

News of Modernity: Early Modern Commercial News Networks

Place/Time

17 April 2015, from 0900 to 1700, John Ryland's Library, Univ. of Manchester, Deansgate, Manchester

Programme

0900 Arrival and coffee

0930 Introduction: Georg Christ, Siobhan Talbott

Mercantile News in the Early Modern World

0945 Chair: Dr Jenny Spinks (Manchester)

Key Note:

John McCusker (San Antonio, Texas): An Introduction to Early Modern Business Newspapers

Siobhan Talbott (Keele) – “By the accounts we have in the last publick news”: How information shaped behaviour in early modern commercial networks

Philipp R. Roessner (Manchester, Leipzig) – News, the ‘Discovery of the Present’ and the Rise of Modern Economic Thought, c. 1500–1800

1130 Coffee break

News in Venice and M. Sanuto as a News Agent

1150 Chair: Julianne Simpson (JRL, Manchester)

Colin Imber (Manchester): Sanuto on Sieges of Buda and Vienna 1529

Chiara Palazzo (Venice) -Diaries and news networks: the dissemination of news in Early Modern Venice

1300 Lunch

1400 Practical session with J. Simpson and J. Hodgson

1445 Coffee break

Digital Humanities and Historical News Analysis

1505 Chair: Michael Winckler (Heidelberg)

Sean Bechhofer (Manchester)/Georg Christ: HyperSanuto: How News Makes History Around 1500

Sheryllyne Haggerty (Nottingham): Social Network Analysis of News and for News

Kamran Karimullah (Manchester): Corpus Analysis and Parallel Online Editing – Some Lessons and Open Question from the Arabic Hippocrates Commentary Project

1645 Conclusions: Georg Christ, Siobhan Talbott

Publication

The editor of the journal of *Library and Information History*, Dr Mark Towsey (University of Liverpool), has invited us to propose a Special Issue, comprising contributions from this workshop.

Organizers

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Rationale and Abstracts

This workshop proposes to investigate the role of news in mercantile networks in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Eastern Atlantic World. This workshop will be a pilot event, with the wider aim of establishing a network of scholars for which funding shall be sought after this workshop.

The importance of news for business is uncontroversial and news in the early modern commercial world has been the focus of a great wealth of studies.¹ Mercantile news networks – i.e. the exchange of news between mercantile agents: merchants, factors, skippers and consumers – have also been studied, although less.² News as raw material for chronicles and hence the relation between news and historiography as well as the use of scientific computing to enhance the study of news by contrast seem underexplored.

This workshop thus seeks to investigate the history of early modern mercantile news and news management from a multi-disciplinary angle with a special interest in news as an agent of history and historiography. This first event will focus on Venice as a centre of information and communication in the early modern period, including the chronicle (*diarii*) of M. Sanuto (the Younger) but also invite more general and conceptual contributions as well as case studies from other places.³ Thus in addition to contextualising the Venetian findings, we will begin discussions of mercantile news networks more broadly, identifying areas of future investigation and possible methodologies that will become the focus of future events of the proposed research network.

We propose the following interrelated lines of investigation:

- a) How did news inform and trigger political, economic decisions, i.e. to put it bluntly, how did news **make history**?
- b) What is the source **analytical potential** of news **beyond veracity**, i.e. beyond their ‘factual accuracy’ or: how do we deal with ‘false’ news?
- c) How did news collections, including diaries, serve as raw material for **writing history**, i.e. how did news shape historiography?

¹ Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); John J. McCusker and Cora Gravesteijn, *The Beginnings of Commercial and Financial Journalism. The Commodity Price Currents, Exchange Rate Currents, and Money Currents of Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam, 1991); John J. McCusker, Jr., “The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World”, *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (2005): 295-321; Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 2002); cf. also the current Leverhulme trust supported project “News Networks in Early Modern Europe” with bibliography, <http://newscom.english.qmul.ac.uk/about/index.html>; cf. also the Centre for Early Modern Mapping, News and Networks, <http://www.cemmn.net/>.

² Theodor Gustav Werner, “Das kaufmännische Nachrichtenwesen im späten Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit und sein Einfluss auf die Entstehung der handschriftlichen Zeitung”, *Scripta Mercaturae* (1975): 3-51; Markus A Denzel, “Wissensmanagement' und 'Wissensnetzwerke' der Kaufleute: Aspekte kaufmännischer Kommunikation im späten Mittelalter”, *Das Mittelalter* 6 (2001): 73-90; relatively well-studied are the so-called Fugger-Zeitungen, <http://www.univie.ac.at/fuggerzeitungen/de/>.

³ For Sanuto and Venice see Chiara Palazzo, *Nuove d'Europa e di Levante. Il network veneziano dell'informazione agli inizi dell'Età Moderna (1490-1520)* (Venezia: PhD thesis, Ca Foscari Univ., 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/10579/1264>.

d) How can digital knowledge management/scientific computing improve our **analysis of history/historiography** by providing the historian with a database integrating primary and secondary data while identifying discrete news items thus enhancing the traceability/reproducibility of the process of history writing?

[Georg Christ]

John McCusker - An Introduction to Early Modern Business Newspapers

One consequence of the introduction of moveable type printing in the middle of the fifteenth century was a change in the ways in which businessmen and women treated information. Within less than a century the latest news about all that mattered was transformed from being proprietary and held private to being public and published, a commodity. What had been the province of a few, the subject of rumor, quixotic and untrustworthy, became well known and authoritative. Among the consequences of this truly world-shattering change was the way in which business could be conducted. No longer secrets shared among a closed circle of a chosen few but the news, broadcast to all who cared to know, about ships and cargoes, money and prices — the stuff of business — opened the world wide to a commercial revolution.

Siobhan Talbott - “By the accounts we have in the last publick news”: How information shaped behaviour in early modern commercial networks

The notion that merchants were heavily involved in the circulation of news in the early modern period is not a new one. Early post networks followed established trade routes, and merchants relied on up-to-date, accurate information to make business decisions. As Andrew Pettegree has recently stated, ‘merchants were both the principal consumers of news and its most reliable suppliers’ in the early modern period. ‘Publick news’ was essential to merchants – information on prices and exchange rates were communicated through prices current; newspapers supplied information both political and economic; merchants acted as conduits for information, taking it with them in both oral and printed form as they travelled.

Much less attention, however, has been given to the dissemination and reception of commercial news and information beyond this public sphere. Histories of early modern trade and exchange have, of late, begun to lavish attention on the informal, private trading networks within which merchants, manufacturers, skippers and consumers operated, but the role of news and information within these networks – imparted not ‘publicly’ but privately through family and business correspondence – has received less scrutiny. In a period in which war and political upheaval consistently threatened trade, merchants were increasingly reliant on accurate information in order to pursue their business. This paper, currently very much a work in progress, will consider the role of both public and private news in shaping behaviour in early modern European commercial networks.

Philipp Robinson Rössner - News, the 'Discovery of the Present' and the Rise of Modern Economic Thought, c. 1500–1800

Around the mid-seventeenth century the rank and place of news in European discourse and perception changed considerably. The first newspapers in the modern sense emerged, for the first time grouping together news and information relating to actors, events and developments (usually political and religious) that may be, and usually were, totally unconnected with each other, in a chronological, spatial as well as social way (range of actors concerned). Previously information relating to specific purpose had been distributed across specific and very limited networks of actors, such as merchants/mercantile news, who often also acted as emissaries and ambassadors thus mingling their 'economic' or commercial function with a decidedly 'political' purpose at one of the numerous European courts and residences. Characteristic of this new landscape of news and information management after c.1650 was that 'news' and information now were collected by specific actors (editors, producers of the paper) with specific motivations (selling a product) and with a specific purpose, for a specified range of customers (their readers). These aspects, in combination with the fact that newspapers and calendars now began to appear regularly, i.e. in exactly specified chronological intervals, constituted what one historian has called the 'emergence of the Present' (Landwehr). Previously the future had occupied a rather bleak function in the mind map of the people. Armageddon was always near; news often evolved around the recounting of (fictitious) stories about monstrous creatures and strange, supernatural events. Judgement Day was nigh; only its exact date was, of course, unknown. In Luther's (and many a Reformer's) theology during the sixteenth century this conviction carried a central function. The past was often used, in the same way as the present and future, to construct narratives drawing biblical connections, to arrive soteriological scenarios carrying a near-100 per cent probability that the end of the world was near. In this way the idea that the world could and should be changed carried a comparatively low probability in the mindscape of the people. This cultural mind-set created a characteristic outlook on the world, the way it could be changed as well as the motivations for such changes which remained, given the prefigured limitations to the manageability of the world and material circumstances of the day under this reference framework, decidedly limited.

But with the emerging change in perspective and outlook and the emerging role of the future around 1650, a new mind map evolved. This was centred on the hypothesis, even obsession with the idea, that the world was principally changeable. The material environment could and should potentially be altered to the benefit of mankind and the future thus became – contrary to the preceding cultural outlook – malleable and manageable. This new reference framework will in the present contribution be studied from the perspective of economic theory and discourse. Since the seventeenth century a European discourse evolved that held the idea that infinite growth was principally possible, if only the right methods and techniques were applied and the spirit of ingenuity was awakened in the human brain. The natural discovery of the world became increasingly important as became the generation and

management of 'useful knowledge'. The latter was spread in the exploding number and range of economic and botanical publications, pamphlets, treatises and, since the 1720s, also economics textbooks. We find this in the rich economic discourse during Sweden's age of greatness (second half of the seventeenth century), but also in German Cameralism since the days of Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff (1626–1692), the 'godfather of Cameralism' (A. Small), Philipp Wilhelm von Hörnigk (1640–1714), or Johann Heinrich von Justi (1717–1771), but also in Anglo-Saxon Mercantilism, as well as elsewhere. This 'new' political economy was very different in terms of epistemology and axiomatic principles compared to earlier 'schools' in economic thought, such as Scholasticism, Neo-Aristotelianism and early or 'primitive' mercantilism of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

With this new cultural outlook the foundations of modern economic growth were laid. My contribution will trace this development using a set of representative texts (pamphlets, treatises and newspapers) giving away the rich and volatile economic discourse of the early modern age and its relation to the emerging modern economy.

Colin Imber – News from Hungary, 1526-1529

In the years between the battle of Mohács in 1526 and the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1529, Hungary became a focus of a conflict which involved not only the rival claimants to the Hungarian throne – Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and the voevode of Transylvania, Janos Szapolyai – but also the allies of Szapolyai – notably Francis I and the Ottoman sultan – who were anxious to prevent any extension of Habsburg power into Hungary. The struggle between Ferdinand and Szapolyai was also of immediate interest to Venice. Not only did the Kingdom of Hungary share a border with the Venetian *terra ferma*, but Venice was a member of the anti-Habsburg League of Cognac and a natural ally of the voevode and his supporters. For the Venetians, therefore, news from and about Hungary was of vital importance. Venetian intelligence came from numerous sources, official and unofficial. The Signoria's diplomatic network, in Istanbul, Paris, London and elsewhere provided information not only on the anti-Habsburg alliance, but equally reported on Habsburg diplomatic efforts, notably on Habordanez's failed embassy to the sultan in 1528 and Bishop Faber's attempt to win the support of Henry VIII for Ferdinand's war in Hungary. It was also a function of the governors of the *terra ferma* to send spies and informants into Hungary and Austria, their reports forming an important source of information on the progress of the war between Ferdinand and Szapolyai and the relative strength of both parties. Additionally, it was a function of the governors of the *terra ferma*, especially governors of Udine and Cividale del Friuli, to detain travellers coming from the north and to question them on what they had seen and learned in Austria and Hungary, being careful in their reports to comment on the reliability (or otherwise) of the information obtained. The news from these unofficial sources was received orally and committed to writing by the governors themselves, an exception being three near identical reports on the Ottoman siege of Vienna of September-October, 1529, which arrived in Venice in November and December. These were translations of a German text, evidently written

immediately after the siege, and bearing a close resemblance to a German account of the siege printed in Nuremberg in 1529. The first of these texts to reach Venice notes that it was: ‘Given in Vienna, 18 October, 1529, and translated by me, Evangelista Cala da Gemona from German to Italian., 7 November, in Gemona.’ During the period of the anti-Habsburg alliance, the Venetian representatives in Istanbul also passed on information of mutual interest – such as news of the French defeat in Italy in 1528 – to the Ottoman grand vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, with whom Venice remained on very good terms during the 1520s.

Chiara Palazzo -Diaries and News Networks: The Dissemination of News in Early Modern Venice

Venetian diaries, due to their exceptional richness and their peculiar structure, permit to investigate the pattern and the working of the Venetian news network at the beginning of the Early Modern Period, and in particular they allow observing:

1. Where news could be gathered (the dissemination of outposts of the Venetian network), which routes it followed (the Mediterranean and European routes that connected the lagoon with hundreds of outposts disseminated in a large area), and how much time was needed to bring news to its destination.
2. How the news was then transmitted from Venice to other courts (in Italy, Europe and the East)
3. How the Venetian government could get informed of political, economic and military events, and how people in the streets could be told about the same facts (the diaries commented on the news at its arrival, inserted oral information, newsletters, transcriptions, abstracts from letters or pamphlets, and many other means: a proof of the many ways in which people of different social classes learned about current news).

Even though some caution is necessary in the evaluation of quantitative data that can be drawn from the diaries, no other source is able to provide such a complete and detailed view on the Venetian news network, which is one of the most complex and sophisticated European networks in the early 16th century.

Examples of use of the Venetian diaries (Sanudo’s and Priuli’s ones) in the news network analysis will be briefly illustrated, extending the working hypothesis of Sardella (*Nouvelles et Spéculations*, 1948).

A few remarks will be made on Priuli’s Diaries and on the necessity, for a wider use of these sources, of the support of digital tools.

Georg Christ/Sean Bechhofer – HyperSanuto: How News Makes History Around 1500

The project ‘News of Modernity’ seeks to re-examine the informational backdrop to the Ottoman as well as the European overseas expansion around 1500. By reuniting Venetian and Mamluk diaries (Sanuto, Priuli, Ibn Iyas) and chronicles (Bembo) as well as archival material (relations of the Senate,

dispatches etc. of the Archivio di Stato di Venezia) in a shared electronic parallel corpus and mapping the appearing, managing and effect of news on old powers (Venice, the Mamluks) and how they thus dealt with challenges encountered for instance the Ottoman expansion in North Africa or the new European power's expansion overseas (Portugal, Spain). This tool, HyperSanuto, will also include selected secondary source material in order to assess how historical news shape chronicles and hence, ultimately, historiography and thus our understanding of the past; how news make history and more specifically- how they construct modernity.

This presentation will focus on the database component of the project, the HyperSanuto database. It will formulate a set of requirements. It will focus on some core problems as the modelling of the news process (event-news-consolidated news item/reports-diaries-chronicles-historiography), the meshing of different corpora (in Arabic, Italian, Latin), as well as the problem of isolating news mechanically i.e. by computer-linguistic/corpus analytical tools.

Sheryllyne Haggerty – Social Network Analysis of News and for News

Historians have long been using networks as an analytic tool, and are more recently starting to complicate their understanding and use of the concept. Furthermore, researchers have also started to visualise their networks. However, Social Network Analysis (SNA) is not simply about producing a pretty picture, it should be used as part of an iterative methodology. Mostly researchers have used SNA to consider networks of people, but there is no reason why it cannot be used to track flows of information or news, as well as the conduits for that news.

After briefly considering the purpose of, and some basic issues with, SNA, this paper will briefly consider the different ways in which SNA might be used within the context of eighteenth-century mercantile news networks. Networks *of* News might be traced for example; types of news and where it comes from, but also Networks *for* News; different people in different locations might be used to access different forms of news. Finally, networks *of* and *for* news might be different at the local, regional and international level.

Kamran Karimullah - Corpus Analysis and Parallel Online Editing – Some Lessons and Open Question from the Arabic Hippocrates Commentary Project

We have a small Arabic-language corpus (approximately a million Arabic words) of commentaries on an originally Greek book on ancient medicine called the Aphorisms, which is conventionally attributed to Hippocrates.

The primary output of the project will be digital editions of these commentaries in marked-up in XML according to the standards of the Textual Encoding Initiative (TEI). These editions will be incorporated into Tufts University's digital classics library called Perseus.

However, the primary long-term goal of the project is to move beyond developing merely more efficient search tools and digitising century-old dictionaries. The idea is to use this project as a platform for beginning to develop tools for historians of ancient medicine that allow them to use text mining tools to ask new questions of the texts that were not possible (or even conceivable) before. To this end, we have identified four challenges that we would like to confront using text mining tools to analyse ancient medical texts.

1. Multilingual Display. The translation of Greek medical texts was very much a multilingual affair, which involved several Greek manuscripts, one or more Syriac intermediary or preliminary translations, and one or more Arabic translation. In addition, each of these texts had different versions. In the case of the Hippocratic Aphorisms, for example, the original Greek text, an early Syriac translation, and two independent Arabic translations are all extant. As we see it, researchers in ancient medicine interested in, for example, verifying the existence of Greek manuscripts that are not available to us but were available to 9th-century Arabic translators, or who are interested in what the relationship between the Syriac and the two Arabic translations is, must consult all of these versions of the “urtext.” The challenge that we would like to confront then is developing way to quickly and seamlessly navigate between the Greek, Syriac, and Arabic versions so that the on-screen display makes it clear how translators were translating Greek/Syrian words or phrases with Arabic words or phrases.

2. Diachronic Display. The Hippocratic Aphorisms were written (probably by several different authors) in around the 4th-century B.C. The most famous Greek commentary by Galen of Pergamon was probably written some time in the late second-century A.D. The Greek text was rendered into Arabic text in the middle of the ninth-century A.D. About a dozen major commentaries in Arabic on the Aphorisms were written continuously from the eleventh until at least the fifteenth-century. Thus, textual, linguistic and conceptual shifts in time is an important element in our research. The challenge here is seeing how all the Arabic commentaries that are included in the corpus can be displayed and navigated simultaneously so that shifts of all kinds are clearly visible to the researcher.

3. Quotation Search. Ancient thinkers quoted their sources, but rarely verbatim. The aim here is not the trivial task of searching for instances of the authors name in the commentary corpus. There are other problems that are far more intriguing. For example, in reconstructing a lost text by a famous Arabic (or Greek) author from the fragments that remain in those who quoted them, the following questions are important. 1. How do we identify genuine from spurious fragments? 2. Can a statistical value be assigned to the “certainty” that a certain fragment is genuine. 3. Can certain stylistic or syntactical features or idiosyncrasies of an author in his or her other writings be collected from their extant works and then brought to bear on searching for quotations of their lost work in other authors?

4. Exegetical Practice. In the ancient world, there was a great deal of discussion and many general prescriptions (and proscriptions!) about how to comment on an ancient medical or philosophical text.

This is well-known to classicists. But there is little knowledge about how a particular physician-philosopher approached the object-text in practice. It seems that it would be possible to identify certain features of a commentators commentary-method merely from a statistical analysis of certain stylistic and syntactic features of his text, e.g. the use of personal pronouns, how she divides up the lemma, her reliance on authority and which authorities, medical histories, citations from other works, and certain types of reasoning (empirical inductive vs. deductive). It seems that tools could be developed that would allow us to identify an exegetical method for each author based on these material features of the text. This would be a fascinating step toward an “exegetical stylistics.”