

The Town Crier in the Dutch Republic: Official, Commercial and Private News Provision in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe, for the first time, the general character and function of the town crier in the Dutch Republic, between the beginning of the seventeenth century and the middle of the eighteenth century. The *stadsroeper* belongs to a cast of

early modern urban professionals that has been largely ignored as an object of study. This article seeks to reconstruct the world of the crier, based on extensive research in Dutch archives. Our analysis covers a discussion of the general distribution across the Republic of the town crier; a comparative examination of the services and duties of the crier; a reconstruction of the appearance and performance of the crier and their relation to the crier's function; and a reflection on the remuneration, ancillary activities and general status of the crier in society. Overall, this article argues that the town crier was a figure central to civic society in the Dutch Republic, across villages, towns and cities, functioning as a vital communicative mediator of news and announcements of official, commercial, and private natures.

Keywords: information, communication, government, commerce, urban history, countryside, orality

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In the early eighteenth century, the '*stadts-roeper*' (town crier) of Wijk bij Duurstede, a town of no more than four thousand people in the Dutch province of Utrecht, was already out on the street by seven o'clock in the morning, ready to start his day. Until seven o'clock at night, he was required to be 'available to serve the citizens and inhabitants' of Wijk bij Duurstede.¹ The town crier was a central figure in his civic community, and would have been known to all fellow inhabitants: on his frequent rounds through the streets, his voice would, in all likelihood, have been the loudest and most frequently audible in the town. From dawn till dusk, with frequent bangs on his copper cymbal, he informed the community of changes in the law and publicised the good governance of the town, announced commercial opportunities, helped regulate the river-borne trade that was so vital to the prosperity of the town, and played a leading civic role as facilitator of the basic buying and selling that underpinned urban life.

The crier of Wijk bij Duurstede was not exceptional. Virtually every town and large village in the Dutch Republic had a crier by 1700. Yet, despite their critical presence in the daily life of their age, very little has been written on the crier in the early modern Northern Netherlands. In literature on civil servants and public services, the office of the town crier is either ignored or misunderstood. Jos Raadschelders has equated the crier to the messenger (*bode*), despite the two being separate offices.² In other publications on urban history, criers remain wholly undiscussed, despite the importance of these public officials in facilitating and controlling information exchange in the urban community.³

¹ Wijk bij Duurstede, Regionaal Archief Zuid-Utrecht (hereafter RAZU), Stadsbestuur Wijk bij Duurstede, Resoluties van de magistraat 51R, 4 March 1715, fol. 164.

² Raadschelders, 'Plaatselijke Bestuurlijke Ontwikkelingen', 65.

³ Van der Heijden, Van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Vermeesch (eds.), *Serving the Urban Community*; Van der Heijden, *Civic Duty*. A recent exception is Manger and Den Hollander, 'The Value of Work', in which criers receive two mentions.

For the Dutch Republic, only Arthur der Weduwen's monograph from 2023 comments on town criers, doing so in relation to their function as agents of political communication.⁴ Elsewhere in Europe, several valuable studies exist on late mediaeval and early modern criers in France and Italy.⁵ These studies focus primarily on the political aspects of the crier's work, emphasising the crier's role as communicator of the law, and for the most part concentrate on large urban centres (Florence, Milan, Paris). We, however, suggest that not only was the office of the crier clearly ubiquitous in smaller communities, but that its relevance moved beyond the communication of law into the mediation of private and commercial information circulating in early modern civic society.

As a historical subject, the crier has fallen victim to the nature of his role and performance. The rich scholarship that engages with the subject of 'information' in the early modern period continues to emphasise that oral communication remained the principal mode of information exchange.⁶ Yet the inherent difficulties of reconstructing oral communication ensures that manuscript or print communication is prioritised when scholars study early modern news flows. The prominence of town criers all around the Dutch Republic is a clear indicator of the continuing importance of oral communication in the early modern period. The study of his function therefore holds the potential to advance our understanding of the role of oral news dissemination in urban society.

The aim of this article is to describe, for the first time, the general character and function of the town crier in the Dutch Republic, between the beginning of the seventeenth century and the middle of the eighteenth century. We argue that the town crier was a figure central to civic society in the Dutch Republic, across villages, towns and cities, functioning as a vital communicative mediator of news and announcements of official, commercial, and private natures. Our analysis is based on an extensive corpus of sources, found in archives throughout the Netherlands. We have identified detailed regulations, instructions or wage lists for criers in twenty towns and villages from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which form the main basis of our reconstruction of the world of the crier.⁷ These sources are supplemented by incidental details from other records, including ordinances, appointments, notices of payment, complaints, newspaper advertisements, chronicles, and notary deeds. From these sources, we have extracted information on criers' tasks, salary, identity, and their relationship towards their employers and fellow citizens. In general, we have to approach the study of the crier from the perspective of the authorities, or those of citizens disgruntled with the crier's service or performance. There are no surviving account books, letters or diaries by early modern Dutch criers; their voices, once so ubiquitous, are now reduced to a few extant petitions for wage increases or poor relief.⁸

4 Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, esp. 28, 30, 49, 129-146, 150-151, 344.

5 For France, see Offenstadt, *En place publique*; Offenstadt, 'Les crieurs publics', 203-217; Lett and Offenstadt (eds.), *Haro! Noël! Oyé!*; Fogel, *Les cérémonies de l'information*; and for Italy: Judde de Larivière, 'Voicing popular politics', 37-51; Milner, '"Fanno bandire"', 107-151; Francelanci, *La città e le leggi*, ch. 1.

6 For some overviews, see Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; De Vivo, *Information and Communication*; Pettegree, *Invention of News*.

7 In alphabetical order: Amerongen, Amsterdam, Bolsward, Den Bosch, Deventer, Haarlem, Haastrecht, Harderwijk, Hoorn, Leeuwarden, Leiden, Mijdrecht, Montfoort, Nijmegen, Tiel, Utrecht, Wijk bij Duurstede, Zaltbommel, Zierikzee, and Zwolle.

8 Manger and Den Hollander, 'The Value of Work'.

This article is structured in four parts: a discussion of the general distribution across the Republic of the town crier; a comparative examination of the services and duties of the crier; a reconstruction of the appearance and performance of the crier and their relation to the crier's function; and a reflection on the remuneration, ancillary activities, and general status of the crier in society. Where appropriate, we also seek to profile the Dutch crier within a broader European context, a process that reveals a few noteworthy differences with criers who have been studied in French and Italian contexts.

An overlooked phenomenon

When, in 1704, Cornelis Jacobsz Linnewever petitioned for the right to become the first licensed crier of the village of Mijdrecht in northwestern Utrecht, he emphasised that it would be useful for the community to have such an office, which was 'common throughout our entire country'.⁹ Linnewever emphasised that he was a 'poor man', receiving alms from the deaconry of the village every week, and had to care for nine children, none older than thirteen. He had, at an unspecified earlier date, taken to 'drumming and crying' in the village to support his livelihood, yet the absence of a formal privilege gave rise to conflict, mostly about pay. The Countess Van Solms, whose lands incorporated the domain of Mijdrecht, agreed to Linnewever's petition, and he was appointed as the first formal crier of the village.

As the case of Mijdrecht, a village of fewer than a thousand inhabitants, demonstrates, it can be difficult to point to an exact moment in time when town criers began their activities. In the absence of existing regulation, any person could pick up a drum or cymbal – accessible and cheap instruments – and offer services of 'crying' to fellow citizens. This tradition dated back deep into the mediaeval era: in Italian and French cities the crier was already a well-established figure by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the Low Countries, the archival evidence points to the gradual institutionalisation of the office of town crier from the middle decades of the sixteenth century onwards.

The earliest attested crier that we have identified is from Leeuwarden, the aptly named Jacob Roeper (Jacob Crier), who claimed in a petition of 1578 that he had been fulfilling his duty as licensed municipal crier from the 1540s onwards.¹⁰ Other criers, all over the northern Netherlands, appear in the archives for the first time shortly thereafter: there are records of town criers in Tiel in 1551, Deventer in 1579, Franeker in 1582, Rotterdam in 1583 and Brielle in 1595.¹¹ For the seventeenth century there is textual evidence of

⁹ Utrecht, Het Utrechts Archief (hereafter HUA), Kapittel van Sint Jan te Utrecht, Stukken betreffende de aanstelling door de proost van een vaste omroeper te Mijdrecht 1073, 1705-1706.

¹⁰ Leeuwarden, Historisch Centrum Leeuwarden (hereafter HCL), Stad Leeuwarden 126, fol. 307.

¹¹ Tiel, Regionaal Archief Rivierenland (hereafter RAR), Stadsbestuur van Tiel en dorpsbestuur van Zandwijk (hereafter Stadsbestuur Tiel) 235, fol. 14v; Deventer, Collectie Overijssel (hereafter DvCO), Cameraars 35i, fol. 16v; Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Collectie doop-, trouw-, lidmaten-, begraafboeken 265, 25 February 1582; Rotterdam, Stadsarchief, Oud Archief van de Stad Rotterdam 714, fol. 931; Brielle, Streekarchief Voorne-Putten, Hervormde Kerk Brielle 111, fol. 61.

the presence of licensed criers in most cities in the Dutch Republic.¹² Between 1650 and 1750 there is also copious evidence of the existence of criers in small towns and villages in every province.¹³ The office was also known in Dutch colonies: in Nieuw Amsterdam (now New York) in 1655, Stoffel Machielse was appointed as ‘town crier and bellman’ because the then-current crier was returning to the fatherland; in the eighteenth century, criers were also present on the streets of Paramaribo (Surinam) and the Caribbean island of Sint Maarten.¹⁴

The regulations, instructions and wage lists that comprise our principal corpus of sources date between 1633 and 1780, despite the practice of crying and the office of *stadsroeper* being much older. This suggests a gradual delineation of the position as time went on – a phenomenon that can also be observed for other civil offices in this period.¹⁵ This process was not only influenced by the steadily intensifying bureaucratisation and professionalisation of civic life, but was also seemingly a reaction to the increasing prominence of the crier in Dutch communities. In an era that saw an explosion in the availability of information, in oral, written and printed form, the need to centralise and regulate the flow of news became more pressing than ever.

Our corpus of instructions does not specify criteria of eligibility for the position of town crier (beyond being a sober and dutiful person), yet it is evident that not anyone could be considered for the position. While it was far from uncommon for women to hold public offices in the Dutch Republic, the profession of town crier appears to have been reserved for men, as we have found no evidence of female criers.¹⁶ The crier needed to be a respectable and well-behaved figure, as he served as a representative of the town. The position was not one of high social standing, however, and criers were often selected from among the less well off, as the appointment of Linnewever in Mijdrecht suggests. Criers were also evidently required to be able to read, possess a loud and clear voice, and be fit enough to perambulate capably through the community. Failure to live up to these standards could have serious consequences: in 1700, Daniel Noordsy, crier of Utrecht, was dismissed because old age prevented him from successfully completing his rounds.¹⁷

In every community in the Republic, a *roeper* (crier) seems to have indicated a person who earned income from making public announcements of commercial, private and official information. The specific use of the term ‘*stadsroeper*’ implied a municipal privilege, but not necessarily a monopoly of the practice. In 1578, Jacob Roeper, *stadsroeper* in Leeuwarden, complained about competition from a non-privileged crier. In larger towns or cities, opportunities for such rivalries increased in line with the size of a crier’s territory: by

¹² This includes Nijmegen (1600), Amsterdam (1611), Leiden (1633), Gouda and Groningen (1638), Harderwijk (1642), Vlissingen (1653), Harlingen and Utrecht (1663), Zierikzee (1670), Zwolle (1678), Hoorn (1680), and Enkhuizen (1687).

¹³ Such as Amerongen, Edam, Haastrecht, IJlst, Makkum, Montfoort, Noordwijk, Rhenen, Sloten, Sneek, Steenwijk, Strijen, Terschelling, Vlieland, Weesp, and Zaltbommel.

¹⁴ *Council Minutes, 1655-1656*, 23 December 1655, fol. 200; The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), Sociëteit van Suriname 132, fol. 591v; NA, Directie ad Interim en de Raad der Koloniën 87, 14 June 1792.

¹⁵ Van Nederveen Meerkerk, ‘Professionalization of public service’, 355-356.

¹⁶ Van der Heijden and Schmidt, ‘Public services and women’s work’.

¹⁷ HUA, Notarissen in de stad Utrecht 1560-1905 (hereafter Notarissen) 958, deed 73.

the 1720s, the *stadsroeper* in Leeuwarden had to make forty-eight stops for each particular cry (*roep*).¹⁸

To alleviate the demands of the *roep*, some magistrates, such as those of Deventer, Groningen, Gouda, Leiden, and Tiel, took the decision to employ more than one *stadsroeper*, while the Amsterdam crier was supported by a host of otherwise unspecified 'assistants' who may have made subsidiary announcements on his behalf. Elsewhere, town councils distinguished between different types of criers. Vlissingen employed a specialist crier for barge departures, who performed a role that was a core duty of *stadsroepers* in many other towns.¹⁹ In Utrecht, the appointed crier for *erfhuizen* (estates of the deceased) also performed the role of auction master (*vendu-meester*), a position known in many other towns as well.²⁰ Clearly there were *stadsroepers* who performed duties that were the prerogatives of separate officials in some communities, while there were also officials or employees who became temporary *roepers* when the authorities demanded it. Before the rise of permanent *stadsroepers*, civic messengers (*stadsbodes*) and assistants of the bailiff or sheriff (*gerechtsbodes*) were commonly tasked with the delivery of proclamations or other announcements; municipal drummers, horn-blowers or trumpeters could also be asked to take up the duties of a crier.²¹ To muddle the picture further, many *stadsroepers*, as we will detail further below, also occupied other civic posts, and combined their work as crier with that of messenger, affixer of placards, drummer, market master or municipal cleaner.

There was thus no single archetype of the *stadsroeper* in the Dutch Republic. Our research demonstrates, however, that the term *stadsroeper* was widely understood as a privileged public office which granted the crier the duty as well as right to perform, within a regulated and often closely supervised framework, a range of political, commercial, and private cries in exchange for money. The crier was a representative of the town and leading agent of state communication, as well as a private trader in information.

The services of the crier

Criers fulfilled an important role as mediators of information, politics, and property within the civic community. Announcements made by criers can be broadly defined as relating to three spheres of information: commercial (announcements concerning sales of goods or property, other business transactions, and transportation), private (generally, but not exclusively, announcements concerning the loss of goods, animals or people), and political or official (announcements ordered on the part of the local authorities). These spheres naturally overlapped. Many municipal ordinances concerned trade and commerce, and the authorities also frequently announced commercial opportunities (market days, leasing

¹⁸ Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, 139.

¹⁹ Middelburg, Zeeuws Archief, Aantekeningen uit de stadsresoluties Vlissingen 5158.

²⁰ *Ordonnantie vande E. vroetschap der stad Utrecht, op't vercoop-ampt van huysen* (Utrecht: Amelis Janssz van Paddenburgh, 1638).

²¹ Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, 132-133, 135, 142.

of land, invitations to tender work contracts). Other official announcements might also touch on the private sphere, such as notices of wanted criminals or information on crime, which could similarly be highlighted by 'private' cries, as they regularly concerned the disappearance of servants, children, animals and high value goods.

The regulations, instructions and wage lists that comprise our principal corpus were mostly concerned with regulating the cost of commercial cries. This is not surprising given the fact that monetary disputes between the crier and his customers could cause serious friction in the community. By drawing up a long list of goods and services, and the corresponding cost of their announcement, town councils could regulate the role of the town crier and, hopefully, prevent future quarrels between the crier and his customers; such an intention was specifically referred to in the case of the crier of Wijk bij Duurstede.²² In Zaltbommel, the authorities went as far as to issue the regulation of the crier's office in print, hinting at a deliberate intention to publish information on his office and rates of pay to a broader audience.²³

In the Dutch Republic, criers were expected to perform a set of commercial cries that were relatively similar across the provinces. Almost all criers in the Republic announced the sale of real estate and goods, and the departure time of barges and ships. In some cases, the regulations governing such cries were extremely detailed. This granularity is exemplified by the differing costs attached to the crying of various seafoods. In the Republic, fishing was vital to the economy and represented a major food source for its inhabitants: crucially, most fish was also highly perishable. Announcing the sale of freshly caught seafood was therefore an important part of the town crier's daily rounds. In Wijk bij Duurstede, the crying of 'cod and haddock', 'flounder and smelt', and 'salted herring' were all subject to different charges.²⁴ In Deventer, the regulations differentiated between the crying of fish caught by foreign (those from outside Deventer) and local fishermen, with foreign fishermen required to pay a premium for the services of the town crier.²⁵ The crier of Zaltbommel even received part of his pay in caught produce: for every announcement concerning mussels, he received two *stuivers* and two buckets of mussels, though he was required to give one of the buckets to the local orphanage.²⁶

While the act of crying across the Dutch Republic displayed many shared characteristics, local differences can be easily distinguished. These can often be explained by the location of the towns where criers were employed. The regulation in Tiel, in the fertile Betuwe region known for its orchards, noted the crying of 'fruit crops, apples, pears, plums and cherries, or other tree crops from every orchard'.²⁷ The emphasis on the crying of fruit

²² RAZU, Stadsbestuur Wijk bij Duurstede 51, fol. 164.

²³ *Reglement en instructie voor den stads omroeper binnen Boemel* (Zaltbommel: J.W. Kanneman, 1752) (only traced copy at RAR, Stadsbestuur van Zaltbommel 142).

²⁴ RAZU, Stadsbestuur Wijk bij Duurstede 51, fol. 164v-165r.

²⁵ DvCO, Rechtersarchief Deventer 124m, 11 January 1731.

²⁶ RAZU, Stadsbestuur Wijk bij Duurstede 51, fol. 164v; *Reglement en instructie voor den stads omroeper binnen Boemel*, 6.

²⁷ RAR, Stadsbestuur Tiel 102.

sales – like fish, a relatively perishable commodity – seems exclusive to criers employed in or near the Betuwe.²⁸

The size of the community could, likewise, result in differences. In Amsterdam, the early seventeenth-century crier, Goosen Cornelis, was paid by postal messengers travelling on nine different routes for crying their time of departure.²⁹ Cornelis was therefore an important link connecting the merchants of Amsterdam with the wider Dutch Republic and beyond. Cornelis may have cried more regularly and at greater length on the departure of messengers than the criers of other towns, but at heart their roles were similar: the crier of Hoorn was paid to announce the departures to Rotterdam, Harlingen, and other places.³⁰ In these respects, town criers across the entire Dutch Republic fulfilled an important role in facilitating the movement of people, goods, and information.

Besides making commercial cries, town criers were commonly hired by citizens to make public information concerning the loss of goods, missing people or run-away servants and children. One can well understand why citizens would wish to hire the services of the crier for such important and irregular events. In contrast to the departure of barges or the sale of fresh fish, events which presumably took place on a regular if not daily basis, the anguish at loss of a cherished piece of jewellery or beloved hunting dog, were occasional occurrences. Such occasional announcements appear, nevertheless, to have been a staple of the crier's work. The two wage lists identified for the town crier in the city of Hoorn (1680 and 1780) specify the costs for the crying of different types of lost or stolen goods and missing people, indicating the frequent occurrence of this cry.³¹ Notarial documentation likewise reveals private announcements as part and parcel of the crier's world. In 1649, one Hendrick Jansz spotted a roll of flower-patterned satin left unattended beside an Amsterdam canal. Before he claimed the fabric as his own, he dutifully took it to the house of Goosen Cornelis, asking him to announce the find of the satin, allowing its owner to step forward.³²

In many cases, given its ability to reach wider audiences, the printed word was a necessary ancillary to the town crier. Private announcements made by the crier would only achieve their objective if the stolen horse, jewellery or the kidnapped child remained within the boundaries of the town. To pursue the fleeing thief or kidnapper beyond the city walls many victims would take out a newspaper advertisement or circulate printed posters, which would be read over a much wider area than those who would hear the town crier.³³

²⁸ Although 'fruit' is mentioned in the wage list of Hoorn (1780), if only in a much longer summation.

²⁹ Amsterdam, Stadsarchief (hereafter SA), Archief van de Burgemeesters: groot-memoriaal (hereafter Groot-Memoriaal) 3, fol.176v-177r.

³⁰ Hoorn, Westfries Archief (hereafter WFA), Oud archief stad Hoorn (hereafter Hoorn) 155, Memoriaal van Burgemeesteren en Regeerders (1664-1685), fol. 277r.

³¹ WFA, Hoorn 162, Memoriaal van Burgemeesteren en Regeerders (1777-1790), fol. 44r.

³² SA, Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam (hereafter Notarissen) 2099, 1 April 1649, fol. 61v.

³³ Der Weduwen and Pettegree, *Dutch Republic and the Birth of Modern Advertising*. For an English perspective on the relationship between newspaper advertisements and lost goods see: Smith, 'Lost Things'.

Newspaper advertisements could also be employed in combination with the services of the crier. From the middle decades of the seventeenth century onwards, criers are frequently mentioned in advertisements as the point of contact for lost or stolen goods.³⁴ One such typical notice was placed on 1 March 1667 in the Amsterdam *Ordinaris Dingsdaeghsche Courant*, listing in detail a variety of coats, clothes and textiles that had been stolen 'from a house on the Water [the Damrak] [...] between Wednesday and Thursday evening'. Readers were instructed that if they chanced upon any of the items described, they should 'address the town crier, and they will receive a good reward'.³⁵ The announcement of lost goods was characterised by interplay between orality and the written word, with the crier serving as mediator and point of contact for the urban community.

Official or public announcements constitute our final category of cries. In the Dutch Republic, it was conventional practice for magistrates to take the duty of announcing new placards and ordinances upon themselves. New laws were not deemed valid until they had been proclaimed from the balustrade of the town hall by the authorities. Criers were clearly used to disseminate such ordinances further afield, but this was not strictly necessary for each new law or ordinance, and was thus dependent on the urgency of the announcement and the breadth of its application.³⁶ It was far more effective, and cheaper, for the magistrates to circulate the text of a new by-law concerning the butchers' guild to the common guildhall than to ask criers to announce the same at forty locations throughout the city. By way of contrast, when the occupying French troops offered all they had for sale prior to their leaving the town of Woerden in 1673, the crier was urgently tasked to announce to all inhabitants that they were not allowed to buy anything from the withdrawing troops.³⁷

In de-emphasising the role of the crier in the process of state communication in their written codifications of the office, Dutch magistrates stand in direct contrast to their French and Italian counterparts. In French and Italian early modern towns and cities, the announcement of ordinances was the principal duty of criers: laws were not valid until they had been formally proclaimed by *banditori* or *juré-crieurs*.³⁸ In the Dutch Republic, by way of contrast, public and official announcements appear to have constituted a smaller part of the crier's duties, and this is exemplified by the heavy regulation of private and commercial crying. Only in Harderwijk do we find the explicit instruction that the town crier had to present himself to the town hall every Saturday morning to 'receive notice of publications' to be made on behalf of the city or state.³⁹ Yet even if the crying of ordinances was not clearly spelled out in most Dutch crier instructions, it does not mean that this was not an important aspect of the office. Dutch authorities recognised that criers made most of their

34 Der Weduwen and Pettegree, *Dutch Republic and the Birth of Modern Advertising*, 180–181.

35 *Ordinaris Dingsdaeghsche Courant*, no. 9 (1 March 1667).

36 Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, 132–133. For numerous payments to Wijnolt den Roeper in Deventer for the announcement of ordinances, see also DvCO, Cameraars 36e, fols. 17r, 19v.

37 *Journal, of dagelijcksch verhael van de handel der Franschen in de steden van Uytrecht en Woerden* (Amsterdam: Jan Claesz Ten Hoorn, 1674), 71.

38 Francalanci, *La città e le leggi*, ch. 1; Judde de Larivière, 'Voicing Popular Politics', 37–51; Fogel, *Les cérémonies de l'information*; De Vivo, *Information and Communication*. The research that underpins this comparison is part of a survey of the crier as a European phenomenon in the early modern period, conducted by the COMLAWEU project at the University of St Andrews. See the forthcoming Gillain et al., 'The voice of the law'.

39 Harderwijk, Noord-Veluws Archief (hereafter NoVA), Stadsbestuur Harderwijk 1231–1813 (hereafter Har-derwijk) 1596, fol. 171.



Fig. 1 Anonymous, Tile with depiction of a crier, c. 1625-1700, earthenware, 131 × 129 × 9 mm, Arnhem, Nederlands Openluchtmuseum.

income from the commercial and private spheres, so these were elements that required strict regulation.

The Dutch town crier was far from just a trader in information: he was the principal mediator of trustworthy public information. His dual role as a servant of the people and of the law also gave him a distinctive profile in the governance of his community. That the crier answered first and foremost to the authorities is attested to by the instruction made to the crier of Wijk bij Duurstede that he police the public sphere: he was required to gain permission from the magistrates to make any commissioned cry which he suspected might be subversive.⁴⁰ The authorities were certainly quick to act when criers betrayed the trust placed in them: the Rhenen crier Jan van Tiel was fired around 1668 for making ‘inappropriate announcements’, and Joost den Roeper of Nijmegen was suspended in January 1673 for erroneously crying that William III, Prince of Orange, had taken the city of Charleroi from the French.⁴¹

The nature of the performance

The importance of the town crier as a representative of the civic community is further illuminated by an investigation into his appearance, civic presence and performance of

⁴⁰ RAZU, Stadsbestuur Wijk bij Duurstede 51, fol. 164v.

⁴¹ RAZU, Stadsbestuur Rhenen 170, petition Jan van Tiel 7 April 1668; Nijmegen, Regionaal Archief (hereafter RAN), Stadsbestuur Nijmegen (hereafter Stadsbestuur) 111, fol. 535.

his function. Like other civic officials he was required to maintain himself honourably and present himself in a dignified manner. There was a widely shared understanding in the Dutch Republic that the town crier had to be a respectable, honest and clearly identifiable individual: he should also 'keep himself sober and be wary of drink', as the magistrates of Harderwijk, Zaltbommel and Haastrecht reminded their crier.⁴² Similar exhortations can commonly be found in the instructions for other civic officials, including the night watchmen of Enkhuizen and the city musicians of Utrecht.⁴³

As representatives of the city, it was important to the authorities that criers were dressed appropriately: both criers and their fellow civic officials clearly wore uniforms. When Stadtholder William IV visited Groningen in 1736, the town crier of the city formally received him, as part of a small delegation of 'uniformed municipal officials', including gatekeepers, the harbourmaster, and messenger.⁴⁴ Rarely is the nature of the uniform specified, with the regents of Nijmegen laconically describing it as 'the clothing that is appropriate for the crier's office'.⁴⁵ Where it is specified, it prescribes a relatively simple gown or coat (figs. 1 and 2). In 1624, the town crier of Deventer was paid more than twenty *guldens* for a 'black coat of 4.25 ell and 3.5 ell of black cloth to line' the same.⁴⁶

Town criers likewise commonly received a musical instrument. The primary instrument of the crier in the Dutch Republic was either the drum (*trommel*) or copper cymbal (*bekken*), use of which was both intended to mark his arrival and to allow for the gathering of a large audience before he launched into his formal announcement. The cymbal (figs. 2 and 3) appears to have been more frequently used. It remained in the possession of the city magistrates and was loaned to the crier.⁴⁷ Only in the province of Friesland do drums appear to have been more frequently used instead of cymbals, and criers of Friesian villages are occasionally referred to with the additional title of '*tromslager*' or '*tambour*' (drummer).

The use of cymbals and drums was a significant divergence from the customs of other parts of Europe: in the Southern Netherlands, France and Italy, trumpets were the principal instrument of criers; in other parts of Northern Europe, drums and bells were relatively common, but cymbals less so.⁴⁸ The magistrates of the larger cities of the Dutch Republic tended to reserve trumpets for specific civic trumpeters, who were relied upon for important ceremonies and processions, and, on occasion, to reinforce the efforts of criers in disseminating news of placards and ordinances.⁴⁹ In Den Bosch, only part of the Republic

42 NoVA, Harderwijk 1596, fol. 171. *Reglement en instructie binnen Boemel*, 1. Gouda, Streekarchief Midden-Holland (hereafter SaMH), Gemeente Haastrecht (hereafter Haastrecht) 76, Regelementen voor de omroeper en asman Pieter Groenevelt, 4 February 1744.

43 WFA, Stad Enkhuizen 1462; HUA, Stadsbestuur van Utrecht (1577-1795) (hereafter Stadsbestuur) 187-1, no. 74.

44 Groningen, Regionaal Historisch Centrum Groninger Archieven (hereafter RHC GrA), Stadsbestuur van Groningen (1594-1815) (hereafter Stadsbestuur) 34, 18 February 1736.

45 RAN, Stadsbestuur 96, fol. 295r.

46 Kampen, Stadsarchief (hereafter SAK), Oud Archief Kampen (hereafter Kampen) 11, fol. 182r; DvCO, Cameraars 44e, fol. 14v.

47 SaMH, Haastrecht 76.

48 Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, 132; Fogel, *Les cérémonies de l'information*, 40-50; Milner, "Fanno bandire", 111-113; Gillain et al., "The voice of the law".

49 HUA, Stadsbestuur 899.

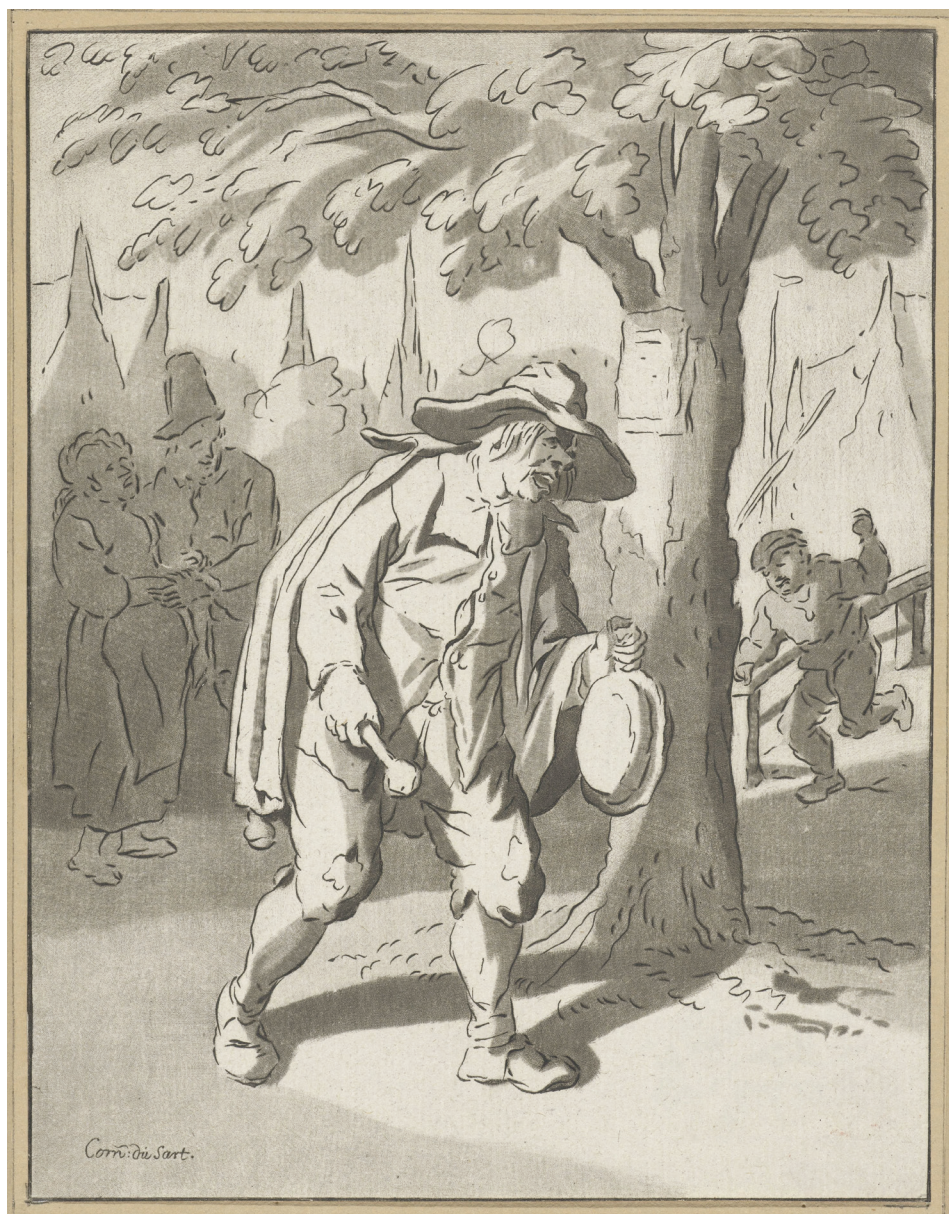


Fig. 2 Cornelis Ploos van Amstel after Cornelis Dusart, *Omroeper*, 1776-1777, drawing facsimile, 200 × 154 mm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 3 Anonymous, A Dutch crier's cymbal, unknown date, Enkhuizen, Zuiderzeemuseum, Copyright: Wim Zandbergen, Vereniging Vrienden van het Zuiderzeemuseum.

from 1629, criers continued to use trumpets, like their counterparts in other cities of Brabant which were still under Habsburg control.⁵⁰

The considerable volume that the crier generated with his voice and instrument required the authorities to take the issue of 'sound control' seriously. Cacophony was not merely frowned upon but seen as dangerous, running as it did contrary to the notion of an orderly society. It could also prove a severe impediment to the flow of information, as many civic rituals, and the regulation of daily life, were dependent on the adequate communication of sounds.⁵¹ Concerns are evident from multiple instructions given to town criers. In 1633,

⁵⁰ Den Bosch, *Erfgoed Den Bosch*, Stadsbestuur van Den Bosch (1262-1810), 196-197, 456-457, 481-492.

⁵¹ Hahn, 'Sound Control', 355-367; Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, 117-120, 130.

the criers of Leiden were specifically forbidden from crying during the formal ringing of the bells for the changing of the guard, and the ringing of the gate bells for their opening or closing.⁵² In Zaltbommel, the crier was not allowed to use his cymbal for any other reason than to announce a cry; in Haastrecht, cries were prohibited during church services and Sunday's catechism lessons.⁵³

Yet, in this regulated auditory environment, the audibility of the town crier remained a concern: there was no point in paying a crier if no-one could hear him. The use of musical instruments served in part to induce silence among the crier's listeners, and to draw attention to him within the soundscape of the streets, characterised by music, bells, animal noise, the call of street sellers, industrial noise, sleds and carts, and the wind.⁵⁴ In Haastrecht, the crier was instructed that each announcement should be preceded with several bangs of the cymbal, and if he had more than one announcement to make, 'there should be a new bang between each [announcement]'. He also had to remember to 'stand still throughout his announcement' and cry 'as clearly and audible as is possible'.⁵⁵ The crier of Harderwijk was asked to 'make all announcements distinctly and loudly, so that one can distinguish each word', while crier Esken of Deventer was reprimanded in 1648 for announcing with limited enunciation.⁵⁶

It is remarkable to note, however, that in the smallest communities in the Republic premiums could be placed on the use of the cymbal, with citizens being asked to pay extra to have the cymbal sounded before the crier made his announcement. This implies that in villages or small towns, the noise of the instrument was deemed less necessary for drawing a crowd, something unthinkable in crowded cities.⁵⁷ The audibility of the crier's performance depended also on the location of the cry. Magistrates of Dutch cities used criers in part because the single proclamation made from the balustrade of the town hall was never likely to reach more than a small portion of the urban community. All indications are that Dutch criers in cities and large towns had to complete relatively burdensome rounds if they were to fulfil their duty. In the process, they gave their fellow citizens ample opportunity to hear the announcements for which their services had been commissioned.

Most instructions do not give a precise indication of the locations where the crier was to halt to make his announcements, or their number, but it is clear that announcements would not be restricted to specific parts of the town. General instructions indicate that criers should 'cry throughout the city' (Deventer), 'at all corners and streets where it is common to make announcements' (Harderwijk) or 'through the entire city, at all street-corners' (Zaltbommel). In Haastrecht, the crier was similarly instructed that he should cry at 'all streetcorners', and that after every cry, he should only 'move on a sensible distance, not too far so that anyone [in the area] can hear and understand him'.⁵⁸ Criers could also

⁵² Leiden, Erfgoed Leiden, Stadsarchief II, inv. 19, fol. 256.

⁵³ *Reglement en instructie binnen Boemel*, 3; SaMH, Haastrecht 76.

⁵⁴ Garrioch, 'Sounds of the city', 8-10.

⁵⁵ SaMH, Haastrecht 76.

⁵⁶ NoVA, Harderwijk 1596, fol. 171. DvCO, Schepenen en Raad van de stad Deventer (periode Republiek) 6c, scan no. 119 (no folio numbers).

⁵⁷ The use of the cymbal demanded 2 *stuivers* for ordinary cries in Haastrecht (a double charge), and a triple charge of 6 *stuivers* for ordinary cries with the cymbal in Zaltbommel.

⁵⁸ SaMH, Haastrecht 76.

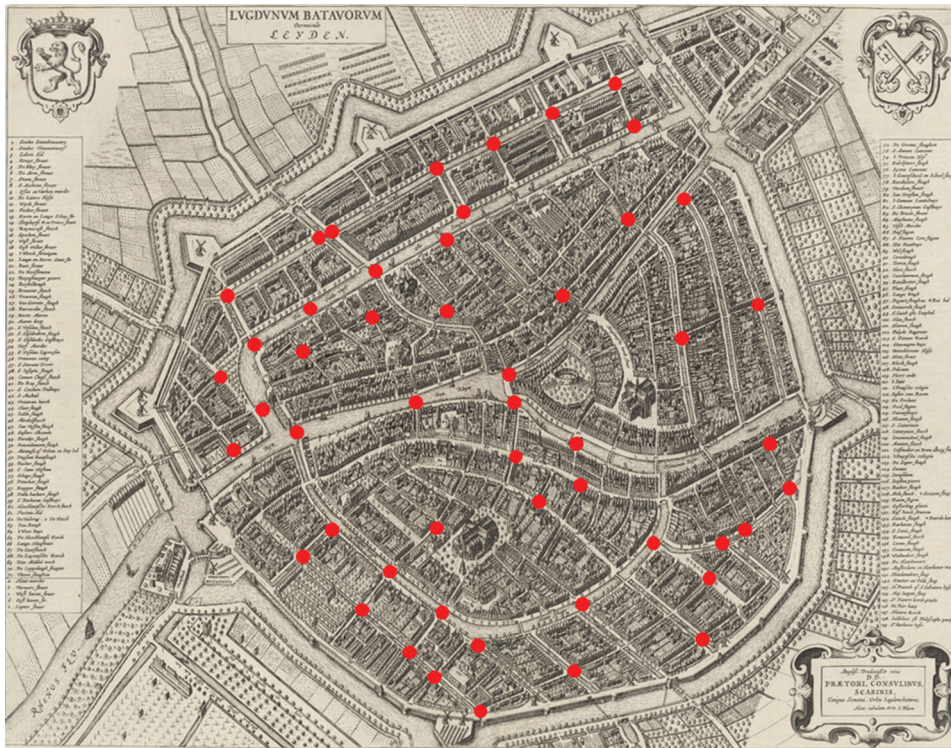


Fig. 4 Anonymous mapmaker published by Joan Blaeu, Map of Leiden, 1652, etching and engraving, 423 × 543 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Annotated with the fifty-one locations where the town criers were ordered to make their announcements (as stipulated in 1633).

be asked to make announcements at specific locations depending on the nature of the job. In 1657, the Amsterdam town crier's assistant, Jacobus Kint, was approached by a sailor, who had found a golden ring. The sailor asked the crier if his find could be announced 'around the Hoogstraat and the Breestraat', where he had found the same.⁵⁹

The most detailed information on locations comes from Leiden, Leeuwarden and Den Bosch where the crier's instructions specify exact stops where they are to make their announcements. These ranged from thirty-one locations in Den Bosch (1761) to forty-one to forty-eight in Leeuwarden (1644, 1720) and fifty-one in Leiden (1633).⁶⁰ Mapping these locations onto the early modern plans of these three cities reveals that they covered the cities very effectively (figs. 4-6). No neighbourhoods were neglected, and most inhabitants would live within a minute's walking distance from a crier's stop. The musical notice of the crier's arrival left plentiful time for any curious citizen to find themselves within earshot of the nearest stop before the crier launched into his announcement. Even if they missed it,

⁵⁹ SA, Notarissen 2734B, 1 May 1657.

⁶⁰ HCL, Stad Leeuwarden 126, fols. 325-328; HCL, Stad Leeuwarden 696, fols. 128-130.

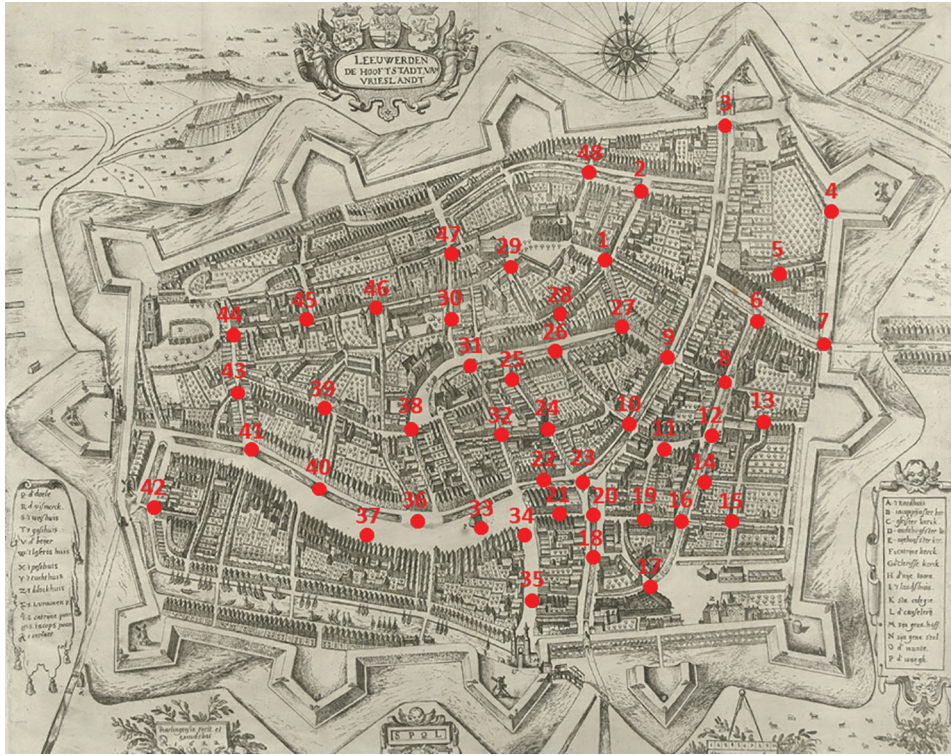


Fig. 5 Pieter Feddes van Harlingen, Map of Leeuwarden, 1622, etching, 410 × 507 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Annotated with the forty-eight locations where the town crier was ordered to make his announcements (as stipulated in 1720), including the specific order of the route.

the next stop would be close by and not necessitate the listener to leave the neighbourhood to hear the crier again.

The stops dictated by the magistrates of Den Bosch, Leeuwarden and Leiden were practical as well as symbolic. They were made outside virtually all prominent civic buildings or locations, including the town hall, markets, churches, weighing houses, and the headquarters of the militia, but also on crossroads and busy commercial streets. In Leiden particularly, many cries were made on the numerous bridges spanning the city's canals. Bridges were an ideal location given that they narrowed the space that an audience could occupy, forcing a congregation together, while sound also carries well over the water, enabling the criers to reach listeners in multiple directions, on and above the water. The inclusion of numerous specifically named streets also indicates that the crier's audience was not necessarily outside: many early modern Dutch people would have been confronted by the crier's announcement while they were at work, or in their homes. In this respect, the crier could also be an unwelcome presence, his loud instruments and voice blurring the boundaries between public and private space.⁶¹ While it required agency on the part

⁶¹ See Pierik, 'Privacy, Publicity and Gender', 1–22.

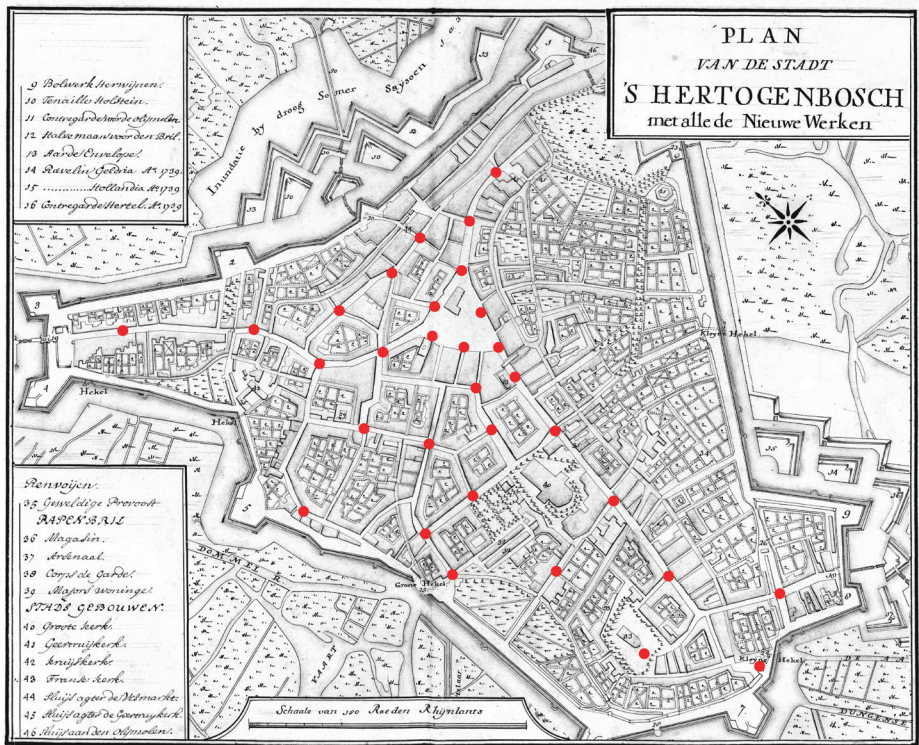


Fig. 6 A. Hattinga, Map of Den Bosch, 1748, pen and pencil on paper, 570 × 470 mm. Den Bosch, Brabants Historisch Informatie Centrum. Annotated with the thirty-one locations where town crier Dirk Praat was ordered to make his announcements (1761). The east of the town, seemingly not covered by locations, was almost entirely composed of gardens.

of a citizen to walk towards the town hall to hear a proclamation, or to buy a newspaper, one did not have to pay anything, or even move, to hear the crier and his announcements.

The routes laid out by the regents of the three cities were physically demanding, especially when compared with the circuits required of their often mounted contemporaries in France and Italy.⁶² Criers were allowed to bundle multiple cries together for their route, but given that new cries could be commissioned at any time, some criers may have had to undertake multiple routes of their city in a single day. That this could be exhausting is attested by the fact that the Leeuwarden magistrates rewarded their crier by paying extra during the winter months: he received 5 *gulden* 13 *stuivers* for a municipal cry between November and May, against 3 *gulden* 3 *stuivers* for the same between June and October. The arduous nature of the performance was further recognised by the warning that the Zaltbommel crier would be fined three *gulden* if he did not cry upon ‘all streetcorners’.⁶³

⁶² Der Weduwen, *State Communication*, 131; Fogel, *Les cérémonies de l'information*, 40-50; Milner, “‘Fanno bandire’”, 111-113; Gillain et al., ‘The voice of the law’.

⁶³ *Reglement en instructie binnen Boemel*, 3.

Authorities did not only regulate where criers were to perform, but when. In Deventer and Zaltbommel, crying was prohibited on Sundays, but in Hoorn, the town crier was allowed to charge double if commissioned to make an announcement on this day; an indication that Sunday crying was uncommon, and considered a burden upon the crier.⁶⁴ In all other respects, the timings of cries in the Dutch Republic seem to have been distributed throughout both the day and the six working days of the week. In Haastrecht, the crier was required to be ready 'at all hours of the day'. Zaltbommel's citizens could 'themselves determine the hour of the cry', although the crier was given leave to make the announcement within a timeframe of one hour around the scheduled time.⁶⁵ The town crier was considered a servant of the community who might be called upon whenever the magistrates, or any private citizen, required him.

The expected perpetual readiness of the crier to serve his community also becomes evident from various instructions specifying that he should be easily findable. Anyone wishing to employ the crier of Zaltbommel should be able to locate him 'within half an hour', on pain of his receiving a 3 *gulden* fine. He was not allowed to leave the town other than with the express permission of the burgomaster, and on condition that he would arrange a temporary replacement in his absence.⁶⁶ That the role of crier was deemed critical enough to the life of the town that a single day's absence was a serious detriment says much about the importance this office held in this small Guelders town by the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

Remuneration, ancillary activities and status

Was it possible to make a decent living as a town crier in the Dutch Republic? Given that much of their business resulted from privately commissioned announcements by fellow citizens, it is impossible to determine even an approximate level of income that criers might expect to earn. Just as the status of a crier in urban society depended largely on the size of community he serviced, so too the pay: the larger the town, the more business a crier could generate. Larger towns could afford to pay annual salaries to civic officials, and to provide other bonuses, such as free or subsidised housing (as in Deventer). In early seventeenth-century Kampen, criers received 36 *gulden* a year and in 1605, the Nijmegen crier received 60 *gulden* a year.⁶⁷ In early eighteenth-century Gouda, the two town criers received a more generous sum of 150 *gulden* a year, but this seems to have compensated them for all their efforts on behalf of the city, whereas their colleague in Kampen would have been paid separately for each announcement for the magistrates in addition to his salary.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ WFA, Hoorn 162, Memoriaal van Burgemeesteren en Regeerders (1777-1790), fol. 44r.

⁶⁵ *Reglement en instructie binnen Boemel*, 3-4; SaMH, Haastrecht 76.

⁶⁶ *Reglement en instructie binnen Boemel*, 2.

⁶⁷ SAK, Kampen 11, fol. 182r; RAN, Stadsbestuur 88, fol. 138r.

⁶⁸ SaMH, Gouda 5038, *Calendrier van de ordinaris besoesnes*.

The smallest jurisdiction for which we have identified the payment of an annual salary by the magistrates is Amerongen (no more than seven hundred inhabitants), where in 1682, crier Cors Woutersz was paid 36 *stuivers* a week (just over 93 *gulden* a year), but this covered all his work for the authorities and included service as nightwatchman as well.⁶⁹ Conversely, criers in Tiel, Zaltbommel and Haastrecht seem not to have received annual salaries. Instead, their earnings were presumably purely from commissioned cries, either from the authorities or fellow citizens.

In the smaller communities of the Republic, ordinary cries announcing the sale of goods were not particularly expensive. Charges of 1 or 2 *stuivers* per cry were the norm in villages and small towns. One had to be a crier of a city to demand more for regular commissions: 3 to 12 *stuivers* in Zwolle, 6 *stuivers* in Haarlem, 6 to 12 *stuivers* in Hoorn, and a lavish 26 *stuivers* in Leeuwarden. Premiums were generally placed on announcements of the sale of property or estates (given the high value of the 'goods' cried), but also on announcements commissioned to be made outside the limits of the town walls, or commissioned by 'foreigners' (that is, from outside the town).⁷⁰

A consistent element of remuneration was that magistrates seem to have paid their criers more to make official announcements than they allowed criers to charge fellow citizens. This was probably motivated by two factors: it made the crier grateful to receive official business and encouraged him to perform well when making municipal announcements; and it encouraged commercial and private crying, by allowing citizens to make use of the crier's services without bankrupting themselves. Payments by towns could be substantial. The criers of Kampen received 1 *gulden* to announce a new ordinance; the crier of Haarlem 1 *gulden* 16 *stuivers* to announce the sale of the right to raise excise duties (the *verpachtingen*). In Tiel and Montfoort, official announcements were also more valuable for the criers than those of private individuals, but nowhere did the magistrates reward their crier as generously as in Leeuwarden, where he was paid 3 *gulden* 3 *stuivers* per ordinance in summer months and 5 *gulden* and 13 *stuivers* during the winter. Set against this, as we have seen, the Leeuwarden magistrates also demanded a particularly arduous tour of the city, and the crier was also supposed to act as municipal *aanplakker* (affixer) on his route.

Overall, we can speculate that in small towns or villages, criers would have to make around ten ordinary commercial or private announcements a day to earn a *gulden*, approximately the equivalent of the day wage for many skilled labourers. In contrast, the crier of a city like Haarlem would only have to perform three cries to exceed that; the crier of Leeuwarden only a single cry. In cities, it seems highly likely that criers would have been extremely busy, and although their work was intensive, it would have been financially rewarding. The fact that the crier of Amsterdam could afford to engage a team of assistants implies that this was a significant operation. By contrast, many village criers could not rely on crying alone to make ends meet, as it seems improbable that a community such as Haastrecht would generate an average of ten cries per day over a year.

⁶⁹ RAZU, Gerechtsbestuur Amerongen, Ginkel en Elst 39, Akte van aanstelling van Cors Woutersz. tot omroeper en nachtwaker; met instructie (1682).

⁷⁰ Announcements beyond the city walls of Haarlem could be charged double, and outsiders had to pay double in Haastrecht as well.

We can glean more about the status and potential income of criers by the ancillary functions or roles that they took on. Again, in larger towns, criers seem mostly to have been exactly that: *stadsroepers*, sometimes with additional duties such as acting as drummers or affixers of placards, activities that were easy for criers to incorporate into their rounds. Criers could evidently combine their main role with other civic offices, as was the case in Tiel, and Rotterdam (where the crier also acted as a messenger), or Steenwijk and Deventer (where he doubled as an assistant to the bailiff). In most small towns and villages, criers more commonly took on a range of duties. The crier of Veenendaal was also a *klepperman* (nightwatchman), *grafbidder* (funeral announcer) and *tabacxspakker* (packer of tobacco).⁷¹ Pieter Groenevelt of Haastrecht was also *asman* (municipal cleaner), a job for which he received 30 *stuivers* a week (78 *gulden* a year). This required a daily morning round through the village to collect ash, and a weekly thorough clean of every village street.⁷²

Yet even in some larger towns the crier had to be a man of many talents. In Nijmegen (c. 13,000 inhabitants), he was not only in effect an early modern police officer, charged with keeping public order, but also acted as assistant to the executioner, and was in charge of cleaning the market square.⁷³ Goosen Cornelis, Amsterdam's crier between approximately 1638 and 1653, was also *marktmeester* (market master), *bierbeschooier* ('beer controller', supervising the supply of beer to all taverns), and *ophaler van erfgoederen* (collector of goods from estates of the deceased that were destined for public auction).⁷⁴ From notary deeds we also know that the criers of Amsterdam and their assistants were regularly authorised by citizens to collect money on their behalf.⁷⁵

As this suggests, the status of the crier in the Republic was conditioned strongly by the world that the crier inhabited. The criers of Amsterdam and Haastrecht were very similar in many respects: they had to be literate, physically fit, eloquent and engage in equal measure with the elite and ordinary members of their communities. Yet being market master of one of the most industrial and prosperous cities in Europe conferred a different degree of authority than being *asman* of a small village in the province of Holland.

The issue of status was complicated by the fact that criers, due to the nature of their role as perambulatory hawkers of a wide variety of news and information, were targets for mockery, insult and even assault. This was as true in Amsterdam as in any Dutch village: in 1621, a drunk man seized the Amsterdam town crier's cymbal stick and threw it into the Burgwal canal.⁷⁶ The fact that in 1688 the magistrates of Nijmegen issued a law that prohibited children from abusing the town crier indicates that defending one's status could be a considerable struggle.⁷⁷

Despite the challenges of the role, everything indicates that the position of town crier was cherished by those in office and sought after. The criers of Leeuwarden, Mijdrecht

71 RAZU, Stadsbestuur Rhenen 846, Petition by Anthonij de Ridder and Henrick Willemsz for these positions following the death of Dirck Jansz van Laren (1701).

72 SaMH, Haastrecht 76.

73 RAN, Stadsbestuur 110, fol. 166; RAN, Stadsbestuur 88, fol. 138r; RAN, Stadsbestuur 87, fol. 44v.

74 See for Cornelis's instructions as 'market master': SA, Groot-Memoriaal 3, fol. 179r.

75 See for instance: SA, Notarissen 1184, 22 July 1634.

76 SA, Notarissen 437, 15 October 1621, fol. 349r.

77 RAN, Stadsbestuur 518, fol. 5v.

and Haastrecht all successfully defended their privileged position from competitors. Many criers seem to have fulfilled the role for life.⁷⁸ In Nijmegen, Joost Jans petitioned the magistrates that his son-in-law Jan Boshof could succeed him when he was no longer fit for the job (a family appeal which was approved).⁷⁹ In Utrecht, Catharyntje Houwers, widow of crier Daniel Noordsy, passed on the office to Arien van Zuylen in exchange for a weekly payment, a practice that was also known for the succession of other municipal offices.⁸⁰

Conclusion

On 29 January 1727, the magistrates of Groningen received a complaint from multiple citizens living in the Ebbingestraat and Boteringestraat. They noted that they could never hear crier Boneschans properly when he made his rounds, and therefore requested, and successfully so, that he perform his announcements at the corners of their streets.⁸¹ To these Groningers, the announcements made by the crier were evidently important enough to warrant a petition; tellingly they also viewed it as their civic right that the crier made announcements in their streets rather than requiring them to leave their houses and shops to listen to him at the nearby market square. Every aspect of our investigation into town criers suggests that these were civic officials who mattered greatly to the commercial and public spheres of their community. They connected all inhabitants of towns, great and small, by their cries, and as the leading public mediator of information, provided them with the latest official, commercial, and public news.

By the time the citizens of Groningen lodged their complaint, the Dutch Republic was a highly urbanised and literate country. Through newspapers, pamphlets and placards, citizens had access to a wealth of information. It might therefore seem odd that such a premium was placed on being able to hear the town crier. Yet, these different modes of communication did not exist in an antagonistic relationship but rather complemented one another, often leading to 'further oral communication'.⁸² Town criers offer us a unique prism through which to view this interplay between oral and literary culture. Firmly rooted in the world of orality, we can clearly trace the defining impact that print and script had on the profession. From the Leeuwarden crier who was tasked with affixing placards in the city to the Zaltbommel crier who saw his instruction being printed and the frequent appearance of town criers in advertisements; across the Dutch Republic town criers were confronted with the expanding world of written and printed documents.

It was precisely this expansion in the availability of information that strengthened the town crier's role as the leading public mediator of information. In an era that saw, as Paul Dover has convincingly argued, an 'information revolution', it was not a question of having access to information – this was in abundance – but rather getting access to the

⁷⁸ See, for instance, the detailed series of crier appointments in the archive of Vollenhove: Zwolle, Collectie Overijssel, Vollenhoofse regesten (Deel III) 35-388.

⁷⁹ RAN, Stadsbestuur 116, fol. 72v.

⁸⁰ HUA, Notarissen 958, deed 73.

⁸¹ RHC GrA, Stadsbestuur 593, scan no. 359.

⁸² Dover, *Information Revolution*, 17.

'right sort of information'.⁸³ The crier was ideally suited for this function since he could provide inhabitants with relevant and time sensitive information in a manner that could simply not be rivalled by print or script. If town criers are an indication of the burgeoning 'information revolution' in the Dutch Republic, this also entails that the 'information revolution' was not solely centred around highly urbanised areas. In smaller towns and villages, such as Haastrecht and Amerongen, the flow of information apparently grew to such an extent that it required dissemination by a licensed and regulated town crier.

Our findings from these smaller communities also indicate that some degree of professionalisation and standardisation of civic services took place across the entire Dutch Republic. The regulation of the town crier's performance and remuneration shows a high manner of consistency, indicating that the profession became increasingly standardised and professionalised during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Although research has shown that such professionalisation took place in large towns such as Dordrecht during the same period, the scale of our findings points to a much broader trend, warranting further research into the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of civic offices in the Dutch Republic, particularly in smaller communities.⁸⁴

It is important to note that the town crier was not uniquely a phenomenon of the early modern period. The rise of the telegraph and daily newspapers seems not to have occasioned the death of the crier, as many Dutch towns and villages had a '*gemeentelijke omroeper*' into the twentieth century. It seems that the office only began to fade with the advent of radio, a truly rival '*omroepdienst*', and the loudspeaker, which became pervasive from the 1920s onwards. In 1933, the council of Enkhuizen formally decided to 'disband the office of crier and dismiss T. Maartens from this function'. It was only with the dismissal of Mr Maartens and his colleagues in other Dutch towns around this time that a remarkable media phenomenon of more than three centuries was truly superseded.

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⁸³ Dover, *Information Revolution*, 265.

⁸⁴ Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 'Professionalization of public service'.

Hoorn, Westfries Archief (hereafter WFA), Stad Enkhuizen.
 WFA, Oud archief stad Hoorn.
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 HUA, Notarissen in de stad Utrecht (1560-1905).
 HUA, Stadsbestuur van Utrecht (1577-1795).
 Tiel, Regionaal Archief Rivierenland (hereafter RAR), Stadsbestuur Tiel en dorpsbestuur van Zandwijk.
 Zwolle, Collectie Overijssel, Vollenhoofse regesten.

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