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## The Extraordinary Newspaper Collection of William of Rosenberg

### Abstract

An exceptional collection of handwritten newspapers and other reports has been preserved in South Bohemia, largely thanks to William of Rosenberg. The aim of this study is to present the origins of this unique collection, and the people involved in its creation. Due to his extensive diplomatic activities, William of Rosenberg maintained an excellent overview of current events and therefore subscribed to handwritten newspapers, despite their cost. However, some newspapers had already been acquired by William's predecessors, while others, especially those from the Netherlands, were commissioned by his brother Petr Vok. After the extinction of the Lords of Rosenberg, the collection was probably further enriched by documents from the archives of the Lords of Schwanberg. In this manner, at least 835 handwritten newspapers, mostly in German and Latin, have survived.

**Keywords:** handwritten newspapers, William of Rosenberg, collection of newspapers, Polish royal elections, culture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the history of journalism

**Słowa kluczowe:** gazety rękopiśmienne, Wilhelm z Rosenbergu, kolekcja gazet, polskie elekcje królewskie, kultura XVI wieku, historia dziennikarstwa

An extremely valuable collection of handwritten newspapers and other news documents from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries has been preserved in South Bohemia. It was created thanks to the power ambitions and diplomatic activities of the Lords of Rosenberg, especially those of William of Rosenberg (1535–1592).<sup>1</sup> To this day, at least 835 handwritten newspapers have been preserved in this collection. Of these documents, which evidently have the character of ordinary handwritten newspapers, 738 are in German, 79 in Latin, 11 in Czech,

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<sup>1</sup> Zdeněk Šimeček was the first to draw attention to this extraordinary collection of newspapers. He devoted several studies to it and described it as a complex in Z. Šimeček, *Počátky novínového zpravodajství a novin v českých zemích (Do devadesátých let 18. století)*, Matice moravská, Brno 2011, pp. 79–93.

four in Italian, two in Polish and one in Spanish<sup>2</sup>. In addition the collection also includes personal accounts of participants in certain battles, lists of troops and their officers, copies of the agreements between the monarchs, reflections on recent events and serious advice for rulers as well as pamphlets and satirical writings, printed leaflets and hundreds of other documents providing news and commentaries on them.

The collection is kept in the State Regional Archives in Třeboň, located in Třeboň Castle, one of the last residences of the Lords of Rosenberg, situated about 25 km from České Budějovice.<sup>3</sup> This study discusses which personalities played the most important role in the creation of this famous collection and what their aims were. It reveals some remarkable facts about how the collection was treated by various members of the Rosenberg family. In particular, the focus is on the decisions and changes made by the most influential of them, William of Rosenberg. However, I also raise other questions that are more difficult to answer, as they focus on the influence of people who are not usually mentioned in connection with the Rosenberg newspaper collection.

## Handwritten newspapers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries

Before focusing on the collection itself, it is necessary to briefly introduce early handwritten newspapers. They originated around the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in two of the most important Italian cities – Rome and Venice. There, a group of enterprising people decided to turn news dissemination into a business, as news was becoming increasingly important. They began to create newspapers and offer them to the most influential people. The profession of “novelant” was born.<sup>4</sup> A novelant was simultaneously the owner of the newspaper, the editor-in-chief, and one of the main correspondents, as he usually gathered some news himself. The newspaper business originated in Rome and Venice, but by the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, it had spread to the major urban centers north of the Alps throughout Europe.<sup>5</sup>

Newspaper writers obtained a significant part of the news through their own observation. They attended ceremonial religious services connected with religious festivals (Christmas, Easter, the feast of the country's patrons) as well as royal coronations, entrances, weddings, baptisms of the ruler's children, and funerals. They closely monitored how key powerful people were dressed, who performed the crucial parts of the ceremonies and who interacted with the ruler's family. Just as closely, the novelants kept an eye on the arriving envoys,

<sup>2</sup> For information on the total number of newspapers and those in various languages, see K. Pražáková, *Obraz Polsko-litevského státu a Ruska ve zpravodajství české šlechty (1450–1618)*, Historický ústav FF JU – Nová tiskárna Pelhřimov, České Budějovice 2015, p. 835.

<sup>3</sup> Státní oblastní archiv v Třeboni (State Regional Archives in Třeboň), collection *Historica Třeboň* (hereafter: SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*).

<sup>4</sup> Z. Šimeček, *Počátky novinového zpravodajství v českých zemích*, “Sborník Historický” 1971, no. 18, pp. 10–11.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Šimeček, *Počátky novinového zpravodajství a novin...*, pp. 20–26.

trying to find out what gifts and offerings they brought, as well as in what mood they left. In their search for the most reliable news, the novelants often engaged in espionage, opening other people's correspondence and making copies of it.<sup>6</sup> They also often bribed servants to tell them, for example, how the monarch's illness was progressing or how he reacted to news about foreign troop movements and intentions. In addition, each newspaper creator collaborated with other novelants and exchanged his newspaper with them.

Based on the information gathered by using the methods described above, the novelants compiled their newspapers. Their headlines usually contained only the date and place of origin of the news. The title *Neue Zeitung* was only occasionally used in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but even then, it was an indication that the author already had a very clear idea of the type of document he was producing.<sup>7</sup> The individual news items followed immediately after the headline. There were no editorials or introductory greetings. Newspapers were divided into paragraphs, each of which contained one item of news. The events were described briefly and clearly, as the authors usually took into consideration that the newspapers were copied by hand. Therefore, they covered the news in a short way and pictures were almost never used. The authors also assumed that their readers came from the upper classes and were therefore familiar with the members of the European royal courts. They usually did not explain who was who but wrote in the style of "the wife of the Duke of Mantua has died," expecting the reader to know very well whom the Duke of Mantua had married.<sup>8</sup>

Typically, a written newspaper consisted of one folded sheet of paper, i.e., four pages, with a size close to today's A4. Sometimes, however, not all the pages were used. More rarely, there were so many reports that the newspaper was extended by additional sheets of paper, reaching up to 8 or even 16 pages. In some cases, the newspaper concluded with a vague wish that everything would turn out for the best, or by repeating the date.<sup>9</sup> In other cases, they simply ended with the last message, without any comment from the writer. Of course, they were not signed, because the novelants tried to reveal their identity only to those who subscribed to their newspaper.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, they did not want to draw attention to themselves and raise questions about how they had obtained certain reports. A typical feature of handwritten newspapers was the fact that the reader had to order them. Unlike leaflets and other small prints of the time,

<sup>6</sup> On the various practices of informants and agents, see A. Rous, *Geheimdiplomatie in der Frühen Neuzeit. Spione und Chiffren in Sachsen 1500–1763*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2023, pp. 40–46.

<sup>7</sup> In the Rosenberg collection, the title *Neue Zeitung* is used, e.g., SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4861/1 or 5013A.

<sup>8</sup> To the main features of written newspapers in detail, see K. Pražáková, *Ručně psané noviny a jejich vliv na společnost 16. století*, [in:] *Jakž lidé hodnověrní zprávu činí. Formy písemné komunikace v raném novověku*, eds. M. Hradilová, M. Tošnerová, Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Praha 2018, pp. 79–97.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Šimeček, *Počátky novinového zpravodajství...*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, 15.

they were not offered in markets, but their delivery resulted from a specific agreement between the novelant and the recipient.<sup>11</sup>

### Interest in the news by members of the Rosenberg family

Members of the Rosenberg family were interested in news and exchanged reports even before the invention of handwritten newspapers arrived in the Kingdom of Bohemia. In 1449, for example, Prokop of Rabštejn sent a letter to Oldřich II of Rosenberg (1403–1462),<sup>12</sup> in which he criticized the South Bohemian magnate over an unspecified action.<sup>13</sup> To soften the impact of his criticism, which he expressed in a rather harsh manner at the beginning of his letter, in the second part of his letter, Prokop of Rabštejn listed several news items that he assumed might interest Rosenberg.

Of course, the Lords of Rosenberg received more letters like this,<sup>14</sup> and a corpus of various news documents from the 15<sup>th</sup> century has been preserved in the remains of their family archive. They cannot be described as newspapers, but they were created to pass on information and commentary on events. There are reports on military clashes, including lists of troops, weapons and captives,<sup>15</sup> copies of treaties between rulers,<sup>16</sup> and records of conflicts or, on the contrary, friendly ties between nobles that did not affect the Lords of Rosenberg directly.<sup>17</sup> Descriptions of festivities were less frequent. They apparently only attracted attention when the usual ceremony was disturbed (e.g., at the coronation of Emperor Frederick III in 1452).<sup>18</sup> One of the most remarkable documents is undoubtedly a fragment of a printed summary of important events that took place between 1485 and 1518.<sup>19</sup>

The oldest real handwritten newspaper dates back to 1512, proving that the Rosenberg news network was one of the leading ones of its time and that its owners had an overview similar to that of the electors of the Holy Roman Empire. For example, the oldest handwritten newspaper in the collection of

<sup>11</sup> The handwritten newspapers were even adapted to the needs of individual customers, especially with regard to their place of residence. For example, if he spent a certain time in Prague, he would not receive news from Prague during that period. Z. Šimeček, *Geschriebene Zeitungen in den böhmischen Ländern um 1600 und ihr Entstehungs- und Rezeptionszusammenhang mit den gedruckten Zeitungen*, [in:] *Presse und Geschichte II. Neue Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung*, eds. E. Blühm, G. Hartwig, K. G. Saur, München–London–New York–Oxford–Paris 1987, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> On his personality and activities of that time, see A. Kubíková, *Oldřich II. z Rožmberka*, Věduta, České Budějovice 2004, pp. 85–128.

<sup>13</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 1138.

<sup>14</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 1489a, 1505, 1544, 1553, 2541a, and others.

<sup>15</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 2402, 3422, 3427, 3450, 3571, and others.

<sup>16</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 1784.

<sup>17</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 795, 2062, and others.

<sup>18</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 1584.

<sup>19</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 3289. Mentioned also by Z. Šimeček, *Počátky novínového zpravodajství a novin...*, p. 80.

the powerful Electors of Saxony dates back to 1508.<sup>20</sup> Two handwritten newspapers from 1512 have been preserved in the Rosenberg collection. While the first deals with the power struggle in the northern part of the Apennine Peninsula,<sup>21</sup> the second contains a variety of news from all over Europe, including the actions of Emperor Maximilian I and the rivalry between England and France.<sup>22</sup>

When these newspapers arrived at the South Bohemian residence, the family estate was being administered by Peter IV of Rosenberg (1462–1523). He was one of those members of the family who were extremely interested in what was happening beyond the borders of their domain. It makes sense that he started ordering handwritten newspapers, which were a novelty in Central Europe at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. About eight of them have survived in the Rosenberg archives from his time. Peter IV's interest in news was so strong that another influential nobleman of the time, Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál, tried to win him over with news.<sup>23</sup> When he wrote to Petr IV of Rosenberg, he often mentioned various news he had gathered.<sup>24</sup> However, this friendship ended up threatening the power of the Lords of Rosenberg, as the seriously ill Peter IV of Rosenberg changed his will shortly before his death in 1523. He practically tried to disinherit his nephews and divide the family estate among other nobles, with Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál receiving a large share.<sup>25</sup>

In the end, his nephews managed to overturn the unfavourable will.<sup>26</sup> However, the large sums of money they had used to influence decisions were no longer available in the years that followed, and they subsequently pursued a much more modest policy than their ancestors did in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>27</sup> This obviously had an impact on the ordering of newspapers, which was expensive and, in the case of a more restrained policy, partly unnecessary. It is not surprising, therefore, that only one handwritten newspaper and several reporting letters has been preserved from the period between 1524 and 1534.<sup>28</sup> The number of newspapers delivered to South Bohemian residences began to increase again in the mid-1530s, when the family estates were administered by

<sup>20</sup> Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10024 *Geheimer Rat*, ref. no. Loc. 10695/02.

<sup>21</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 3565.

<sup>22</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 3570.

<sup>23</sup> On the personality of Zdeněk of Rožmitál, see S. Kotlárová, *Páni z Rožmitálu*, Veduta, České Budějovice 2008, pp. 42–91; B. Czechowicz, *The uncrowned 'Bohemian king' and his 'bible' castle. Blatná as commissioned by the highest burgrave of Prague castle, Zdeňek Lev of Rožmitál, around the years 1520–1530*, "Res Gestae" 2022, no. 15, pp. 50–66.

<sup>24</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 3547, 3634a, 3652, 3751, 3788, and others.

<sup>25</sup> R. Šimůnek, R. Lavička, *Páni z Rožmberka 1250–1520. Jižní Čechy ve středověku. Kulturněhistorický obraz šlechtického dominia ve středověkých Čechách*, Veduta, České Budějovice 2011, pp. 41–42; S. Kotlárová, *Páni z Rožmitálu...*, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> A. Míka, *Osud slavného domu. Rozkvět a pád rožmberského dominia*, Růže, České Budějovice 1970, pp. 91–93; S. Kotlárová, *Páni z Rožmitálu...*, pp. 55–61.

<sup>27</sup> A. Míka, *Osud slavného domu...*, pp. 95–99.

<sup>28</sup> The only newspaper from this period dates back to 1532 and describes the great Turkish campaign. SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4788.

Jošt III (1488–1539) and, subsequently, by his brother Peter V of Rosenberg (1489–1545). Both tried to achieve effective management while simultaneously strengthening the influence of the whole family in Bohemian society.

### The influence of William of Rosenberg's first political experiences on his attitude toward newspapers

William of Rosenberg, son of Jošt III, inherited the family estate theoretically as early as 1545. As a ten-year-old, however, he was, of course, not allowed to actively manage it. Therefore, three guardians, appointed by his uncle Peter V of Rosenberg before his death, made decisions for him. Peter V chose capable people who did not jeopardize the Rosenberg property and made reasonable decisions.<sup>29</sup> The most important was to support the king Ferdinand of Habsburg against the revolt of the Bohemian Estates in 1547. As a result, the young William as well as his younger brother Peter developed excellent relations with the ruling family, which helped them in many situations from their youth.<sup>30</sup>

Surprisingly, a few handwritten newspapers and several other reports from the time of the guardianship have survived in the Rosenberg collection.<sup>31</sup> It is not entirely clear who acquired them. It is possible to speculate that they were an attachment to one of the letters exchanged between the guardians or the young Rosenbergs' mother, Anna of Roggendorf, and her relatives. Since some of these newspapers originate from the same months as the letters of the Lords of Schwanberg, which will be discussed later in connection with the later additions to the Rosenberg archive, it is likely that they may not have been originally part of the Rosenberg collection.

In May 1551, at the age of 16, William of Rosenberg took over a relatively consolidated domain. His contacts with the ruling Habsburg dynasty deepened, for already in June 1551, he and a group of other prominent Bohemian nobles set off for Genoa, where they awaited the arrival of the young archduke Maximilian (the future Emperor Maximilian II) and his wife Maria. They solemnly welcomed the future rulers and accompanied them to Vienna. The trip to northern Italy broadened the political and cultural horizons of the participants. They came into contact with some of the personalities they had only heard of, became aware of the vastness of the known world at the time and the complexity of the relationships between its rulers, and learned in detail about Renaissance art, education, and collecting.<sup>32</sup>

After his return from Italy, William of Rosenberg turned his full attention to the administration of the family estate, and soon began ordering handwritten newspapers containing information from various parts of Europe. Although

<sup>29</sup> A. Míka, *Osud slavného domu...*, pp. 103–110.

<sup>30</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové. Velmoži české renesance*, Panorama, Praha 1989, p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4200, 4208, 4244, 4307a, 4313, 4314, and others.

<sup>32</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 67–83.



the corpus of documents resulting from his political activities is rightly described as a vast and valuable collection of newspapers, William certainly did not intend to build up a collection at this early stage. He ordered newspapers for their information and, after reading them, presumably decided whether a particular piece deserved to be kept or not.

The fact that the South Bohemian magnate carefully sorted the newspapers and saved only a few of them in his archive is best proved by the fact that a significant part of the newspapers from the 1550s, 1560s, and 1570s, i.e., from at least 25 years of his administration of the family estate, form a kind of thematic groups. Very often, most of the newspapers from a given year focus on a single topic that William of Rosenberg was obviously interested in. A typical example of this is the year 1554, from which ten newspapers have been preserved, seven of which mention the war activities of Albrecht II Alcibiades of the House of Hohenzollern.<sup>33</sup> Albrecht II Alcibiades sided with the Habsburgs in the Schmalkaldic war, but in the early 1550s, he turned against them and initiated the so-called Second War of the Margraves, which culminated at the turn of 1553 and 1554. It ended with the defeat of Albrecht II Alcibiades at Schwarzach on 13 June 1554. William of Rosenberg wanted to be informed of these events, not only because imperial politics naturally influenced events in the Kingdom of Bohemia, but also for personal reasons. By 1554, he was presumably already planning his marriage to one of the imperial duchesses. In early 1557, he married his first wife Catherine, the sister of Erik II, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg.<sup>34</sup> In considering this marriage, William of Rosenberg had to think about how the Second Margrave War had changed the balance of power in the Holy Roman Empire and to whom he would be related to. Another example of the sorting of incoming newspapers is provided by sources from the early 1560s. No handwritten newspapers have been preserved from 1561, 1562, and 1564, but nine from 1563.<sup>35</sup> Eight of them describe the religious situation in France and deal with the military successes as well as the subsequent assassination of Francis de Lorraine, Duke of Guise.<sup>36</sup>

A significant number of the newspapers in the Rosenberg collection reported on the wars with the Turks, especially in the mid-1560s. Naturally, the wars with the Turks were a topic followed by the whole society because of Sultan Suleiman I's successful military actions and the growing Turkish threat. But William of Rosenberg also had a personal interest in these wars. In 1566, he became the commander of the Bohemian troops that were to support the army of Emperor Maximilian II in the defence of the fortress of Siget, to which the

<sup>33</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4307b, 4311, 4312, 4314, 4315, 4316, and 4322.

<sup>34</sup> In detail, see P. Marek, K. Pražáková, *Šňatkové strategie se zahraniční šlechtou*, [in:] *Světý posledních Rožmberků*, eds. V. Bůžek et al., Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Praha 2011, pp. 152–156.

<sup>35</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4510a, 4510b, 4511, 4512, 4513, 4514, 4515, 4516, and 4520.

<sup>36</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4510a, 4510b, 4511, 4512, 4513, 4515, 4516, and 4520.

huge army of Sultan Suleiman I was marching.<sup>37</sup> The Bohemian nobleman did not experience the actual battle, as the emperor did not have the courage to initiate the clash and his army did not move to the aid of the besieged fortress. William's brother-in-law, Miklós Zrínyi, died during the capture. While members of the Habsburg family, many courtiers, and Bohemian nobles wanted to forget the incident as quickly as possible, it seems that William of Rosenberg purposely kept some newspapers and other reports from 1566 in his collections to preserve the heroic memory of his sister Eva's husband.<sup>38</sup> In this case, the handwritten newspaper served the influential South Bohemian magnate not as a source of information (thanks to his personal involvement, he probably knew more about the event than its authors), but as a form of commemorative record. Therefore, at this point, it is possible to speak of a certain form of collecting in relation to the newspapers.

### The Polish mission and the growing collection

In the first half of the 1570s, William of Rosenberg's policy was largely influenced by his famous diplomatic journey to Poland, which he was sent on by Maximilian II in the summer of 1572. Together with Vratislaus of Pernštejn, he was to persuade the Polish and Lithuanian nobility to elect one of the emperor's sons to the vacant throne. The two Bohemian magnates spent about three-quarters of a year in Poland, establishing many contacts, but in the end, they failed in their mission.<sup>39</sup> At the beginning of May 1573, the Electoral Diet elected Henry of Valois as the new king. Everything seemed settled, but Henry of Valois did not rule the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for long. When his brother Charles IX died, he fled Poland on the night of 18 to 19 June 1574 to claim the French throne. His escape led to another interregnum, during which a group of Polish nobles remembered William of Rosenberg and proposed him as one of the potential candidates.<sup>40</sup>

In the summer of 1574, William of Rosenberg decided to make a real attempt to gain the Polish throne.<sup>41</sup> This intention naturally influenced the composition of the Rosenberg collection of reports. From 1572 onwards, the number of documents dealing with Polish affairs increased considerably. Just few of them were in the form of written newspapers, whose authors were not always able

<sup>37</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 133–139.

<sup>38</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4677a, 4687, and 4688.

<sup>39</sup> In detail, see A. Bues, *Die habsburgische Kandidatur für den polnischen Thron während des Ersten Interregnums in Polen 1572/73*, VWGÖ, Wien 1984, pp. 62–145; J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 164–172; H. Gmiterek, *Lublinská epizoda mise Viléma z Rožmberka do Polska v době bezkráloví v letech 1572–1573*, [in:] *Andros Probabilis. Sborník prací přátel a spolupracovníků historika prof. PhDr. Miloše Trapla, CSc., k jeho 70. narozeninám*, eds. J. Malíř, P. Marek, Matice moravská, Brno–Olomouc 2005, pp. 403–411.

<sup>40</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 174–175.

<sup>41</sup> In detail, see K. Pražáková, *The secret candidature of William of Rosenberg to the Polish throne in 1574 and 1575*, "Eastern European History Review" 2027, no. 7, (in press).



to describe all the secret connections between Polish nobles and their intentions in the depth required by William of Rosenberg. The proportion of other writings, various reflections and assessments of the situation, increased much more. Moreover, a new type of document appeared that William of Rosenberg probably had not used before, or only to a limited extent. These were encrypted letters containing estimates of how various influential people felt about his candidature, as well as those of Habsburgs and other personalities.<sup>42</sup>

William of Rosenberg kept up his efforts to gain the Polish throne until the Diet of Steżycza in May 1575. He hoped that the Polish and Lithuanian nobles there would already proceed to the election of a new king. The turbulent course of the Diet and the postponement of the election to the autumn of 1575 worried him. Realizing the growing danger of Habsburg action and uncertain whether the majority of the Polish and Lithuanian nobility would accept his candidacy, he withdrew his financial contributions to his supporters. Although he continued to communicate with them in a very friendly tone, it was clear that he had withdrawn from the election. This was also well understood by emperor Maximilian II, who reconciled with William of Rosenberg to a large extent. In the winter of 1575, after the double election of Maximilian II and Stephen Báthory to the Polish throne, the emperor asked the South Bohemian nobleman with sincere interest what steps he should take in this difficult situation. William of Rosenberg was one of the personalities who dissuaded Maximilian II from taking military action in Poland and trying to assert his claims by force.<sup>43</sup>

Also in the following years, during the reign of Rudolf II, William of Rosenberg remained a valued expert on Polish affairs thanks to his contacts. The emperor asked him to comment on various Polish events and requested him as a negotiator when his brother Maximilian was captured in early 1588 in an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Polish throne during another interregnum.<sup>44</sup>

William of Rosenberg was not only a valued expert on Polish affairs but also kept a close eye on events in other countries during the 1580s. At that time, newspapers were delivered to the Rosenberg residences on post days, twice a week, unless there was an unforeseen event. They contained news from all parts of the known world at the time. The greatest attention was paid to the long-lasting Dutch revolt, followed by the traditional close monitoring of all activities in the Ottoman Empire. Events in the Italian states, France and Spain were also covered relatively regularly. The rarest, but still present, were re-

<sup>42</sup> William of Rosenberg, unfortunately, did not trust even the encrypted letters and destroyed most of them. Fragments of the originally quite extensive correspondence. Preserved documents in SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4834/36. Transcription was made by Ф. Вержбовский (F. Verzhbovsky), *Две кандидатуры на польский престол Вильгельма из Розенберга и эрцгерцога Фердинанда 1574–1575 гг. По неизданным источникам*, тип. К. Ковалевского, Warsaw 1889.

<sup>43</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 179–180; K. Pražáková, *Obráz Polsko-litevského státu...*, pp. 128–130.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 178–181.

ports on events in England, Russia, or even overseas.<sup>45</sup> A much larger number of newspapers have also survived from the 1580s. For example, there are 17 newspapers from 1583 and as many as 32 from 1584.<sup>46</sup> At this time, William of Rosenberg probably did not sort the newspapers as rigorously as he had done previously. The question is whether he did not begin to collect them to some extent.

The end of William's life is a remarkable but tragic period. Almost complete series of newspapers have survived from 1591 and 1592.<sup>47</sup> They indicate that the dying Rosenberg no longer had the energy to read and sort them, so they simply piled up. From a scientific point of view, this is of course an extraordinary opportunity, as the preservation of so many documents will make it possible in the future to better define the typical content of handwritten newspapers intended for one of the most powerful Bohemian noblemen of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

After William's death, his younger brother Petr Vok of Rosenberg inherited the family domain. He obtained a rather problematic inheritance, as the family estates were heavily in debt as a result of William's ambitious policies, and creditors began to demand their claims, not expecting the younger brother to achieve greater economic or political success.<sup>48</sup> Petr Vok was soon forced to sell off parts of the estate and to make cuts in other areas as well.<sup>49</sup> Naturally, this also affected the ordering of newspapers. It was much cheaper and easier to buy them at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century than it had been at the beginning, but they still cost considerable sums. Petr Vok slowly began to restrict their ordering. In the first two years after William's death, he seems to have left the orders almost unchanged. There are 72 preserved newspapers from 1593 and 72 from 1574.<sup>50</sup> This was probably because from 1592 onwards Petr Vok had to take a more active part in the politics of the state, to negotiate with the emperor in various difficult situations and to understand the situation in the war with the Turks. After all, despite his reluctance, he was supposed to become the commander of the Czech army in that phase of the war with the Turks which began in 1594.<sup>51</sup> However, when Petr Vok managed to avoid this task and convince the most influential people that he would not participate in politics like his brother, he also began to limit his purchases of news from abroad. From 1595 to 1602, an average of 20 handwritten newspapers per year have survived.

From 1603 onwards, there are hardly any written newspapers among the Rosenberg documents, although Peter Vok did not die until November 1611. This is rather surprising, since even in later years, Petr Vok of Rosenberg often

<sup>45</sup> To news from overseas, see Z. Šimeček, *L'Amérique au 16e siècle à la lumière des nouvelles du service de renseignements de la famille des Rožmberk*, "Historica" 1965, no. 11, pp. 53–93.

<sup>46</sup> Spread among the documents SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 5186–5291.

<sup>47</sup> Spread among the documents SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 5516–5605/1.

<sup>48</sup> A. Míka, *Osud slavného domu...*, p. 187.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, pp. 188–192; J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 274–276.

<sup>50</sup> Spread among the documents SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 5605/2–5787/3.

<sup>51</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 274–280.

invited friends to his residences, with whom he discussed various political matters.<sup>52</sup> Until his death, he also looked after the library, which was one of the largest and best of its time.<sup>53</sup> For the Rosenberg library, Petr Vok also ordered the binding of 78 printed pamphlets and newspapers. These were apparently kept together with handwritten newspapers in the family archive. In the 1590s, however, they were selected, bound in three representative leather-bound volumes and placed in the library. During the Thirty years' war, however, they were taken to Sweden with the library and are now lost. Thanks to a detailed catalogue of the Rosenberg Library made by the librarian Václav Březan, at least the approximate subjects and dates of these prints are known.<sup>54</sup>

### Uncertainties about other creators of the Rosenberg newspaper collection

William of Rosenberg, who acquired most of the surviving newspapers, can rightly be regarded as the main founder of the Rosenberg collection of handwritten newspapers. From his youth, he built up a network of contacts that provided him with news from all parts of Europe and even from many overseas regions. It should be recalled, however, that several of the newspapers in the Rosenberg collection had been obtained by his predecessors even before his birth. In addition, William's brother Peter should also be acknowledged as a contributor to the Rosenberg collection. Of course, he contributed to the collection by purchasing some newspapers after William's death, when he was only gradually cancelling the established news networks. But it should also be noted that Petr Vok actively acquired some newspapers during William's lifetime. The back of several newspapers from the 1580s explicitly stated that they were intended for Petr Vok of Rosenberg.<sup>55</sup> These were usually news from the Dutch provinces. It is logical that Peter Vok was interested in the developments in this region, as he had visited it in his youth on a cavalry tour, which made a great impression on him.<sup>56</sup> As a non-Catholic, he later sympathized with the rebels.

However, a certain part of the handwritten newspapers, which are now part of the Rosenberg collection, may have originated from the Lords of Schwanberg. After the death of Peter Vok of Rosenberg, Jan Jiří of Schwanberg inherited the rest of the Rosenberg estate on the basis of old contracts. Subsequently, some Schwanberg documents were included in the Rosenberg family archive. Typically, these were various instructions to officials and reports in which these officials or the lower nobility informed the Lords of Schwanberg abo-

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, pp. 312–317.

<sup>53</sup> In detail, see L. Veselá, *Knihy na dvoře Rožmberků*, Scriptorium, Praha 2005, especially pp. 71–83 and 119–128.

<sup>54</sup> V. Březan, *Bibliotheca Rosenbergica id est Consignatio accurata omnium librorum etc.* (Photocopy on CD-ROM), [in:] *Knihy na dvoře Rožmberků*, ed. L. Veselá, Scriptorium, Praha 2005, pp. 859–863.

<sup>55</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 5255, 5256, 5259, 5267, and others.

<sup>56</sup> J. Pánek, *Poslední Rožmberkové...*, pp. 117–123.

ut various events on the estate and beyond.<sup>57</sup> It is not certain whether these reports were accompanied by any handwritten newspapers, which were later separated and kept separately by the archivists. Most of these documents relate in some way to the activities of Jindřich III of Schwanberg. They generally date from the period between 1530 and 1567. After 1568, a few Schwanberg documents were still preserved in the Rosenberg collection, but they were not of a news nature.

The Rosenberg collection is therefore clearly worthy of further study, not only in terms of the content of individual newspapers, but also in terms of the contribution of individual subscribers to the collection of this remarkable corpus.

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<sup>57</sup> SOA Třeboň, *Historica Třeboň*, ref. no. 4131, 4432A, 4473, and others.

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