



AN ESSAY

Early European Books Collection 12:

Exploring the Impact of the Printing Press on the Dissemination of Political and State Communication

By Arthur der Weduwen, Historian at University of St. Andrews:

The growth of the state was one of the defining characteristics of the early modern period. Europe's kings, princes and regents steadily accrued more political power over territories great and small. The absolutist rule of King Louis XIV of France (1638-1715) is the most famous example of the expansion of state power in this period. Yet everywhere throughout Europe political authority was gradually transferring from the hands of many feudal and ecclesiastical lords to a smaller number of potentates and representative assemblies.

This authority was a privilege, but it carried responsibilities. The wars waged by Louis and his enemies required immense taxation. To push through the commercial and industrial reforms implemented by Louis's chief minister Colbert, the state had to rely on the consent of its citizens. Regulations had to be explained, and new taxation measures had to be justified.

Legislation was not valid without publication to the people. For centuries Europe's rulers had communicated the law to their subjects through proclamations made by royal heralds, civic officials and town criers. Word of mouth remained the foremost medium of state communication throughout the early modern period. But from the late 15th century onward, Europe's authorities increasingly turned to the printing press to bolster their communication strategies.

The digital collections of *Early European Books* currently present a corpus of 854 printed ordinances, edicts, proclamations and other state publications, ranging from the 15th to the late 17th centuries. Most state publications in the corpus are in French or Dutch, but the collection also includes German, Danish, Italian and Spanish items. While Latin remained the international language of scholarship, state communication was a vernacular process. The law had to be communicated to citizens of all ranks and education.

This body of content provides unparalleled insight into the role played by the printing press in communicating legislation to the people.



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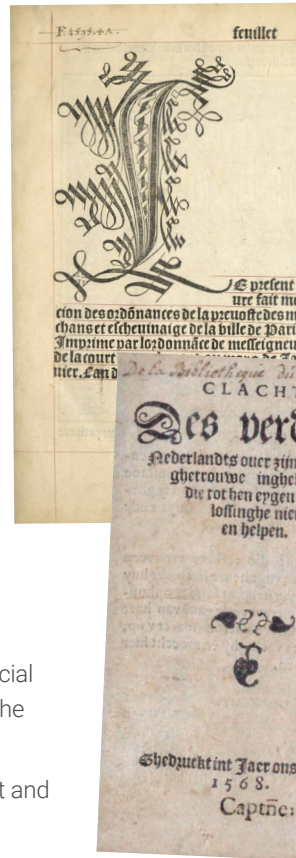
Digitisation enables rare insights into early modern political culture

From the early 16th century onward, political pamphleteering – the discussion of affairs of state in short pamphlets – became a notable feature of European politics. Martin Luther's Reformation in Germany demonstrated the effectiveness of short, vernacular polemical writing. This was a lesson which later reformers and rebels would not forget. During the French wars of religion (1562-1598) and the Dutch Revolt (1566-1609), printed pamphlets, libels and posters played an important role in marshalling support to the contending parties of the conflict (see highlight no. 2). Pamphlets from these two religious conflicts are well represented in EEB's collections, which contain a total of 864 political tracts.

Political pamphleteering became a regular feature of 17th-century European politics. Successive political conflicts in the Dutch Republic (the Remonstrant crisis of the 1610s), England (the civil war of the 1640s) and France (the Fronde of the early 1650s) demonstrated the powerful role which pamphlets could play in encouraging political revolutions. Pamphlets were an ideal medium with which to disclose political information or vilify opponents: they were generally short quarto or octavo booklets of 16 pages or fewer, and could be printed in a couple of day's work.

Official and popular political print have rarely been studied together as two complementary, interacting genres of the book world. Ordinances and edicts have attracted most attention from legal scholars, interested in reconstructing the formulation of law in the early modern period; whereas pamphlets, libels, petitions and songs are generally considered as a separate realm of popular media. We can, however, learn much from considering these two genres together: political pamphlets were often published in reaction to, or in support of, official declarations and ordinances. Studied in unison, official and political print can be used to present a more holistic picture of early modern political culture, and the development of the state and civil society.

The following five highlights from the EEB collections, each illustrate some characteristic aspects of European official print and political pamphleteering from the 16th and 17th centuries.



Five highlights from EEB Collection 12

1. Ordinances of the City of Paris

Le present livre fait mention des ordonnances de la prévosté des marchans et eschevinaige de la ville de Paris ([Paris: Antoine Vérard], 1500 [=1501]). In folio, ff. 92. Copy digitized from Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris: RES-F-709

The ordinance is a typical example of many early state publications. It is a lengthy work, close to 200 pages in folio, and contains the text of 50 different regulations affecting Parisian trade. The sale, distribution and prices of goods like grain, fruits, coal and wine are stipulated within, as well as transportation duties targeting imports and exports in the city.

It exemplifies the ambitions of the French crown to exercise its royal authority to its full extent, but the legislation also reveals the complexities of the expanding power of the state. The French crown always struggled to exercise control over Paris, a sprawling metropolis of close to 350,000 inhabitants by the middle of the 16th century. In Paris, the crown had to contend with the power of the Parliament, which could challenge edicts issued by the king, forcing changes or removal of certain laws and regulations; and with the provosts of the trade of the city, a group of magistrates responsible for the commerce and infrastructure of Paris.

New ordinances would have been proclaimed by the royal crier, accompanied by three mounted trumpeters, who declaimed the text of the publication at over a dozen locations throughout the city. Most Parisians would have learned of the new ordinance by word of mouth. It is unlikely that many would have owned a printed copy of this substantial new piece of legislation.

The print version was designed as a reference volume for use by lawyers, civic administrators and perhaps some merchants. The copy available in the EEB collection was once in the possession of the Jesuit College of Paris. The book contains woodcut illustrations of the provosts of Paris and King Charles at the beginning of the ordinance. The 50 regulations which follow are also preceded by a woodcut of the respective subject: the sections on the wine traders, the wine transporters and the wine sellers all feature separate illustrations.

2. Complaints of the oppressed Netherlands concerning their weak and disloyal inhabitants

Clachte des verdructe[n] Nederlandts over zijn slappe onghetrouwe ingheboerne die tot hen eygen verlossinghe niet en helpen ([Cologne: Gottfried Hirtshorn], 1568). In octavo, pp. 14 [2]. Copy digitised from Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague: 1715 G 17

The *Clachte des verdructe[n] Nederlandts over zijn slappe onghetrouwe ingheboerne die tot hen eygen verlossinghe niet en helpen* (Complaints of the oppressed Netherlands concerning their weak and disloyal inhabitants who do not help themselves to their own liberation) is one of the texts which was published in 1568 in support of William of Orange, the exiled Stadhouder of Holland, who launched an invasion of the Low Countries. His campaign was accompanied by numerous declarations, tracts and poems, urging the people of the Netherlands to rise in revolt against Habsburg rule.

Like most pamphlets disseminated by Dutch rebels during the 1560s and 1570s, this pamphlet was published anonymously. It is possible that the author was a Reformed minister (as suggested by the annotator), judging by the placement of two biblical citations at the beginning and end of the pamphlet, and the Reformed tone of the piece. However, typographical analysis has revealed that this pamphlet was printed by Gottfried Hirtshorn, a publisher active in Cologne and evident supporter of the rebel cause: almost all publications ascribed to him concern the oppression of the Protestant faith in the Low Countries. Hirtshorn was also responsible for publishing William of Orange's famous *Warning to the inhabitants and subjects of the Netherlands*, the official declaration made to accompany William's invasion into the Netherlands in 1568.

The copy of the *Clachte des verdructen Nederlandts* available from EEB is one of only two surviving copies known today.

From the ex libris inscription inside the pamphlet we know that the copy was once part of the library of Anne d'Yves (1738-1814), a Belgian noble and revolutionary who helped organise the Brabant uprising against Austrian rule in 1789.

3. Petition to a open city that was closed due to plague

Señor, la Ciudad de Xerez de la Frontera pour su Procurador m̃ayor Dize, q, cerrò la comunicaion la dicha Ciudad, y la de Cadiz, con la del ([Jerez de la Frontera: s.n., 1626]). In folio, ff. [2]. Copy digitised from The Wellcome Library, London: 3453/D

Petitioning was the most prominent way for ordinary people to put pressure on their policymakers. Most petitions were modest in nature: citizens, guilds or corporations requested new by-laws or changes in existing municipal legislation; and they asked for financial privileges and protection for economic ventures.

This document, digitized by EEB from the collections of the Wellcome Library in London, contains the text of a petition by the magistrates of Jerez de la Frontera, in Southwestern Spain, submitted to King Philip IV in 1626. Jerez de la Frontera lies upstream from Cadiz and El Puerto de Santa Maria, two major Spanish ports, and due to the plague the passage from Jerez to those cities was closed to all traffic. The magistrates petitioned to inform the king the plague has subsided and urged for the king to allow the city to open for trade once more, as the inhabitants of Jerez were dependent on commerce with Cadiz and El Puerto de Santa Maria.

This printed petition is a simple, unassuming piece of printing, composed of a single folio sheet of four pages, without any typographical sophistication or official signature. This would certainly not have been a copy of the document which would have been placed before the eyes of the king and his councillors. It seems that the text of the petition was reproduced to assure the citizens of Jerez that the king was informed of their plight, and that an answer could be expected imminently.

4. The richest widow in the country

D'Instructie vanden Hove van Hollandt, Zeelandt ende Vrieslandt. Gheordonneert by de keyserlijcke majesteyt, in't jaer vijftien-hondert een-en-dertich (The Hague: widow and heirs of Hillebrant van Wouw, 1648). In quarto, pp. 70 [14]. Copy digitised: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague: 393 L 35 [1]

The 1648 edition of this ordinance was printed by "the widow and heirs of Hillebrant van Wouw", the official printers of the most prominent institutions of government in the Dutch Republic. Machteld Hendricksz (the widow Van Wouw) and her son Hillebrant van Wouw junior were the appointed printers of the States General, the States of Holland, the Prince of Orange and the Court of Holland and Zeeland between 1622 and 1661.

These positions gave the Van Wouws the privilege to reprint and sell commercially all old ordinances issued by the authorities. As a result, Machteld Hendricksz and her son became members of the wealthy elite of The Hague, and were amongst the richest publishers in the Dutch Golden Age.

The copy of this ordinance digitized by EEB contains copious late 17th or early 18th-century annotations. It is the first item bound in a Sammelband with other mid-17th-century ordinances concerning the constitution of Holland and its provincial court, all printed by the family Van Wouw. The binding of the volume suggests that the ordinances were gathered together in this form sometime in the seventeenth century.

A manuscript note on the third page of this ordinance states that the volume is part of the library of "Corn[elius] Vinck". Judging by the style of the hand, Vinck seems to have been responsible for the other annotations of the volume. The ordinance, like the other 14 items in the Sammelband, is interleaved with numerous blank pages which the owner used for further annotations. Most annotations consist of references to other legal sources and ordinances.



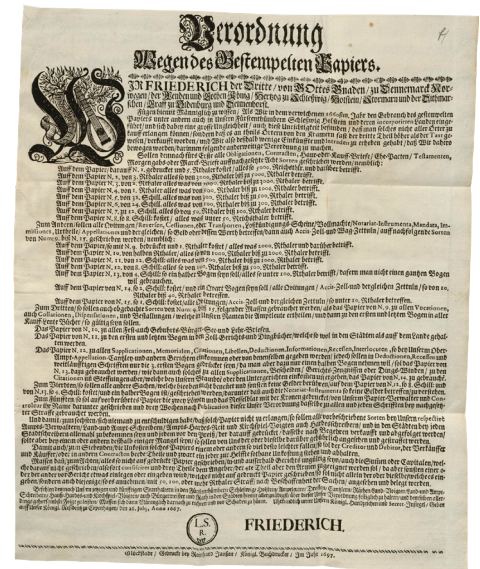
5. Stamp tax

Verordnung wegen des Gestempelten Papiers (Glückstadt: Reinhard Janssen, 1697). Broadsheet, ff. [1].
Copy digitised from Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen: 9-300

This ordinance was issued by King Frederick III of Denmark in Copenhagen on 26 July 1667. The ordinance introduced a stamp tax on all bonds, contracts, wills and other legal and administrative documents in his dominions. Like many other rulers throughout Europe, Frederick had come to realise that there was much money to be made from taxing paper; especially paper used by notaries and lawyers, who could hardly do without.

This broadsheet placard is a typical example of its genre. Broadsheets which were to be affixed and exhibited in public were designed to stand out in the hustle and bustle of daily life. When posted up, they would be surrounded by all sorts of commercial and private notifications. This placard was carefully produced to help compete for attention: it contained a large woodcut initial, while the title of the king was displayed prominently at the bottom of the placard, alongside a woodcut of the royal seal.

At the top of the placard a large title ("Ordinance concerning the stamp tax") stood out, immediately communicating the subject of the regulation. It is a striking, sophisticated piece of printing, one which was to be worthy of the royal authority it represented. The broadsheet placard, the most ephemeral of state publications, played a crucial part in ceremonial depictions of power in early modern Europe.



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About Arthur der Weduwen

Arthur der Weduwen is a PhD student at the University of St Andrews. He has a first-class degree in History and International Relations from the University of Exeter and an M.Litt. in Book History with distinction from St Andrews. He is an associate editor of the Universal Short Title Catalogue (<http://ustc.ac.uk/>). In 2015, he won the Gray prize for the best postgraduate performance in the Humanities at the University of St Andrews. His first book, *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618-1700*, will be published in two volumes by Brill in May 2017. Recent articles on the early periodical press and media have been published in *Quaerendo*, *Media History*, *Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies* and edited collections.

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