Introduction

News of the World

This book examines the circulation of Mexican and Ottoman people and cultural goods through the Habsburg realms during the sixteenth century. In the early sixteenth century, the Aztec and Ottoman Empires were newly compelling to Europe: the Mexicans would be first encountered and then conquered, while the Ottomans began their expansion into Hungary and the Mediterranean. This situation, it has been argued, was met with modes of indifference in Europe, or with models of cultural superiority that had already been set in place in Latin Christendom by 1500. Such models are thought to have shaped the colonization of the Canary Islands and the early encounters in the Americas. Similarly, it has been proposed that once the shock of the 1453 fall of Constantinople had faded, Latin Christians who did not live in the Italian peninsula or Hungary ceased to pay much heed to the Ottoman Empire.¹

J.H. Elliott’s influential thesis argued that the New World had a “blunted impact” on the Old World that was Europe. Geography, botany, classical authority, and ideas about culture would eventually be reconceived, but these paradigmatic shifts in European thought only began

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some fifty years after 1492. This argument of initial European indifference, beyond fantastical or orientalist projections, drew on evidence of publication volume to gauge levels of interest. More recent studies linking trading centers with the flow of news have traced significant and ready interest for early news about the New World, as well as some of the information networks that disseminated it. That work, along with earlier studies on the well-known Fugger information network, offers insights into the volume of news and interest in the Americas present during the early sixteenth century, and inspires further questions about the information order in the Habsburg empire. By what means did information about the “Indians” or the “Turks” and their cultures flow? When was such information credible to the sixteenth-century recipient? What sorts of people probably received (read or heard) such news?

News about America and the encroaching Ottoman Empire flowed through the Habsburg empire in a variety of formats. Archival evidence demonstrates that news from far afield traveled in a variety of registers as court news, humanist and merchant epistolary exchanges, and printed newssheets, as well as by word of mouth. Courts and important trade cities (above all, Venice) were nodes for news gathering, and news

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2 J.H. Elliott described what he later termed “a blunted impact” of the New World on the Old in The Old World and the New, 1492–1650 (1970, reprinted with a new preface, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), i–27. See also his “Final Reflections,” in America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 391–408. In Elliott’s 1992 “Preface to the Canto Edition,” in The Old World and the New, 1492–1650, he reiterated that “after the initial excitement of discovery, America tended to recede from the consciousness of many Europeans,” and he continued to cite publication volume as a gauge of “the degree of interest in America shown by Europeans at any given moment, in so far as this can be measured by the books they were reading and writing,” xii. Building on Elliott, Michael Ryan’s influential essay “Assimilating New Worlds in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” CSSH 23 (1981): 519–38 focused on paradigmatic shifts, arguing for a blunted impact, particularly in scientific thought, due to Europeans’ assimilation of these cultures with historical pagan examples already available to them.

transmission followed well-established routes. News from the Indies (both east and west) came via the Portuguese and Castilian courts or official ports. News on the Hungarian front or elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire circulated via Habsburg envoys or individuals living in Poland, Venice, Ragusa, and Vienna.

These information networks grew out of fifteenth-century merchant and ambassadorial networks that had sought accurate information for trade and diplomacy. The practice of circulating letters and reports within these close and closed groups continued, even as the printing press began issuing copies, whether genuine or contrived, of informational letters. Merchants remained a crucial mechanism of news circulation, but in the broader information networks of the sixteenth century, connections between different social groups (particularly merchants, statesmen, and humanists) were crucial. To note a few networks: Philip Melanchthon was


at the center of a Wittenberg-based network among princes, other humanists, and merchants. Nuremberg humanist Christoph Scheurl got his news from merchants and the imperial court. In the 1520s, Augsburg merchant banker Jakob Fugger provided news to the Wettin princes of Saxony. Central European merchants based in Iberia were closely involved in transmitting early information about the Indies to the German imperial cities. Baltasar Springer, author of the east Indies Meerfahrt (1509), was a printer and Welser factor. Valentin Fernandez Moravus, another Welser factor at the Portuguese court, provided Conrad Peutinger with early accounts of east India. In Seville, the first printer of Cortés’s letters, Jacob Cromberger, was the father-in-law of Lazarus Nuremberger, a factor for the Hirschgogels in the east and west Indies and then for the Welsers in the west Indies. Although Lazarus Nuremberger traveled extensively, he maintained ties to his home town Nuremberg: one manuscript account of his voyage to the east Indies was sent to Nuremberg’s leading humanist, Willibald Pirckheimer. News from the west Indies (soon reconceived as the New World) flowed through the conduit of the Castilian court. In Seville, the Casa de la Contratación had been established as the official crown depository of all information and treasure from the New World. Pilots’ logs, treasure


inventories, and conquistador reports were all to be housed and, it has been argued, guarded there from the prying eyes of rival states and all other undesirables. Yet the court of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon also disseminated cultural information about the New World. When Charles succeeded his grandfather Ferdinand in 1516, his court became even more prominent as a nexus for such information. Within the Habsburg family, much detailed information circulated: Charles’s aunt Margaret, regent in the Low Countries, received descriptions both long (relaciones) and short (newsletters), as did Charles’s siblings Ferdinand and Maria. In the case of Ferdinand, he acquired much information from his own ambassadors to Charles’s court. These ambassadors, well-trusted and lifelong servants of the family, received their news from Charles’s councillors. Early accounts of Hernan Cortés’s and Pedro Álvarado’s adventures, the Pizarros’ early voyages and the discovery of Peru, and Marcos de Niza’s travels to discover the Seven Cities of Cibola were all sent in manuscript form from Castile to other Habsburgs. Ferdinand’s interest in receiving news about the New World extended beyond triumphal news: he also obtained reports on revolts against


9 Some Franciscan copybooks contain multiple excerpts from accounts of the east and west Indies and appear to be based on material from the Habsburg court. One, compiled at least partially in 1500 by a father Oliverius at a Franciscan monastery in Nuremberg, is in Krása, Codex Bratislavensis, 73. Another, compiled in the late 1520s, contains information from Nicolas of Herborn, who sent letters back from the Iberian Habsburg court to his home monastery in Cologne. Trier Stadtbibliothek, Codex 1374/140, fols. 220–9 and Ludwig Schmitt, Der Kölner Theologe Nikolaus Stagefyr und der Franziskaner Nikolaus Herborn (Freiburg im Briesgau: Herder’she Verlag, 1896).


Charles’s authority in Peru, such as the rebellions of Gonzalo Pizarro and Lope de Aguirre.\textsuperscript{12} From 1521, the date of Ferdinand’s relocation to central Europe, through the 1550s, Ferdinand considered information on the New World a standard topic for his regular ambassadorial intelligence reports from Castile. Ferdinand’s desire for all the news from the New World could, however, be thwarted by politics in Castile: when Cortés was in disfavor with Charles, the ambassador Martin de Salinas refused to forward Ferdinand’s personal letters to the conquistador and claimed to be unable to obtain further information on Cortés’s activities from court officials.\textsuperscript{13}

News presented in printed broadsheets allowed for the possibility of broad social circulation beyond noble, merchant, humanist, and clerical circles. Printed news pamphlets, reporting on recent events, appeared in the late fifteenth century in the Holy Roman Empire and Italy (particularly Rome).\textsuperscript{14} Breaking news of Ottoman military activities and of peoples encountered in the Indies were among the first types to appear in these printed pamphlets, and these two topics dominated the genre.\textsuperscript{15}
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during the first decades of the sixteenth century. In manuscript ambassadorial reports, newsworthy events were those with empire-wide significance. In printed news, the same guidelines prevailed; events of imperial scope were reproduced with various topics often bundled together in a single pamphlet, just as in ambassadorial reports. News from the Ottoman court and of Turkish military activities appeared with some regularity along with other military matters and political news. Sometimes the Turkish news was printed alongside cataclysmic news, whether military events such as Charles V’s capture of the king of France or the sack of Rome, or agricultural catastrophes such as a horde of grasshoppers. Divine signs were announced in reports of many current events, and important or significant events in the news pamphlets might reappear in vernacular cosmographies of the 1530s and 1540s. Links to ethnographic or cosmographic agendas were often made explicitly by printers, through their inclusion of descriptive news from the Turks and the Indies. In 1522, 1533, and 1534, the years when information about new

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18 New zeytung. Die Schlacht des Turkischen Kesers mit Ludovico ewan Konig zu Ungern geschehen am tag Johannis enbeuhtung. Item des Türkischen Sendbriefe des König Ludovico zugesandt vor der schlacht. Item eyn klegrer Sendbriefe so die Vngern dem König in Polen zugeschickt/ nach der schlacht. Item etzlich nau getzeyten aus Polen. New zeytung vom Babst zu Rome am xxvii. tag Septembr geschehen. (1526); Warhafftige vnd kurzte bericht Im der Summa/ wie es jetzol im Tausent Funff hundert vnd Siben vnd zayntzigsten jar Den vi. tag May/ durch Römischer Kayserlichen/ vnd Spanischer Königlicher Mayestet kriegs volck/ In eroberung der Stat Rom ergangen ist/ biß auff den xxi. tage Juni. [1527]; Neue zeytung aus Polen... [1527].

19 Examples include Chronical Beschreibung und gemeyne aneyzetl vorn aller Welt herkommen (Frankfurt am Main: C. Egenolff, 1535) and Sebastian Franck, Germaniae Chronicon (Augsburg: Weissenhorn and Steiner, 1538).
subject empires (the Aztec and Inca Empires) reached Europe, broadsheets bundled news from the Indies and the Ottomans.20

Printed pamphlets were cheap and quickly produced, often without printer’s information. They included supporting information designed to reinforce their credibility. Not surprisingly, printed news pamphlets publicized their sources and their reliability. Unlike non-printed newsletters circulating in closed, familiar merchant and banking circles, printed pamphlets might emphasize and advertise their sources in the Habsburg court. News of imperial scope was delivered as published correspondence between Habsburg family members and courtiers, particularly letters to Archduchess Margaret, ranging from the discovery of Mexico to the marriages of her niece Mary and nephew Ferdinand.21

The pamphlet producer underscored the veracity of the news through several strategies. Most commonly, the text declared its origin as a letter from one known official or dignitary to another; alternatively, the letter might assert the authorship of an eyewitness who lived in a military hot spot. Reflecting the importance of the letter format,22 acknowledged authors were located in a variety of social positions, ranging from the Habsburg family and other royalty,23 nobles, councillors, named secretaries at the Spanish or Portuguese courts,24 city secretaries, and

20 Translation uss hispanischer sprach zu Frantzösisch gemacht…. [Basel: Pamphilius, 1522]; Neue zeitung von demlande, das die Sponier funden haben…. [Erfurt: Maler, 1522]; Ein missif oder sendbrief neuer zeytung…. [1533]; Neue Zeytung aus Hispanien und Italien. Mense Februario. 1534 [Nuremberg: Petrius, 1534].

21 See Translation uss hispanischer sprach….; Die abschrifft auß dem Original so der Turck sampt dem könig von Cathey vnd Persien allen Christlichen stenden des Römischen Reychs geschryben haben. (Nuremberg): Friedrich Peypus, 1526; and Die Stend des hailegen Römischen Reichs/ mit sampt aller Churfürsten vnd Fürsten…. (Augsburg: [Silvan Otmar] 1518), a letter from Johann Haselberg to Archduchess Margaret about the imperial diet of 1518.

22 A preponderance of early pamphlets on the Turks appeared in letter form. See Gollner, Turcica I. The pamphlet in letter form, either as a “copy of a letter” or an “avviso,” was popular in Italy as well as the Holy Roman Empire, appearing in the 1510s and peaking in the 1530s. Wilhelm, 205–73.

23 Bottschaft des Groszmächtigsten Konigs David…. (1533); Copia de vna littera del Re de Portagallo mandata al Re de Castella del viaggio y successi de India (Rome: Joanni de Besicken, 1505); Isabella Hunyadi, Queen of Hungary in Vier warhaftigke Misiven/ eine der frauen Isabella Königin vnd nachgelassene wittib in Ungern/ wie untreulich der Turck vnd die iren mit ir umbgangen. Die ander/ eines so in der belegerung bey der Konigin im Schloß gewest/ wie es mit Ofen/ vor und nach der belegerung ergangen. Die dritte/ eines Ungern von Gran/ wie es yetz zu Ofen zugehe. Die vierdte / des Türcischen Tyrannen an die Sibenbürter [Nuremberg: Johann vom Berg and Ulrich Neüber, 1542].

24 Peter Martyr of Anghiera’s De Orbe Novo in Opera (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1966); Mayster Adolff in Copey etlicher briefff so auff Hispania kummen sendt/ anzaygent die
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merchants. Accompanying woodcuts might illustrate the news being physically conveyed: for example, a text purporting to be a letter from the Ottoman ambassador to the Venetian Senate was illustrated with the image of an identifiably Turkish man bearing a letter with a pendant seal. The earliest pamphlets about the New World often contained a woodcut of a ruler receiving his latest letters. Each of these devices underscored the news’ initial epistolary form.

News pamphlets often noted that their material had been translated from another vernacular language – one of the few times that vernacular-to-vernacular translating was touted in the early sixteenth century. News about the Turk might derive from sources closer to the front, “transferred out of a foreign tongue into high German” (in this example, via Belgrade), or “printed in Venice and now word by word translated into German.” These translations were most commonly made from “Welsch” (Italian or another Romance language), Greek, or sometimes Latin. The information that the news bulletin had been translated
Cultural Hierarchy in Sixteenth-Century Europe seems to have added credibility. A related means to validate news was to emphasize its eyewitness origin.\textsuperscript{31} All of these markers of credibility come together in an example from 1535: “[S]uch news has been translated out of Spanish into French, and then into Netherlandish and High German languages. A trustworthy man named Master Adolf, imperial secretary in Spain, has seen these two ships unloading.”\textsuperscript{32}

Although I have concentrated here on the circulation of information via links between courts and texts in the form of manuscript or printed pamphlets, word of mouth also played an important role in the transmission of information. Both written and verbal accounts of the New World exerted a persuasive pull during the late 1520s, serving as enticements to journey there.\textsuperscript{33} The flow of verbal information from the Ottoman front is evident in municipal and court account books. The Vienna court as well as city councils got up-to-the-moment reports from returning soldiers and travelers.\textsuperscript{34}

News and information were everywhere: lively interest in the west Indies and the Ottoman Empire formed the context for cultural descriptions of their inhabitants. In this first half-century of encounter, shifts


\textsuperscript{32} “[s]olche zeyttung ist auß Hyspanischer sprach/ in die Frantz "osische getransfertirt worden/ darnach in Nyderlendisch vnd hochteusch sprach. Dise zway schyff hat ein glaubwürdiger Mann mit nammen Mayster Adolf Kay. May. Secretari in Hyspania abladen sehen.” Copey etlicher brieff so auß Hispania kummen seindt....(1535).


\textsuperscript{34} See Chapter 4.