Privateering, War, and the News: analysing the impact of the St.Malo corsairs in news discourse, 1689-1714

The Nine Years War and the War of the Spanish Succession shook Europe in more ways than the military or political. Throughout these wars, a war of information was also waged, with periodical presses in all countries involved attempting to not only convey information, but also sway public opinion, construct a clear enemy and bolster morale. Newspapers and other news publications reported –and often interpreted– battles and diplomatic moves. One phenomenon which was commonly presented was privateering, especially relating to the St. Malo corsairs. The French privateers were a thorn in the side of the English and the Dutch, their activities reported with alarming –for their readers– frequency.

This paper will provide a comparative analysis of English and French news publications relating to the St. Malo privateers, in order to examine how different publications in both countries presented this phenomenon. It will focus on the differences in the reportage of such publications and the ways in which news was translated in order to be used in rival publications. Translation of paragraphs from foreign newspapers would often be interpreted in such a manner as to drive a message home. This paper will examine how publications attempted to shape public opinion by analysing how news relating to the St. Malo privateers was inflected differently in publications appearing in embattled countries as well as the ways in which such publications intersected, commenting on and often directly responding to one other. Even though public opinion was still viewed with apprehension in this period, this paper will argue that news publications showed a vested interest in indirectly appealing to ‘the public’. This was achieved by employing a clearly defined ‘us and them’ mentality, while also creating an imaginary public opinion of ‘the other’ (most commonly showing the disagreement of ‘the public’ with their leaders’ actions).

Biography

Dr Lena Liapi is an Honorary Research Fellow at Keele University. She has written a monograph titled *Roguery in Print: Crime and Culture in early modern London* (Boydell & Brewer, 2019) and a number of other publications relating to news, crime, and the public sphere. Her current research project, “News in Conflict: Cultures of Communication in England and France, 1688-1720" examines the ways in which news publications in rival countries presented the war to a domestic and international audience.