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Towards a Complete Bibliography of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Newspapers: Delpher and its Applications

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic provided fertile ground for the expansion of the serial press. In 1946, the Swedish bibliographer Folke Dahl documented this extraordinary dynamism in *Dutch Corantos, 1618-1650*. He provided the first tentative bibliography of early Dutch newspapers. Since Dahl's publication, repeated calls have gone out for the extension of his bibliography to the end of the seventeenth century. The failure to do so is in part due to the dispersed nature of the holdings of seventeenth-century newspapers. Here Delpher is an enormous aid to the compilation of a bibliography of all seventeenth-century Dutch newspapers. It provides a unique platform on which dispersed collections are brought together. Scans of newspapers in Moscow, Oldenburg, London, and Amsterdam are displayed on one digital database where content can be rapidly described, typographical developments observed, publication trends easily compared, and variants discovered. Still, the creation of a bibliography can in no way rely purely on Delpher. The resource will not replace the valuable insights gained from detailed book-in-hand inspection of newspapers.

KEYWORDS

newspapers, bibliography, *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant*, seventeenth century

The seventeenth-century Dutch Republic was a dynamic centre of the early periodical press. From at least 1619, two weekly newspapers were printed in Amsterdam. Others followed shortly, in Arnhem (1619/1620) and Delft (1620). By the 1640s, Amsterdam had become the periodical capital of Europe with seven Dutch titles competing for subscribers each week. During the course of the century, the Dutch Republic accommodated weekly papers printed in French, English, Spanish, Italian, and Yiddish. The rise of advertising – of fundamental importance to the long-term success of the newspaper – found its most innovative and expressive forms in the Dutch Republic.¹ This

¹ The earliest known advertisement can be found in an issue of the *Tijdinghen uyt verscheyde Quartieren* dated 1 March 1621 present in the Royal Library in Stockholm.

was a market which established norms and standards of newspaper publication that became influential throughout Europe.

The precocious nature of the Dutch press has long been recognised. A vogue for bibliographical analysis of early newspapers commenced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with W.P. Sautijn Kluit leading the way.² The first historians of the Dutch press had few copies of surviving newspapers to work with; Sautijn Kluit accessed many individual issues spread between the collections of fellow bibliographers or antiquarians. There were only a few major collections of Dutch newspapers extant in Dutch institutions.³

A significant development was the discovery of over 1,000 early Dutch newspapers in the Royal Library of Sweden in Stockholm in the 1930s by Swedish bibliographer Folke Dahl.⁴ The diversity and quantity of newspapers found in Stockholm allowed Dahl to re-write the early history of the Dutch press. Using the Stockholm collection as a foundation, Dahl visited other collections in Paris, The Hague, and London, amongst others, in order to compose a bibliography of all Dutch newspapers published before 1650. The result, *Dutch Corantos, 1618-1650*, was published in 1946, and contained circa 2,000 issues.⁵

Dahl's foundational work has not been pursued. Knowledge of seventeenth-century Dutch newspapers advanced little in the years following the publication of *Dutch Corantos*; in particular, there was no attempt to continue Dahl's survey to the end of the century. Interest in making further progress had not subsided: Otto Lankhorst recently pointed out that pleas for the resumption of Dahl's work were made as early as 1971. He added that it was an 'urgent desideratum' that such a project was composed.⁶ Today it remains accepted that a full bibliography would be a useful aid, if not an inspiration, to the study of the Dutch press and its role within early modern society.⁷

Even Folke Dahl was not confident that such a survey would ever be attempted. He wrote in his bibliography that 'the task of compiling a complete bibliography is

² Sautijn Kluit wrote numerous articles on the history of the press in different Dutch towns. See also W.P. Sautijn Kluit, 'Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Dagbladpers tot 1813.' *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van den Nederlandschen Boekhandel* 7, 1896, 87-284, for Sautijn Kluit's interpretation on the general history of the Dutch press.

³ Most notably, a volume of Amsterdam newspapers dated 1626-1635 in the Royal Library in The Hague (KW 341 A 1), a complete run of the *Amsterdamsche Courant* in the Amsterdam Stadsarchief from 1684 onwards, and a similar complete run of the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* from 1665 in the archive of the publishing firm Enschedé in Haarlem.

⁴ Folke Dahl, 'Amsterdam – Earliest Newspaper Centre of Western Europe.' *Het Boek* 25:3, 1939, 161-198.

⁵ Folke Dahl, *Dutch Corantos, 1618-1650: A Bibliography*. Den Haag: Koninklijke Bibliotheek 1946.

⁶ Otto S. Lankhorst, 'Newspapers in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.' In Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*. London: Routledge 2001 (151).

⁷ René Vos, 'Een Gouden Eeuw met grote gaten: Enkele ontwikkelingen rond de "Republiek der Couranten" (1675-1800).' *Documentatieblad werkgroep Achttiende eeuw*, 2003, 124-134; Otto Lankhorst, 'Bibliografie van Nederlandse couranten voor 1800: is het geen tijd om "zulk een kolossaal gebouw" op te trekken.' *Open* 27, 1995, 232-234.

definitely impossible.’⁸ Dahl’s pessimism was framed by his knowledge of the widespread dispersal and destruction of library collections that had occurred during the Second World War, a conflict which impeded Dahl’s own research. The ephemeral nature of the periodical press certainly made it almost impossible to reconstruct the publication history of many titles. Newspapers such as the *Courante uyt Italien, Duytsland ende Nederlandt* (Jan Andriesz and Andries Cloeting: Delft, 1620-1643) or the *Ordinaire Donderdaeghsche Europische Courant* (Gerard Lodewijk van der Macht: Utrecht, 1660-1667) survive in less than one percent of their likely total run.⁹ The existence of a newspaper in Rotterdam in the 1680s is established by the publication of a printed English translation, as well as archival references, but not a single copy in Dutch has of yet been found.¹⁰ Furthermore, the rate of survival does not necessarily improve throughout the century: for the period 1681-1682 only 39 issues of Dutch newspapers survive, divided amongst three libraries, out of a minimum total of 840 issues published.

Even if issues have survived, one still encounters the problem of their present location. Many titles are extant only in a couple of libraries and archives. If one wishes to read the *Extraordinaire Advijzen op Donderdagh* (Jan van Hilten: Amsterdam, 1644-1645), the *Oprechte Rotterdamse Zee- en Posttijdingen* (Joannes Naeranus: Rotterdam, 1666-1668), the *Noodig, Continueerlick Acht-Dagen-Nieuws* (Samuel Brown: The Hague, 1653), or the *Wekelycke Mercurius* (Johannes Rammazeyn: The Hague, 1654), one must seek out the few institutions which hold their issues. This dispersal has always been a serious barrier to the compilation of a complete bibliography, as it necessitates research in close to a dozen countries.

Notwithstanding such logistical obstacles, the time is ripe for such a venture, not least thanks to the proliferation of digital tools such as Delpher. I am currently undertaking the composition of a general bibliography of all Dutch-language newspapers published in the Dutch Republic up to 1700 at the University of St Andrews.¹¹ The publication of Delpher has provided an enormous help to the task of reconstructing the corpus of surviving issues. Delpher currently presents on one platform several major collections of seventeenth-century Dutch newspapers: those of the Royal Library in Stockholm, the National Archives in Kew, the Russian State Archives for Ancient Acts in Moscow, the Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv in Oldenburg, the Stadsarchief in Amsterdam, and the Royal Library in The Hague. Some smaller collections are also represented, including that of the Persmuseum in Amsterdam.

These digital holdings amount to close to 6,000 issues for the period up to 1700, divided amongst 12 titles (out of a minimum of 28 titles published in the Dutch

⁸ Dahl 1946 (11).

⁹ Currently I have identified 7 extant copies of the *Courante uyt Italien, Duytsland ende Nederlandt* and 15 extant copies of the *Ordinaire Donderdaeghsche Europische Courant*.

¹⁰ M.M. Kleerkooper, ‘De Haarlemsche (en de Rotterdamsche) courant in het Engelsch.’ *Tijdschrift voor Boek- en Bibliotheekwezen* 4, 1906, 99-107; and W.P. Sautijn Kluit, ‘De Rotterdamsche Courant.’ *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 1878, 3-92.

¹¹ Arthur der Weduwen, *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618-1700*. Leiden: Brill 2017, forthcoming.

Republic). Each issue can be located on Delpher with relative ease, regardless of whether the copy is located in Russia or England. Developments of the imprint, the structural design, or the use of woodcut emblems in individual titles can be observed across the century. Likewise one can chart developing trends in the presentation of the news: for example, the refinement of geographical organisation in the structure of reports or the use of a roman typeface.

Along with basic bibliographical detail, the bibliography under construction is intended to provide an indication of the character of each newspaper, particularly the range of sources upon which it could draw. Seventeenth-century news reports were made up of letters forwarded by a publisher's correspondents in different parts of Europe; the content of the newspaper was largely made up of brief summaries abstracted from these reports. An average issue of an Amsterdam newspaper in the first half of the seventeenth century would include 10 such reports. By the end of the century this had increased to 18 reports.

To guide the reader through the newspaper, the publisher headed each report with a note of its geographical origin and date. A despatch from Rome would thus be headed: 'From Rome, the 8th of September'. In the bibliography each bibliographical entry lists all of these places of correspondence for each issue. This allows the user to gauge the frequency with which readers would be provided with reports from different European news hubs. It also points up significant differences in the network of correspondents maintained by different publishers, and at different points in the century.

The introduction of advertisements into Dutch newspapers dates at least to 1621. By the 1640s, the vast majority of issues featured at least one advertisement, in the early years overwhelmingly for books and prints, at a time when similar periodicals in France, England, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Habsburg Netherlands included few advertisements, if any at all. Through an incorporation of the placement of advertisements in the bibliography, one can accurately date the rapid expansion of paid advertising to the early 1630s. The development of different genres of advertising, such as those for Latin or French schools, book auctions, the sale of spices or tobacco, the loss of jewellery, or wanted criminals, presents new perspectives on the reach and clientele of the seventeenth-century Dutch press, as well as the development of a consumer society in the Dutch Republic.¹²

Delpher can also be used for a more complex study of the production techniques of the seventeenth-century press. Dahl noted in *Dutch Corantos* that various issues of Jan van Hilten's *Courante uyt Italien, Duytslandt, &c.* (Amsterdam, 1618-1669) survived in two different editions. This he credited to Van Hilten's use of "stop-press" techniques of production.¹³ Dahl demonstrated that Van Hilten would often change the printing form of his newspaper while it was already in production, in order to enter a late news item.

¹² The development of advertising is subject to a corresponding project at St Andrews, due to be published in 2018. See Arthur der Weduwen and Andrew Pettegree, *News, Business and the Birth of Modern Advertising. Advertisements and Public Announcements in Dutch and Flemish Newspapers, 1620-1672*. Leiden: Brill 2018, forthcoming.

¹³ Dahl 1946 (22-26).

This was a shrewd commercial tactic designed to keep the news as fresh as possible. While Dahl singled out Van Hilten for his use of the stop-press technique, it was also adopted by Van Hilten's competitor Broer Jansz, as evidenced by differences in issue 40 of 1635 and issue 25 of 1639 of his *Tijdinghen uyt verscheyde Quartieren* (Amsterdam, 1619-1671).¹⁴ Other newspapermen, including Abraham Casteleyn in Haarlem and Mathijs van Meininga in Amsterdam, would do likewise.

Dahl found that the use of stop-press editing altered the number of lines in one or two columns of the newspaper. This encouraged him to count the number of lines in Van Hilten's issues in each library that he visited, thus exposing that dozens of issues survived in more than one variant form. However, Dahl and the readers of *Dutch Corantos* were often left guessing at the significance of these changes beyond their mere presence. The use of the STCN fingerprinting methodology is here also of little use: a change in the fourth column of news reports (where publishers would usually make alterations) does not necessarily affect the line-placements of other columns. Through Delpher, one can now compare directly duplicate copies spread throughout Europe. Working in the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, as I did recently, one can place a physical copy of Van Hilten or Jansz' newspapers alongside digital copies present in Stockholm or Oldenburg. One no longer has to rely on Dahl's method of counting lines; a comparison of places of correspondence highlights where a new report was inserted, or an older report moved around.

The problem of variant issues can get more complicated. Take, for example, issue 27 of the *Haerlemse Dingsdaeghse Courant* of 6 July 1660. This issue survives in two copies: the first in the Russian State Archives for Ancient Acts in Moscow, and the second in the Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv in Oldenburg. Both copies are available on Delpher. Both have an identical number of lines of text in all four columns: 70, 70, 69 and 70 lines. The news content matches also, with reports from Smyrna (2), Livorno, Rome, Turin, Milan, Venice, London (2), Libau, Danzig (2), Copenhagen (3), Hamburg, Brussels, Antwerp, and Amsterdam. Once subjected to Dahl's system of line counting or a comparison of places of correspondence, these two copies appear to be the same. Nevertheless, there are delicate textual differences which identify these two copies as distinct editions.

The title of the Moscow edition reads 'No: 27' whereas the Oldenburg edition states 'No. 27'. The headings of several news reports are likewise distinct: 'Coppenhagen den 26 Juny' compared to 'Copenhagen den 26 Iuny'. A comparison of a notification at the end of the issue highlights the subtle contrasts in the spelling of the two editions. Throughout the paragraph, almost every other word is spelled differently. There are also several differences in the line-breaks:

¹⁴ Surviving in the Royal Library in Stockholm and the National Library of the Netherlands in The Hague and the Historisch Centrum Overijssel and the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, respectively.

Moscow edition, fourth column, line 61 onwards:

De heer Marselis vanders Goes/ tot Middelburg/ als ge-qualificeert zijnde/en ordre hebbende van haer E.E. Mogende de heeren Staeten van Zeelandt/advertteert midts desen andermael/ alle de geene die geinteresseert zijn in 't Schip van Jan Vinchart/ alias Waeterdrincker/ komende van Cadix in Spangien/ op ultimo Octobris des voorleden Jaers/ omtrent ter Veer in Seelandt verongheluckt/met hunne Cognossementen en bewysen hun te adresseren aen Marselis van der Goes/ om hun te restueren 't geene alreede uyt het Wrack gevist en geborgen is/ mits betalende gedaene Onkosten ende Berghloon.

Oldenburg edition, fourth column, line 61 onwards:

De heer Marselo van der Goes/ tot Middelborgh/ als Ghe-qualificeerde/ ende Ordrehebbende van hare E.E. Moghende de heeren Staten van Zeelandt/ advertteert mits desen andermael alle den gheenen die gheinteresseert zijn in 't Schip van Jan Vinchart/ lias Waterdrincker/ komende van Cadix in Spangien op ultimo van October des voorleden Jaers/ omtrent ter Veer in Zeelandt verongeluckt/ met hunne Cognossementen en bewijsen hun te adresseren aen Marselis van der Goes/ om hun te restitueren/ 't geen alreede uyt het Wrack gevist en geborgen is/ mits betalende gedaene Oncosten en Berchloon.

The contrast between the two paragraphs is highly revealing. Early modern spelling was not standardised; two compositors could be given the same handwritten text of the newspaper and produce different versions. It demonstrates that already in 1660, the *Haerlemse Dingsdaeghse Courant* was composed on two forms, and therefore printed on two presses. Abraham Casteleyn, the publisher of the Haarlem newspaper, was rapidly becoming the most successful periodical publisher in the Dutch Republic. His paper was also widely read in England, Russia, and the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁵ Casteleyn invested significant capital resources in his venture, dedicating two presses to the weekly newspaper, in order to increase the print run and to speed production. Delpher obviates the lack of archival evidence of Casteleyn's newspaper sales by allowing one to demonstrate the difference between these two editions and the practical logistics behind Casteleyn's success.

With so many opportunities to discover more about the early periodical press through Delpher, it is a shame that digitisation efforts are at times incomplete, sometimes in rather perplexing ways. Almost all volumes of Dutch newspapers in the Royal Library in Stockholm are available on Delpher, but the volumes containing issues of the *Courante uyt Italien* of Jan van Hilten from 1642-1664 are missing, as are volumes containing many unique issues of newspapers from The Hague, Leiden, and Weesp. The Stadsarchief in

¹⁵ See here Ingrid Maier, 'Zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse couranten vertaald voor de Tsaar.' *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 12:1, 2009, 27-49 and Ingrid Maier and René Vos, 'Gelezen van Londen tot Moskou: Internationale dimensies van de *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* in de zeventiende eeuw.' *Haerlem Jaarboek*, 2005, 9-32.

Amsterdam holds a wonderful collection of the *Amsterdamsche Courant* of the later seventeenth century: it contains issues dated 1672-1677, and from September 1684 onwards. While the former are included, the latter are notably absent. “Duplicate” issues are also largely excluded. The National Archives in Kew contains hundreds of duplicate issues of the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* between 1665 and 1679; around a quarter are in fact variant editions. Sadly, Delpher features only one copy of each issue from this collection.

The absences serve as a warning. One should not approach Delpher as an easy way to compose a bibliography, or as a research tool which allows one to make sweeping assumptions with respect to the development and organisation of the Dutch press. At the moment, Delpher includes approximately 40 per cent of all surviving Dutch-language newspapers of the seventeenth century. This is a momentous achievement, especially in comparison to the resources available to press historians of other European countries, but it should not lead to complacency. Dutch newspapers can be found in over 70 libraries and archives across the world, but at the moment only 13 institutions are (partially) included. Over three-quarters of all issues on Delpher are divided between the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* and the *Amsterdamsche Courant*, excluding a wide variety of lesser-known newspapers. In order to appreciate the diversity and complexity of the national market for periodical print, one needs to incorporate a thorough study of newspapers published in Leiden, Utrecht, Weesp, The Hague, and Rotterdam, which are largely excluded from digitisation. Delpher cannot provide a substitute for the depth of understanding that emerges from a more holistic study cultivated through access to physical pages or collections. This really is a subject where one reaps rich rewards from examining every surviving copy, in the rare cases where newspaper issues survive in more than one exemplar.

Rather, Delpher provides instead a valuable foundation for researchers as a repository through which one can read newspapers at one’s own leisure, comparing developments across the century in a matter of seconds. Balancing the use of Delpher with the inspection of newspapers in hand will take the history of the early Dutch press to new frontiers.

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