Arranging reality: The editing mechanisms of the world’s first Yiddish newspaper, the Kurant (Amsterdam, 1686-1687)
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2. The main events in the Dutch Republic and abroad

2.1. National news

The Kurant appeared in the late Golden Age.¹ For the Dutch Republic the years 1686 and 1687 were a rather quiet interval between great historic events. It had taken the Dutch Republic several years to recover from the Year of Disaster, 1672, when the Dutch Republic suffered a severe political and economic crisis and was attacked by France, England, Münster and Cologne, followed by several years of war with England and France. William III became stadholder.

In the 1680s the Dutch economy prospered mainly because of overseas commerce, shipping and industry. Although the once profitable Baltic bulk traffic and fisheries had diminished, the VOC and the WIC² were still highly profitable companies. Despite the peace treaty with France in 1678, Louis XIV kept threatening the Dutch Republic and started to conquer parts of the Spanish Netherlands, but the Dutch tried to maintain internal calm by preferring adjusting to confrontation, as France was one of the most important markets for Dutch goods. Yet in August 1687 Louis XIV imposed new protectionist measures and it became clear that it was only a matter of time before a new war of commerce would erupt.³ This war eventually started in November 1688.

Meanwhile, another measure of Louis XIV had important consequences for the Dutch Republic: the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, forcing some 50,000 Huguenots (French Protestants) to escape to the Dutch Republic. About ninety percent stayed in France and converted to Roman Catholicism, but it were mainly the highly-educated Huguenots who came to the Netherlands and were welcomed as skilled tradesmen. Partly thanks to them the Dutch economy recovered in the years 1685-1688.⁴ The public opinion was very favorable toward the Huguenots, and the Dutch newspapers – including the Kurant – sympathized with the ‘poor Protestants’ who suffered the hardships of the cold winter when escaping to Switzerland.

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¹ According to Israel, The Dutch Republic, 619, the economic Golden Age lasted from 1590 until 1740.
² The United East Indies Company and the West Indies Company.
³ Israel, The Dutch Republic, 844.
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Stadholder William III had married his English cousin Princess Mary in 1677 and was intent on a chance to dethrone the Catholic King James II, but that too was to happen only in 1688.5

2.2. International news

The most important subject in the Dutch newspapers, and in the Kurant as well, is the war between the Habsburgs and the Turks in Hungary.6 At first sight it may seem strange that the news about the war between the Habsburg Empire7 and the Ottoman Empire8 in the Balkans, especially in Hungary, is so much at the center in the Dutch newspapers and even more in the Kurant. After all, the Dutch Republic was not involved in this war, was an important trading partner of Turkey,9 and had an ambassador in Constantinople, as is mentioned in the Kurant.10 In a sense the Dutch Republic did have some interests in the development of the war, because the successes of the Habsburgs over the Turks reinforced the likelihood of Dutch neutrality in a new war between Louis XIV and the Habsburgs and

5 Israel, The Dutch Republic, 824, 841-846.

6 See Ch. 9.

7 In the years 1686-1687 the Habsburg Empire or Habsburg Monarchy comprised the possessions of the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs: the so-called Erblände (Hereditary Lands), being the Austrian lands, the lands of the Bohemian Crown (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia), and the Hungarian Kingdom (the western part of Hungary, not belonging to Turkish Hungary or independent Transylvania); traditionally the Habsburg emperor, at the time Leopold I, was also the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, yet as a result of the Peace of Münster (1648), this empire had become a conglomerate of de facto independent German states: Hochedlinger, Austria’s War, 7-24.

8 In 1686-1687 the Ottoman Empire consisted not only of present-day Turkey, but also of Greece, most parts of the Balkans, the Crimea, the Middle East and North Africa; in 1687 Sultan Mehmet IV was dismissed and imprisoned, and succeeded by his brother Suleiman II: Stiles, Ottoman Empire, 111.

9 De Groot, The Netherlands and Turkey.

10 In a sense the Dutch Republic did have some interests in the development of the war, because the successes of the Habsburgs over the Turks reinforced the likelihood of Dutch neutrality in a new war between Louis XIV and the Habsburgs and
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heightened the prospects of a full-scale conflict between the Habsburgs and the pro-Turkish French on the Rhine.\textsuperscript{11}

Yet there was another reason why this war was at the center of the attention in the Dutch – and European – press. Several European countries, like the Dutch Republic, maintained good relationships with the Turks, and the French King Louis XIV actively supported the Ottomans, while several German Electors, and even, for a short period, the Polish King Jan III Sobieski, took sides with the French and against the Habsburgs.\textsuperscript{12} Nevertheless in Western Europe the expansionism of the Ottoman Empire was considered a threat to civilization. The Turks tried to invade Europe earlier and that had installed fear in the hearts of the Christian Europeans.\textsuperscript{13} After several attacks the Turks managed to conquer Constantinople in 1453. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century they fought against the Holy Roman Empire, capturing large parts of Hungary, including, in 1526, Buda. In 1529 the Turks tried to conquer Vienna – in vain. According to Wheatcroft the war between Habsburgs and Ottomans was considered a clash of faiths, of Christendom versus Islam, a definitive struggle between East and West.\textsuperscript{14}

In the first half of the seventeenth century it was quiet on the Balkan front, due to internal problems in Turkey and because the Habsburgs were occupied by the Thirty Years War.\textsuperscript{15} In the sixties there were some skirmishes about Transylvania and the Turks captured several strongholds in Hungary, followed by a twenty years’ truce. Shortly before the end of the truce, Turkey, encouraged by French subsidies, tried to conquer Vienna for the second time.\textsuperscript{16} The Emperor, Leopold I, assisted by the Elector of Bavaria and King Jan III Sobieski of Poland, managed to ward off the attack after a siege of two months.

The siege of Vienna was a turning point in the war in Hungary. In 1684 Leopold I formed a ‘Holy League’ with Poland and Venice against the Turkish sultan, under auspices of the Pope. Russia joined two years later. The first aim was to re-conquer Buda. The main army under Charles of Lorraine managed to take Pest and several fortresses.\textsuperscript{17} It also dealt a heavy blow

\textsuperscript{11} Israel, \textit{The Dutch Republic}, 843.
\textsuperscript{12} Hochedlinger, \textit{Austria's War}, 55, 71-73, 154-155.
\textsuperscript{13} Wheatcroft, \textit{The Enemy at the Gate}, 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Wheatcroft, \textit{The Enemy at the Gate}, 6-8.
\textsuperscript{15} Stiles, \textit{Ottoman Empire}, 158-159.
\textsuperscript{16} De Boer, \textit{Het oude Duitsland}, 201.
\textsuperscript{17} Hochedlinger, \textit{Austria's War}, 156-159.
to the so-called *Kuruc* movement, a group of Hungarian nobles, peasants and border guards who rebelled against the military occupation and religious persecution of the absolute and strictly Catholic system of the Habsburgs and sought refuge in Transylvania, a Turkish vassal state. From there they had launched guerrilla raids into Upper Hungary from 1672 onward. Their commander was Count Imre Thököly (1657-1705), who is mentioned frequently in the *Kurant* and in the Dutch newspapers (‘Grave Teckeley’). They were supported by the French King Louis XIV. In 1685 the *Kuruc* movement crumbled. Its army and soldiers deserted to the Imperial camp. Only Thököly’s fortress Munkács held out until beginning of 1688.¹⁸

In 1686 there was a breakthrough. After a siege of several months the Christian armies succeeded in capturing Buda (2 September 1686).¹⁹ The first known issue of the *Kurant* dates from August 9, 1686. Although we do not know whether this was the very first issue, it could well be that the newspaper was started during this stage of the war. Newspapers often started to appear when a war broke out.²⁰

In 1686 and 1687 the Imperial Army captured several more towns and strongholds. In October 1687 Charles of Lorraine invaded Transylvania, which was forced by treaty to provide winter quarters for the Imperial army.²¹ In December 1687 the archduke of Austria was crowned King of Hungary, which was a heavy blow for the Turks.²² The war continued until 1699, when a peace treaty was signed in Karlowitz. Hungary and Transylvania were given to the Habsburg Empire.²³

From the moment that Leopold I formed the holy league against the Turkish sultan, the Venetian Republic re-entered the theater of war. Fifteen years after the loss of Candia (Crete), which had resulted in an uneasy peace,²⁴ Venetian troops and fleet occupied the Dalmatian coast and Morea (Peloponnesus). In October 1686 Napoli de Romania was

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¹⁹ Hochedlinger, *Austria’s War*, 159.
²⁰ Schneider & Hemels, *De Nederlandse krant*, 40-45; Dahl, *Dutch corantos*, 36, 57; see also Ch. 3.
²¹ Hochedlinger, *Austria’s War*, 159-160.
²² Stiles, *Ottoman Empire*, 111.
²³ Hochedlinger, *Austria’s War*, 165; Stiles, *Ottoman Empire*, 111-112.
²⁴ Setton, *Venice, Austria and the Turks*, 244.
conquered, which led to festivities all over Europe,\textsuperscript{25} and in September 1687 Athens was conquered.

Meanwhile Poland tried to defeat the Turks near the Black Sea and Russia attacked the Crimea, but these allies of the holy league were less successful.\textsuperscript{26}

Apart from the ‘official’ wars, there was an enemy that was less easy to defeat: the mostly North-African pirates under Turkish rule who endangered all seas and were a great risk for the Dutch and European merchant navies.

\textsuperscript{25} See 9.3.3.

\textsuperscript{26} Stiles, \textit{Ottoman Empire}, 107-111.