The Baltic trade of cities along the river IJssel in the turbulent sixteenth century

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The sixteenth century was in many ways a turbulent one. Religious, political, and economic structures that sometimes existed since ancient times were replaced by new ones. With regard to the Baltic trade, it is broadly assumed that the Hanseatic League lost its dominance to upcoming nation states.¹

The Dutch Hanseatic cities Zwolle, Kampen, Deventer, and Zutphen along the river IJssel were no exception to this. Their flourishing trade in the late Middle Ages is explained in the historiography by their favorable geographical location between the Baltic and Hanseatic cities in the Rhine region.² Kampen is even often described as the most important Dutch Hanseatic city in the fourteenth century.³ The sixteenth century is considered as a period of decline though. Only Kampen, and to a lesser degree Deventer, remained involved in long distance trade.⁴ Deventer increasingly focused on its famous markets, while Kampen slowly lost its trade with Hanseatic ports in the Baltic.⁵ At the end of the century the town was fully outcompeted by Amsterdam.⁶

The so-called Sound toll tables that Nina Ellinger Bang published in the beginning of the twentieth century form the by far most often used source that supports this interpretation.⁷ However, the tables do not provide us with a clear graph by which the decline of the Baltic trade of the cities along the IJssel could easily be deduced. Many years

⁶ Milja van Tielhof, The ‘mother of all trades’. The Baltic grain trade in Amsterdam from the late 16th- to the early 19th century The northern World III (Leiden 2002) 166-167.
⁷ Nina Ellinger Bang, Tabeller over skibsfart og varetransport gennem Øresund 1497-1660 I:Tabeller over skibsfarten (Copenhagen and Leipzig 1906).
of the Sound toll registers in the first half of the sixteenth century are missing and the remaining curve shows steep ups and downs. Not all the information in the Sound toll registers is adopted in the tables though. It is therefore my endeavor to investigate whether the online Sound Toll registers can give us a more comprehensive and detailed insight into the development of the Baltic trade of cities along the IJssel.

**Figure 1:** Number of passages through the Sound by skippers from the cities along the river IJssel 1497-1600.\(^8\)

In conformity with the curvy development of the number of passages through the Sound by skippers from Kampen, historians have distinguished reasons for the long term decline from short term effects. It is generally assumed that the main factors that caused the decline on the long term are the rise of the Amsterdam staple market and the silting of the river IJssel.\(^9\) These two could of course be interrelated. For example, there is evidence of wine merchants from Deventer who exported their goods to the Baltic in the 1560s on ships from Amsterdam.\(^10\) This has lead historians to the opinion that the merchants from Deventer had to go to Amsterdam instead of Kampen, because sailing with large ships on the IJssel was not possible.\(^11\)

However, the reliability and usability of the sixteenth-century Sound toll registers can be questioned. They are indeed reflecting the turbulence of their age. The administration from the first half of the century is mostly missing. Often a war was the reason for this. For example, in 1549 it was stated that older accounts had been lost “during the changes and acts of war”. In 1548 toll-collector Peder Hansen was suspected of fraud and destroying the

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\(^8\) Based on Bang, *Tabeller over skibsfort*.


\(^10\) J. van Doorninck, ‘Welke zou de hoofdoorzaak van het verval der bevaarbaarheid van den IJssel zijn?’, *Overijsselse almanak voor oudheid en letteren* IV (1838) 62-126, there 73-74.

accounts of the preceding official, his father. The extant registers have a concise character and are sometimes difficult to read. Only the names of the shipmaster and the amount of nobels he had to pay are registered. The only exception to this rule was the separate toll on wine.

Halfway the century drastic reforms were taken. In a few decennia cargo toll, buoy money, and lantern money were added to the ship toll. The registration was further extended by the separate administration of the existing tariff rates according to privileges for certain regions. This made the administration more orderly and ensured a better control over the toll collectors. Whereas in the registers of 1547 all ship toll is written down in one list, in the next fully extant year, 1557, for example the Dutch passages are brought together in the section “register for the Dutch and Western Hanseatic cities ships and goods”. In the second half of the century this system remained in place. Besides this, almost no registers have been lost since then. The years 1559, 1561, and 1570-1573 are the only gaps in a further uninterrupted series until the end of the century. The reliability of the accounts are further improved by the opening of a customs house at the Great Belt in 1560, making an end to the possibility of sailing through this strait to avoid the Sound toll.

With these considerations in mind, it becomes clear that a graph based on the tables made by Nina Ellinger Bang showing the number of passages through the Sound during the sixteenth century does often not provide the researcher with definite answers to his or her research questions. Therefore I approached the Sound toll registers from new perspectives. First, I collected all data about skippers and merchants from the cities along the IJssel in a database. Then I standardized geographical and personal names to make it possible to determine the population of merchants and skippers and to follow their careers and the routes that they took. Finally, I also analyzed the wine toll and cargo toll.

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12 Aksel E. Christensen, *Dutch trade to the Baltic about 1600. Studies in the Sound toll register and Dutch shipping records* (Copenhagen and The Hague 1941) 49.
14 Sound Toll Registers Online, film 2 scan 462.
15 Tielhof, *De Hollandse graanhandel*, 253.
A first result is that the Sound toll tables are very accurate. I encountered almost no deviations in the number of passages during the whole century between the tables and my data. The tables do not include information on the routes. From 1557 onwards, the ports of departure were registered, so it is possible to see whether the skippers from Kampen were specializing on certain routes. Two destinations stand out. The first is a group of ports at the Sound, including Copenhagen and Malmö. The second is Danzig. Whereas Danzig remained the most important destination during this whole period, the trade with the cities at the Sound seems to have come to a halt quite suddenly in the 1580s. It is therefore plausible that reasons for the decline on the long term can be found in this development.

An analysis of the wine toll proved to have further explanatory value. There were signs that Deventer was involved in the Rhine wine trade during the sixteenth century, but they are so scarce that it is assumed in the historiography that there was no longer a large scale export on wine.\textsuperscript{16} However it appears that approximately 25\% of all Rhine wine that came through the Sound until the 1580s was exported by merchants from Deventer, as can be seen in figure 3. In the peak year of 1568, they transported a surprising amount of 5376 so-called “amer” of Rhine wine.\textsuperscript{17}

The wine toll registers also mention the origin of the skipper. During the flourishing trade in the 1560s, the Deventer merchants most often transported their wine on ships from Kampen. In the ship toll registers the skippers can be identified as going to the cities at the Sound. Especially in the peak years of the decennium, wine was also carried on ships from

\textsuperscript{16} Weststrate, In het kielzog van moderne markten, 199.
\textsuperscript{17} An “amer” corresponds to one barrel of approximately 140-150 liters.
Amsterdam and Frisian cities. This is rather a sign that the wine trade was so successful that there were not enough skippers from Kampen to transport the wine, than that the river IJssel became not navigable.

Figure 3: Rhine wine transported by merchants from Deventer as a percentage of the total quantity of Rhine wine that came through the Sound.

These observations imply that the Hanseatic trade network between the IJssel towns and the Sound region remained intact for a long time in the sixteenth century. Already in the fourteenth century skippers from Kampen were specialized in transporting French salt and Rhine wine to the markets in Scania at the southern point of Sweden. There, they particularly bought the famous herring, and regularly sailed further to Baltic ports from where they took home in particular grain, wood, animal skins, tar, pitch, flax, fur, and wax. The year markets began to lose its importance in the fifteenth century. Dollinger argues that this process accelerated from the 1560s on. Moreover, by the late sixteenth century, Dutch fisherman started to produce high quality herring from the North Sea and even export it to the Baltic markets. Finally, the wine toll reveals that in the late sixteenth century the amount of Rhine wine decreased while other wines from for example France passes the Sound in increasing numbers. Together, these developments caused the end of the trade of the IJssel cities with the Sound region.

What remained for a few years was the trade of Kampen with Danzig. Not surprisingly, we see a dominance of grain in the cargo toll and lantern money. Also in this

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18 Enneus Rijpma, *De ontwikkelingsgang van Kampen tot omstreeks 1600, vooral in de laatste jaren der zestiende eeuw* (Groningen and The Hague 1924) 8-9.
19 Dollinger, *De Hanze* (298-299).
trade Kampen was already involved since centuries. Baltic grain became increasingly important for the economy of the young Dutch Republic in the 1590s, but Kampen could somehow not profit from this expanding market. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Amsterdam had already started fishing in the same nod. It has been estimated that the amount of grain that Amsterdam imported grew from 15,000 lasts in 1507 to 20,000 lasts in 1539 and 60,000 lasts in 1560.\textsuperscript{21} Thereby it had surpassed Kampen by far. It is likely that Amsterdam has indeed outcompeted the Baltic trade of Kampen.

Clé Lesger has made a model that has a high explanatory value in this respect. He states that in the first half of the sixteenth century important ports in the Netherlands functioned as gateways between the hinterland, and the outside world Amsterdam was no exception to this.\textsuperscript{22} According to this model, Kampen exported and imported goods that were sold mainly on the markets of Deventer. Merchants from Deventer exported wine from the German hinterland to mainly the ports at the Sound. This gateway system was strongly disrupted by the Dutch Revolt, and after the fall of Antwerp in 1585 a new structure was needed quickly. In this process, Amsterdam became in a few decades a large international trade hub and the center of Dutch trade.\textsuperscript{23}

The rapid expansion of the Amsterdam trade network was according to Lesger caused by the separation of the Southern Netherlands from their Northern neighbors. Merchants from the south migrated to Amsterdam and brought their trade connections with them. Together with the existing trade connections and the need to expand, this effectuated that Amsterdam became a center of information. A stabilizing effect on commodity prices occurred which strengthened the competitiveness of Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{24}

In my view this does however not sufficiently explain why Kampen, situated in the Northern Netherlands, could not maintain its Baltic trade. Still, the role of information is important. Until about 1580, most Dutch merchants – or their agents – traveled to a certain

\textsuperscript{21} Tielhof, De Hollandse graanhandel, 97-98.
\textsuperscript{22} Clé Lesger, Handel in Amsterdam ten tijde van de Opstand. Kooplieden, commerciële expansie en verandering in de ruimtelijke economie van de Nederlanden ca. 1550-ca.1630 (Hilversum 2001) 60-61, 88.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibidem, 133-137.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibidem, 209-249.
city to do business with local merchants on the spot. In this system it was necessary for merchants to reduce their risks. Reliable social networks and family relations were very important, as was the spreading of risk on more merchants. For example, this could be done in guilds or by partial ship-owning. When the ship would be lost, it would not ruin the complete capital of one merchant. This network building and risk reduction explains a great deal of the functioning and success of the Hanse. In the Hanseatic kontore in the most important trade towns abroad, Hanseatic privileges were safeguarded, relations with local merchants were maintained and information was collected. This made the Hanseatic trade efficient. During the sixteenth century, merchants from outside the Hanseatic League increasingly tried to make use of those kontore by pretending they were Hanseatic merchants.

Quite exceptional for this time, merchants from Kampen also stayed in other cities during the winter to continue maintaining relations with local merchants and be the first to buy for example grain when prices were low. Jorma Ahvenainen writes about Dutch merchants from probably the IJssel towns who early in the sixteenth century stayed in Reval over the winter. There is evidence that this was already usual in the late fifteenth century. In a letter to Reval dated March 1500, the Mayor and Aldermen of Kampen for example announce that skipper Engbert ten Bergen is allowed to collect the legacy of the recently deceased Berent Johanss, a citizen from Kampen.

Another example concerns Gaspar Cunertorf, a patrician from Kampen, who established a trading company in Lissabon and started to live there around 1570. In 1577, he contracted an agent, Jan Janssen from Kampen, who had to go to the places where his

29 Jurjen Nanninga Uitterdijk, Een Kamper handelshuis te Lissabon 1572-1594. Handelscorrespondentie, rekeningen en bescheiden (Zwolle 1904) IX-XI.
superiors wanted him to go. The places where Janssen subsequently lived reveal the trade network of a Hanseatic merchant. In August 1577 Janssen stayed in Antwerp. The following year he went back to Kampen and then spent some weeks in Enkhuizen. From there he moved to Amsterdam where he lived at the house of Barent Rutgersz, who is identified as a merchant from Kampen as well. In 1579, Janssen went to Lübeck and from there to Danzig. There he stayed at the house of Harmen Igerman. In the Sound toll registers, Igerman appears three times between 1562 and 1566 as wine merchant from Kampen. His name is also on the Reformed Church member list in Kampen from earlier in the 1570s. Somewhere in the following years he moved to Danzig.

With its common practice of sending agents and permanently settling abroad, Kampen long had an advantage compared to other cities. After the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt, cities from Holland increasingly started to send representatives to important trade centers like Danzig as well. From the 1590s onward, especially Amsterdam merchants settled permanently in places abroad. Soon many European ports had a Dutch merchant colony. From this perspective, Lesger’s argument about the quick rise of Amsterdam as the international center of information supply can help us to understand why from the 1590s also Kampen could no longer compete with Amsterdam in the Baltic grain trade. For a merchant it was no longer beneficial to make use of the trade networks of Kampen, while the international center of information had just emerged around the corner.

This did not imply that merchants and skippers from Kampen and Deventer stopped their business. In the so-called ‘poorterboeken’, in which citizens that acquired the citizenship of Amsterdam were registered, it is visible that skippers from Kampen and merchants from Deventer moved to Amsterdam between 1580 and 1600. Skippers from Kampen remained sailing to the same places where they or their ancestors from Kampen went before. In charter parties from the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century

31 Lesger, Handel in Amsterdam ten tijde van de Opstand, 87.
32 Uitterdijk, Een Kamper handelshuis te Lissabon, XIX.
33 Johannes Gerard van Dillen, Amsterdam in 1585. Het kohier der capitale impositie van 1585 (Amsterdam 1941) 64.
34 Uitterdijk, Een Kamper handelshuis te Lissabon, XIX.
35 In the years 1562, 1566 and 1568.
36 F. van der Pol, De reformatie te Kampen (Kampen 1990) 415.
37 Tiellhof, De Hollandse graanhandel, 179-180.
39 Amsterdam City Archives, Poorterboeken (5033).
skippers from Kampen can be found. They mostly remained operating in a familiar trade network. Bouwen Dircks for example went most of the times to Danzig, but also to Lisbon. In charter parties it is stated that he came from Kampen, but in the Sound toll registers he does not appear as skipper from that place.  

Arendt Brandt is one of the last skippers in the sixteenth century that is present in the Sound toll registers with Kampen as his domicile. This is the case from 1585 until 1599. In 1595 at the request of Isaak le Maire he declared that he had sailed for Marcus Jacobsen from Amsterdam to Arkhangelsk in 1590. In June 1600 a charter contract was made in which was stated that he would first sail to Setúbal to load salt. This he had to transport to Danzig, Konigsberg, Riga or Reval. There he should load commodities and bring them to Amsterdam. He passed the Sound that year on 12 September, indeed coming from Setúbal. On 30 October he came back in the Sound. Riga had apparently become the destination, for it is listed as port of departure.

In summary, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, the cities along the river Ijssel had already lost their dominant presence in the Baltic. The markets at Scania had lost importance and Amsterdam had expanded its trade. However, the way in which merchants from the Ijssel cities traded in the Baltic remained functioning well until the 1580s. Kampen was as a gateway between its hinterland and the Baltic. Most commonly, its skippers sailed with ballast, French salt, or Rhine wine that was loaded by merchants from Deventer to the ports at the Sound. There they could visit the markets in Scanea, sell the wine and buy herring or malt. After that they could sail further to the grain ports in the Baltic which was in most of the cases Danzig. Merchants and agents from Kampen that were present in those cities ensured an optimal functioning of the information supply and made the trade network complete.

From the end of the 1580s the structure of Dutch gateways quite rapidly fell apart after the fall of Antwerp and the segregation of the Netherlands in a Northern and a
Southern part. Subsequently, Amsterdam, already the most important trade center in the Northern Netherlands, attracted merchants and their trade connections to the city. Moreover, Amsterdam merchants began to expand and strengthen their position abroad by installing merchant colonies. Within a short time they dominated the international business communication. Now the old system of trade relations of Kampen was completely undermined. In the last years of the century, Amsterdam merchants made use of the experience of skippers from Kampen. Now those skippers sailed to the same directions as they and their ancestors had done before. Some of them became Amsterdam citizens. They had been fully adopted to the new economic structure of the Dutch Republic.