, wood, fruit, game, flight, fishing, as plentifull as in anye other Prouince of *Fraunce*'. He writes elsewhere of the 'very fat and fruitfulness of *Brye*' (p. 18).

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Georges Verdelot, seigneur des Prez, and Catherine de Saily, dame de Mersan.¹² This does not tell us much about his paternal family but it is important to remember the significance of his links with his mother's family, which was much better known. His cousins included another chevalier de Malte, Nicolas Verdelot (promoted 1546), whose brother was an *homme d'armes* of the king of Navarre's company in 1556 and was closely related to the family of the Champagnes, who included the comtes de Suze.¹³ His father's ancestors, though they must have been noble, are obscure. The best clue here is that de Seure's arms¹⁴ correspond exactly with those of an antecedent, Hue de Sèvre, seigneur de Sèvre (near Paris), buried in 1339 and whose tombstone was recovered in 1989.¹⁵ Sibert's eighteenth-century researches on the knights of Saint-Lazare add that Michel's great-grandfather, Philippe de Seure, was buried at the church of Saint-Martin de Montmorency.¹⁶ The main point is that the de Seures stemmed from the lesser nobility of the Parisian region and scarcely distinguished themselves before the sixteenth century.¹⁷

Born at the latest by 1523, the first secure date of de Seure's life is his presentation as chevalier of Saint John of Jerusalem in 1539,¹⁸ when he must have been at least sixteen according to the statutes of the order. His career was shaped by the military-religious orders. The Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, suppressed and absorbed into that of the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem (Rhodes, later Malta) by the Papal Bull *Cum Solerti* in 1489, continued in France, based at Boigny (Loiret), though there were ongoing disputes with the Knights of Saint John. An attempt by Catherine de Medici to impose de Seure

¹²Edmé Gautier de Sibert, *Histoire des ordres royaux: hospitaliers-militaires de Mont Carmel et Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem* (Paris, 1772): 'il naquit à Lumigny dans la Brie'. The origin of the information on his family is given as the 'registres du grand prieuré de France', copied in seventeenth-century notes on the chevaliers de Malte, BnF, fr. 32665, pp. 10–16, listing parents and grandparents. In the sixteenth century, four quarterings were necessary for entry into the order in France, though it was eight in Germany, and in later centuries sixteen became the norm. Lumigny itself was owned by the comtes de la Suze, Protestants after 1560.

¹³A.M. d'Hozier de Serigny, *Armorial général de France*, 10 vols (Paris, 1738–1768), I, pt. V (1764), Champagne, p. 11 (275).

¹⁴The arms given by modern commentators are: D'argent (ou d'or) à la croix d'azur chargée d'une croissette d'argent et cantonnée de quatre fleurs de lys de sable. However, early historians of the order were unclear about his arms, and his signet was a simple oval bearing the word 'Virtus' and a cross.

¹⁵Hue de Sèvre's arms were drawn in the abbé Leboeuf's seventeenth-century collection of notes on Parisian families: BnF, fr. 4752, pp. 227–228.

¹⁶Sibert, *Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem*, pp. 285–290.

¹⁷The point was made by Charles de Baschi d'Aubais in the eighteenth century: 'Il est singulier qu'une famille qui a donné un grand-prieur de Champagne, ne soit pas plus connue' (*Pièces fugitives pour servir à l'histoire de France*, 2 vols (Paris, 1759), I, p. 122).

¹⁸The dates have been variously given as 2 January and 11 June.

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as Grand Prior of France failed in 1564,¹⁹ but in that year he became Grand Master of the Order of Saint Lazarus²⁰ in succession to Jean de Lévis-Charlus (thus reinforcing royal control of the order). In 1571 he was given the position of Grand Prior of Champagne in the Order of Saint John.²¹

By the sixteenth century, the original requirement for members of the military-religious orders to take the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience had been relaxed, and marriage was permitted in some cases. There is no indication, however, that de Seure ever married. All the same, though it would be mistaken to regard him as some kind of chivalric monk in the twelfth-century mould, there was still a close relationship between the military orders and the crusading ideal. Many knights of the order were associated with naval war and Mediterranean galley fleets, especially when the order was finally fixed at Malta.²² The brother of the second duc de Guise was François de Lorraine, Grand Prior of France and general of the galleys in 1557.

Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, the adventurer and explorer of South America, had become a chevalier of the order in 1531 (he had been born in Provins in 1510 and was nephew to the then Grand Master, Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam). An experienced naval commander by the 1540s (he published an account of the Emperor's Algiers expedition of 1541 in 1553), he commanded the French galley fleet sent to Scotland in 1548 to bring Mary Stuart to France, sailing north from Leith to Dumbarton to collect Mary.²³ This is the first known military/naval experience of de Seure, for we are told by Jean Beaugué of these galleys, 'dont estoient capitaines les seigneurs de Villegaignon et de Seure'. They also took part in the ejection of the English garrison from Inchkeith in June 1549.²⁴

¹⁹Catherine was negotiating for his advancement as Grand Prior of France 'pour la conservation de sa religion' (*LCM*, X, p. 146).

²⁰Including the commanderie of Boigny.

²¹On the background down to 1522, see Jean-Marc Roger, 'Le prieuré de Champagne des chevaliers de Rhodes' (unpublished PhD thesis, Paris IV, 2001). Pierre de Longueil had been Grand Prior of Champagne until his death in Rome in 1566 (L. Moréri, *Grand dictionnaire historique*, 10 vols (Paris, 1759), VI, p. 380).

²²Anthony Luttrell, 'From Jerusalem to Malta: the Hospital's character and evolution', *Peregrinations*, <<http://www.orderofmalta.int/wp-content/uploads/archive/publicazioni/FromJerusalemtoMalta.pdf>> (accessed 8 May 2014), points out that the order was not primarily a crusading order since its function was that of continuous holy war rather than participation in papal-inaugurated crusades. On the importance of the chevaliers in French naval warfare, see H.J.A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven, CT, 1996), pp. 85–100, 115–138.

²³A. Heulhard, *Villegaignon, roi d'Amérique, 1510–72* (Paris, 1897), pp. 46, 264.

²⁴Jean Beaugué, *Histoire de la guerre d'Ecosse, pendant les campagnes de 1548 et 1549* (Paris, 1556; repr. Edinburgh, 1830), pp. 30, 134.

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De Seure's focus of activity in the 1550s was the Mediterranean.²⁵ In May–June 1551 he accompanied Gabriel d'Aramon, French ambassador to Suleiman the Magnificent, on his return journey to Constantinople.²⁶ De Seure was commanding a galiot in the small French squadron on this voyage, which sailed from Marseilles via the Balearic islands, initially to Algiers, in order to liaise with the Ottoman Pasha (called 'king' in contemporary accounts), al-Hassan, the son of Barbarossa. At first, the French were warmly received, but Hassan was a weak ruler soon to be displaced on orders from Constantinople and the encounter went badly wrong as a result of attempts made by Christian slaves to take refuge with the French fleet. Nicolas de Nicolay, the cosmographer, who was accompanying the expedition and wrote an account of it, relates that, despite de Seure's negotiations, the slave-owners were not pacified and the French had to make a run for it to Malta at a time when the island of Gozo was being attacked and devastated by the Turks.

The Grand Master, Jean d'Omède, persuaded the French to help with the defence of Tripoli by the garrison of the knights of Saint John, who had held it since 1530 but were under siege by Sinan Pasha and Dragut Bey. The siege was a disaster for the order, which was forced to surrender Tripoli. All that de Seure and Aramon could do was negotiate surrender terms with their Turkish allies. Some, including the Grand Master of the Order, blamed the French, though Nicolay claims that they were exonerated. He specifically described de Seure as a 'gentilhomme de grande expérience et excellent jugement'. All the same, it is clear that the French policy of close relations with the sultan created an inevitable ambivalence towards the outposts of the order. De Seure returned with Jean Chesneau, another chronicler of Aramon's embassy, sent back to France by the ambassador.²⁷ He was then sent back with letters of Henri II to Aramon, then at Adrianople,

²⁵Sibert, *Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem*, p. 287, states that: 'Le service sur les galères s'estant rendu très recommandable en France, le chevalier de Sevre, quoique très jeune, obtint le commandement d'une, sous le général Léon Strozzy et la baron de la Garde ensuite de quoi le Roy François Ier lui en confia des escadrons dans les mers Océane et Mediterranée, et se servit de lui dans plusieurs emplois importants.' (MS copy in BnF, fr. 24967, fo. 196v.)

²⁶Odet de Selve to Secretary Phébus, in E. Charrière, *Négociations de la France dans le Levant*, 4 vols (Paris, 1848–1860), II, pp. 150n, 154n. The French arrived at Tripoli on 5 August (letter of Aramon, 28 August 1551, in *ibid.*, pp. 154–162).

²⁷N. de Nicolay, *Les Navigations, pérégrinations et voyages faites en la Turquie* (Antwerp, 1577 (first published Lyon, 1567)), p. 2. See Villegaignon's own *Discours de la Guerre de Malte* (Lyon, 1553), denying French responsibility for the loss of Tripoli and (from p. 52) describing Aramon's arrival with two galleys at Malta after the siege of Gozo and the siege of Tripoli. He does not mention Seure's presence with Aramon in his arguments in the latter's favour. On the background, see F. Lestringant, *Voyages en Égypte des années 1549–1552: Jean Chesneau, André Thevet. Présentation, choix de textes et notes* (Cairo, 1984).

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and orders to persuade the Turks to attack the Emperor's fleet, 'dont il eut fort bonne responce'.²⁸ As a result of this mission, the Turkish fleet under Sinan and Dragut attacked Apulia and the bay of Naples, sacking Reggio Calabria on 4 July 1552. Though the French galley fleet under La Garde failed to rendezvous with the Turks, the latter were able to defeat Doria's fleet on 5 August.²⁹ Whether de Seure was involved in the Franco-Turkish collaboration under Dragut Pasha on Corsica in 1553 is uncertain but, in view of his later activities in Corsica, seems likely.

In 1554, de Seure was charged with a sensitive mission to Renée de France, duchess of Ferrara and mother-in-law of the duc de Guise. Henri II had become alarmed by reports from Duc Ercole II of his wife's heretical leanings and sent de Seure to investigate. He was simply charged to observe and in fact he recommended his old colleague from Aramon's staff, Jean Chesneau, now no longer welcome to the new French envoy to the Porte, Michel de Codignac, as 'contrôleur' of her household.³⁰ However, he was soon followed by an Inquisitor, Mathieu Ory, and the duke of Ferrara lost no time in arresting his wife. She remained obdurate under threats and de Seure was astonished that she could 'subir de si dures extrémités pour une affaire de doctrines'.³¹ De Seure was again sent on mission to Ferrara in April–May 1556.³²

De Seure's real training as a resident ambassador before his appointment to England began soon afterwards and has left extensive evidence. He was made resident ambassador to Portugal in June 1557, a position which lasted only a little under two years.³³ His predecessor,

²⁸C. Scheffer (ed.), *Le Voyage de Monsieur d'Aramon, ambassadeur pour le Roy en Levant escript par noble homme Jean Chesneau* (Paris, 1887), p. 153.

²⁹On this period, see G. Veinstein, 'Les préparatifs de la campagne navale franco-turque de 1552 à travers les ordres du divan ottoman', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 39 (1985), pp. 35–67. On Franco-Ottoman operations in general, see C. Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: the Ottoman and French alliance in the sixteenth century* (London, 2011), pp. 114–140.

³⁰Scheffer, *Voyage de Monsieur d'Aramon*, p. lviii; Chesneau's narrative dates this around May 1555 (see d'Aubais, *Pièces fugitives*, I, p. 61).

³¹BnF, Dupuy 322, fo. 76, Instructions for Ory; B. Fontana, *Renata di Francia*, 3 vols (Rome, 1889–1899), II, pp. 344–350; E.-P. Rodocanachi, *Renée de France, duchesse de Ferrare. Une protectrice de la Réforme en Italie* (Paris, 1896), p. 231; Caroline zum Kolk, 'Les difficultés des mariages internationaux: Renée de France et Hercule d'Este', in I. Pourtin and M.-K. Schaub (eds), *Femmes et pouvoir politique. Les princesses d'Europe, XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Rosny-sous-Bois, 2007), pp. 102–119 (also available online at <<http://cour-de-france.fr/article1814.html>>, accessed 8 May 2014).

³²Dominique du Gabre to Monsieur de Montmorency, 6 May 1556, in A. Vitalis, *Correspondance politique de Dominique du Gabre* (Paris, 1903), p. 167.

³³E. Falgairolle, *Le Chevalier de Seure, ambassadeur de France en Portugal au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1896), pp. 16–26. Falgairolle published letters from Portugal that he found at St Petersburg. Sixty years later, Luis de Matos published the letters in BnF, fr. 15871, which complement

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Honorat de Caix, had been in post throughout the reigns of Francis I and Henri II and had become acclimatized. De Seure, on the other hand, not only found himself an ambassador at a difficult time but seems to have actively disliked the Portuguese, this despite the significant role of the military-religious orders in Portuguese public life. He seems to have thought life in Lisbon too expensive (ambassadors were always kept short of money) and the people not particularly friendly, though on his departure he promised on his return to Secretary Robertet de Fresnes ‘vous conter des belles dames de Portugal et des grans et magnifiques tourneys qui s’y sont faitz depuis que y suis’.³⁴ On the other hand, his successor, Jean Nicot, was more agreeable to the Portuguese court and the suspicion remains that de Seure was too confrontational. Being an envoy at Lisbon at a time of war between France and Spain left the ambassador somewhat isolated and his communications subject to the vagaries of English piracy in the Atlantic and Bay of Biscay. His work also involved the pursuit of merchants from Brittany who were carrying on grain trading with Portugal in time of war.³⁵ Furthermore he felt cut off, anxious that he had not heard of the return of the Constable to the court of France and had not therefore congratulated him. He feared this would undermine (‘nuire’) his interests with the Constable.³⁶

In Portugal, French merchants were increasingly irked by the monopolies created by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and the Papal Bull *Ea quae* of 1506; like the English, they saw no good reason for their exclusion from the Atlantic trade. Propositions had been made throughout the 1530s and 1540s for bypassing Portuguese control of the trade with South America, involving Portuguese renegades in contact with Jean du Bellay, Marguerite of Navarre, and Mme d’Etampes.³⁷ Then in 1557–1558 came the serious attempt at colonization and

the St Petersburg documents (Matos, *Les Portugais en France au XVIe siècle: études et documents* (Coimbra, 1952)) but did not find de Seure’s original despatches from late 1558 in BnF, fr. 3151: these appeared in J.V. Serrão, ‘Michel de Seure, embaixador francês em Portugal (1557–1559): duas cartas para o seu epistolário’, *Arquivo do Centro Cultural Portugues*, 1 (1969), 455–458. Edmond de Barthélemy, in *Archives historiques du département de la Gironde*, 17 (1877), pp. 250–251, copied a letter by him in St Petersburg, asking for safe conduct via Spain, which he dates as Lisbon, 18 April 1555, but which must be from 1559. There is an original despatch from Henri II to de Seure, 4 October 1557, in Archivo General, Simancas, Estado, K. 1490, no. 86.

³⁴ De Seure to Robertet de Fresnes, 18 April 1559, in Matos, p. 284.

³⁵ De Seure to the Constable, 12 February 1559: ‘le grant danger qu’il va maintenant des Angloys et Bicyans’ (Matos, p. 276); de Seure to the duc d’Etampes, governor of Brittany, Lisbon, 30 May 1558, in Dom Morice, *Mémoires pour servir de preuves à l’histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Bretagne*, 3 vols (Paris, 1742–1746), III, cols 1222–1223.

³⁶ De Seure to de Fresnes, 12 February 1559, in Matos, p. 281.

³⁷ Matos, pp. 6–7.

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settlement at Rio de Janeiro, led by the chevalier de Villegaignon, of which André Thevet and Jean de Léry bear such conflicting witness.³⁸

The politics of Portugal were also delicate: King Sebastian had just succeeded to the throne at the age of three, under the regency of his formidable grandmother Catalina, Emperor Charles V's youngest sister, and then his uncle Cardinal Henrique; the child's own mother, Juana (the emperor's daughter), was serving as her brother Philip II's representative in Spain during his absence and was never to see her son again. As Seure was soon to observe, Queen Catalina 's'est montré bien fort passionnée pour le Roy d'Espagne' in helping the silver fleet to transport its treasures into Spain.³⁹ Henri II needed to know what was going on in Lisbon, while French colonial activities at Rio de Janeiro were bound to be a cause of conflict. So de Seure closely monitored the arrival of the urgently awaited Indies fleet at Seville in November 1558, giving minute details on its cargo and suggesting that only by ill luck had the French ships from La Rochelle and Dieppe that had been waiting in ambush at Havana been thwarted and captured. With better fortune, he asserted, this crucial support for the Habsburg monarchy could be cut off.⁴⁰ He lost no time in formulating a strategy for France to undermine Spanish and Portuguese power in South America.⁴¹ Other tasks involved transmitting news from China to the French court, as well as acting as a collector of ancient marbles for the cardinal of Lorraine.⁴² He also took the trouble to write a treatise on the revenues of Portugal.⁴³

De Seure was one of a select few ambassadors in the sixteenth century whose recall was forced by the hostility of his hosts. By January 1559, he was asking the king to 'pourvoir d'un successeur [...] ou qu'elle ayt volonté d'y en tenir ung ordinairement, parce que n'y puis gueres demeurer, à cause que ces seigneurs et gens de deça

³⁸F. Lestringant, *Cannibals: the discovery and representation of the cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, tr. R. Morris (Berkeley, CA, 1997); idem, *Jean de Léry ou l'invention du sauvage. Essai sur l'Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (Paris, 1999).

³⁹De Seure to Henri II, Lisbon, 12 October 1558, BnF, fr. 3151, fos 84–87, passage in cipher on fo. 85r–v. On Queen Catalina, see Yolanda Scheuber, *Catalina de Habsburgo: reina de Portugal* (Madrid, 2011).

⁴⁰De Seure to Henri II, 12 December 1559, BnF, fr. 3151, fo. 84–87, in cipher, with decipher: 'il seroit aisé d'oster à vostre enemy ce grant soullaigement qu'il a de ce monde de delà, ou pour myeux dire, tout le nerf et tout le moyen qu'il a desormais de maintenir la guerre contre vous.'

⁴¹De Seure to Henri II, 30 January 1559, in Falgairolle, *Chevalier de Seure*, pp. 15–29.

⁴²De Seure to Lorraine, 12 February 1559, in Matos, p. 279.

⁴³'Sommaire du revenu qu'a le roy de Portugal', Bibliothèque municipale de Carpentras, MS 490 (reproduced in Matos, pp. 82, 291–297). He estimated the revenues at 500,000 gold écus p.a., of which 300,000 came from the Lisbon customs.

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sont si contraires que à merveilles'.⁴⁴ In February 1559, 'ces seigneurs si ennuyez de ma demeure envers eulx pour les raisons que votre grande prudence et divin jugement peult bien comprendre'.⁴⁵ But he was unrepentant, telling Secretary Robertet de Fresnes that

je suis gros de sçavoir quel diable ilz pouvoient alleguer contre moy [...] car c'est moy qui avoys toutes les raisons du monde de faire ce qu'ilz ont fait. Mais j'estime qu'ilz aient fait comme les chatz qui sont en amour ; ce que je diz est oultre le subson, car il ne leur estoit gueres honnest d'en parler veu qu'ilz n'en avoient nulle cause apparante.⁴⁶

The Constable intimated the recall of de Seure to the Portuguese regent on 28 January 1559.⁴⁷ Meanwhile his replacement by Jean Nicot was being talked of in Lisbon and this was not unwelcome to de Seure, since he regarded Nicot as a good friend.⁴⁸ His recall was minuted by the secretary of state with the face-saving formula that the ambassador needed to return to attend to his private affairs. Henri II's advisers, though they accepted that the 'mauvaise volonté' of the Portuguese made it impossible for de Seure to remain, noted that this 'provient plus de la vigilance et soing' rather than any 'occasion que leur ayez donné de vous vouloir mal'.⁴⁹ De Seure left Lisbon in May aboard a Breton ship, delayed by bad weather until the 22nd, when he wrote to the Portuguese secretary of state that he would be leaving the next day.⁵⁰

De Seure had not waited in Portugal for Nicot's arrival, which was delayed by the English blockade of La Rochelle, forcing him to travel via Spain. His first audience was delayed until September.⁵¹ By that time de Seure had reached La Rochelle, returned to court, and been sent immediately to Marseilles. By September he was at sea again, charged with the delicate task of overseeing the return of French fortresses in Corsica to the Genoese republic in accordance with the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis.⁵² From Marseilles he reported in August on the difficulties with his colleague Jean Hurault de Boistailié.⁵³

⁴⁴ De Seure to Henri II, 30 January 1559, in Falgairolle, *Chevalier de Seure*, p. 23.

⁴⁵ De Seure to Constable, 12 February 1559, in Matos, p. 277.

⁴⁶ De Seure to de Fresnes, 18 February 1559, in *ibid.*, p. 282.

⁴⁷ Matos, pp. 286–287.

⁴⁸ De Seure to Robertet de Fresnes, 18 February 1559, in Matos, p. 283.

⁴⁹ Matos, pp. 286–287.

⁵⁰ To Henri II, 18 April 1559, *Archives historiques du département de la Gironde*, 17 (1877), p. 250; de Seure to Portuguese secretary of state, 22 May 1559, in Matos, pp. 289–290.

⁵¹ E. Falgairolle, *Jean Nicot, ambassadeur de France en Portugal au XVI^e siècle. Sa correspondance diplomatique inédite* (Paris, 1897), pp. xxvii–xxxi.

⁵² L. Romier, 'L'abandon de la Corse par les Français (1559)', *Revue du seizième siècle*, 2 (1914), pp. 376–378; B. Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité. La négociation du traité de Cateau-Cambrésis* (Madrid, 2010); A. de Ruble, *Le Traité de Cateau-Cambrésis* (Paris, 1889), pp. 63–84.

⁵³ BnF, fr. 15872, fos 139–144: letters of de Seure and Boistailié from Marseilles, August 1559.