Chapter 4

Verhoeven and the News of Europe

The context in which newspaper production has so far been discussed has been that of the local milieux of the Antwerp book trade, the Lipsian humanist circle, and political-cultural patronage in the Habsburg Netherlands. However, newspapers were an international phenomenon, not simply in that they were printed in many lands, but also because the news they printed came from across Europe, and the printed sheets themselves circulated widely along trade and postal routes. Abraham Verhoeven’s individual editorial decisions only make sense within the structures of information flows and the culture of publicity that limited them. First the pattern of subscription to foreign newswriting services attested by the internal evidence of the *Nieuwe Tijdinghen* will be considered, on the basis of 1186 issues out of a probable original total of 1336 from the years 1620–1629. Then a comparison will be made with the other newspapers that survive for the sample year of 1623 in the collections consulted. This comparison will serve three purposes: demonstrating the extent to which common structures of communication produced news that was the same in all newspapers; showing the variety of types of news covered, with illustrative quotations to give a sense of the style of coverage; and examining reporting of specific great events, to see how different confessional and dynastic loyalties were expressed within the common communications structure. One conclusion that can be derived from a reading of the news reports is that although newswriters and newspaper editors had access only to public information, they were willing and able to speculate about secret decisions and negotiations on the basis of the facts available.

International News in the *Nieuwe Tijdinghen*

When he began publication of the *Nieuwe Tijdinghen* in 1620, Verhoeven subscribed to a very narrow range of regular correspondence on which to base a regular news publication. The regular reporting was made up exclusively of letters from Vienna and Prague, eked out with whatever news came to hand from other sources. As his business prospered, he made efforts to expand his correspondence, and by mid-1623 his regular news came from a wide spread of cities, and his occasional sources were among the most far-ranging of the time. While the reports of most newspapers were confined to two or three language areas (typically the German, the Italian and perhaps the French), the Dutch-language
Nieuwe Tijdinghen in addition drew not infrequently on English and Spanish sources, giving it one of the widest linguistic, as well as geographical, ranges.

As the 1620 octrooi spoke of victories and sieges in the Empire, it is not surprising that the bulk of Verhoeven’s stories came from Germany, Austria and Bohemia, and largely concerned the war. In second place came reports from Italy, followed by the Low Countries, France, England, Spain, Poland, and elsewhere. Of the 4623 stories in all of Verhoeven’s newspapers studied from the years 1620–1629 which were datelined from specific towns or provinces, 2461 (53.2%), came from eleven sources, in descending order of frequency: Vienna, Prague, Cologne, Rome, Venice, Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, the Army of Flanders (including the Army of the Palatinate in 1620), the Dunkirk fleet, and The Hague. The other half (2162 stories) came from 400 different locations, but within this mass of minor sources fifteen centres of secondary importance can be discerned. Again in descending order, these were Madrid, Danzig, Calais, Breslau (Wrocław), Brussels, the imperial army (under Bucquoy and later under Wallenstein), Lübeck, Milan, Antwerp itself, London, Augsburg, Wesel and, in joint thirteenth place, Leipzig, Seville and ’s-Hertogenbosch. Beyond these was yet another group, standing out from the hundreds of sources which supplied no more than one or two reports, but trailing significantly behind those already listed: Ostend, Brandenburg, Brunswick, Eger, Frankfurt, Hessen, Linz, Mainz, Münster, Speyer, Stettin, Toruń, Rouen, Lyon, the army of the king of France (only during the Huguenot wars of 1621–22 and 1628), Genoa and Constantinople. Thus the core of Verhoeven’s news network was not made up of nearby political and economic centres, shading out towards the fringes, but of a ‘skeleton’ of great European centres concentrated on the main international postal routes, the body being fleshed out with occasional reports obtained through the lesser local networks of each of these centres (Map 2).

None of the remaining 368 towns and provinces which provided only occasional reports were of great significance to Verhoeven’s output as a whole, but they demonstrate the outer limits of his information network, in terms of distance, density and local detail. Reports datelined from places outside Europe all originated either within the Spanish Monarchy or with missionary priests. Several extra-European reports were, however, received mediately, for instance news from Syria and Persia in letters from Venice or Constantinople, or in one case from Lisbon, and in these cases the news clearly followed the routes of international commerce.¹ News from Sallee reported via Dunkirk likewise

¹ News from Syria, Damascus, Constantinople and Venice, forwarded from Lisbon on 4 June, in NT 1622 101 (8 July), headlined Nieuwe Tijdinghe wt de Indiaensche Zee (New Tidings from the Indian Ocean).