

THE PROFITS AND PERILS OF PUBLICITY: *ALLGEMEINE LITERATUR-
ZEITUNG*, THE THURN UND TAXIS POST, AND THE PERIODICAL TRADE
AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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Recent historiography on the growth of periodical publishing has emphasized newspapers and journals as constituents of an emergent communications system in early modern Europe. This system comprised the newspapers, journals and other publications that contributed its content, and also the postal systems that were the principal method of distributing that content. This article describes how the growth of this system in central Europe was supported in large measure by financial incentives that it offered to both constituents. First, in contrast with postal systems in France and the UK, the Thurn und Taxis *Reichspost* inserted itself as a middleman in the sale of periodicals, which gave the *Reichspost* an incentive to promote the trade. Second, the financial conditions for periodical publication made their costs depend more heavily on costs that were scalable to circulation than is true today, which resulted in the viability of publications with a lower circulation. The same cost structure also made it possible for certain prominent periodicals of the era to earn considerable profits for their publishers, as illustrated in this article by *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, which was published in Jena from 1785.

Keywords: Thurn und Taxis Post; periodical publishing; financial aspects;
Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung; Germany; eighteenth century

INTRODUCTION: PERIODICALS AS COMMUNICATIVE STRUCTURES

Throughout much of the time for which historians have explored the origins and evolution of scientific periodicals, that history has been discussed as a portion of the history of ‘print culture’. And as with other historical studies of print culture, the periodical press has considered issues of genre and audience, periodicals as material objects, and the relationship to other institutions such as learned academies and societies. Equally important has been the role of periodicity itself in configuring this form of print culture. Within this framework, as Jeanne Peiffer, Maria Conforti and Patrizia Delpiano have

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written recently, a very broad range of material could be comprehended, including extracts and reviews of scholarly monographs, scholarly news and original research reports.¹

The very notion of a 'scientific periodical' is something of an anachronism, needless to say, based as it is on a clear distinction between 'science' and other forms of scholarship that was by no means as evident in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as it would become later on. In part, *Philosophical Transactions*, as inaugurated by Henry Oldenburg in the 1660s, contributes to this historiographic confusion, because its contents were largely based on reports of first-hand observations and experiments, and not on other kinds of scholarly news. On this basis David Kronick drew a basic distinction between 'substantive' and 'derivative' journals in his wonderfully erudite and comprehensive history of the scientific press in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Kronick himself declared, of the three leading journals of the later seventeenth century, *Philosophical Transactions*, *Journal des Sçavans* and *Acta Eruditorum*, 'the last two can be included in an inventory of scientific and technical periodicals only because there were so few other media for reporting scientific news at that time.'²

More recently a very different perspective on the periodical press has taken shape, one that examines the contribution of these publications to the evolving structures and practices of communication in early modern Europe. This literature finds its anchor not so much in the history of print culture, although it retains strong links with it, as in historical and political studies of the formation of the early modern state. Much of its theoretical inspiration comes from Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, first published in 1962 but completely ignored by Anglo-American historians until its translation into English in 1989. Habermas's key concept of the 'public sphere' (*Öffentlichkeit*) was offered as a discursive structure with strong political overtones that first emerged in the later seventeenth century. Despite decades of criticisms of Habermas's historical account of the emergence of the public sphere, criticisms founded partly on Habermas's somewhat romanticized picture of the eighteenth-century public sphere and partly on the inability of readers, especially English-speaking readers, to properly grasp the meaning of *Öffentlichkeit*, it appears as robust and widely discussed now as it has ever been.³ Even historians, whose embrace of Habermas has always been ambivalent at best, continue to hold the emergence of something resembling the public sphere as a key moment in early modern history.⁴

Early critics of Habermas often focused on his attempt to associate the emergence of the public sphere in the developing institutions of sociability in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and on the ways in which the supposedly universal public sphere failed to incorporate the participation of women in particular.⁵ From this point of view it made more sense to talk about the public as a multiplicity of different 'publics' than as a single undifferentiated totality. Others pointed out that Habermas's claims for the 'oppositional' character of the public sphere in its self-definition against the state was compromised by the fact that most of the participants in the public sphere—in central Europe, at any rate—were themselves teachers, ministers, progressive aristocrats and government functionaries, not the sort of crowd from which one would normally expect an oppositional stance, much less the faint stirrings of revolution.⁶

More recently, however, discussions of the public sphere have shifted to analysing it in terms of emergent communicative practices and institutions in the early modern era. From this point of view, gazettes, intelligencers and the expanding periodical press become the essential scaffolding for the new public sphere. For example, Wolfgang Behringer has

provocatively claimed that the emergence of communicative systems, represented most comprehensively by the Imperial postal system that spanned central Europe from the Spanish Netherlands to northern Italy, became an information system that was originally sponsored by governments but rapidly exceeded the ability of those governments to control or even meaningfully direct the spread of information.⁷

Behringer's argument highlights a significant structural change that created the conditions for the emergence of the demand for news. As those familiar with Habermas's work know, the growth in the demand for news played a key, and arguably *the* key, factor in the transition from an old-style representative form of publicity as centred on the princely court to its newer bourgeois model. Yet Habermas never examined the role of news in the public sphere very closely. To be sure, he sprinkled his narrative with talk about the role of critics as judges of art for the public and he linked these functions to the press, among other tantalizing hints, but to a great extent he dropped this line of thinking in favour of a discussion of the public and its relationship with various social and cultural institutions.⁸ In contrast with Habermas's suggestive yet underdeveloped treatment, Behringer's focus on the practice and structure of communications networks, together with other work on this topic, provides a crucial insight into this phenomenon.⁹

As important as these insights have been into the periodical press as a part of a broader system of communication, there remains much to be explained concerning how these systems emerged. One thing we know almost nothing about, for example, is the material and economic basis of the expansion of the press. If periodical publishing experienced a rapid and sustained growth throughout the eighteenth century, especially in the second half of the century, what made this growth possible from the viewpoint of its costs and profitability? Although easily posed, a satisfactory answer to this question is by no means easy to provide. One reason for this situation is the scarcity of relevant sources. Publishers' records before the nineteenth century are extraordinarily scattered and fragmentary, and the records of those publishers who were engaged to any significant extent in the periodical and news business comprise a small subset of those records that do exist. One useful collection of sources, as Anne Saada has recently shown, document the publication of *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* and are housed in the Akademie zu Wissenschaften in Göttingen.¹⁰ This article explores records from two other German sources. The first are the account books, meeting protocols and correspondence from the firm of Friedrich Justin Bertuch, whose publishing house in Weimar produced several of the most influential journals of the last two decades of the eighteenth century, including *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (ALZ) and *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*. Neither of these was a 'scientific' journal in the narrow sense but, as we shall see, some of the financial considerations that went into making ALZ a successful venture reveal a great deal about the economic structure of the publishing business in general and the periodical business in particular. A second equally valuable collection of material is housed in Regensburg, in the financial records of the Thurn und Taxis Post, which functioned as the postal system of the Holy Roman Empire from the sixteenth century to the dissolution of the Empire in 1803.¹¹

By looking at Bertuch's publishing firm on the one hand and the Thurn und Taxis Post on the other we can develop a powerful picture of the economics of periodical publishing in central Europe in the eighteenth century. Taken together, these records provide a suggestive answer to the question posed above—why the periodical press flourished as it did in the Holy Roman Empire, especially after the end of the Seven Years' War

in 1763. As will readily become apparent from these two examples, one principal reason for the rapid expansion of the periodical press is that it was profitable, and indeed sometimes highly profitable.

CASE 1: THE THURN UND TAXIS POST

Let us begin with a discussion of the postal system that distributed periodicals to subscribers, paying special attention to how its operation and financial structure supported the press. In the eighteenth century, postal traffic in central Europe was divided between the Imperial *Reichspost*, headquartered in Regensburg and operated by the counts of Thurn und Taxis, and other independent postal services operated by individual principalities, both Protestant and Catholic, of which the largest were located in electoral Saxony, Hannover, Bavaria, the Austrian (Hapsburg) crown lands and Brandenburg-Prussia. Of this group the *Reichspost* was by far the largest operator, for it served not only important Imperial free cities such as Hamburg, Nuremberg and Frankfurt am Main, which were politically independent, but also Catholic principalities and archepiscopal states such as Mainz, Trier and Würzburg.

The roots of the *Reichspost* can be traced back to the 1470s, when members of the northern Italian Tassis family held the office of papal couriers. The appointment by Emperor Friedrich III in 1493 of one 'Janetto de Tassis' as 'obristen postmaister' in the Tirol marked what seemed to be a change in the family's allegiance from the papal to the Imperial court. The Emperor's interest in fostering a postal system was obvious. With the marriage of Friedrich's son Maximilian into the house of Burgundy, the Hapsburgs had acquired a claim to the Spanish throne, and with it The Netherlands and the duchy of Naples. Thus, with a dominion embracing four widely disconnected territories (Naples, Spain, The Netherlands and Austria), the Imperial court required a network of communications that could reduce the daunting problem of governing such an unwieldy domain. By the terms of a contract signed in 1505, the house of Tassis received the right to operate the Imperial postal system in return for a subvention to be paid out of the Imperial treasury.

The onset of the Reformation and the religious strife culminating in the Thirty Years' War left the Imperial postal system remarkably intact. To be sure, by the mid seventeenth century the *Reichspost* had begun to face competition from the postal systems operated independently by prominent Protestant states, but it alone spanned the length and breadth of the Holy Roman Empire. The division of the vast Hapsburg empire in 1555 into Spanish and Austrian successors had been paralleled by a division of the Tassis family, with some members settling into directorship of the Netherlands post in Brussels and others taking up similar duties in Germany. The branch of the family that remained with the Hapsburgs settled in Regensburg, the town that eventually became the perpetual seat of the Imperial Reichstag, and Germanified their name to 'Taxis'.

By the early eighteenth century the *Reichspost* had developed from a limited number of direct lines beginning and ending in key administrative and financial centres such as Brussels, Vienna, Milan and Augsburg to a much more complex web of routes. The entire network was divided into approximately a dozen districts, with each district centred on an 'Oberpostamt' in a major city such as Hamburg, Bremen, Munich or Nuremberg, with smaller stations subordinated to the district centres. Maintaining the

entrepreneurial attitude that had characterized their predecessors, the Taxis family had also expanded the post into an all-embracing delivery service for the transmission of private letters and freight, along with official correspondence. These services included the complicated and lucrative business of transferring money packets between debtors and creditors.¹²

For the purposes of this article, the most important development in the story occurred early in the seventeenth century, when the *Reichspost* became involved in the publication of newspapers. This undertaking developed as an outgrowth of postmasters' location on major commercial routes, where they could traffic in gossip and news along with mail and freight. Postmasters in cities such as Frankfurt am Main and Cologne began publishing 'Post-Zeitungen', which were small, typically octavo-sized, weeklies or biweeklies containing reports of the latest diplomatic and commercial goings-on from correspondents in far-flung centres. The competition to publish these newspapers was fierce, especially in places where only one news outlet was likely to receive an official privilege to be published. It was not long after the first print newspapers began appearing that printers, too, began to appreciate the potential profitability of entering the news business; eventually their closer familiarity with printing and publishing, not to mention their possession of the most essential equipment for the task, allowed them to squeeze the postmasters out of business in most cities.¹³

Yet having been driven out of newspaper publishing did not diminish the *Reichspost's* appetite for the business, and postmasters soon found other ways to become involved with the press. They did so principally by remaking themselves as news agents, distributing first newspapers and then other periodicals through postal routes and selling copies of those publications out of their offices. This was a striking innovation, and one that clearly distinguished the *Reichspost* and its central European competitors from the postal systems in England and France. In the latter two countries, newspapers and other periodicals were distributed through the system for a fee, just like any other piece of mail. In the Holy Roman Empire, by contrast, postmasters made themselves middlemen in the connection between publishers and consumers.¹⁴

There were two key innovations that enabled postmasters to participate in the periodical business as middlemen and made it quite lucrative. The first innovation, paradoxically enough, was the introduction of what came to be called '*Portofreyheit*', an odd mixture of Italian and German denoting any item's right to be carried by the post free of charge. Official Imperial correspondence had obviously long enjoyed this privilege—after all, this was the principal service rendered by the Thurn und Taxis postmasters in return for their Imperial subventions—and various princes and cities had wrested this same concession over the decades in return for granting the *Reichspost* right of entry into their cities and territories. But *Portofreyheit* also began to be extended to newspapers and other periodicals as well, in return for the stipulation of a contracted price at which postmasters could sell the publication to subscribers. It was a remarkable step, exemplary of the *Reichspost's* shrewd business sense.¹⁵

One inducement for granting *Portofreyheit* to newspapers and other media that made the business attractive to the *Reichspost* was that it made use of already existing resources. Like another transportation system of a later era, the railways, the *Reichspost* worked with relatively high fixed costs. It had to maintain stations and wagons, feed horses, and pay postmasters, riders and drivers.¹⁶ At a certain level, these costs were independent of the volume of traffic, and profitability depended on how intensively the system was used.

Thus, by supplementing the traffic in letters and packets already handled by the system, the distribution and sale of periodicals helped to increase its efficiency.

Along with the introduction of *Portofreyheit*, a second innovation also contributed to making the *Reichspost* an active partner in the expansion of the periodical press. By the terms of an order issued in 1742, all of the profits gleaned from the traffic in periodicals remained with the post offices themselves and were not handed over to the General Directorate in Regensburg.¹⁷ This gave local offices a tremendous incentive to set up their own news bureaux, called *Zeitungs-Speditionen* or *Zeitungs-Comptoirs*, and attract business to them. Particularly in larger towns, the earnings from this effort comprised a not-inconsiderable portion of the total incomes of the personnel at those stations with sufficient traffic in periodicals and newspapers to support a *Zeitungs-Spedition*. To take just one well-documented example, in Würzburg in 1781 the manager of the post office nearly doubled his total income with 372 Gulden (fl.) from periodicals on top of his regular annual salary of 400 fl. His first assistant, whose share of the periodical earnings was much smaller than the postmaster's or the office manager's, nevertheless received 124 fl. from the business, a 44% supplement to his regular annual salary of 280 fl.¹⁸

One of the more vexing issues arising from this lucrative system was how to divide the income between different post stations. According to the original terms established in the order of 1742, only the larger district post offices with their own *Zeitungs-Speditionen* were designated to enjoy the fruits of this business. The smaller, subordinate offices in their districts were ordered to receive the printed matter and see that it got into the hands of subscribers for no extra charge. Needless to say, this led to a flood of complaints and to all kinds of creative attempts by operators of the smaller post stations to get around this restriction, for example by imposing their own unauthorized surcharges on subscribers or attempting to procure subscriptions for customers via a source other than that of their supervising district post office. Eventually the General Directorate recognized the futility of its original plan and permitted the smaller offices to have a share of the proceeds.¹⁹

At this point it may be helpful to provide a specific example of how the *Reichspost* contracted with publishers to distribute their periodicals. In December 1783 the bookseller and publisher Karl Wilhelm Ettinger in Gotha wrote to the General Directorate in Regensburg to request that a new publication, *Wöchentliche Nachrichten vom Handel* (Weekly News on Trade) be granted *Portofreyheit* so that it could be advertised and sold at one price to all subscribers in central Europe. The General Directorate in turn handed this request over to the district postmaster in Erfurt, the district office that would handle any periodical distributed from Gotha. The district postmaster recommended that Ettinger be paid 1 Reichsthaler (Rthlr) 20 groschen (gr.) per subscription and that subscriptions be sold for 3 Rthlr, a retail mark-up of more than 75%. The post office in Gotha, which would undertake most of the work of getting the journal sent out, would receive about 25% of the revenues, with other stations that were situated between Gotha and Ettinger's subscribers receiving the rest. Although Ettinger had originally sought 2 Rthlr per subscription as his share of the sales price, which was 4 gr. more than he was being offered by the *Reichspost*, his primary concern was that the subscription price not rise above 3 Rthlr, which he believed would hurt its attractiveness to subscribers. Thus, he acceded to the *Reichspost*'s offer.²⁰

From this example it might appear that the *Reichspost* held an unassailable bargaining position in negotiations with Ettinger, but in fact it was less secure than it might seem. In

the first place, a publisher such as Ettinger, who like many publishers was also a bookseller, could and in fact *did* distribute his journal through the exchange network provided by the book trade. That is, instead of being sold to a post station for subsequent distribution and sale through the system, the journal could be sent to other booksellers along with the shipments of books that were sent through the post, and then subscribers could obtain the journal from their bookshops. This was effectively a parallel but independent method of distribution that also used postal routes but did not officially contract with them. Such a method would probably be slower, but in consideration of the trade in books that Ettinger already carried on with his professional brethren it would avoid the necessity of making a separate distribution agreement for the journal. Another alternative available to Ettinger would have been to distribute his journal by means of a competing postal service, such as the Saxon Post, which was more than eager to take business away from the *Reichspost*.²¹ In fact, the *Reichspost* routinely tried to stipulate in its negotiations with publishers that it should enjoy exclusive distribution rights over its direct competitors. Yet even in cases where such demands were put into a contract they were just as often ignored.

Although a great deal more could be added to this very brief discussion of the *Reichspost*'s involvement in the periodical trade, we have seen enough to appreciate the point made above that the mechanisms for the distribution and sale of periodicals developed by the *Reichspost* and other postal services supported the expansion of the press. Beyond any question there was money to be made in supporting this business, and the *Reichspost* and its local postmasters took every opportunity to exploit these opportunities. By doing so, it helped create a truly national distribution network for journals and newspapers.

CASE 2: ALLGEMEINE LITERATUR-ZEITUNG

If the profits from the trade in periodicals had found their way only, or even primarily, to the postal services that distributed and sold them, surely the expansion of periodical publishing in central Europe would have grown considerably more slowly than it did. But in fact periodicals also brought profits to their publishers and editors, and indeed sometimes quite considerable profits, as can be seen for *ALZ*, which began publication in Jena in 1785.²² From its very first issue in January of 1785, everything about *ALZ* marked it as a self-consciously novel project in terms of both content and format, especially in comparison with its major competitor, *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek (ADB)*, published by the publisher and bookseller Friedrich Nicolai, and already by then a major organ of the Berlin Enlightenment for some 20 years.²³ In comparison with *ADB*, which appeared quarterly, *ALZ* was a daily, published six times per week, often with one or more supplementary issues to accommodate the volume of book reviews it published. Although the existing systems for distributing periodicals prevented *ALZ* from being received more frequently than weekly in locations further than a short distance from Jena, where it was printed, the daily schedule of its production and its entire feel was considerably more topical and 'newsy' than that of *ADB*.

Moreover, *ALZ*'s format was also quite distinctive. It was printed on quarto-sized paper, not octavo, the standard size for other journals. The larger page allowed *ALZ* to be set in double columns, and it also used a considerably smaller font than was typical in review journals. In this respect too, it resembled a newspaper. Most dramatically, *ALZ* was

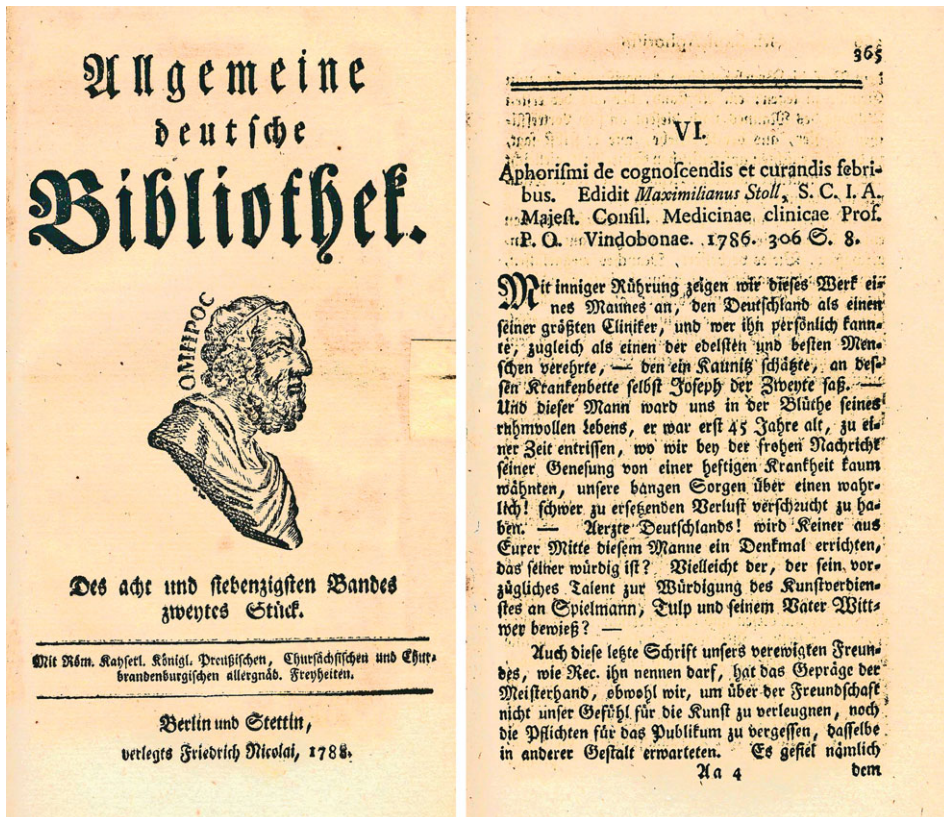


Figure 1. *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, title page (left) and typical content page (right), illustrating format and typeface. (Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison.) (Online version in colour.)

printed in Latin characters, not the Fraktur typeface that was the standard in other periodicals, including *ADB* (see figures 1 and 2).²⁴ Perhaps nothing else could have so vividly announced *ALZ*'s determination to be modern, European-centred and, most of all, different.

ALZ was the product of a collaboration between Christian Gottfried Schütz, a professor of poetics and eloquence at the University of Jena, who served as the editor-in-chief, and Friedrich Justin Bertuch, the journal's publisher and financial backer.²⁵ Starting from an initial print run of 800 copies, *ALZ*'s circulation rapidly climbed to 1700 by 1787, and by 1789 its circulation had reached nearly 2200, a very high figure for that time. During its first two years, nearly all of *ALZ*'s revenues came from direct subscriptions, as well as sales of the semi-annual cumulations that were distributed by booksellers. However, late in 1786 Bertuch and Schütz decided to begin publishing an *Intelligenzblatt* as a free supplement to *ALZ* on Wednesdays and Saturdays.²⁶ It was an inspired decision, because the *Intelligenzblatt* provided a flexible medium for generating a great deal of additional revenue. Before its introduction, advertisements in *ALZ* had been pushed off to marginal positions in the journal, for example on the blue paper that served as envelopes around the uncut pages that were sent to readers. Advertisements were also printed in *ALZ* itself,

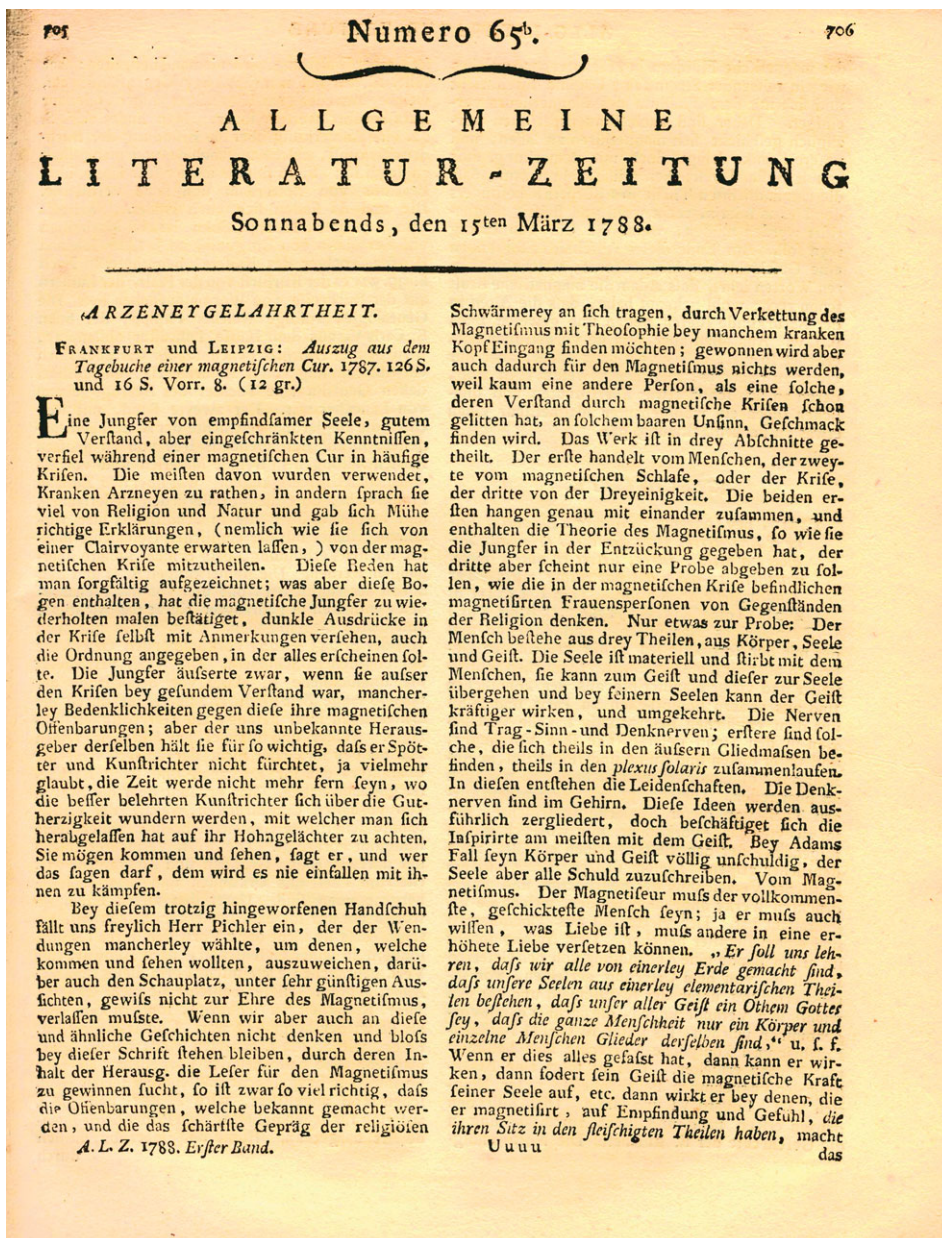


Figure 2. A page from *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, illustrating format and typeface. (Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison.) (Online version in colour.)

but only at the end in a filler section titled 'Kurze Nachrichten'.²⁷ By contrast, the *Intelligenzblatt* featured paid insertions as its main content. What made it especially flexible as an advertising supplement was that production could be adjusted as demand for space dictated. About half of the time on any given Wednesday or Saturday, only one

four-page issue of the *Intelligenzblatt* was printed. At other times, however, two, three or even four issues could be printed and sent out together. In format the *Intelligenzblatt* resembled the main journal, with the same quarto page size and double-column typesetting. The main difference between the two was that the *Intelligenzblatt* was printed on cheaper paper to save costs. Eventually, after a couple of years of publication, Bertuch and Schütz decided to squeeze more lines into each column of the *Intelligenzblatt*, making it possible to bring in more income on each page.²⁸

At this point, a brief examination of *ALZ*'s production costs will help clarify why the *Intelligenzblatt* proved so useful in the general operation of the journal. For its day, *ALZ* paid its reviewers very high honoraria, beginning at 15 Rthlr per printed sheet (that is, eight pages printed in double columns) in 1785, and rising to 20 Rthlr soon thereafter. This compares favourably with the 5–7 Rthlr offered by *ADB* to its reviewers, although those numbers must be reconciled for the differing formats used by the two journals. Even with those differences taken into account, however, *ALZ* was clearly a richer source of income for writers, a point remarked on by Bertuch himself.²⁹ But it was not only the honoraria paid for content that dictated costs, as the financial records make clear: the cost of paper was a second significant factor. The budget estimate for 1789 prepared by Bertuch in October of 1788 shows that costs were apportioned between four major categories: payment of honoraria was the largest single item, comprising 32%. Next came paper at 24%, printing at 16%, and finally the salaries of *ALZ*'s staff at 13%. Together these costs come to 85% of the total, with the other 15% comprising items such as renting *ALZ*'s offices and obtaining books for review. In that era, review journals did not obtain copies of new books gratis as part of publishers' marketing efforts, as they do today. Instead *ALZ* and other review journals had to purchase them and then 'loan' the books to reviewers. Afterwards *ALZ* hoped to sell most of the books reviewed in its pages to its reviewers for a discount. Bertuch's records do not make it clear whether the sum reported for books as an expense might have been the cost of the discounts or other losses related to obtaining them.³⁰

One thing will immediately strike anyone who studies these figures: paper was a major expense. In today's publishing business, the material costs of producing a book or magazine are minor in comparison with the costs of content and marketing. Not so for *ALZ*, as Bertuch's budget makes clear; the archival records of *ALZ*'s operation are filled with discussions about paper, where to obtain it and how to reduce the cost of it. An appreciation of how expensive paper was illuminates the decision taken by Bertuch and Schütz to increase the number of printed lines per column in the *Intelligenzblatt*. As a consequence the *Intelligenzblatt* would generate more income by squeezing more revenue-generating advertising onto each page, but equally important to them, as the record makes clear, was the saving on paper that would result. For the same reason Schütz and Bertuch decided in October 1788 to shift some of the review content of *ALZ* over to the *Intelligenzblatt*, instead of increasing the number of issues of *ALZ* by producing more supplements. Although content of this kind published in the *Intelligenzblatt* had to be compensated with honoraria just as it was in the main issues of *ALZ*, the lower-quality paper used for the *Intelligenzblatt* and the increased number of lines per page made the increased profitability of doing so evident.³¹

Despite its hefty production costs, *ALZ* was a huge success financially for the partners. At the height of its popularity in the 1790s it regularly returned an annual profit of between 2000 and 2500 Rthlr to Bertuch and Schütz.³² We should acknowledge that these results

were extraordinary for the time, needless to say, and therefore it would not be appropriate to extrapolate from *ALZ*'s success, and that of several of Bertuch's other publications, to the periodical business as a whole. Yet the example of *ALZ* makes it clear that the cost structure of the publishing business in the eighteenth century was slanted far more towards its material inputs than is true today. And those costs, it should be noted, were entirely scalable to circulation: the more copies of the journal that were printed, the greater was the cost of paper and printing, but the greater the income from subscriptions.

What all this suggests is that the break-even point of profitability for periodicals was comparatively low in the eighteenth century. Provided that it was possible to set the subscription price above a certain threshold level, it would be possible for a publication to sustain itself or even turn a profit for its publisher with lower paid circulation than would be true later on. Thus, in pursuing an answer to why the publication of periodicals expanded as rapidly as it did in the eighteenth century, we now have two important factors that undoubtedly contributed to the phenomenon: first, the active participation and support of the *Reichspost* and other postal systems in promoting the sale and distribution of periodicals from post offices, and second, a cost structure that lowered the break-even point of profitability by placing a greater share of costs on the side of those that were scalable to circulation.

A SOMETIMES FRAUGHT RELATIONSHIP

From what has been said above, it should be clear that the rapid expansion of the periodical press in central Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century was powerfully undergirded by the mutually interlocking interests of the Thurn und Taxis *Reichspost* and the potential—not to say the *promise*—for profit that periodical publishing held out to entrepreneurs such as Bertuch. But clearly the self-interest brought by each party to this relationship was not entirely mutual. As the hereditary leasehold of an aristocratic family, the *Reichspost* was tied to the hierarchical social structure of early modern society. The *Reichspost* also served a public function, which meant, among other things, that it became involved in matters of censorship. Yet censoring the press in actual practice, as opposed to the mere assertion of the right to censorship, was a complicated matter that carried with it a potential for significant financial loss. This point can be nicely and amusingly illustrated by recounting the story of the *Reichspost*'s prohibition of the distribution and sale of *ALZ*, which occurred between July and September of 1787.³³ It gives us some final insights into some aspects of the periodical business of the later eighteenth century.

The stimulus for the ban was a review published in *ALZ* on 13 June 1787 that criticized the *Reichspost* itself. At issue in the book under review was the question of whether postmasters, as the designated representatives of the postal system of the Holy Roman Empire, could be made subject to the laws of the cities in which they operated. Redolent of the labyrinthine legal structure of the Empire, in which competing legal claims and traditions had piled on top of one another for centuries, at first glance there would seem to be little in this dispute to make anyone sit up and take notice. But in the city of Frankfurt am Main this particular question had already been an irritant for several decades, so when a new book appeared on the subject it was not so easily dismissed. It was probably not the appearance of the review itself that brought the wrath of the *Reichspost* down on *ALZ*; more than likely it was the sympathetic stand taken by the

reviewer towards the book's point of view, describing it as 'very well written' and adding that it presented a 'thorough argument' in favour of the city's legal position.³⁴ This was too much for the *Reichspost* to endure and on 12 July the General Directorate in Regensburg issued a system-wide ban on the distribution and over-the-counter sale of copies of *ALZ*.³⁵

But things did not go at all as the ban intended them to go, because placing a ban on this despoiler of Imperial and aristocratic dignity ran directly against the powerful currents of financial self-interest. Almost before the ink had dried on the decree banning *ALZ*, post offices began to flood the General Directorate with pleas to have it lifted or at least postponed. The Nuremberg office wrote to express its obsequious concession that of course the ban was fully justified, but perhaps it should be implemented only after the local *Zeitungs-Spedition* had disposed of its inventory for the current year. Otherwise, they faced the prospect of being exposed to a substantial loss by having to make restitution to subscribers.³⁶ The postmasters in Würzburg and Frankfurt am Main wrote in to make a similar point. The Jena postmaster, meanwhile, through whose office *ALZ*'s substantial correspondence in letters and packages of books was transacted, contributed a different argument: in consideration of the substantial traffic in correspondence generated by *ALZ*, which amounted to several hundred Reichsthaler paid to the Jena office alone, perhaps the General Directorate might consider lifting its ban.³⁷ This argument might have well cut closer to the bone in Regensburg, because whereas the income from sale and distribution of periodicals stayed with local offices, as described above, the income from regular correspondence went directly to Carl Anselm, the current Count of Thurn and Taxis. Despite all such lamentations, the ban remained in place.

As the dispute dragged on from one week to another, it began to look a little frayed. The General Directorate discovered that the Nuremberg office, which had expressed the most impassioned opposition to the ban, had been selling copies of *ALZ* under the counter—they were fined 50 Rthlr.³⁸ It became evident, too, that the ban, although it had obviously been inconvenient to the publishers of *ALZ*, had fallen far short of causing them any serious financial pain. In the circumstances Bertuch and Schütz had found other outlets for the journal and for conducting their correspondence through the Saxon Post and other postal systems and through the distribution network provided by booksellers. Indeed, it soon became evident to the General Directorate that the longer the ban stayed in place, the more Bertuch and Schütz would become habituated to distributing *ALZ* through channels other than the *Reichspost*, even if those alternatives were less efficient ones. Eventually a compromise was devised by the ever-diplomatic Bertuch, who wrote to the General Directorate proposing some language by which the publishers could distance themselves from endorsing agreement with the review that had criticized the *Reichspost* and set off all the trouble. This retraction was published in *ALZ*'s issue of 8 September, and thereupon the ban was lifted.

The recounting of this admittedly minor incident brings us full circle back to Wolfgang Behringer's point from the beginning of the article about the expansion of communication networks in early modern Europe as something initiated by governments as a method of extending their administrative reach in their territories and increasing their efficiency. However, once those networks began growing they incorporated private interests that far surpassed the ability of those authorities to control effectively what was transmitted through them. This was especially true because governments soon recognized that the operation of postal systems and the publication of official or semi-official gazettes,

intelligencers, almanacs and other media could be a source of income as well as a method for distributing information. In the case of the dispute between *ALZ* and the *Reichspost*, the latter's claim to exercise the right of censorship over what travelled through the system came into direct conflict with the financial self-interest of the counts of Thurn und Taxis, the hereditary leaseholders of the right to operate the postal system.

In the final analysis, however, what comes through most clearly here is not this transitory moment of friction between a publication such as *ALZ* and the *Reichspost*, but instead the enormous mutual reliance that they displayed in the pursuit of income. Their relationship provides us with a small but essential glimpse into the powerful expansion of the public sphere as an economic phenomenon. Yet much more needs to be added to the picture. Information in this period, of which scientific information was a growing share, did not just consist of letters, pamphlets, articles in journals, and other writings. Seen from a different perspective it also existed in the form of roads, post stations, coaches, and horses, riders and drivers. None of us will have any difficulty in accepting that this infrastructure came with a real cost, and the ability to expand these networks and turn them to the distribution of information depended on the ability to balance the opportunity for income against those costs. The difficulty begins when we try to determine what those costs were and how they were handled. It is to be hoped that this article has provided a small step towards overcoming them.

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NOTES

- 1 Jeanne Pfeiffer, Maria Conforti and Patrizia Delpiano, 'Introduction', in *Les journaux savants dans l'Europe moderne. Communication et construction des savoirs* (ed. Jeanne Pfeiffer, Maria Conforti and Patrizia Delpiano) (*Arch. Int. Hist. Sci.* **63** (170–171)), pp. 5–26 (2013), which also provides a good historiographic overview. On the origins of scientific and scholarly periodicals the literature is large and diverse. For a taste of that diversity, see Adrian Johns, 'Miscellaneous methods: authors, societies and journals in early modern England', *Br. J. Hist. Sci.* **33**, 159–186 (2000); Jean-Pierre Vittu, 'La formation d'une institution scientifique: journal des savants de 1665 à 1714, part 1: d'une entreprise privée à une semi-institution', *J. Sav.*, 179–203 (2002); *idem*, 'La formation d'une institution scientifique: journal des savants de 1665 à 1714, part 2: l'instrument central de la République des Lettres', *J. Sav.*, 349–377 (2002); and Thomas Broman, 'Criticism and the circulation of news: the scholarly press in the seventeenth century', *Hist. Sci.* **51**, 1–26 (2013).
- 2 David A. Kronick, *A history of scientific and technical periodicals: the origins and development of the scientific and technical press, 1665–1790*, 2nd edn (Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ, 1976), p. 77. As Pfeiffer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), point out, Kronick's typology continues to be more or less explicit in later studies of the history of scientific periodicals. Influential in this regard was James E. McClellan III, 'The scientific press in transition: Rozier's Journal and the scientific societies', *Ann. Sci.* **36**, 425–449 (1979).
- 3 On the problematic relationship between the *Publikum* and the *Öffentlichkeit* in discussions of the public sphere, see Thomas Broman, 'Metaphysics for an enlightened public: the

- controversy over monads in Germany, 1746–1748’, *Isis* **103**, 1–23 (2012). A similar criticism is found in Harold Mah, ‘Phantasies of the public sphere: rethinking the Habermas of historians’, *J. Mod. Hist.* **72**, 153–182 (2000).
- 4 Timothy Blanning, *The culture of power and the power of culture: old regime Europe, 1660–1789* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and James Van Horn Melton, *The rise of the public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) are two prominent recent examples.
 - 5 For two early versions of this widely echoed criticism, see Joan Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1988), and Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy’, in *Habermas and the public sphere* (ed. Craig Calhoun), pp. 109–142 (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992). See also Ulrike Weckel *et al.* (eds), *Ordnung, Politik und Geselligkeit der Geschlechter im 18. Jahrhundert* (Wallstein, Göttingen, 1998).
 - 6 Andreas Gestrich, *Absolutismus und Öffentlichkeit: Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), pp. 28–33; *idem*, ‘The public sphere and the Habermas debate’, *German Hist.* **24**, 413–430 (2006).
 - 7 Wolfgang Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur: Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2003). Behringer has not been alone in making this observation about the crucial role of postal systems. See also Paul Arblaster, ‘Posts, newsletters, newspapers: England in a European system of communications’, *Media Hist.* **11**, 21–36 (2005).
 - 8 Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (tr. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence) (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1989), esp. pp. 16–17 and 20ff. for comments on the news, and pp. 40–42 on criticism; Thomas Habel, *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen der Aufklärung: Zur Entstehung, Entwicklung und Erschließung deutschsprachiger Rezensionszeitschriften des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Editions Lumières, Bremen, 2006). On criticism and its relationship to the news, see Thomas Broman, ‘Criticism and the circulation of news: the scholarly press in the late seventeenth century’, *Hist. Sci.* **51**, 1–26 (2013).
 - 9 Along with Behringer and Arblaster (*opp. cit.*, note 7), see also Carmen Espejo, ‘European communication networks in the early modern age: a new framework of interpretation for the birth of journalism’, *Media Hist.* **17**, 189–202 (2011), Joad Raymond, ‘Introduction: networks, communication, practice’, *Media Hist.* **11**, 3–19 (2005), Gestrich, ‘The public sphere’, *op. cit.* (note 6), esp. pp. 419–421, and the essays collected in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina Baron (eds), *The politics of information in early modern Europe* (Routledge, London, 2001).
 - 10 Anne Saada, ‘La contribution de Albrecht von Haller aux *Göttingische Anzeigen von Gelehrten Sachen*: les archives comptables’, in Peiffer *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 61–77.
 - 11 And indeed beyond the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1803. See Siegfried Grillmeyer, *Habsburgs Diener in Post und Politik: das ‘Haus’ Thurn und Taxis zwischen 1745 und 1867* (Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 2005), which includes an overview of the finances in the eighteenth century on pp. 99–111; and Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis. Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen* (Piper, Munich, 1990), pp. 15–148, which has abundant detail about the operations of the post in general but has little on the periodical trade.
 - 12 Behringer, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 25ff, and Grillmeyer, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 30–34.
 - 13 On the history of *Postzeitungen*, see Dieter Paul Baumert, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Journalismus. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Studie* (Duncker & Humblot, Munich, 1928), esp. ch. 3. See also the articles collected in Klaus Beyrer and Martin Dallmeier (eds), *Als die Post noch Zeitung machte. Eine Pressegeschichte* (Anabas-Verlag, Giessen, 1994), and Behringer, *op. cit.* (note 7), pp. 381–412. Finally, on the history of one of the most durable of the *Postzeitungen*, the Frankfurt *Oberpostamtszeitung*, see Bernhard Faulhaber, *Geschichte des Postwesens in Frankfurt am Main nach archivalischen Quellen* (K. Th. Völcker, Frankfurt a.M., 1883), pp. 60–67.

- 14 Martin Dallmeier, 'Die kaiserliche Resichspost zwischen Zeitungsvertrieb und Zensur im 18. Jahrhundert', in *Presse und Geschichte II: Neue Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung* (K. G. Saur, Munich, 1987), pp. 233–258, esp. pp. 233–234.
- 15 On the general state of the *Reichspost*'s finances in this period, see Behringer, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 128–138.
- 16 Werner Münzberg, *500 Jahre Post Thurn und Taxis 1490–1867*, Theil 2 (n.p., Regensburg, 1989).
- 17 Fürst Thurn und Taxis Zentralarchiv (hereafter FZA) Postakten 1978, 'Fürstliches Reskript, vom 2. Mai 1742, daß die Zeitungsemolumenta den Postverwaltern und Postoffizialen als Teil ihres Salärs zugewiesen werden.' Also Dallmeier, *op. cit.* (note 14), pp. 235–237.
- 18 FZA Postakten 1516, 'Kaiserliche Reichs-Post-Amt Würzburg'.
- 19 Dallmaier, *op. cit.* (note 14).
- 20 FZA Postakten 1982, 'Zeitungs- und Journal-Speditions-Akkorde und Beförderungen, 1721–1789. Vol. II, 1783–1789'. The surviving records do not make it clear how this transaction was performed. We might plausibly suppose that the Gotha post station took responsibility for paying Ettinger when he delivered the issues to be sent out. But because Ettinger's subscribers would probably have paid for their copies at their local post stations, it must have cost a good deal of effort to keep all the accounts straight and make sure that all the players received their designated portion of the revenues. To my knowledge no one has ever found how this accounting was managed.
- 21 Gustav Schaefer, *Geschichte des sächsischen Postwesens vom Ursprunge bis zum Uebergang in die Verwaltung des Norddeutschen Bundes* (R. v. Zahn, Dresden, 1879).
- 22 Katharina Middell, *Die Bertuchs müssen doch in dieser Welt überall Glück haben: der Verleger Friedrich Justin Bertuch und sein Landes-Industrie-Comptoir um 1800* (Leipziger Universitätsverlag, Leipzig, 2002), pp. 50–56, and Werner Greiling, *Presse und Öffentlichkeit in Thüringen: mediale Verdichtung und kommunikative Vernetzung im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Böhlau, Cologne, 2003), esp. pp. 438–449. On *ALZ*'s place in the cultural milieu of the later eighteenth century, see Siegfried Seifert, "'Eine vollständige Übersicht der Kantischen Grundsätze': die Jenaer "Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung" und ihr Beitrag zur Kritik in einer Zeit des Umbruchs und Aufbruchs', In *Evolution des Geistes: Jena um 1800* Friedrich Strack (ed.), pp. 275–293 (Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1994).
- 23 Günther Ost, *Friedrich Nicolais Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* (E. Ebering, Berlin, 1928), and Ute Schneider, *Friedrich Nicolais Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek als Integrationsmedium der Gelehrtenrepublik* (Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1995). On Nicolai's publishing business, including his publication of *ADB*, see Pamela E. Selwyn, *Everyday life in the German book trade: Friedrich Nicolai as bookseller and publisher in the age of Enlightenment, 1750–1810* (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 2000).
- 24 On the choice of Fraktur as *ALZ*'s typeface, see Christina Killius, 'Bertuchs Beitrag zur Antiqua-Fraktur Debatte', in *Friedrich Justin Bertuch: Verleger, Schriftsteller und Unternehmer in klassischen Weimar* (ed. Gerhard R. Kaiser and Siegfried Seifert), pp. 351–368 (Max Niemeyer, Tübingen, 2000).
- 25 On Bertuch as a successful entrepreneur of publication projects, see Gerhard R. Kaiser and Siegfried Seifert (eds), *Friedrich Justin Bertuch (1747–1822). Verleger, Schriftsteller und Unternehmer im klassischen Weimar* (Max Niemayer, Tübingen, 2000), and especially the article by Doris Kuhles, 'Das "Journal des Luxus und der Moden" (1786–1727). Zur Entstehung seines inhaltlichen Profils und seiner journalistischen Struktur' (pp. 489–518). See also Middell, *op. cit.* (note 22).
- 26 Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv (hereafter GSA) 06/5485, 'Protokolle über die Sitzungen der Herausgeber der *ALZ*, 1786–1788', minutes of meeting of 21 November 1786.
- 27 For an excellent recent study that emphasizes advertisements as an unjustifiably neglected part of the history of the periodical press, see Michael Harris, 'Timely notices: the uses of advertising

- and its relationship to news during the late seventeenth century', *Prose Stud. Hist. Theory Crit.* **21**, 141–156 (2008).
- 28 GSA 06/5486, 'Protokolle über die Sitzungen der Herausgeber der ALZ, 1788–1802,' minutes of meeting of 12 October 1788.
- 29 GSA 06/5485, 'Protokolle über die Sitzungen der Herausgeber der ALZ, 1786–1788'. For *ADB*'s honoraria, see Pamela E. Selwyn, *op. cit.* (note 23), p. 291.
- 30 *Op. cit.* (note 28).
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.* See budget summaries for the years 1792 and 1793.
- 33 An account of censorship of *ALZ* by the Reichspost is presented in Rudolf Freytag, 'Das Speditionsverbot der Jenaischen Allgemeinen Litteraturzeitung im Jahre 1787', *Arch. Buchgew. Gebrauchsggr.* (May), 89–103 (1928).
- 34 The book in question was Carl Friedrich Seeger, *Volständige Darstellung der Gründe, womit in Sachen Herrn Fürsten von Thurn und Taxis, als Kayserlichen Reichserbgeneralpostmeisters Hochfürstl. Durchlaucht wider Herrn Bürgermeister und Rath der Kayserlichen Reichsstadt Frankfurt am Mayn, prætensi mandati S.C. die Ausübung der Civil- und Territorialgerichtbarkeit über die kayserlichen Postofficianten in causis non officialibus betreffend ...* (Heinrich Ludwig Brönnner, Frankfurt am Main, 1786). For the review, see *ALZ*, 13 June 1787.
- 35 Recommendation for issuance of the ban is in FZA Postakten 1985, 'Speditions-Verbot verschiedener Zeitungen und Journale 1742–1799. Vol. I, 1742–1790'.
- 36 *Ibid.*, letters dated 18 July (Frankfurt am Main), 2 August (answer from Regensburg to Würzburg; original appears lost) and 12 August (Nuremberg).
- 37 *Ibid.*, letter of 8 August. Indeed, Schütz had already drawn the General Directorate's attention to this loss of income in a letter responding to the ban, written on 25 July. See Freytag, *op. cit.* (note 33), p. 93. Thus it is conceivable that the postmaster in Jena had been prompted by Schütz to make this point in his own letter.
- 38 *Ibid.*, letter from General Directorate to Nuremberg dated 18 August.