PART 3

Studies

News from the New World: Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century

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The first handwritten newsletter concerning the New World was an *avviso* from Milan to the Duke of Ferrara in 1496.¹ It announced the return of Columbus from his second voyage and the arrival of bullion from the Antilles.² One hundred years later, in 1596, the Fugger merchants in Augsburg received two handwritten newsletters announcing the amount of silver to be expected from the Americas that year. Both newsletters referred to information coming from Seville, despite increasing competition amongst European powers in the Atlantic. The first had been written in Madrid, the second had been submitted via Lyon and Madrid.³ The trajectory of these newsletters suggests that European transatlantic rivalries notwithstanding, the Spanish Empire held a monopoly on handwritten media disseminating news from its Atlantic realms over the period of a hundred years.⁴ This key position might have been due to the monopoly Castile claimed for legal trade and migration to its American territories. This claim was secured through formal institutions. The first one was the Casa de la Contratación founded in 1503.⁵

The impact and long-lasting effects of formal and informal institutions were analysed by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson in their most recent work on economic theory in 2012 using the concept of path dependency.⁶

1 All dates are given according to the Gregorian calendar.

2 Reale Commissione Colombiana pel quarto centenario della scoperta dell'America. *Raccolta di documenti e studi*, part 3, ed. Guglielmo Berchet, vol. 1.2 (Rome: Roma Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1892), p. 148.

3 ÖNB (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek), Cod. 8969, fos. 799–801, 177–8.

4 Although Spain did not exist as a political entity in the sixteenth century, for practical reasons, this name will be used for the kingdoms of Castile and Aragón in this text.

5 Guiomar de Carlos Boutet, *España y América. Un océano de negocios. Quinto centenario de la Casa de la Contratación, 1503–2003* (Seville: Sociedad estatal de conmemoraciones culturales, 2003).

6 Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (London: Profile Books, 2012).

This concept was adopted from physics and introduced into economic theory in the 1980s. Path dependency refers to the influence of initial conditions in the long run, even if the situation has changed in the meantime. Another theoretical model from 1967, christened the “sailing ship effect” by W. Ward, describes the persistence of old technologies and their improvement even as new technologies become available. As S. Mendonça has shown recently, the improvement of sailing ships was an intrinsic process of this old technology and happened before steam ships had become serious competitors.⁷ Thus the focus of recent economic theory has shifted from change to tradition.

In contrast to this development in economic theory, in 1979 Elizabeth Eisenstein praised the emergence of the printing press as an “agent of change”.⁸ From the end of the fifteenth century printing businesses began to spread all over Europe; the earliest printed news periodicals were published in upper Germany every six months at the end of the sixteenth century.⁹ Together with printed books and broadsheets, these should have influenced the advent of modernity. The search for the origins of printed newspapers has therefore received renewed interest recently.¹⁰ However, considering the path dependency of institutions described in the economic theories of Acemoglu and Robinson and allowing for the “sailing ship effect” as an intrinsic process, historical studies might be well advised to deal not only with the occurrence of printed news periodicals, but to study information media based on older technologies such as handwritten newsletters. At the end of the fifteenth century, handwritten newsletters were already well established in Italy, with the diaries of the Venetian Marino Sanudo, which made use of newsletters, among the

7 Sandro Mendonça, “The “sailing ship effect”: Reassessing history as a source of insight on technical change”, *Research Policy*, 42 (2013), pp. 1724–38.

8 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

9 Karl Schottenloher, *Flugblatt und Zeitung. Ein Wegweiser durch das gedruckte Tagesschrifttum*, 2 vols., ed. Johannes Blindowski (Munich: Klinkhardt and Biermann, 1985).

10 Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641–1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Gerhild Scholz Williams and William Layher, eds., *Consuming News: Newspapers and Print Culture in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008); Johannes Arndt and Esther-Beate Körber, eds., *Das Mediensystem im Alten Reich der Frühen Neuzeit (1600–1750)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2010).

best-known examples.¹¹ *Avvisi* became widespread all over Europe in the last decades of the sixteenth century, and they remained an important part of the information economy until the end of the eighteenth century.¹² For two hundred years both handwritten newsletters and printed news periodicals distributed current news to the learned public, who read them aloud and disseminated them further to friends and relatives.

The sixteenth century will be at the centre of the present analysis of handwritten *avvisi*, since the expansion of the printing press and the development of the handwritten newsletters as a regular medium of information occurred parallel to the first expeditions and permanent settlements of Europeans in the Americas. Due to its outstanding position in organising the conquest and colonisation of ancient American societies, the nascent 'Spanish' Empire and its centre on the Iberian Peninsula will be the starting point for the analysis of newsletters that conveyed news from the New World in the sixteenth century. The recipients of these newsletters will be selected according to their residence. The basis of this selection is that the recipients should reside outside the Iberian Peninsula but within the European areas of influence of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy, i.e. in central Europe or northern and central Italy. By selecting recipients from outside of the Iberian Peninsula, where intermediaries had to intervene in the distribution of news, the network through which information was transferred within Europe can be reconstructed. The choice of European areas attached to the Habsburg monarchies guarantees that the sample will contain (at least) a minimum of information exchange on Hispanic America. Thus handwritten newsletters will be studied to analyse the distribution of news from the New World to central Europe, and northern and central Italy during the sixteenth century.

There has been a recent flurry of historiographical interest in handwritten newsletters, analysing specific collections like the *Fuggerzeitungen* or those of specific cities like Venice.¹³ This has uncovered the main internal

11 Marino Sanudo, *I Diarii*, 58 vols., ed. Federico Stefani *et al.* (Venice: F. Visentini, 1879–1903).

12 André Belo, 'Between history and periodicity: printed and handwritten news in XVIIIth century Portugal', *E-Journal of Portuguese History*, 2:2 (Winter 2004) <www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue4/html/belo_main.html> [1/8/14].

13 Oswald Bauer, *Zeitungen vor der Zeitung. Die Fuggerzeitungen (1568–1605) und das frühmoderne Nachrichtensystem* (Berlin: Oldenbourg Akademieverlag, 2011); Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond, eds., *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

characteristics of the medium. However, external conditions have received less attention. In order to remedy this, this chapter will compare different collections from different places dealing with the single topic of news from the Americas.

Unlike most studies of newsletters, which deal with their specific content, this study will consider the geography of information flows in order to track the diffusion and control of information.¹⁴ Newsletters offer various relevant data on these questions. First, their paragraph headings order information according to time and space. In addition, there are frequent references to the origin of news. From these data geographical networks can be reconstructed. Subsequent network analysis offers an insight into the general structure of information flow and the hubs which controlled these networks.

Historiographical analysis of printed information concerning the early Americas has frequently stressed the important role of German printing houses and imprints in Germany in disseminating news from the New World.¹⁵ By contrast, the purpose of the present chapter is to assess the position of the Spanish Empire and the Iberian Peninsula in the information business of handwritten newsletters. Castile, by 1500 considered to be the centre of the incipient Spanish monarchy, claimed a monopoly over contact, commerce and migration with its transatlantic realms. The Casa de la Contratación was established in Seville in order to enforce this monopoly. The present analysis aims to reveal whether this institutional monopoly could control information flows within Europe as well, and if institutional path dependency had influence on the networks through which information for handwritten newsletters was channelled until the end of the sixteenth century. Was there an intrinsic 'sailing ship effect' in the case of networks for handwritten newsletters?

In order to assess the impact of monopolistic institutions through path dependency, and the extent of the persistence of old technologies in a period of innovation, it is necessary to use a chronological approach to information flows from the Americas through the Iberian monarchies. Thus, for various periods different networks through which handwritten *avvisi* obtained and distributed their information have to be reconstructed. The first period runs

2007); Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito. Una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2001); François Moureau, ed., *De bonne main. La communication manuscrite au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Voltaire Foundation, 1993).

14 Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2002).

15 Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

from the earliest contacts between Europeans and the Americas until the first years of the reign of Philip II, i.e. up to 1560. The second period witnessed the consolidation of colonial rule in Spanish America and the increasing presence of seafarers from rival European monarchies either through privateering or trying to establish settlements of their own. The third period starts with the integration of Portugal into the Iberian Habsburg monarchy and the growing antagonism between Catholic and Protestant powers in north-western Europe in 1581 and ends with the death of Philip II in 1598. Comparing these three different periods will enable us to determine if the position of the Spanish Monarchy in the network of European newsletters did change or if it remained largely constant. In the case of the latter, this would suggest a strong path dependency through thoroughly founded institutions, and that traditional information media experienced a “sailing ship effect”.

The newsletters collections of the sixteenth century to be analysed are those of the Fugger merchants, the counts of Pfalz-Neuburg, and the dukes of Bavaria and Urbino. These newsletters are bound together as special collections of up to four hundred newsletters per year. Furthermore, newsletters received by the dukes of Florence, the German Emperor and the Papal court are considered as well. These last are not as numerous and are mostly preserved as attachments to diplomatic correspondence. In addition, scattered historiographical references to handwritten newsletters dealing with the New World are included. The newsletters kept in collections are available at least for several subsequent years during the second half of the sixteenth century. Those newsletters that are accessible only by dispersed references or through diplomatic correspondence cover the whole of the sixteenth century. In order to handle the large number of newsletters the following three very specific topics were searched for: first, the amount of gold and silver arriving in Europe from the New World, a recurring subject throughout the century. The other topics involve conflict over the settlement of European rivals in American territories claimed by Castile. The second is the Spanish destruction of a French Huguenot colony in Florida in September 1565, spread through various media including newsletters; and the third topic concerns an event generating substantial media coverage, which happened twenty years later: the attacks of Francis Drake on Santo Domingo and Cartagena from January to April 1586, which were reported in handwritten newsletters and provoked much fear and expectation in Europe. References to these three topics are the basis of the following network analysis.

Before the reconstruction of the various networks through which handwritten *avvisi* were distributed in Europe, a short summary of the contents of the news is in order. In descriptions of the first contacts of Europeans with the

islands in the Western Atlantic, economic considerations played a major role. Experiences from the Portuguese voyages to Africa raised high expectations of the quest for spices and gold, and this featured prominently in Columbus's first manuscript reports as a consequence.¹⁶ In 1496, when Columbus returned from his second voyage, he brought the first samples of precious metals from the Caribbean and this news spread immediately in Europe. Antonio Costabili, member of the court of Hercules of Ferrara received the information in a newsletter from Milan dated 23 June to 9 July 1496: "Avvisi venuti di Hyspania. Che Colunno, capitaneo del armata hispana ... era arrivato a Cales, e ha portato gran quantitate de oro" ("Avvisi received from Spain: Columbus, the captain of the Spanish fleet has arrived in Cádiz, and he imported a large quantity of gold").¹⁷ This information formed a model for years to come. Almost a century later, an *avviso* of 28 August 1584 from San Lúcar de Barrameda, the Andalusian port where the fleets from Hispanic America arrived, mentioned that the last incoming fleet had brought for the crown 600,000 ducats in gold and silver, and for private merchants 1,400,000 ducats in precious metals. According to the tax declarations copied in part in the newsletter the fleet also delivered considerable quantities of pearls, indigo, cochineal, sarsaparilla, guaiac wood, sugar, ginger and hides.¹⁸ The money for the Castilian crown proceeded from taxes, mainly mining taxes, levied in Spanish America. Precious metals and the wares of private merchants were the payment for European exports to Spanish America. By the early 1580s silver production in Potosí in Upper Peru (now Bolivia) increased dramatically. Accordingly, the newsletters were very much interested in the yearly deliveries of precious metals reaching the Andalusian ports. Thus a newsletter from Venice dated 20 December 1586 informed the Duke of Urbino that the fleet from New Spain (Mexico) had arrived at San Lúcar on 2 November. The cargo consisted of 800,000 ducats for the crown, 1,200,000 ducats for private merchants, and the deliveries of cochineal had a value of more than one million ducats.¹⁹ The Fugger merchants were notified likewise. They received a newsletter from Madrid on 15 November 1586. It mentioned that the fleet from New Spain had arrived safely and that the fleet from Peru was expected to bring a cargo worth seven million ducats.²⁰ When the

16 Juan Gil Fernández and Consuelo Varela, *Cristóbal Colón. Textos y documentos completos: Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memoriales* (Madrid: Alianza, 1992).

17 Raccolta III, 1.2, 148.

18 OeStA, HHStA (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv), Spanien, Varia 2/3, Relationen 1583–85, fos. 32–3.

19 BAV (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), Cod. Urb. lat. 1045, fos. 595–7.

20 ÖNB, Cod. 8959, fos. 647–8.

silver fleet from Peru really arrived the next year on 25 September 1587, the Duke of Bavaria received a newsletter which informed him that the value of the whole cargo of the fleet amounted to 17,000,000 (though without indicating in what currency). This newsletter had been sent from Antwerp on 24 October and it referred to information coming from Madrid on 4 October 1587.²¹ The Fugger merchants got the same information from a similar newsletter directly from Madrid with the same date.²² The accuracy of the handwritten newsletters varied considerably. In some cases copies from official tax records were included, in other approximations were distributed that mentioned a general amount without indicating any monetary unit, and the sum may have even included the value of wares like hides or cocoa. This was probably the case with the newsletter of October 1587.²³

A comparison between handwritten and printed newsletter reveals considerable differences. On 26 July 1529 a handwritten newsletter was dispatched at Antwerp and sent to Helmstedt in Saxony. It referred to a letter sent by Giovanni Battista Grimaldi to Ansaldo Grimaldi, both members of the famous Genoese family of bankers attached to Charles v. The original information was sent from Spain to Genoa on 14 February 1529. The handwritten newsletter from Antwerp mentioned that two ships had brought gold with a value of 100,000 ducats and pearls worth 50,000 ducats from the Americas to Seville.²⁴ These newsletters or similar ones formed the basis for a broadsheet printed in Speyer the same year. The printed version mentioned only the pearls with their respective value and omitted the amount of precious metals.²⁵ The difference between handwritten and printed *avvisi* remained the same at the end of the sixteenth century. The Fuggers received a newsletter from Antwerp written on 4 April 1598. It referred to news brought by a courier from Madrid to Brussels. It reported that the American silver fleet had arrived at Seville with a cargo of 7,000,000. The text does not mention any details of whether the sum included goods as well as precious metals, nor did it specify the monetary unit. Similar information was printed in one of the first regular German news periodicals, the *Frankfurter Messrelation* which was published in September the same year.

21 BayerStaBi (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek), Cod. germ. 5864/3, fos. 161–2.

22 ÖNB, Cod. 8960, fos. 414–15.

23 Renate Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt. Amerika im Kommunikationsnetz des habsburgischen Imperiums (1493–1598)* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2000), ch. 4.1.

24 Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 130 Helmst., fos. 191–2.

25 John Alden and Dennis C. Landis, eds., *European Americana. A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas, 1493–1600*, vol. 1 (New York: The John Carter Brown Library, 1980), p. 32: “Copey eynes brieffes ... Ansaldo de Grimaldo und andern Edllen von Genua auss Hispanien zugeschrieben”.

The printed periodical mentioned that the silver fleet from New Spain (Mexico) had arrived at Seville in April 1598, and that its cargo was about seven millions of gold. Like the handwritten newsletter, the printed periodical did not mention any monetary units, but it transformed the American bullion which by that time consisted mainly of silver into a stream of gold, making the enormous sum of precious metals even more impressive. Comparison of the contents of handwritten newsletters and printed news periodicals shows that even if the new medium of printed news periodicals might have reached a broader learned public, the old medium of handwritten newsletters was more precise and much faster in informing European merchants and elites. Thus it might have been important for the Spanish Empire to supervise the contents of handwritten newsletters through the control of its distribution channels.

The command of information was crucial too in the case of armed conflicts. Two of them, which happened in Florida and the Caribbean, left a considerable echo in European newsletters. The first one occurred in Florida.²⁶ In 1564 French Huguenots had founded the colony Fort de la Caroline, today Jacksonville. Due to a lack of resources some of the French settlers began to plunder in the Spanish Caribbean. Therefore in June 1565 Spanish troops under the command of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés were sent to Florida, which had been claimed by the Spanish crown. In September 1565, Pedro Menéndez founded St. Augustin and attacked the French fort, killing almost all of its defenders and putting to death a group of French soldiers who had surrendered after their intended assault on St. Augustin had failed. Three ships were able to escape, one of them under the command of René Ladonnière. His vessel was the only one to reach Europe in January 1565. The bloody events in Florida happened during a short period of peace in the midst of the French wars of religion, and during a period of growing antagonism between Catholic and Protestant powers in Flanders and in Europe in general. When in January 1566 notices about the fate of the Huguenot fort arrived in Europe the Spanish side initially proclaimed their victory against the Protestant intruders into their realms. In the French fortress, the Spanish troops had found letters of patent and settlement signed by the Huguenot Admiral Coligny. This was the proof that Coligny had openly disregarded Spanish territorial claims in the Americas. But when French survivors of the slaughter in Florida arrived in Europe different reports circulated, and the French king sent a severe protest to the Spanish court asking for apologies. Since each side had committed serious aggressions against the other the affair was settled rather swiftly.

26 Carlos Fernández Shaw, *Presencia española en los Estados Unidos* (Madrid: Cultura Hispanica, 1987).

The contents of the newsletters reflected the changing attitudes and debates in Europe. A newsletter from Seville mentioned on 26 March 1565 that a ship had arrived from Havana with the news that the French had built a fortress at the coast of Florida and some of these Frenchmen were plundering Spanish possessions in the Caribbean. This newsletter was sent by the Imperial ambassador from Madrid to the court of Vienna.²⁷ On 13 April 1565 another newsletter was sent from Madrid to the Duke of Urbino. This *avviso* mentioned that the Spaniards were trying to recover the “island of Florida in the Indies” (America) which had been captured by French corsairs.²⁸ In June 1565, when Mendéz de Avilés had set sail from Andalusia to Florida, newsletters were sent from Madrid to Vienna and Florence on 30 June 1565, referring to information from Seville from six days before, 24 June 1565. The Madrid newsletters reported that the governor of Cuba had already expelled the French from Florida. Only three ships escaped, but one had sunk, another had disappeared, and the third had fallen into the hands of indigenous tribes who devoured the French in a solemn banquet.²⁹ It is unclear to which event in Florida these newsletters refer, but it was probably a mutiny within the French colony. At the end of the Florida affair, a newsletter was edited in Madrid between 12 February and 15 March and sent to the Emperor in Vienna. The text reported that the Spanish crown feared a French counter-attack and would probably dispatch 2,000 soldiers to Florida in order to reinforce the troops of Pedro Méndez.³⁰ Similar information was transmitted in a newsletter received by the Duke of Urbino. This newsletter sent from Brussels on 29 April 1566 remarked that the Spanish King Philip II would send a navy of 30 ships in order to reconquer Florida and expel the French.³¹ The contents of the newsletters about Florida reveal that very similar texts were sent to different places in Europe, and that by the 1560s *avvisi* written in Spanish were received in Florence and Vienna alike without being translated. All newsletters relayed on information originating in the Iberian Peninsula, and they interpreted the events in Florida from a Spanish

27 HHStA, Spanien, Varia 2/15, fo. 1: ‘Copia de una carta de Sevilla’, Sevilla, 26 March 1565.

28 BAV, Cod. Urb. lat. 1040, fo. 10.

29 HHStA, Spanien, Varia 2/15, fos. 16–19: ‘Avvisos de la Corte de España’ from 7–30 June 1565, herein: newsletters from Seville 24 June 1565. The text says: ‘el terzero topo con los Indios de la tierra, que tomaron a todos ellos, y se los comieron en un su banquete solemne’. ASF (Archivio di Stato Firenze), Mediceo del Principato 5037, fo. 167: ‘Avisos de la Florida por avisos de Sevilla’, Sevilla, 24 June 1565: ‘y benidos a sus manos se los comieron todos en un solene vanquete’.

30 HHStA, Spanien, Varia 2/17, fos. 9–11: ‘De la corte de España’, 12 February–15 March 1566.

31 BAV, Cod. Urb. lat. 1040, fo. 220.

point of view. Furthermore, newsletters reported both rumours and established facts, often without distinction.

The third event to be considered is the attack of Francis Drake of the city of Santo Domingo, the oldest Spanish settlement in the Caribbean and the Americas.³² In 1585, after the fall of Antwerp into the hands of Spanish troops, open warfare broke out between Spain and England. Francis Drake was sent with a fleet of 30 vessels and 2,000 men to the Caribbean. After plundering in Galicia, Spain and Portugal, the Canary Islands, Cape Verde and finally Puerto Rico were ransacked as well. On 10 January 1586, Drake's fleet appeared before Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola. The next day he met little defence when he attacked the already-evacuated city. By that time, the zenith of Santo Domingo had passed: in the 1580s it was only an administrative centre without any major economic functions. Therefore, Drake and his men could obtain only a ransom of 25,000 ducats which did not fulfil their expectations. On 9 February, the English left Santo Domingo and turned on Cartagena, on the Atlantic coast of modern-day Colombia. Here they stayed almost two months. Due to the spread of tropical diseases amongst the crew the English turned northwards in April 1586 and sailed back to England, sacking Honduras and St. Augustin but without daring to attack Havana. Upon their return to Portsmouth on 7 August 1586, they delivered booty with an estimated value of 200,000 ducats, consisting of precious metals, weapons, church bells of copper, and ships. Three months after the arrival of Drake, the silver fleet from Mexico arrived at Seville and delivered 3,000,000 ducats, and the fleet from Peru brought 7,000,000 ducats in 1587. Thus, from an economic point of view, the expedition of Drake had been a failure, and more so if the death of a third of the crew is taken into consideration. Nonetheless, the outcry in Europe was enormous, as fears based on his circumnavigation of the world and the booty he had obtained on the West coast of Spanish America in 1577–80 found voice.

Drake's expedition was referred to in numerous newsletters. The present analysis deals with 57 *avvisi* that spread the news between late February and September 1586. Rumours and fantastical assumptions appear in many of them. Immediately after the arrival in Spain of the first official reports from the Caribbean, a handwritten newsletter from Madrid informed the Fugger merchants in Augsburg. The *avviso* of 5 April 1586 mentioned that news had come

32 Simon Adams, 'The outbreak of the Elizabethan naval war against the Spanish Empire: The embargo of May 1585 and Sir Francis Drake's West-Indies voyage', in *England, Spain and the Gran Armada, 1585–1604: Essays from the Anglo-Spanish Conferences, London and Madrid, 1988*, ed. M. Rodríguez-Salgado and Simon Adams (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1991), pp. 45–69.

from Seville on 24 and 28 March. The newsletter reported the assaults on Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, claiming that 2,000,000 ducats had been obtained as booty by Drake and that all Catholic priests and monks had been murdered in Santo Domingo. Furthermore the newsletter spread fears that the English were building a new fortress in the latter city and that there existed considerable danger of an attack on Havana.³³ The amount of the booty, the death of clerics and the fortification were only rumours, and a sign of the fears then current in Spain. From Barcelona news about the attack spread from 9 April. The Duke of Urbino obtained a newsletter from Venice referring to information from Barcelona dated 9 April 1586. This newsletter mentioned that a courier from Madrid had been sent to Barcelona. The information it purveyed was that the English had attacked Puerto Rico and ransacked Santo Domingo. They had obtained two million ducats and freed African slaves. The same news was sent to northern Europe without mentioning the Africans. The count of Pfalz-Neuburg received this newsletter on 7 May 1586. The *avviso* had been edited in Cologne on 3 May 1586 and it referred to information coming from Barcelona on 9 April 1586.³⁴ Previously, a newsletter written in Cologne on 26 April 1586 had reached Pfalz-Neuburg. Its text, based on information coming from Lisbon, differed from the information distributed from Madrid. It mentioned that in Lisbon news had come from England that 'Admiral Draco' had been supported by the Indians from the Island of Santo Domingo, who had rebelled against the Spaniards, and that now Santo Domingo was fortified by the English and their indigenous allies. The amount of the booty obtained was not mentioned.³⁵ The fortification of Santo Domingo which had frightened the authors in Madrid and Barcelona was interpreted as a positive sign in London and Lisbon. Whereas newsletters from Barcelona had spread fears of a slave rebellion, in the information from Lisbon Drake was presented as an Admiral who supported an indigenous rebellion against Spain. The idea behind this newsletter must have been that the Englishmen behaved in the Caribbean in the same way as in the Netherlands. In both cases an oppressed population was freed from the Spaniards. None of the news was correct. Drake had freed French war prisoners from a ship in the harbour of Santo Domingo.

The news of the return of Drake to England was distributed at first by newsletters from London. On 6 September 1586 a newsletter was sent from Venice to Urbino, reporting that Drake had landed with 80 ships and with a rich booty in England. This *avviso* referred to news from London dated 5 August which had

33 ÖNB, Cod. 8959, fos. 363–4.

34 BayerHStA, Pfalz-Neuburg 920, fo. 38.

35 BayerHStA, Pfalz-Neuburg 920, fo. 62.

been sent from Antwerp 16 August 1586.³⁶ On 17 September a newsletter from Rome mentioned that after the return of Drake to England there was no more use for the fleet which had been prepared in Naples in order to expel Drake and his men from the Caribbean.³⁷ Due to the relative sparseness of the booty and the high death toll among his men, the reports of Drake's return were less exciting than the information about his attacks in the Caribbean. European newsletters returned to European themes. In the case of Drake's expedition, information was spread via Spain and England likewise, and according to the origin of the news the contents varied considerably. Thus, the control of the network through which newsletters were disseminated must have been important.

Network analysis will be applied to determine the position of Spain in the geographical network of handwritten newsletters, an old medium and institution used for contemporary political communication. From network analysis different centrality indices are available. One of the most important is 'betweenness' centrality. This measures the control of a node on the communication between other nodes. This index is employed generally in social network analysis especially for undirected networks. Its widespread use notwithstanding, this index does not measure appropriately the influence of the sender of information in a directed network. The contents analysis of the newsletters has shown the relevance of the origin of news. Therefore, for the present purpose the centrality of the cities in the newsletter networks will be calculated according to the weighted 'outdegree' centrality. The outdegree measures the relative importance of each city in the network by the number of direct links originating in that city. The outdegree centrality is weighted according to the number of messages sent through the links.³⁸

The network for the first half of the sixteenth century (1496–1560), is based only on ten newsletters as no larger collections are available for this period (see Figure 21.1). The place with the highest weighted outdegree centrality was Madrid, i.e. the city with the highest number of direct outgoing connections to other cities, taking into consideration the number of messages sent. For practical reasons Madrid stands for the Spanish court, which was itinerant between various royal cities until 1560, when Philip II fixed Madrid as the capital. The Catholic kings, Ferdinand II of Aragón and Isabella of Castile, as well as their grandson Emperor Charles V often stayed in Valladolid, Toledo, Seville and Barcelona, but visited also many other cities in Castile and Aragón. Thus, if

36 BAV, Cod. Urb. lat. 1054, fos. 428–31.

37 BAV, Cod. Urb. lat 1054, fos. 454–6.

38 For network analysis the open source program Gephi 0.8.2 201210100934 has been used.

FIGURE 21.1 *Network of handwritten newsletters on Spanish America (1496–1560)*

SOURCE: PIEPER, VERMITTLUNG, ANNEX IV.

newsletters mentioned Spain or the Spanish court, for the purpose of this network analysis this information was identified with Madrid. If a specific Spanish city was indicated, its name was not conflated in this way. Thus the analysis reveals that the *avvisi* network concerning the news from the New World was centred on the Spanish court.

The destination of most newsletters was Italy. Genoa was second in importance to the Spanish court with respect to its outgoing degree centrality. Genoa redistributed information coming from the Spanish court to Ferrara and Antwerp. Other places such as Seville, Toledo and Barcelona also sent news to Italy, and Milan distributed a newsletter within Italy. Nonetheless, all these cities were less important than the Spanish court (or Madrid) and Genoa. In north-western Europe, newsletters are preserved in Saxony. In the library of the Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel there is a manuscript series containing two newsletters which were sent to Helmstedt, a small city in Saxony, at the border between Catholic and Protestant interests in the early sixteenth century. These newsletters obtained their information either directly from the Spanish court or from Antwerp which redistributed an incoming message from Genoa. Thus the earliest network was completely controlled by the Spanish court and most of the newsletters were sent to Italy, where it was Genoa that mainly distributed them further. There is one exception, a newsletter which reached Brussels and referred to information coming from Lisbon. The direct connection between Portugal and Flanders without any interference of Spain is noteworthy and seems to be a singularity at first sight.

During the second period from 1561 until 1580, i.e. during the reign of Philip II before his accession to the Portuguese crown, the number of *avvisi* that have been analysed doubled: 13 *avvisi* dealt with the import of precious metals and ten *avvisi* mentioned the events in Florida (see Figure 21.2). In this second network the outdegree centrality of Madrid was overwhelming. Madrid collected news coming from Florida and Havana, or Seville and San Lúcar, the harbour of the mercantile city. Madrid distributed this news to Italy and north-western

FIGURE 21.2 *Network of handwritten newsletters on Spanish America (1561–80)*

SOURCE: PIEPER, VERMITTLUNG, ANNEX II AND IV.

Europe. Almost all information was directed through the Spanish capital. Only a handful of newsletters did not mention the intervention of Madrid but referred directly to news obtained from Seville and in one case from San Lúcar. In Italy, Genoa still transmitted newsletters, but now it sent the information to the Imperial Court at Vienna. In this second period, Rome served as an intermediary for newsletters received in Urbino. During the first period, Brussels had had a link to Lisbon. The situation changed in the second period, when Brussels acted as an intermediary between Madrid and Urbino. Antwerp appeared again as a distributor of news in north-western Europe, but now it received its information directly from Spain and sent it to Augsburg. A similar position was held by Cologne even if in this case the newsletter sent from Cologne to Augsburg did not mention its sources. Between 1561 and 1580 the network of the handwritten *avvisi* concerning information on Spanish America was completely controlled by the Spanish court. Spain, i.e. Madrid, Seville and San Lúcar, exercised its undisputed monopoly over the connection between the Americas and Europe. In addition, the first signs of institutional intermediaries in Antwerp and Cologne in north-western Europe and Rome and Genoa in Italy appeared. Obviously, the venerable medium of handwritten newsletters was reorganised and improved as the emerging structure of the network and the increasing number of newsletters suggests.

In the last decades of the sixteenth century (1580–98), handwritten newsletters became a regular information medium (see Figure 21.3). Information was collected and distributed through a well-established network with central places in Italy and north-western Europe. For this period, 41 *avvisi* were selected that mentioned the arrival of precious metals in Europe, and 57 that informed about the deeds of Francis Drake. For news proceeding from Spanish America, the control of Madrid remained. Madrid informed 13 cities directly and was referred to as the origin of a message in every second newsletter. No other city of the network had such a presence. The handwritten newsletters were transferred regularly through

FIGURE 21.3 *Network of handwritten newsletters on Spanish America (1581–98)*

SOURCE: PIEPER, VERMITTLUNG, ANNEX III AND IV.

specialised central places. In north-western-Europe Antwerp was able to maintain its position despite continuous warfare. In Italy, Genoa was replaced by Venice. Rome and Cologne were second to Venice and Antwerp respectively. Venice and Antwerp held a comparable position with respect to the transmission of information (weighted outdegree centrality), but there was a considerable difference in their distribution patterns. Antwerp informed directly seven places north and south of the Alps. Venice, on the contrary, had only two direct outgoing links, its customers in Urbino and Augsburg. Therefore the betweenness centrality of Venice was rather low. There was a second distinction between Antwerp and Venice. Antwerp collected its news from sources both inside and outside of the Iberian Peninsula: only 20% of these messages came directly from there.

Venice was connected to a great variety of senders as well, but received more than half of its information directly from Iberia. Content analysis has shown that the messages from the Iberian Peninsula were more reliable than those coming from north-western Europe, therefore newsletters from Venice were in general more accurate than those from Antwerp, which tended to contain

many rumours. For the distribution of news about the New World, Venice was more reliable than Antwerp but the betweenness centrality of Venice was lower, i.e. the news distributed through Venice spread only to a specific geographical area. Other cities, such as London, Lisbon, Paris and Lyon had a rather low weighted outgoing degree centrality and their influence on European images of the Americas in the network of the handwritten *avvisi* was relatively small at the end of the sixteenth century.

The analysis of handwritten newsletters referring to the Americas has shown that parallel to the spread of the printing press the old medium of handwritten newsletters was transformed into a new communication medium during the sixteenth century. This was mainly due to the organisation of central places for collecting, editing and distributing newsletters. During the first half of the sixteenth century the first hints appeared when Genoa transmitted news from Spain to Italy and north-western Europe. In the north, Antwerp distributed the information to its own customers. The second period, from 1561 to 1580, was characterised by an increasing number of handwritten newsletters and further reorganisation. Antwerp maintained its position in the north, but Genoa now shared its role with Rome. During the third period, from 1581 to the end of the century, the network of handwritten newsletters developed fully. The number of newsletters increased enormously and four cities could secure a position as main hubs for this business. Measuring their importance with the weighted outgoing degree centrality, Venice and Rome controlled the network in southern Europe. Antwerp and, to a lesser extent, Cologne collected and transmitted news in north-western and central Europe. London and Lisbon participated likewise but their positions in the network were less important than those of Antwerp and Venice. In the French area of influence Lyon and Paris also dealt with *avvisi*, but to a lesser extent than even London or Lisbon.

With respect to news coming from the New World the analysis shows that the Spanish court could maintain its monopoly from the end of the fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth century. Even in the case of serious encounters with its French and English adversaries in the Americas, the opinion of Madrid was dominant in the handwritten newsletters sent across Antwerp, Venice and Rome and through many other cities of the network. From 1503 on, the establishment of a formal institution—the Casa de la Contratación—for the control of the commerce and migration between Spanish America and Europe secured the control of Spain over the information about Spanish America within Europe in the *avvisi* as well. The position of the Spanish monarchy in the network of European handwritten newsletters was maintained. It was backed by the path dependency of thoroughly founded and constantly adjusted institutions and traditional information media which experienced a ‘sailing

ship effect' as an intrinsic process of modernisation. In the seventeenth century, especially during the Thirty Years War, this situation came to an end. The declining political power of Spain weakened the institutional framework. In contrast to the theory of Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, in the case of handwritten *avvisi* concerning Spanish America path dependency could no longer guarantee a significant Spanish influence in the European information media. However, the sailing ship effect, considered as an intrinsic improvement of old technologies, guaranteed that the handwritten newsletters remained an important news medium for another two hundred years.³⁹

39 See ch. 4, above.