



News from Prague: The Bohemian Revolt and the Birth of the Dutch Newspaper (1618)

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It goes without saying that the Bohemian Revolt had momentous influence on the history of the Czech lands, its people and its culture. What may not be as well known today is that the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618 also had decisive impact elsewhere, often in unexpected ways. In my home country, the Netherlands, the war in Bohemia is generally considered as an appendix to the longer Eighty Years War; the fight for independence against Habsburg Spain which started in 1568 and resumed in full force around 1621. In the seventeenth century, however, the conflict in Bohemia was of vital interest to the people of the Dutch Republic. The Protestant Dutch saw a natural ally in Bohemia to fight the Habsburg Empire, opening up a new front in a global struggle. The Dutch supported the Bohemian cause financially: they had contributed 50,000 guilders per month to the Protestant German Union since 1613, and in 1618 they added another 50,000 guilders. After the Battle of White Mountain, the Dutch would provide a home for the Winter King and his wife, Elizabeth Stuart.

The revolt in Bohemia was also largely responsible for an important media development in the Netherlands: the birth of the newspaper. The first printed weekly newspapers were German, and had appeared in Strasbourg in 1605, followed by another paper in Wolfenbüttel in 1609. The Dutch may not have invented the newspaper, but they would produce more newspapers per capita in the first half of the seventeenth century than any other country in Europe. Amsterdam would develop into the newspaper capital of Europe: it was here that the first French and English newspapers (1620) were printed. The first Dutch papers emerged around the summer of 1618. The oldest extant issue dates from 14 June, and we have four other surviving issues, from 22 June, 15 November, 23 November and 30 November. All of these issues belong to the weekly *Courante uyt Italien, Duytlandt, &c.* (Current news from Italy, Germany, and so forth), published by Caspar van Hilten in Amsterdam. We know that at the same time another weekly paper was published by Broer Jansz, also in Amsterdam, named the *Tijdinghen uyt verscheyde Quartieren* (Tidings from various quarters), but the first surviving issue of that paper dates from February 1619.

These two Amsterdam newspapers, like all seventeenth-century papers, were largely composed of short news bulletins. These were dense reports, and went unac-

accompanied by any commentary or further analysis. Newspapers did not interpret the news, as they do today, but provided raw information for readers, who were expected to be informed enough to form the right opinion about the value and meaning of the news reports. This was a tradition that the printed newspapers had adopted from commercial manuscript newsletters, the so-called *avvisi*, which had originated in Italy, and which were extremely popular amongst Europe's ruling elite. The first printed newspapers emerged out of this established market for manuscript newsletters. The incentive to turn to print was commercial: a printed newsletter could be produced in hundreds of copies, instead of a couple of dozen. But the emergence of printed newspapers in the Netherlands cannot be explained by the ease of production or lower price alone. It was not a coincidence that the first newspapers appeared around 1618, when the revolt in Bohemia broke out.

The content of the earliest surviving Amsterdam newspapers is largely made up of reports concerning the tumultuous events taking place in Bohemia: the aftermath of the defenestration, the rallying of troops on both sides, and the diplomatic and military manoeuvring of the most important princes of the realm. The newspapers all contained long reports from Prague, which took up around a quarter of each issue, while reports from Vienna, Cologne and The Hague also concerned the development of the conflict in the Czech lands.

Why did these newspapers devote so much attention to Bohemia? Of course, there was genuine interest amongst Dutch citizens in the revolt. More importantly, the two news publishers, Caspar van Hilten and Broer Jansz, belonged to a political faction in the Dutch Republic which had a profound interest in publicizing the war. The two newsmen both described themselves as news writers for Prince Maurice of Orange, the Stadholder and Captain-General of the army. Maurice was embroiled in a political conflict with the most powerful regents of Holland, led by the elderly statesman Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, who wished to avoid a renewal of war with the Habsburgs. Maurice, on the other hand, was in favour of continuing the war, and fighting the Habsburgs on as many fronts as possible by sponsoring or helping other enemies of Spain. The newspapers of Van Hilten and Jansz offered welcome publicity for the cause of Prince Maurice and his allies, by exposing the tribulations of international Calvinism, and rallying war sentiment to support the Bohemians against the Habsburg Emperor. Although they claimed to be objective publications with sober news reports, the first Dutch newspaper publishers had a partisan allegiance, and placed the Bohemian revolt at the centre of their weekly issues.

After the Battle of White Mountain and the exile of the Winter King, the Amsterdam newspapers did not fold. Instead they continued to publish many news reports from the different theatres of the Thirty Years' War, and soon also concerning other political conflicts around Europe. The papers proved incredibly popular in the Dutch Republic, and by the 1640s, Amsterdam was home to six Dutch newspapers, some of which were published twice or three times a week. Newspapers also appeared in other towns, following the standard set by the Amsterdam papers. The newspapers expanded in size and scope, and instead of the four or five reports that the first newspapers included, they contained more than twenty. Although Prague remained an important news centre for the Dutch papers, with at least 1,402 reports from Prague placed in seventeenth-century Dutch newspapers, after the Thirty Years' War the city





lost its prominence to new centres of conflict, such as London, Paris and Vienna. Nevertheless, it was the news from Prague that first encouraged news writers to think of publishing a printed newspaper. It is to the Bohemian revolt that the Dutch press today owes its existence.

FURTHER READING

Helmets, Helmer J.: Foreign News in Times of Domestic Crisis: The Truce Conflicts, the Thirty Years' War and the Rise of the Dutch Newspaper. In: Alexander Wilkinson — Graeme Kemp (eds.): *Conflict and Controversy*

in the Early Modern Book World. Brill, Leiden 2019.

Weduwen, Arthur der: *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618–1700*. 2 vols. Brill, Leiden 2017.

THE REPORTS

Below you will find extracts from the first five surviving Dutch newspaper issues. Each contained a report from Prague, which is reproduced here, translated into English. The reports provide a good indication of the style and tone of early newspapers, which has been kept as faithful to the original as possible.

This is the oldest surviving Dutch newspaper, the *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.* of 14 June 1618. Most Dutch newspapers were printed similar to this example, on a half-sheet folio, in double columns. The first issues were printed on the front side of the sheet only, but by 1621 reports also occupied the back side. In this issue, the report from Prague takes up most of the first column and the top of the second column. Image reproduced with permission from the Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm.

Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.

VVt Venetien den 1. Iunij, Anno 1618.

Den 25. Passato is geadviseert worden van het gegot verraet alhi. r. / twelck ontdeckt is / zijnde vele der selver geustreert daer onder eenighe Francoysen die sich met de Spaenschen ende eenighen deser Edellipden berdoonden dese Stadt aen 50 plaetsen ende meer in brant te stellen / ende te plonderen / ghegheimen van aen seker plaetsen by de 50. porten met vier werck heeft ghebonden / her welcke eene hunner mede gesellen a. n. deser Seign. ontdeckt heeft / den welcken hi 25. duysent ducaten hebben bererret : Als sulck die andere hebben vernomen / zinder by 700. wech ghesloopen. Doch 20. daer van gebanghen / ende dese daghen 40. van Padua alhier ghebracht / oock noch bagghelick van daer ende Verona / Vicenza / Bergamo / en andere plaetsen ghebarickelijck gebracht werden : dese ouer Natien alhier die daer toe ghesloepen / zyn des nachts van wegen harer grooter vrienben verbronden worden / ende homen dagghelick noch wonderlijcke saken aen den dach / sonderlijcken dat de Spanische dese Stadt also innemē wilde.

De nuwten Hertogh Piulij is met 12. schepen / ende van den 41. Heeren / op den Puzento / welcke 4. andere Galleyen / die gestadich haer gheschut los gheschoten / gheconvoeyert / ende rechtlicken inne ghehaelt / groote bruchden / fessie / tot inden nacht gehouden. Doch by de croonighe vele ghelst uyt gheworpen.

VVt Prage, den 2. dito.

Die Staten zyn eersderls van hier vertrocken / van weghen het Pimterfeest / op hare goederen / sullen haer weder comen / onder tusschen Gouverneren die Heeren desenoren alhier.

Desen moegen is den Jesuwpten / van 3. Heeren / 3. Ridder's persoonen / ende 3. vander Chermepite een decreet / van den Staten overgegeven / dat sy hun metten eersten uyt Prage / ende andere Steden / bant ghehele Coninckrijck Behemen begheben souden / is oock terfont een garde vooz hun Collegie alhier bestelt worden. Die Staten laten oock te Pferde ende te voete vele volck aennemen / ende vermanen die gheincorpoeyerde Landen den ghemachten accoort / ende om assistentie aenhouden. Laten oock die Croone tot karsken sterck bewaren.

Vele Haers. herren ende andere / die het met de Officiers ghehouden / hebben ettelijcke duysent Floynen / oock de opperste Voogh. Gzade 100. duysent Floynen te leuen / aen ghepresentert / om te aenneminghe des volck te gebuycken. Die Catholijcke Staten hebben sich oock met de Euangelische verbonden / nu voorzaen met een ander vjedelick te leuen / ende den Maskestis vjef te helpen maintueren. Daer op sy int ghehele Coninckrijck den 5. Maan op gheboden / soo 150. duysent Mannen belopen. Gegeeren oock van den Slesiren binnen 4. wecken 1000. Petzen / ende een regiment voort. volck te seynben.

Ondertusschen is Doctoor Pauzon ghebanghen / die soude oock alle aenlaghen teghen die Staten gegiben hebben. Derselijck heeft men den Secretaris Michna / derwelck oor dat werten die Staten ten hooyfsten heeft gedeben / alle zyne goederen ende schult. brieven ingetrocken / de wlsche op 130. duysent Floynen bedaggen / maer hy selve ist ontcomen / met Pater Colozat Jesuwijt. Doch heeft men onder zyne saken 100. wite bladren ghebonden / die alle met des kersers secreet versegheit waren. De Heerse Alabata / die genade heeft becomen / heeft be-

kent / dat hy hier toe sy gheperluert / begheert geen offitie meer / met vermelden dat alles vanden Jesuwpten come. De Hoere Simpfansh die teghenwoordich tot Weenen is / heeft aende Staten oock ghescheyden / ende genade aensceken laten.

De Cheurboyst van Saren / heeft enen post aen dese Heeren Desenoren ghesonden de welke 2. Wplen van hier is afgheworpen / ende die vjeben ghescheurt worden.

VVt Ceulen, den 11. Dito.

Wy hebben van Piesburgh / dat alsoo die tpinghe aldaer van het Cumult van Prage aengquam / dat alles in stille was / ende die Hongersche kroonighe tot op Bartholomei is uyt ghestelt worden.

De Weenen heeft men / dat den Prager pzoce / aldaer velen selt aem is booz komen / willen niet dat men daer van speken soude / soo is den Secretaris Michna / van Prage ontloopen zynde / aldaer oock aencomen. Ondertusschen wert daer oock stercke pparatie vande Heeren Desenoren vooz ghenomen / die van Saren Guling soude bestellinge op een regiment boetvolck ende 2000. Peerden hebben / ende wert die Crommel aldaer omgheslagen.

De Duytslant wert geadviseert / dat den Geunierden Voysen. dach tot Haplbau / als oock den Graben. dach tot Frybbugh / wel beromen zyn / ende wat tot vjede ende eenichpeyt dient / tracteert hebben.

Wy verfaen oock dat in Duytslandt ober al Crichvolck soude aenghenomen werden / gheselck van alreede eenighe Bewelhetbers alhier gheweest zyn / die welke volck aennemen wilde / maer niet toghelaten / daarom sy noch van hier wjcken moesten / de wyle de gheselckche Cheurvoysen ende Bisschoppen oock volck aennemen wilden.

VVt's Graven. haghe den 13. Dito.

Booz wepnich daghen artibeerde alhier een Ghesanten van den Groot. Voyst van Moscobien / met eene tamelijcke groore zupre. Ende des anderen daechs van de Ghepdeputerde der Ghegeneraliteyt / ende vande Heere Prince / menss zynen Heere Broeder ende andere Heeren beseght ende willecom gheheeren. Sin voozleden Saterdach mer eenighe Caroten ende Ghegeneraliteyt ter audientie ghebracht worden. Wat hare aenzynt is / salmen isfner tijt vernemen.

Voozleden Sacerdach smozens is zyn G. Gzade Wilhelm Lode wjck uyt Pzislant oock hier gearrbeert. Ende zyn nu de Ghebeputerde van de Pzobincien hier teghenwoordich / comen dagghelick te samen / hebben ern beginsel van hare Generale vergaderinghe ghemaecht / ende tracteren van hare saken.

Tot Delft heeft de Ghemernte haren Magistrat oock doen aenseggen / dat se verfaen dat sy wyden hun tot de andere Steden / Voyst / Amsterdam / Enchuyssen / etc. souden voegen / en mede de poincten by de selve ende de Ghegeneraliteyt vooz goet gebonden / als het souden vande Spnude Nacional / aschankinghe der Waergelbers / ende so voorzaen appzoberen. Waer op sy haer beraet noch eenighe daghen ghenomen hadden. Doch souden hun dese weke / als de omzaginghe by de Ghegeneraliteyt geschieden sal / oock signelijck verclaren. Ende so voozsy by de andere Steden oock gheschieden / om te weten / wafse epudelijck te doen bedacht zyn.