

# II The Maritime Connections

1550  
-1810



Based on  
**Thomas Lindblad,**  
*“Nederland en de Oostzee, 1600–1850” in “Goud uit Graan”*

# The Mother Trade

**During the Golden Age, on the global trading scene, the supremacy of Holland and Amsterdam**

was inextricably linked to the Dutch merchants’ prominent position in the trade on the Baltic Sea through the Danish Sound. As far back as 1671, Johan de Witt referred to the trade in the Baltic Sea as the “Mother Trade”. Shortly before that the Ambassador of the States General in Denmark had written that he “had seen the keys of the Sound in Amsterdam”.

Northern European imports, consisting mainly of grain, but also of other products such as timber and skins, were carried out in a routine fashion: year after year ships, often in large convoys, plied the waters between the Republic and the Baltic Sea. The trade did not catch people’s imagination as much as the large ships of the Dutch East India Company returning from Asia with their cargo of exotic goods. Nevertheless, the trade with the Baltic laid the foundation for the growing Dutch economy in the Golden Age.

## “Ommelandvaart”

The “Ommelandvaart” (sailing around Denmark) already began in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and starting from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Baltic trade became important for both Holland and Zeeland. During the heydays of the Hanseatic times in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries a substantial part of the trade with the Baltic region was already executed by ships from Holland (see also the article by Brand on this early period). The overall picture changed during the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the German Hanseatic League lost its grip on the trade to and within the Baltic region, which gave more possibilities to Dutch merchants. This was followed by a spectacular rise of the young Republic, the Dutch Golden Age, when the Republic also became more and more involved in the battle for political power within the Baltic area. Historians are still debating whether the Dutch trade on the Baltic Sea reached its culminating point in the second or third quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Around 1650, the balance of political power in the Baltic region had clearly shifted in favour of Sweden. Moreover, Sweden felt an increasing need for commercial emancipation with respect to Holland and Amsterdam. The war that King Charles X was



Map of Northern Europe



conducting in Poland from 1655 till 1657 was perceived as a direct threat to the benefits that they enjoyed from having free access to the grain producing area in the hinterland of Dantzig. In 1658, the Swedish army marched across the ice of the Great and Small Belt and stabbed the Danish king in the back, so to speak. Denmark had to relinquish the peninsula of Scania to Sweden, who thereby gained possession of the eastern bank of the Sound.

The next move of the perhaps overbold Swedish monarch was an attempt to also conquer the western bank of the Sound in order to turn the entire Baltic Sea into, to put it in slightly overstated terms, a Swedish lake. But then the Republic intervened. A Dutch fleet sailed to the Sound, defeated the Swedish fleet and drove the Swedes out of Denmark in 1658. Peace was made as early as 1660, partly as a result of the unexpected death of Charles X. The change in course in the years 1640—1650 illustrates the Republic's eagerness to control the balance of power in the Baltic region. Neither Denmark nor Sweden could be allowed to expand too much. The Dutch trade flourished best if the two rivals remained equally strong.

During the major part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, grain prices from the Baltic rose as a result of an increasing demand, which in turn was caused by an increasing population growth in the Republic, from an estimated 1.5 million people in 1600 to 1.9 million in 1650. But in the 1660's prices started to drop due to a slower population growth and a large arrival of grain in Amsterdam from areas other than the Baltic Sea. The profit margins dropped, the growth came to a standstill and the culminating point in the 1680's was followed by a dramatic recession.

## Consolidation

The Great Northern War, which erupted in 1700 between Sweden on the one hand and Denmark, Russia and Poland on the other hand, constitutes, in more than one aspect, the turning point with respect to the dominating tendencies of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. More than ever before, the Dutch shipping and trade on the Baltic Sea was suffering from danger and war actions. For a long time, the States General twisted themselves into knots trying not to offend the belligerent Charles XII of Sweden. Charles's requests for support against Russia were met with sympathy, although no concrete assistance was offered. During talks with the English government, the envoys of the Republic openly admitted that commercial interests turned the scale. The fact is that Amsterdam merchants Christoffel Brants and Jean Lups supplied thousands of muskets and hundreds of mortars every year to Peter the Great, Charles's arch-enemy. In 1709, the situation changed when Russia defeated Sweden and Charles XII went into voluntary exile in Turkey. But even thereafter they proceeded with caution in order to avoid the Swedish naval force hindering Dutch ships in harbours that had now become Russian.

Up to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Russia had never had a port on the Baltic Sea, now thanks to the war it acquired the former Swedish possessions around present-day St Petersburg, in Estonia and Latvia. The new superpower extended its influence to the eastern part of the Baltic region. The 17<sup>th</sup> century had been the "Swedish Century"; the 18<sup>th</sup> century now became the "Russian Century".

The Republic lost its position as one of the leading powers on the European scene. The commercial and political climate in the Baltic region was not favourable and in addition to that the stagnation of the grain trade continued for a few more decades. It was only from the 1750's onwards that the grain supply from the Baltic Sea started to recover, both in total supply as well as in the portion thereof destined for the Republic. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the total volume of grain had increased from 160,000 to

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180,000 tons or approximately the same volume as in the 1680's. The Dutch share, on the other hand, dropped to below fifty percent, although in absolute figures the overall volume increased. An all time low was reached in the 1780's, at the time of the Fourth English War, when scarcely more than a quarter of all the grain coming from the Baltic region landed in a harbour of the Republic. The Amsterdam staple market did not benefit from the general revival of the grain trade, partly because by now the Dutch competitiveness had been undermined and partly because for some time already the focus had been diverted to other routes. Generally speaking, navigation on the Baltic Sea remained at a relatively stable level during the entire 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Based on the existing shipping statistics it is wrong to conclude that the Republic's Baltic trade had vanished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The continuity after the 17<sup>th</sup> century was far greater than has often been assumed by both contemporary and later historians. The continuity also related to the position of Amsterdam in the total shipping on the Baltic Sea, even if the capital's share had fallen from 80% or more before 1730 to around 60% by 1780.

The Baltic region remained a source of grain and important commodities that could be traded via the staple market in Amsterdam. A global picture of the supply can be obtained by adding, for each of the most important products, the quantities that were transported westwards through the Sound, though only after having assembled them under one identical denominator through conversion by cargoes.

To consolidate the existing operation became an increasingly important target for the merchants involved in the Baltic trade. This is also apparent from the range of goods that was collected from the Baltic region. The relative allocation between grain, timber, hemp (with flax) and other selected materials (ash, potash, leather, hides, tar, pitch, and iron) remained notably stable between 1720 and 1770. Compared to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, grain only assumed a modest position, its share in the total (of selected goods) rarely or never exceeding a third.

Notwithstanding the growing diversification of the trade, grain resumed an important position again in the second half of the century. However, the relative recession of Dutch shipping was particularly felt in the grain trade. Having lost the competition

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battle for the grain cargoes, the Republic could not fully benefit from the attractive conjuncture and the increasing trade in the Baltic Region as of the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the grain prices were on the rise again. The previous diversification had left lasting traces.

Timber from the hinterland of the Russian ports on the Baltic Sea, occupied a more than proportional percentage of the cargo capacity, and represented minimally a fifth and sometimes a third of the total value. The timber trade reached its culminating point around 1750, at the precise time when the grain trade to Dantzig fell to an all time low.

However, the situation of the timber trade drastically changed when Empress Elizabeth in 1756 restricted the export of timber; for fear that the deep Russian forests would be exhausted! The result was that the timber trade declined. Narva, having been one of two main destinations of the Dutch skippers in the Baltic Sea as well as Dantzig, were now replaced by another Russian town, namely Riga in Livland. This harbour mainly supplied hemp and flax. This further diversification, from timber to different commodities, was inspired by political decisions made in the Baltic Region, which were totally beyond the control of the Republic and the States General. An unexpected consequence of the decline in the timber trade was that the village of Hindeloopen in Friesland experienced a sudden rise in unemployment as a remarkable number of its inhabitants had specialised in the timber trade. Other important commodities included Swedish iron, a product that would assume a unique position in the European market until the eve of the Industrial Revolution.

## The end

After the French era and the Napoleonic Wars, the foundations for lively trade between the Netherlands and the Baltic region were still further undermined. The higher degree of integration of markets within Europe meant that there was little scope for intermediate trade on the basis of regional price differences. Further technological progress boosted the “*voorbijlandvaart*” (sailing past the land), which had already dealt harsh blows to the Dutch intermediaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The increasing integration within the large Russian Empire, which now stretched out to the hinterland of Dantzig and the whole of Finland, caused the economic orientation to shift from west to east in large parts of the Baltic region.

Swedish iron lost its unique position in the European market and the rising Swedish timber industry mainly focussed on destinations further away than Amsterdam. The notions of a glorious past were kept alive in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830). The emphasis on the Baltic trade was shifted towards the colonies: the Netherlands Indies trade and the supplies of sugar, coffee and other tropical agricultural products from Java were meant to revive the Golden Age. Simultaneously the Dutch economy became more and more intertwined with the rapidly growing German economy. This double economical reorientation, in the direction of Java and the Ruhr region, underlined the fact that the Dutch trade could assume nothing but a marginal position on the Baltic Sea.

# II The Maritime Connections 1550 -1810

Based on an article by  
**Suzanne Barbier**  
in *“De vergeten Oostzee connectie”*

## The Sound Toll Registers

**During the Hanseatic period, Amsterdam obtained an important function as a staple market.**

Bulk goods such as rye and wheat were offloaded here, stored and resold to other parts of Europe. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries this trade with the Baltic increased dramatically. The prosperity of the Golden Age can be directly traced back to the Baltic connection. The warehouses and guild houses, fortifications and Lutheran churches that so characterize Riga and Tallinn testify to the fact that there exists a centuries old relationship with “the West”. After the pullout of the Soviet army in the early nineties the old port cities have been restored and the monuments have received a fresh coat of paint. The 800th anniversary of Riga in 2001 turned into an immense fraternization with deputies from a large number of Hanseatic towns. The message is clear: the Baltic countries are no newcomers to Europe, they have always been there.

### **The Netherlands Sound Toll Registers**

Historians dispose of various written sources on the Baltic trade. And, as is quite often the case, records were kept because of taxes. To reach the Baltic coasts all ships originating from the West had to pass the Sound, the strait between Denmark and Sweden. Most maritime traffic to and from the Baltic had to pass through the Sound. The two other Danish sea routes, the Great Belt and the Small Belt, were according to some historians far more difficult and dangerous to sail through, although there is ample proof that Dutch ships often sailed through the two Belts. In the early 15th century the Danish King Erik van Pommeren imposed a passage toll to all ships sailing through the Sound.

In Elsinor (Helsingor) from 1497 onwards the cargoes of the majority of these ships were registered, enabling the assessment of the taxes or tollage due. Of these levies the Danish toll officials kept records in registers. Until today these original records, around sixty meters of archives, are kept in the Danish National Archives in Copenhagen. At the Netherlands Economic Historical Archive (NEHA) in Amsterdam a copy on microfilm is available. The Danish registers are very extensive and complete: the information has been placed in chronological order per individual ship and the cargo has



## The Sound Toll Registers

been made much of. This tremendous amount of data — the toll was abolished only in 1857! — was revised by Danish historians at the beginning of the last century into the Sound Tables. Both sources provide a good picture of the trade traffic between the Baltic and the rest of Europe between 1500 and 1800.

The Dutch seafarers and traders of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries dominated the European trade with the Baltic as is shown by the Danish toll registers. Between 1610 and 1620, as many as 3400 Dutch ships sailed through the Sound to Dantzic, Riga,



Königsbergen and Reval (Tallinn). Also a century later, between 1721 and 1764 Dutch ship masters made by far the most passages through the Sound. And during this period Amsterdam remained the most important final destination of the Baltic shipping. The Baltic trade was a profit making, continuous business that was a solid economic base of the Republic of the United Provinces.

In the forties and eighties of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch trade in grain from the Baltic reached the impressive level of 70,000 last (1 last is equal to two tons). That was enough to feed 650,000 people. Quite understandably Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt called the Baltic trade “de moedernegotie” that is “the mother of all trade”. The reason for the intensive seagoing trade to “eastland” was the explosive population growth in the Republic and Western-Europe. The increased demand made the grain trade a good investment. Before the potato became the common staple food, grain was for centuries the most popular food product to make bread, beer and porridge. In the Baltic area grains like rye and barley were much cheaper than in the Republic. The soil was much

The Sound Toll Registers

better suited to arable farming and the cost of labour was low because the German, and later the Russian large landowners still practiced serfdom.

Baltic peoples and Poles are quite different from the Dutch: they are very conscious of their historical relationship with the rest of Europe. "Already at a young age pupils are taught about the historical ties of the "Homeland": the Christianization, the Holy Roman Empire and the trade relations with the Hanseatic League and Russia. The East—West connection is also very popular with historians nowadays. The subject is

being taught at school, but is also a point of interest in folklore, fairy tales, historical novels and traditions this history lives on", emphasizes the Latvian custodian Māra Sprudža.

In the Netherlands, however, there is little interest in the Baltic at schools or in (popular) literature. Surely, the Netherlands are certainly proud to be a seafaring nation. Its glorious trade and naval history can be traced in literature, school textbooks and in many a historical museum, but this has almost always been connected to the trade with "the East" or "the West" and therefore with the large trading companies V.O.C. (Dutch United East India Company) and the W.I.C. (Dutch West India Company) and hardly anything in connection with the Baltic trade.

More research is needed

Notwithstanding its profitability and the large amount of sources there has never been much interest in the Baltic connection in The Netherlands. According to maritime historian Ivonne Lucker this might have to do with the organizational structure. The V.O.C. was administered from a central office in the region: one in Batavia and one in Amsterdam, with easily accessible archives. The Baltic Sea trade, however, was in the hands of hundreds of private entrepreneurs and whoever wishes to research the Baltic trade has to search for the remainders of private sources. Think of notarial archives, seamen's exchanges (kind of insurance policies against piracy and accidents) and with a bit of luck ship's journals or similar material.

Year	Name	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3	Location 4
1716	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Peter Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Cornelis Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Peter Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Cornelis Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Peter Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Cornelis Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
1718	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Peter Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Cornelis Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Peter Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Cornelis Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Peter Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Cornelis Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam
	Jan Meester	Amsterdam	Rotterdam	Amsterdam	Amsterdam

Sound toll register

Beyond

In 1992, Hans van Koningsbrugge of the Groningen University made a real find when he discovered the Netherlands Sound Registers in the National Archives. In the archive of the States General, the highest political body in the Dutch Republic, he hit on transcripts dealing with the shipping traffic in the Sound during a large part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These transcripts belonged among others to commissioners, a type of ambassadors of the Republic. It was clear that the States took great care of serving the trading interests on this crucial waterway. Commissioner Arent van Deurs decided in 1742 to send simple lists of ships passing the Sound to the States General. In these he mentions the date, name and home port of the shipmaster and the origin, destination and cargo of the ship. These are much less data than in the Danish sources and therefore these Netherlands registers are easier to study.

### **“Moedernegotie”: Mother of all trade**

Researchers of the Institute for Maritime History and the University of Leyden have processed thirteen years of data from the NSR (available at [www.nationaalarchief.nl/sont](http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/sont)). This has made it possible to comb through almost 50,000 ships' voyages. Besides the Dutch and Danish toll registers we also have the Amsterdam “Galjootsgeld” registers (the administration in which all ships are recorded coming from the Baltic to Amsterdam from 1720 onwards), as well as the published chartering contracts and the notarial archives.

Very well known in the academic world are the recent books of Dr Milja van Tielhof “The Dutch grain trade 1470-1570” and “The Mother of all Trades”, in which she analyzes a large number of records and published sources on the history of the Netherlands and the Baltic trade. Very aptly she characterizes the Sound Tables in the latter book as the “bible of the Baltic historian”.

“The Baltic trade was important, but not spectacular. This is the reason why the story has remained so unknown” thinks Peter Rogaar, one of the present governors of the fund “Directie der Oostersche Handel en Reederijen” (Eastern Trade and Shipping Companies Board) in Amsterdam. The East India and West India companies' ships returned with exotic unknown products and fantastic stories from far away lands and produced gigantic profits. True, only a small group of entrepreneurs profited from it, but nobody can ignore the wealth. However, the owners and the investors of the Baltic fleet spread their risks. They were 1/16<sup>th</sup> or 1/32<sup>nd</sup> owners, representing a well-to-do middle class that lived nicely but did not catch the eye. So, as a result, in The Netherlands the centuries' long relationship with the Baltic region has not resulted in a visible inheritance.

However, we overlook one thing. Actually we do not have a clear picture of which sources have been preserved in the Baltic archives which are of value to us. Who knows, we could find more than tax ledgers? What is to be found in the archives of the town councils, the guilds, the trading houses and in the journal of the ships' owners, and — maybe — the clerics? What impression was left behind with the Livonian traders about their contacts? There are initiatives like “Baltic Connection” that aims at establishing an online-archive containing all sources concerning the economic relations between the Baltic and the Netherlands between 1450 and 1800.

If our political and economic future lies in Europe, then it is also worth strengthening the centuries' old relationship with the Baltic region and to remove existing prejudices. For that reason we have to go to the source. Riga, Tallinn and Gdansk have confirmed that we are very welcome.

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*Based on article in “Mare Balticum”*

## The Baltic Region in Dutch cartography

In 1532, the book printer **Jan Seuerszoon Cruipel vander Schellinc** published the first (as far as is known today) pilot's chart printed in Amsterdam covering the Baltic, under the title of “De Kaert vander Zee” (The Map of the Sea). The chart describes the sailing route from Spain and Portugal to the Baltic. In spite of its name it is not a chart, but a verbal guide with sailing directions. The period between 1550 and 1675 is considered a time when Dutch map publishing flourished. Maps were published elsewhere in Europe, but the quality of Dutch printing ensured them a leading position.

After Spain captured Antwerp in 1585, its time of prosperity was over. Instead the era of prosperity for the Northern Netherlands began. One of the results of the 80 Years' War was that Dutch trade with Portugal was blockaded. The Dutch began to plan starting up their own trade with the East Indies. One important part of this plan was to find a route via the Northeast Passage. These efforts did not, however, yield any results, but as a consequence the Dutch became increasingly interested in mapping the Scandinavian countries.

After the publication of the first pilot's chart in 1543, another study of the Baltic Sea was started. The printer Jan Jacobzoon published a work in Amsterdam in 1541, called “Dit is die Caerte vander zee: om Oost en(de) West te zeylen, en(de) is van die beste Pyloots, en(de) wt die ald(er) beste Caerte(n) ghecorrigeert, dieme(n) weet te vinden, ende elcke cust op tsijn gheset” (This is the map of the Sea to sail to the East and the West, of the best navigators, corrected according to the best maps which can be found, on which every coast is represented). Not much is known about this book, but it is interesting in the sense that Cornelis Anthonisz (about 1507–53) probably used it as one of his sources when he drew his “Caerte van Oostlant” in 1543, the oldest printed sea chart of the North Sea and the Baltic. The route along the southern Baltic coast extends, however, from Domesnäs to Pärnu (Pernau). The book shows that mariners dared to sail direct from Bornholm to Riga — it is said that it took two days to sail these 80 leagues, if the wind was favourable and the ship carried the necessary ballast.

The Dutch word “caert” meant two things in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: “pascaert” (a chart) and “leescaert” or “caerte van der zee” (route description). The latter were written by mates and pilots, who were by no means always artistically talented. But Cornelis

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Anthonisz certainly was an unusually versatile man-seafarer and cartographer, painter, draughtsman and engraver in both wood and copper. In the cartouche of his chart “Caerte van Oostlant” (Map of the East Land) he announces that, in the next few days, he is going to publish a booklet in which he will explain what is not apparent from the chart. In other words, he is going to publish sailing directions with illustrations as seamen saw things, i.e. profile sketches, “simulque figuris aliquot designabuntur regiones, quemamodum sese navigantibus offerant”.

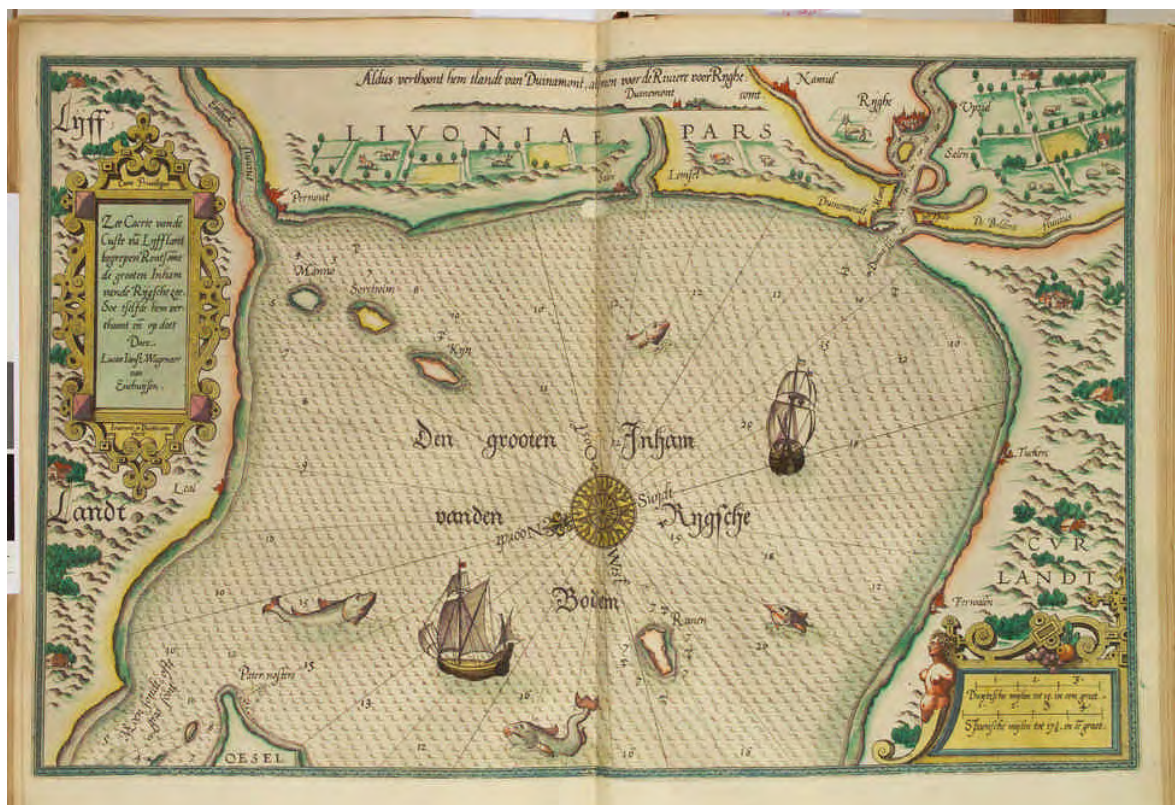


“Caerte van Oostlant” (Map of East Land), by Cornelis Anthonisz, the oldest printed sea chart of the North Sea and the Baltic, dating from 1543

Of the first edition, probably published in 1544, or the second published in 1551, there is not a single copy left. But the third edition, published in Amsterdam in 1558, has been preserved. It consists of two parts of which the second part was called: “Hier beghint die Caerte van die Oosterse See ende hoe hem die landen wter See opdoen ende oock die coertsen ende streckinghe vander See vanden eenen hauen tot den anderen neerstelich ghecorreigeert ende verbeteret Anno M.CCCCC.LVI11” (Here starts the map of the Eastern Sea, how to sail to the countries around the sea, including navigation routes, currents and harbours, corrected 1558). Anthonisz’s chart was very important, especially for Baltic mariners. The first part of the 1558 edition contains a textbook on navigation, for mates, but it also states that other than Dutch verbal directions

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(leeskaarten) have hitherto only dealt with western waters. “Because we Dutch and Zealanders have not described the seaways of the North Sea and the Baltic as we should have done, many human lives have been lost.” In the second part Anthonisz therefore concentrates on describing the Baltic. Differing from the charts of 1532 and 1541, which were not illustrated, “Die Caerte van die Oosterse See” contains numerous woodcuts by Anthonisz. To maximize the benefit of these coastal profiles for the reader, the charts of 1558 were broad octavo size; other directions are in small octavo.



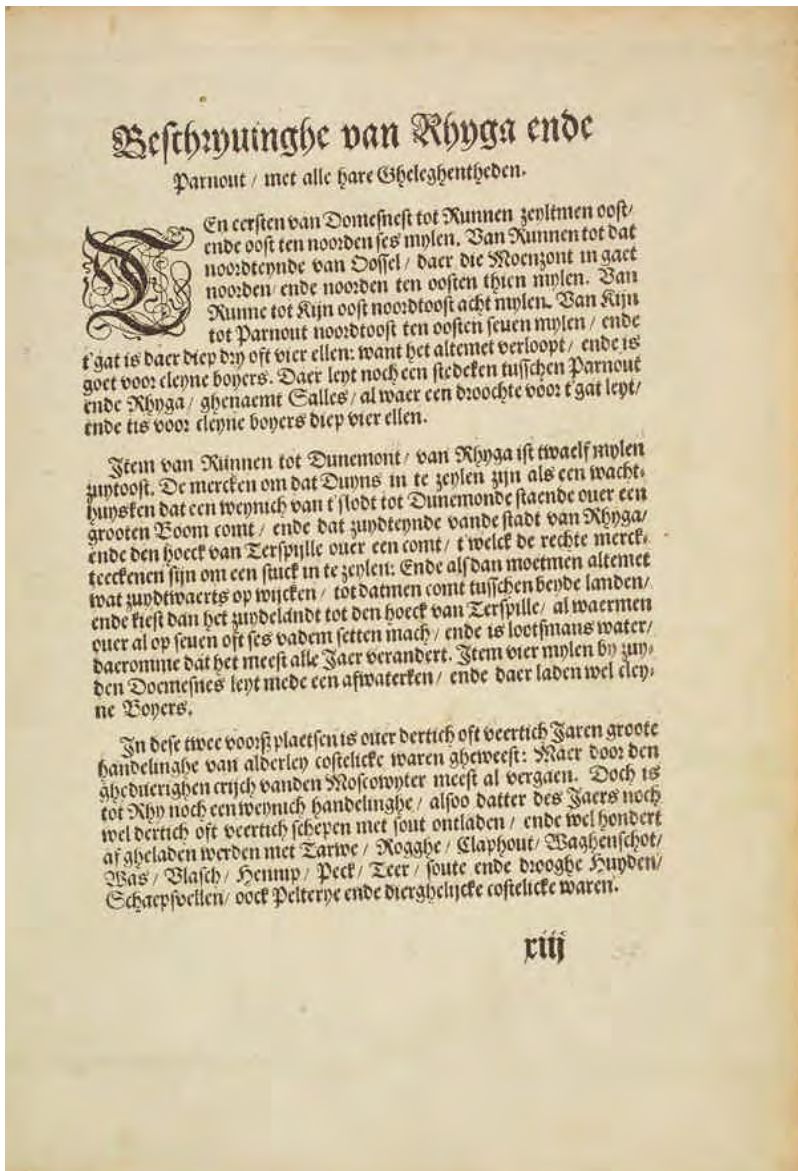
Map of Bay of Riga by Lucas Waghenaer, dating from 1584/1585

Still, more popularity was won by “Het Leeskaartboek van Wisby” (Route description of Wisby), printed by Jan Roelants in Antwerp and sold by Hendrick Albertsz in Amsterdam. Several editions of it appeared in Dutch and Low German, and it was translated into English in 1587. “Het Leeskaartboek van Wisby” acquired its name because it contains a chapter on Visby’s maritime law, which has in fact nothing to do with Visby, but is a compilation of Dutch and western Hanse decrees in maritime law, partly taken from a Flemish 13<sup>th</sup> century translation of “R les d’Ol ron”. The name is only a reminder of the time when Visby was the authority on maritime law, “dat hogh-este Waterrecht”, before L beck’s rise to the domination of the Baltic.

All educated people in the 16<sup>th</sup> century devoured books about voyages of discovery, but at the same time they wanted more precise information. Cornelis Anthonisz had realized how many mariners lost their lives because they did not have sufficient information about the dangerous shallows and shoals of the North Sea and the Baltic. His work had, however, to be revised, and the City Council of Amsterdam gave the task to Aelbert Haeyen, who had sailed a great deal in those waters. In 1585 his work

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“Amstelredamsche Zee-Caerten” (Amsterdam Sea Charts), about the coast of the North Sea, was printed. A couple of years ago, G nter Schilder found a thin manuscript entitled “Recveil et ovtraict davlevnes villes maritimes et plvs memorables ports et levrs advenves et marcqves servantes a la navigation en la mer ocean ” at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. The 24 charts drawn in pen-and-ink give a unique image of the coast, starting from Reval and running to the mouth of the River Charente and the Žle d’Ol ron. Eight of these charts cover the coast in its entirety from Reval to L beck, and



Book (will be add info)

the ninth gives a panorama view (scale 1:640 000) from the Sound partly in the direction of L beck and partly to the point of Skagen. The coast is presented from a bird’s-eye view, with insets of profiles of cities. The lesser islands are also shown in profile. The drawings give the impression that the draughtsman has wished to present the coasts as viewed from the crow’s nest of a ship.

Schilder believes that the Madrid manuscript was made around 1586 by Aelbert Haeyen. No-one else drew lines of bearings on his charts as he did. The fact that Haeyen’s charts have never been printed is probably because Lucas Waghenauer from

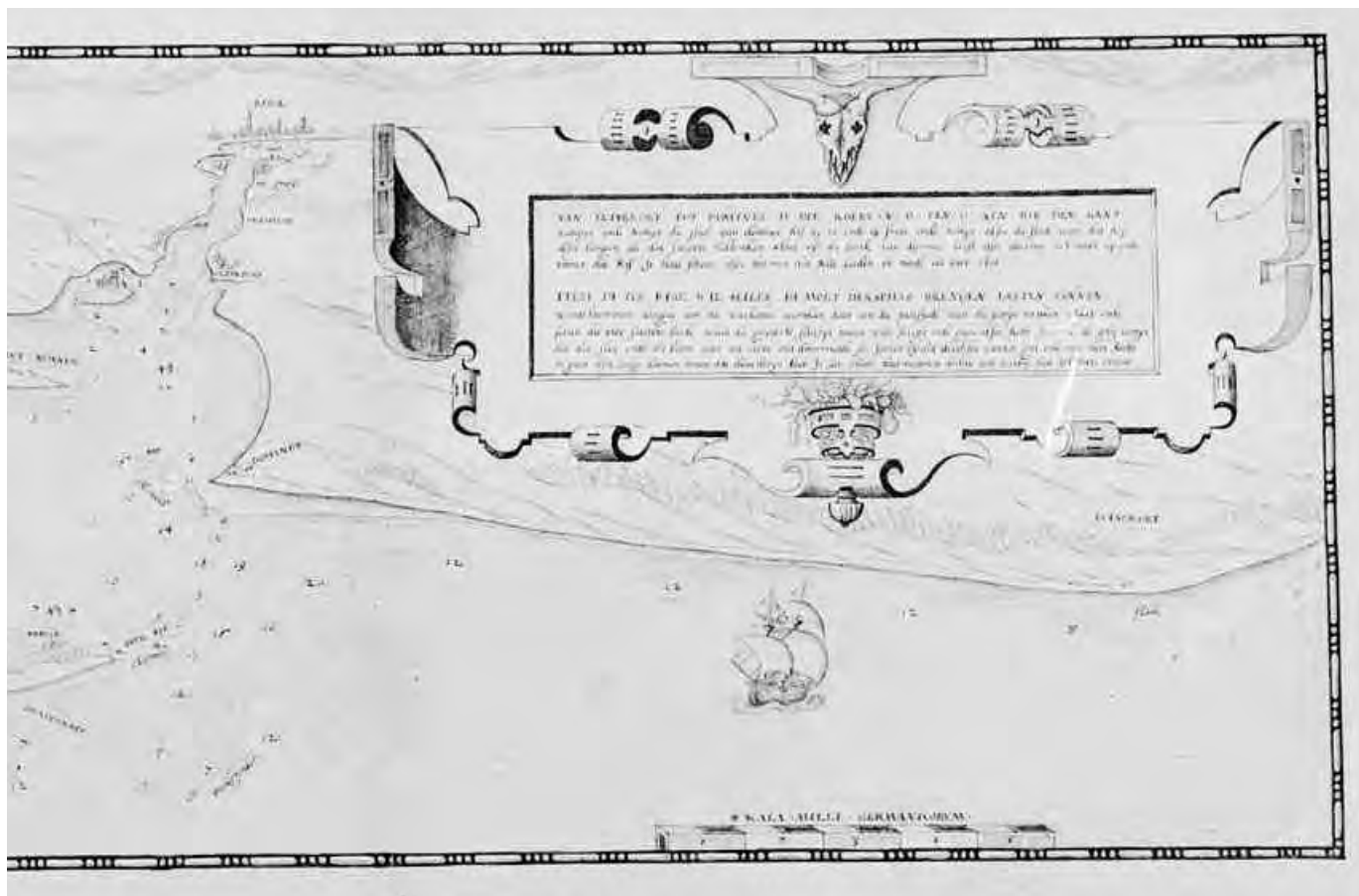


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Beyond

## The Baltic Region in Dutch cartography

Enkhuizen had just published the first maritime atlas in the world, “Spiegel der Zeevaerdt” (Mirror of Navigation), in 1584–85. The Amsterdam City Council was of the opinion that this publication drove Haeyen’s manuscript out of the market. Haeyen’s drawings, especially of the southern and eastern coasts of the Baltic, are however; definitely better than those in Waghenauer’s work. Haeyen broke with old traditions and let the picture speak of details that had previously only been described in words.



A chart showing the bay of Riga from the *Amstelredamsche Zee-Caerten* (Amsterdam Sea Maps) by Aelbert Haeyen, dating from 1585.

“Spiegel der Zeevaerdt” by Lucas Waghenauer, which appeared 1584–85, was a beautiful work in the same size and similar layout as Ortelius’s atlas. Van Deutecum had engraved all the 46 charts, except for five. These covered the shores all the way from Gibraltar to Norway. The second part of “Spiegel der Zeevaerdt” contains “Noordtsche ende Oostersche Schipvaert” (Northern and Eastern Shipping). Its 22 charts were printed in 1585, but many of them are dated 1583. Of the 22 charts, which are drawn to a scale of about 1:390 000, five sheets cover Norway—Sweden, seven the rest of the Baltic, one the Sound and two Jutland. The atlas was, however, rather a work for connoisseurs, and not of much value to the ordinary mariner, who probably hardly understood the charts, while the sailing directions would have been too brief for him. In addition, the folio size was too big and the price too high. But there were sufficient collectors who wanted to acquire Waghenauer’s work, for in 1592 it was published



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in five languages: Dutch, Latin, English, German and French. In England it gained such popularity that the word “waggoner” became a synonym for a marine atlas.

Waghenaer also wanted to publish something closer to practical needs. François van Raphelengien published the new marine atlas by Waghenaer, called “Thresoor der Zeevaart” (Treasure of Navigation) in 1592. This book is made in a long, broad size, and contains detailed sailing directions; thus it was more suited for the use of sailors. Waghenaer had also included facts from the latest route descriptions, and he gave more information about northern waters and the Baltic. For instance, he describes in his text possible access to the Northeast Passage, and gives a new chart of the White Sea and Novaya Zemlya based on the voyage made by Oliver Brunel in 1584. One important detail that he borrowed from Aelbert Haeyen’s chart, “Amstelredamsche Zee-caerten” (1585), is the drawing of bearing-lines to the approaches of harbours. But he had given up the idea of showing coastline sketches on the same sheet as the chart.

“Thresoor der Zeevaart” contains only 22 charts on a scale of approximately 1:600,000, because several of the charts taken from the “Spiegel” were combined into one sheet. Although Waghenaer should have been content with his new book, he published one more in 1598, this time a sea chart book of the old, familiar tradition: “Enchuyser Zee-caert-boeck” (Enkhuizen Book of Sea Charts), printed by Cornelis Claesz, who was also responsible for the second Latin edition of the “Thresoor”. Claesz had looked after Waghenaer’s heritage, and in 1603 he published “Den groten dobbelten nieuwe Spiegel der Zee-vaert” (The great double new Mirror of Navigation). In the same year (1608), when he published the last version of the Thresoor, a similar manual for sailors appeared: “Het Licht der Zee-vaert” (The Light of Navigation), written by Willem Blaeu. This contained 41 charts in the same size as Waghenaer’s, but his charts would give the latest information and would be on a bigger scale than Waghenaer’s. The constant appearance of reprints and translations into English (1612) and French (1619), show how greatly Blaeu’s work was valued.



Dutch ships in the Sound, by Gerard van Keulen

# II The Maritime Connections

1550  
-1810

Joost Schokkenbroek,  
*Curator, National Maritime Museum, Amsterdam*

## Protection of Dutch Shipping Interests

In 1689, three merchants and three ship owners, all with their dwellings and businesses in Amsterdam, came together to establish the “Directie der Oostersche Handel en Reederijen” (Executive Board of Trade and Shipping with the Baltic — OHR). In their eyes the Baltic trade, of crucial importance to Holland and the other provinces of the Dutch Republic, deserved to be better protected against offensive actions of local belligerent parties (notably the Danes and the Swedes).

### Opportunism



Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch men-of-war and Dutch naval heroes have been involved in these wars over the supremacy of the Baltic and its rich, fertile hinterland. The States General repeatedly displayed a very keen sense for opportunism while choosing their ally. In most cases Denmark received naval support in its struggle against Sweden. Being the weaker of the two belligerent parties, Denmark in the case of a joint victory had to abide by some, if not all of the demands put to the fore by the Dutch. Not surprisingly, on these occasions tax rates, levied by the Danish King at the entrance of the Sound, were discussed. Dutch military support to Denmark fairly often resulted in either a reduction or even a complete abandonment of import and export duties.

### Admiralties

At the time — until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century — naval power was de-centralized. Five admiralties, divided over the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen combined, Middelburg and Harlingen, were responsible for the construction, fitting out and manning of their men-of-war. These ships — very expensive floating economic entities — were mostly, but not solely employed for warfare. Protection of the huge merchant marine sailing under Dutch flag — next to the whaling ships destined for Greenland, Dutch East and West Indiamen, and herring boats involved in the very substantial herring fishery — was another important task these admiralties were supposed to perform. During the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, claims on protection by

## Protection of Dutch Shipping Interests

warships increased. The labour force, however, was limited in the relatively small Dutch Republic. Not all commercial maritime industries could be protected equally extensively.

### Directie der Oostersche Handel en Reederijen: past and present

In order to promote and secure their interests Amsterdam-based merchants, shipping agents and ship owners involved in the Baltic trade united. In 1689, these many hundreds if not thousands of entrepreneurs appointed representatives. This Executive Board, which went by the name of Directie der Oostersche Handel en Reederijen (OHR) received the mandate to demand from the States General and the



Sea battle in the Sound (8 November 1658)

admiralty of Amsterdam that they should provide sufficient means to safeguard shipping to and from the Baltic region. In times of war, the OHR, in order to inform the merchant fleet about a potential menace, sent out galliots. Between 1709 and 1826, the OHR annually levied so-called “galjootsgeld” on ships returning to Amsterdam from the Baltic. This way they procured financing for the fitting out and taking into service of these small and fast sailing vessels.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the OHR adapted its policy to new circumstances. Instead of petitioning for the protection of merchantmen, smoothing of trade regulations abroad and supervision over the local Baltic exchange had become its two highest priorities.

Nowadays, there is no need to protect Dutch merchant vessels on their way to and from the Baltic area. The OHR, on the other hand, is still very much alive and relentlessly active, as it wholeheartedly supports numerous projects related to the exposure, and subsequent expansion, of knowledge concerning past and present contacts between the Netherlands and the vast area where many centuries ago its “mother of all trades” had been conceived, matured and sustained through the ages — the Baltic!

# II The Maritime Connections

1550  
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*Summary based on the article "Zeilen naar de Oostzee" by  
Henk Dessens  
from the book "Goud uit Graan"*

## Sailing to the Baltic Sea

### **Because of the unusual shape of their hulls, Dutch sailing ships were often the subject of mockery**

by foreigners. The English had nicknamed them "Dutch butter boxes" and an old low-German proverb said: "Kuffen un Smakken s nd Waterbakken. Prunkers op de Ree, un Dwarsdrivers op See," thereby referring to the fact that under conditions of wind and waves the Dutch Koff and Smack would drift slanting and sideways instead of moving forwards.

Foreign criticism set aside, the Dutch ships proved their worth for more than three centuries and were in high demand with both the Dutch and, for example, the Swedish and German ship-owners. The Dutch shipbuilders apparently had reached a compromise between maximum cargo capacity, shallow draught and acceptable speed. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, most of the ships sailing to the Baltic Sea were Flutes and Cats. From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, the Dutch ship owners increasingly opted for smaller type vessels such as the Smack, the Galliot and the Koff.

### **Small ships for transporting big cargoes**

After 1630, the Dutch shipbuilding industry slowed down almost to a standstill. From that time on, the leaping developments as seen in the previous two centuries no longer occurred. Specialist historians are of the opinion that as of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century standardisation and cost reduction took precedence over innovation. Contrary to France, England and Sweden, where the concept of shipbuilding made immense progress, shipbuilders in the Netherlands stuck to their traditional building methods.

The models were primarily chosen due to the nature of the cargo, which consisted mostly of bulky mass products. Because bulk transportation was based on cheap freight rates, it was not profitable to give the underwater hull a more pronounced V-shape and sacrifice cargo capacity for speed. The actual sailing time was relatively short because the ships spent a lot of time in ports. The loading and unloading, moving the vessel, provisioning and making repairs to the ship were all time consuming activities which could keep a vessel in port for weeks at a time. A great amount of time could also be lost when

## Sailing to the Baltic Sea

ships could not enter a harbour, or sail out to sea because of unfavourable winds or when the ports along the Zuyder Zee had to contend with low water levels caused by the unrelenting offshore winds.

Considering the fact that ships were immobile for a relatively long time, it was far more profitable to maintain a high cargo capacity and to carry as much cargo as possible on each voyage. Evidently, the cargo capacity had been adapted to the size of the parcels offered on the freight market. The long travelling times had little impact on the

operating costs, which were also favourably influenced by the small crews of less than 10 men, needed on the Dutch coasters.

A second factor that influenced the design of Dutch ships were the sail-



Dutch ship models

ing grounds. The Dutch harbours and coastal waters were shallow, as was the case for many of the ports of destination, such as the shallow lagoon coast of northern Germany and the often small harbours in Finland.

Ships sailing the North Sea and the Baltic Sea were constantly close to coasts, which could suddenly become dangerous lee shores when the winds turned and gathered strength. Even the small coasting vessels that sailed through Schleswig–Holstein via the Wad and the channel, occasionally had to leave the coast in order to cross estuaries during which time they risked being caught in bad weather. Therefore, the Dutch shipbuilders had to find a solution to a problem that could only be solved with difficulty in the case of sailing ships and that could only result in a compromise. In order to tack into the wind, a seagoing vessel had to have a considerable draught. However, the shallow Dutch tidal waters and tidal harbours, which also often ran dry during low tide, and the shallow lagoons along the Baltic Sea often made a draught of more than two to three metres very impractical. No matter how creative the solution of the shipbuilders or how experienced the Dutch sailor, for many a century the safe return of a ship strongly depended on a great deal of luck, which meant that one had to be fortunate enough not

## Sailing to the Baltic Sea

to be caught in a storm or run aground unexpectedly. As long as accidents like that did not occur too often, the ship owners did not get into low water either and the Dutch “butter boxes” constituted a rational choice.

### Different ship types

As far as the Baltic merchantmen were concerned, the Flutes were positioned at one end of the scale, the Galliot and Koffs somewhere in the middle, and the Smacks and Sailing Barges (Tjalks) at the other end. The latter two were in fact river vessels, which, with an experienced skipper at the helm, some extra cladding over the hatches on the hold and a fair amount of luck weather-wise, could offer the owner years of profitable operation and a safe return home.

### The flute

Developed at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Flute became the most important Dutch type of ship for European trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Its overly familiar story tells about the narrow deck which, until 1669, offered an advantage when it came to paying Sound toll. The merchantmen sailing to the Baltic Sea were “Oostervaerders Fluiten die vaak om’t Oosten koorn Haalden” (East-bound Merchantmen: Flutes that transported grain from the East) and “Noorts-vaerders” (North-bound Merchantmen).

Nobody really knows how efficient the Flute was as a sailing ship and more precisely how much headwind and sea swell affected her performance. For the moment we can, however, safely assume that the Flute did not perform well under the stress of headwinds and high sea swells and that she rarely had to beat up against the wind in narrow tidal inlets, except perhaps when the tide was favourable and the ship was making good progress with the current.

### The cat

The Cat was a very basic sailing vessel with dimensions similar to the Flute. Notary documents dating from around 1700 and relating to North-Holland, often refer to Cats, although Flutes are referred to ten times more frequently. The Cat was especially suitable for transporting timber, which required a lot of cargo space and filled the entire hold.

### Small and middle sized coasting vessels

“Because they have to cross seas, rivers and waters that run dry”, is how Witsen described the reason for being of small coasters such as the Boyers and the Galliot in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Even in Witsen’s time, small coasters were used as ferries, often for the transport of mixed cargo. As of the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a notable shift in types of ships took place, from large Flutes and Cats to smaller types such as the Galliot, the Koff and the Smack.

The reason for the shift towards smaller ships is not clear. But assuming that a ship-owner always adapts the size of his ship to the cargo parcels on offer, then the introduction of smaller ships might indicate a change in the transport market. The total duration of a voyage to the Baltic region was for a major part determined by the time needed to reach the North Sea, or to enter the harbour from the sea. Headwinds could prevent ships from sailing for days or even weeks. A smaller ship was much easier to manoeuvre in the channels between the sandbanks.

Where the skipper of a large Flute would have remained at anchor for perhaps a week due to a headwind, his colleague on a Galliot would have reached the open sea on

## Sailing to the Baltic Sea

the ebb tide. Over a longer period this would have resulted in a larger number of voyages per year. But whether these were the actual reasons for opting for smaller units, we do not know. The fact is that these smaller types of ships persisted far into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that this, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, went hand in hand with the arrival of captain/owners, most of whom had their domicile in Groningen.

### The galliot

Around the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century the designation “Galliot” was probably used as a collective term for small coastal vessels in various shapes. The general endeavour for faster sailing ships which occurred around 1850 brought about a considerable change in the shape of the Galliot. The extent of the change was such that the most recently built Galliotics should in fact be considered a new type of ship. As had been the case in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the designation again became a collective term for different types of small ships.

### The smack

Most of the cargo brought in from overseas was destined for transit inland. In a country with as much inland water as the Netherlands, the shipper would have been extremely tempted by a ship owner’s offer to take the cargo to the place of destination without transshipment.

The Smack made its debut in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and became the coastal vessel par excellence of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to its reduced size and flat bottom which enabled it to penetrate deep into the country. However, this type of ship was quite vulnerable when caught in a storm in the vicinity of a lee shore. Nevertheless, the number of wrecked ships was still lower than the number of ships bringing their voyages to a good end.

### The Koff

The Koff with its square shape was also a typical ship in the category of Dutch flat bottomed coasters. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Koff’s dimensions were similar to those of the Smack, but its square shape was more pronounced. By 1850, one third of the Dutch merchant fleet consisted of Koffs. The Koff disappeared after 1870 when iron construction made it possible to build ships that were lighter and easier to construct and that offered an almost equal cargo capacity. The Koff was succeeded by iron and steel Koff Tjalks which were leaving the slipway in the province of Groningen up to the First World War. Other more modern ships that were introduced after 1850 were the Schooner and the Brig.

Until 1920, the Dutch skippers sailed to the Baltic Sea in Koff Tjalks, Sea Tjalks and other river vessels that had been adapted for the “Wad and Sound trade”, but by then the long era of “Sailing to the Baltic Sea” eventually came to an end with the introduction of the diesel engine and the motor coaster.



Dutch ship decoration found on the coast of Latvia

# II The Maritime Connections

1550  
-1810

**Elita Grosmane,**

*Director of the Art History Institute at the Latvian Art Academy*

## Ventspils Building Shipyard

**In the 17th century, ships had become great symbols of the power** of kings and rulers of different countries. At the time, much importance was attached to decorative wood carvings, ornamentation, painting and sails that had to be as magnificent as possible. Beautiful sceneries with the sea and ships drew the attention of painters and a new specific painting genre was created — marine, which reached its highest flourishing peak in the art of the newly created Republic of the Netherlands, because the ship represented the boom in the economy and commerce for the new state.

Shipping in the Netherlands had a long history. Their ships were less pompous, more convenient and possessed faster speed unlike the ships of other 17<sup>th</sup> century states. Already in 1595, the “fluyt” (flute) was designed for this reason. Being adequate for the growing interests of merchants, it could manage four voyages instead of two from Holland to the Baltic in one year’s time (see for more details the article by Dessens).

### **Courland and Duke Jacob**

The Courland coast was situated in a geographically more suitable position than Riga. In Courland, ship building started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Duchy of Courland and Semigallia (Kurzeme and Zemgale) was established in 1561/1562, after the crumbling of the Order of Livonia in the southwest of Latvia. It already existed as a dependent state under Sigismund the Second August, King of Poland and Lithuania. Its relative independence encouraged the economic development, especially during the rule of Duke Jacob (1642–1682) of the Kettler family.

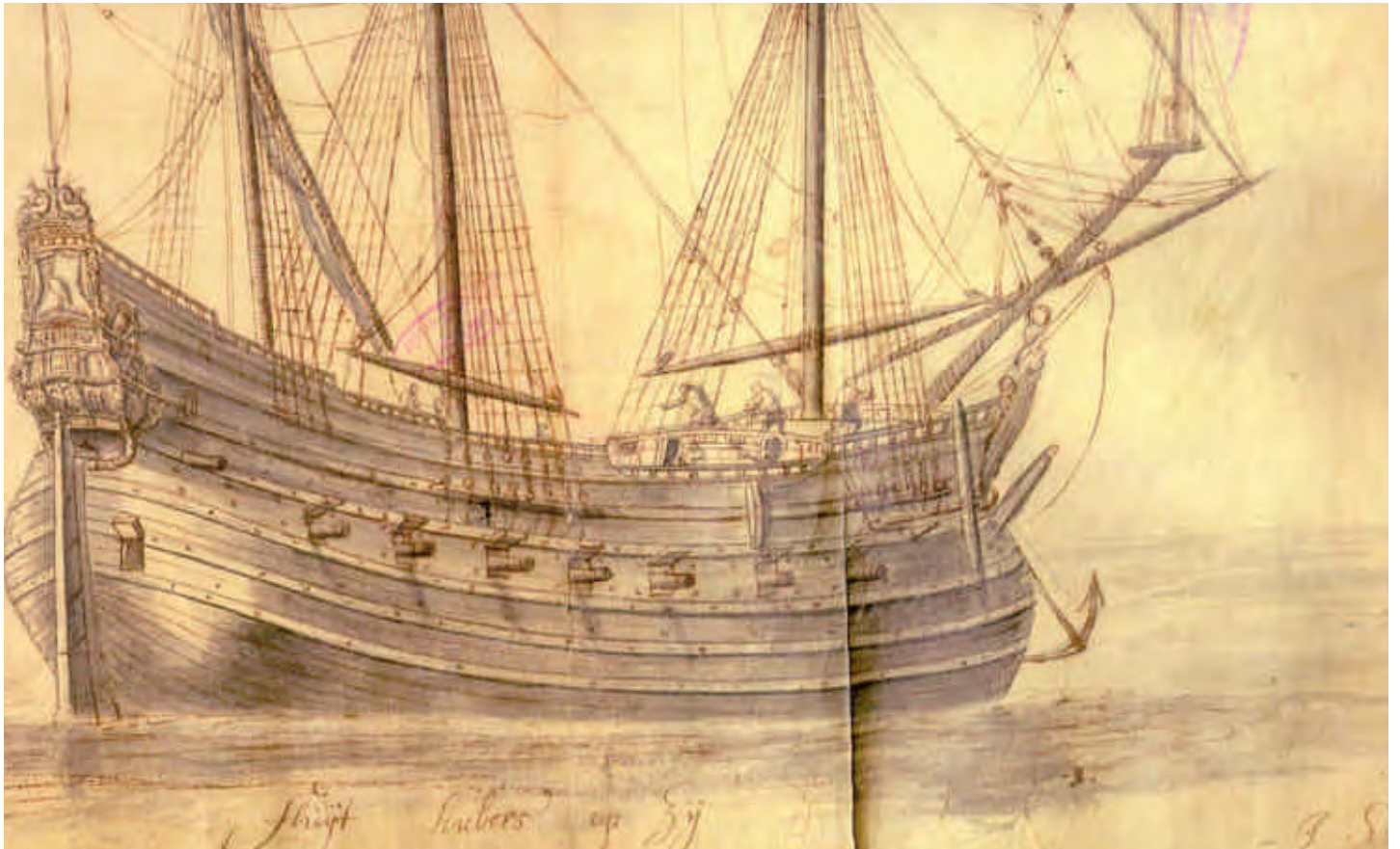
Jacob has marked himself in history books as a powerful lord, who stood out for his development and implementation of mercantile politics. Being stern and of a practical nature, Jacob tried to put the economic life in order and to reanimate domestic and foreign trade. Alongside establishments of an industrial character, manufactories, such as weaving-mills for tapestry and brocade, were created. The art world improved as well, many painters, sculptors, builders and other masters of art came to the duchy, which made life more colourful and joyful there. Although Jacob was not a sophisticated art lover dedicated to the development of the traditions of local culture, one of his



## Building Ventspils Shipyard

responsibilities included keeping up with the current trends of the baroque period and sustaining them. Houses of the Duke and landlords were gradually filled with artwork. Striving for luxury and external splendour touched almost every facet of life, including ship building, which became of vital interest to him.

Before becoming a Duke Jacob, who was chosen by the childless Duke Friedrich as his successor because Jacob was the son of his brother, who had fallen into disgrace and gone into exile, dreamt about creating a fleet in order to support the might of the



Ship drawing, from archive of Duke Jacob

Duchy. Already in 1633, the Duke to-be had obtained several regions in Courland to establish a shipyard. He chose the oldest city on the west coast of Latvia, Ventspils, to fulfil his plan. The choice was successful in the context of the political and economic development of Europe during those times and helped because the demand for agricultural products was growing.

This emergence of the Duchy coincided with the gaining of independence by the northern part of the Netherlands. The names of Dutch merchants appeared in Riga and also in Jelgava. Holland as a small state by the sea served as an inspiring example. The great number of Dutch books in the library of the Duke serves as evidence for this. For example, in the description of the library in 1656, one can find “Hollandsche rechten, Zee Rechten, Herstelde Zee, of discours wat in den Nederlanden gepasseert is int Jahr 1650 et 51” and others.

## Building Ventspils Shipyard

### Ventspils shipyard

Although one has to conclude that there are no concrete or comprehensive documents about the link between Holland and the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia in the field of ship building, there is no doubt that during the rule of Duke Jacob they were of great importance, especially in the period of creating the shipyard and its early operation. It is impossible to name a precise year when the Ventspils shipyard was established. It is known that in 1638, Dutch masters were invited to Courland to train the



Ventspils harbour in Duchy of Courland

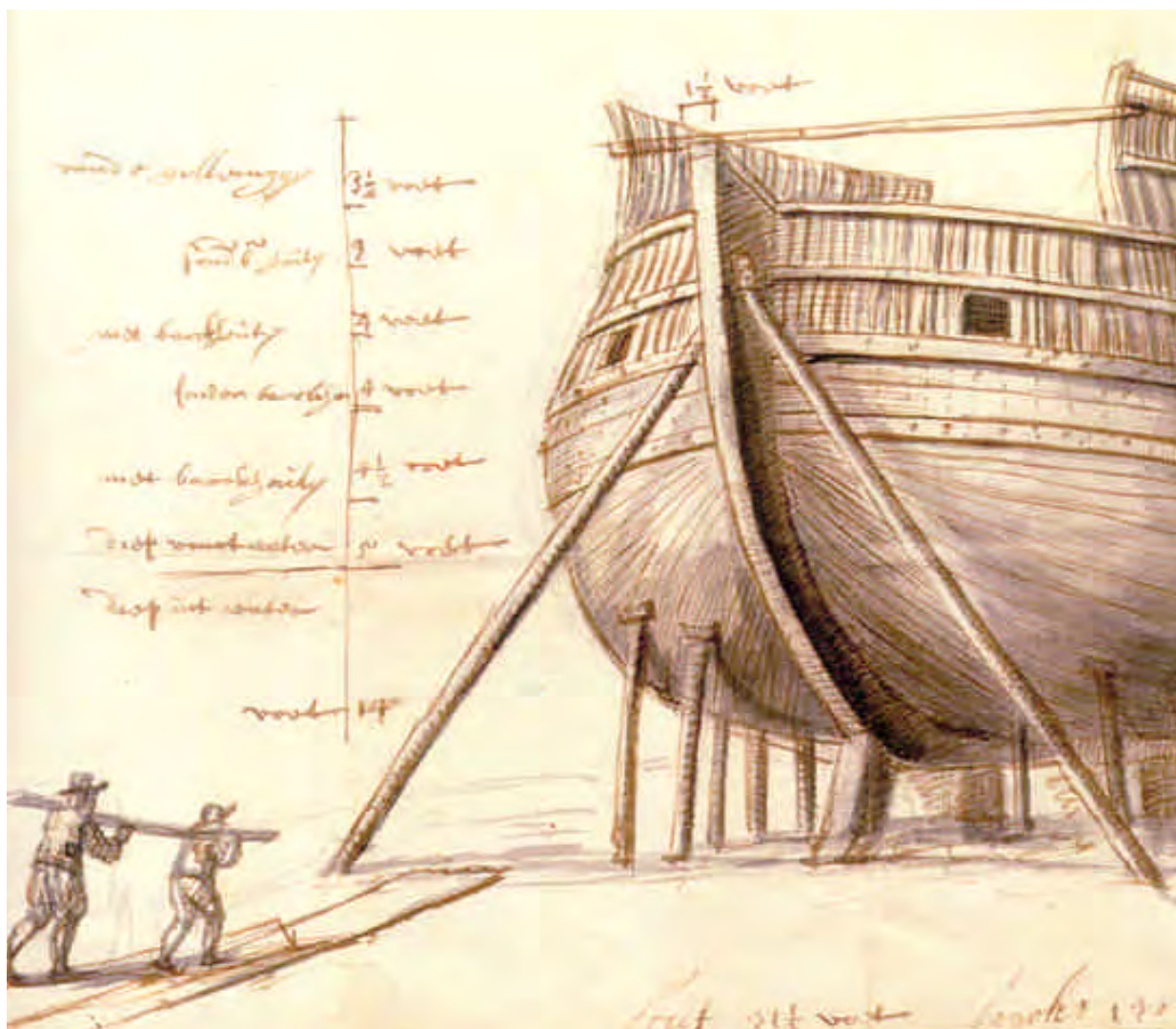
workers and manage the work. After one year the first ship was built and in 1641 it sailed through the Sound. Because foreign masters were paid higher salaries and demanded privileges or could easily leave after the expiration of their contracts, the Duke issued an order that local citizens must be trained to replace them.

As can be seen in a topographic plan, which has been created during the invasion of the Swedish army and may be attributed to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, from the Stockholm Royal War Archive, a shipyard settlement was located on the banks of the river Venta beyond the city and was surrounded by a high fence. Inside there were not only the workshops, but also the houses in which craftsmen lived. In the very centre stands a large carcass of a ship, the symbol of the function of this place. The picture is supplemented by descriptions of a real estate inventory, the largest house "built with a red roof", belonged to the chief building master, but the rest (altogether 28) belonged to the administration and craftsmen: anchor smith, carpenter, clerk etc. During the most active years approximately 100 craftsmen were employed: masters, clerks, apprentices and carpenters. During the rule of Duke Jacob, altogether 44 war ships and 79 trade ships were built there. They were used both for the creation of the local fleet and for sale to foreign countries, including England, France, and Venice. The Duke's agent in Holland in 1659 was Heinrich Momber.

## Building Ventspils Shipyard

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a ship had to be not only fast and durable, but it also had to possess a certain standard of individual beauty, which was closely related to the name of the ship, for instance, “Das Wappen von Curland”, “Prinzessin”, “Temperantia”, “Pax”, “Crocodil”, “Die Dame”, “Der Cavallier”. Therefore, there was a house with a shingled roof and a number of rooms for the Duke’s sculptor in the shipyard. It is indicated by the philologists that the last name of master Nicolas Söffrens the Elder (Nicolaus Söffrens der Ältere) and his son Nicolas Söffrens, the Younger (Nicolaus Söffrens der Jüngere) sounded Dutch. However, there is no evidence about their origins and the place of immigration, there is only the assumption that it might have been Prussian Holland.

All ships built in Ventspils have sunk in foreign waters. Only from reports of the administration of the Duke one can find that “it is necessary to nail a sea-horse to the plane of the stern” or that the new ship is ready so that one has to “measure the area where a portrait of the Duchess should be on the order of His Highness”. Therefore, the wood carver is asking for a sketch of the “manner” of the costume or to send “a painted portrait of the merciful Duchess in order to get the likeness of the face”. Although there were certain regulations, it depended on the skills and fantasy of the sculptor, how beautiful, luxurious and impressive the new ship would be. The massive hull of the ship was



Ship drawing, from archive of Duke Jacob

covered with plaster decors — balconies, balustrades, allegorical figures, heraldic compositions and ornaments — the ship became an impressive work of art.

The only visual evidence about the ships of Ventspils shipyard is a collection of drawings from the archive of Duke Jacob. The majority of ships are depicted with decorative wood-carvings, which evidently had to inspire both the clients and the creators. Commentaries under the pictures, which are written in Dutch, explain what kind of ship is depicted — frigate, yacht, fluyt — or state that the pictures are not to be considered as autonomous artworks but are classified as work sketches. They were executed in the grisaille technique. In the margins of the pages, the scale is shown as well. All the pictures had been done by one author. His signature can be found on one of the pages “Joh. Streck”, but on others are only the initials “J. S.” Two drawings show ships’ hulls without any decorations.

The rest of the pictures show completely finished ships with sails and woodcarvings. Apparently they were made for the requirements of the craftsmen of Ventspils shipyard.

Other evidence of the Dutch partaking in the establishment of the Ventspils shipyard is a sample sheet, printed in Amsterdam by J. H. Visscher in 1653, which contains instructions in the field of ship building. The sheet also had been added to the collection of drawings.

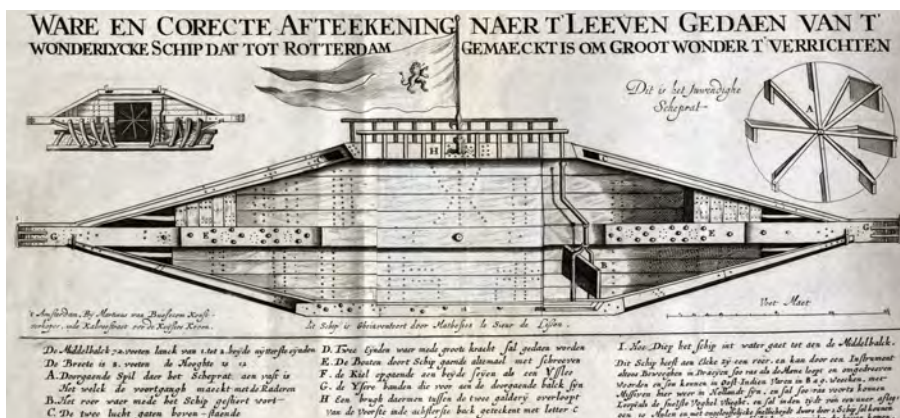
## An Experimental Ship

When, in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Duke of Courland decided to build his own fleet for his maritime and colonial adventures, he invited Dutch shipbuilders and ship designers to assist in this enterprise. As a result, he collected many ship’s drawings and designs of Dutch shipbuilders, which are now kept in the State Historical Archives of Latvia, and which are described in more detail elsewhere in this book. Among these there are some drawings which attract special attention, as they depict a very strange-looking ship, unlike any other design of those times.

It looks like a prototype submarine, driven by a wheel, with a text in Dutch saying “True and correct drawing of a miraculous ship built in Rotterdam to perform a great miracle. This ship is invented by the mathematician Mr de Lisson”. After describing the dimensions, features, and capabilities of the ship, the author boasts that “it

can sail to the East Indies in 8 to 9 weeks, and can sail as fast as the fastest bird. It can cover a distance of 10 miles in one hour, and can pierce itself through a ship with incredible speed. It

prototype submarine? No, research has shown that it was a prototype paddle-boat, which is described in detail in the book “De Nederlandse Scheepsbouw-konst open gestelt” (The Dutch Art of Shipbuilding explained), written in 1697 by the Dutch ship’s carpenter Cornelis van Yk. In one chapter, he describes ships which are driven by



Pictures with description of prototype paddle-boat, designed by French/Dutch engineer Van Son or De Lisson, from archive of Duke Jacob

can furthermore destroy whales which come to the surface.” What was this strange ship, to which these miraculous capabilities are ascribed? Was it really a

wheels, including a vessel built in Rotterdam in 1653, and nicknamed “Het Malle Schip” (The Funny Ship). The genius behind the design of this ship was a

## An Experimental Ship

certain Mr. van Son, a famous mathematician from France who worked in the Netherlands. De Lisson was apparently his original French name, shortened to the Dutch-sounding "Van Son". In the words of Van Yk: "At his own expense, he had built a vessel in Rotterdam in 1653, which can hardly be called a ship, 72 feet long (approximately 22 metres), 12 feet high, and 8 feet wide. On each side it was equipped with a rudder, and on the inside with a wheel which could be wound up and propel the vessel for up to 8 hours. Without sails, it could be driven with such a speed over the water surface that it could depart from Rotterdam in the morning, arrive for lunch in Dieppe in

France in the afternoon, and return in the evening to the same place from where it had departed." When he had made sufficient progress with the construction of the vessel, Van Son informed the Dutch authorities that he wanted to give a public demonstration on the Maas in Rotterdam, for which advertisements were put in the newspapers. "Thousands of people flocked to Rotterdam from all sides on the appointed day. But the day before, he informed the authorities by letter that the vessel wouldn't be ready on the appointed day, as he lacked something for the construction for which he was still looking. After having found this missing part, he would fix another day

and inform the authorities. Upon this, all people returned home fruitlessly, their hopes being destroyed. Since that time, Mr. van Son went into hiding, while the vessel was demolished at the same place where it was built, without ever having been launched. Hence one Dutch poet wrote the following poem on the author:

*Son woud onsterflijk sijn, naast aan Erasmus leven,  
Hy heeft ook wel verdiend, dat hem meed' werd gegeven,  
Een Pronkbeeld van Metaal, op dat altijd de Maas  
Gedenk dien wysen Man, en ook dees grooten dw aas.*

*(Son wanted to be immortal, live on like Erasmus,  
He deserved what he was given  
A statue of metal, so that the Meuse would always  
Remember this wise man, and also this great fool.)*



So, after his failed public demonstration in Rotterdam, he disappeared. Is it possible that he went to Latvia afterwards, to arouse the interest in his invention of the Duke of Courland with his maritime ambitions? It is very possible, but we don't know for sure, as apart from his drawings in the archives of the Duke of Courland, no mention is made in historical records of a Van Son or De Lisson in the employment of the Duke of Courland, or of the vessel being built or tested in Latvia. The only thing we know is that Van Son's or De Lisson's design ended up in the collection of the Duke of Courland, now kept in the State Historical Archives of Latvia. And with that, De Lisson managed to gain a little bit of immortality, after all.

# II The Maritime Connections

1550  
-1810

Joost C.A. Schokkenbroek,

*Curator, National Maritime Museum, Amsterdam*

## Souvenirs in Silver

**Commercial contacts between the Netherlands and the Baltic region** date from almost a millennium ago. The total volume and importance — materially as well as immaterially — of this trade can hardly be measured, as figures and values are abstract phenomena, in this case representing macro-economic flows. Throughout these hundreds of years shipping has been the vehicle for the close economic and cultural relations. Tens of thousands of ship owners, shipwrights, sail makers, rope manufacturers, coopers and seamen could make a living thanks to their involvement in what often times in fairly congenial and warm terms has been referred to as “de Moedernegotie” (the Mother of all trade).

Initially, small towns in the Netherlands signed up for maritime trade with the Baltic under the aegis of the almighty, monopolistic Hanseatic League. Much later, some time during the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Amsterdam and other major cities in the province of Holland became increasingly involved in the Baltic trade. Business with the Baltic was booming, and ships from Holland could provide the required cargo space.



## Souvenirs in Silver

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Amsterdam generated the lion's share of commercial activities with the Baltic region. Most skippers of the merchantmen employed in the Baltic trade came from Amsterdam, or from cities fairly close by (Hoorn and Enkhuizen). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the centre of recruitment of skippers shifted towards Friesland. The Frisian Islands of Ameland and Terschelling rapidly became the cradles for new generations of captains sailing to Königsberg, Danzig, or Riga. Another change can be discerned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Skippers from Groningen took over the helm from their Frisian colleagues.

Through the centuries, Dutch seamen have been intrigued by the level of local craftsmanship and the beauty of the products these artisans were able to make; be it in wood or in silver. Colourful souvenirs like hand-painted and intricately decorated poplar-wood cups, dinner-services, small barrels, or furniture had found their way to the Dutch houses from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Often, these objects are referred to as having been made in or originating from Riga. Hence the Dutch terms like “Riga-



Ship broker's spoons, also called “Riga spoons”, dating from 19<sup>th</sup> century

nappen,” “Riga-bekers,” or “Riga-tafels”. Not all souvenirs came from Riga. The manifold usage of the Latvian capital's name as a prefix is above all a clear indication of the city's importance within the Baltic commercial network. A phenomenon especially related to 19<sup>th</sup> maritime trade with the Baltic was the so-called “Cargadoorslepel”. This “ship-broker's spoon” also goes by the names of “Oostzeelepel” (Baltic spoon), “Kapiteinslepel” (Captain's spoon) or, again, “Riga-lepel” (Riga-spoon). The following few paragraphs are devoted to the history and symbolism of this souvenir in silver.

The spoons were made locally. Ship-brokers customarily requested a local silversmith to produce a spoon containing the name of the ship-broker, often in combination with the name of the town and a year. In some cases, these spoons were ornately decorated according to latest style or fashion. More often, however, the silversmiths managed to satisfy their customers with fairly simple specimens. The origin and quintessential meaning of the custom to donate silver spoons to captains of the koffs, brigs and schooners sailing from Groningen is still not unambiguously clear. According to some, these spoons were given as a memento<sup>1</sup>. Others refer to this exchange of spoons as souvenirs of concluded transactions. In both cases, it seems safe to assume that silver

spoons were donated in return for repeated visits and business deals. Most spoons carry traces of wear and tear. In other words: though cherished as souvenirs, the Dutch captains must have used the spoons frequently for their meals.

So far, we have been able to retrieve about 100 spoons in public repositories in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup>. The number of spoons in private households and collections must be much higher<sup>3</sup>. The collection of the Noordelijk Scheepvaartmuseum in Groningen (NSG) contains three “Cargadoorslepels” connected with Riga; the Fries Scheepvaartmuseum in Sneek (FSS) has four, while the Kapiteinshuis Pekela (KP) keeps no less than twelve. The three spoons in the NSG-collection — ornately decorated with rococo-motives and dated 1846, 1852 and 1856, respectively — bear the name of the Riga-based firm of G.W. Schröder & Co. Silversmith Christoph Barthold Knuth (active between 1834—1864) left his mark on the two earliest ones. The one dated 1856, was crafted by a certain Weitz. All three spoons carry the number 84<sup>4</sup>.

The more extensive collection at the KP contains three spoons made by the same

C.B. Knuth, crafted in 1839, 1844 and 1846. Again, this silversmith had received his orders from the firm of G.W. Schröder & Co. In earlier days (1832) this firm had turned to local craftsman Georg Michael Vendt (active between 1805—1854)<sup>5</sup>. So far we have been unable to retrieve information regarding the exact nature and scope of Schröder’s business. Data concerning all “Riga-spoons” in this collection are accessible. They are listed in note 6 to this article.



This modest contribution to the maritime relations between the Netherlands and Riga has been focused on the ubiquitous presence of silver spoons, taken home by Dutch captains as souvenirs of their visits and activities in Baltic ports. Additional (art-) historical research, conducted by Dutch and Latvian scholars, should lead to larger numbers of “Cargadoors-lepels”. Subsequently, these silver souvenirs should provide more data concerning the identity of Latvian craftsmen, ship-brokers and Dutch skippers involved in the transport and distribution of Baltic timber and wheat.