Abstract - George Welling (University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands): Destination Amsterdam. Can ships bound for Amsterdam in the Sound Toll Registers be traced in the Paalgeld Registers and the Lastgeld Registers of Amsterdam?

The Soundtoll Registers offer us the possibility to test a number of theories that have been formulated about the Dutch trade in the 16th-19th century. About the “contraction of the trade to Amsterdam” and the share of the “voorbijlandvaart – which means the habit of Dutch shipmasters to travel from foreign ports in the Atlantic area to foreign ports in the Baltic area and vice versa, without visiting any Dutch port in that journey” in the Dutch trade I have made some remarks in one of the earlier STR Online symposia. In this contribution I would like to focus on the trade of Amsterdam with the Baltic. The STR Online is a valuable source for this research, but it is not sufficient. It is of great importance to understand that destinations mentioned in the STR are planned destinations. For most of the sound passages we have no way of checking if these destinations were actually reached. For two periods however, we can compare the data from the STR with actual arrivals in Amsterdam. The data of Registers of the Lastgeld 1744-1748 and the registers of the Paalgeld 1771-1788 have been digitized and put in a database by me and these data cover actual arrivals of ships in Amsterdam. The Registers of the Lastgeld offer very restricted information, but since the port of departure is mentioned, it allows us to crosscheck data from the STR. The Registers of the Paalgeld offer much more detailed information and can be used to verify most of the data in the STR for ships coming from the Baltic to Amsterdam.

The trade with the Baltic area is commonly known as “de Moedernegotie”, which could be translated as “the mother of all trades”. In earlier publications I have shared my doubts about this theory at least in respect to the late 18th century, but still the Baltic trade of Amsterdam was one of the major trades of the city. If and when other sources for the trade of Amsterdam become available, we will be able to understand the whole trade of Amsterdam better.

In this research I have tried to trace ships coming westwards through the Sound with destination Amsterdam in the two sources mentioned. For a number of reasons this is a very complicated process. Only very few perfect matches with data from the STR could be made. Still if we only regard the absolute numbers of ships heading for Amsterdam in the Sound and the number of actual arrivals, we must see a problem: the numbers do not fit. The number of ships that mention Amsterdam as their destination in Helsingör is always bigger than the actual arrivals in Amsterdam (except for two years, where the data in the STR are incomplete in the version I have used). Can we explain these differences or is this a complete enigma.