

Building the practical gaze
Police gazettes and their communication networks in the German Confederation

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“He, who departs from the path of virtue, has to accept to be assigned his place in the police gazette ...”¹

Police gazettes were the main communication tool within the policing community of the 19th century. They replaced the publication of search warrants in bookform or in newspapers. The advantage of police gazettes over these previous media was a broader circulation and a more adequate timing of the publication of search warrants as compared with the books, and a better targeted audience as compared with the newspapers.

Books containing long lists of professional criminals circulated in few copies within a small group of highly committed police experts and could not be updated according to the status of police interventions. Newspapers could publish search warrants without delay. The disadvantage of this medium was the lack of control over circulation. Warrants could easily fall into the hands of the criminals who were searched. This could help them to change their appearance accordingly.

Police gazettes as a remedy to these shortcomings were the result of individual projects at the intersection of police communication and journalism. The first gazettes bore still the imprint of their precursors in at least three respects:

- in analogy to the search warrants in book form, the early police gazettes were put together and published by a small group of highly motivated police experts. It was a more or less private project based on their professional experience and the information collected during their police work;
- in analogy to the newspapers, the content of the police gazettes was not at all limited to the publication of search warrants. Depending on the targeted audience, search warrants stood next to reflections on legal and security policy or next to short essays on crime control and crime prevention;

- in analogy to the newspapers, the circulation of the first police gazettes was not limited to police and gendarmerie. The gazettes were produced for a larger audience, which comprised also the respectable part of the citizens.

Looking at the development of the police gazettes over the course of the 19th century, we are confronted with an interesting concurrence of continuities and discontinuities, which I will address in my paper. It regards the circulation of information, the organization of the publication and distribution project, and, finally, the content of the gazettes.

Table 1: Police Gazettes in 19th Century Germany

1802-1827, 1829-1830	Allgemeine deutsche Justiz- und Polizey-Fama ¹	Semi-official
1810-1811	Gemeinnütziges Justiz- und Polizeyblatt der Deutschen	Semi-official
1819-1852	Mitteilungen zur Beförderung der Sicherheitspflege (nach 1852: Preußisches Central-Polizei-Blatt)	Semi-official, official from 1852
1824-1827	Criminalistische Beiträge	Semi-official
1831-1833	Centralblatt für magistratliche Verwaltung und allgemeine Polizey-Fama für Bayern	Semi-official
1836-1900	Allgemeiner Polizei-Anzeiger	Semi-official
1838-1872	Der Wächter: Zeitschrift für Polizeiwissenschaften und Polizeipraxis (nach 1840: Polizeianzeiger für Norddeutschland)	Semi-official
1846-1870	Hannoversches Polizeiblatt	official
1853-1932	Central-Polizeiblatt Österreich	official
1866-1945	Bayerisches Central-Polizei-Blatt	official

Circulation and Access

One main line of continuity is the quest of police reformers to find a tenable solution to the problem of circulation, information access, and usage. Search warrants in police gazettes are only valuable tools of policing if they circulate as widely as the searched criminals. To be effective, police gazettes have to be used and not just made available by the personnel on the local level.

¹In den Jahren 1808-1814 erschien dieses Polizeiblatt unter dem Titel *Policeiblätter*; die von Lucassen, Zigeuner, 232, behauptete Unterbrechung der Publikation ist daher nicht zutreffend.

Both premises were not met during the 19th century. Despite of the increasing professionalization of police work and police organizations, the readiness to comply with new procedures and implement innovations could not be enforced in small cities and the rural areas. To further complicate the situation, the federalistic character of the German confederation and later the German empire, resulted in the publication of a plethora of official and semi-official gazettes.

Robert Heindl, a famous German police expert of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bemoaned this complicated situation in a report of 1912. He presented the British case as positive example, where search warrants were published in three media – depending on the expected circulation of the criminals: the local, national, and international. (Heindl 1912) This more transparent system made information available in a highly efficient manner. While German police officials had to browse through 16 police gazettes, their British counterparts could limit their investigation to three.

Robert Heindl wrote his comments at a point in time, when the circulation patterns of police gazettes had already changed. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, specialized police departments increasingly organized the publication of the gazettes. Their distribution was free of charge within the national security apparatus and police officials throughout the country were required to keep copies of them. From the viewpoint of Heindl, there were still too many of these gazettes circulating because of the federalistic character of Germany.

In the first half of the 19th century, when the police gazettes emerged as a communication tool, the situation was quite different. Information was not yet circulating in an efficient manner – and this meant both a deficit of data arriving from the local level to *centers of calculation* and a lack of efficient communication from these centers to the local actors. Before thinking about efficient reorganization, this information flow had to be built in the first place.

Friedrich Eberhardt, one of the most ambitious and energetic police officials of the first half of the 19th century, published a call for participation in the 3rd issue of his police gazette in 1836. He reminded his colleagues, that only a closer cooperation and the joint striving for a common goal will enable the eradication of the underworld and the general reduction of crime. (Eberhardt, Aufforderung, 1836) He proposed his police gazette as the platform for this closer cooperation. This implied two connected expectations:

1. the voluntary communication of search
2. the communication of biographical, pictorial, and legal information about members of the criminal classes
3. the regular purchase and usage of the police gazette

Organization

Looking at distribution networks as they emerge during the 19th century, we can distinguish two different models: a communitarian and a bureaucratic model. They differ in the definition of their audience and in the underlying concept of policing.

The *communitarian* model – represented by projects like *Merkers Mitteilungen* and *Eberhardts Allgemeiner Polizei-Anzeiger* - relied on the production side on voluntarism from members of the policing community like Friedrich Merker and Friedrich Eberhardt. They collected data through their own work and through communications from colleagues, edited them for publication, and, finally, compiled data collections at their institutional base for further use. At the reception side, this model was based on voluntary subscriptions, which could be encouraged by police hierarchies but not enforced. Subscriptions were not limited to the policing community – this was another feature of this model. The openness resulted practically from the policy of free access to subscriptions throughout the German Confederation. Theoretically, it reflected the idea that crime prevention and policing should be a joint concern of police institutions and respectable citizens.

The *bureaucratic* model followed a different political and institutional rationale. The *Hannoversche Polizeiblatt* was the first gazette produced within this framework, which was defined by institutional editorship, compulsory subscription, and limited circulation. In order to secure continuity and link the production of the police gazette as efficiently as possible into the flow of information within the police apparatus, the director of the Hanover police secured political support for the creation of an official police gazette. Its creation in 1846 is indicative for the political dimensions of the project.

Political opponents as well as ordinary criminals were searched in the *Polizeiblatt*. Considering the intimate links between political opponents and respectable citizens, the circulation had to be limited to the officials in charge with fighting and preventing crime. The *Polizeianzeiger* was shared with neighboring police offices. They had to

commit themselves to treat the content of the gazette as official secrets – “to communicate the issues and their content only to public officials and members of the police and to refrain from sharing it with the public ...”, as the director of the Hanover police emphasized against the Home Office.

The differences between the police gazettes following these two models were not very obvious in terms of daily routines. Friedrich Merker operated the publication of his pioneering, semi-official publication with more than official consent. The Prussian Home Office repeatedly encouraged and reminded officials within the various policing institutions to subscribe to the gazette and to share information with the editors. Already in 1819, the first year of its existence, the costs for the subscription to the *Mitteilungen* could be covered by the income from passport fees.

The main difference between official and semi-official gazettes regarded their financing and the continuity of editorship. The costs for editing, publishing, and distributing the *Hannoversche Polizeiblatt* were covered from the police budget. This provided the police authorities with full control and guaranteed institutional continuity. Semi-private initiatives like the *Mitteilungen* from Friedrich Merker caused trouble when the pivotal figure passed away.

When police councilor Friedrich Merker died in 1842, his widow immediately filed a petition to the Berlin police president to secure the transition in editorship to her son-in-law Baurat. The latter, also working in the police administration in a more subaltern position as police secretary, had already collaborated in this project, as the petition argued. Neither experience nor family relations could secure police secretary Baurat the editorship of the *Mitteilungen*. The president of the Prussian province Brandenburg, who had to make the decision, opted for an official appointment. The private financial interests of the family were taken care through a contract with the Berlin police. A few years later, the *Mitteilungen* were turned into an official police gazette, which was published from 1852 under the new label *Preußisches Central-Polizeiblatt*.

Semi-official police gazettes continued to exist until the end of the 19th century and contributed to the complexity of information flows, which Robert Heindl bemoaned in his report from 1912. The integration of police institutions into a centralized governance structure during the 19th century provided the momentum for a shift towards an exclusive control over information exchange within the field of internal security. This tendency should not be overestimated in its implications for policing at the local level,

however. Before the creation of regional coordination units for the integration and standardization of detective work in the interwar and postwar period, information exchange between the center and the periphery remained unreliable.

Content

The editorial offices for police gazettes turned into *centers of calculation* in the sense of Bruno Latour. They required standardized input about criminals and suspects. The traditional organization of information in legal terms, that is, focused on the crime, had to give way to a biographical organization of information. This can be traced very well at the example of the police headquarter in Hanover. At the same time, when the official police gazette was started, an overhaul of the archive took place in order to shift to a biographical classification system.

Editorial offices of police gazettes were situated, ideally, at the intersection of various local, regional, national, and international information flows regarding criminals and suspects. Official and semi-official projects used different strategies to mobilize the full potential of biographical information available within the community. Bureaucratic schemes simply required every official working within the police system to report relevant data. Communitarian projects had to rely, on the contrary, on voluntary communications from zealous policemen. In practice, this distinction was almost in-existent because of the difficulties to enforce the compliance with the rules.

The editors of the police gazettes made the best out of the information available at their sites. When they published search warrants, they cross-referenced them in order to provide additional clues to the persistence in crime of the subject in question. To give you an impression about the narrative strategies of the search warrants, I include one reference indicating a wanted gypsy in January 1858:

[29339] **Imker**, August, gypsy, from Hunteburg, in II. Nr. [4315], VIII. [19146] IX [22851] XI [27707] [27839] [28284] referenced, as he was required by the Oldenburg government to relocate to his home town because of vagrancy but failed to arrive there. He will be most likely in the company of Rosalie Wellern from the Prussian district of Soldin, cf. XI. Nr. [27839], who is traveling together with a small child of 1 year of age.

Physical description: Age 26 years, Height 5 feet 10 inches, Figure slim, hair black, front covered, eyebrows black, eyes brown, nose pointed, mouth ordinary, teeth healthy, chin round, beard black, face lengthy, complexion yellowish, speaks German.

This reference features a physical description, the indication of the reason for the warrant, and the mentioning of a woman with her child as company. The add-on value of the editorial office of the police gazette can be seen in the thorough referencing of previous search warrants. They serve a dual purpose. First, they provide indications for the zealous policemen where to look for additional clues in order to avoid mistakes in identifying a suspect. Second, they represent already at first sight the dangerousness of August Imker, who repeatedly refused to integrate into the normative order, which prohibits vagrancy.

As *centers of calculation* the editorial offices could further process the data, which arrived from local, regional, and national sources. The processing was not limited to the improvement of search warrants. It extended into the analysis of negligence from the side of police officials, and into the compilation of extensive biographies of the most wanted criminals. The latter was used to publish criminological insights into the dynamics of criminal careers and the best means to prevent them.

Police gazettes served an important educational role. They pointed the attention of police officials to social problems, helped them to look with a learned gaze at suspicious individuals, and publicly reprimanded them for negligent behavior. With an academically based criminology arriving towards the end of the 19th century, police gazettes lost their educational vigor and their criminological relevance. Knowledge about crime and criminals was no longer produced in the editorial offices of police gazettes, but rather in the medical wards of the prisons and in statistical offices.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 19th century police gazettes emerged as a new medium for the communication within the policing community. The content published in the gazettes and the organization of their production and distribution was subject to change – from a more communitarian towards a bureaucratic form. This change excluded citizens from participating in this exchange, which was symptomatic for the position of the police vis-à-vis society. The editorial offices of the police gazettes aspired to become *centers of calculation* where information from a wide range of information networks were further processed to re-inserted into these networks in an enriched way. As long as criminological knowledge was still produced by practitioners, these offices were important sites within the criminological discourse.

¹ Friedrich Eberhardt: Vorwort. In: Allgemeiner Polizei-Anzeiger 10, 1840, III-IV, III.