

Spoken text accompanying the PPT on Systematic diplomatics

My name is Nicolai Zimmermann, I work at the Third Reich Department or *Abteilung Deutsches Reich* in the German Federal Archives. In the following, I would like to present a relatively short module on systematic diplomatics within the EHRI online course, Diplomats of the Holocaust.

We shall begin with a short discussion of the purpose of the systematic analysis of documents and then look at the varying criteria for classification. I shall present a comprehensive typology of documents, whereby categorization is of course very different for papers found in files from before or after the twentieth century. Finally, we will concretize such classification using a fictive work. The module ends with a short look at the terminology used for documents in the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Reich Ministries.

In light of the many, often highly individual, types of documents, it is frequently difficult to focus on the fundamental and general characteristics of each paper. Systematic diplomatics provides tools for grouping. With these aids, one can define the form and content of documents and classify them accordingly. Systematic diplomatics enables us to correctly understand the context of each missive. At the same time, it gives us insight into the administrative structure of government agencies and the practices of communication between and within institutions.

Criteria used by systematic diplomatics to categorize documents include grammatical style, form, the relationship of sender and addressee and finally the purpose or function of the text. Each of these categories is determined by a variety of questions. The first questions relate to grammatical style: Does the writer refer to himself in the first person singular or plural, or does he use objective, impersonal language? What is the formal design of the missive? Who is writing to whom? Are the people writing to each other equals or do they have a hierarchical or dependent relationship? And finally, what is the function of the document? Is it a directive? Or is it merely reporting matters of interest?

For documents written until the end of the nineteenth century, the science of diplomatics developed a nuanced categorization that I would like to briefly present so that you can get an idea of the framework. Each document can be placed somewhere on this grid according to its style, function, and the hierarchical relationship between sender and addressee. This categorization needed to be adapted for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, because the *pluralis majestatis* or royal "we" is no longer used in contemporary times and the difference between the use of first person or a more objective style is no longer as relevant. The formal design of letters has also shrunk in importance. For example, a directive can take the form of a letter or simply of a note with a list of regulations.

In the period we are discussing, the Nazi era, both, first, the function of a missive and, second, the relationship of the communicating institutions remain of interest. Close attention must be paid to the fact that it is often difficult to determine hierarchies and dependencies because of the intermixing of party and state and the numerous special representatives or *Sonderbeauftragte*. Moreover, there were many informal hierarchies, often depending upon the intimacy of someone's relationship to the Führer. For this reason, the purpose of a missive must be given

particular importance. Third, communication also differed greatly depending on whether it was internal or within an administration or between administrations or between administrations and external parties, particularly private individuals.

The following twentieth-century model for a new typology of documents attempts to take account of these facts. I would like to now go into more detail in some of the individual categories. To do so, we shall examine the management of a fictive case:

Let us assume that a Jewish citizen applies to his finance ministry asking for an exemption from the Reich Flight Tax.

- To this end, he writes a letter to the tax office. The letter is from a private person to an administrative authority and the private person is in a dependent position, therefore the letter direction of the letter is from the bottom to the top. If he were legally entitled to an exemption, the letter would have the form of a claim, without legal standing, it must be classified as a request.
- At the tax office, a clerk might write a file note on the letter to document the case. He might make a proposal on how to answer and, for example, ask his colleagues for a response. These procedures are written internal institutional operations among equals.
- When the clerk presents a proposal for action to his superior, drawing from his colleagues advice, this internal communication can be in the form of a note known as a *Leitungsvorlage*, or proposal to management, or in the form of a report.
- Let us assume that the applicant in our fictional case is an extremely prominent and wealthy person. The local tax office is therefore reluctant to make an independent decision, and involves the authority immediately above them, the Chief Finance President who in turn perhaps involves the Reich Ministry of Finance. This inter-institutional communication from the bottom to the top can take the form of a *Vorlage*, a report or presentation.
- Should the Reich Ministry of Finance then ask the Reich Ministry of Economics or the Foreign Office for a response because—we assume—the applicant is a particularly influential businessman with very good international contacts, this official missive would be communication among equals, since none of these institutions are below or above any of the others.
- Finally, the Reich Ministry of Finance reaches a decision and imparts it to the Chief Finance President. This missive is referred to as a decree or *Erlass*, a written directive from the highest authority to the administration directly below itself. The next orders, from the Chief Finance President to the tax office, are in contrast known as directives or *Verfügungen*.
- Within the tax office, the director tells the clerk to implement the ministries decision, that is, he issues a *Weisung*, or instructions.
- The private Jewish applicant who set this process in motion with his request now receives a letter of information from the tax clerk or, if he had legal standing, an official decision from the administration, including any available avenues of contestation or appeal.

I hope that this example has helped serve to clarify this typology for written documents.

In conclusion, I would like to add that these classifications are in the main in accordance with the denotations for most important documents of the time, as they are for example referred to in the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Reich Ministries, the *Gemeinsamen Geschäftsordnung der Reichsministerien*, or GGO.

As cited in the GGO:

"Missives to higher authorities are called *Berichte* or 'reports', to authorities at the same level are *Schreiben* or 'missives', and *Erlasse* and *Verfügungen*, or 'decrees' and 'directives', are sent to lower-ranked institutions."

If one adds to these categories other inter-administrative written documents such as notes, and those documents that result from correspondence with private citizens, such as applications or *Anträge* and decisions or *Bescheide* and request or *Eingaben* as well as informational letters or *Mitteilungsschreiben*, then one has all categories necessary to classify most written documents.

Thank you for your attention.