Tackling the Cambrai Congress as the apex of diplomatic argumentation in the Post-Utrecht era (See Ch. 2.1), I shed once more the lights on the actors in the Franco-British game (1). The Walpole administration would find a new ally in the person of Louis XV’s preceptor, the aged and discreet André-Hercule de Fleury, bishop of Fréjus. While Robert Walpole and Charles Townshend were slowly working out Carteret and Schaub, both Stanhope’s men, they continued the latter’s policies by tying their fate to the strongest man in Versailles.

The Congress of Cambrai (See Ch.3.1: 1–11) served as an essential clarification point for all participants in the big diplomatic game which had been going on since the Utrecht Treaties. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the Quadruple Alliance, designed to perfect the 1713 settlement, linked France, Britain and the Emperor in a struggle for the imposition of peace conditions on Spain and Savoy. To what extent, however, had peace been restored between Philip V and Victor Amadeus, whose isle of Sicily he had invaded? Or between Charles VI and Philip V, who were still at cessation of arms-terms since 1713?

The whole contentieux of the Spanish Succession still laid bare. Cambrai is traditionally seen as a waste of time and money on the part of the major European powers: the decisions that counted, were taken in Paris, Madrid, Vienna or London, while the plenipotentiaries danced, drank and vetted on ridiculous details.

The work of Lucien Bély on the Utrecht conference has challenged this idée recue. Diplomatic sociability in the conference’s microcosm went hand in hand with the elimination of the rule of precedence to avoid the number of incidents. By the opening of the conference in January 1724, the participants had spent years together in Cambrai. The conference developed a genuine dynamic. Delegations were not independent from orders coming out of other capitals, but took over the right of initiative, almost forcing the respective monarchs into a passive role. France and Britain, the two major powers of the moment, held sway, as mediators, over the congress’ agenda and proceedings. They enjoyed a rhetorical and legal superiority over Spain and Austria, as these two powers contested the Utrecht solution, and had no direct gains to achieve or losses to fear in the outcome. Consequently, their delegations could gently force the two contestants to align their mutual quarrels on the lines drawn out in 1713.
Cambrai offered a full display of all the rhetoric, linguistic and political talent inherent in the diplomatic arena of the *trentre heureuses.* Surprisingly, but scant attention has been devoted to the vivid and detailed accounts produced by the British delegates Polwarth and Whitworth for George I. We see the ability and perseverance of the Imperial diplomats Penterrieder and Windischgrätz, the incoherent and passionate attacks of Beretti Landi, the timid complaisance of Santistevan or the uncontrollable cross-fire of Sardinian demands, not to mention the relentless and chaotic interventions from a myriad of Italian sovereigns.

The congress broke up for dynastic reasons, when the French ministry sent back Louis XV’s promised spouse, Infanta Anna Maria Victoria. This should not obscure that the negotiations were far more significant for what was to follow. The tumult of the 1725 Ripperda Treaty between Spain and Austria (Section 1:11) seemingly brought Europe on the brink of an all-out war between two radically opposite blocs. Ripperda, a former ambassador of the United Provinces to Spain, had joined the service of Philip V after a remarkable itinerary of changing allegiances. By a single stroke, he seemed to have reconciled Philip V and Charles VI. In reality, it took two years to reconcile France and Austria, or to bring down yet another Spanish Prime Minister, after Alberoni in 1719, Ripperda, by coupling the issues of the Ostend Company and the Imperial Pragmatic Sanction (Section 2).

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1 Dhondt, “La représentation du droit.”
3 NA, SP, 78, 173–176.
4 Don Manuel Domingo de Benavides y Aragon, Corella, Davila, Portocarrero, and de la Cueba, count of Santistevan, del Castellar, Cozentayna, and del Risco, Marquis of Malagor Las Navas and Selena, grande of Spain (1682–1748), brigadier in Philip V’s armies, first gentleman of the bedchamber. Son of the Vice-Roy of Naples, will eventually accompany don Carlos to Tuscany, and then to Naples. See Ozanam & Ozanam, Les diplomates espagnols, 182.
5 Dhondt, “Law on the Diplomatic Stage.” When the present book uses the plural to identify the agreements concluded by Ripperda in Vienna in 1725, this includes the commercial treaty as well. The singular denotes the mere Peace and Alliance Treaties.
6 Dhondt, “So Great A Revolution.”
7 Saint-Simon, Mémoires, t. xv, Ch. 5: “D’une maison illustre de la province d’Over-Yssell, mais sans biens. Il avait été catholique, mais il s’était perverti pour entrer dans les charges de son