H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Randall. *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News.* Political and Popular Culture in the Early Modern Period Series. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008. xi + 235 pp. $99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-85196-956-2.

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Published on H-Albion (April, 2009)

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David Randall, in his *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News*, argues that, from the 1570s through the 1630s, the English experienced a transformation in the way they received, understood, and evaluated military news. This was a complicated process that sheds light on changing expectations about politics, popular participation in the public sphere, print culture, methods of reading, and, of course, the establishment of credibility in the news.

English people sought out military news, because they had political, economic, and social reasons for wanting to know what developments in Europe and on the open seas would affect their country and themselves. During the years of Randall's study, almost all of this news came from overseas, as England itself enjoyed a period of domestic peace. It was because the news came from far away that the issue of credibility was so important. In short, consumers of news needed to know that what they were hearing or reading was true, so they could use that knowledge appropriately. But how could they know?

Randall suggests that in the early years of his study people had two avenues to discover the news and to verify it. The first was oral transmission. Someone told listeners what they saw or heard. Authorities could then confirm this sort of message. For instance, there could be some sort of public performance that established the reliability of the news. So if the news was that a battle had been won, there could be a church service that celebrated the victory, or a public display of captured enemy standards as proof of the veracity of the news.

The second source of information, the letter, was more private. Men on the front wrote to their friends and patrons about the latest battlefield news. This source of written news, which Randall terms "sociable news," allowed men of high social standing to pass along public information in a private way. This was important because the English government did not condone public discussion of

international affairs. Englishmen, though, clearly wanted such news, and by the 1580s, with the war with Spain in the Netherlands heating up, these sorts of letters were quite common. Randall notes that this was usually a male phenomenon, as women very rarely received or asked for battlefield news. The way that letter writers established their credibility to their correspondents was by emphasizing their own personal honor. Honorable men told the truth and only reported what they had seen for themselves, or what they could verify for themselves. Obviously, this honor reporting was only for elite men, and it was the exclusivity of this sort of news that made it so potent. Only a select few were worthy of knowing what happened, and this added to its mystique.

Yet, as the Spanish war dragged on both in the Netherlands and in Ireland, a new form of news appeared--the anonymous newsletter. These were reports written by men present at the scene of battles that were then copied and sent from person to person. These quickly became a great source of military news, and even the government utilized them by the 1590s. Almost at the same time, printers began to print the news. In both cases, the news writers and printers were no longer producing information for social acquaintances, but rather they were trying to sell the news as a commodity to the widest number of people. While at first authors attempted to use the same honor standard of credibility found in private letters, this floundered because readers of these newsletters and prints could not possibly know the author of said works. Thus, writers of these anonymous news sources tried another, ultimately successful tack, in which they established their credibility in the text of their news. They demonstrated that they had eyewitness accounts, personal details, and geographic particulars of the area that they were discussing, and they then further attempted to prove their veracity by writing in a plain, accessible style. Further, in these early efforts news writers attempted to show that they had a partisan bias. Since by this point English national identity was wrapped up in the Protestant cause, the nation at large was very anti-Catholic and thus it was important in these turn of the century newsletters that they be seen as staunchly anti-Catholic.

Readers knew, though, that the authors of both newsletters and printed pamphlets could make mistakes as well as falsify information. Consequently, they started to read extensively to better understand what the reporters were saying. They learned that by reading many different sources of news, they could probably piece together an accurate description of what they were reading. In response, writers and editors of the corantos, forerunners to newspapers, began to shift their tone from partial to impartial. They wanted to prove that they had the most reliable news, and readers started to view impartial news as the best source. Randall proves that this was the case by noting that editors even published news from Catholic sources, even if it reflected badly on the Protestant cause in Europe, in order to prove that they were, in fact, impartial. The key player in these final developments were the editors of corantos, who were supposed to impartially weigh the news that came to them, and then decide which news was accurate enough to print for the reader's consumption.

Randall argues that his research has important implications for understanding some key intellectual and social changes in Europe in the seventeenth century. He notes that historians of science and philosophy have asserted that writers, such as John Locke and Francis Bacon, developed "a radically new fact-based, skeptical, empirical, and liberal epistemology" (p. 153). Changes in military news reflected this new worldview, and may have even influenced it. Printed military news also had important implications for a free press and the creation of a public sphere in early modern England. Without the opportunity to compare corantos, newsreaders would not be able to accurately inform themselves of the events of the day.

Thus, something that they wanted, a wide ranging press, quickly became something they needed, the freedom of the press. This transformed the nature of public credibility into something that could only be created by the judgment of private individuals who collectively shaped the public consensus on events. Finally, this meant that because anyone who could read the news and comment on it had the permission to do so, elites in English society were allowing common people an opportunity to participate in politics. This revealed that they at least tacitly acknowledged common people's right to do so.

This book, which appears to be narrow in scope, clearly speaks to many historiographical issues. Well supported by a wide range of manuscript and printed primary sources, Randall's argument will be very useful to scholars of print culture, the news, political culture, rhetoric, and military history.

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Citation: Amos Tubb. Review of Randall, David. *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News.* H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. April, 2009.

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