Arranging reality: The editing mechanisms of the world’s first Yiddish newspaper, the Kurant (Amsterdam, 1686-1687)

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5. Bibliographical description

The one hundred issues of the Kuranten were bound into a volume when they were bought by David Montezinos in 1902.¹ As the Kurant disappeared without a trace, for the description we have to rely on the photos taken of them before the volume was prepared for shipping to Jerusalem.² As to the appearance and age of the volume itself no information can be found.

5.1. Content

The volume contains a hundred newspapers of four pages each, apart from the first issue, of August 9, 1686, of which only pages 3 and 4 are included.³ News reports in the paper are ordered geographically according to country, and within the country, according to place. Almost all reports are dated. A few issues carry advertisements, which are printed like regular reports, just above the colophon. The first 67 newspapers were printed by Uri Faybesh Halevi; the following 33 were printed by David de Castro Tartas. There are a few differences between them, which will be pointed out below.

5.2. Format

The size of the pages is 170 by 98 mm.⁴ The type area is 155 by 90 mm. The text of each page is printed in two columns, divided by a line in the middle. The width of each column is 43 mm (Halevi) or 44 mm (Tartas). A column contains 38 lines. According to Seeligmann, the Kurant was printed on a double octavo sheet.⁵ From the photos, it is impossible to judge

¹ See the Introduction.
² Photos and photocopies are in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana of the Universiteit van Amsterdam; microfilms are kept in the City Archives in Amsterdam and in several libraries, e.g. in the YIVO Library in New York and the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem.
³ See 5.5.
⁴ This means the Kurant was slightly larger than the Gazeta, which is 149 by 92 mm, apart from the copy of September 5, 1672, which appeared in folio: see Den Boer, ‘Spanish and Portuguese editions’, 122.
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whether the format is really octavo.\textsuperscript{6}

5.3. Printing types, lay-out

The run-on type is the typical Ashkenazi cursive font that was used for Yiddish printed text between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century. Non-Yiddish words, including toponyms and Hebrew words, appear between round brackets, as was usual.\textsuperscript{7}

The newspapers are not numbered, nor are the pages. At the bottom of almost every page is a catchword.

At the top of the first page of each issue is the heading with the title of the newspaper, in large square script. Halevi mentions the name of the newspaper, either \textit{Dinstagishe Kuranten} or \textit{Fraytagishe Kuranten}. Curiously, one single issue is entitled \textit{Kuranten}, although the Dutch word \textit{couranten} is the plural of \textit{courant}, ‘newspaper’.\textsuperscript{8} On the right side of the title the date is mentioned, the Jewish date – for example 23 Menahem – above, and the Christian date – 13 August – below. On the left side is the abbreviated Jewish year, with the Hebrew addition ק"לפ (lefa”k, lifrat katan, ‘by the abbreviated era’). Both date and year are printed in the run-on type. The names of the countries are printed in the same large square type as the name of the paper.

Tartas changed the name to \textit{Dinstagishe Kurant} and \textit{Fraytagishe Kurant}. He also changed the style of the heading, apparently in an attempt to give the newspaper a more professional appearance. It took him a week to develop the definitive lay-out. In the first issue, of Friday, June 6, which appeared at the regular time, three days after the last issue was published by Halevi, the title headings and country names are in square script of a smaller face than Halevi used. The date is printed in the normal run-on type, but the Jewish

\textsuperscript{6} The terms ‘folio’, ‘quarto’, ‘octavo’, etc., do neither refer to the size of a book, nor to the number of pages in a gathering. The terms solely refer to the number of times the original sheet of paper has been folded. In a book (or newspaper) in octavo, the sheets have been folded three times. As sheets come and came in different sizes, a small quarto may be of the same size as a large octavo. The only criterion to judge the format with some certainty is the position of the watermark and the direction of the chain lines, both of which are invisible on the photos of the \textit{Kurant}: McKerrow, \textit{Introduction to Bibliography}, 164-166.

\textsuperscript{7} Fuks & Fuks-Mansfeld, \textit{Hebrew Typography}, 7.

\textsuperscript{8} The printer or the editor may have misunderstood the meaning of the word \textit{Kurant}; he may have confused it with \textit{Tijdingen} (Reports), also a common name for newspapers during this period. De Castro Tartas probably realized the peculiarity of the name \textit{Kuranten} and changed it to \textit{Kurant}. 
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year now appears in the same type and face as the heading. This lay-out is also used in the
next issue, of Tuesday, June 10, but on Friday, June 13, Tartas presented his final version: the
headings, both of the title and of the names of the countries, are the same size of those of
Halevi, but between Dinstagishe/Fraytagishe and Kurant the coat of arms of the city of
Amsterdam is inserted: two lions carrying a crown and a shield with three crosses. Tartas
probably followed the example of the Amsterdamse Courant, and of the Spanish Gazeta de
Amsterdam and the Italian Gazzetta d’ Amsterdam, which he published himself. The coat of
arms in the Kurant is similar in size and design to that of the Gazeta and the Gazzetta,
whereas the Amsterdamse Courant differs, so it may well be that Tartas used the same print
form with the coat of arms for all papers. The Jewish year has now become part of the title,
and is printed in the same square type, without the addition lefa”k, but followed by a colon;
the Jewish date appears under the first word of the title, the Christian date under the second
word and the year, both in the run-on type.

Although there are differences in the lay-out of Halevi and Tartas, their run-on types are
very similar. It is hard to see any differences, except for the slight difference in width of the
columns.

The text has hardly any punctuation. The end of a sentence is marked with a high full
stop, followed by a space of between 5 and 15 mm. In some cases a colon is used instead of
a full stop. In some cases the next sentence appears on the next line. Under one place-name,
several subjects may be mentioned. A new subject may or may not appear on a new line. A
new report, from another city, usually starts on a new, indented line. The last line of a
column is sometimes centered, but not always. The colophon is usually centered, as is the
line above the colophon.

5.4. Colophon

At the end of each issue, the names of the compositor and the printer are mentioned in
Hebrew. From August 9, 1686, Halevi has the following colophon text, printed in the run-on
type, always starting on a new line immediately after the last report:

על יד המ써ר י”ר משה בר
אברהם אביו ז”ל
פ”כ ק”ק אמסטרדם בית המקוק
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ה”ר רבי אהרן הלוי ז”ל, אורי פֿײבש "ה

Al yedey hamesader h”rr [harav rabi] Moshe bar
Avraham Avinu zts”l [zekher tsadik livrakha].

Po k”k [kehila kedosha] Amsterdam beveyt hamehokek
h”rr Uri Faybesh bh”rr [ben harav rabi] Aharon Halevi z”l

By the compositor Mr. Moshe bar
Avraham Avinu (son of our Father Abraham), blessed be the memory of the righteous one.

Here [in] the holy community of Amsterdam in the house of the printer
Mr. Uri Faybesh son of Mr. Aharon Halevi of blessed memory

From the Fraytagishe Kuranten of December 27, 1686, (h”rr Moshe bar Avraham Avinu) is replaced by ח”ר [kevod harav rabi] (‘His Honour Rav Rabbi’).

On Friday, June 6, 1687, Tartas takes over, and changes the colophon text as follows:

ע”ל וי”ר ח”ר משוה בר אברום אבנינו
ז”ל פ אומשדדמב ביב הלמוטק
דוד תרטס.

Al yedey kh”rr Moshe bar Avrah’ Avinu
zts”l. Po Amsterdam beveyt hamehokek

David Thartas.

By His Honour Mr. Moshe bar Avrah. Avinu,
blessed be the memory of the righteous one. Here [in] Amsterdam in the house of the printer

9 Literally: ‘the rabbi, Rabbi’, a polite form of address for a man, not necessarily a rabbi.

10 For the sake of clarity in the transcription I use the modern Hebrew pronunciation here, although the seventeenth-century Ashkenazi pronunciation was different.
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David Tartas.

So Tartas leaves out the word *hamesader* and does not use any honorary titles for himself.

On Friday, June 13, 1687, the same text is used, but the name David Tartas is printed in a larger bold square type.

On June 17, 1687, the text is:

עַיְיָ כִּה”ר
משה בר אֵל’ אֶבֶנֶי. ה פא אמשטרדמ’
בבית המחוק דוד תרטס

A”y kh”rr

Moshe bar Av’ Avinu. Po Amsterdam

beveyt hamehok [sic!] DAVID THARTAS

The text starts halfway a line, immediately after the last report.

From Friday, June 20, 1687, it is:

עַיְיָ כ”ר משא בר אברוחimulation אביני.
ב’amshrdm’ בביית דוד תרטס

A”y kh”rr Moshe bar Avraham Avinu.

Beamsterd’ babayit shel DAVID THARTAS

By His Honour Mr. Moshe bar Avraham Avinu.

In Amsterdam in the house of DAVID THARTAS

Two entire lines are used for this colophon text.

On Friday, July 25, 1687 the last line is changed into:

ב’amshrdm’ בביית דוד תרטס:

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Beamsterdam beveyt **DAVIDTARSATH** [sic!].

On Tuesday, July 29, 1687, it becomes:

באמשטדרם בביית דוד תרסח:

Beamsterdam beveyt **DAVID TARSAH**.

From Friday, August 1, 1687 (TARSATH) becomes **TARTHAS**.

From Friday, August 22, 1687 (Avinu) is changed into **Azts”l Avinu zekher tsadik livrakha**), and this is how the text stays until the last issue of the **Kurant**. (Only on Friday, September 5, 1687, the last letter of **TARTHAS** has fallen out of line.)

5.5. First issue

There has been some confusion among scholars about the date of the first issue of the **Kurant** in the volume. The first page of the volume starts in the middle of a sentence and is neither the first nor the last page of an issue. Page 3 of the volume is the first front page, dated Tuesday, August 13, 1686. With the help of the catchwords and the dates of the reports (the latest reports, from the Netherlands, usually date from one or two days before the date of publication or sometimes even from the publication day itself) we can safely conclude that the first page of the volume is page 3 of the issue of August 13, 1686. The following three pages of the volume are respectively page 4, 1 and 2 of the same issue.

After the last page of Friday, December 5, 1687, printed by Tartas (page 396 in the volume), two undated pages follow, the recto and verso side of the same sheet. Identification is hampered, but by no means made impossible, by the fact that great parts of

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11 Incorrectly dated Friday, September 6, 1687.
12 Seeligmann, ‘Jüdische Ansiedelung’, 7: ‘Der Anfang der Nummern des Exemplares ist 13. August : 23 Menachem ו” למנים’ (1686), der Schluss 8. [sic!] December : 1 Tebeth וה”omanip’ (1687)’; Weinreich, ‘Di bobe’, 679 states that the first complete issue appeared on Tuesday, 23 Menachem 5446 / August 13, 1686, and that the two pages that precede this issue probably date from Friday, August 9.
13 Only Toury, ‘Reshit ha’itonut hayehudit’, 314-315 seems to have noticed these pages. He remarks that the last two pages are much older than the issue preceding them (dated December 5, 1687), and that they were not printed by Tartas but by Halevi. So Toury assumes, correctly, that the last two pages must be the second part of the **Fraytagishe Kuranten** of August 9, 1686.
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pages 396 and 397 are illegible. The last page in the volume (page 398) is the last page of a newspaper by Halevi, according to the colophon, and contains reports from The Hague, August 6, and Amsterdam, August 7. So this is most probably page 4 from Friday, August 9, 1686, from which follows that the second last page is page 3 of the same issue. Of this page only the top half is legible. The few places and dates that are mentioned – the Polish field army near the town of Tishmenits (Tyśmienica), July 13, Lemberg, July 15, and London, August 1 – give still more evidence that this is, indeed, the issue from August 9, 1686.14

5.6. Frequency

In general, the Kurant appeared twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, but there were important exceptions. Both printers decided to publish the paper on Fridays only for several months. Halevi announced on Friday, December 6, 168615 that until Rosh Hodesh (= the first of) Adar the Kuranten was to appear only on Fridays. And he kept his word: the next issue of the Dinstagishe Kuranten appeared on February 14, 1687, or 5 Adar 5447. Tartas, in turn, announced in the Fraytagishe Kurant of August 8, 168716 that until 1 Nisan he would publish the newspaper on Fridays only, unless there were much news, because the Tuesday edition sold poorly.17 As 1 Nisan is three (Jewish) months later than 1 Tevet (December 5, 1687), when the last known issue appeared, we do not know whether the Kurant was published twice a week again after 1 Nisan, as promised. Or, for that matter, if it appeared at all. In that same month, on Tuesday, August 26, 1687,18 Tartas decided to publish an issue of the Dinstagishe Kurant, probably because he wanted to report the overwhelming victories gained by the Venetian and the Habsburg troops over the Turks on the Peloponnesian coast and in Hungary. After this, he only published Friday issues.

5.7. Missing issues

14 Reports from London are usually dated about a week earlier, or slightly more, than the publication date.
15 Incorrectly dated Friday, December 5, 1686.
16 Incorrectly dated Friday, August 5, 1687.
17 לא שמעתי מדויקות הכנסות קורנט נט אר נסן מספר מאר חنقصון עלא וחنقصון טבבליא אליאין ויהי אין פירמתוניש קורנט ודקור. גם
18 Incorrectly dated Tuesday, August 27, 1687.
Several issues are missing, almost always without notice, but sometimes apparently because the publication dates were Jewish holidays. From Halevi’s period, the following issues are missing: the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of September 20, 1686, 2 Tishri 5447: this was the second day of Rosh Hashana; the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of October 4, 1686, 16 Tishri 5447: Sukkot; the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of October 11 1686, 20 Tishri 5447: Simhat Tora; the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of November 5, 1686, 18 Heshvan 5447: no apparent reason; the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of November 29, 1686, 13 Kislev 5447 and the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of December 3, 1686, 17 Kislev 5447: no apparent reason, but the following issue, December 6, 1686, announces that the newspaper will appear only once a week: perhaps there had been production problems in the preceding weeks that forced the printer to reduce the frequency of publication; after an announcement in the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of March 28, 1687, 14 Nisan 5447, that next week only one newspaper will appear, on Thursday (April 3), the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of April 1, 1687, 18 Nisan 5447 is – indeed – missing, and the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of April 4, 1687, 21 Nisan 5447 (seventh day of Pesach) is replaced by the *Donershtagishe Kuranten* of April 3, 1687, 20 Nisan 5447; missing is the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of April 20, 1687, 8 Sivan 5447: no holiday, but the day after Shavuot.

Of the papers printed by Tartas, the only missing issue is the *Fraytagishe Kurant* of November 28, 1687, 23 Kislev 5448: no apparent reason.

### 5.8. Incorrect dates

Quite often issues are incorrectly dated. Sometimes there is an error in the Christian date, sometimes in the Jewish date, and sometimes in both. In Halevi’s issues this happens in the following issues: the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of August 20, 1686, 1 Elul 5446: 1 Elul should be 30 Menahem Av; the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of September 3, 1686, 13 Elul 5446: 13 Elul should be 14 Elul; the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of September 24, 1686, 5 Tishri 5447: 5 Tishri should be 6 Tishri; the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of September 31, 1686, 13 Tishri 5447: September 31 should be October 1; the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of November 8, 1686, 20 Heshvan 5447: 20 Heshvan should be 21 Heshvan; the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of December 5, 1686, 20 Kislev 5447: December 5 should be December 6; the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of April 15, 1687, 3 Iyar 5447: 3 Iyar should be 2 Iyar.

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19 Incorrectly dated December 5, 1686.
In Tartas’s papers there are two issues dated August 5, 1687, 26 Menahem [Av] 5447. The first is called *Fraytagishe Kurant*, the second *Dinstagishe Kurant*. The latter gives the correct date. From the date of the latest reports from Amsterdam (August 8) in the *Kurant* of ‘Friday, August 5’, we can conclude that Friday, August 5 should be Friday, August 8, and Friday 26 Menahem [Av] should be Friday 29 Menahem [Av]. Apparently, the binder of the volume got confused by the similar dates, and incorrectly inserted the issue of what should be Friday, August 8, before the issue of Tuesday, August 5. Tartas has three more, successive, errors: the *Dinstagishe Kurant* of August 27, 1687, 17 Elul 5447: August 27 should be August 26; the *Fraytagishe Kurant* of September 6, 1687, 27 Elul 5447: September 6 should be September 5; the *Fraytagishe Kurant* of September 13, 1687, 5 Tishri 5447: September 13 should be September 12.

5.9. Condition of the volume and the issues

No information could be found regarding the volume’s condition. In general the issues seem to be well preserved, although some pages are damaged or have stains.

On pages 2 and 3 of the volume (respectively page 4 and page 1 of the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of August 13, 1686), there is a white rectangle, probably adhesive tape, of 82 mm by 40 mm in the middle at the bottom, which covers the last nine lines of the left column of the right-hand page and of the right column of the left-hand page, leaving about ten mm on each side. The text shines through, but is barely legible.

Similar, but smaller rectangles are visible on pages (of the volume) 21, 22, 24, 30, 42, 78, 83, 150, 151, (Tartas) 370, 393 (page 1 of the *Fraytagishe Kurant* of December 5, 1687: upper half of right column, and top side, covering the title), 394-395 (pages 2-3 of the *Fraytagishe Kurant* of December 5, 1687: triangle in right and left lower corner), 396-397 (page 4 of the *Fraytagishe Kurant* of December 5, 1687, covering the greater part of the upper half left column and part of right column, page 3 of the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of August 9, 1686: the lower half of the page).

Pages 30-33 (pages 2-4 of the *Fraytagishe Kuranten* of September 7, 1686 and page 1 of the *Dinstagishe Kuranten* of September 10, 1686) show stains at the top and the bottom, perhaps caused by moisture. The text is still legible. This damage was clearly caused after the papers were bound into the volume. Some smaller stains are to be found on pages 34-37,
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Letters show through on several pages, especially page 344 (page 4 of the Fraytagishe Kurant of August 15, 1687, pages 346-347, pages 2-3 of the Fraytagishe Kurant of August 22, 1687).

The last line of the first column of page 345 and the last line of the first column of page 347 (pages 1 and 3 of the Fraytagishe Kurant of August 22, 1687) are slanted.

The lower right corner of page 368 (page 4 of the Dinstagishe Kurant of October 3, 1687) is slightly torn.

5.10. Notes and marks in handwriting

On what is probably the pastedown of the volume, before the first page of the Kuranten, someone made notes in Dutch handwriting. It is a survey of the dates of publication from ‘one page before August 13, 1686’ until March 28, 1687, which also mentions the missing issues.

On the end-leaf of the book are some handwritten remarks as well, probably in the same handwriting as the notes on the first page of the book. The first sentence reads: ‘Waar behoort dit exemplaar?’ (‘Where does this copy belong?’) This question is probably referring to the last, undated, two pages in the book, which almost certainly date from Friday, August 9, 1686. The second sentence is: ‘Zie verder mijn artikel: N.I.W. 12 XI 1935, No. 28 art. v. J.S. d. Silva Rosa’ (‘See also my article: N.I.W. [Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad] November 12, 1935, Nr 28 art. by J.S. da Silva Rosa’).20

These words must have been written by Da Silva Rosa himself, who was librarian of Ets Haim at the time, and therefore probably the only one who was entitled to write in books that belonged to the library.

There is a handwritten cross (X) on the lower right corner of page 172 of the book (page 4 of Fraytagishe Kuranten March, 7, 1687).

In the left top corner of page 229 (page 1 of Fraytagishe Kuranten May 2, 1687), there is a handwritten number 1. On page 233, the first page of the next issue (Dinstagishe Kuranten,

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20 This refers to Da Silva Rosa, ‘Een Amsterdamsch-Joodsche Courant’, in the NIW of November 18 (not 12), 1935.
May 6, 1687), there is a 2. On page 237, the first page of the next issue (Fraytagishe Kuranten May 9, 1687), no 3 can be discerned, but this copy has an unusually narrow upper margin: it could be that a small strip with a 3 on it was cut from the top of the paper, to make it fit into the volume. On page 241, the opening page of the next issue (Dinstagishe Kuranten, May 13, 1687), there is a 4. On the first page of the issue that comes right after it, page 245 (Fraytagishe Kuranten May 16, 1687), a small rounded line is discernible that is probably a 5. On the issue after that, on page 249 (page 1 of Fraytagishe Kuranten, May 23, 1687), there is a 6. The next issue, on page 253 (page 1 of Dinstagishe Kuranten, May 27, 1687), shows a 7. On the next issue, on page 257 (page 1 of Fraytagishe Kuranten, May 30, 1687), a rounded form may be an 8. And finally, on the first page of the next issue, on page 61 (Dinstagishe Kuranten June 3, 1687), the last issue printed by Halevi, a 9 appears. The style of writing of the numbers looks rather seventeenth-century than nineteenth- or twentieth-century. On the next issue, the first one printed by Tartas, no number can be seen. On some of the papers that follow there may be numbers, but they are too vague to be made out.

5.11. Stamps

On the right side of the bottom of page 112 of the volume (page 4 of Fraytagishe Kuranten, December 6, 1686) the upper half – or so it seems – of a stamp can be seen, probably with the words ‘םײמדרש עץ ח’ (Midrash Ets Haim).

At the bottom of page 180 (page 1 of Dinstagishe Kuranten March 3, 1687), in the middle, there is a stamp with the words ‘David Montezinos’. The same stamp can be found at the bottom of the left side of page 206 (page 2 of Dinstagishe Kuranten April 11, 1687).

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21 If these numbers were written shortly after publication of the newspaper, this might indicate that the missing issue of Tuesday, May 20, 1687, did not get lost, but was never published.

22 Incorrectly dated December 5, 1686.