

Controlling the Flow of Information: The Soft Power Dimensions of Printing Privileges in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

MARIUS BUNING

Marius Buning is Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Oslo, Norway. His research interests focus on the origins of intellectual property and the role of the state in shaping notions of technological and scientific progress. Since 2022, he has been the PI of the ERC project Before Copyright (BE4COPY, 101042034), which explores the intertwining of printing privileges and the politics of knowledge in early modern Europe.

Abstract

This article examines the political dimensions of printing privileges in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, analysing their impact on the dissemination of information, the development of the printing industry, and the nature of published works. While Dutch printing privileges are often seen as legal tools primarily important for the local market, this essay shows that the 'local' cannot be isolated from intra- and pan-European connections. By selectively granting privileges, the authorities sought not only to control the flow of information, but also to actively shape it. Privileges thus served as instruments of power and as a means of transmitting cultural values and setting the political agenda. Analysing Dutch privileges from this perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of their application and purpose, illustrating their role as mechanisms of soft power that reinforced existing power structures and facilitated cultural hegemony.

Keywords: printing privileges, publishing industry, cultural hegemony, intellectual property, knowledge infrastructure

Controlling the Flow of Information: The Soft Power Dimensions of Printing Privileges in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic

MARIUS BUNING

Power is the ability to make others do what you want them to do. The power of a political state is therefore often expressed in terms of its degree of control over population, territory, and natural resources – a form of control maintained through the use of punishment and reward.¹ However, power does not always need to be exercised through violence or coercion. An important element in maintaining political power is the ability to make others *want* what you want. This form of second-degree power is often associated with intangible sources such as culture or ideology that others find desirable. Joseph Nye has called this co-optive form of power ‘soft power’, that is, the ability to shape the preferences of others.² Drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s ideas about cultural hegemony, Nye argued that soft power is based on three resources: culture, political values, and foreign policy.³ These resources work indirectly to shape the political environment by relying on the attractiveness of one’s culture and values, or the ability to manipulate the political agenda.⁴ This article uses this basic insight as a starting point to examine the soft power dimensions of printing privileges in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. It highlights the role of printing privileges in the nexus of knowledge and power and provides insights into their strategic and culturally motivated uses. The structure is as follows: after a brief discussion of the emergence of a privilege system in the Dutch Republic, the essay presents several examples – drawn from engravings, maps, and printed books – that show how rulers sought to shape public opinion through the granting of exclusive privileges. The article concludes by arguing that looking at the system of printing privileges through the lens of soft power can help us better understand how, why, and when certain publications appeared on the market.

1 Nye, ‘Soft Power’, 4. This article was supported by the ERC project Before Copyright (ERC, BE4COPY, 101042034), funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

2 Nye, *Soft Power*, 5-7; Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 32, 188.

3 Nye, *Soft Power*, 11.

4 Nye, *Soft Power*, 7; Nye, *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition*, 12.

The Rise of the Dutch Privilege System

Printing privileges first appeared on the European continent in the fifteenth century, almost immediately after the invention of the printing press.⁵ While the granting of printing privileges was a novelty, privileges as a legal form were not. They had a long history, tracing back to Roman law, where privileges were used to legitimise an exceptional position that gave a group or individual some advantage over the majority – effectively a form of discrimination. By this definition, therefore, privileges were used for a variety of purposes that went far beyond our current understanding of copyright.⁶ For example, privileges were used to determine the legal status of creditors, heirs, and artificial persons such as guilds. Printing privileges were just one possible variation of a system: they were exclusive rights granted to (a group of) individuals for the commercial exploitation of a variety of printed materials such as books, engravings, or globes. Typically, privileges were granted to individuals or institutions for a limited period of time by the highest authorities of a given jurisdiction. In the Dutch case, where the question of sovereignty remained a thorny issue, the question of who was responsible for granting privileges remained a contentious issue that depended on the assertion of concrete political power relations.

A Dutch system of printing privileges developed in the 1580s, at the height of the Dutch Revolt. Resisting their Spanish overlords, the Dutch political leadership felt the need to take official printing policy into their own hands. This meant that the highest authorities appropriated the right to grant privileges to authors, engravers, translators and, most notably, printers. These privileges remained valid for a limited period of time (usually six to fifteen years) and were designed to protect either a single work or a series of works from being copied. Illegal reproductions were confiscated, and infringers on the privilege were fined.⁷ In this respect, the Dutch system largely mirrored those already in place in other countries throughout Europe, and particularly in the Southern Netherlands. This connection is evidenced, among other things, by the fact that in 1584 the independent Dutch authorities granted the ‘chief printer’ (*hoofddrucker*) of the Netherlands, Christophe Plantin, one of the first privileges in the Republic, ‘similar to that granted to him by the king in the Chancellery of Brabant on 15 March 1563, for six years after the printing of each edition’.⁸

5 The literature on printing privileges is too vast to list. A first overview can be found on www.copyrighthistory.org (Accessed on 14 November 2024).

6 For the issue of defining privileges, see also Mohnhaupt, ‘Unendlichkeit des Privilegienbegriffs’. There is still a widespread belief that printing privileges were the precursors of copyright because they explicitly invoked the notion of exclusive rights as a measure against piracy. But it has become clear that things are not so simple, and that it makes more sense to consider printing privileges as an object of study in their own right, rather than merely as a precursor to something else. The ERC-funded project ‘Before Copyright’ (BE4COPY, 101042034) is currently preparing a series of publications on the interconnected nature of printing privileges in early modern Europe.

7 In the Dutch case, the fine usually had to be paid in three equal parts to the authorities, the privilege holder, and the poor.

8 The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), Staten-Generaal (hereafter SG) 11, Resolution 22 June 1584, fol. 140v: ‘in forma, gelijk hem verghunt es by den Coninck in de canselyre van Brabant in date den 15 Meerte 1563 voor ses jaeren naer impressie van elcke editie, prout latius in leteris’. See also Japikse et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën*, iv, 717. Original spelling and grammar have been retained; only the long ‘s’ has been replaced by its modern equivalent and common abbreviations have been expanded. Translations are the author’s unless otherwise stated. For Plantin’s activities in the Dutch Republic, see also note 42.

However, in the transition from a vassal state to an independent republic, the administration of privileges changed from the previous situation in which the Council of Brabant and the Privy Council had played a central role. Following the abdication of Philip II in 1581, the revolutionary States of Holland initially assumed the right to grant privileges, as can be illustrated by the privilege granted to the printer of the famous *Apology* of William of Orange, in which the latter defended himself against the ban imposed on him by Philip II.⁹ This propagandistic treatise was preceded by an ‘Advertisement to the Reader’ in which William of Orange himself warned that ‘no other translation, in any language, is to be regarded as genuine and of value, except those which have been translated by order and command of His Excellency, and which have been examined by him before being placed in the hands of Charles Silvius for printing.’¹⁰ The printing privilege, granted later in the year, was printed directly below this warning and closely related to it; it gave the printer Charles Silvius the right to print the book to the exclusion of all others for three years (fig. 1).¹¹

The use of printing privileges to disseminate and control the circulation of knowledge continued when the Duke of Anjou came to power in 1582, and the right to grant privileges passed into his hands.¹² This is evidenced, for instance, by the privilege for the lavishly illustrated book on the duke’s own joyous entry into Antwerp, as printed by Plantin. The privilege for this treatise stated that the Duke of Anjou, being the only brother of the King of France, ‘has retained and confirmed Plantin as his printer, and has given him the authority to print all edicts, mandates, letters patent, statutes, ordinances, placards, and other things concerning the general public.’¹³ Once again, the exclusive right to print was used to regulate the dissemination of knowledge, especially in matters that concerned the common good. The same was true when Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, came to power in late 1585 as the new Governor-General of the United Provinces. He severed the connection with Plantin but continued the time-honoured custom of seigniorial justice by granting

9 In the years leading up to the abdication of Philip II, the States of Holland granted an individual privilege for the printing of a Bible. We know of this privilege, supposedly issued in 1579, only from the title page. For further details see Buning, ‘Commentary’.

10 Oranje, *Apologie* (Leiden 1582), sig. A1v: ‘Dat hu gheen ander translatie in wat spraecken dat het sy, voor de sijne noch voor oprecht ende van weerden en houdt ofte advoueert, dan de ghene die hy op laste en bevele van zijne Excell. syn overgesett ende by selve oversien, ende ind handen van Charles Sylvius ghelevert om te drucken.’ The reason for this precaution was to prevent other printers in Antwerp or elsewhere from printing the apology ‘without his [the author’s] will and without his consent’. Incidentally, the advertisement and the privilege do not appear in the same place in every edition. In another edition, for example, the privilege appears immediately below the letters from the Prince of Parma and the king’s Privy Council, who made it obligatory to publish the ban in all towns and provinces, so that no one could pretend ignorance of the law: Oranje, *Apologie* (s.l. 1582), 192.

11 It is interesting to note that the penalty for infringement, apart from the confiscation of all books printed and sold, was a fine of fifty gold crowns for the benefit of ‘the common cause’ (*de ghemeyne saecken*). This is further evidence that this privilege, probably the first to be granted by the rebellious Dutch authorities, was also seen at the time as part of a well-oiled war machine.

12 Although he had been named Lord of the Netherlands during the negotiations at Plessis-les-Tours in 1581, the Duke of Anjou was not sworn in until a year later.

13 *La ioyevse & magnifique entrée*, sig. A1v: ‘ayant retenu et confirmé Christophe Plantin pour son imprimeur, lui a donné le pouvoir d’imprimer tous édits, mandements, lettres patentes, statuts, ordonnances, placards, et autres choses concernant le public en général.’ On the same day, 17 April 1582, the duke granted another privilege to two printers in Ghent to print his joyous entry in Ghent: *L’Entree magnifique*, sig. A1v.

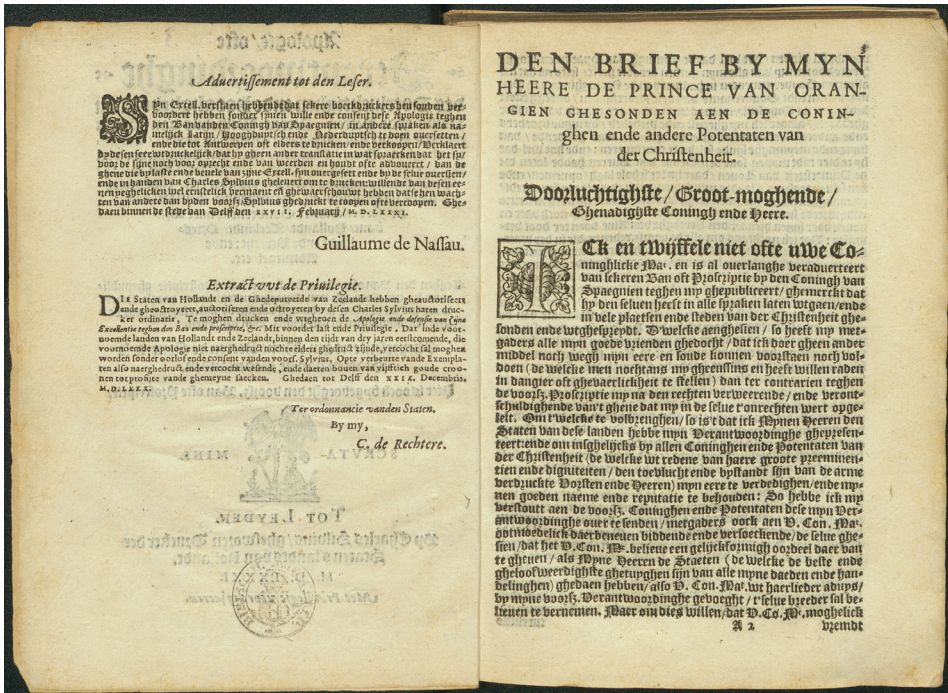


Fig. 1 Privilege for Willem van Oranje, Apologie, ofte Verantwoordinghe (The Hague: Charles Silvius, 1581). Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam, Pfl. D.6b.

Cornelis Claeszoon the privilege of printing the *Image or Figure Book*. *Serving the Ordinance of Currency*.¹⁴ The text of this privilege made it clear that:

Our gracious Lord the Earl of Leicester, desiring that all may have knowledge of the true coinage, and be warned of counterfeit [coins], has by special grace granted and authorised Cornelis Claesz. to print (to the exclusion of all others) henceforth all matters concerning the coins, such as valuations, permits, and images of gold and silver pennies, with their value and weight as recommended by the General Masters [of the Mint]. Claesz. may print and distribute [this information] in Holland, Zealand, and the United Provinces, and no one is allowed to copy [this information], either wholly or in part, or to sell copied copies, on penalty of one hundred golden *angelotten* and on top of that the confiscation of all copies, as is more clearly stated in the privilege expedited at The Hague on 8 March 1586. Signed: R. Leycestre [below:] Chr. Huygens.¹⁵

14 *Beeldenaer ofte figuer-boeck*.

15 *Beeldenaer ofte figuer-boeck*, sig. A1v: 'Onzen ghenadighen Heere den Grave van Leycestre begerende dat een yegelic kennissen hebben der goeder Munten, en gewaerschout voor de quade, heeft daerom wt gratie speciale toegelaten ende gheauthoriseert Cornelis Claesz. dat hy voortaan alleene (ende met seclusie van alle andere) sal moghen printen de saken ende affairen, aenclevende der Munten als te weten, Valuatien, Permissien ende Caerten vande Goude ende Silvere Pennighen ghevalueert ende ongevalueert met haren prijs en waerde ende gewichte ghelijck den Generael Meesters der Munten dat bevolen is te ordonneren, desen sal moghen Printen oock distribueren vercopen in Holland ende Zeelant ende den gheunieerden Provintien. Sonder dat em ymant sal vervorderen int gheheel oft deel die nae te drucken ofte naghedruete te vercopen, op de verbuerte van hondert

In this case, too, the purpose of the printing privilege was to inform the general public about state affairs and matters of general concern. As we shall see, this was no different when the Dutch Republic took on its final political form.

After Leicester's departure in December 1587, there was some initial confusion as to which authority had the right to grant privileges. At first, the Council of State took on this role, as it had previously assisted Leicester in the distribution of exclusive printing rights. However, following a political manoeuvre that deprived the Council of State of the right to grant any privileges, the States-General assumed the power to grant them from April 1588 onwards.¹⁶ From then on, three levels of government interfered with the issuing of privileges in the Republic: the States-General, the provincial States and, in exceptional cases, the municipal authorities. The States-General was the central political body in which each of the seven provinces that made up the Dutch Republic was represented with one vote. As a result, a privilege granted by the States-General was valid in each of the provinces (but not, for example, in the Kingdom of France, and certainly not in the rival Habsburg Netherlands). The provincial States, in turn, had power over provincial jurisdiction. In principle, this meant that a privilege granted by the States of Holland was not valid in the province of Utrecht, for example. Despite their limited validity, the importance of provincial privileges grew steadily over time, not so much because of a growing sense of independence on the part of the provincial authorities, but because of the establishment of new booksellers' guilds in various towns in the province of Holland.¹⁷ Finally, a privilege granted by the municipal authorities was only valid within the jurisdiction of a particular city. Such municipal printing privileges were not often used, however. When granted, they usually covered materials of local importance such as textbooks for use in the city's Latin schools.

gouden Angelotten ende noch daerenboven te verbeuren die Exemplaren ghelijckt breder blijckt, by de Prevelogie daer af-gheexpedieert in Gravenhage. Den viij. Martij, 1586. Onderteeckent R. Leycestre [...] Chr. Huygens.' The privilege can also be found in *Manuel ofte handtboeck*. The privileges that had served to standardise the coinage business were to be maintained for a long time to come, granted to the various printers of the time. For the introduction of the Dutch Currency Regulation, see Gelder, 'De Nederlandse beeldenaars'.

¹⁶ For further details of this political manoeuvring under the auspices of Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt, see Buning, *Knowledge, Patents, Power*, 33-38. It describes the reorganisation of the administration of invention privileges, but the political wrangling over sovereignty and the right to grant privileges for printed matter was no different. For examples of privileges issued by the Council of State, see NA, Raad van State 515, Resolutions 20 December 1584, fol. 257 (to Simon Stevin); 6 January 1587, fol. 259v (to Thomas Basson, for the publication of English books); 7 October 1587, fol. 259v (to J. Paedts Jacobsz.); and 18 January 1588, fol. 259 (to Laurens Jacobsz.). These privileges were issued in the name of Leicester. In particular, the 1588 privilege granted to the Amsterdam bookseller Laurens Jacobsz is interesting because it was granted at a time of constitutional confusion; the printer solved this by not printing a date of issue in the published summary of the privilege. See Copius, *Vier ende vijftich predicatien*, sig. A1v.

¹⁷ For most of the seventeenth century, booksellers were under the guild of St. Luke, which united artists such as painters. Unlike the later booksellers' guilds, these guilds were not directly involved in advising on future privileges. Separate booksellers' guilds were established in Middelburg (1590), Utrecht (1599), Haarlem (1616), Leiden (1651), Amsterdam (1662), Rotterdam (1699), and The Hague (1702). Until the 1640s, most privileges were granted by the States-General. After that, the States of Holland took the lead. Hoftijzer argued that privileges granted by the States of Holland were de facto respected elsewhere in Dutch Republic: Hoftijzer, 'Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges', 55.

Irrespective of the level of political power involved, the procedure for obtaining a privilege in the Republic was set in motion when an applicant submitted a petition to the relevant authorities setting out the reasons why he or she considered certain material to be worthy of privilege. The reasons for which applicants sought privilege were varied. However, as in other European countries, the most common justification was to reward the labour invested in the work and to protect the printer from unfair competition in the form of pirated editions. Printing privileges were primarily intended to reduce the printer's risk, and the privilege provided no 'property rights' with respect to the author's intellectual work. Still, authors and others who provided creative input (such as translators and engravers) were certainly not excluded from judicial favour. For example, when Festus Hommius (1576-1642, later secretary of the Synod of Dordrecht in 1619) applied for a privilege for his translation of the *Explicationes catecheticae* by Zacharias Ursinus, the authorities granted it on the grounds that a privilege would ensure 'that the applicant could more easily find a publisher who would be willing and able to bear the great expense of printing, and who would not be harmed by other printers or booksellers'.¹⁸ The privilege thus gave creative workers some control over their work, even though that was not the fundamental purpose of the system. By granting the privilege, the government reduced the risk for printers and facilitated the realisation of projects. Given the importance of the privilege to print production, it is interesting to examine which works the authorities chose to honour and protect.

Between Economy and Promotion

Printing privileges enabled their holders to do something that was normally against the law, namely, to establish an economic monopoly. The justification for such privileges was therefore embedded in language that focused strongly on moral justice. It would be unjust if others could freely benefit from the investment of time, effort, or money made by the printer or the first author, and the disseminator of 'useful' knowledge had to be rewarded so that others would follow his lead. If the justification for a privilege was couched entirely in terms of merit and reward, the reality was that monopoly rights usually had to be bought. Although we still know relatively little about the price that had to be paid for a privilege issued by the States-General, the archives of the Keeper of the Seal show that in the first decades of the seventeenth century the average stamp duty for a privilege from the province of Holland was set at six pounds.¹⁹ However, some privileges were issued free of

¹⁸ NA, SG 7474, Petition by Festus Hommius, 1601: 'Maer opdat de suppliant des te beter soude cunnen vinden den Drucker, die de groote onkosten des Druckens soude willen ende connen dragen, en dierselven den anderen Druckers ofte Boeckvercoopers niet vermindert ofte beschadigt worde.' The privilege related to the publication of Ursinus, *Het schat-boeck der christelycke leere*.

¹⁹ This observation is based on the analysis of the accounts of Johan van Oldebarnevelt, who served as Keeper of the Seal for Holland in the year 1593-1618: NA, Landsadvocaat Van Oldenbarnevelt 1053-1075, Stamp duty accounts, 1593-1618. Unfortunately, the archives containing the financial records of the stamp duties of the States-General have been lost over the centuries. The Dutch pound was a unit of account valued at one guilder (consisting of forty *groten*): Gelder, *De Nederlandse munten*, 267.

charge. The famous cartographer Willem Jansz Blaeu, for example, was granted a ‘gratis’ privilege in 1608, giving him the exclusive right for ten years to ‘sell all works by his own hand which he has newly invented or shall invent during that period’.²⁰ It is possible that, behind the scenes, such privileges cost more than the official stamp duties suggested, not least because it is well known that one had to offer numerous ‘douceurs’ to facilitate any action by the relevant authorities in The Hague. Nevertheless, booksellers’ accounts from the later seventeenth century indicate that the total cost of a privilege rarely exceeded forty guilders.²¹ This was a negligible amount compared to the profits that could be made on certain titles.

The question, then, is why some works appeared under privilege and others did not. It should be noted that it was not compulsory to apply for a privilege in the Dutch Republic, and estimations suggest that only 1 percent of the total printed output in the seventeenth century appeared under privilege.²² Paul Hoftijzer has argued that this was because printers only considered the process of obtaining a privilege worthwhile when they expected a work to be a resounding success; when a book had already proven to be a bestseller; or when they wished to protect their investment in a particular project, for instance because it required the use of high-quality paper and engravings, or because it involved extraordinary editing and translation costs.²³ These observations are certainly not inaccurate, and it is clear that printers had a strong financial interest in obtaining monopoly rights to certain titles through privileges. But there was more to it than just financial gain. A privilege also represented, quite literally, a form of state-sanctioned preferential treatment.²⁴ For this reason, Simon Groenveld and Nadine Orenstein have suggested that a privilege may have conferred a certain ‘faux prestige’, even if – in their view – it did not imply state approval.²⁵ Elsewhere, I have extended this argument by arguing that there was indeed a mutually beneficial relationship between printers and authorities, wherein a privilege also signalled that the authorities valued certain content.²⁶ This article takes the argument a step further, positing that a printing privilege functioned as a mechanism to actively shape readers’

20 NA, Van Oldenbarnevelt 1060, Stamp duty accounts, 18 August 1608: ‘Omme te moegen voordien tyt van thien Jaren vercoopen alle syne eygen wercken die hy van nyiews geinventeert heft, ofte die hy binnen des selven tyt noch Inventeren zal.’ See for the Blaeu privilege: NA, svh 5676, Resolution 5 August 1608, fols. 69v-70v.

21 Only very few specific prices are known from booksellers’ accounts. Van Eeghen, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel*, V.1, 223, cites two examples of forty and eighty guilders, but this may have been the later resale price of the privilege; Hoftijzer, ‘Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges’, 58, estimates that the price in the mid-seventeenth century must have been around fifty guilders. The price may (and probably was) lower: Grabowsky, “‘Op de goede beterschap’”, 40, n. 14, mentions a specific fee of seventeen guilders in 1714 for the renewal of the privilege held by the directors of Amsterdam’s municipal theatre.

22 Hoftijzer, ‘Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges’, 49.

23 Hoftijzer, ‘Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges in de achttiende eeuw’, 163-164. Note that Hoftijzer does not mention translation costs explicitly.

24 The key here is the word ‘privilege’, which literally implies a form of favouritism; just as certain people were privileged, so could the content of books be privileged. For similar observations on the French censorship system, see also Darnton, *Censors at Work*, 29.

25 Orenstein, ‘Sleeping Caps’, 320; Groenveld, ‘The Dutch Republic’, 291. See also Hoftijzer, ‘Boekverkopersprivileges in de achttiende eeuw’, 163; Kruseman, *Aanteekeningen*, 345.

26 Buning, ‘Privileging the Common Good’.

preferences and was thus part of the soft power apparatus that reinforced and maintained existing power structures.

A compelling piece of evidence for this argument lies in the nature and variety of titles that were favoured by the authorities. This selection was largely driven by the need to standardise aspects of society such as law, religion, medical knowledge, hymns, and historical records, where the lines between politics, commerce, and ethical beliefs were often blurred. For instance, the government granted privileges to specific theological works, like those by William Perkins and Jean Taffin, which not only set a moral benchmark but also promoted specific religious ideas.²⁷ Privileges were also important in the market for medical knowledge or for textbooks, such as the *Reduced Tables of Interest* by Petrus Andreas Duyrcantius, published in 1616, whose privilege indicated that the book was meant to educate ‘all simple souls’ in arithmetic.²⁸ Similarly, privileges were instrumental in projects such as Johannes Halsbergius’s Dutch translation of Du Mornay’s *De la verité de la religion chestienne*, a Christian guidebook deemed essential by the East Indies’ governors for warning travellers to Asia and Africa against ‘the Muslims in particular’.²⁹ These examples show how granting privileges was strategically used by authorities to shape societal standards. In a related vein, the authorities also granted privileges to prestigious projects that could put the Republic on the map as a respectable centre of learning. One of the many examples here is the *Rosarium Politicum* by the German scholar George Gentius, a Latin translation and commentary on the *Gulistān* that became a standard work for the study of Persian for centuries.³⁰

However, privileges were not only granted for well-known works by famous authors or translators. Other types of work produced under privilege included official judgments and government decrees that required wide circulation in a standardised format. These were not expensive printed books, but rather more affordable printed matter.³¹ Pamphlets with moral undertones could sometimes count on privileged treatment as well. One example was the publication of *The Repentance* by Jean Haren, a Walloon Reformed minister from Bruges who had temporarily converted to Catholicism before returning to the Reformed church. In 1610, the States-General granted the printer Louis Elzevier a six-year privilege to publish Haren’s *Repentance* in both French and (translated into) Dutch.³² The small quarto booklet of four gatherings, without illustrations, could not have been expensive to produce, even if a translator had to be paid. Rather, it seems that the States wanted to ensure that a proper edition of this pamphlet was published for the edification of the

27 NA, SG 12299, Privilege granted to Jan Evertsz. Cloppenburch for Perkins’s works translated into Dutch, 30 July 1604, fol. 185. For the various printing privileges granted to Jean Taffin, former chaplain to William of Orange, see Japikse et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën*, VI, 666; VII, 292; XVIII, 150; IX, 708; and XII, 650. Several privileges were also granted for Bibles, the most important of which was the 1637 States Bible: Verwey, ‘De Statenbijbel’.

28 Duyrcantius, *Ghereduceerde Tafelen van Interest*, sig. A1v: ‘alle simple lieden’.

29 Du Plessis-Mornay, *Bybel Der Natvre*, sig. A4v: ‘in sonderheydt tegens de Mahumedisten’. The ten-year privilege had been issued to the translator on 14 July 1600: NA, SG 12298, Privilege 14 July 1600, fol. 362.

30 A transcription of the privilege can be found in Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, I, 283.

31 See also Buning, ‘Privileging the Common Good’, 94–95.

32 NA, SG 12300, Deed 29 April 1610, fols. 178v–179. It resulted in the publication of Haren, *De Bekeeringhe*; Haren, *La Repentance*.

public. The privilege was thus not just a sign of 'false prestige', but of a special favour that served the interests of the state, in order to co-opt the reading public, to promote its own culture and values, and to manipulate the political agenda.³³

Once a privilege had been granted, it had to be communicated so that other actors in the printing business were aware of its existence. One way of doing this was to send messengers to the door of the relevant actors in question, or to have the town's printer (operating under privilege, by the way) print a sort of flyer with the town's coat of arms on it, which could be posted in public places as a warning to others.³⁴ Another time-honoured way of publicising privileges was through advertisements in newspapers, which, in fact, often appeared under privilege as well.³⁵ In 1690, for example, the mayors of Amsterdam agreed that henceforth only one single French newspaper would be allowed to appear under the name *Gazette d'Amsterdam*. This was the immediate trigger for the fifteen-year privilege granted by the States of Holland to the editor of this newspaper, the French Huguenot refugee Jean Tronchin Dubreuil, on the express condition that he 'would print nothing against the state'.³⁶ The exclusive privilege of the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* was to last well into the eighteenth century.³⁷ Meanwhile, other publishers with French language skills were trying to obtain other privileges, including the privilege of translating German newspapers into French, which was finally granted to the French news compiler Paul Acéré, *seigneur des Forges*, on condition that he published his name and those of any translators with the pieces and 'take care that no offence should be caused to any person, high or low'.³⁸ In this case, too, it is clear that the privilege was not only a means of protecting local printers from the immoral act of piracy, but also a way to streamline the circulation of knowledge in an international market.

International Alliances and Conflicts

Privileges, by definition, had an international dimension. We know that they were traded on international markets and that, due to their limited validity, authors and printers repeatedly sought out different authorities in order to accumulate as many exclusive rights as possible for a given title. A notable example is the case of Otto van Veen, the

33 Cf. Verhoogt and Schriks, 'Reflecting Media,' 87, who argue that 'obtaining a privilege was not a special favour' in the Republic.

34 Several examples of such announcements can be found in the archive of the Amsterdam booksellers' guild.

35 In 1684, for instance, an Amsterdam printer published an advertisement in the *Haerlemse Courant* 'inviting all market masters to make perfectly known [the privilege of his almanac in various formats] at their annual market days, fairs, horse, cattle, and leather markets': Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, II, 1047.

36 Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, II, 840: 'qu'il ne sera rien inseré dans la dite gazette contre l'interest de l'état'. The history of the French newspaper begins in the 1620s: see Der Weduwen, *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers*, I, 185-186; Georgakakis, 'Delivering the News from Abroad'.

37 For the 1733 privilege granted to the son of Dubreuil, see Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, II, 1523.

38 Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, II, 1519: 'dat geene hooge personagien ofte andre van wat staet ofte conditien aenstoot en moogen worden gegeeven'.

teacher of Peter Paul Rubens, who worked mainly in the Southern Netherlands as court painter to Isabella and Albert of Austria. In 1609, the Dutch States-General granted him a privilege

for the same time as granted to him by the emperor, the Kings of France and Spain, and the archdukes, to engrave or draw his inventions, to the exclusion of others, in copper or wood, and to publish them in two different books, one to be called *Emblemata Horatian* and the other *Emblemata amorum*.³⁹

Van Veen's famous emblem books were then published in Antwerp for the author with privileges from the pope, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the Kings of Spain and France, and the Dutch authorities (*principum belgi*).⁴⁰

The case of Van Veen, and others like him, puts a different complexion on the idea that privileges were merely aimed at protecting local printers from competition. Privileges also held value as gifts and instruments of patronage, where the author's reputation, rather than the place of publication, was the main factor of consideration. For instance, in 1613 the Dutch authorities granted a privilege to the renowned humanist Adrianus Schrieckius for his *The Beginnings of the First Peoples of Europe* (1614), which had also been privileged by Isabella and Albert of Austria.⁴¹ Schrieckius was stationed in Ypres when he applied for the privilege and decided to have the book printed by the local printer François Bellet, who was best known for his production of Jesuit books. It was unusual for the Dutch authorities to grant such privileges to inhabitants of the Habsburg Netherlands. But this took place during the Twelve Years' Truce, when relations between the northern and southern Netherlands were somewhat normalised. The Dutch authorities may also have turned a blind eye in this case because Schrieckius argued in his voluminous tract that Dutch was in fact the mother of all languages, already spoken in paradise. Contrary to Van Veen, Schrieckius did not hesitate to proudly display the privileges granted by both the Dutch and Habsburg authorities side by side (fig. 2).

The fact that the Dutch authorities granted privileges for the production of printed matter outside their jurisdiction shows that they were not only intended to protect local printers from piracy; printing privileges were also an expression of approval by which the authorities wished to favour certain projects. Conversely, foreign authorities also granted privileges to authors and printers who had established themselves in the Dutch Republic. An interesting case in this respect is the privilege granted for a publication by Joseph Scaliger, the famous French humanist who had taken over the chair of history and law at Leiden University after the departure of Justus Lipsius. One of Scaliger's first publications after arriving in the Republic was a curious book on the squaring of the circle (*Cyclometria Elementa*, 1594), printed by Franciscus Raphelengius the Elder, who was at the time in charge of the Leiden branch of his father-in-law Christophe

39 Dodt van Flensburg, *Archief*, v, 15: 'Omme voor den tyt, dat hem gelyk octroy is gegunt, by den keyser, coningen van Vrankryk ende Spangien, mitsgaders die ertshertogen, alleene inde Veneerichde Provincien te mogen snyden in't copier of hout, ofte etzen, ende uitgeven sekere syne inventien by twee diverschen boucken, daervan het eene geintituleert is Emblemata Horatiana, ende het andere Emblemata Amorum.' The penalty for infringement was three hundred guilders and confiscation of goods.

40 Veen, *Amorum Emblemata*, 248.

41 Van Scrieck, *Van t'beghin*. On Van Schriek, see Olender, 'Der Arisch-Semitische Streit', 947.

Extrait des Privileges.

PAR Octroy & Priuilege des Archiducz est consenty & permis a Adrian van Scrieck Licencié es loix Sr. de Rodorne de faire imprimer *Originum, Rerumq; Celticarum & Belgicarum libros xxxij. cum Indicibus*, en langue Belgieque, Francoise, & Latine, par tel imprimeur ou imprimeurs qu'il voudra choisir, sans qu'aultres imprimeurs les pourront imiter, ny vendre es pays de pardeça, que par sa permission, le terme de dix ans, a paine de confiscation, & de cinquante florins d'amende pour chascun exemplaire, applicable selon les lettres patentes donnees a Bruxelles le dixieme d'Octobre de l'an XVI. XII. Signées sur le reply *T. De Berty*, & sceellées du grand seal de leurs Altezes.

By Octroy van die Staten Generael der Vereenighde Nederlanden is t'ghelijcke toeghelacten voor dize editien ende ses iaeren aenden voorszeyuen Adriaen van Scrieck Heere van Rodorne / met verbot aen een yeghelick die voorsz. boecken int gheheel ofte ten deele na te drucken / ofte elders naeghedrukt inde Vereenighde Provincien te brengen om te vercoopen / op verbeurte der seluer / ende daerenbouen van dryhondert guldens / te bekeeren een derdendeel ten behoef vanden officier / het tweede derdendeel vanden aenbrengher / ende t'resterende derdendeel tot behoef vanden voorsz. Aucteur: al breeder blyckende by d'acten ghedaen in s'Graven-haghe den sesten Septembzis ror. ruij. Gheteekent Bursman V. ende het neder / Ter ordonnantie vande Hoogh-ghemelte Heeren Staten Generael; Aerffens. ende daerbeneben was ghedruckt den seghel.

Tibi Francisco Belletti Typographo Ypris Flandrorum, impressionem operum meorum committo, ADR. SCRIECKIUS RODORNIUS.

Fig. 2 Privileges for Adrian Van Scrieck, Van t'beghin der eerster volcken van Evropen (Ypres: François Bellet, 1614). Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam, om 63-1561.

Plantin's printing imperium.⁴² Scaliger's treatise on humanist mathematics was printed on exclusive paper and protected by an exclusive privilege granted directly to the printer by the King of France, Henry IV. The privilege gave a lengthy explanation of the motives behind it, focusing mainly on the disadvantages that the learned public might suffer if deprived of Raphelengius's publications.⁴³ It was to avoid this from happening that the French king wished to protect the printer's activities in Leiden by issuing a ten-year privilege, whereby all printers in France were forbidden to reprint or sell Raphelengius's books, in whole or in part, without the printer's permission. The French protection of a Leiden-based printer clearly shows that privileges did not always serve to protect local printers from piracy, even if its legal scope was limited to clearly defined boundaries of political power.

The curious *mélange* of legal power and political prestige could, of course, also lead to conflict. A good example here is the case of the prominent French author François Eudes de Mézeray, who was granted a privilege by the Dutch authorities to publish two books on French history.⁴⁴ In 1668, Mézeray, whose books had previously been printed with a privilege granted by the French king, planned to have his books printed and sold on the Dutch market 'for the use of the inhabitants of these lands'.⁴⁵ In 1672, however, Louis XIV invaded the Dutch Republic, an act which would mark the beginning of the Franco-Dutch War (1672-1678). This allowed the Amsterdam printer Abraham Wolfgang to apply to the Dutch authorities for a privilege on his behalf to reprint Mézeray's *Chronological Summary of French History*. He argued that the French were charging excessive prices for their books, 'so that the booksellers in this country could not exchange the books they printed for the French ones and still make a profit'.⁴⁶ The printer had therefore begun reprinting the book in quarto and was almost finished with his work. But he had recently learned that Mézeray had been granted an earlier privilege by the Dutch authorities, which he now sought to have revoked. He argued that the privilege had not been clearly advertised by its holder, thus essentially rendering it invalid. Moreover, it was not customary to grant privileges to people residing outside the province and, in any case, privileges granted in times of peace should be revoked in times of war, if only

42 Scaliger, *Cyclometrica elementa dvo*. Plantin settled in Leiden in 1583 as the printer of the university. He returned to Antwerp in 1585, leaving the management of the Leiden branch of his business imperium to his son-in-law Franciscus Raphelengius, a staunch Calvinist.

43 A transcription of the privilege can be found in Bierens de Haan, *Bouwstoffen*, 282-284. For a broader analysis of the mathematical content and function of Scaliger's treatise, see Bierens de Haan, *Bouwstoffen*, 280-314. The privilege covered not only the *Cyclometrica elementa dvo* but also other books by Scaliger. For more background on the acquisition of the privilege and the intermediaries who may have been involved, see Nina Lamal's article in this special issue.

44 The privilege concerned his *Histoire generale de France* and his shorter *Abregé chronologique de l'histoire de France*.

45 Cited in Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, II, 1015, privilege 23 July 1668: 'tot dienst vande ingesetenen deser landen'. The book by de Mézeray was first published in France on 10 February 1668, with a printing privilege issued by the king on 6 December 1664 (and registered on 12 January 1668).

46 Cited in Kleerkooper and Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam*, II, 1015: 'Dat de Boekverkopers hier te lande met de boeken die sij drukken tegens de Fransse niet wel konden handelen, om deselve met eenig profijt te verkopen.' The system of early modern book trade was largely based on mutual exchange, often measured in number of sheets.

because it was officially forbidden to trade with the French and the book in question was therefore difficult to obtain. Wolfgang's line of argument apparently resonated with the Dutch authorities, who granted him a new fifteen-year privilege to reprint Mézeray's version of French history.⁴⁷ This case illustrates how the interplay of legal power and political prestige could lead to conflict, depending on the specific circumstances, but also how the granting of a privilege involved constant negotiation between the various interested parties.

Negotiation Strategies

As we have seen, the authorities granted a printing privilege when they believed that a financial guarantee, secured by temporary monopoly rights, would contribute to the publication of works that would benefit the common good.⁴⁸ This contextual background can in turn help us to understand the timing of the appearance of specific works, such as the Dutch translation of Hugo Grotius's treatise *Mare liberum*. Grotius's work on the freedom of the seas was essentially a propagandistic treatise arguing that the Dutch should have the same right to sail and trade in the East Indies as other states. First published in Latin at the express request of the Zeeland Chamber of the Dutch East India Company, the *Freedom of the Seas* has been aptly summarised as 'a justification of colonialism, colonial trade, and colonial rule'.⁴⁹ Beyond the subject matter, it is however the printing history of the book that shows how the authorities interfered in the production of texts and how privileges were used in this context to maintain control over the contents.

The Latin version of the *Freedom of the Seas*, which Grotius had worked on for several years, was ready for printing in 1608, but its publication was delayed until the end of April 1609, at the request of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, so as not to jeopardise the ongoing negotiations for the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621).⁵⁰ It was only when the truce between the Spanish Habsburgs and the Dutch was concluded on 9 April 1609 that the Dutch authorities allowed Grotius's treatise on to be published, albeit without a privilege and without any reference to its author. During the conferences between the Spanish Habsburgs and the Dutch, it was also agreed that the truce would come into force in the East Indies one year after its ratification in Europe. Soon, however, it

47 The privilege led to the publication of De Mezeray, *Abregé chronologique*. Curiously, there is no further mention of the printing privilege anywhere in the book; we have now entered a new era in the history of the Dutch practice of granting printing privileges.

48 To clarify, it is worth noting that it was thus not only individual works that could count on state support, but that the authorities also, for example, used privileges to keep printers in business who could market publications valuable for the common good. We have already seen an example of this in the case of the French privilege for Raphelengius. For another example, involving the Dutch printer Johannes van Ravensteijn, see Buning, 'Privileging the Common Good', 100.

49 Vervliet, 'General Introduction', ix.

50 For the reconstruction of the printing history of *Mare liberum*, see Ittersum, 'Preparing *Mare Liberum* for the Press'. On the 1609 (pirated) editions of the *Mare liberum*, see Somos and Margócsy, 'Pirating *Mare Liberum* (1609)'. On the reception of the text and its use during the Anglo-Dutch Conferences, see also Somos, Corredera, and Gallwey, 'Sir Daniel Dun's *Mare Liberum* and the 1613 Anglo-Dutch Conference'.

appeared impossible to maintain the truce in the East Indies, and 'by 1613 at the latest [...] the Twelve Years' Truce had definitively broken down in the regions covered by the VOC Charter'.⁵¹ It was no coincidence that the privileged translation of Grotius's text into Dutch appeared at precisely this time 'for the progress of the fatherland', as the title page announced. The Dutch authorities used the translation of the *Mare liberum* as part of their strategy to defend their foreign policy to a domestic audience. As the Leiden printer Jan Huybrechtsz explained in his preface, the pamphlet 'should be read by everyone [...] as a proof of the right granted to us by God, but begrudged by some powerful states. So that what Latinists know but do not practice may be understood by those who deal with these questions every day.'⁵²

When Huybrechtsz applied for the privilege of publishing the translation on 15 August 1614, the States-General decided to consult Grotius first to see if he was satisfied with the result.⁵³ Three days later, the printer was indeed granted exclusive rights to sell and produce the booklet, and the federal authorities decided to buy a copy for their own use.⁵⁴ This clearly suggests that the States-General wanted to ensure that the translation was correct, since the printing privilege meant that the content of the book was in line with their semi-official position. By monopolising the means of publication, the ruling authorities were thus able to shape public discourse in a way that reinforced their political dominance as part of a broader strategy to establish cultural hegemony.

Grotius's case was not unique. It was during the negotiations over a privilege that the authorities could intervene in the way that knowledge was communicated to a wider audience. An interesting example of this was the case of Emmanuel van Meteren, a polymathic merchant who was called to account for his controversial publication entitled *The Dutch History of our Times*.⁵⁵ As a consul of Dutch merchants in England, Van Meteren had collected many notes on various political issues over the years, notes which, encouraged by his cousin Abraham Ortelius, he finally decided to publish in 1593. Once completed, Van Meteren sent his manuscript to an engraver in Germany to provide the illustrations for the book. But the engraver died suddenly, while still in possession of the manuscript, and his descendants then decided to print an unauthorised translation of the work in German and Latin, which duly appeared in Nuremberg and Cologne. There was little the author could do about this form of piracy; the situation would be different, however, when the book was the subject of a later reprint on Dutch soil.

51 Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius*, 349-350, n.129.

52 De Groot, *Vrye zeevaart*, sig. A2v: 'Van yeder man ghelesen werden, tot [...] bewijs van trecht, twelcke ons soo wel van Godt is vergunt, als t'ghebruyck des selven by eenighe machtighe wert misgunt. Op dat also t'gene de Latinisten weten ende sonderlinge niet en oeffenen, by den genen soude verstaen werden die sulcks dagelicks verhandelen.'

53 Dodt van Flensburg, *Archief*, VI, 359.

54 The six-year printer privilege can be found in NA, SG 12301, Deed 18 August 1614, fol. 68. In fact, the first Latin edition to show Hugo Grotius as the author was only published in 1618. The States-General bought off one copy for twelve guilders: Japikse et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën*, v, 270.

55 The book was marketed under various names, including German and Latin; in this essay I will use the translation *The Dutch History of our Times* for van Meteren, *Belgische ofte Nederlantsche Historie*. The complicated printing history of Van Meteren's book is studied in detail by Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 81-173. For an incisive analysis of the work in the context of pre-modern diplomacy, see Helmers, 'History as Diplomacy'.

The Dutch printer Jacob Cornelisz Vennecool had obtained a copy of the German translation, which he decided to retranslate into Dutch for the local market. On 22 August 1597, the printer received an eight-year privilege from the Dutch authorities for his future publication plans.⁵⁶ When Van Meteren got wind of the planned publication, he was infuriated and tried to persuade Vennecool to print an authorised work instead. After some argument and disagreement, and with the encouragement of the States-General, the printer agreed, and Van Meteren returned to England with the promise that Justus Menius would correct the 'gross errors' in consultation with the author.⁵⁷ The book was partly rewritten, though this could not prevent a huge uproar when it was finally published in 1599. The authorities were unhappy with the contents, to say the least. They wanted to know how Van Meteren had managed to obtain information about what had been discussed *in camera* at the States-General. In addition, members of both the States of Holland and Utrecht felt that there were still several 'errors' in the text, and complaints were received from individuals who felt that they were not accurately represented in the book.⁵⁸ Further printings were immediately banned, and existing copies recalled. Van Meteren tried to excuse himself by saying that it had never been his intention to incriminate the States, but rather to exonerate them, and to this end he had 'repeatedly asked [the printer] to keep the privilege he had been granted secret'.⁵⁹ It was in vain. After he had revealed the names of his informants to the authorities, Van Meteren left the country under the impression that his book would not appear on the market.

Half a year later, however, the storm had died down somewhat, and the authorities tacitly condoned the redistribution of Van Meteren's work.⁶⁰ The printer then decided to produce a new edition, but this too caused controversy. Again, he came into conflict with Van Meteren and, following an intervention by the States-General, it was decided that he should print nothing that was uncorrected by the author and, in particular, that he print nothing concerning England, Scotland, or Ireland without the approval of the authorities.⁶¹ The book then appeared on the market in 1605 with 'with privilege not to be pirated', as the title page stated.⁶² It had been revised by the printer for typographical errors, but otherwise did not bear Van Meteren's approval.⁶³

Behind the scenes, Van Meteren complained vehemently about the course of the events, not least in a letter to his friend Christiaan Huygens in which he explained that he was working on a new version of the book because in his earlier work, 'with censorship and printer's privilege, I had made my work partisan and not neutral, as I am trying to do

⁵⁶ Japikse et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën*, IX, 707; NA, SG 23, Resolution 22 August 1597, fol. 289v.

⁵⁷ Japikse et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën*, IX, 707-708: 'de grove faulten'. The fine for violating the privilege was set at twenty-five guilders. Justus Menius had been the official history writer of the Republic since 1595: Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 92.

⁵⁸ Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 95.

⁵⁹ Cited in Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 96: 'hebbe zelve den Drucker meermalen verzoght zijn verleent Privilegie secreet te houden'.

⁶⁰ A letter from Van Meteren to Bernard Paludanus suggests that the States-General had instructed the printer to sell the existing copies abroad only: Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 99.

⁶¹ Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 151.

⁶² Van Meteren, *Belgische ofte Nederlantsche oorlogen* (1605), title page.

⁶³ Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 152.

now, with the idea of having it printed outside the country, without privilege'.⁶⁴ This new version did indeed appear a few years later, in 1609, 'printed for the author' in Scotland, according to the imprint, and without privilege.⁶⁵ It was republished several times until Van Meteren's death in 1612. It was at this point that his descendants claimed the right to reprint the book officially in the Dutch Republic and tried to obtain a privilege from the authorities to do so. After some discussion, the members of the States-General decided to grant the privilege on the condition that they be given the freedom to rewrite certain passages. Six months later a licensed version appeared on the market.⁶⁶ This rewritten version (with renewed privileges) was highly successful; it was published in numerous editions well into the eighteenth century and is still used today by historians writing about early Dutch history. That the book also served as a symbol of national pride at the time is suggested by the fact that the printer was expected to deliver sixteen copies of the book 'on account of the generality' as gifts for the members of the States, 'as well as one that might serve to be displayed on the conference table of the High and Mighty Lords, and another for the clerk'.⁶⁷

The story of Van Meteren's *Dutch History* provides yet another example of the strategic use of privileges by the authorities to control the dissemination of knowledge. This control extended beyond mere textual content and into the realms of images and cartography.⁶⁸ The authorities did not simply grant privileges; they used them as tools to manage how knowledge was presented and marketed to the public. This ability to dictate the circulation of intellectual and visual content underscored their broader agenda of establishing and maintaining hegemony across cultural spheres. Another important element of this approach involved the distribution of portraits of famous people, which helped to establish a canon of knowledge. How this worked can be illustrated by the example of Willem Jacobs Delff (c. 1580-1638), a well-known engraver from Delft, who was granted a privilege on 17 October 1626 which gave him the exclusive right to print and sell (or have printed) all the portraits he would create in the future.⁶⁹ The condition for this privilege was that the engraver had to submit his portraits to the States-General before they could be put into circulation. On 12 November 1627, after he had indeed submitted his work to

⁶⁴ Van Meteren to Huygens, London, 31 August 1605, cited in Brummel, *Twee ballingen*, 184: 'Met haer censure ende druckers privilege hebbe ick myn wreck partiael gemaect ende niet neutrael, also ick nu tracht, met dat buyten landen te laten drucken, sonder privilege.' The author also complained that although he had agreed to keep the 1599 work as his own, things had been changed in it without his knowledge, forcing him to produce a new edition.

⁶⁵ Van Meteren, *Belgische ofte Nederlantsche oorlogen* (1609).

⁶⁶ The revised edition was probably prepared by Ledenberg, secretary for Utrecht, and the well-known jurist Hugo Grotius: Fruin, 'De Historiën van Emanuel van Meteren', 385.

⁶⁷ Dodt van Flensburg, *Archief*, vi, 360: 'Tot kosten vande generaliteyt sal moegen leveren, mitsgaders een exemplae om te dienen tot legger op de taefel in haere Ho. Mo. Vergaderinge, ende noch een voor den griffier.' On 4 May 1618, Jean de la Haye obtained 250 guilders for his French translation of the work by van Meteren, which he dedicated to the States-General: Japikse et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën*, III, 390.

⁶⁸ For examples related to the production of maps, see Buning, 'Promoting Technical Knowledge,' 411-412.

⁶⁹ NA, SG 12303, Deed 17 October 1626, fol. 186. This was an extension of an earlier eight-year privilege, dated 10 August 1622, which did not explicitly mention 'to have printed and sold': NA, SG 47, Resolution 10 August 1622, fol. 308. Jacobus Hondius had previously been granted a similar general privilege in 1599: see Orenstein, 'Prints and the Politics,' 242; Orenstein, *Hendrick Hondius*, 93-94, 113-114.



Fig. 3 Willem Jacobsz Delff, Portrait of Princess Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia and Electress Palatine, 1623, line engraving, 41,7 × 29,4 cm, London, National Portrait Gallery.



Fig. 4 François van den Hoeye, Portrait of Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, 1628, engraving, 19,7 × 13,2 cm, London, British Museum.



Fig. 5 Hendrick Hondius (I), Portrait of Prince Philip William of Orange, 1628, engraving, 37,6 × 29 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.



Fig. 6 Willem Jacobsz Delff, Portrait of Prince Philip William of Orange, 1628, engraving, 43,3 × 31,5 cm, Leiden, Museum De Lakenhal.

the authorities, Willem Jacobs received permission to publish the portrait of the former princess consort Louise de Coligny (1555-1620), the last wife of William of Orange.⁷⁰ On 12 July 1628 he also received permission to publish two portraits of the King of Great Britain.⁷¹ On the same day, however, he complained that two Amsterdam booksellers had infringed on his privilege. François van den Hoeye was accused of copying the portraits of the King and Queen of Bohemia, the Prince and Princess of Orange, and the portraits of Prince William and Prince Maurice at an older age, while Jacobus Hondius was accused of copying the portraits of the said prince and princess (figs. 3-6).⁷² Willem Jacobs Delff had brought an action against these copycats before the court of Amsterdam which had been dragging on; the central authorities promised to write to the court to ensure that his case would be heard soon. On a later occasion, the States-General intervened again, ordering that the prints by Hondius and Van den Hoeye be withdrawn from the market while the case was still pending, so that Willem Jacobs Delff could fully enjoy his privilege.⁷³ This not only underscores the direct involvement of the authorities in the production and regulation of printed materials but also highlights how privileges were used strategically to shape the cultural landscape, reinforcing authorised narratives and controlling the portrayal of important historical and political figures. Through such actions, the Dutch authorities shaped public perception and cultural memory while influencing both the creation and the consumption of knowledge.

It was not until the last quarter of the seventeenth century that a shift occurred, with the privilege increasingly seen as a commercial matter and no longer necessarily as an implicit form of state support. This shift was directly linked to a political conflict in which a privilege granted by the States was seen as going against the interests of the state because it offended foreign governments.⁷⁴ On the one hand, the booksellers' guilds gained more and more influence over the granting of privileges, as they were increasingly consulted before any rights were granted. Their voice – the voice of the trade – grew louder and louder, and in several petitions and agreements they insisted that the privilege was indeed nothing more than a delimitation of the printers' financial investment.⁷⁵ At the same time, the voice of the author was becoming more and more audible, opposing the absolute right of printers to dispose of written works as they saw fit. A new balance was thus slowly emerging between state support, commerce, and individual claims to creation. Although old practices of prejudice and privilege persisted, a new path was being forged in which

70 NA, SG 52, Resolution 12 November 1627, fol. 268v.

71 NA, SG 53, Resolution 12 July 1628, fol. 302v.

72 NA, SG 53, Resolution 12 July 1628, fol. 302v.

73 NA, SG 53, Resolution 25 October 1628, fol. 514. It is interesting to note that different privileges on similar subjects could co-exist, probably in order to divide the market. For example, at the time of the conflict, Hondius himself was also given permission to place 'with privilege' on some of his portraits: 9 December 1628 (Amalia of Solms, Princess of Orange); 17 August 1628 (Willem van Nassau, Lord of De Lek); 9 December 1628 (Philip William, Prince of Orange). On 19 February 1627, Hondius showed the portrait of the late Count Willem I and Jacobs Delff showed the portrait of the Count of Culenborch, and both received permission to publish their works with privilege: NA, SG 52, Resolution 19 February 1627, fol. 69. In other words, the right to make portraits of certain people was narrowly defined.

74 For an account of this shift and the political conflict behind it, see Buning, 'Privileging the Common Good'.

75 Schriks, *Het kopijrecht*, 98-110.

soft power was not directly coordinated by the state, but implemented by proxy through institutions and social organisations such as guilds and artistic societies.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Printing privileges are commonly understood as straightforward means employed by printers to strengthen their economic position on the local market and to secure the place of steady sellers in their portfolio. This article has demonstrated, however, that they were also integral to the soft power mechanisms employed by the Dutch authorities to establish the Republic as an important state in its own right. The examples presented show how Dutch authorities used privileges to standardise, disseminate, and control the circulation of knowledge, highlighting in this respect that ‘the local’ cannot be seen in isolation from inter-European connections. Indeed, as I intend to explore in further research, this understanding of the nature of printing privileges was not unique to the Dutch Republic, and I am not arguing for Dutch distinctiveness in this regard. For example, when the Portuguese monk Serafim de Freitas wrote a polemic against Grotius’s work on the free seas, he was granted a ten-year exclusive privilege by Philip IV of Spain, on the condition that the content of his writings be reviewed before mass publication.⁷⁷ This provides further evidence that political authorities across Europe used privileges to control the circulation of knowledge and that legal protection and property rights in the world of print were often directly linked to international affairs.

An insight into this aspect of the privilege system enhances our understanding of how, why, and when certain publications were brought to market. With specific reference to the Dutch Republic, the aim of this essay has been thus to shift the perspective from viewing printing privileges solely as economically motivated to demonstrating how the authorities used privileges to promote ‘useful’ knowledge, that is, the type of knowledge they considered beneficial. This shift in emphasis should help to correct the still widespread misconception that the Dutch occupied an exceptional position within the European system of privileges, and that the authorities played only a minor role in the regulation of printing in the Republic. By putting the focus on the system of printing privileges, it becomes clear that state authorities actively intervened to shape the nature of printed knowledge, adding yet another layer to our evolving understanding of the circulation of knowledge in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), Landsadvocaat Van Oldenbarnevelt 1053-1075, Stamp duty accounts, 1593-1618.

NA, Raad van State 515, Resolutions, 1584-1600.

⁷⁶ For some examples of these privileges granted to artistic ‘societies’ (*genootschappen*), theatres, and orphanages, see Geesink, ‘Over privileges’, 38-39; Grabowsky, “Op de goede beterschap”.

⁷⁷ De Freitas, *De ivsto imperio Lvsitanorvm asiatico*, sig. Q2rv.

- NA, States of Holland 5676, Privileges issued by the States of Holland, 1601-1611.
 NA, States-General (hereafter SG) 11, Resolutions 1584.
 NA, SG 47-52, Resolutions, 1622-1627.
 NA, SG 7474, Incoming petitions, 1600-1601.
 NA, SG 12298-12303, Deed books, 1589-1629.

Secondary Literature

- Beeldenaer ofte figuer-boeck dienende op die nieuwe Ordonantie vander Munte, bij zijne Excellentie ghearre- teert ende uitgegeven den 4 Augusti 1586* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz., 1586).
- Bierens de Haan, David, *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der wis- en natuurkundige wetenschappen* (Amsterdam 1878).
- Borschberg, Peter, *Hugo Grotius, the Portuguese, and Free Trade in the East Indies* (Singapore 2011).
- Brummel, Leendert, *Twee ballingen 's lands tijdens onze opstand tegen Spanje. Hugo Blotius (1534-1608). Emanuel van Meteren (1535-1612)* (The Hague 1972).
- Buning, Marius, 'Promoting Technical Knowledge. Printing Privileges and Technical Literature in the Early Dutch Republic', in Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, Koen Vermeir, Valérie Nègre, and Delphine Spicq (eds.), *Le livre et les techniques avant le XXe siècle. À l'échelle du monde* (Paris 2017) 453-462.
- Buning, Marius, 'Privileging the Common Good. The Moral Economy of Printing Privileges in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic', in Shanti Grahelli (ed.), *Buying and Selling. The Business of Books in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden 2019) 88-108.
- Buning, Marius, *Knowledge, Patents, Power. The Making of a Patent System in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden 2021).
- Buning, Marius, 'Commentary on the Privilege for the Deux-Aes Bible (1579)', in Martin Kretschmer and Lionel Bently (eds.), *Primary Sources on Copyright (1450-1900)*, https://www.copyrighthistory.org/cam/tools/request/showRecord.php?id=commentary_nl_1579 (Accessed on 10 May 2023).
- Copius, Balthasar, *Vier ende vijftich predicatien, over den christelijcken ende in Gods woort ghegronden catechismus, die in de kercken ende scholen der keurvorstelijke Paltz, ende deser Nederlanden, gepredickt ende gheleert wort* (Bruges: Lourens Jacobsz, 1588).
- Darnton, Robert, *Censors at Work. How States Shaped Literature* (New York 2014).
- De Freitas, Serafim, *De ivsto imperio Lvsitanorvm asiatico* (Vallisoleti: Ex officina Hieronymi Morillo, 1625).
- Dotd van Flensburg, Jens Jensen, *Archief voor kerkelijke en wereldsche geschiedenissen, inzonderheid van Utrecht*, 7 vols. (Utrecht 1838-1848).
- Du Plessis-Mornay, Philippe, *Bybel der natvre. Dat is, Vande vvaerheyt der christelijcke religie teghens de Atheisten, Epicureen, Heydenen, Joden, Mahumedisten ende andere ongelooovighe*, Joannes Halsbergius trans. (Amsterdam: Herman de Buck, 1602).
- Duyrcantius, Petrus Andreas, *Ghereduceerde Tafelen van Interest* (Rotterdam: Abraham Migoen, 1616).
- Eeghen, Isabella Henriëtte van, *De Amsterdamse boekhandel, 1680-1725*, 5 vols. (Amsterdam 1978).
- Fruin, Robert, 'De Historiën van Emanuel van Meteren', in Pieter Lodewijk Muller and Samuel Fzn. Muller (eds.), *Robert Fruin's verspreide geschriften. Met aantekeningen, toevoegsels en verbeteringen uit des schrijvers nalatenschap*, 11 vols. (The Hague 1903) I, 383-410.
- Geesink, Marja, 'Over privileges, schouwburgregenten, uitgevers, vignetten, verstopte herdrukken en de STCN', in *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman* 37 (2014) 37-55.
- Gelder, Hendrik Enno van, *De Nederlandse munten* (Utrecht 5th ed. 1972).
- Gelder, Hendrik Enno van, 'De Nederlandse beeldenaars van 1586 tot 1626', *Jaarboek voor munt- en penningkunde* (Amsterdam 1973) 1-75.
- Georgakakis, Panagiotis, 'Delivering the News from Abroad. French-Language Gazettes Published in the Dutch Republic During the Second Half of the 17th Century', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 89 (2020) 657-674.
- Grabowsky, Ellen M., "'Op de goede beterschap van ons sieke privilegie". Over Amsterdamse schouwburgregenten, drukkers en censuur', *Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis* 2 (1995) 35-55.

- Groenveld, Simon, 'The Dutch Republic, an Island of Liberty of the Press in 17th Century Europe? The Authorities and the Book Trade', in Henk Bots and Françoise Waquet (eds.), *Commercium Litterarium, 1600-1750. La communication dans la République des Lettres* (Amsterdam 1994) 281-300.
- Groot, Hugo de, *Vrye zeevaart ofte Bewys van't recht dat den Hollanders toecompt over de Indische coophandel* (Leyden: Jan Huybertsz, 1614).
- Haren, Ian, *De Bekeeringhe van Ian Haren, ende syn Weder-Komen tot de Ghemeynte Godts*, Jean De la Haye trans. (The Hague: Louis Elzevier (II), 1610).
- Haren, Ian, *La Repentance de lean Haren et Son Retovr En l'eglise de Dieu, Pvbliquement Par Luy Recitée En l'eglise Vvalonne à VVezel* (The Hague: Louis Elzevier (II), 1610).
- Helmers, Helmer, 'History as Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe. Emanuel Van Meteren's *Historia Belgica* and International Relations, 1596-1640', *Renaissance Studies* 36 (2022) 27-45.
- Hoftijzer, Paul, 'Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges in de achttiende eeuw. Kanttekeningen bij een inventarisatie', *Documentatieblad werkgroep 18e eeuw* 22 (1990) 159-180.
- Hoftijzer, Paul, 'Nederlandse boekverkopersprivileges in de 17^e en 18^e eeuw', *Jaarboek Nederlands Genootschap Van Bibliofielen* 1 (1993) 49-62.
- Ittersum, Martine Julia van, 'Preparing *Mare Liberum* for the Press. Hugo Grotius' Rewriting of Chapter 12 of *De Iure Praedae* in November-December 1608', *Grotiana* 26-28 (2007/1) 246-280.
- Japikse, Nicolas, et al. (eds.), *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, van 1576 tot 1609*, 14 vols. (The Hague, 1915-1970).
- Kleerkooper, M.M., and Wilhelmus Petrus van Stockum Jr., *De boekhandel te Amsterdam voornamelijk in de 17e eeuw. Biographische en geschiedkundige aantekeningen*, 2 vols. (The Hague 1916-1916).
- Kruseman, Arie Cornelis, *Aantekeningen betreffende den boekhandel van Noord-Nederland* (Amsterdam 1893).
- La ioyevse & magnifique entrée de Monseigneur Francoys de France, frere unicqve dv Roy, par la grace de Dieu, Dvc De Brabant, d'Anjou, Alençon, Berri, &c. en sa tres-renommée ville d'Anvers* (Antwerp: Christophle Plantin, 1582).
- L'Entree magnifique de Monseigneur Francoys Filz de France, Frere unique du Roy, par la grace de Dieu Duc de Lothier, de Brabant, d'Anjou, d'Alençon, &c. Comte de Flandres, &c. Faicte en sa Metropolitaine & fameuse ville de Gand, le xxme d'Acoust, Anno 1582* (Ghent: Cornelis de Rekenare and Jehan vanden Steene, 1582).
- Manuael ofte handtboeck inhoudende die weerde vanden Marck, once, Engelsche ende Aes van alle ghevalueerde ende onghevalueerde Munte, dienende den Wisselaers deser vereenichde Nederlantsche Provintien voor instructie op d'ordonnantie vander Munte vanden 4. Augusti 1586* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1586).
- Meteren, Emanuel van, *Belgische ofte Nederlantsche Historie, van Onsen Tijden* (Delft: Jacob Corneliszoon Vennecool, 1599).
- Meteren, Emanuel van, *Belgische ofte Nederlantsche historie van onsen tijden* (Delft: Jacob Corneliszoon Vennecool, 1605).
- Meteren, Emanuel van, *Belgische ofte Nederlantsche oorlogen ende gheschiedenissen, beginnende van t' jaer 1598 tot het besluit van de Ned. vrede, in t'jaer 1609* (Amsterdam: Hermes van Loven, 1609).
- Mezeray, François Eudes de, *Abregé chronologique de l'histoire de France* (Amsterdam: Abraham Wolfgang, 1673-1674).
- Mohnhaupt, Heinz, 'Unendlichkeit des Privilegienbegriffs. Zur Einführung in das Tagungsthema', in Heinz Mohnhaupt and Barbara Dölemeyer (eds.), *Das Privileg im Europäischen Vergleich*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main 1997) I, 1-13.
- Nye, Joseph S., *Bound to Lead. The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York 1990).
- Nye, Joseph S., 'Soft Power', in Joseph S. Nye (ed.), *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition. Shifting Sands in the Balance of Power Between the United States and China* (Singapore 2023) 3-15.
- Nye, Joseph S., *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition. Shifting Sands in the Balance of Power Between the United States and China. China and Globalization* (Singapore 2023).

- Nye, Joseph S., *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York 2004).
- Olander, Maurice, 'Der Arisch-Semitische Streit zu Beginn der modernen Sprachwissenschaft', in Marcelo Dascal, Dietfried Gerhardus, Kuno Lorenz, and Georg Meggle (eds.), *Sprachphilosophie. Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung*, 2 vols. (Berlin 1996) II, 943-953.
- Oranje, Willem van, *Apologie, ofte Verantwoordinghe des doerluchtighen ende hooghgeborenen vorsts ende heeren, heeren Wilhelmus van Godes ghenade Prince van Orangien* (Leiden: Charles Silvius, 1581).
- Oranje, Willem van, *Apologie, ofte Verantwoordinghe des Doorluchtighen ende Hooghgeborenen Vorsts ende heeren, heeren Wilhelmus van Godes ghenade Prince van Orangien* (s.l.: Charles Sivilius, 1581).
- Orenstein, Nadine, 'Prints and the Politics of the Publisher. The Case of Hendrick Hondius', *Simiolus. Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 23 (1995) 240-250.
- Orenstein, Nadine, *Hendrick Hondius and the Business of Prints in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (Rotterdam 1996).
- Orenstein, Nadine, 'Sleeping Caps, City Views and State Funerals. Privileges for Prints in the Dutch Republic, 1580-1650', in Amy Golahny, Mia M. Mochizuki, and Lisa Vergara (eds.), *In His Milieu. Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias* (Amsterdam 2006) 313-346.
- Scaliger, Joseph Justus, *Cyclometrica Elementa Duo* (Leiden: Franciscus Raphelengius, 1594).
- Schriks, Chris, *Het kopijrecht. De ontwikkeling van het auteursrecht in Nederland* (Zutphen 2004).
- Somos, Mark, and Dániel Margócsy, 'Pirating *Mare Liberum* (1609)', *Grotiana* 38 (2017/1) 176-210.
- Somos, Mark, Edward Jones Corredera, and George Gallwey, 'Sir Daniel Dun's *Mare Liberum* and the 1613 Anglo-Dutch Conference', *Zeitschrift für Ausländisches Öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht/Heidelberg Journal of International Law* 81 (2021/2) 479-496.
- Ursinus, Zacharias, *Het schat-boeck der christelycke leere. Ofte uytlegginge over den catechismus. Ende verclaringhe der besonderste hoofdstucken der christelijcke religie*, Festus Hommius trans. (Leiden: Andries Clouck, 1602).
- Van Sctieck, Adriaen, *Van t'beghin der eerster volcken van Evropen, in-sonderheyt vanden oorspronck ende saecken der Neder-landren, XXIII boecken* (Ypres: François Bellet, 1614).
- Van Veen, Otto, *Amorum Emblemata. Figuris Æneis Incisa* (Antwerp: Venalia apud Auctorem, 1608).
- Verhoogt, Robert, and Chris Schriks, 'Reflecting Media. A Cultural History of Copyright and the Media', in Karl Maria Michael de Leeuw and Jan Bergstra (eds.), *The History of Information Security. A Comprehensive Handbook* (Amsterdam 2007) 83-120.
- Vervliet, Jeroen, 'General Introduction', in Robert Feenstra and Jeroen Vervliet (eds.), *Hugo Grotius. Mare Liberum, 1609-2009* (Leiden 2009).
- Verwey, Herman de La Fontaine, 'De Statenbijbel en de drukkers. De strijd tegen een monopolie', in Herman C.F. Schoordijk, Govaert C.J.J. van den Bergh, and Johan A. Ankum (eds.), *Plus est en vous. Opstellen over recht en cultuur, aangeboden aan Prof. Mr. A. Pitlo ter gelegenheid van zijn 25-jarig hoogleraarschap* (Haarlem 1970) 441-456.
- Weduwen, Arthur der, *Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618-1700*, 2 vols. (Leiden 2017).