On 29 April 1747, the Amsterdam burgher Jan de Boer (1694–1764) wrote in his diary about a report from Veere in Zeeland that he had read in his local newspaper. It stated that the city council had responded to a burgher revolt by promising to nominate Willem Friso, stadholder of Friesland, Groningen, Gelderland and Drenthe, for the stadholdership of Zeeland. It was a striking decision, given that the provinces of Zeeland and Holland had been without a stadholder since the death of William III in 1702. For decades the local élite had managed to retain the reins of power, enjoying the ease of protecting its local and provincial interests without the interference of a stadholder – an office with an inherent bias towards the concerns of central government. Yet in 1747 the tide was evidently turning.

The report in the *Amsterdamsche Courant* must have reached a good many other readers, but Jan de Boer was one of the few to document having read it. The report from Veere was the first in a long line of entries about his reading that De Boer made in his diary from 1747 to 1758, and his daily account therefore provides a remarkably detailed picture of an eighteenth-century reader of printed news. Much has been written about the production of topical publications such as newspapers or pamphlets, but little is known about their consumption; sources are few and far between. What news publications were read in the eighteenth century, how did readers obtain them, and what did they do with them? Jan de Boer’s diary will enable us to answer these questions in this chapter, at least for one eighteenth-century reader.

Reading was not the only way in which De Boer kept himself informed about events in the world around him. He supplemented his daily

---

1 The ‘news’ discussed in this chapter, as in most studies of this kind, will generally be confined to what Dooley calls ‘political information’ in his editorial comments on a collection of articles on the news media. B. Dooley and S. A. Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001).
jottings with what he learnt from ‘aural and eyewitness testimony’, as he called it himself. His diary therefore provides a good opportunity to place his daily relationship with the printed word in a wider context of communication. What were the channels through which news reached people in the eighteenth century, what news was disseminated by aural, written and printed means, and how did these various media relate to one another? The present chapter will explore these issues, on the basis of Jan de Boer’s sources of information for two specific years.

The diary on which Jan de Boer embarked in 1747 grew into a five-volume manuscript that he entitled *Chronologische historie*.

Unlike the diarists discussed in the previous chapters, Jan de Boer seldom wrote about his own everyday activities, focusing instead on the political events of his day. He filled his diary with newspapers and other news media, often quite literally since he added countless copies of newspapers to his text, revealing his patterns of reading in a way that rarely features in reading research. Even so, certain aspects of De Boer’s reading behaviour remain obscure. His diary tells us little about the religious, historical or literary books that he read, for instance, besides the news media, nor does it give us much concrete information about De Boer’s reading habits. What is more, aside from the diary itself, we know little about the uses to which De Boer applied his writing skills. For these reasons, the present chapter will not include an account of the way in which De Boer used the spoken, written and printed word in everyday life; instead, the primary theme will be his reception of news through conversations, written texts and printed publications.

---

2 KB, mss 71 A 8–12. The full title of the first volume is as follows: *Chronologische historie van alle hetgeene is voorgevallen bij de komste van Willem Karel Hendrik Friso, prince van Oranje etc. Alsmede het geen dat er is voorgevallen onder het plunderen der pachtershuijzen en verdere revolutie tot Amsterdam in ao. 1747 en 1748. Waarin gevonden worden alle de gedruckte papiere, die tot de gewigtigste zaken nodig zijn, alle de praterijen en discoursen dewelke in die tijt onder de luijden waren; en verder al het gepasseerde in Amsterdam. Alles door oor-, en ooggetuijgenisse nauuwkeurig waargenomen door den schrijver dezes, Jan de Boer in Amsterdam. Journaelscher wijze geschreven door den autheur in ao. 1747 en 1748.* (‘Chronological history of all that took place regarding the advent of Willem Karel Hendrik Friso, Prince of Orange etc., and what took place regarding the plunder of tax-collectors’ houses and the subsequent revolution in Amsterdam in the years 1747 and 1748. In which will be found all the printed papers required to comprehend the most important matters, all the rumours and debates that were current among the people, and for the rest all the events that took place in Amsterdam. All such matters observed meticulously by the present author, Jan de Boer in Amsterdam, through aural and eyewitness testimony. Written in the form of a journal in the years 1747 and 1748.)