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# MICROHISTORIES OF LONG-DISTANCE INFORMATION: SPACE, MOVEMENT AND AGENCY IN THE EARLY MODERN NEWS*

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In November 1617, on the eve of the Thirty Years War, the Spanish and Venetian fleets clashed in the southern Adriatic Sea. Inconclusively fought at sea and out of view, the battle prompted a flurry of antithetical reports in manuscript and print. Both sides claimed victory in official announcements, printed newsbooks and even massive thanksgiving ceremonies. What is more, contradictory accounts flourished in writing and in rumour inside each camp and throughout the social scale. In Venice, the news sparked quarrels in a friary and a tussle in a shop. In the words of a contemporary political observer and possibly one of the battle's earliest reporters, information fuelled political discussion among 'barbers and the humblest artisans in their workshops'.[1] The echo of the battle resonated far, over long geographical distances and across religious and political boundaries that made even small journeys seem very extensive; it reached not just Venice, Naples and Spain, but also Dubrovnik and England, the Ottoman Balkans and Istanbul, and in every place it reverberated differently. The local mobilized the global and gained significance from it. Just as mounting hostilities were engulfing the continent of Europe, many thought that the confrontation played a strategic macro-regional role extending well beyond the shores of the Adriatic. Meanwhile, a pamphlet printed in Italy listed the clash alongside other examples of Spanish prevarication, including atrocities in Mexico — for this purpose the author excerpted, and then for the first time translated into Italian, Bartolomé de Las Casas' *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.

Why did the news of a relatively minor skirmish travel so far, and how did it change so radically along the way? The authorities' manipulation of military

* This article is dedicated to the memory of Raul Merzario (1946–2005), teacher and microhistorian. For their numerous comments and suggestions, I am very grateful to Ilaria Favretto, John-Paul Ghobrial, Carlo Ginzburg, Kat Hill and Mario Infelise; for specific help, I wish to thank Henry Ettinghausen and Antonio Castillo Gomez. This article is made open access with funding support from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme (grant agreement no. 638578).

[1] Ludovico Zuccolo, 'Della ragion di stato' (1621), in Benedetto Croce and Santino Caramella, *Politici e moralisti del Seicento: Strada, Zuccolo, Settala, Accetto, Brignole Sale, Malvezzi* (Bari, 1930), 25; and see below, 200–207.

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information is hardly surprising, but what role did other people play in its circulation? Why the tussles? Like trade or migration, information is an essential element of global history, both a means and an effect of contacts among distant regions and peoples.[2] Yet a macro approach struggles to explain how information worked on the ground. Quantifying the production of early modern printed periodicals, for example, will trace the long-term thickening and accelerating of grand flows of distribution, but not who participated or how they treated information and why. By contrast, microhistory maximizes the variety of our sources to study how the news travelled as far as it did, why it came to mutate in the process, thanks to whose agency, and with what impact. Several microhistories of information are possible, as I show. In this article I trace how the reports of one event moved across distances that were vast in geographical and/or cultural terms, in the Mediterranean and beyond.[3] Analysed in microscopic detail, the movement of information reveals itself as a transformational process compounded of intensely localized and socially defined activities, by a wide range of people who shaped the news as they relayed it through places that were at once specific and connected. Information was both global and local: its circulation made long distances small, but every small step could make for huge transformations.

This view adds complexity to our sense of global contacts more generally. Intense criticism has recently focused on (some) global historians' tendency to emphasize, first, the mobility of minorities over the majority's stability, and secondly, encounters and exchanges at the expense of conflicts.[4] By locating global movement simultaneously over long distances and in specific places, we remind ourselves that the news invited competition as much as exchange and that the world was becoming at the same time both more connected and also more ridden with conflict. Information divided people as much as it brought them together, and flows of resources saw unequal degrees of participation. Like the other contributors to this collection, I hope to rethink large-scale, global phenomena by, as John-Paul Ghobrial's introduction underlines, contextualizing them precisely in small spaces. Recent works have already established themselves as models of global microhistory,

[2] See Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, 1996), 2, 93, 124–5.

[3] Guillaume Calafat's contribution to this volume, 'Jurisdictional Pluralism in a Litigious Sea (1590–1630): Hard Cases, Multi-Sited Trials and Legal Enforcement between North Africa and Italy', reminds us that the Mediterranean was punctuated by legal differences that made neighbouring places culturally very distant from each other.

[4] See Jeremy Adelman *et al.*, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, xiii, 1 (2018), 1–21.

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whether by following individuals who moved across borders,[5] or by reconstructing networks that spanned oceans.[6] Global histories of science and material culture have described the circulation of knowledge and artefacts as transformative processes combining multiple sites of production and re-elaboration best captured through a micro-approach.[7] Just as a ewer that was probably made in Flanders could then be decorated in Egypt to be sold in Italy where rich buyers had it further inscribed, so news could be manipulated and enriched (or impoverished) in successive steps on sometimes circular trajectories.[8] In proposing a microhistory of long-distance information I bear all these models in mind to focus on both individuals and authorities, while also investigating their own more or less extensive networks of other informers, and the use they all made of a variety of means for both face-to-face and impersonal communication. By restricting focus, I increase the variety of my sources, and in this way I hope to enhance our sense of context and to widen the framework of historical explanation to include social, political and cultural elements as well as the materiality of information. This breadth of sources and approaches is what makes microhistory history on the *large* scale.[9] I concentrate on the case of the news described at the beginning of this article, but this has broader significance because it can only be

[5] For an early example, see Jonathan Spence, *The Question of Hu* (New York, 1988); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (London, 2007); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Hanover, NH, 2011); John-Paul Ghobrial, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory', *Past and Present*, no. 222 (Feb. 2014).

[6] Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven and London, 2009); and Francesca Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?' *California Italian Studies*, ii (2011).

[7] See Sarah Easterby-Smith's contribution to this volume, 'Recalcitrant Seeds: Material Culture and the Global History of Science'; and more generally Paula Findlen and Pamela H. Smith (eds.), *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science and Art in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2002); Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke, 2007); Simon Schaffer *et al.* (eds.), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, Mass., 2009). On the history of material culture, see Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds.), *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London, 2016).

[8] Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London, 2006), 310.

[9] Filippo de Vivo, 'Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale', *Cultural and Social History*, vii (2010).

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understood by reference to the wider forces at play, from economic competition to religious differences to structural inequalities, and because in turn, it throws new light on the prevailing forms of information exchange and so on information history more generally. The point of Jacques Revel's call for combining different scales of analysis is not to populate macro-historical models, but to rethink general explanations through specific cases.[10] I come back to the significance of my case in section III below, but I want to stress that, methodologically, there is no contradiction between microhistory and the study of cases, unless one sees cases as merely examinations of general theories in particular contexts.[11] Surely cases may be used not just to verify, but also to correct general interpretations and, if necessary, to propose new ones.

## I

Over the last generation, some of our time's most momentous concerns have transformed the historical study of information in two seemingly opposite directions: the communicational practices that spread the news across specifically located societies; and the media that increasingly enabled it to travel over long distances and across continents. On the one hand, influenced by our own digital revolution, many historians have responded to Robert Darnton's call of twenty-five years ago, to move from the history of the book to the history of communication.[12] They have identified the defining feature of early modern news not in the new technology of print, but in the interaction of print with other modes of communication: scribal, visual and oral, including songs and objects.[13] And they have sought to contextualize

[10] As well as the classic Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996), I recommend Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel (eds.), *Penser par cas* (Paris, 2005); see also Antonella Romano and Silvia Sebastiani, 'Tentare la storia: spazi e scale di un'esperienza'; and Francesca Trivellato, 'Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory', both in Antonella Romano and Silvia Sebastiani (eds.), *La forza delle incertezze: Dialoghi storiografici con Jacques Revel* (Bologna, 2016).

[11] As Jan de Vries does in his contribution to this volume: Jan de Vries, 'Playing with Scales: The Global and the Micro, the Macro and the Nano'.

[12] Robert Darnton, ' "La France, ton café fout le camp!" De l'histoire du livre à l'histoire de la communication', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, c (1993); and Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Revolutionary France* (London, 1996), 169–80.

[13] See on manuscript, Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993); on orality, Thomas V. Cohen and Lesley K. Twomey (eds.), *Spoken Word and Social Practice: Orality in Europe (1400–1700)* (Leiden and Boston, 2015); on singing, Massimo Rospocher and Rosa Salzberg, 'Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication', *Cultural and Social History*, ix

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information to understand the diverse human activities through which people received, processed and experienced the news across specifically located societies.[14] In this approach, passive access to the media is less important than communication as a meaningful form of human intelligence and action. Whatever one thinks of Habermas's model of the public sphere, it is undeniable that the events of 1989 drew huge attention to his emphasis on the political potential of communication.[15]

On the other hand, the global turn in history has given new prominence to the old study of communications in the plural as studied by Marshall McLuhan and especially Harold Innis.[16] Between 1400 and 1800 old and new means increasingly facilitated the long-distance transportation of messages: merchant letters circulated along expanding trade routes;[17] diplomatic correspondence grew in regularity with the establishment of stable

(2012), 9–26; on objects, Stefan Hanss, *Die materielle Kultur der Seeschlacht von Lepanto (1571): Materialität, Medialität und die historische Produktion eines Ereignisses* (Würzburg, 2017); for a synoptic approach to genres, see Barbara J. Shapiro, *Political Communication and Political Culture in England, 1558–1688* (Stanford, 2012).

[14] Antonio Castillo Gómez, *Escrituras y Escribientes: Prácticas de la cultura escrita en una ciudad del Renacimiento (Alcalà de Henares)* (Las Palmas, 1997); Robert Darnton, 'An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *American Historical Review*, cv (2000); Pierangelo Bellettini, Rosaria Campioni and Zita Zanardi (eds.), *Una città in piazza: Comunicazione e vita quotidiana a Bologna tra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna, 2000); Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007).

[15] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, 1989); for a critical historical overview, see Massimo Rospocher (ed.), *Beyond the Public Sphere: Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe* (Bologna and Berlin, 2012). For different approaches, see Andreas Gestrich, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit: Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1994); Rudolf Schlögl (ed.), *Interaktion und Herrschaft: Die Politik der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt* (Konstanz, 2004).

[16] Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto, 1950); Marshall McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (London, 1962); Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1996–8).

[17] Pierre Jeannin, 'La diffusion de l'information', in Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Fiere e mercati nella integrazione delle economie europee, secc. XIII–XVIII* (Florence, 2001); Georg Christ, 'A Newsletter in 1419? Antonio Morosini's Chronicle in the Light of Commercial Correspondence between Venice and Alexandria', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, xx (2005); Silvia Marzagalli, 'La circulation de l'information, révélateur des modalités de fonctionnement propres aux réseaux commerciaux d'Ancien Régime', *Rives nord-méditerranéennes*, xxvii (2007).

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embassies;[18] professionals began writing regular manuscript newsletters for fee-paying elites throughout Europe;[19] and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the periodical press sold at diminishing prices for widening publics.[20] Global empires, trading companies and missionary orders attracted and redirected information from and to distant parts of the world.[21] Meanwhile a series of infrastructural improvements in the organization of postal relays increased the speed and reliability of the transportation of letters and newsletters.[22] Such developments made news-readers aware of global

[18] Johann Petitjean, *L'Intelligence des choses: une histoire de l'information entre Italie et Méditerranée (XVI^e–XVII^e siècles)* (Rome, 2013); Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350–1520* (Oxford, 2015); Filippo de Vivo, 'Archival Intelligence: Diplomatic Correspondence, Information Overload, and Information Management in Italy, 1450–1650', in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Proceedings of the British Academy, ccii, Oxford, 2018).

[19] François Moureau, *Répertoire des nouvelles à la main: Dictionnaire de la presse manuscrite clandestine XVIII^e siècle* (Paris and Oxford, 1999); Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: Alle origini della pubblica informazione (secoli XVI e XVII)* (Bari, 2002); Zsuzsa Barbarics and Renate Pieper, 'Handwritten Newsletters as a Means of Communication in Early Modern Europe', in Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (eds.), *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400–1700* (Cambridge, 2007); Paola Molino, 'Connected News: German *Zeitungen* and Italian *Avvisi* in the Fugger Collection (1568–1604)', *Media History*, xxii (2016).

[20] Interesting transnational cases in John J. McCusker and Cora Gravesteijn, *The Beginnings of Commercial and Financial Journalism: The Commodity Price Currents, Exchange Rate Currents and Money Currents of Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam, 1991); and Marion Brétéché, *Les compagnons de Mercure: journalisme et politique dans l'Europe de Louis XIV* (Ceyzérieu, 2015).

[21] Michiel van Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic: Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil* (Philadelphia, 2016); Adrien Delmas, *Les Voyages de l'écrit: culture écrite et expansion européenne à l'époque moderne: essais sur la Compagnie Hollandaise des Indes Orientales* (Paris, 2013). For a different take: Arndt Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire: Spanish Colonial Rule and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berlin, 2016); and Cornel Zwierlein, *Imperial Unknowns: The French and British in the Mediterranean, 1650–1750* (Cambridge, 2016). On missionary orders: Markus Friedrich, *Der lange Arm Roms? Globale Verwaltung und Kommunikation im Jesuitenorden, 1540–1773* (Frankfurt, 2011). For earlier periods, see the comments by Hilde De Weerdt, Catherine Holmes and John Watts, 'Politics, *c.*1000–1500: Mediation and Communication', in the last supplement of *Past and Present*, Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen (eds.), *The Global Middle Ages* (Past and Present Supplement no. 13, Oxford, 2018), 238, 13.

[22] Wolfgang Behringer, *Im Zeichen Des Merkur: Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2003). A parallel history could be written for the

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connectedness and, in the words of a recent synthesis, helped the world come to know about itself.[23]

These historiographical transformations imply different geographical choices. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians studied the national press or postal system, often in a competitive mood to assess which state had these first.[24] Against this approach, historians of communication have restricted their focus to gain informational complexity and social depth: through archival excavations, they assess the ability of information less to cover countries than to pervade richly reconstructed places, cities or even squares. This is no trumpeting of local achievements. Teachings drawn from case studies produced models for comparison, as with Darnton's influential communication circuit.[25] In turn, even before the calls for decentring European history, the attention to communicational variety drew from the anthropology of societies where literacy was not prevalent.[26] Nevertheless, many of these studies have tended to neglect the long-distance movement of news: not to ignore it, but to take it for granted. By contrast, the turn to the global prompts us to look beyond places or even nations, to news moving over long distances and across empires, seas or continents.

This is an exciting challenge — and one which calls for a microhistorical approach. This may seem paradoxical.[27] Of course we could study long-distance information media on a macro-scale, because printed gazettes and newspapers lend themselves to the digital collection of large amounts of data

Ottoman empire: see Colin Heywood, 'The Ottoman Menzilhane and Ulak System in Rumeli in the Eighteenth Century', in *Writing Ottoman History: Documents and Interpretations* (Aldershot, 2002).

[23] Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven and London, 2014); Brendan Dooley, *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham and Burlington, 2010).

[24] Joad Raymond, 'The History of Newspapers and the History of Journalism: Two Disciplines or One?', *Media History*, v (1999), 223–32; and for Italy, Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, vi–vii; for communications, see Behringer, 'Introduction: Communication in Historiography', *German History*, xxiv (2006).

[25] Robert Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, cxi (1982), 65–83.

[26] The influence of Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977) was particularly prominent with medieval historians such as Armando Petrucci and Michael Clanchy; see Pierre Chastang, 'L'Archéologie du texte médiéval: autour de travaux récents sur l'écrit au Moyen Age', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, lxiii (2008).

[27] Which is why there are hesitations and disagreements in Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (eds.), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 5, 12, 152–3, 512 ff.

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over long periods.[28] Ideally, quantifying headings, size, dates and so on, makes it possible to compare the capacity of different centres for attracting or disseminating news, and to assess shifts in the speed and regularity of periodicals. But this approach entails two blindspots. One is geographical, because the existence of large bodies of printed periodicals tends to privilege some areas over others. In Andrew Pettegree's recent synthesis — admirably including the oral reception of news, but essentially viewing the rise of the press as a marker of modernity in line with German *Pressegeschichte* — the 'world' that came to know about itself is reduced to western and increasingly north-western Europe.[29] Others have gone as far as stating that mastery of information technologies is a reason for the rise of the West, thus essentially substituting the nationalism of old information histories with ethnocentric modernization theory.[30] We should heed Lara Putnam's warning about the flattening effect of massive data searches, which privilege English-language sources and gloss over geo-social and linguistic differences.[31] In some countries, regular newsletters were mostly manuscript, in others entire series of printed periodicals are attested by only one preserved exemplar.[32] The other blindspot is social. The history of the media investigates technologies crossing vast spaces, but leaves little room for the people who participated in the exchange at either end and along the way, not to mention those who did not. Insofar as they do consider actors, historians of the media tend to focus on producers, whether news-writers or publishers — once again recalling the

[28] An excellent recent work applies quantitative analysis to data gathered from the Fugger collection of 16,000 newsletters, 1568–1604: Katrin Keller and Paola Molino, *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext: Zeitungssammlungen im Alten Reich und in Italien* (Wien, 2015).

[29] Pettegree, *Invention of News*; for a critical discussion of *Pressegeschichte*, see Keller and Molino, *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext*, ch. 1.

[30] Jeremy Black, *The Power of Knowledge: How Information and Technology Made the Modern World* (New Haven and London, 2014).

[31] Lara Putnam, 'The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast', *American Historical Review*, cxxi (2016) — this is particularly detrimental for cultures that remained largely manuscript into the nineteenth century, such as Arabic; see Ghobrial's point in the introduction to this volume, 'Seeing the World like a Microhistorian', 7. For very interesting methodological considerations on digital research, see Julia Laite, 'The Emmet's Inch: Small History in a Digital Age', *Journal of Social History* (forthcoming 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shy118> (accessed 10 July 2019).

[32] Carmen Espejo and Francisco Baena, 'A Critique of Periodicity in Early Modern Journalism: The First Spanish Serial Gazette. Gazeta de Roma in Valencia (1618–1620), *European Review*, xxiii (2015).

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traditional history of information as proto-journalism. Instead, they merely assume diffusion and reception. But needless to say, we can only write a history of information as truly an element of global knowledge if we consider the people who read or heard about the news.

Microhistory enables us to limit these blindspots and combine the two approaches of the study of local communication practices and long-distance media. One approach, which I adopt in this article, is to follow the movement of news concerning a specific event, to uncover a variety of means of information and a variety of experiences; and to understand both the circulation of ideas and the material medium and physical contact that enabled it. Others have done the same before.[33] Although they have not all elaborated on the microhistorical approach involved, the method recalls the exercise indicated in a foundational piece by Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, namely to follow a name through archives.[34] Other experiments are possible to reconcile the local and global, for example to study the functions of particular urban spaces as 'resonating boxes' for information originating from far away;[35] the networks of well-connected individuals or groups drawing information from relatives, partners or agents;[36] or the activities of single collectors of both local and distant news.[37] In all these cases, the reduction in focus makes it possible

[33] Hans Medick, 'Historical Event and Contemporary Experience: The Capture and Destruction of Magdeburg in 1631', *History Workshop Journal*, lii (2001); Margaret Meserve, 'News from Negroponte: Politics, Popular Opinion and Information Exchange in the First Decade of the Italian Press', *Renaissance Quarterly*, lix (2006); other examples below, 208–209. Sonja Shultheiss-Heinz, 'Contemporaneity in 1672–1679: The Paris Gazette, the London Gazette and the *Teutsche Kriegs-Kurier*', in Dooley, *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity*.

[34] Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, 'Il nome e il come: scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico', *Quaderni storici*, xl (1979).

[35] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 6; and Daniel Bellingradt, 'The Early Modern City as a Resonating Box: Media, the Public Sphere and the Urban Space of the Holy Roman Empire, Cologne and Hamburg *c.*1700', *Journal of Early Modern History*, xvi (2012).

[36] Paul Arblaster, *Antwerp and the World: Richard Verstegan and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation* (Leuven, 2004); John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford, 2013); Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015).

[37] Brendan Dooley, *Morandi's Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics* (Princeton, 2002); Matthew Lundin, *Paper Memory: A Sixteenth-Century Townsman Writes His World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); Tom Hamilton, *Pierre de L'Estoile and His World in the Wars of Religion* (Oxford, 2017).

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to capture both local and long-distance exchanges, the transmission as well as the manipulation of messages, and the human as much as the technological element.

Microhistory entails specific advantages for the history of information. Two of these stem from the close engagement with a wide variety, not just a great number, of sources — a point emphasized by Giovanni Levi in his contribution to this collection. Instead of extensively gathering homogeneous data from the media alone, restricting our focus enables us to read newsletters and gazettes against other sources and to cross-examine different archives. A history of the media based on internal evidence alone tells us nothing about the motives of news-writers or publishers, whom media historians presuppose to be free actors attempting to maximize profit in a competitive market. But by considering personal or judicial sources, we discover that most professionals were clients of powerful figures and that, before 1700, many printers too depended on patronage for survival.[38] Multiplying our sources, we gain a sense of agency in information processes. This does not just add human flesh to the history of media; it also affects our understanding of content. Archival evidence may show that an innocent-looking piece of news reported in one place originated as a planted leak in another. For example, prior to the 1570 invasion of Cyprus, newsletters from Venice informed the Fuggers in Augsburg that the Ottomans were planning an attack on Spain; the news derived from intelligence sent by the Venetian ambassador — but in fact research on Ottoman sources reveals that he was unwittingly repeating deliberately misleading information sown by Ottoman double agents.[39] Microhistory can reveal bias and show the difference between news and fake news.

A second advantage of restricting focus relates to the uses of information. Evidence about these can be gathered for example by more intensely concentrating on some collections to study marginalia or the ways in which readers assembled or organized those collections.[40] Or it can be gathered from other

[38] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 80–5; for a spectacular case of business failure and dependence on patronage, Stéphane Haffemayer, *L'information dans la France du XVII^e siècle: La Gazette de Renaudot de 1647 à 1663* (Paris, 2002).

[39] Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 8949, fols. 107^r and 107^v, 112^v accessed online at <http://fuggerzeitungen.univie.ac.at/faksimiles/1569?page=2> (accessed 18 June 2019). Emrah Safa Gürkan, 'Desinformación y rumores en Estambul en el comienzo de la guerra de Chipre (1569–1570)', in Gennaro Varriale (ed.), *Si fuera cierto? Espìas y agentes en la frontera (siglos XVI–XVII)* (Alcalà de Henares, 2018).

[40] Noah Millstone, 'Designed for Collection: Early Modern News and the Production of History', *Media History*, xxiii (2017); see also de Vivo, 'Archival Intelligence'.

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sources, such as descriptions, chronicles, or trial records that tell us about the people who had access to information and about their reactions. It was by studying Menocchio's books against his trial records that Ginzburg set a milestone in the history of reading as a creative activity.[41] In Venice, moles' reports describe who read newsletters, where, and sometimes what they commented.[42] Focusing on a single diary spanning thirty-seven years, an economic historian and pioneer historian of information insisted on the commercial value of news in determining prices and investments.[43] Responding to a less impersonal view of the market — a view itself closely connected to microhistory[44] — more recent historians have underlined the uncertainties of and unequal access to information. As important as the development of information technologies was the know-how (both local and global) of investors who took decisions on the basis not only of rational calculus but also of personal, social and institutional ties.[45]

As the last two paragraphs argue, sources enable microhistorians to gain a richer sense of context and so to nuance understanding of how information worked in practice. But microhistory does not just gain greater granularity. A final advantage concerns the conceptualization of historical phenomena themselves. Just as microhistory was originally inspired to challenge the stereotypes of modernization theory, so the microhistory of global information overcomes the technological determinism of media history.[46] A methodological leap typical of microhistory and resulting from its close dialogue with the social sciences consists in historicizing a category to understand its

[41] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London, 1980).

[42] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, ch. 3.

[43] Pierre Sardella, *Nouvelles et spéculations à Venise au débuts du XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1947); see also Michel Morineau, *Incroyables gazettes et fabuleux métaux: les retours des trésors américains d'après les gazettes hollandaises* (Cambridge and Paris, 1984).

[44] Giovanni Levi, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist* (Chicago, 1988). In *Centro e periferia di uno stato assoluto: Tre saggi su Piemonte e Liguria in età moderna* (Turin, 1985), Levi underlined the role of unequal information as well as personal circumstances in determining early modern landed investments.

[45] Wolfgang Kaiser and Biagio Salvemini (eds.), 'Informazioni e scelte economiche', special issue of *Quaderni storici*, cxxiv (2007); Anne L. Murphy, *The Origins of English Financial Markets: Investment and Speculation before the South Sea Bubble* (Cambridge, 2009); Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 153–93.

[46] Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991); Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It', *Critical Inquiry*, xx (1993); Maurizio Gribaudi, 'Échelle, pertinence, configuration', in Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles*.

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construction as resulting from social processes that themselves require analysis — as with Simona Cerutti's work on citizenship, for example.[47] When it comes to information, media histories essentially adopt a diffusionist model to understand the news as prepackaged goods, distributed in linear processes with varying speed and quantity but without changing. By privileging the ability of technologies to fix messages for quick transmission, media historians have thus shifted away from Braudel's 'tyranny of distance', to the 'demise of distance', in line with a vision of modernity dominated by the acceleration of time and the compression of space.[48] But we need to ask how movement affected information, ideas, knowledge: what distance *did*. As I hope to demonstrate in the second part of this article, microhistory highlights variations, accretions and manipulations, to understand information as unstable and as constructed in the process of moving. This in turn allows us to understand space less as an obstacle to overcome than as itself a transformative factor.

## II

Different scales must be combined. Before turning to the microhistory of the news of the 1617 Adriatic battle from which we started, we need to consider its broader, or macro, context, extending to the Mediterranean and Europe and reaching back in the medium and long terms. Claimed by Venice as a sovereign dominion, the 'gulf of Venice' — as it was labelled in most contemporary maps (see Plates 1 and 2) — was for centuries both an unstable frontier and a channel for exchange. In the sixteenth century competition grew, with direct trade between papal Ancona and Ragusa, but in the 1590s Venice established a free port at Split welcoming Muslims, Jews and Christians. The project, supported by the Ottomans and proposed by Portuguese-born Jewish merchant Daniel Rodriga, was sustained by a global vision for reviving east–west trade

[47] Jacques Revel, 'Microanalyse et construction du social', in Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles*; and see also Simona Cerutti, *Giustizia sommaria: Pratiche e ideali di giustizia in una società di Ancien Régime (Torino, XVIII Secolo)* (Milan, 2003). As these publications show, De Vries's idea of an 'animus' in microhistory against 'social science history and especially economic history' is based on a selective view of microhistory, De Vries, 'Playing with Scales'; see also Trivellato, 'Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory', in Romano and Sebastiani (eds.), *La forza delle incertezze*.

[48] John J. McCusker, 'The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World', *American Historical Review*, cx (2005); see Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (Chicago, 2015).

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against growing Atlantic routes.[49] But regional difficulties undermined it. While Venice was committed to protecting navigation, the threat of piracy persisted. The Uskoks, a refugee population who had fled Ottoman advance and now guarded some of the disputed borderland between Habsburgs and Ottomans, raided both Muslim and Christian convoys from their coastal fortresses in modern-day Croatia.[50] In 1615–17, partly with Dutch ships and men arriving via the Adriatic, Venice opened war on the Uskoks' overlord, the archduke of Inner Austria, who as Emperor Ferdinand II would soon become a driving force in the Thirty Years War.[51] His Spanish cousin, the king of Spain, did not enter into formal hostilities with Venice, but the duke of Osuna, bellicose Spanish viceroy of Naples and a prominent member of Madrid's war faction, repeatedly attacked Venetian galleys, partly with Ragusan intelligence.[52] In 1617–18 this growing entanglement risked having serious geopolitical consequences. Had the Spanish secured control of the Adriatic, they could have turned it into a corridor to central Europe, a strategic alternative to the route that cut across the Alps — and this just as general war was about to break out.[53] Unsurprisingly, the authorities on all sides attached huge importance to the event. But so too did very many other people.

## *Spin, secrecy and publicity*

On 19 November 1617, after months of mounting hostilities, the Venetian fleet surprised a smaller Spanish squadron by the bay of Santa Croce in southern Dalmatia. Heavy cannon fire broke out, but no on-board attack followed and, despite numerical inferiority, the Spanish managed to escape and reach their port in Apulia.[54] The encounter was undignified for both

[49] Renzo Paci, *La 'Scala' di Spalato e il commercio veneziano nei Balcani fra Cinque e Seicento* (Venice, 1971).

[50] Alberto Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice* (London, 1967); Catherine W. Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca and London, 1992).

[51] Paolo Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia, la casa d'Austria e gli Uscocchi*, ed. Gaetano and Luisa Cozzi (Bari, 1965).

[52] Luis M. Linde, *Don Pedro Girón, duque de Osuna: La hegemonía española en Europa a comienzos del siglo XVII* (Madrid, 2005).

[53] Osuna repeatedly tried to ship troops to Triest: Hans von Zwiedineck-Südenhorst, *Die Politik der Republik Venedig während der dreissigjährigen Krieges*, vol. i (Stuttgart, 1882), 41–7; A. B. Hinds (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers . . . Venice*, vol. xv (London, 1909), 433, 447, 551.

[54] Cesareo Fernández Duro, *El gran duque de Osuna y su marina: Jornadas contra turcos y venecianos (1602–1624)* (Madrid, 1885), 100–8; Mario Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della marina veneziana da Lepanto alla caduta della Repubblica* (Rome, 1935), 97–112.

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sides, which is no doubt one of the reasons why both soon tried to turn it into a triumph. Close observation shows that even the protagonists diverged in interpretation and detail, so as to inflate their merit or deflect responsibility. For this reason they sent reports as swiftly as possible. On 21 November, the Spanish commander Francisco de Ribera wrote to the viceroy in Naples about his *buen succeso*, a carefully chosen expression that avoided falsely claiming victory. With only fifteen vessels against fifty-nine, and despite unfavourable wind, he had suffered only a dozen casualties and forced the enemy to flee 'with shame'.[55] The Venetian admiral Lorenzo Venier sent a message as soon as he sighted the Spanish fleet, but after the battle had to wait for the passing of a storm before following up with more news — adverse weather at this time of year in fact meant that his first dispatch only reached Venice after his second.[56] On 23 November he managed to anchor at Palagruža, a rock midway between Dalmatia and Puglia, and dispatched another boat to Venice to inform the Senate that he had repelled the Spanish out of the 'Gulf'. But he also revealed details that would never make it into public reports. Just as his fleet manoeuvred into a crescent for the final blow, many officers failed to obey his order to attack. With unusual strength, he denounced his fellow patricians: 'the fault is mine, for failing to understand that I commanded men of no heart'.[57] Four days later, having reached a Venetian port with regular connections across the sea, he discovered and reported worse news: after the battle, five of his galleys sank in the storm.[58]

Those who received the reports manipulated them before passing them on: speed mattered less than the possibility for spin — and in this process, distance was less a problem than an opportunity. Proximity gave the Spanish the advantage, but Osuna waited several days before reporting to Philip III in Madrid, possibly waiting for better news. He then inflated the number of Venetian vessels by a third, omitted all Spanish casualties, and unambiguously affirmed that Ribera was now *señor* of the Adriatic. He also announced that a storm had sunk eleven Venetian galleys, rather than Venier's alleged

[55] Ribera to Osuna, 21 Nov. 1617, in Marquès de Pidal, Marquès de Miraflores and Miguel Salvá (eds.), *Coleccion de documentos inéditos para la historia de Espana* (hereafter CODOIN), xlvi (Madrid, 1865), 203–4.

[56] Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Rettori*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, copy forwarded on 22 Nov. 1617, received in Venice on 4 Dec. 1617.

[57] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci dei provveditori di terra e da mar*, file 926, Dispatch from Palagruža of 23 Nov. 1617, partially published in Mocenigo, *Storia della marina veneziana*, 126–9.

[58] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci dei provveditori di terra e da mar*, file 926, Dispatch from Curzola/Korçula of 27 Nov. 1617.

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five.[59] Osuna had his reasons for twisting an indecisive encounter into victory, because he and his faction were fighting their own battle at court for aggressive foreign policy against the appeasement preferred by Spain's first minister, the duke of Lerma. Thus fake news first arose not out of self-delusion but for reasons linked with disagreement over the political strategies of far-flung empires.

In Venice, Venier's letter was slow to arrive, but the Senate relayed the news immediately, wishing to counter unfavourable accounts that were already circulating. Crucially, its communications diverged depending on the addressee. To ambassadors abroad, the Senate denounced Spanish treachery at a time when Lerma was mediating peace between Venice and the Austrians, and it announced Venier's victory as a sign of Venice's Adriatic sovereignty. But writing to coastal governors and naval commanders, the Senate gave more realistic instructions to prepare for renewed enemy attacks.[60] Meanwhile at home the government opened an enquiry into the officers' insubordination, but concealed this from larger patrician assemblies, possibly to prevent internal rifts from escalating.[61] And while hesitating between warning and reassuring its own officers, the government immediately opted for secrecy when it came to the larger public. On hearing about the battle, the governor of Spalato informed 'militias, townwellers and villagers' to prepare to defend themselves; but from Venice the Collegio, a smaller and more reserved assembly than the Senate, secretly instructed him in future to keep such news to himself and especially to avoid alarming merchants.[62]

Things changed when the authorities on both sides embarked on communication activities that exploited the urban space to target a range of publics. In Naples, the viceroy addressed in person the representatives of merchants and professionals, announcing that he had destroyed the Venetian navy and spelling out the local implications: Venice could no longer exact customs duties in the Adriatic.[63] This was part of a long-term strategy since he

[59] Osuna to Philip III, 30 Nov. 1617, in Pidal, Miraflores and Salvá (eds.), CODOIN, xlvi (Madrid, 1865), 203–7; Osuna received Ribera's letter on 25 Nov.: Francisco Quevedo, *Epistolario completo*, ed. L. Astrana (Madrid, 1946), 77. On other skilful exploitations of postal tardiness, see Pidal, Miraflores and Salvá (eds.), CODOIN, xlvi (Madrid, 1865), 569.

[60] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni segrete*, reg. 111, fos. 13 and 24–5, Dispatches of 6 Dec. and 8 Dec. 1617.

[61] *Ibid.*, fol. 14$^{v}$.

[62] ASV, *Senato*, *Rettori*, *Dispacci*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, 20 Nov. 1617; and ASV, *Collegio*, *Lettere segrete*, file 49, 9 Dec. 1617.

[63] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Residenti*, *Napoli*, file 34, 4 Dec. 1617.

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regularly appealed to the *popolo* against the hostility of the aristocracy.[64] He also ordered special thanksgiving ceremonies for the feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December, in the Jesuit church and the monastery of San Lorenzo — a religious site with official civic functions where the *popolo* met and where he had been acclaimed upon his arrival a year earlier.[65] A sermon by the viceroy's chaplain, printed the following day, made no reference to the battle but adopted a military tone, appropriate to a church he described as 'full of brave soldiers . . . with their feathers, strong lances and swords'; he elaborated on the Virgin's battle against the devil, and celebrated the king of Spain as *monarcha del Mundo*.[66] The occasion is particularly intriguing, since Osuna ordered officers, nobles and university professors to attend and swear their belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, which in those years the Spanish wanted the pope to define as dogma.[67] One could say that Osuna wanted the congregation to believe in similarly unquestioning terms in his recent victory. A procession reinforced the message by marching to the Castel Nuovo, with its massive towers and the Aragonese arch celebrating earlier triumphs, flanked on either side by military companies. More parades and fireworks were staged outside the viceroyal palace, including a sumptuous apparatus of ephemeral arches hailing Osuna as champion of the faith, conflating infidel and Venetian foes. The celebration involved a notable display of sea power since the palace faced onto the arsenal, where Osuna ordered the construction of more ships.

Meanwhile, the Venetian Senate too abandoned secrecy for official communication, both in the capital and in the territories. Governors told the representatives of local communities that the enemy had been defeated, and that the Republic would protect the safety of its subjects, their goods and their honour.[68] Such generic language was given substance when the

[64] On Osuna's problems with the *seggi*, see Rosario Villari, *Un sogno di libertà: Napoli nel declino di un impero, 1585–1648* (Milan, 2012), 89–127.

[65] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Residenti*, *Napoli*, file 34, Dispatch of 12 Dec. 1617; also in Encarnación Sánchez García, *Imprenta y cultura en la Nápoles virreinal: los signos de la presencia española* (Florence, 2007), 119–21. On San Lorenzo, see Giulio Cesare Capaccio, *Il forastiero* (Naples, 1634), 186, 412, 661, 905–6. I am grateful to Melissa Calaresu for her advice on this point.

[66] Pedro Miraval Ayllon, *Sermon predicado . . . en la solennissima fiesta que el . . . señor don Pedro Giron duque de Ossuna virrey de Napoles . . . hizo a la Inmaculada Conception de la Virgen . . . en la casa profesa de la Compania de Iesus* (Naples, 1617).

[67] Domenico Antonio Parrino, *Teatro eroico e politico* (Naples, 1770), i, 336–7; and see also Gabriel Guarino, *Representing the King's Splendour: Communication and Reception of Symbolic Forms of Power in Viceregal Naples* (Manchester, 2010), 80.

[68] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni segrete*, reg. 111, fos. 52$^{v}$–53$^{v}$, 19 Dec. 1617.

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Board of Trade convened merchants in Rialto to reassure them that the navy was patrolling the sea and to promise special escorts all the way to Corfu.[69] The governor of Spalato similarly pledged escorts north to merchants coming overland from Istanbul.[70] Again, announcements were followed by public ceremonies, when the Senate ordered a procession to the arsenal for the launch of two large galleons. Such a display of naval strength was meant for local audiences, but also to inspire reports destined abroad; a favourable news-writer commented that Venice now had a greater fleet than at the time of Lepanto.[71] In both Naples and Venice, then, the authorities tried to impose their version of the events, avoided negative details, amplified positive ones and simplified accounts to increase their effectiveness. Declarations and ceremonies inscribed the news into opposite imperial projects — Venice's sovereignty over the Adriatic as a safe corridor for trade versus Spain's leadership of Catholic Europe under the guidance of the Virgin Mary.

### *Agents and means of information*

Official declarations and ceremonies were less top-down propaganda than responses to information that circulated outside the authorities' control. A range of semi-official figures with an interest in the news had a remarkable ability to mediate it across borders. In Naples, the Ragusan merchant Giorgio/Jorge Dolisti worked as an agent of the grand duke of Tuscany, furnished ships to Osuna and belonged to a broader network of fellow-Ragusans helping the Spanish.[72] In meetings with the viceroy and in letters to Philip III's secretary in Madrid, he described the battle as a resounding victory, inflated Venetian losses and claimed merit for pointing the Spanish to the best spot on the coast.[73] As the Venetians complained repeatedly in this period, the Ragusans were spies of the Spanish.[74] But they too had their informers in Spanish territories, and across the social scale. One, in the port of Brindisi,

[69] ASV, *Senato*, *Deliberazioni segrete*, reg. 111, fo. 77, 5 Jan. 1618.

[70] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Rettori*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, 12 Dec. 1617.

[71] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome (hereafter BAV), MS Urb. Lat. 1085, fo. 507$^{v}$, Venice *avvisi* of 23 Dec. 1617; and MS Urb. Lat. 1086, fo. 23$^{v}$, Venice *avvisi* of 20 Jan. 1618; ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 704, file 4, 6 Jan. 1618.

[72] Fernández Duro, *El gran duque*, 233–4, and a selection of his letters to the grand duke in Francesco Palermo (ed.), *Narrazioni e documenti sulla storia del regno di Napoli dall'anno 1522 al 1667* (Florence, 1846). On Ragusan intelligence networks see Petitjean, *L'Intelligence des choses*, 311–79.

[73] 14 Dec. 1617, in Pidal, Miraflores and Salvá (eds.), CODOIN, xlvi (Madrid, 1865), 231–2; and ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Residenti*, *Napoli*, file 34, Dispatches of 28 Nov. and 1 Dec. 1617.

[74] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Rettori*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, 5 Dec. 1617 (governor of Kotor).

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wrote that Spanish casualties amounted to three hundred and, to corroborate his report, turned to his own expert informant or 'practitioner' (*prattico*): a shipwright who assured him that heavy damages to rudders, masts and riggings, and holes 'only two palms above the waterline' made the fleet unserviceable. The Venetian agent in Naples passed on the intelligence as 'more than 300 casualties and as many or more wounded', making the Spanish defeat 'obvious'.[75] Discrepancies increased as information travelled.

The intelligence of paid informers was compounded by the periodical newsletters or *avvisi* produced by professionals for paying subscribers. They were constantly at odds with each other. The earliest report in Venice was vague: 'rumour has it here' (*qui s'è sparsa voce*) that the Venetians had clashed with eight Spanish galleons and sunk two, 'with little damage to ours'.[76] A later newsletter reported bolder news from Naples: six Spanish galleons had been sunk.[77] On 6 December, a Roman news-writer reported news from Bari that a large Spanish fleet had been spotted off the Apulian coast; three days later he added that the Spanish had beaten the Venetians, repeating details matching Ribera's letter to Osuna.[78] Another Roman news-writer affirmed that the storm destroyed almost all the Venetian fleet.[79] In the following days, different news-writers reported wildly contrasting facts about the timing of the battle, the size of the fleets, the number of vessels sunk and the casualties. A Venetian news-writer repeated the gist of the Brindisi spy's report, though he said he obtained the news from a boat coming from that city; he toned down the casualties by a third but added that disease had spread in the port.[80] Another added colour when he affirmed that one of the Spanish galleons was so damaged that it sank while entering the harbour.[81] Thus, news-writers repeated some of the reports they received from abroad and twisted others, enriching them with news they obtained locally.

Their contradictions encouraged those who could afford it to seek more authoritative reports known at the time as *relazioni* or *relaciónes*. Longer than

[75] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Residenti*, *Napoli*, file 34, Letters from Brindisi of 29 Nov. and 13 Dec. and enclosing dispatch of 19 Dec. 1617.

[76] BAV, MS Urb. Lat. 1085, fo. 477, Venice *avviso* of 2 Dec. 1617; no mention in the *avviso* of 2 Dec. 1617 submitted to the Inquisitors of State for approval, ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 704, file 4.

[77] BAV, MS Urb. Lat. 1085, fo. 485$^{v}$, Venice *avviso* of 9 Dec. 1617.

[78] [78] BAV, MS Urb. Lat. 1085, fo. 481, Rome *avviso* of 6 Dec. 1617; and fo. 492, Rome *avviso* of 9 Dec. 1617.

[79] BAV, MS Urb. Lat. 1085, fo. 482$^{v}$, Rome *avviso* of 9 Dec. 1617.

[80] BAV, MS Urb. Lat. 1085, fo. 508, Venice *avviso* of 23 Dec. 1617.

[81] ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 704, file 4, Undated, but between 9 and 23 Dec. 1617.

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newsletters, they tended to concentrate on specific events and offer broader analysis. Some were allegedly written by eyewitnesses — the author of one, an anonymous Ragusan nobleman, claimed he saw everything from his house by the sea (his report was sold to the duke of Urbino, possibly by a Roman newswriter).[82] Authors now famous for their literary writings fashioned their image as news experts at the time. At Osuna's command, Francisco de Quevedo, then in Madrid as his agent, wrote on Italian affairs pleading for aggressive Adriatic policy, and later penned (divergent) reports of the November battle.[83] Ludovico Zuccolo, a well-known writer of political and moral treatises and an active intelligencer then teaching philosophy in Ragusa, offered a *relazione* to the duke of Urbino.[84] This may coincide with an anonymous text now in the latter's collection.[85] It claimed impartiality, set the news in a longer narrative of Venetian–Spanish rivalry, and corrected some information then circulating to conclude that the Spanish suffered greater damages, but the battle was humiliating for both sides. Whatever their opinions, the authors of *relazioni* must have regarded uncertainty less as a problem than as an opportunity for advertising their expertise and selling their services.

The microhistorical approach allows us to see printed texts not in isolation but as engaged with other forms of communication. The two newsbooks mentioned above were printed in early 1618, possibly to counter the mounting tide of contrasting reports. Like countless occasionals at the time and unlike manuscript *relazioni*, they were meant for a wide public, produced in large print-runs, in two editions in Venice, and three in Spain.[86] They presented themselves as eyewitness reports — letters by the Spanish commander

[82] BAV, Ms. Urb. Lat. 1085, file 488, Report dated 24 Nov. 1617. The Venetian agent in Naples also obtained an eyewitness report from Ragusa, dated 23 Nov. 1617 and forwarded it to Venice on 4 Dec. 1617: ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Residenti*, *Napoli*, fo. 34.

[83] Francisco Quevedo, *Obras completas*, ed. A. Fernandez-Guerra and M. Menéndez Pelayo, i (Seville, 1897), 214–16 ; and Pablo Jauralde Pou, *Francisco de Quevedo (1580–1645)* (Madrid, 1998), 333–95; on the November battle: Francisco Quevedo, *Mundo caduco*, ed. J. Biurrun Lizarazu (Pamplona, 2000), 87 and 136; and on these literary milieux in Spain, see Maria Soledad Arredondo, *Literatura y propaganda en tiempo de Quevedo: guerras y plumas contra Francia, Cataluña y Portugal* (Madrid, 2011).

[84] Bruno Nediani, 'Dieci lettere inedite di Ludovico Zuccolo ai duchi d'Urbino (1606–1621)', *Studi romagnoli*, viii (1957), 181–6; Zuccolo is the author of the quotation from which I started on political discussions in artisans' and barbers' shops.

[85] BAV, Ms. Urb. Lat. 1113, fos. 318–26.

[86] *Relación de lo que sucedió a los galeones del excelentisimo duque de Osuna* (Seville, 1618), also printed in Madrid and Malaga; and *Lettera di ragguaglio di qvello che è svccesso tra le due armate in mare* (n.p., n.d.).

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himself, Ribera, and by one undefined Venetian 'captain Alfonso'. Both affirmed their reliability with rich accounts of life aboard, climate details and locations at sea, but of course they diverged in both general interpretation and points of fact. The Spanish newsbook also associated Osuna's victory over the Venetians with Christian accomplishments over Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean. And they differed in presentation: an official letter full with royal arms and licence to publish in Spain, versus a personal letter in a bare anonymous pamphlet in Venice, without licence or publication details. In this as in other public polemics at the time, the Venetians preferred to put distance between themselves and their texts.[87]

Even when it ceased to be news, information continued to nourish publications in a variety of genres. A large publishing centre, Venice produced many pamphlets in support of Venice's Adriatic sovereignty, a literature that is now known especially because of Paolo Sarpi's contribution.[88] One advantage of the microhistorical approach is that it captures others and less known participants and places. In 1618–19 two large legal treatises mentioned the news (and referred to the newsbooks) to support opposite claims about the dominion of the Adriatic: one was published in Salamanca and in Naples; the other in Lyon in two editions by a professor of law who would soon obtain a chair in Padua.[89] Authors had obvious stakes in reporting the news. For their part, Neapolitan printers did not lie idle; if anything, in a declining industry under increasing censorship, they were bound to seek government patronage.[90] They dedicated encomiastic publications to Osuna, associating his earlier exploits in Flanders against the Dutch with those against the Venetians and the Turks now. Some of their pamphlets were then reprinted in Spain, turning news of Osuna's victories into arguments in favour of his faction.[91] Nor did the news have only textual ramifications, since it also

[87] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, ch. 6; see Valentina Nider, 'La *Relación verdadera* de Emanuel de Tordesillas y el *Mundo caduco* de Francisco de Quevedo', *La Perinola*, xviii (2014), 147.

[88] De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications of Venetian Power in the Adriatic', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lxiv (2003).

[89] Valenzuela Velazquez, *Consilia seu Iuris responsa* (Naples, 1618); and Giulio Pace, *De dominio maris Hadriatici disceptatio* (Lyon, 1619).

[90] Pasquale Lopez, *Inquisizione stampa e censura nel Regno di Napoli tra '500 e '600* (Naples, 1974), 199–245; and on publishing under Osuna's patronage, Sánchez García, *Imprenta y cultura*, 93–114; for an earlier period, see Pietro Manzi, *La tipografia napoletana nel '500*, 6 vols. (Florence, 1974).

[91] Jauralde Pou, *Francisco de Quevedo*, 368n; Augustin Redondo, 'El mundo turco a través de las relaciones de sucesos' de finales del siglo XVI y de las primeras décadas del siglo XVII: La percepción de la alteridad y su puesta en obra narrativa', in A. Paba and G.

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nourished material culture. In the wake of the battle, in circles close to the viceroyal court, Neapolitan and Flemish craftsmen collaborated to produce a series of ebony and ivory cabinets richly inlaid with maps of the Adriatic Sea dotted with ships and surrounded by portraits of kings of Naples and Spain, visually claiming the sea for the Kingdom of Naples (see Plate 1).[92]

Finally, some authors parodied the language of the news in print for satirical effect. A genre recently inaugurated by Traiano Boccalini and already popular in Europe at the time, featured historical and mythical characters gathering in Parnassus to comment on fictional and real news.[93] One, attributed at the time to Quevedo, described Venice's ignominious arrival at Parnassus: abandoned by its allies, threatened by the Austrians, humiliated by the Spanish, Venice has to seek refuge in a 'hospital' — a common polemical construction aimed at highlighting the adversary's weakness.[94] Circulated in manuscript in October, the text attracted three responses in several printed editions — a typical case of polemical inflation — published in both Italian and Spanish under various pseudonyms by the same author, Giacomo Castellani.[95] The first begins with the arrival at Parnassus of ragged Venice and triumphant Spain, but then unmasks the two characters as impostors paid by Spain and cites the battle off Santa Croce as evidence of Spain's, not Venice's, defeat.[96] The actress impersonating Spain is none other than *Donna Francesca de Quevedo*, a prostitute and a witch who

Andrés Renales (eds.), *Encuentro de civilizaciones (1500–1750): Informar, celebrar, narrar* (Alcalà de Henares, 2003), 250.

[92] Two similar desks with a very similar map of the Adriatic were produced within a few years of each other in 1619 and 1621; both are held at the Museum of the Certosa di San Martino in Naples; another one, similar in design but showing the battle of Lepanto, is in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan. For a further discussion of the genre, see Alvaro González-Palacios, 'Giovanni Battista De Curtis, Iacobo Fiamengo e lo stipo manierista napoletano', *Antologia di Belle Arti*, vi (1978).

[93] Harald Hendrix, *Traiano Boccalini fra erudizione e polemica: ricerche sulla fortuna e bibliografia critica* (Florence, 1995).

[94] Federica Cappelli, '*La República de Venecia . . .* (1617) attribuita a Francisco de Quevedo: saggio di edizione', *Rivista di filologia e letterature ispaniche*, vi (2003). On the polemical strategy, Noel Malcolm, *Reason of State, Propaganda, and the Thirty Years' War: An Unknown Translation by Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, 2007).

[95] [Giacomo Castellani], *Avviso di Parnaso . . . scritto da vn curioso nouellista spagnuolo. Con alcvne annotationi molto importanti* (Antopoli, 1618); Valerio Fulvio [Castellani], *Castigo essemplare de' calunniatori* (Antopoli, 1618); and Michele Pio [Castellani], *Allegatione per confirmare quanto si scrive nell'annotationi dell'Avviso di Parnaso al numero 57* (Antopoli, 1618).

[96] [Castellani], *Castigo essemplare de' calunniatori*, 11.

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fabricated both news and magical concotions — a humiliating denunciation of Quevedo's servile lies, and an indirect attack on Osuna, whose lover had been implicated in suspicions of witchcraft a year earlier.[97] Thus, literary imagination was coupled with social and sexual stereotypes to twist factual information into comical stories that pilloried both news specialists and their masters for the entertainment of readers familiar with the real world of information.

### *Places: geographical ramifications*

Castellani's last pamphlet gave the news a surprising global echo when it listed Osuna's incursion in the Adriatic alongside other examples of Spanish imperial tyranny around the world. To do so he quoted passages on the atrocities perpetrated against natives in Mexico from Bartolomé de Las Casas' *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* — which he later went on to translate into Italian for the first time.[98] The news had impressive ramifications indeed, well beyond the opposing parties. Printed gazettes reveal some but are subject to a staggeringly low chance of survival. None, to my knowledge, are extant for the early months of 1618, but the earliest Dutch *Corantos* from later in the year regularly relayed news from Venice, and the same goes for both earlier and later German *Zeitungen*.[99] In Frankfurt, a 1618 untitled annual bulletin collating periodical reports from many locations reported military preparations in Naples and the arrival of Dutch reinforcements in Venice, but nothing on the battle.[100] In Paris, the 1619 *Mercure de France*, covering the two previous years, assigned victory to the Venetians who, it said, gunned down three Spanish ships.[101] If we confined ourselves to printed gazettes we would know very little of the staggering multiplication of news analysed so far. And we would be blind to the information channels in areas where no gazettes were printed. This is the case, most notably, in the Ottoman empire, a third party in the Venetian–Spanish confrontation, but one where interest in the Adriatic was high. For this we need to turn to other sources.

[97] Villari, *Un sogno di libertà*, 136–7.

[98] [Castellani], *Avviso di Parnaso*, 54–6; and Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Istoria ò brevissima relatione della distruttione dell'Indie Occidentali* (Venice, 1626).

[99] Folke Dahl, *Dutch Corantos, 1618–1650: A Bibliography* (The Hague, 1946), 1; Johannes Weber, 'Strassburg 1605: The Origins of the Newspaper in Europe', *German History*, xxiv (2006). Dahl calculated that the survival rate of English corantos was 0.013 per cent.

[100] Untitled *Zeitung* printed in Frankfurt since 1615: <http://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/pageview/904381> (accessed on 18 June 2019).

[101] *Cinquiesme tome du Mercure françois . . . contenant ce qui s'est passé de memorable ez années 1617, 1618 et 1619* (Paris, 1619), 217.

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1. Interior side of an inlaid cabinet dating to 1619 showing the Adriatic Sea surrounded by cameos of kings of Spain and Naples; the external face shows a map of the globe. The cabinet, produced in the circles of the Viceroy of Naples, was part of a series and is now held at the Certosa e Museo di San Martino. By kind permission of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Polo Museale della Campania.

Diplomatic dispatches and petitions show that Ottoman authorities and merchants kept a close eye on the events. In the months before the battle they demanded redress from the Venetians for the losses incurred as a result of earlier Spanish attacks. The sultan sent an envoy to Venice, which he held responsible for failing to protect the Adriatic.[102] After the battle, diplomatic dispatches show that the Ragusan and Venetian envoys engaged in fierce discussions in Istanbul. The former, subjects of the sultan, complained of

[102]See Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Ottoman Views on Corsairs and Piracy in the Adriatic', in E. Zachariadou (ed.), *The Kapudan Pasha, His Office and His Domain* (Rethymnon, 2002), 357–70; based on Maria Pia Pedani, *I documenti turchi dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia* (Rome, 1994), 317–25; and Stephen Ortega, *Negotiating Transcultural Relations in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Ottoman–Venetian Encounters* (Farnham, 2014), 135–63.

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Venetian incursions at Santa Croce and sought the protection of their overlord. The Venetian *bailo* or ambassador used the news to demonstrate Venice's determination to protect Ottoman merchants, and pointed the finger at the Ragusans who had invited and guided the Spanish in the first place.[103] Later he encouraged the Ottomans to dispatch a large fleet in the Mediterranean, evidently hoping to divert the Spanish. The *Kapudan pasha*, or admiral of the sea, suggested a joint operation to trap the Spanish from north and south and, interestingly, asked the *bailo* to divulge information about Spanish movements so as to convince other Ottoman ministers.[104] Meanwhile, in Italy and Spain, intelligence about a possible Ottoman–Venetian alliance echoed in the secret dispatches of ambassadors and in newsletters which turned it into anti-Venetian news.[105]

Turning back to the Adriatic, we see information exhange across borders and beyond the level of the authorities. Venetian governors in Dalmatia informed their neighbouring Ottoman counterparts about Spanish maritime movements.[106] Worrying that growing hostilities at sea had for months discouraged overland convoys from Istanbul, the governor of Split said that news of the battle would bring 'trust and consolation' to the 'Turks of Bosnia' and show that Venice was serious against the Spanish.[107] Documents collected by the Venetians show that a range of Ottoman subjects were concerned about the news. In mid December, unnamed merchants who in the Italian translation of their petition defined themselves as Turkish and Muslim ('noi mercanti Turchi . . . Mussulmani') asked the doge for escorts going to Venice from the island of Olib, midway between Zadar and Istria. Rather than legal claims after the facts (of the kind merchants made in Istanbul), this request for immediate inter-religious assistance shows awareness of a fluid situation of war.[108] On the day of the battle, the inhabitants of Herceg Novi — competitors of nearby Ragusa and victims of Spanish raids in the past — sent armed squads to the coast at Santa Croce. They arrived too late, but their *aga* wrote to the Venetian governor of neighbouring Cattaro/Kotor — with which they had long had economic relations — to offer help for

[103] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Ambasciatori*, *Costantinopoli*, file 84, fos. 254$^{v}$–256$^{v}$, 26 Dec. 1617; and 269$^{v}$, 10 Jan. 1618.

[104] *Ibid.*, fos. 357$^{r}$–358$^{v}$, 24 Feb. 1618.

[105] Ortega, *Negotiating*, 161; and BAV, Urb. Lat. 1086, 91$^{v}$, *avviso* of 20 Mar. 1618.

[106] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Rettori*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, Dispatches of 16 Oct. 1617 (from Trogir), 20 Nov. and 22 Nov. 1617 (from Split), and 23 Nov. 1617 (from Kotor).

[107] *Ibid.*, Dispatch of 14 Dec. 1617 and, for the convoys, 5 Jan. 1618.

[108] *Ibid.*, Undated, sent with letter from Olib of 12 Dec. 1617.

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the future.[109] In the following days they drew up an *arz* or petition to the sultan against the Ragusans, for treacherously enabling Spanish incursions on their territories. According to the document, the Venetians protected 'the routes of the Grand Signor' and prevented Spanish attacks on Ottoman lands.[110] In mid December, two informers from Herceg Novi who signed themselves 'Xasan Chiexaia' and 'Xusain Chapilia' wrote to the Venetian governor of Cattaro to report that the Ragusans were spreading anti-Venetian news backed by a letter written aboard the Spanish navy.[111] This shows, first, that even in the absence of printed periodicals, orality and written reports combined to put forward competing news in Muslim towns just as they did in Christian ones; and secondly, that Hassan and Hussayn were reaching beyond boundaries that made even a short distance such as that between Cattaro and Herceg Novi a religious and political chasm. A macro-history of information would miss both points.

### *People: mixed reactions*

Manuscript and printed media carried information far, but in each place the news solicited mostly oral responses at different social levels. We can glimpse some through the microhistorical combination of a variety of sources. In Venice we know about the news' reception thanks to the Inquisitors of State, a magistracy who enquired about foreign spies and in the process recorded their interactions with locals.[112] Their reports show that in 1617 the city was full of rumours about Spanish movements in the Adriatic, as shops and squares multiplied the repercussions of the news. An informer overheard a conversation in the Rialto about Osuna preparing to launch an invasion.[113] Some weeks later, another denounced a Sicilian for reading out pro-Spanish newsletters in a tailor's workshop.[114] A busy harbour such as Naples would have had equally rich oral exchanges. While we have no equivalent of the Venetian records, we know that the Venetian agent there had informers from a wide social spectrum: shipwrights in the arsenal, sailors aboard the fleet, a monk on an island off the Apulian coast, an instrumentalist in the viceroyal

[109] *Ibid.*, Letter of the governor of Kotor of 23 Nov. 1617 enclosing the translation of an undated letter by the 'aga and capi' of Herceg Novi.

[110] The original *arz* was sent from Kotor on 5 Dec. 1617 and translated in Venice on receipt. The *bailo* in Istanbul used it in dealing with Ottoman ministers there. ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Ambasciatori*, *Costantinopoli*, file 84, fos. 289$^{v}$–290$^{r}$, 27 Jan. 1618.

[111] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Rettori*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, Letter of 12 Dec. 1617.

[112] De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 86–119.

[113] ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 1213, file 40, Report dated 26 Aug. 1617.

[114] ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 1213, file 37, Deposition of 8 Feb. 1618.

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palace and a servant of Osuna's secretary.[115] The diarist Francesco Zazzera, a devoted subject of the king of Spain but a critic of Osuna, described the battle as a Spanish victory but supplied contrasting details, mentioning heavy Spanish losses, and also recording rumours of impending Venetian attacks; (he also criticized the handling of Osuna's celebrations).[116] In the Adriatic itself, the Venetian governor of Curzola interrogated a range of figures who clearly had the means of knowing about maritime hostilities that might have spelled their life or death, including a shipowner, two captains and an oarsman.[117]

These sources reveal a range of reactions. A few days after the first reports reached Venice, the Inquisitors investigated a brawl in an apothecary shop: a merchant and a goldsmith came to blows with a news-writer who claimed that the Neapolitans sank most of Venice's galleys and mocked the Venetians as *braghessoni* — a dialect reference to the *Commedia dell'arte* character *Pantalone*, the old and impotent fool, often dressed as a patrician. Those present included the apothecary, a violin player, a tooth-surgeon, a hat-maker, several lawyers, and others whose profession was so lowly that it escaped notice.[118] A few weeks later, some Dominican friars fell out in the convent of San Giovanni e Paolo. One disparaged the Venetians, 'these little lords' (*questi signoretti*) who had a large navy but no soldiers and so no dominion of the Adriatic: they 'were wrong to wage war, and now [the king of Spain] will show them'. 'But if the Venetians are not lords of the sea, why did Osuna not come earlier?', one of the brethren responded. The witnesses declared that the pro-Spanish friar enjoyed showing off his 'knowledge of the world' and for this reason used to subscribe to newsletters — but he now saved money by reading other people's copies 'in the shops'. He picked the news he preferred: born in Bergamo but educated in Milan, he 'is more Spanish than Venetian, and in reading the newsletters he skips over things that are good for the Republic, and if there is something for the Spanish, he enjoys it and reports it during our conversations by the fire

[115] ASV, *Capi del Consiglio di Dieci*, *Dispacci ambasciatori e residenti*, box 19, 3 Oct. 1617; and, misfiled in *CX*, *Deliberazioni secrete*, file 29, 26 Dec. 1617.

[116] Francesco Zazzera, 'Giornali', BL, Add. MS 8688, fos. $84^{r}$–$85^{v}$ and $88^{r}$, partially published in *Archivio storico italiano*, ix (1846).

[117] ASV, *Senato*, *Dispacci*, *Rettori*, *Dalmazia*, file 17, Interrogations of 20 Nov. and 24 Nov. 1617.

[118] ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 1213, file 31, 11 Dec. 1617, Enquiry on news-writer Vincenzo Tucci.

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after supper'.[119] Orality could be directed to large publics too. In December the authorities expelled a Capuchin friar who attacked Sarpi from the pulpit and preached that the dominion of the sea belonged to God alone.[120]

If some people had a partisan attitude to the news, others were more sceptical. An example comes from the diary of a Venetian physician. He dwelt on the battle, transcribed the printed newsbook by 'capitan Alfonso' and another letter from the fleet. He believed the Venetians won and reported Spanish casualties at a staggering 1600. But he also added negative information that he clearly obtained elsewhere, including details of the officers' mutiny, and praised Spanish military discipline as better than Venetian.[121] However, he disbelieved Spanish boasts and described the duke of Osuna as *gran ciurmadore*: a charlatan who 'talks in the same way as the Spanish captain acting in the *commedia*, and says that he will conquer Venice and, what's more, that he will do so in no time at all'.[122] Thus he too commented on the news with everyday language drawn from street life. Charlatans acted to peddle their medicines, and the word *ciurmeria* meant effective lying, 'winding someone up in words' (*avvolgimento di parole*): equivalent to the Latin *circuitio* and a literal premodern version of 'spin'.[123] For its part, the Spanish captain or *Capitano spagnolo* was a stock character in *Commedia dell'arte*: vain and arrogant, his bragging bravado was as preposterous as it was laughable. The two expressions meshed in *spagnolata*, a synonym for empty boast that the diarist annotated in the margin to sum up his point.[124] Such common metaphors offered people tools to analyse information, to equate manipulation with a mask, and then to unmask it through ridicule.

This language travelled in both space and time. Perhaps conveyed by companies of actors, who criss-crossed Europe just like the news did, the same images returned in a description of the battle contained in the manuscript memoirs written years later by a Spanish travelling soldier who had served in Osuna's service, Diego Duque de Estrada. Having fought in the battle, he

[119] ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, box 1213, file 43, 7 Jan.–14 Jan. 1618, Enquiry on Fra Michele da Urgnano.

[120] ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni secrete Roma*, file 6, 29 Dec. 1617; and ASV, *Roma ordinaria*, file 40, 30 Dec. 1617; the news was reported by the Spanish ambassador on 4 Feb. 1618: Archivo General, Simancas, *Estado*, 1930, n. 5. The friar, Giacinto da Casale (1575–1627), went on to play an important role in negotiations during the Thirty Years War, see A. Koller, 'Natta, Giacinto', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiano*.

[121] Giancarlo Sivos, 'Cronaca', in Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Cod. Ital. VII.122 (8863), fos. $85^{r}$–$88^{v}$, $84^{v}$.

[122] *Ibid.*, fo. $39^{v}$.

[123] *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice, 1612).

[124] Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Cod. Ital. VII.122 (8863), fo. $39^{v}$, marginal note.

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described it in a hilarious vignette, adding precise data favourable to Spain. He recounted how the sailors shouted as the fleets manoeuvred close at night:

> They told us in their language 'Ponentine thieves! What do you want of our gulf? Just wait till daybreak! We'll shake the dust off you so that your king, poor little Philip, whom you so proudly carry on [or inside] you, comes crashing to the ground'. And we replied: 'Levantine thieves! We'll make you take off your slippers and run even if you're not on land, you liver-eating pantaloons!'[125]

Thus the battle turned into a matter for laughter thanks to a mixture of picaresque exaggeration, multi-linguistic mockery and semi-scatological insults. *Filipeto* could refer to medals carrying the emblem of the king shaken off the soldiers' uniforms, or to coins farted off their bodies, and the Venetians are satirized for their dietary habits and (again) compared to the stock character of the slipper-wearing pantaloon.

The same images returned over time, with significant twists. In a biography of Osuna written at the end of the century in Italian and soon translated into French and Dutch, Gregorio Leti — Protestant exile, prolific author, and news-writer — described the duke as a buffoonish *capitan spagnolo* who had enjoyed acting in his youth.[126] According to Leti, Osuna hoped his bravado would inspire fear in his enemies and in the people. But the point could be reversed, as Leti explained in a more general text on the use and effects of periodicals, written in 1666: 'Everyone knows that princes turn defeats into victories in order to spare the people from fear and bring it into greater affection: and so the people, so often deceived, always turns victories into defeats, forming squadrons at its pleasure and princes to its tastes'.[127] Writing after the experience of the Fronde, the revolts of Naples and Catalonia, and

[125] 'Que queréis de nuestro golfo? dejad llegar el dìa, que os sacudiremos el polvo de manera que os caiga el Filipeto de vuestro Rey, que traéis en el cuerpo'; 'Ladrones levantinos! nosotros os haremos quitar los pantuflos y correr, aunque no estéis en tierra, pantalones come-hígado'. Diego Duque de Estrada, *Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo: Vida del mismo autor*, ed. Henry Ettinghausen (Madrid, 1982), 243, and on the dating and sources of the text, 42–3. I am grateful to Henry Ettinghausen and to Antonio Castillo Gomez for helping with the translation of this text. On Spanish soldiers' autobiographical writing, see Miguel Martínez, *Front Lines: Soldier's Writing in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Philadelphia, 2016). The Spanish abbreviation of Felipe would be Felipito, so this version might be Duque's rendering — witting or unwitting — of the Italian assonance with *peto*, a fart.

[126] Gregorio Leti, *Vita di don Pietro Giron duca d'Ossuna vicerè di Napoli e di Sicilia sotto il regno di Filippo III* (Amsterdam, 1699), i, 317–19.

[127] Leti, *Dialoghi politici* (Geneva, 1666), 260.

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the English civil war, this expert practitioner of the information world knew that rulers may well spin the news, but subjects spin it back with unforeseen consequences.

## III

Following a piece of news through different archives has shown how an inconclusive battle echoed across three empires and further afield, in famous information hubs and also in areas where we still know little about the circulation of news, and among not just political insiders and professionals but also outsiders and ordinary people. The Mediterranean crossroads region, until recently neglected in the history of information, was criss-crossed by a variety of both old and new means of communication cutting through religious, political and linguistic borders.[128] Close attention to sources suggests that we need to rethink our understanding of the very nature of information. The news did not travel unchanged, but grew and altered as it moved. On the one hand, as it crossed borders, each crossing provoked further transformations because the news served rival political projects — Venice's sovereignty of the sea, Spain's leadership in Catholic Europe, Ragusa's survival between Ottomans and Spanish. On the other, transformations occurred simultaneously also inside states and empires, where each harbour, town or capital acted as a multifaceted mirror, refracting and distorting the news because competing actors circulated contradictory reports side by side. The authorities tried to control knowledge of the events through censorship and official statements; powerful individuals manipulated accounts for their factional or personal ends; professional news-writers, publishers and intelligencers turned information into a tool of trade or patron–client relations; while ordinary people, in Venetian shops or Bosnian merchant convoys, were ready to comment on the news and discern personal implications in what they read or heard. Some people took sides, others displayed a scepticism that recurred across boundaries and used similar metaphors of unmasking and ridicule for news they knew was fake. Instead of a linear diffusion of information, microhistory reveals three-dimensional ramifications across both space and social scale.

Not every ramification can be captured. It is important to recognize that even the most detailed microhistory has its limits, but these have to do less with geographical size (as is commonly thought) than with the sources

[128] For recent considerations see Petitjean, *L'Intelligence des choses*; Corey Tazzara, *The Free Port of Livorno and the Transformation of the Mediterranean World* (Oxford, 2017); and Erin Maglaque, 'The Literary Culture of the Venetian Mediterranean', *Italian Studies*, lxxiii (2018).

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themselves.[129] While Giovanni Levi systematically read all sources relating to the small town of Santena, he knew that only part had been preserved since the seventeenth century.[130] The archives for global history obviously magnify this problem. I have only been able to study Ottoman reactions to the 1617 news through scattered published translations or indirectly from Venetian sources. Greater collaboration among historians with different languages will be crucial in the future, and one hopes that research funding will help achieve this goal — starting with a comparative survey of the sources and documentary genres that may make this enterprise even thinkable. But some aspects escape most archives, in whatever language. One is the role of women. I found no record relating to the 1617 battle that mentions information exchanged by women — though we saw that the idea inspired a pamphleteer's fiction about a witch pretending to be a man, a sneer perhaps mixed with anxiety at gender reversals. All we know is that Venetian women read newsletters and listened to men reading them, and that moles on the Spanish fleet were paid via their wives in Naples, who certainly had news about the battle.[131]

Other lacunae may have to do with self-censorship, for example due to religion. We know that in Florence in the 1610s the Druze leader in exile Fakhr al-Din followed the news while planning a rebellion back in Lebanon. He spent the winter of 1617–18 as a guest of the duke of Osuna in a palace overlooking the harbour of Naples, and he took part in some of the viceroy's ceremonies.[132] He must have heard about the battle. But there seems to be a gap in the archives once he moved to Naples, and he recorded no news in the biography he part-dictated to a Muslim jurist years later, possibly because he wanted to distance himself from Christian politics.[133] Further microhistorical study may reveal more leads and possibilities, but we need to accept that even a rich combination of diverse sources will only ever reveal part of reality.

What is the broader significance of this case study? The inconclusiveness of the 1617 battle and its location on a contested borderland facilitated the proliferation of contrasting accounts. But this is far from exceptional — in

[129] On the awareness of the limitations of sources, see Trivellato, 'Is There a Future'.

[130] Levi, *Inheriting Power*.

[131] Misfiled in ASV, *CX, Deliberazioni secrete*, file 29, 26 Dec. 1617; and see also de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 114–17.

[132] The documents are in Paolo Carali (ed.), *Fakhr ad-Din II principe del Libano e la corte di toscana, 1605–1635: Studi e documenti* (Rome, 1936), 2 vols.

[133] The memoirs in Carali, 'Soggiorno di Fakhr ad-Din II al-Ma'ni in Toscana, Sicilia e Napoli e la sua visita a Malta (1613–1618)', *Annali del R. Istituto Superiore Orientale di Napoli*, viii (1936). On Fakhr and his biography, see also Nabil Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (New York, 2009), 80–93.

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fact it is largely unexceptional. Many battles prompted incredulity and disagreements about the sequence of actions or the numbers of casualties.[134] Even in the face of resounding defeats, combatants tried to claim victory for weeks after the event: during the Italian Wars, after Lepanto, in the Thirty Years War, close attention reveals that clear outcomes often emerged slowly and were at first obfuscated by contradictory accounts that fuelled uncertainty and scepticism.[135] The point is not to suggest a history of global information one news story at a time.[136] All events are to a large degree exceptions — indeed, this has long been the core of social historians' criticism of *histoire événementielle*. Microhistorians endorse that criticism — but go on to use exceptions to reveal broader phenomena. The gist of Edoardo Grendi's notion of 'normal exception' rests in sources: deviant behaviour prompts outstanding record-making, and the records can then be used to reconstruct both deviance and the norm.[137] So, what does our unexceptional exception reveal?

One way of answering is to compare the processes analysed here to the prevalent mechanisms for the circulation of information at the time. As it turns out, the notion of transformational movement captures, much better than the diffusionist model of traditional media history, the normal functioning of the principal media of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Manuscript newsletters and printed gazettes were the products of professionals situated at nodal points along postal routes, who collaborated with postmasters, innkeepers (both men and women) and stable boys to collect information from other newsletters produced at other points; they selected faraway information and enriched it with local news gathered through conversation or direct observation; and their compilations then reached other professionals who further transformed the news while reporting it. Such

[134] Ottavia Niccoli, 'The Kings of the Dead on the Battlefield of Agnadello', in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore, 1991); and John Gagné, 'Counting the Dead: Traditions of Enumeration and the Italian Wars', *Renaissance Quarterly*, lxvii (2014), 791–840.

[135] Massimo Rospocher, *Il papa guerriero: Giulio II nello spazio pubblico europeo* (Bologna, 2015); Florence Alazard, *La Bataille oubliée: Agnadel, 1509, Louis XII contre les Vénitiens* (Rennes, 2017); Stefan Hanss, *Lepanto als Ereignis: Dezentrierende Geschichte(n) der Seeschlacht von Lepanto (1571)* (Göttingen, 2017). Lepanto itself was initially seen as unclear, and the same can be said of countless battles during the Thirty Years War, see now Filippo de Vivo and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, 'La guerra dei Trent'Anni e l'informazione', special issue of *Rivista storica italiana*, cxxx (2018).

[136] To paraphrase Tonio Andrade: 'A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory', *Journal of World History*, xxi (2010), 591.

[137] Edoardo Grendi, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale', *Quaderni storici*, xxxv (1977).

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located intermediaries were crucial to long-distance communication. Information covered large distances through shorter journeys, and it changed as it moved. An analogy can be made with navigation. When possible, ships avoided long crossings and instead stopped in successive ports to embark food and sell small amounts of goods. Just as their cargo changed along sea routes, so newsletters were re-elaborated at every step of the way. This literally shaped the media, since manuscript and printed periodicals were organized into paragraphs preceded by headings indicating the origin of the news (not the location of the original event.) Successive newswriters repeated some paragraphs, dropped others, and added yet more — and it is interesting that the eighteenth-century press maintained this basic arrangement.[138] Most media theorists see writing and printing as primarily functional to 'fixing' messages.[139] But in fact, what is striking about the early modern media is how much flexibility they enabled. Before telegraphy and the steam press, the specificity of information was its mixed nature, at once located and in movement.[140]

The mixed contribution of local and distant knowledge vehicled in the prevalent media at the time had its visual counterpart, for example on the title pages of many early printed periodicals. Some displayed the flying Mercury, others foot-travellers or couriers, and the backgrounds included both medium-sized walled towns and faraway horizons. In early modern maps, specific places were inscribed into large regions and world-spaces. The ivory chart of the Kingdom of Naples and the Adriatic reproduced in Plate 1 was inlaid in a cabinet whose drawers were decorated with views of famous cities of the Spanish empire and the Mediterranean and whose opening table also showed a map of the world.[141] This later map is another typical example, which displays the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and part of the Red Sea, all surrounded by cameo bird's-eye views of harbour-cities on African, Asian and European coasts.[142] Often including information about cities' or

[138]Will Slauter, 'The Paragraph as Information Technology: How News Traveled in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, lxvii (2012).

[139]This is true of even admirable works combining sociology with history such as John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge, 1995). On fixing, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, 1982).

[140]For an interesting take on 'crosslocations' see the ongoing project <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/crosslocations> (accessed 18 June 2019).

[141]See Plate 1, above, p. 201.

[142]This had an obvious precedent in Georg Braun's *Civitates orbis terrarum*, which functions as a complement to Ortelius' atlas. For more information on this combination see Hilary Ballon and David Friedman, 'Portraying the City in Early Modern Europe: Measurement,

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regions' clothing and information centres, this was a common representation at the time, combining the local and the global perhaps more readily than some historians are prepared to do today (see Plate 2).

Further research will extend the comparison of practices, channels, habits and techniques.[143] In many places around and beyond the early modern Mediterranean — in Italy, France, the Ottoman Empire or Persia — information had a dual nature, combining the exogenous and the endogenous, because news brought in from the outside was reworked by locals on the basis of their own concerns.[144] In every place I know of, people needed local knowledge to find distant news. Just as in Venice gossips and news-writers picked up the news in the Rialto, so in Rome they did in the Banchi area; in London they had St Paul's Walk; in Istanbul, gardens at the back of embassies; barbershops in Damascus, or coffee houses and travel lodges in Isfahan.[145] Comparisons will show more analogies and differences, as a new and rich global history of information is written through microhistories of exchanges at once closely embedded in their local context and connecting faraway places. The same applies to the history of science and material culture.[146] As with commodities, luxury goods and scientific ideas, so with information,

Representation, and Planning', in David Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography*, iii (Chicago, 2007).

[143] Jeroen Duindam and Zoltán Biedermann each also insist on different views of the relationship between the local and the global, see Duindam, 'A Plea for Global Comparison: Redefining Dynasty; and Biedermann, 'Three Ways of Locating the Global: Microhistorical Challenges in the Study of Early Transcontinental Diplomacy, both in this volume.

[144] Michèle Fogel, *Les Cérémonies de l'information dans la France du XVI^e au milieu du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1989); Babak Rahimi, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran: Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590–1641 CE* (Leiden, 2012); Helen Pfeifer, 'Encounter after the Conquest: Literary Salons in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Damascus', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2015).

[145] See respectively Filippo de Vivo, 'La farmacia come luogo di cultura: le spezierie di medicina in Italia', in Maria Conforti, Andrea Carlino and Antonio Clericuzio (eds.), *Interpretare e curare: medicina e salute nel Rinascimento* (Rome, 2013), 129–42; John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities* (Oxford, 2013), 82, 114, 141; Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (London, 2009), 48; Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 442–3; Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton, 2005), 165–72; Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford, 2013).

[146] See p. 181 above.

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we need to recognize that in the early modern world, the global and the local were inextricable.

I want to end with a final reason why all this matters. The early modern plurality of comunication activities of the kind explored in this article gave way in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the emergence of mass media. Today digital social media have once again given strength to dispersed information pluralism — while they have also created new, subtle channels for propaganda.[147] By stressing agency and uncovering manipulation, the kind of microhistory I have explored in this article is better suited than the one-way, top-down histories of the media that arose in the twentieth century, not just to account for the past but to engage with some of the key questions of the present. First, as we move back to the future, we need to remember that pluralism is always a precarious good, undermined by trolls, bots, deep fakes and targeted ads. Information is and was unstable and continuously constructed, but this does not mean that all news is fake news: on the contrary, this article has shown the subtle ways in which opposite agents manipulated reports to turn an inconclusive event into a powerful message. The microhistory of information helps us understand the consolidation of news into 'facts' at the time and later. Moving from synchronic to diachronic, rival nationalist histories turned information into national traditions precisely by treating spurious reports as reliable sources.[148] Secondly, by considering a large variety of sources beyond periodicals, social and cultural history can help us answer the question of how messages go viral. Reflecting on his experience of the trenches in World War I, Marc Bloch explained fake news in terms of the lack of reliable information; later, in the *Royal Touch* and in his enthusiastic response to Georges Lefebvre's *Great Fear*, a 1932 study of the massive rumour that engulfed France in the wake of the Revolution, he described fake news as evidence not of fact, but of collective mentality; and then, during another disastrous war, he elaborated it into a broader point of

[147] John Oddo, *The Discourse of Propaganda: Case Studies from the Persian Gulf War and the War on Terror* (University Park, Pa., 2018).

[148] As with rival histories that claim a victory in 1617 on the basis of misinterpreted evidence such as the newsbooks printed in Venice and Spain: Cesareo Fernández Duro, *El gran duque de Osuna y su marina: Jornadas contra turcos y venecianos (1602–1624)* (Madrid, 1885), 100–8; and Mocenigo, *Storia della marina veneziana*, 97–112. In dissecting these constructions, I see a parallel between microhistory and the study of tradition as practised by philologists such as Sebastiano Timpanaro and Franco Contini, see Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method* (Chicago, 2005, first pubd 1960); and Contini, *Varianti e altra linguistica* (Turin, 1997). I am indebted to Carlo Ginzburg for this point.

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2. Measuring 146 x 62 cm, Romein de Hooghe's chart shows the Mediterranean criss-crossed by naval routes and surrounded by cameos showing bird's-eye views of harbours on all the sea's shores. From Pierre Mortier, *De Fransche Neptunus* (Amsterdam, 1693), it comes from one of the largest world-atlases printed at the time. © British Library Board, Maps 147.d.26.



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source criticism.[149] Finally, then, today we can derive wisdom from the fact that the seventeenth century already developed a whole vocabulary and intellectual armoury to denounce and ridicule spin. Thus, the microhistory of information can help us understand conflicting constructions: not to conclude that it's all a fabrication, but to understand how fabricating worked, how some people contributed and how others saw through it.

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[149] Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance* (Paris, 2006), 117–67 (1914–15), 293–316 (1921), and 928–30 (1941–43); see also Jacques Revel's introduction to Georges Lefebvre, *La grande peur de 1789: Suivi de les foules révolutionnaires* (Paris, 1988), 7–23.

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