

Year of the News

Veranstalter: Paola Molino, Historisches Seminar, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München / Università di Padova; Brendan Dooley, School of History, University College Cork

Datum, Ort: 01.06.2017–02.06.2017, München

Bericht von: Florian Runschke, Historisches Seminar, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

The comprehension and reconstruction of international news networks in the early modern period is „probably the most pressing and promising issue in the history of early media today“¹, as Joad Raymond noted in 2012. The content of printed gazettes is still largely unstudied, not least because of the difficulties in handling such an enormous amount of sources. Studies on the European periodical press have so far mainly focused on particular newspapers. The only general survey, recently released by Andrew Pettegree², deals with questions concerning the publishing history of the papers, particularly problems of editorship, ownership, etc., rather than the actual contents. For this reason the workshop „Year of the News“ developed an approach allowing historians to share insights and data on the pan-European network first created in the 16th and 17th centuries. A major purpose was to describe the circulation pattern as accurately and exhaustively as possible at the current state of research, in part by examining correspondence networks, but mostly by looking at the news itself as it moved from place to place. Therefore the speakers selected key years as well as less outstanding years, in order to get a better picture over long stretches of time. The presentations were organised in sessions of two as well as in single sessions. In addition the workshop was lined by a novel and innovative approach of discussion panels.

Within the scope of the Forschungszentrum Fundamente der Moderne and with funding from the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, the workshop was organised by Brendan Dooley and Paola Molino, offering a framework of specialists for a systematic transnational study of news contents. In this setting, early mod-

ern manuscripts and printed news sheets in all their conditions, origins and circulations were discussed. The participants explored primarily the exchange of information about specific contemporary circumstances. Some of the presentations were methodological, regarding how to analyse large quantities of news data; others were theoretical, concerning the role of information (and its opposite) in political and social discourse; still others were more empirical, reporting the results of analyses year by year. The workshop's main aim was the discussion and preparation of a collective book, tentatively titled „The News of the Year“. This publication will showcase novel applications of humanities, social science and information science methods to a vast and unique collection of material from all over Europe in order to shed light on a phenomenon of worldwide significance.

In their introduction, Brendan Dooley and Paola Molino expounded the problem of defining „news“ either as true facts concerning events or simply as knowledge. Primarily news is a reflection of events and thus choices about how to frame these events are as important as the news itself. For this reason it is necessary for the historian of media to explore how the reader receives news content – in other words, to study both the production and the consumption of media.

ALESSIO ASSONITIS (Medici Archive Project) opened the first session of the workshop presenting the work and progress of the Medici Archive Project. Its purpose is to digitalise the Archivio Mediceo del Principato, from the Renaissance until the end of Medici government in the 18th century. This archive contains four to five million letters, ranging from the history of the state and diplomacy to urban history, Jewish history, and the history of food and medicine. The aim of the project is not only to make this material accessible online but also to enable cooperation between the users and the project, for instance by means of uploading transcriptions and even pictures of documents taken in the archive.

¹Joad Raymond, *Newspaper: A National or International Phenomenon?*, in: *Media History* 18 (2012), pp. 249-257, here p. 255.

²Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know About Itself*, New Haven & London 2014.

MARIO INFELISE (Venice) focused on the sources themselves by following the origins of the *avviso*. The increased demand for information in the Late Middle Ages spurred the development of the *avviso* that became a synonym for news. Although the frequency of *avvisi* was never regular, Venice and Flanders offered the most reliable points of origin. However, it was not only the origin, but also the quality that made news marketable, as CARMEN ESPEJO CALA (Sevilla) explained. In 1625 news pamphlets were used for the propagandistic distribution of recent Spanish victories and helped to embed these events in collective memory. That way the Spanish news market developed considerably in 1625, simply because good news was easier to sell.

The following section buttressed this conclusion by showing that it was enough to have exciting events to get a great reception. DAVIDE BOERIO (Teramo) exemplified this with the year 1648, which saw not only the Peace of Westphalia but also the end of the popular rebellion in Naples, the beginning of the French Fronde and the Khmelnytsky Uprising in Ukraine. In England, the conflict between Parliament and Charles I escalated and Oliver Cromwell invaded London with elements of the New Model Army as the Civil War continued. Boerio examined the role of manuscript and print news in these events, particularly with regard to the diffusion of popular dissent. ANDREAS WÜRLER (Bern) demonstrated that one big event was enough for good news. For instance, the first revolution in the modern sense of the term, the so-called Swiss peasant rebellion of 1653, was reported by a number of newspapers. As the most radical Swiss revolt in the early modern period it was reported by Germans, French, English, Dutch and Italians. The most detailed ones were the „Wochentliche Donnerstags Zeitung“ from Hamburg, the „Ordinarii Reichs-Zeitung“ from Vienna, the „Europäische Zeitung“ from Hamburg and the „Nouvelles ordinaires“ from Paris. Some of them did not hesitate to call the events a rebellion. This posed the question of how news impacted war. In a following discussion it was observed on this occasion that newspapers have a great influence on the population. For example, the Dutch were never at war

with the Turks, but due to the anti-Ottoman attitude displayed in German and Venetian newspapers, many Dutch became hostile to the Turks.

In the following section, PAOLA MOLINO (Munich / Padova) made use of the year 1588 to illustrate how the German and the Italian media network developed in close reciprocity. As a prime example, she took the *Fuggerzeitungen*, handwritten newsletters produced between 1568 and 1604, which constitute one of the best-known central European collections of early modern news. With a view to the years 1578-1586 and 1601 the collections are divided into two parts: one in German, containing newsletters mainly from Antwerp and Cologne; the other containing Italian *avvisi* sent primarily from Rome and Venice. From 1588 until 1604 (with the exception of the year 1601) *avvisi* from both cities are only preserved in German. The reasons for this shift seem to be both personal and related to their role as global entrepreneurs, and also connected to a shift in the news market. In addition to the *Fuggerzeitung* Molino considered two other important collections of *avvisi*: firstly, the „Urbinati Latini“ in Rome (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana); secondly, the collection of *avvisi* in Florence (Archivio Mediceo del Principato). These two collections help to provide some insights into the interaction between *Zeitungen* and *avvisi* and the moment in which emerged the German *Zeitung* as a new medium, which was able to transmit information on both sides of the Alps. In contrast, NICHOLAS BROWNLEES (Florence) showed how European news was also received on a grand scale in England. 1623 represents the first year in which serialised news was constantly published on a weekly basis. In order to escape censorship, the *corantos*, filled their pages with foreign news rather than with more politically sensitive domestic information. In the first year publishers wanted to make the *corantos* appear professional; hence, unconfirmed news was noted as such. The possibility of misinformation and propaganda was often indicated.

Especially stirring was the year 1618 which was examined by BRENDAN DOOLEY (Cork). As the Thirty Years War broke

out in this year, events came thick and fast and variously transformed news spread across all of Europe. Of course, no *histoire totale* emerges from this seventeenth-century avalanche of news, despite an astonishing amount of detail: perceptions conveyed by this news might change from week to week, and the representation of the world found in the periodicals differs radically from the one found in modern historical scholarship. Moreover, very little information in printed gazettes and the handwritten newsletters from 1618 refers to the cultural accomplishments for which the year is best known. Instead, the focus was on daily affairs shared by most people, namely the society and the state. To get a picture of the year, we might turn to the year's total print production. The gazettes and newsletters, while rich in relevant references, are only one source among many for a better understanding of these and other episodes of the year 1618. But the existence of these particular sources offers an element of regularity. In a similar way, JOOP KOOPMANS (Groningen) approached the year 1689 by analysing the content of Dutch newspapers. In that year William and Mary were proclaimed co-rulers of England, Scotland and Ireland and the Nine Years' War between the Grand Alliance and France started, but among Dutch newspapers only the one from Harlem and Amsterdam covered these events. Most foreign reports were made about the neighbouring countries, England and Germany. Finally CORNEL ZWIERLEIN (Bochum / Erfurt) ended the workshop by addressing some fundamental questions: how can we identify years of the news? When does the voice of the journalist emerge? What is an event? For these and many other reflections the conference publication shall be preceded by a glossary that clarifies some of these basic terms.

The analysis of news allows us to see how – and for how long – specific episodes captured the attention of contemporaries. We get a glimpse of how the events would have appeared to those who got their information mainly from news reports, or to those who were able to compare the news reports to a variety of other testimonies. On all these aspects, the workshop provided cutting-edge

research findings. The attendees deliberately chose not just key years for their presentation, thus demonstrating their focus on history of media instead of history of events. Yet it was also important to examine years (such as 1648) that have preoccupied modern historiography. It is crucial to cover both aspects in order to get a balanced overview of early modern media. That said, for the conference volume it would be desirable to define a precise red thread and thus guide the reader's way through the contributions that treat such a wide variety of years. Providing a clear structural framework in the publication would enable historians of media more easily to explore and build on the rich results of this workshop.

Conference Overview:

Brendan Dooley (Cork) / Paola Molino (Munich/Padova): Welcome and Introduction

Session I: The Sources, the Archives

Discussant: Carmen Espejo Cala (Sevilla)

Alessio Assonitis (Medici Archive Project): (Digitally) Reconstructing the Medici Archive: 1370-1743

Mario Infelise (Venice): The origins of the avviso

Carmen Espejo Cala (Sevilla): 1625, The annus mirabilis of the news in Spain

Discussant: Paola Molino (Munich/Padova)

Session II: The Sources, the Archives

Inputs: Paola Molino (Munich/Padova), Davide Boerio (Teramo), Cornel Zwierlein (Bochum/Erfurt)

Session III: News before the Revolt, News in the Revolt

Discussant: Mark Hengerer (Munich)

Davide Boerio (Teramo): 1648: A Test of the News

Andreas Würzler (Bern): European Newspapers reporting about the Swiss Peasants „Rebellion“ 1653

Session IV: News in Revolt

Inputs: Joop Koopmans (Groningen)

Session V: Communications and Translations

Discussant: Arndt Brendecke (Munich)

Paola Molino (Munich/Padova): Instant messages, avvisi and Zeitungen in 1588

Nicholas Brownlees (Florence): Reporting and Selling Foreign News in England in 1623

Session VI: Communication and Translation

Inputs: Brendan Dooley (Cork), Alessio Assonitis (Medici Archive Project), Mario Infelise (Venice)

Session VII: The Year of the News

Discussant: Susanne Friedrich (Munich)

Brendan Dooley (Cork): News in the Year 1618

Joop Koopmans (Groningen): The 1689 News in Dutch Newspapers of 1689

Coffee round table and final discussion:
„Towards the Year of the News“

Discussant: Cornel Zwielerlein
(Bochum/Erfurt)

Tagungsbericht *Year of the News*.
01.06.2017–02.06.2017, München, in: H-
Soz-Kult 05.08.2017.