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Annette S. Finley-Croswhite

Old Dominion University, acroswhi@odu.edu

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# Urban Identity and Transitional Politics: The Transformation of Political Allegiance Inside Amiens Before and After the City's 1594 Capitulation to Henry IV

#### Annette Finley-Croswhite

**Old Dominion University** 

I will begin this paper by defining terms. By "urban identity" I mean the "perceptions of urbanites," religious, social, and/or political in nature, that molded the motives, loyalties, and fears of city-dwellers in Amiens. I am interested in these "perceptions" because I want to know how Catholic Leaguers metamorphosed into royalists between 1588 and 1594. Primarily I consider elite culture, the wealthy lawyers, merchants, and churchmen who commandeered Amiens's leadership positions, but in examining the elite, I also will try to make a few observations about the "identity" of the populace at large. I do not deal with the more obvious stimuli motivating the populace toward the League or royalist camps such as religious fervor, Henry IV's abjuration, or the course of the religious wars.

By focusing on urban identity in Amiens during the period of the Catholic League's ascendancy, I also want to suggest answers to questions raised by Robert Desçimon in his examination of the League in Paris. Thanks to Desçimon, we know a good deal about the Parisian League, but with the exception of Rouen and Toulouse, we know substantially less about the provincial League experience. For Desçimon the personal motives behind the Parisian League leaders were kindled by a defense and reinvigoration of communal virtues and civic liberties. Imbued with religious zeal, the Leaguers recreated an urban sociability that harkened back to a medieval ideal of patriotism and civic responsibility. For a time, at least, the Paris Sixteen held the state at bay and reinvented the medieval commune. This argument is provocative and ground breaking, but what I hope to determine are some alternative reasons that might explain the rise and demise of the Catholic League in Picardy's capital city. Specifically, I want to know what the perceptions or motives undergirding Amiens's League can tell us about the nature or "identity" of urbanites in early modern culture.

Overwhelmingly Leaguers in Amiens greatly resembled their *Politique* counterparts. Thus, unlike the Parisian League model, artisans did not infiltrate the municipal government, which remained in Amiens solidly merchant-bourgeois. Yet what is

particularly intriguing about the nature of the political/religious allegiance in Amiens is that the divisions that formed between Leaguer and Politique city leaders in 1588, after the "Day of the Barricades" and before the assassinations at Blois, remained solid throughout the period of Catholic League domination. This can be proven by the fact that in 1588 Henry III received a letter naming all of the League leaders in the city as well as his own royalist allies. Neither the murders at Blois nor the ascension of a Protestant king altered significantly the ranks of these two groupings. Henry III's loyal servants named in the document happened to be the very same men who opened Amiens's gates to Henry IV's royalist commanders in 1594. Of course there were desertions from the "Holy Union" over the course of its five-and-one-half-year existence as partisans gradually grew weary of life under the League, but most of the Leaguers named on this 1588 list either made the leap to the king's cause in the ninth hour on the eve of Amiens's capitulation or they remained true to their beliefs and left with the League governor of Picardy, the duc d'Aumale, when he was expelled from the city in August 1594.

The way in which the League took form in Amiens and the way it fell apart tells us a good deal about the motives of urbanites. Just as in other towns, uncertainty surrounding Henry III fueled pre-League anxiety on the part of Amiens's citizenry. In 1587, for example, rumor circulated that the king intended to place a garrison in Amiens as well as to construct a citadel. The word "citadel" roused such fear in the Amiénois that League leaders employed it to excite crowds gathered at the municipal assembly hall. The townspeople possessed a proud exemption from such treatment in their communal charter and were determined to prevent any tampering with the esteemed privilege. The citadel issue was an important consideration among the increasing numbers of antiroyalists who urged the city's citizenry to join the "Holy League." Amiens did so on 19 May 1588 shortly after the "Day of the Barricades."

The assassinations of the duc de Guise and his brother, the Cardinal de Lorraine, on 24 December 1588 radicalized the Catholic Leaguers in Amiens as elsewhere. Four days after the assassinations, Leaguers representing the clergy, nobility, presidial court, bourgeoisie, and the municipal government voted to sever ties with the crown and to create an assembly called the "Chamber of the Estates of Picardy" to administer both the town of Amiens and the province of Picardy. Municipalities throughout the region were invited to send delegates to this new institution. Amiens's municipal magistrates exuberantly supported the "Chamber" and quickly transformed the échevinage into its enforcement arm. Thereafter, acting for the "Chamber," they expanded their control over all areas of local administration.8 A majority of city leaders no longer recognized Henry III, and when letters from the king addressed to Amiens's mayor and municipal councilors arrived in the city on 12 January 1589, they were tossed unopened into a fire.9 League police squads appointed by the city government rounded up, imprisoned, and fined Politiques, royalists, and Huguenots. 10 In the wake of the Guise murders, moreover, city leaders persuaded the Amiénois populace to relinquish royalist allegiances and to espouse the religious zealotry of the League." The municipality instructed all parish priests to preach sermons that would stir the emotions of the people for the League, and the Leaguer bishop of Amiens, Geoffrey de la Martonnie, charged his priests, canons, and clerics likewise.<sup>12</sup> Processions increased and the townspeople were ordered under penalty of fine to decorate the front of their houses for the League by hanging green banners, the colors of Lorraine and hence the League, from their windows. Other visual images excited the people. A priest at the church of Saint-Leu, for instance, ordered two large paintings mounted beneath his pulpit depicting in gruesome detail the assassinations at Blois.<sup>13</sup> Placards also appeared denouncing the king and the royalist governor of Picardy, Henry I d'Orléans, duc de Longueville.<sup>14</sup>

In the formation of Amiens's seditious government, Parisian influence was important. Deputies sent from Paris encouraged the Amiénois to join the "Holy League," and once the "General Council of Union" was formed in France's capital, Amiens's city government kept deputies there. At one point the échevinage even discussed sending money to the Paris Sixteen. Even the chronology of League history in Amiens lagged slightly behind the Parisian experience. Yet the thrust of Amiens's "Chamber of the Estates of Picardy" was to try to build regional strength, and if ever it could be argued that Amiens sought autonomous control of the province, evidence can be found in the few remaining documents left by the Chamber. Clearly, Amiens's League leaders hoped to control taxation in Picardy and encouraged the centralization of regional tax monies in the Chamber's hands. Abbeville, Peronne, Montdidier, and Noyon dispatched regular deputations to Amiens and for a time complied deferentially with the Picard capital. Amiens's leaders offered money, supplies, troops, and munitions to these and other towns and viewed themselves as the protectors of the province.

Within Amiens, power was concentrated in the hands of city leaders connected to mighty patrons. They in turn influenced their friends, families, and neighborhoods. Vincent Le Roy, lieutenant-general at the presidial court, was one of Amiens's most important and notorious Leaguers. A client of the duc de Mayenne, Le Roy greatly benefitted from his association with the duke. The officer virtually controlled Amiens's government during the League, and around 1590 Mayenne made him his right hand man in the city and turned him into something akin to an intendant. The duke instructed Le Roy to control the accounts of the bureau of finances as well as to search out and try persons guilty of anti-League activity.<sup>18</sup> During this same period (1590-91), Le Roy's brother Nicholas served in the échevinage and went on personal missions for the ducs de Mayenne and d'Aumale.<sup>19</sup> Charles de Lorraine, the duc d'Aumale, resided in Amiens often during the League's ascendancy and placed his clients in key positions throughout the city as well. All three Pécoul brothers, for example, were his clients: André, a royal notary; Claude, a procurator and municipal magistrate; and Adrien, a canon at Amiens's Notre Dame cathedral. The Pécouls had Spanish connections, and Claude even took an oath of allegiance to the king of Spain. He received a seigniory and 6000 livres from d'Aumale, and when the Spanish surprised and captured Amiens in 1597, the duke made Pécoul mayor.<sup>21</sup> D'Aumale frequently intervened in Amiens's municipal elections to ensure his clients sat on the échevinage. In 1593 when his client Antoine de Berny failed to win a mayoral election, the duke left a tennis match and marched to the city hall where he installed forcefully his man as mayor.<sup>22</sup> Amiens's other great source of patronage, Bishop Geoffrey de la Martonnie, also exerted a commanding influence over not only the church establishments but the secular government as well. His clients held positions in the city government, as was the case with François Bignant in 1590 and 1591. Bignant's brother was a canon at the cathedral.23

Just as the Amiénois' concern for urban privileges and regional ties and the ramifications of their patron-client relations tell us a good deal about the formation of the Catholic League, they can also tell us about its breakup. By summer 1594 things were

going badly for the ducs de Mayenne and d'Aumale as the situation inside Amiens deteriorated and more and more townspeople longed to reopen communications with Henry IV. The city government was losing control, especially after Paris capitulated, and became divided between those who wanted to settle with the king and those who preferred to remain in the League. But if Mayenne's followers were switching sides, he was his own worst enemy. In late July he personally sent over five hundred mandates to suspected pro-royalist bourgeois ordering them to leave the city, but when the city leaders learned of his intentions, even the League magistrates became angered since this was a command they felt only they had the prerogative to give. The municipality refused to force the bourgeois to leave, and Mayenne became so angered that he threatened to plant his guidon in the market square and direct his troops to burn and sack the city. The introduction of troops was a major stumbling block since throughout the spring Mayenne had wanted to bring contingents of Spanish forces into Amiens, but each time the issue was raised, the municipal leaders condemned the idea. In 1594 the magistrates feared he planned to call in the Spanish anyway.

Regional problems were another major issue contributing to the League's decline in Amiens. It was natural in time of war for key towns in any province to ally and support each other. This was particularly true in Picardy since familial alliances existed between the magisterial elite of many towns. Robert de Sachy, for example, held the office of échevin nine times between 1589 and 1602. His father and brother, moreover, both served as mayor of Doullens during the same period. Similarly, the mayor of Abbeville, Jean de Maupin, married his daughter to a Louvencourt, an Amiénois family strongly tied to the échevinage." Yet if familial alliances helped to solidify a province, competition between cities served to destroy such unity. In 1589, in the wake of League excitement, Abbeville's government seemed willing to work with Amiens. This cooperation ended when Abbeville's leaders began to see their interests compromised. Economic rivalry had always been strong between the three main cities in Picardy, Amiens, Abbeville, and Saint-Quentin, and interestingly enough, Saint-Quentin remained solidly royalist during the League wars. Abbeville went Leaguer but eventually grew disenchanted with Amiens and sent fewer and fewer delegations to the city. The "friendship" ended when Abbeville decided to strengthen its own regional influence in Picardy. Thus, during the period 1591 to 1594, Abbeville relied less and less on Amiens and allied and protected League towns in its immediate vicinity along the Atlantic coast of the province.28 In the end, Abbeville's inhabitants prided themselves on surpassing Amiens by becoming the first League city in Picardy to capitulate to Henry IV.29

Probably the single most important factor leading to the League's demise had to do with Henry IV's clients living and waiting inside the city. At no time during the Catholic League domination of Amiens was the city's municipal government ever entirely Leaguer or entirely royalist. Amiens's municipal magistrates split over the sedition issue from the day they voted to enter the "Holy Union." Jehan de Collemont, mayor in 1588, was also a client of Henry III. During crucial deliberations he warned his colleagues that joining the League might eventually threaten the city's privileges. Collemont backed down and begrudgingly accepted the League, but five years later, he and his familymen played a vital role in the royalist takeover. Between 1588 and 1594, the municipality in Amiens consisted of a large number of zealous Leaguers, many known royalists, and perhaps a majority who walked the line between the two. Frequently, the royalist échevins suffered

imprisonment for their anti-League activities, but they soon obtained their freedom, only to be jailed again at a later date. 11 Orders from the municipal government expelled many royalists from the city, but they always managed to return. The city government, in fact, made quite a profit from fining royalists for their anti-League activities and from confiscating their goods and later selling them back to them. By 1594, however, the king's clients had achieved the upper hand and converted enough of Amiens's populace that the people rioted in favor of Henry IV. Augustin de Louvencourt, Robert Correur, François d'Aguesseau, Jehan Postel, Jehan de Cordelois, Michel de Suyn, and Adrien de Maroeuil were just a few of the échevins who associated first with Henry III and then with Henry IV throughout the 1588 to 1594 period. They worked consistently from the creation of the League in Amiens to bring about its demise. In the end, they manned the barricades erected between 5 and 7 August 1594, and once street fighting ended, they chased the duc d'Aumale and his clients out of the city.<sup>32</sup> Ennobled following the capitulation, these staunch royalists completely dominated the municipal government after 1597 when Henry decreased and reorganized the échevinage. From then until the king's assassination in 1610, only one formerly zealous Leaguer managed to win a place on the city council.33

What then were the people's motives inside Amiens for supporting or denouncing the League or the monarchy? The period of the Catholic League in the towns is often portrayed in texts as a sort of swan song for the medieval commune. Ardent Leaguers fired with religious enthusiasm are seen asserting their autonomy, defending their privileges, and avowing their civic responsibility. Perhaps this was the case, but it may not have been the entire scenario. Regional allegiances and rivalries played an important role in motivating people for or against the League, and these situations deserve further study. It seems to have been the case that often one city in a province supported the League while its neighbor remained royalist. This is what occurred with Amiens and Saint-Quentin in Picardy, Rouen and Caen in Normandy, Châlons-sur-Marne and Vitry-le-François in Champagne, Clermont-Ferrand and Riom in Auvergne, and certainly with many others.

Arguably, the attachment to communal privileges in Amiens was strong. Yet this may have resulted less from a revived communal spirit and more from a fear of the repercussions of the loss of privileges. All early modern cities disdained the introduction of troops into their midst because of the economic dislocation and personal injury these actions could cause. If ever the crown or the nobility threatened the towns, it was in this area. I know of no town that ever revolted because a king or nobleman interfered with election rights and manipulated their outcomes. The same can not be said with regard to the introduction of troops. In 1588 when Amiens feared the construction of a citidel, the town leaders exalted their urban privilege and adopted the League. In 1594 when Mayenne menaced Amiens with his own troops, the town trumpeted the same privilege and opted for the king. In 1597 when Henry IV wanted to use Swiss troops to bolster Amiens's urban militia in case of Spanish attack, the magistrates clung once again to their privileged exemption and rejected the king's offer. Shortly thereafter the city fell to the Spanish.

Clientage and its role in the towns is another issue that merits future research. The royalist duc de Longueville enjoyed a solid power base in Saint-Quentin but was less highly revered in Amiens. It should come as no surprise then that while the city leaders in Amiens drew up an oath of loyalty in support of the League, the municipal magistrates

in Saint-Quentin devised an anti-League pledge. The continued presence of royalists in Amiens during the League years is also of interest. They worked steadily, consciously, and directly from the beginning of the League to bring about its downfall. The royalist families were united by ties of marriage and kinship, and they utilized fictive kinship ties and economic leverage to influence their parishes and neighborhoods. Whole blocks of parishes were known to the municipal government during the League as either pro-League or *Politique*, and, thus, when the royalist coup occurred in August 1594, neighborhoods battled it out until the royalists finally won. The most important aspect of the clientage issue in Amiens, however, was that the lines that divided Leaguer and royalist city leaders were drawn clearly in 1588 and waffled very little thereafter.

I see little evidence, therefore, in a revived communal spirit in Amiens stretching deep into the heart of the populace. Urban sociabilities pre-dated the formation of the Catholic League and do not really explain why one neighborhood supported the League while another favored the king. If anything, the League leaders seem to have acted like tyrants. They enacted stringent legislation that curtailed the freedom of the people, and they manipulated their beliefs and emotions. Told originally to defend the League, in the end the part of the population that tried to remain fervent was suddenly encouraged to recognize the king. Vincent Le Roy and his brother Nicholas, for example, rode through their neighborhood on the eve of Amiens's capitulation waving white feathers as a sign to their followers to switch sides.<sup>37</sup> For several years after 1594, moreover, League adherents continued to live in the city and many may have felt abandoned. This would explain why on a rampart wall in late 1596 when André Pécoul showed up for militia duty—the same André who had supported the League but who also made the timely switch to the king's side in 1594—he confronted an angry League defender who threatened him. On that night Pécoul was met by a militia captain, Philippe Otiger, who first terrorized him and eventually wounded him with a knife after crying repeatedly that Pécoul had betrayed the "Holy Union." For those ideologically confused at the capitulation, League sentiment remained strong and undoubtedly contributed to the Spanish capture of Amiens in 1597.

In summation, I believe that the "identity" of urbanites in Amiens was tied directly to issues affecting privileges, regional matters, and particularly clientage. We know that urban leaders controlled their neighborhoods through their influence and status and could motivate or prevent factional strife and violence. They were the great patrons of the populace. Why one magistrate, Augustin de Louvencourt, chose to support the king in 1588 and another, Antoine de Berny, adopted the League is perhaps the greater question. Concern for city privileges and regional issues undoubtedly influenced individual decisions, but before the assassinations at Blois men like Louvencourt and De Berny had already made their choice based upon their clientship status. Louvencourt and his familymen and women sided with the king; Berny and his chose d'Aumale. There was no slow "transformation" of Leaguers over the 1588 to 1594 period, only a gradual changing of sides of the populace. Very few Leaguers metamorphosed into royalists until the last moments before the capitulation when being on the winning side caused the most ardent yet ambitious of Leaguers to shift allegiances. Their "identities," perceptions, and agendas had long been established. And, yet, their "identity" greatly affected the heart of the city, and Henry IV understood this. How else can we explain that after the recapture of Amiens in 1597, even though he offered a generous pardon to ex-Leaguers, the king also made sure that only long-standing royalists held municipal posts in the city government and captainships in the urban militia? How else could Henry IV assure himself that on the streets, corners, and back alleys of Amiens, La Rochelle, Nantes, and any other city, his people would be loyal?

#### **Notes**

- 1. Robert Desçimon, Qui etaient les Seize? Mythes et réalities parisienne (1585-1594) (Paris: Fédération des Sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris, 1983); idem, "La Ligue à Paris (1585-1594): Une revision," Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations 37 (1982):72-111; Elie Barnavi, "Réponse à Robert Desçimon," Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations 37 (1982):112-21; idem, Le Parti de Dieu: Etude sociale et politique des chefs de la Ligue parisienne, 1585-1594 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1980); Philip Benedict, Rouen during the Wars of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Mark Greengrass, "The Saint Union in the Provinces: The Case of Toulouse," Sixteenth Century Journal XIV (1983):469-96.
- 2. Desçimon, Qui etaient les Seize?, 62-65, 295-96.
- 3. This suggestion has been called for by various scholars. See for example, Peter Ascoli, "French Provincial Cities and the Catholic League," Occasional Papers of the American Society for Reformation Research I (1977):15-37 and Barbara Diefendorf, "Recent Literature on the Religious Conflicts in Sixteenth-Century France," Religious Studies Review 10 (1984):366.
- 4. This is what Philip Benedict observed to be true in Rouen (Benedict, Rouen, 182). In terms of social standing Amiens's Leaguers resembled long-held yet highly criticized assumptions about the kinds of men who joined. See the Drouot thesis in Henri Drouot, Mayenne et la Bourgogne, étude sur la Ligue (Paris: Picard, 1937), 43-55, 333-34. The majority of Amiens's powerful elite, the officers of the bureau of finances, rallied behind the king (both Henry III and Henry IV) so that League leadership in Amiens was divided between lawyers from the presidial court and merchants trading in spices, dies, and cloth. Not all merchants were Leaguers, however, and particularly those related to the great financial officials remained royalists. Even so, Amiens's Leaguers were far from rabble-rousers and came from notable families traditionally associated with municipal office. While the presidial court in Amiens held the upper hand over the municipal government in terms of status and authority and oversaw the municipality's annual elections, the two institutions cooperated in administering the city. Tensions existed brought on by what the merchants viewed as an influx of officers into the ranks of the échevinage, but familial alliances uniting the two groups helped to minimize problems. During the last half of the sixteenth century, in fact, many members of the presidial court and the bureau of finances were the sons and or brothers of merchants. For example, in sixteenth-century Amiens, Michel de Suyn held the offices of councillor at the presidial court, controller-general of the domain of Picardy, greffier at the bureau of finances and échevin in the municipal government. He was the son of a prominent spice merchant. See

Bibliothèque Nationale, Dossier Bleus, 622. By the seventeenth century office holders had formed their own familial networks and were less often directly related to merchants (Pierre Deyon, Amiens capitale provinciale, étude sur la société urbaine au 17e siècle [Paris: Mouton, 1967], 272-75).

- 5. Bibliothèque Nationale, Manuscrits Français (hereafter BN MSS FR) 8914, 133-39 and Jehan Pagès, *Manuscrits de Pagès*, *Marchand d'Amiens*, Louis Douchet, ed., (Amiens: Libraires de la Picardie, 1859), 73-78.
- 6. A. Dubois, La Lique: documents relatifs à la Picardie (Amiens: Yvert, 1859), 73-78.
- 7. Ibid.
- 8. Peter Ascoli argues that the city government exerted "limitless" control over local government ("French Provincial Cities," 31). Little is known of the *Chambre des états de Picardie* although the municipal deliberations in Amiens contain a good deal of information about its existence (Archives municipales, Amiens [hereafter AMA], BB 49-53). There is also one small packet of documents referring to the creation of the "Chamber" housed in the AMA, 120. See the small book by F. Pouy, *La Chambre du conseil des états de Picardie pendant la ligue* (Amiens: Delatte, 1882). See also, Henri Drouot, "Les Conseils provinciaux de la Sainte-Union (1589-1595)," *Annales du Midi* 65 (1953):415-33.
- 9. AMA, BB 49, 62-65 and Pagès, Manuscrits, 35.
- 10. AMA, BB 49, 92v.
- 11. In the 1588 document cited above as BN MSS FR 8914, 133-39 that lists all royalist and Leaguer leaders in the town, the town populace itself is noted as being primarily loyal to Henry III. This was no longer the case by 1589.
- 12. AMA, AA 120, n.p. Entry dated 10 January 1589.
- 13. Pagès, Manuscrits, 35. Similar paintings were hung in the city's cathedral (AMA, BB 49, 110, 125).
- 14. AMA, AA 17, 86.
- 15. AMA, BB 48, 100. The municipality eventually decided it did not have the funds to send money to Paris.
- 16. See Descimon's chronology in Descimon, Qui etaient les Seize?, 15.
- 17. AMA, AA 120 and Ascoli, "French Provincial Cities," 31-32.
- 18. Archives Départementales, Somme, 1B 12, 177.
- 19. AMA, FF 1249.
- 20. AMA, FF 501, Piece 10.

- 21. A. Janvier, Livre d'or de la municipalité d'Amiénois (Paris: Picard, 1893), 403 and Pouy, La Chambre du conseil des états, 40.
- 22. A. Thierry, Recueil des monuments inédits de l'histoire du Tiers-Etat (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1856), 2:1042-43.
- 23. BN MSS FR 8914, 133.
- 24. Jehan Patte, Journal historique de Jehan Patte, bourgeois d'Amiens (1587-1617), ed. M.J. Garnier (Amiens: Lemer Ainé, 1863), 77-92.
- 25. Ibid., 86 and AMA, BB 53, 157-61.
- 26. Dubois, La Ligue, 90 and Pages, Manuscrits, 71.
- 27. Ernest Prarond, La Ligue à Abbeville, 1576-1594 (Paris: Dumoulin Libraire, 1873), 174.
- 28. Ascoli, "French Provincial Cities," 32.
- 29. Annette Finley-Croswhite, "Ceremonial Reconciliation: Henry IV's Royal Entry into Abbeville, 18 December 1594," Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History 17 (1990):96-105.
- 30. Pouy, La Chambre, 43-44.
- 31. AMA, CC 811. This document contains lists of fines exacted from prisoners over the course of the League. The same royalist names turn up over and over again.
- 32. Patte, Journal, 88-92.
- 33. That man was Antoine de Berny, described in BN MSS FR 8914 as the most ambitious man in Amiens.
- 34. Paul Logie, "Les Ducs de Longueville, Gouverneurs de Picardie," Bulletin trimestriel de la société des antiquaires de Picardie, 72-87.
- 35. For example, the Voiture, Collemont, and Pingré families, all royalists, were related by marriage, as were the Du Mons and Le Mattre families. There is no space here to trace all of these alliances, but the block of men who supported the royalist cause from 1588 to 1594 formed four important groupings of familymen.
- 36. Diefendorf, "Recent Literature on the Religious Conflict," 366.
- 37. Pages, Manuscrits, 78-87.
- 38. AMA, FF 850, 17-18.
- 39. Archives Nationales, KK 1213: no. 12.