

WOLFGANG BEHRINGER

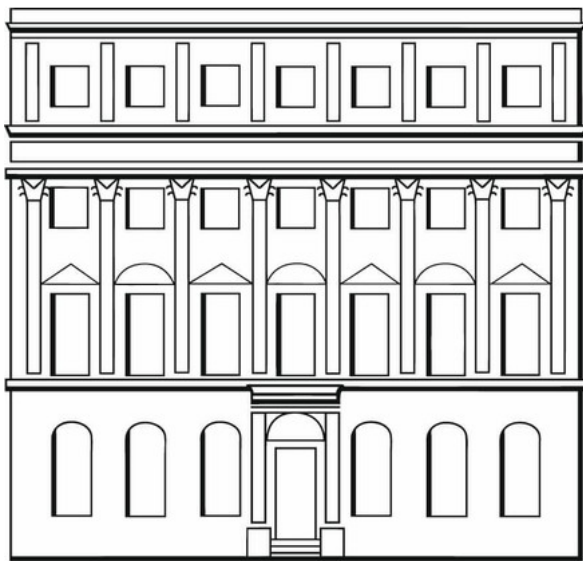
Core and Periphery: The Holy Roman Empire as a  
Communication(s) Universe

in

R. J. W. EVANS, MICHAEL SCHAICH, AND PETER H. WILSON (eds.), *The  
Holy Roman Empire 1495-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

pp. 347–358

ISBN: 978 0 19 960297 1



---

German  
Historical  
Institute  
London

---

The following PDF is published under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND licence. Anyone may freely read, download, distribute, and make the work available to the public in printed or electronic form provided that appropriate credit is given. However, no commercial use is allowed and the work may not be altered or transformed, or serve as the basis for a derivative work. The publication rights for this volume have formally reverted from Oxford University Press to the German Historical Institute London. All reasonable effort has been made to contact any further copyright holders in this volume. Any objections to this material being published online under open access should be addressed to the German Historical Institute London.

DOI:

## Core and Periphery: The Holy Roman Empire as a Communication(s) Universe

WOLFGANG BEHRINGER

The benefits of infrastructure and the importance of location are obvious today. The same, of course, was true during the Industrial Revolution. Railway tracks could determine the rise or decline of entire cities, regions, and even states.<sup>1</sup> Before the introduction of railway systems, postal networks had a similar importance. In fact, they represent the most advanced communication facility throughout the early modern period, as was rightly emphasized by both Werner Sombart and Lucien Febvre.<sup>2</sup>

If we look at a post map of Europe shortly before the introduction of the railways, such as the one created by the Viennese Franz Raffelsberger (1793–1861),<sup>3</sup> we find that the postal network was denser in those areas where a century later the network of railways, or nowadays the network of highways, and perhaps even the network of airports and airways, would also be denser. To be sure, it could be argued that demographic density is closely related to the density of infrastructure, and northern France, for instance, needs denser networks than the south. On the other hand, compared to conurbations in Russia, Turkey, or Egypt, transport facilities in western Europe have always been amazingly advanced, with the leading industrial nations of Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, and northern Italy displaying the densest networks.

<sup>1</sup> Walt Whitman Rostow, 'The Take-Off into Self-Sustained Growth', *Economic Journal*, 66 (1956), 25–48.

<sup>2</sup> Werner Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus: Historisch-systematische Darstellung des gesamt-europäischen Wirtschaftslebens von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1916–27; repr. Munich, 1987); Lucien Febvre, 'Avant-propos', in Pierre Sardella, *Nouvelles et spéculations à Venise au début du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, [1948]), 5–8.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Raffelsberger, *Der Reise-Secretär: Ein geographisches Posthandbuch für Reisende, Kaufleute, Geschäftsmänner und Postbeamte*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1829–31). The first volume contains two illuminated maps of Germany and Europe reproduced as copperplate engravings.

However, we can trace these postal networks back even further. The areas mentioned above already had the densest networks in the middle of the seventeenth century, as can be demonstrated from the earliest post maps.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in order to locate the roots of this development, we can go back to the very beginning of the modern period. In 1501, Brussels became the centre of the first international postal network.<sup>5</sup>

Why Brussels? The postal courier system, developed by the famous Machiavellian princes of Renaissance Italy,<sup>6</sup> was brought to the rest of Europe by Maximilian I (r. 1493–1519), who was elected king of the Romans in 1486, while his father, Frederick III (r. 1440–93), was still reigning, as can be seen in a Flemish tapestry.<sup>7</sup> Maximilian was the ruling prince of the Netherlands, which he had inherited from his first wife, Mary of Burgundy (1457–82). In 1490, when he inherited the duchy of Tyrol, he demanded effective communication lines between Brussels and his new capital Innsbruck. He invited the Taxis company from Italy to maintain these services, which were originally meant to be exclusively reserved for the Habsburg dynasty.<sup>8</sup> But it was only a matter of months before the kings of France and England began to imitate Maximilian. The French postal network was soon denser than the imperial one, while Henry VII (r. 1485–1509) and subsequent Tudor monarchs remained content with a line of communication from Dover to London and from London to Berwick on the Scottish border.<sup>9</sup> The imperial network, however, gained importance when it was extended to Spain and the Spanish possessions in southern Italy after the succession of Maximilian's son Philip I (r. 1502–6) in Spain. And after Philip's sudden death, when his son Charles took over, the whole system

<sup>4</sup> [Nicolas Sanson] and Melchior Tavernier, *Carte géographique des postes qui traversent la France* (Paris, 1632); Nicolas Sanson and Jan Lutgenburg, *Carte des postes de Paris dans les royaumes du nord: l'Empire d'Allemagne et les XVII provinces des Pays Bas* (Paris, 1645); Nicolas Sanson d'Abbeville, *Cartes générales des toutes les parties du monde* (Paris, 1654); id., *L'Empire d'Allemagne* (Paris, 1674).

<sup>5</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, 'Brussel: Centrum van het internationale Postnet', in Luc Janssens and Marc Meurrens (eds.), *De Post van Thurn und Taxis: La Poste des Tour et Tassis 1489–1794* (Brussels, 1992), 21–42.

<sup>6</sup> Giorgio Migliavacca, *The Post and Courier Service of Early Modern Italy* (New York, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Octave le Maire, *François de Tassis (1459–1517): organisateur des postes internationales et la tapisserie de la légende de Notre-Dame du Sablon* ([Brussels], 1956).

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I.: Das Reich, Österreich und Europa an der Wende zur Neuzeit*, 5 vols. (Munich, 1971–86), v.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Beale, *A History of the Post in England from the Romans to the Stuarts* (London, 1998).

was entirely transformed. Pushed by the Taxis company, Emperor Charles V (r. 1519–56) opened the imperial posts to the public. *Nouvelles postes* were established which offered open access to ‘offices’, soon to be followed by a fixed price for the transport of letters and goods, known as the *porto*.<sup>10</sup> By then, the Holy Roman Empire had become the centre of the European communication(s) universe.

The terms ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ refer to the dependency theory introduced into historical debate by Immanuel Wallerstein some decades ago, implying that the system of unequal exchange and indirect rule which characterizes the modern world can be traced back to the sixteenth century. Curiously enough, communication lines are not mentioned at all in Wallerstein’s master narrative.<sup>11</sup> However, as we can learn from the story of Maximilian and Charles, to contemporary rulers they appeared more important than transport vessels. During the reign of Emperor Maximilian, when private use of the imperial posts was still illegal, the terminuses of the first transcontinental post lines were already shifted from Innsbruck to Venice in the south, and from Brussels to Antwerp in the north.<sup>12</sup> News arrived from all over the world in these towns, and this is where the communication and news businesses started to merge. And even more importantly, the Fuggers and other trading companies had their most important branches in these ports. Although it is widely assumed,<sup>13</sup> in reality the Fuggers did not maintain a communication system of their own. They merely gained access to the imperial posts, presumably as early as the 1490s, as official members of Maximilian’s court. This is illustrated by the fact that the letter drawers in Jacob Fugger’s (1459–1525) office display the names of the major European post offices.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur: Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 3 vols. (New York, 1974–89).

<sup>12</sup> Fritz Ohmann, *Die Anfänge des Postwesens und die Taxis* (Leipzig, 1909).

<sup>13</sup> Victor von Klarwill (ed.), *The Fugger Newsletters: Being a Selection of Unpublished Letters from the Correspondents of the House of Fugger during the Years 1568–1605*, trans. Pauline de Chary (London, 1924); Victor von Klarwill (ed.), *The Fugger Newsletters, Second Series: Being a Further Selection from the Fugger Papers Specially Referring to Queen Elizabeth and Matters Relating to England during the Years 1568–1605, Here Published for the First Time*, trans. L. S. R. Byrne (London, 1926).

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, ‘Fugger und Taxis: Der Anteil Augsburger Kaufleute an der Entstehung des europäischen Kommunikationssystems’, in Johannes Burkhardt (ed.), *Augsburger Handelshäuser im Wandel des historischen Urteils* (Berlin, 1996), 241–8.

There is some coincidence involved when we ask why Upper Germany became the centre of the communications universe in the sixteenth century. First and perhaps most crucially, France failed to open its post lines to the public. French post houses could be used for travelling by hiring horses there, but it remained illegal for them to accept mail until the time of Louis XIII (r. 1610–43).<sup>15</sup> Secondly, although the Habsburg Empire began to spread over large parts of Europe, Emperor Maximilian stayed loyal to Augsburg as one of the cities where he conducted most of his business.<sup>16</sup> During the sixteenth century the city became the dominant centre of early capitalism, and the location of the most important post office within the Holy Roman Empire. A broadsheet designed by the famous artist Lukas Kilian (1579–1637) for Octavio von Taxis (1572–1626) announces that news spreads from this post house ‘through the whole of the Empire of the German Nation’.<sup>17</sup> Other reasons for Augsburg’s central importance were the proximity of Austria, its legal status as an imperial city, good transport links to Italy via the Brenner pass, and its convenient location between Antwerp and Venice, and Vienna and the Habsburg lands in the Alsace—right at the heart of Europe, as contemporaries would have said. Augsburg benefited greatly from being at the centre of the communication system. Bankers profited from the steady flow of communications, and the town became the preferred venue of imperial diets in the sixteenth century, which resulted in such important documents as the Augsburg Confession of 1530, and the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555.<sup>18</sup>

However, unlike the dynasties of ancient Persia and Rome, or contemporary non-European empires such as those of China, Russia, Mexico, and Peru, the Habsburgs were unable to maintain a regular postal system at their own expense.<sup>19</sup> In 1501

<sup>15</sup> Eugène Vaillé, *Histoire générale des postes françaises*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1947–53).

<sup>16</sup> Christoph Böhm, *Die Reichsstadt Augsburg und Kaiser Maximilian I.: Untersuchungen zum Beziehungsgeflecht zwischen Reichsstadt und Herrscher an der Wende zur Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> [Octavio von Taxis], *Aus disem als dem Haupthauß hat | Gsetzt Kayserliche Mayestat | Durchs gantz Reich Teutscher Nation | Aller Endts her die Post Zuegohn* (Augsburg, 1616).

<sup>18</sup> Rosemarie Aulinger, ‘Augsburg und die Reichstage des 16. Jahrhunderts’, in *Welt im Umbruch: Augsburg zwischen Renaissance und Barock*, 3 vols. (Augsburg, 1980–1), iii, 9–24; Winfried Schulze, ‘Augsburg 1555–1648: Eine Stadt im Heiligen Römischen Reich’, in Gunther Gottlieb et al. (eds.), *Geschichte der Stadt Augsburg von der Römerzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1984), 433–49.

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Strieder, ‘Finanznot des Staates und Entstehung des neuzeitlichen kapitalistischen Wirtschaftslebens’, *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung*, 8 (1932), 447–63; reprinted in id., *Das reiche Augsburg: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Augsburger und süddeutschen*

Maximilian had urged his son Philip of Burgundy, the later King Philip I of Spain, to take over, which is why Brussels became the centre of the imperial network. But shortly after succeeding to the Spanish throne, Philip came to the conclusion that his bureaucrats were unable to run the system. For this reason he signed an agreement with Franz von Taxis (1459–1517), the head ('regierer') of the Taxis company, enabling the firm to maintain the post lines unhampered by state interference as long as they served the Habsburgs well. The agreement was renewed after the accession of Charles of Burgundy, and again when he became king of Spain and was elected Roman emperor as Charles V.<sup>20</sup> Whereas the status of private mail remains unclear in the treaty of 1506, it is obvious from the contract of 1516 that the Taxis company had the right to carry mail and keep the profit as long as it guaranteed the delivery of court mail at clearly defined speeds, regulated by time sheets to be filled in by the post riders on the way to their destination. In return, imperial privileges guaranteed exemption from local taxes, local jurisdiction, and military service.<sup>21</sup> The terminology of the early modern communications system and the legal status of its participants were invented at these negotiations. Postmasters acquired a legal status akin to members of the church. And John Baptist von Taxis (1470–1541), Charles V's general postmaster and second director of the Taxis company, was granted the right to display the imperial eagle in the family's coat of arms.<sup>22</sup> All these privileges were intended to encourage the owners of the company to invest in and improve the system.

John Baptist von Taxis also stabilized the service by introducing a franchise system. He recruited wealthy innkeepers, who were permitted to display the company's symbols, the imperial eagle and the post horn, and to enjoy the privileges mentioned above, including imperial protection. They could keep the profit of the travelling services, but had to use their own capital for any necessary investment and to hire post riders. This system proved so successful that it did not break down until the end of the Holy

*Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Heinz Friedrich Deininger (Munich, 1938), 9–29.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Kohler, *Karl V. 1500–1558: Eine Biographie* (Munich, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Martin Dallmeier, *Quellen zur Geschichte des europäischen Postwesens 1501–1806*, 3 vols. (Kallmünz, 1977–87).

<sup>22</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis: Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen* (Munich, 1990).

Roman Empire. In Upper Germany and Austria many inns and hotels still bear names such as *Zur Post* or *Schwarzer Adler*.<sup>23</sup> Under Charles V a number of further innovations turned the imperial posts into a unique device. The most important, almost revolutionary, improvement was the introduction of a regular service in the 1530s. The ordinary post ran weekly on a fixed schedule between Antwerp and Augsburg from 1534. Two years later this service was extended from Augsburg to Venice, and soon after intensive negotiations with the papacy and Italian states resulted in the extension of the ordinary service to Rome for the Council of Trent. The post line between Brussels and Rome, as represented in Giovanni da l'Herba's *Itinerario delle poste per diverse parte del mondo*,<sup>24</sup> soon became the backbone of European communications. From about 1540 the messenger system also began to change in response to the newly established postal service: couriers no longer walked the whole way to their destination, but merely delivered important mail to the next post office where it was picked up by the ordinary rider. Thus European communications began to follow the rhythm of the main post line.<sup>25</sup> From the start of the ordinary service, the postal system's superiority was obvious. The very terms post and ordinary became so popular that all kinds of institutions started to imitate the postal system's periodicity. One of the spin-offs was the periodical press, and I have shown elsewhere that this media revolution originated in the imperial post office at Augsburg.<sup>26</sup>

After Charles's resignation, however, the imperial post ran into difficulties. The Protestant princes complained first that the organization was no longer imperial, but Spanish, a fief of Philip II

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Freytag, 'Dachs, Horn und Adler als Symbole der alten Reichsposten', *Archiv für Postgeschichte in Bayern* (1953), 156–62.

<sup>24</sup> Giovanni da l'Herba and Cherubinus da Stella, *Itinerario delle poste per diverse parte del mondo: opera piacevole, et utile a quelli che de lei se voranno servire: con il viaggio di Santo Iacomo di Galitia, & altre cose notabili, con tutte le fiere, che si fanno per tutto il mondo* (Rome, 1563).

<sup>25</sup> Ottavio Codogno, *Nota de gli ordinarii che partono da la città di Milano per diverse parti del mondo* (Milan, 1616); [Johannes von den Birghden], *Kurtze doch eygentliche Verzeichnuß | Auff was Tag unnd Stunden | die Ordinari Posten in diser freyen Kayserlichen Reichs-, Wahl und Handel Statt Franckfort am Mayn | abgefertiget werden | und wie solche wider allhie ankommen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1621); Caspar Augustin, *Verzeichnuß aller Ordinarien-Posten | Reitend- und Fußgehender Botten | fürnembarster Führen, etc. wenn und zu welcher zeit sie Wochentlich alhero nacher Augspurg kommen und von hier wider abreisen | deßgleichen, wo sie losiren und anzutreffen sein | Item wenn allerhand Brieff alhier mögen ufgeben, und von da an gehörige Ort versandt werden . . .* (Augsburg, 1626).

<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, 'Communications Revolutions: A Historiographical Concept', *German History*, 24 (2006), 333–74.

(r. 1556–98) of Spain and based in the Spanish Netherlands. Secondly, they complained that the post only connected the German south and west, but ignored the north and the east; and, thirdly, the Austrian Habsburgs had established their own court posts after the Habsburg division of lands in 1521, providing separate postal services in Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary.<sup>27</sup> The princes therefore also claimed the right to create postal networks. In response, Emperor Rudolf II (r. 1576–1612) proclaimed an imperial postal monopoly and initiated a postal reform which, in 1597, resulted in the foundation of the Reichspost, the new Imperial Post. The postmasters, post houses, post riders, and the general post office located in Brussels remained the same, but now the offices bearing the imperial eagle depended entirely on the emperor. They retained the same privileges and the general post office even became a hereditary fief. The Taxis of Brussels remained in office until the end of the Holy Roman Empire in August 1806. No German prince dared to touch the royal prerogative until the Peace of Westphalia (1648). It was only in 1649 that the electorate of Brandenburg created a postal network of its own, and other Protestant princes, such as those of Hesse-Kassel, Brunswick-Lüneburg/Hanover, and Saxony followed its example.<sup>28</sup>

The core of the German territorial posts, curiously enough, was Swedish.<sup>29</sup> King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden (r. 1611–32), who had no postal services at home yet, employed Protestant renegades from the Imperial Post during the Thirty Years War to create a Swedish postal network in the Holy Roman Empire. It was directed by Johannes von den Birghden (1582–1654), the powerful former *Reichspostmeister*, who became Swedish postmaster general.<sup>30</sup> Von den Birghden elevated his office in Frankfurt to become the heart of the Swedish system. After the Swedish retreat his employees manned the key territorial posts of Saxony, Hesse, and Sweden. The Imperial Post still provided the model and, unsurprisingly, the Swedish communication services were called Rijkspost.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Rüdiger Wurth (ed.), *Zwei Jahrtausende Postwesen: Vom cursus publicus zum Satelliten* (Halbturn, 1985).

<sup>28</sup> Ludwig Kalmus, *Weltgeschichte der Post: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des deutschen Sprachgebietes* (Vienna, 1937).

<sup>29</sup> Georg Rennert, 'Die schwedische Post in Deutschland um 1632', *Deutsche Postgeschichte*, 1 (1937–8), 188–95.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Heinz Kremer, *Johann von den Birghden 1582–1645: Kaiserlicher und königlich-schwedischer Postmeister zu Frankfurt am Main* (Bremen, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Eberhard Klass, *Die Anfänge des schwedischen Post- und Zeitungswesens bis zum Tode Karls XII.* (Berlin, 1940).



After the war the larger Protestant territories created postal networks of their own. Compared to the steady growth of the imperial posts, these territorial posts were introduced quite suddenly, by decree, as in the electorate of Saxony.<sup>32</sup> After 1650 the communication(s) universe of the Holy Roman Empire was no longer imperial, but became fragmented and remained so. The territorial posts were, of course, intended mainly to serve their own territories.<sup>33</sup> Provincialism, therefore, is one reason why Germany had one of the densest communication networks in the world. As a consequence, there was no longer one core within the German communication system, but many. The location of these centres and sub-centres was determined not by function, but by historical coincidence. And the competing posts became peripheral at European level.

By this time the model for geometrical networks was provided by France. The kingdom had opened its infrastructure to public access and had systematically introduced mail coaches on a nationwide scale. By 1632 the new communications system was represented by an entirely new medium of travel planning, the post map, invented by the engraver and geographer Nicolas Sanson (1600–67), later count of Abbéville.<sup>34</sup> But Britain, Spain, and Poland had also opened their systems to the public, and in Denmark and Sweden national networks were also being introduced. There were postal networks all over Europe now. Most were less dense than in Germany, but some were more efficient, for instance, those in France, Britain, and the Spanish Netherlands, the latter still run by the Taxis company.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, state monopolies such as that of France had advantages. For example, the king could simply issue an order to introduce an innovation such as the mail coach. And this is exactly what the elector of Brandenburg did in the 1650s. The private Taxis company, on the other hand, experienced the resistance of princes who feared that their traditional carriers would suffer, or just did not like

<sup>32</sup> Kurt Krebs, *Das Kursächsische Postwesen zur Zeit der Oberpostmeister Johann Jacob Kees I und II* (Leipzig, 1914).

<sup>33</sup> Emeran Ackold [i.e. Andreas Ockel], *Gründlicher Unterricht Von dem Aus Landes-Fürstlicher Hoheit herspringenden Post-Regal Derer Chur- und Fürsten des H[eiligen] R[ömischen] R[eichs], Kürztlich für-gestellt, Und Herrn Ludolff von Hörnicks irrigen Meinungen entgegen gesetzt* (Halle, 1685).

<sup>34</sup> [Sanson] and Tavernier, *Carte géographique*; Guy Arbellot, *Autour des routes de poste: les premières routières de la France XVIIe-XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Berthe Delepinne, *Geschiedenis der internationale Post in België, onder ed Postmeesters der Familie de Tassis* (Brussels, 1952).

foreigners, labelling them as Spanish, Dutch, Italian, or Catholic. Despite early attempts, the Imperial Post also failed to introduce coach services, and was the butt of public criticism for being so slow and backward.

The War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), when the Taxis lost their postal network in Belgium and could only rent it back from Austria,<sup>36</sup> came as a shock. For reasons of safety the Taxis transferred their general post office from Brussels to Frankfurt, and began to present themselves as a German dynasty, with German marriages and careers in imperial institutions,<sup>37</sup> eventually serving as the emperor's lieutenants at the imperial diet in Regensburg.<sup>38</sup> To secure their hereditary fief the Taxis introduced a tight regime of supervision and systematic improvement within the Imperial Post. In 1705 a mail coach system was finally introduced, governed by four directors in Frankfurt, Cologne, Nuremberg, and Augsburg, and represented on the famous post map of 1714 published by Johann Peter Nell (1672–1743), Prague's imperial postmaster.<sup>39</sup>

After a generation, the Imperial Post's mail coach stations were ranked among the communication centres with the highest frequency of service and were considered more efficient than the territorial posts of Prussia,<sup>40</sup> Hanover,<sup>41</sup> and Hesse-Kassel.<sup>42</sup> They were regarded as so effective that Archduchess Maria Theresa of Austria, queen of Hungary and Bohemia (r. 1740–80), asked for help in introducing exactly the same system throughout the Habsburg lands from Bohemia to Milan. In 1764 the Imperial Post introduced the first transalpine ordinary mail coach from

<sup>36</sup> Janssens and Meurrens (eds.), *De Post van Thurn und Taxis*.

<sup>37</sup> Max Piendl, *Das fürstliche Haus Thurn und Taxis: Zur Geschichte des Hauses und der Thurn-und-Taxis-Post* (Regensburg, 1980).

<sup>38</sup> Walter Fürnrohr, *Der Immerwährende Reichstag zu Regensburg* (Kallmünz, 1963); Max Piendl, 'Prinzipalkommissariat und Prinzipalkommissare am Immerwährenden Reichstag', in Dieter Albrecht (ed.), *Regensburg: Stadt der Reichstage* (Regensburg, 1980), 131–50.

<sup>39</sup> Johann Peter Nell, *Postarum seu veredariorum stationes per Germaniam et provincias adiacentes: Neu vermehrte Post-Charte durch gantz Teutschland nach Italien, Frankreich, Niederland, Preußen, Polen und Ungarn, etc.* (Nuremberg, 1714).

<sup>40</sup> Heinrich Stephan, *Geschichte der preussischen Post von ihrem Ursprunge bis auf die Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1859; repr. Heidelberg, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Henri Bade, *333 Jahre Braunschweigische Post 1535–1867* (Brunswick, 1960); Heinz Drangmeister, 'Die hannoversche Staatspost und das Generalpostdirektorium', *Postgeschichtliche Blätter Hannover*, 4 (1980), 3–18.

<sup>42</sup> Julius Boes, 'Das Hessen-Kasseler Postwesen', *Archiv für deutsche Postgeschichte* (1957), no. 2, 25–9; (1958), no. 1, 41–51.

Augsburg to Venice, making it possible to travel in scheduled imperial mail coaches from Hamburg to Venice. In the second half of the eighteenth century the Imperial Post was again the most powerful organization in the communications universe of the Holy Roman Empire. When the troops of revolutionary France began to invade neighbouring territories and occupied the western parts of the Holy Roman Empire,<sup>43</sup> they found the Imperial Post at its peak, as many sources including the development of revenues between 1746 and 1806 testify.<sup>44</sup>

Post officials were dedicated to enlightened ideas in their correspondence and everyday work. Mail coach commissioners (Fahrpostkommissare) such as the published author Franz Joseph Heger (c.1700–69) of Mannheim did their best to ensure the speed, punctuality, reliability, safety, comfort, and even equality of the service. The best service was not automatically to be reserved for the wealthy and noble, but for those who came first. For these communications specialists, postal communications represented progress,<sup>45</sup> or even industrial take-off in Walt Whitman Rostoff's sense. And certainly, progress was not bound to particular states or nations. The Austrian post officials Johann Christian Olearius and Josef Efinger put forward the idea that the post did not serve a dynasty or even a state, but humanity itself. Communication transcended the boundaries of states, they argued, and even of civilizations. Eventually, the same services would be available in the Ottoman Empire and in the rest of the world.<sup>46</sup>

Imperial Post officials such as Franz Maximilian Diez (1767–1851), whose pioneering postal handbook of 1790 covering the whole of the Holy Roman Empire and some neighbouring countries was updated and remained in print under various titles until

<sup>43</sup> Guido Sautter, 'Die französische Post am Niederrhein bis zu ihrer Unterordnung unter die General-Postdirektion in Paris 1794–1799', *Annalen des Historischen Vereins Niederrhein*, 65 (1898), 1–92; id., 'Die Reichspost beim Einbruch der Franzosen in das Reich 1792–1793', *Archiv für Post und Telegraphie*, 41 (1913), 1–16, 43–53, 85–92.

<sup>44</sup> Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Franz Joseph Heger, *Post-Tabellen oder Verzeichnuß deren Post-Straßen in dem kayserlichen Römischen Reich, verfaßt durch den Churf. Maynzischen und Fürstlich Taxisschen Hofrath, auch des kayserlichen Reiches Post Commissarium* (Mainz, 1764); id., *Tablettes des postes de l'Empire d'Allemagne et des provinces limitrophes* (Mainz, 1764).

<sup>46</sup> [Johann Christian Olearius], *Geographisches Hand- und Postbuch, welches alle Länder der Welt, ihre Gränzen, Größe, Flüsse, Eintheilung, Beschaffenheit . . . enthält, nebst allgemein nützlichen Postnachrichten, oder summarischer Auszug eines vollständigen Post-Systems . . . Ingleichen dem gesammten Publiko nöthige und nützliche Postcours- und Speditionsnachrichten*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1779). The foreword is by Johann Efinger.

the 1840s,<sup>47</sup> and his successors as authors of similar publications, Johann Christian Hendschel (born 1766) and his son Ulrich (1804–62), who integrated rail and steamship schedules into his postal handbooks,<sup>48</sup> were proud to belong to dynasties of postal officials who had served the Holy Roman Empire. But they clearly considered themselves part not just of an organization, or a national service, but of a far greater, if not universal, system of communications—a communications universe. They were living in the ‘space of flows’ and working for a ‘network society’ more than 200 years before Manuel Castells wrote of these phenomena.<sup>49</sup>

When the Holy Roman Empire collapsed and Germany moved from the centre to the periphery of international communications, imperial communication specialists sublimated the concept of universal monarchy into the utopian idea of a universal realm of unrestricted communication. It was only a few years before nostalgic voices suggested that the Holy Roman Empire had already come close to this ideal.<sup>50</sup> Johann von Herrfeldt (1784–1849), a former Imperial Post employee,<sup>51</sup> was among the first to establish journals of transport and communications,<sup>52</sup> to

<sup>47</sup> Franz Maximilian Diez, *Allgemeines Post-Lauf- und Straßenbuch durch das ganze Heilige Römische Reich und einige angränzende Landen mit der bey jeder Haupt- und Handelsstadt bemerkten Ankunft und Abgang sowohl reit- als fahrender Kaiserlicher Reichsposten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1790); id., *Post- und Reise-Karte von Deutschland und den anliegenden Ländern . . . nach den Postkursen aus meist officiellen Quellen bearbeitet vom Hofrat und Postcommissar F. M. Diez, geographisch entworfen von Ad[olf] St[ief]er* [durchaus revidiert und berichtigt bis 1. Juli 1827: Mit Nachträgen im Jahr 1833] (Gotha, 1833); Adolf Stieler, ‘Deutschland und anliegende Länder: Zur Übersicht der Hauptstraßen und Entfernungen zwischen Paris, Mailand, Warschau und Königsberg: Nach Diez’ neuester Post-Karte berichtigt 1835’, in id., *Hand-Atlas über alle Theile der Erde und über das Weltgebäude* (Gotha, 1840), no. 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ulrich Hendschel, *Neuestes Post- und Eisenbahn-Handbuch von Deutschland und den angrenzenden Ländern* (Frankfurt am Main, 1845); id., *Telegraph: Monatliche nach Notizen des Kursbüros der Fürstlich Thurn und Taxisschen General-Post-Direktion und anderen officiellen Quellen bearbeitete Übersicht über Abgang und Ankunft der Eisenbahnen, Posten und Dampfschiffe in Deutschland nebst Angabe der Entfernungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1847); id., *Hendschel’s Telegraph: Übersicht der Eisenbahn-, Post-, Dampfschiff- und Telegraphen-Verbindungen. Nach Notizen des Coursbureaus der Fürstl. Thurn und Taxisschen General-Post-Direction und anderen officiellen Quellen bearbeitet* (Frankfurt am Main, 1854).

<sup>49</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, i: *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Johann Ludwig Klüber, *Das Postwesen in Deutschland, wie es war, ist, und seyn könnte* (Erlangen, 1811); [id.], *Patriotische Wünsche, das Postwesen in Teutschland betreffend* (Weimar, 1814); Johann Herrfeldt, ‘Historische Nachrichten von dem fürstlichen Hause Thurn und Taxis’, *Archiv für das Transportwesen* (1829), 42–5.

<sup>51</sup> Johann Herrfeldt, *System der Post-Einrichtung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1808).

<sup>52</sup> Id. (ed.), *Archiv für das Transportwesen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1829); id. (ed.), *Archiv der Postwissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1829–35).

publish a number of useful surveys and handbooks on the subject,<sup>53</sup> to propose the institutionalization of a science of communication(s),<sup>54</sup> and to found a global organization of postal services, the *Weltpostverein*,<sup>55</sup> which came into existence in 1874 under the name *Union postale universelle* (UPU). The Universal Postal Union—from 1947 under the umbrella of the United Nations—regulates international postal exchange to the present day.

Postal services have since disintegrated, and the internet has attained overwhelming importance and developed into the leading sector of global communications.<sup>56</sup> The utopia of boundless, quick exchange, however, does not seem too far from the ideas of early modern communication specialists, such as those educated within the transnational Holy Roman Empire, which served as a first modern communication(s) universe. As for the origins of the internet, it seems short-sighted to link it to the invention of the telegraph,<sup>57</sup> and too generous to start with Dante Alighieri.<sup>58</sup> A more plausible suggestion points towards Gutenberg and the printing revolution.<sup>59</sup> However, there seems to be a serious misunderstanding: books are containers of information, and they resemble bricks rather than networks. I would prefer to relate the internet to the introduction of the postal services in the early modern period, which generated an ever improving network of communication(s) and sparked off waves of media revolutions. At the core of these communications revolutions was the invention of the public network, which was first tested within the Holy Roman Empire.

<sup>53</sup> Id. (ed.), *Sammlung aller europäischen Post-Verordnungen* (Worms, 1827); id., 'Literatur des Postwesens', *Archiv für das Transportwesen* (1829), 154–61; id., *Die Transport-Wissenschaft: Ein Handbuch für das praktische Geschäftsleben und wissenschaftliche Belehrung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1837); id., *Die freie Concurrenz im Transportwesen als unbedingtes Erfordernis zur Beförderung der Cultur, des Handels, der Industrie und des Nationalwohlstandes* (Frankfurt am Main, 1839); id., 'Die Literatur des Postwesens', *Der Freie Verkehr*, 1/6 (1847), 41–4.

<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm Schröder, 'Johann von Herrfeldt: Ein Post- und Verkehrswissenschaftler der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Verkehrswesen Dresden*, 7 (1959–60), 761–71.

<sup>55</sup> Ludwig Kämmerer, *Johann von Herrfeldt und die Idee des Weltpostvereins* (Hamburg, 1963).

<sup>56</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on Internet, Business and Society* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> Wade Rowland, *The Spirit of the Web: The Age of Information from Telegraph to Internet* (Toronto, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet* (London, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge, 2001).