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Accounts of events, lampoons and lies: the Madrid infosphere in 1598–1627

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 17th century in Madrid one deals with a specifically functioning infosphere that influences the formation of the first public opinion. The author describes the phenomena related to the acquisition, dissemination and commenting of information in the city space. In her analysis she uses literary works, dictionaries and chronicles, along with preserved documents of social life. The article shows in a cross-sectional way the nature of the changes taking place in the society of Madrid between the year 1598 - Philip III's accession to the throne- and the year 1627, when Philip IV issued a regulation prohibiting the free circulation of informative publications, such as reports from events, letters, sermons, etc.

The turn of the 16th and 17th centuries is the beginning of the history of Spanish journalism. It was then that circles of recipients of journalistic news began to form; they were interested not only in reading, but also in commenting and evaluating the information received. The fact is that it has been a long time since the scientists have been using the term "public opinion" in the context of seventeenth-century society¹. The article presents the infosphere of seventeenth-century Madrid on the

¹ See e.g. M. Olivari, *Avisos, pasquines y rumores. Los comienzos de la opinión pública en la España del siglo XVII*, Madrid 2014; R. Chartier, C. Espejo (eds.), *La aparición del periodismo en Europa: comunicación y propaganda en el Barroco*, Madrid 2012; A. Castillo Gómez, J. S. Amelang (eds.), *Opinión pública y espacio urbano en la Edad Moderna*, Madrid 2010; et al.

basis of literary texts and the notes of contemporary chroniclers. It shows how the inhabitants obtained and disseminated information, and how the habit of exchanging opinions about the news heard or read in the city space came into being.

In 1598, Philip III ascended the throne of Spain. His rule brought a qualitative change in the way of exercising power compared to the reign of Philip II. It was expressed, i.e., in a significant increase in the free flow of information, easing censorship criteria and relative tolerance for texts of a political nature or directed ad personam, against a given official. During the reign of harsh Philip II, even anonymous publication of a lampoon entailed risk of dying on the gallows. Meanwhile, officials of Philip III often withdrew from looking for the guilty, and this lack of motivation was primarily due to royal indulgence. The ban on staging theatrical performances introduced by Philip II in the last months of his life was lifted, and judging by the significant increase in the production of *avisos* from the beginning of the 17th century², they no longer struggled with the programmatic distrust of the rulers.

In 1621, Philip IV ascended the throne. Six years later, in 1627, he announced a new law on the publishing market. It restored the requirement to obtain authorization for all kinds of publications, including leaflets, accounts of events, letters, sermons, etc., thus inhibiting the previously free circulation of information among the public. Hence, I decided to limit the timeframe of the presented period to the first stage of the relatively free development of the information market.

The city space played a significant role in the circulation of information. The street was common property for the Spaniards and performed primarily social functions; therefore it is not surprising that it also became a typical space to publish and announce all kinds of messages. In Sebastian Covarrubias' dictionary, published for the first time in 1611, we find the following definition of the word *street*, Spanish: *calle*:

*"We say about the street that it belongs to the king, therefore you cannot forbid anyone from walking on it [...]. To go out on the streets with business, to make something public, although it should be kept secret"*³. Publishing was closely related to the recognition of space as "common utility", under the protection of authorities. After all, no one could give himself any prerogative over what belonged to the king. Nobody had any special privileges over the streets. The last sentence of the definition reads: *"When something is very public we say- 'People talk in the streets'"*⁴, which clearly shows that the fact that a given piece of information appeared in the area of the street made it public information. The city space spoke, as it was expressed by Francisco de Quevedo, who referred to the pamphlets and lampoons on display as "attached tongues of gates and street corners"⁵.

Naturally, along with the streets, the square played the role of spreading information, which also, according to the Covarrubias' dictionary, was "a public place

² M. Dolores Sáiz, *Historia del periodismo en España*, vol. 1, Madrid 1996, p. 35.

³ S. de Covarrubias, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, Madrid 1611, fol. 177v. Unless otherwise indicated, the translation was made by the author.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ F. de Quevedo, *Obras políticas: históricas y críticas*, Madrid 1893, p. 142.

where supplies were sold and neighbors and inhabitants of the region gathered”⁶. In the *Diccionario de autoridades*, published by Real Academia Española over a hundred years later, under the entry *plaza*/ English: square, one could find the following phraseology: ‘Put on the square. Make public and broadcast something that was hidden or that nobody knew’⁷. In the squares, apart from the unofficial circulation, information of an official nature was also published - this is where the town crier most often made an official reading of the announcement dictated by the authorities. This ritual had the driving force, as only after being read out loud was the document considered binding.

It is important to emphasize the close bond linking the public nature of certain spaces with enabling the public to obtain information there-news from the court/the world, official information, news about new laws and regulations. The collective attention, which the rulers often deliberately attracted, was a condition for judgment: unanimous or not, positive or negative, but it was also a condition for discussions triggered by news that interested the significant audience. However, also those who decided to confront power with lampoons and pamphlets relied on the same information-judgment dynamics and similarly sought the collective audience in public places. In both cases, attempts to reach the audience took into account the oral message - reading aloud made it possible for illiterate people to get acquainted with the information.

As professor Antonio Castillo Gómez accurately stated, Madrid - the country’s capital and seat of the court since 1561 – was then considered the “Babylon of Information”⁸. The change on the Spanish throne significantly influenced the monarch’s exposure. The rulers were the subject of constant interest from their subjects, who most often felt reverently towards them. Their gestures, words, clothes – everything that was exposed to the light of the day, was observed. Young Philip III and his even younger wife (born in 1584) meant a nice change for the people. They brought energy to the court that swept away the sense of royal isolation typical of his predecessor. The monarchs left the palace with uproar and splendor, showing themselves to the people of Madrid, organizing grand ceremonies and public audiences.

Thus, vivid words circulated the streets and squares of both Madrid and other 17th-century cities, taking various forms. Anyone who wanted to know the latest news knew perfectly where to go. In most Spanish cities, there were places called by the Spaniards *el mentidero*, or “gossip mill”⁹. As the name suggests, they did not enjoy a good reputation. They were rather associated with a place where women indulged in gossip, as the well-known proverb went: *Yendo las mujeres*

⁶ S. de Covarrubias, op. cit., fol. 590r.

⁷ *Diccionario de autoridades*, [online] <http://web.frl.es/DA.html>, [access: 05.05.2020].

⁸ A. Castillo Gómez, *El placer de los libros inútiles y otras lecturas en los Siglos de Oro*, Madrid 2018, p. 65.

⁹ *Mentidero* is literally a “liars’place”. Spanish: *mentir*, meaning “to lie”. The suffix *-dero* in the case of nouns means “the place where the action indicated by the verb in the stem is performed” (see *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, <https://dle.rae.es/-dero>, [access: 09/04/2020]).

Javier Castro Ibaseta writes more about Madrid lies and their political importance in his doctoral thesis *Monarquía satírica: poética de la caída del conde Duque de Olivares*, defended in 2008 at the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid (access possible via the AMU repository: <https://repositorio.uam.es/handle/10486/1281>). See above all pp. 221-270.

al hiladero, van al mentidero¹⁰ (Eng. “When a woman goes to the spinning mill, she goes to the gossip mill”). In the already mentioned *Diccionario de autoridades*, under the entry *mentidero*¹¹, we find the following definition: “A place where idle people gather to talk. Its name comes from the fact that people usually tell made up stories and lies there”¹².

To support the definition, the authors of the dictionary cite an excerpt from a comedy by the seventeenth-century playwright Manuel de León Marchante:

What are you doing alone in Madrid?
I hardly ever leave the gossip mill
I do it only for dinner, which means never or just for a while
I dine quickly in the house of my tailor friend
To my knowledge, to go to the tailor’s shop
Is as if you had never left the gossip mill¹³.

Manuel de León Marchante’s work is not the only one that mentions the existence of gossip mill. The *mentidero* institution was widely known. There, you could get familiar with the latest information, rumors and even news from the underworld. In 1622, after the murder of the controversial Count of Villamediana, numerous epicedia¹⁴ and sonnets circulated in Madrid’s gossip mill, the authors of which demanded that the perpetrators of the crime be exposed, but also expressed their own opinions on this matter. In one of them, attributed to Luis de Góngora, *A la muerte violenta que le dieron al Conde de Villamediana sin saber quien* (English: “To the violent death inflicted on Count of Villamediana by an unknown perpetrator”), begins with the words: “Gossip mill of Madrid; / Tell us who killed the Count?”¹⁵ only to accuse the king of ordering to kill the aristocrat in the last verse.

There were three *mentideros* in the Spanish capital. The first of them, called Las Losas del Palacio, was located in front of the Royal Alcazar. It was attended primarily by courtiers and royal officials, which gave it mainly a political nature. This is what Gabriel Pérez del Barrio Angulo, a 17th-century official and author of a textbook for those who wanted to learn the complicated art of service at the court, wrote about it in his *Secretario y Consejero de señores y ministros* (English: *Secretary and Counselor of Lords and Ministers*):

Melancholy has led me this afternoon to the mentidero of pretenders and courtiers, and since those who are afflicted by misfortune are emboldened by the complaints of others, at first they shouted and cursed, and there were so many dissatisfied, sad and disconsolate people that in order to soothe their emotions and wipe away their tears they opened their hearts wrapped in words of competition and jealousy of those who were better off, so that

¹⁰ The proverb appears in the work by the sixteenth-century paremiologist Hernan Nuñez, published in 1555: *Refranes o proverbios en romance*. The quote comes from the first edition (Salamanca 1555, fol. 131r; available on Google Books: https://books.google.pl/books?id=-4dNAAAACAAJ&hl=es&source=gbs_navlinks_s).

¹¹ The entry *mentidero* appears in volume 7 of the dictionary, published in 1734.

¹² *Diccionario de autoridades*, op. cit.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Epicedium - a piece of literary work written in honor of the deceased.

¹⁵ L. de Góngora, *Todas las obras de Don Luis de Gongora: en varios poemas*, Madrid 1654, fol. 65r.

both made me feel in their position, showing the results of both fates: some sail joyfully among the sounds of trumpets and sing praises of Sejanus: others, grumpy, tormented by storms, call Saint Elmo, drifting at sea, trying to cope with their lives [...].¹⁶

Another *mentidero*, dominated by people associated with the theatre world, was called Mentidero de Comediantes. It was located on the corner of Calle de León and Santa María, in a small square of Plazuela de León. In other words, as the famous playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca pointed out in his play *El astrólogo fingido* (*Fake Astrologer*), it was marked by the corners of Calle del Lobo and Calle del Prado. Don Antonio tells about how quickly rumors spread and evolved in the community of comedians in the aforementioned play:

An expert and authority
in the art of astrology
by all men you are known to be.
In all Madrid there is not yet
a single man whom I have met
to whom I have not also said
a thousand things both wrong and right.
By God, lying is sheer delight! (...)
From there I then went on a ways
to where the actors stage their plays
and where it's known that in effect
the darkest secret won't be kept.
I walked on to where Lobo Street
and Prado Street both cross and meet.
There their four corners form a place,
which a lady with wit and grace
has named the Tattle Hall of Fame
of men of great and noble name.
I started off to speak of you
and then, you won't believe it's true,
there was a man who knew you were
a real live astrologer.
Then, though non knew better than I,
as truth they told me my own lie.
But wait, the best is still to come!
In a pool parlor was someone,
who mentioned things he saw you do.
I can't help laughing, I tell you.
When I no longer could stand it,
I now began to contradict
all this nonsense and foolish stuff.
He then stood up all in a huff
and told me right to my own face:
"You don't know him in the first place!

¹⁶ G. Pérez del Barrio, *Secretario y Consejero de señores y ministros*, Madrid 1645, fol. 238r.

I do and what you hear from me
I have on good authority,
for he my pal happens to be."
That's how Madrid enforces news!
I had to swallow my own ruse! ¹⁷.

The third *mentidero*, the most universal and heterogeneous one, was located on the stairs in front of the Convent of Saint Philip on Puerta del Sol. There, too, one could get acquainted with a variety of information from the country and the world, both information containing a part of the truth or two truths, and information which was completely made up. It is about this gossip mill that another 17th-century author, Francisco Santos, writes in his costumbrista¹⁸ work *Día y Noche de Madrid* (English: *Day and Night in Madrid*):

Why do you call a holy place, said Onufry, a mentidero?

- I don't treat the place indecently; those who lie there, even though it is a holy place, are called liars, because by profaning the place, they make it a lie; and among them more lies are told than between tailors and women. And to let you know what is going on in this noisy place pay attention to this man who has just finished reading the letter, and you will see how much fuss he makes.

Hardly had he folded the letter and put it away when he pulled out another one, with more lines than the other had letters, and as he went up the stairs, he stopped as if reading it, and during that time more than twenty people gathered around him. One said, "What's new, Mr. Jonson?" Another one asked: "Do we have some good news?" Another one asked if it was a letter from the Army. Another said: "Captain, take us out of our doubts." Another, in a voice so loud that it stood out above the rest, said, "This letter is sure to tell the truth." Eventually they all lined up and he started reading it in the middle, and people everywhere flew towards him like flies.

It took him over an hour to read the letter [...]. Some people left the circle, some saying goodbye, others pulling their eyebrows, others biting their lips, and others clenching their fists and kicking; when other people saw it, they asked what news had come. He finished reading the letter [...] and there he was, surrounded by curious people, talking about the deployment of the army, preventive actions and the siege of the enemy, expressing opinions on how people during the invasion should be managed and how it should be led.

- Can you see this man? - said Johnny-. In his whole life he has not left Madrid, and the Captain they call him and you can hear him talk about over five hundred wounds they inflicted on him in the war; [...]. And I bet the letter he read he had written in his home so that today it amazes a hundred fools who get excited about hearing such lies¹⁹.

A 17th-century resident of Madrid not only listened to but also read news from home and the world. He used what by Antonio Castillo Gómez was referred to as "urban graphosphere"²⁰. In the famous scene from *Don Quixote*, the narrator

¹⁷ P. Calderón de la Barca, *Fake Astrologer: A Critical Spanish Text & English Translation* (transl. and ed. by Max Oppenheimer), Bern 1994, pp. 155-157.

¹⁸ Costumbrism - a trend in Spanish art, focusing on reflecting the customs of society in a given region (hence the name, from the Spanish *costumbre* - custom). Although costumbrism is associated primarily with the Romanticism, it had its precursors already in the Baroque period, such as Juan Zabaleta or Francisco Santos.

¹⁹ F. Santos, *Día y noche de Madrid*, ed. E. Suárez Figaredo, Lemir, 14:2010, pp. 729-730.

²⁰ A. Castillo Gómez, op.cit., p. 48.

tells us that he likes to “read anything, even scraps of paper lying in the gutter”²¹. What scraps of paper could be found on the streets of a 17th-century city? Official prints, the content of which was prepared by officials, or unofficial ones - those created by residents. Among them there were completely harmless papers, such as advertisements, the content of which miraculously reached our times, recorded as part of the search and inventory of the contents of confiscated trunks²². It was this form of an advertisement on street corners that was chosen by Don Quixote so that the inhabitants of Madrid could see his challenge to a duel for all those who would not consider Queen Zenobia the most beautiful in the world²³. Despite being reluctant to this idea, Sancho buys a little glue and first hangs the poster on the court’s door, to which the curious *alguazil*²⁴ reacts immediately, suspecting that it is an advertisement for the play: “What are you hanging here, brother? Are you a servant of some comedians?”²⁵.

In the streets, there also appeared leaflets containing pamphlets and lampoons aiming at specific people, social groups (e.g. converts) or political or religious authorities. Pamphlets were hung on the doors of churches and other institutions, on the walls of the Inquisition’s seat, in squares, streets, or on the doors of people who were described in them. They were also spread freely in public places so that people could reach for them and read them, or listen to them when they were read aloud²⁶. Yet, there were also those who tore them off the walls to use paper to roll cigarettes²⁷.

In pamphlets and lampoons, along with caricatures depicting ridiculed or criticized characters, a frequent recourse were nursery rhymes to make texts easier to remember. Many were put into circulation simply in the form of couplets (Spanish *coplas*), i.e. popular works composed of quatrains, used to defame and slander public figures and ordinary citizens accused of the loss of honor, adultery, cryptojudaism, etc. In order to strengthen their overtones, they were usually hung on the walls of institutions or houses belonging to the criticized. Hence, lampoons directed against the king or his officials were hung on the gates of the Royal Palace, those criticizing the clergy - on the door of churches, and those slandering private persons - on the doors of their houses.

On the other hand, edicts and decrees were officially published. Many government regulations could be adapted for private reading and distributed in the form

²¹ M. Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. by John Rutherford, London 2003, p. 74.

²² The content of one of the advertisements for an offer to sell two plots of land on the streets of Jesús and San Pedro in Madrid, was recorded as part of the research who was the author of pamphlets hung at the gates of the Royal Alcazar, among the papers of the historian Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega. See F. Bouza, *Papeles y opinión. Políticas de publicación en el Siglo de Oro*, Madrid 2008, p. 103.

²³ The passage comes from the apocryphal continuation of *Don Quixote* from 1614 by Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda.

²⁴ Alguazil - in Spanish alguacil, then - police officer.

²⁵ A. Fernández de Avellaneda, *Segundo tomo del Ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha, que contiene su tercera salida y es la quinta parte de sus aventuras*, available [online] w Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes: http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/segundo-tomo-del-ingenioso-hidalgo-don-quijote-de-la-mancha-0/html/ff3baa00-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_2.html#l_0_ (chapter 6), [accessed: 10.04.2020].

²⁶ See more about pamphlets and lampoons in the 16th and 17th centuries in Spain in: T. Egido López, *Sátiras políticas de la España Moderna*, Madrid 1973; J. M. Díez Borque, *Literatura en la calle. Prosa y poesía en las paredes: pasquines del Siglo de Oro español (I)*, Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, n.4 (72): 1995, pp. 365-384; F. Bouza, *Escribir en monopolio. De los libelos de vecinos a las críticas al rey*, [in:] Idem, *Corre manuscrito: una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro*, Madrid 2001, pp. 109-136; et al.

²⁷ A. Castillo Gómez, op. cit., p. 34.

of printed notebooks, aimed mainly at lawyers and officials, but their announcement had to be public. The act of publication was conducted in a specific way; it was announced by the town crier, and from the 15th century the announcement involved hanging the document in various public places. This method gained importance over time so much so that in Sebastian de Covarrubias' dictionary we can find the following definition of the word *edicto*:

It is commonly understood as texts placed in public places, announcing certain things for everybody to know and understand, and to direct to the right place those who may be interested or obliged to answer them²⁸.

The thematic scope of the published Madrid edicts was unique in comparison to other cities in Spain, as many of edicts dealt with particular problems arising from the presence of a court and from functioning in a large city. They could inform about how to dress, how to hunt, or how to issue a license to own a carriage.

From the mid-16th century onwards, edicts, previously rather handwritten, began to be printed, but retained the structure of their predecessors. Some even had a handwritten signature to give them more official power. They used various advantages of typographic art²⁹. Such efforts can be seen in the organization of the graphic space or the use of small caps in the appropriate places, the interchangeable use of various typefaces, which increased the readability of the text, as well as the introduction of commonly known emblems and iconographic motifs - especially in the case of edicts issued by ecclesiastical institutions. They were read during the most important masses, hung on the doors of churches and monasteries, as well as in other public places, depending on the document. The publishing of the edict had additional goals: to visualize the authority from which they originated an important symbolic role, thanks to which, apart from the informational purpose, they also played a symbolic role in the graphic materialization of the voice of the authority³⁰.

From a typographic point of view, the richest and most complex type of announcements were posters announcing literary competitions and debates on dissertations defended at universities. In the case of the former, the upper part was reserved for the title of the competition and for the person in whose honor it was held. Then followed a preamble explaining the reason for the ceremony in more detail. The middle part contained a description of the professions and features that a given work of art should display (language, rhythm, content) in each of the disciplines. While in the remaining parts the text was composed to the full width of the page, this part was often divided into columns. At the bottom, there were detailed rules for the competition, jurors, date and form, in which the pieces to take part in the competition had to be delivered³¹. There were also all kinds of restrictions,

²⁸ S. de Covarrubias, op. cit., fol. 333r.

²⁹ See: A. Castillo Gómez, *Edictos, carteles y pasquines. Papeles efímeros y comunicación urbana en la sociedad hispana de la temprana Edad Moderna*, La Bibliofilia 2019, n. 2, pp. 207-236.

³⁰ A. Castillo Gómez, *Edictos...*, p. 216.

³¹ Comp. Francisco Martínez's notebook with notes, in which the author has included several posters of this type (digitized by Biblioteca Digital Hispánica) <http://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/detalle/bdh0000012204>. See also: A. Castillo Gómez, *El placer...*, p. 56 and following.

e.g. that one of the copies of the work should not be signed or that it could not be written in honor of a woman.

As we read in the anonymous *Noticias de Madrid* (English: *News from Madrid*), in the entry of March 9, 1622:

On that day, the fathers of the Society of Jesus, in order to initiate the celebration of the canonization of Saint Ignatius and Saint Francis Xavier, brought out one hundred and sixty banners and the same number of young men on horseback, aged twelve to fourteen, who started to post information about the literary competition in which great prizes were offered for those who would compose the best poetry in honor of the Saints. They hung posters on the door of the Palace, on the Convent of the Poor Clares and on the Main Square³².

Another area in which wall typography predominated were the already mentioned advertisements concerning the defense of university theses. Initially, these posters were handwritten, but then the printed form was used more often. The advertisement contained a dedication with the image of a chosen saint or the coat of arms if the defense was dedicated to secular or clergy personages. Next came the name of the student and his studies, the degree to which he aspired and the conclusions he was to defend publicly³³; the place of discussion, authorities presiding the ceremony, the day and time. In the case of this type of advertisements, we also deal with typographically diverse texts, with the use of small caps and italics for better readability, decorated with embellishments on the margins and ornate initials. The text was composed on the full width of the page, although it happened that the defended conclusions were arranged in two columns³⁴. The content of the advertisements was written in Latin, therefore, the group of their recipients was much narrower. They were hung on the doors of academic institutions and, if they concerned theological issues, on the gates of the most important churches.

The traditional, but still very important, communication tool were sermons that could later be read in printed or handwritten versions. Undoubtedly, at the beginning of the 17th century, the preaching service still retained many of its original features, but due to the generally occurring convergence of information channels, this one, which was one of the oldest, became part of modern forms that increased the range of influence. As Michele Olivari showed, the success of a given preacher

³² *Noticias de Madrid 1621–1627*, ed. A. González Palencia, Madrid 1942, p. 24 Diego Duque de Estrada writes about the same professions in his autobiography: "I was present at the canonization of Saint Ignatius and wrote many works in his honor, which were very well received by the public, and at [...] a poetry competition they gave me a silver cup and a doublet woven with golden threads as a prize".

D. Duque de Estrada, *Comentarios del desengañado de sí mismo, prueba de todos estados y elección del mejor de ellos, con la vida del mismo autor*, Madrid 1860, p. 44. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/memorial-histri12realuoft/page/n7> [accessed: 02/01/2020].

³³ As for the standards of the defense of the so-called Conclusions, a very interesting document is the preserved, sixteenth-century regulations from the University of Salamanca. See P. Valero García, *Documentos para la historia de la Universidad de Salamanca*, Cáceres 1989, pp. 143-144.

³⁴ On the PARES portal (Portal de Archivos Españoles, pares.mcu.es), two seventeenth-century advertisements for the defense of the conclusions are available in a digital form, one from the University of Alcalá de Henares from 1676 (defense of Francisco Ignacio del Barrio, in the file reference number ES (28079.AHN/5.1.3//CODICES, L.1499), and the second from the University of Salamanca from 1601 (defense of Francisco Sancho Castillo, reference number INQUISICIÓN, MPD.338).

Both documents were digitized by the Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid. In the case of the former, judging from the notes on the back of the poster, it later served as a notebook for an Irish student studying at the university's Colegio Menor de San Jorge.

often depended on advertising measures that guaranteed a larger audience³⁵. Cristobal Suárez de Figueroa, in his costumbrista work *El pasajero* (1617), describes the example of a person offering this kind of promotional service. Researchers believe that Suárez de Figueroa had in mind the activities of Andres de Almansa y Mendoza, at that time a popular author of reports on events and letters like proto-newspapers, today considered one of the precursors of journalism in Spain³⁶.

He was said to have always provided a great audience, not from the commoners, but from the most eminent figures, and that he began his preparations eight days before the sermon. To oblige the invitees and to avoid any excuses they might make, whether based on business interests or reluctance to get up early, he insisted that the sermon should take place late and offered a comfortable place so that inconvenience would not spoil his efforts³⁷.

Almansa y Mendoza knew everyone and was everywhere; his best friend, as the author of *El Pasajero* assures, was the Madrid town crier. He created a network of contacts and controlled various information channels. His services were used by various groups in society from the arts down to the clergy³⁸. He then quoted the best excerpts from the sermons in his accounts of events (product placement!), thus promoting the activity of a given preacher. It is worth mentioning that the speakers, in order to make their sermons more attractive, often referred to events that warmed up the public opinion at a given moment, and sometimes, if they were brave enough, they pointed to the abuse of power or bad habits of the courtiers³⁹.

At that time, only theatrical plays had an impact comparable to sermons. The development of theatre in Spain coincides with the development of public opinion and the impact of this medium on society cannot be overestimated. The great success of this form of entertainment, which attracted representatives of all social classes, contributed to the fact that theatrical performances became an extremely important form of communication. The shift towards folk themes and the popular trend made theatre become not only a link between the two worlds – the intelligentsia and the people. Theatre was also a way of informing poorly educated or even illiterate audiences. If, for example, in England, the press usurped the role of an interpreter of reality that had been previously reserved for theatre, then in Spain theatre was the main form of manifesting social unrest and problems⁴⁰.

Some playwrights made only faint allusions to the world of politics. However, there were also those who, taking advantage of the ambiance of relative tolerance prevailing under the rule of Philip III, decided to do much more, as Guillén de Castro did in his play *Allá van leyes, donde quieren reyes* (English: *There come the laws*), in which he condemned the tendency of rulers to interpret the applicable law in their

³⁵ M. Olivari, op. cit., p. 187.

³⁶ See footnote 279 in C. Suárez de Figueroa, *El pasajero*, ed. E. Suárez Figaredo, Lemir, 22: 2018, p. 465.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 464.

³⁸ We know about Almansa's activities, among others from Lope de Vega's comments: "[...] Mendoza is the best man of preachers; he rides in carriages with gentlemen, knows all the ladies, listens to all comedies among poets, evaluates sermons, consults sonnets; he is a discreet ambassador of Your Majesty at the court, envoy of the Puerta de Guadalajara, Mercury of the news and the satire of this Kingdom". F. Lope de Vega, *Cartas*, ed. N. Marín, Madrid 1985, p. 185.

³⁹ M. Olivari, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

⁴⁰ R. Chartier, *Inscribir y borrar. Cultura escrita y literatura*, Buenos Aires 2006, p. 110.

favor. "(...) Like a plow after oxen, there lie laws where the Kings wish"⁴¹. Probably most of the inhabitants of Madrid easily picked up the allusions to Duke of Lerma in the play. When, however, the matter concerned not a ruler or a royal favorite, but rather inferior representatives of the privileged class, the authors were not in the habit of limiting themselves to subtlety. Apart from the Church, which deserved special protection, no government officials were able to escape virulent criticism. The plays referred to ethical and political principles officially promoted by monarchs, yet so contradictory to the unlawful conduct they condemned.

In addition to what could be heard in the streets, squares and corrals, or read from the papers hung on the walls, information could also be purchased. Although booksellers, printers, wandering merchants and stallholders were involved in the sale of all kinds of printed matter, it was *ciegos*, i.e. the blind who were primarily associated with information trade and even its production⁴². The blind were information brokers of the time, like town crier in the case of official proclamations, or like more or less random newscasters in *mentideros*. As we read in *Avisos* by Jerónimo de Barrinuevo: "The Queen of France is also notified that she is pregnant, although it can be concluded without notice. Great things are said about her entry into Paris, which the blind from this Court will surely publish", and also: "The news of the capture of Turin has not only been confirmed, but even published by the blind from this Court, along with the report I enclose"⁴³.

The fact that the trade in leaflets and the dissemination of information was reserved for the blind is evidenced by the fact that some claimed to be blind in order to be able to participate in this activity. The attitude of both real and pretended blind people, was contested by the moralists of the time, including a soldier and doctor, Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera⁴⁴ (1558–1620), in whose work, under the highly significant title *Discursos del amparo de los legítimos pobres* (English: *Speech in defense of the real poor*), we will find the chapter "Let the blind not sing nor sell couplets about imaginary events". It reads as follows:

It is imperative that Your Majesty curb the ways of earning money by some blind men and others who only pretend to be blind despite having a very good eyesight, who line up in the squares and main streets of large towns in this kingdom to sing to the accompaniment of the guitar and other instruments, printed couplets, and sell them, despite the fact that they speak of apocryphal events, completely unbelievable, and sometimes even outrageous; on

⁴¹ G. de Castro, *Allá andan las leyes*, Madrid 1662. Digitized and available on the website: <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/alla-van-leyes-donde-quieren-reyes/> [accessed: 08/05/2020].

⁴² As Abel Iglesias Castellano states, the blind author is a figure mostly found in the context of the 16th century. In the 17th century, the blind dealt mainly with the distribution of leaflets (p. 473). It is worth adding that in the 18th century institutions such as the Hermandad de Nuestra Señora de la Visitación de Madrid, under the auspices of which they operated, received the exclusive privilege of street sale of entertainment prints, including reports from events (p. 468). A. Iglesias Castellano, *Los ciegos: profesionales de la información. Invención, producción y difusión de la literatura de cordel (siglos XVI–XVIII)*, [w:] *La invención de las noticias: las relaciones de sucesos entre la literatura y la información (Siglos XVI–XVIII)*, red. G. Ciappelli, V. Nider, Trento 2017, pp. 467–490.

⁴³ J. de Barrinuevo, *Avisos (1654–1658)*, vol. 4, Madrid 1892, p. 311.

⁴⁴ In his work, Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera emphasized the urgent need to distinguish the real poor from those who pretended to be homeless in order to extort money, steal and live a non-Christian life, and even work as scouts for other kingdoms. Cf. C. Pérez de Herrera, *Discursos del amparo de los legítimos pobres*, [online], http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/discursos-de-amparo-de-los-legitimos-pobres-y-reduccion-de-los-fingidos-0/html/feaaaa42-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_8.htm, passim [accessed: 13/01/2020].

imaginary examples, they teach uneducated people and people with evil inclinations, things from which then their boldness results, because they encourage them to commit similar crimes those about which they have sung; and as many people gather to listen to them, numerous thefts are committed in the crowd [...]”⁴⁵.

However, the trade of all kinds of leaflets, couplets and other editorial products was not well perceived at all by intellectuals of the time. Pedro de Valencia (1555–1620), humanist and chronicler of Philip III, divided the professions into useful, useless and harmful. The last group included women practicing harlotry, comedians and “stallholders selling couplets, engravings and prophecies, along with other traders of this type of goods”⁴⁶.

In the 17th century, a kind of proto-newspapers were sold, which were at that time referred to as *relaciones de sucesos* (accounts of events), *avisos* (from Italian *avvisi*) or simply *gacetas*. The former grew on the basis of other press genres, primarily the so-called *cartas de relación* (i.e. letters describing the events) – in terms of content – and *copla*, in terms of the form of the composition. While *Cartas de relación* were more private in nature and addressed specific individuals and institutions, *relaciones de sucesos* were a step forward, as they became public texts at a time when, as we have seen, all social classes were thirsty for information⁴⁷.

The Spanish “accounts of events” is a controversial genre as it has always balanced on the margin of news and stall literature. They were aimed not only at informing, but also moving the recipient and providing them with entertainment. They could refer to events of a historical and political nature, e.g. the course of an important battle, holidays and celebrations, natural disasters, but also the so-called unusual events. In *Catálogo y Biblioteca Digital de Relaciones de Sucesos*⁴⁸ you can find numerous examples of accounts of every type, including, for example, a story published in Madrid in 1611 by “a Franciscan father” about the miracles performed by two figures of Christ that came to life to heal a good Christian and to punish a bad one⁴⁹.

Cartas de relación also derive from the so-called *avisos*, but they exhibit distinct characteristics. While *relaciones de sucesos* covered a single event on several pages, *avisos* usually contained a bundle of different, summarized messages, presented in no more than a paragraph or two. Contrary to the accounts of events, *avisos* were written in a formal style, devoid of rhetorical means. In addition, they often had a handwritten circulation, becoming a carrier of important or confidential information in certain official and court circles⁵⁰. Therefore, it can be said that at the

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ P. de Valencia, *Discurso contra la ociosidad*, Madrid 1993, p. 170.

⁴⁷ See more about the typology of early press genres in Spain: H. Ettinghausen, *Hacia una tipología de la prensa española del siglo XVII: de «hard news» a «soft porn»*, [in:] *Studia aurea: actas del III Congreso de la AISO* (Toulouse, 1993), I. Arellano Ayuso, C. Pinillos Salvador, et al. (eds.), Pamplona 1996, pp. 51–66; C. Espejo Cala, *Gacetas y relaciones de sucesos en la segunda mitad del XVII*, [in:] *Géneros editoriales y relaciones de sucesos en la Edad Moderna*, PM Cátedra García, ME Díaz Tenia (eds.), Salamanca 2013, pp. 71–88.

⁴⁸ *Catálogo y Biblioteca Digital de Relaciones de Sucesos*, <https://www.bidiso.es/CBDRS/> [accessed 05.05.2020].

⁴⁹ *Aquí se contienen tres maravillosos casos que dos santos Christos obraron...*, Miguel Serrano, Madrid 1611.

⁵⁰ See C. Espejo, *Un marco de interpretación para el periodismo europeo en la primera edad moderna*, [in:] *La aparición del periodismo en Europa: comunicación y propaganda en el Barroco*, ed. C. Espejo, R. Chartier, Madrid 2012, pp. 103–126. Particularly the sub-chapter referring to *avisos*, pp. 106–113.

beginning of the 17th century, those genres which were intended for the mass and popular audience – e.g. reports from events – coexisted on the information market along with the genres whose target readers came from slightly more selected circles.

Naturally, the main source of information of a political nature was the court and all its branches. In this context, a very interesting figure was Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, secretary of Margaret of Austria, wife of Philip III. Being a regular visitor at the palace, during his long service, he managed to create the richest and most important chronicle from this period, containing first-hand news interwoven with the information found in letters and *avisos*. Importantly, in the context of this article, Cabrera also used to write down information on various texts that appeared in the street circulation. For example, in the report of August 2, 1608, the secretary wrote:

Fifteen days ago, certain papers similar to lampoons or pamphlets appeared at the gates of the Palace, at Puerta de Guadalajara, at the gates of the Royal Prison, and at Puerta del Sol, the content of which I shall present roughly, urging the public to wake up, because the favorite-tyrant⁵¹ who rules, has full authority over the king and the kingdom. Much has been done to find the author, but it has not been possible to identify him; if found, he would receive an exemplary punishment⁵².

On June 6, 1609, Cabrera informed about the successful investigation and the arrest of Francisco de Mendoza on charges of offending majesty and treason. The reason for his detention, he wrote, was the anonymous, defamatory memorial sent to the king a year earlier, in which he “condemned the present government”. Later, however, “there appeared on the corners of this city [Madrid – K.S.] papers repeating the contents of that memorial, the authorship of which is attributed to him”⁵³. In fact, during the search of the admiral’s home, two boxes of papers were confiscated as final evidence⁵⁴.

Francisco Bermúdez de Pedraza wrote about how much the Spanish court was involved in gossip and how the people around it were fed with rumor, in a very popular, at that time, treatise on the duty of the royal secretary (*El Secretario del Rey*, first edition: 1620). Arriving at the royal court in the second decade of the 17th century, Bermúdez de Pedraza was disturbed by what he found there. Therefore, he decided to warn the king against the dangers of the “outflow” of information. According to him, one of the main duties of the secretary, as the name of the office suggests, is “la observancia del secreto” (“keeping the secret”). As owing to a secret:

[...] the subjects’ love and respect for the ruler is born. Since the reasons and grounds for decisions made by the King, when they are uncertain and unknown to the people, are more respected by them; for when the minister reveals why it was resolved this way and not

⁵¹ It refers to the favorite of the time, Spanish valido, Duke of Lerma.

⁵² L. Cabrera de Córdoba, *Relaciones de las cosas sucedidas en la Corte de España, desde 1599 hasta 1614*, Madrid 1857, pp. 344–345. I quote the first printed edition available at Biblioteca Digital Hispánica.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 371.

⁵⁴ The trial against the admiral is described by F. Bouza, *Quién escribe dónde. Autoría y comercio. Escritos a propósito de unos pasquines madrileños de 1608 y el proceso del Almirante de Aragón*, [in:] *Formas de historia cultural*, S. Gayol, M. Madero (eds.), Buenos Aires 2007, pp. 47–60.

otherwise, or what motives made him punish one and forgive the other, or grant or deny the grace, then there will appear many personal judgments, vivid discussions and arguments that would refute these reasons, causing contempt for the royal decisions and arousing aversion to the King among the people⁵⁵.

At the court and in its surroundings, at the academies in the palaces of the mighty, during the tertulias of intellectuals, in bookstores, pharmacies, and finally - in the *mentideros*, streets and squares of the city, the same names resounded and the same things were commented. The English queen, the unrest in France, the intrigues of the Italians, the daily activities of the rulers and members of their retinue, the affairs of the great noble families, the problem of the Moriscos⁵⁶, all kinds of important government decisions as part of domestic and international politics... All this created a range of common interests for the public, who commented on these topics. Of particular interest were appointments to high-ranking officials (along with the issues of nepotism and the influence of Prince Lerma). These interested the public for two reasons: some were interested in being informed about vacancies in clerical positions, both in Spain and, perhaps most importantly, in the New World; the uneducated, on the other hand, liked to bet on who would get the job and who would be dismissed. As Lope de Vega wrote: "Nothing new is happening here, except for what is told by the people who appoint temporary ministers and archbishops every now and then"⁵⁷.

How ordinary citizens participated in the circulation of information was described e.g. by Jerónimo de Alcalá y Yáñez, in his 1624 novela picaresca, *El donado hablador: vida y aventuras de Alonso, mozo de muchos amos*:

For several days I listened with pleasure to news from Italy, from Constantinople, from India, and also the talks about how to behave in the Royal Palace or how to rule the whole Kingdom well; the poor talk about all these things in hospitals and taverns, [...]⁵⁸.

As has already been mentioned, the reign of Philip III meant an increase in tolerance and leniency for published texts. The permeability of censorship filters increased in relation to all kinds of proto-press; many types of publications circulated without the need for prior authorization. The king even used his influence to ease the censorship of Santo Oficio. Thanks to this, genres such as political satire, magazines promoting voluntarism or regalistic legislation hostile to ecclesiastical aspirations to power flourished at the beginning of the 17th century⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ F. Bermúdez de Pedraza, *El Secretario del Rey*, Madrid 1620, fol. 61r–61v.

⁵⁶ Moriscos – Christian inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula with Muslim roots. Their ancestors were forced to convert by a decree of 1502. The so-called The „Moriscan problem“ continued throughout the 16th century, as this community did not want to humbly accept being cut off completely from the culture of their ancestors. Social unrest eventually led to the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain (1609).

⁵⁷ F. Lope de Vega, *Cartas, Documentos y Escrituras del Dr. Frey Lope Felix de Vega Carpio (1562–1635)*, vol. 1, red. K. Sliwa, Newark 2007, p. 199.

⁵⁸ G. de Alcalá Yáñez y Rivera, *El donado hablador: vida y aventuras de Alonso mozo de muchos amos*, Madrid 1788, p. 120.

⁵⁹ J. Pérez Guzmán, *De la libertad de imprenta y de su legislación en España*, Revista de España, vol. 135: 1873, p. 364.

The intellectuals' sensitivity to public opinion also increased. One of the vivid and widely commented cases among the erudites was the social reaction to the devaluation of money, which reached its peak under the rule of Philip III, although it continued throughout the whole 16th century. Despite the opposition of the Cortes⁶⁰, in 1602 Philip III decided to remove the remnants of silver from minted coins, so that the coin, if you still could refer to it this way, contained only copper⁶¹. In response to this, and in line with the prevailing belief in society, the rebellious Jesuit Juan de Mariana wrote a treatise in which he accused the rulers of devaluing the coin in order to finance state expenditure. In the prologue to *Tratado y discurso sobre la moneda de vellón* (English: *Treatise and Speech on Coin*), he justified his boldness in addressing the topic:

[...] I will not say anything that is my individual opinion, the whole kingdom screams and laments crushed by burdens; the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant; it is no wonder that among so many people someone has dared to write what is spoken about in squares and what you hear in groups, in corners and streets⁶².

Juan de Mariana listened carefully to the opinions of the public. He did not do it, however, to advise the king, but to sharply criticize the plunder policy of the ruling class. Therefore, using rhetorical means, he transformed the protests from streets and squares into a collective denunciation with which many of his readers could identify. In fact, Juan de Mariana played the role of an intermediary between the city's discourse and the discourse of the elite who used to participate in political and intellectual debates. In this case, neither the king nor his valido, Duke of Lerma, turned out to be lenient - Father Mariana spent a year and a half in prison, which constituted the punishment for his publication⁶³.

The state administration noticed the threats resulting from free trade in information. This caused that in 1627 the announcement of the pragmatics mentioned in the introduction was issued; it prohibited the free circulation of printed matter without appropriate permits:

[...] it is forbidden to print and copy reports, letters, apologies, panegyrics, newspapers and news, sermons, speeches and other papers (...), even if they concern trivial matters and have few lines, unless they have been previously checked and approved of at the Court by one of the members of the Council, who would have the title of Commissioner for these matters [...]⁶⁴.

The 19th-century Spanish historian and journalist Juan Pérez de Guzmán said, not without exaggeration, that the regulation caused that "the press in Spain

⁶⁰ Cortes - an institution of a parliamentary nature, state representative assembly, separate until the eighteenth century for each kingdom included in the Crown. In the 17th century, they had almost exclusively fiscal policy powers.

⁶¹ J. I. García de Paso, *El Análisis de la Política Monetaria de Felipe IV y el Conde-Duque de Olivares por Don Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas*, <http://documentos.fedea.net/pubs/eee/eee104.pdf>, p. 6.

⁶² J. de Mariana, *Obras de Padre Mariana*, ed. F. Pi y Margall, Madrid 1854, p. 37.

⁶³ See A. Feros, *El Duque de Lerma: realeza y privanza en la España de Felipe III*, Madrid 2002, pp. 399-402.

⁶⁴ *Observancia de las leyes precedentes; y absoluta prohibición de imprimir papeles algunos sin las licencias que se previenen*, <http://www.filosofia.org/cod/nv081609.htm>, [accessed: 08.05.2020].

died for a while"⁶⁵. This event should certainly not be underestimated in the history of Spanish journalism. It is worth remembering that the same pragmatics also completely forbade the publication of books "unnecessary or useless, dealing with subjects which they neither should nor could address in response to an appeal from the Council of Castile in 1625 calling for a ban on comedy and short stories. From then on, the information inconvenient for the rulers returned to the oral and handwritten circulation, and the ambiance was definitely more repressive. Changes in the prevailing legislation meant that the so-called official journalism, or propaganda dictated by the mighty Count-Duke of Olivares, the first minister of King Philip IV, started to play a more significant role.

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⁶⁵ J. Pérez Guzmán, op. cit., p. 364.

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Relacje z wydarzeń, paszkwile i kłamalnie: madrycka infosfera w latach 1598–1627

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Słowa kluczowe: infosfera; przestrzeń miasta; opinia publiczna; Madryt; XVII w.

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Streszczenie: Na początku XVII w. w Madrycie mamy do czynienia ze specyficznie funkcjonującą infosferą, która wpływa na kształtowanie się pierwszej opinii publicznej. Autorka opisuje zjawiska związane ze zdobywaniem, rozpowszechnianiem i komentowaniem informacji w przestrzeni miasta. Czyni to na podstawie dzieł literackich, słowników i ówczesnie spisanych kronik, a także zachowanych dokumentów życia społecznego. Artykuł w sposób przekrojowy pokazuje charakter zmian zachodzących w społeczeństwie madryckim między rokiem 1598 – wstąpieniem na tron Filipa III, a rokiem 1627, kiedy Filip IV wydał rozporządzenie zakazujące swobodnego obrotu drukami informacyjnymi, takimi jak: relacje z wydarzeń, listy, kazania, etc.

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Dr. Katarzyna Setkowicz absolvierte den Studiengang Spanische Philologie. 2018 erlangte sie den Doktorgrad der Literaturwissenschaft an der Philologischen Fakultät der Universität Breslau. Zurzeit ist sie wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin im Institut für Wissenschaftliche Information und Bibliothekswissenschaft derselben Universität. Ihr Forschungsfeld umfasst die Literatursoziologie, die Buchgeschichte und die Geschichte der Trivalliteratur vor allem in den spanischsprachigen Ländern, und zwar besonders in Spanien. 2020 war sie Preisträgerin im Wettbewerb „Monografie“ [„Monografien“] der Stiftung für die polnische Wissenschaft.

Ereignisberichte, Schmäh- und Lügenschriften: die Madrider Infosphäre in den Jahren 1598–1627

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S **tichworte:** Infosphäre; Stadtraum; öffentliche Meinung; Madrid; 17. Jh.

Z **usammenfassung:** Am Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts haben wir es in Madrid mit einer spezifischen Infosphäre zu tun, die auf die erste öffentliche Meinungsbildung Einfluss nahm. Aufgrund von den literarischen Werken, Wörterbüchern und zeitgenössischen Chroniken sowie den erhaltenen Dokumenten des sozialen Lebens schildert die Autorin jene Erscheinungen, die damit verbunden sind, verschiedene Informationen in einem Stadtraum zu gewinnen, verbreiten und kommentieren. Der Beitrag zeigt bereichsübergreifend den Charakter der Änderungen in der Madrider Gesellschaft aus der Zeitspanne zwischen 1598 (Thronbesteigung von Philipp III.) und 1627, als Philipp IV. eine Anordnung zum Verbot vom freien Umsatz von Informationsdrucken, wie etwa Ereignisberichte, Briefe, Predigten etc., erließ.