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**In het kielzog van moderne markten : handel en verkeer op de Rijn,
Waal en IJssel, c. 1360-1560**

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Summary

In the wake of modern markets. Trade and traffic on the rivers Rhine, Waal and IJssel, c. 1360-1560.

The Low Countries are an estuary. Throughout recorded history the rivers Rhine, Meuse, Scheldt and their branches have played a crucial role in the political and economic development of the Low Countries. These rivers have served as political borders between peoples and countries, have been of strategic military value to countless rulers over the centuries, and were always the primary waterways which connected the markets of the low-lying territories near the North Sea to those of inland Europe — indeed, they still are. In the pre-modern Low Countries, the rivers were a vital part of the infrastructure that enabled the towns of Holland, Guelders and Oversticht (the present-day province of Overijssel) to take an intermediary position between inland Europe on the one hand, and coastal regions such as Brabant and Flanders, as well as overseas territories like England, Norway and the Baltic region on the other. While historians generally recognize the importance of the rivers for the Dutch pre-modern economy, remarkably few studies have dealt with the subject in depth. This study seeks to fill that gap, at least to some extent, by exploring the nature of river trade on the river Rhine and its branches — namely the Waal, Lower Rhine/Lek and IJssel — during the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth century.

In part, this book addresses some very basic issues concerning river trade. First, it examines the composition of the flow of goods. The main sorts of merchandise are discussed and an estimation is made of the relative share of these goods in the total volume of river trade. Furthermore, this study addresses the question of which regions were actually connected by the rivers. What were the main areas of commodity production and which markets were the most important destinations? Finally, the organisation of trade and traffic receives due attention. The origins of skippers and merchants are explored (to the extent that sources will allow), as are the types of cooperation which existed between merchants amongst themselves and between skippers and merchants. How did the agents of river trade manage their business? Did they specialize in certain products or services? The answers to these basic questions will help

us to understand the organisation of river trade and explain the ways in which towns along the rivers positioned themselves within this system of goods exchange. One of the main goals of this book is to uncover any changes in this system over time.

The study of river trade must be seen in the light of a broader issue. The underlying central question of this dissertation is how the urban centers of Guelders and Oversticht, most of which are situated along the rivers, responded to both economical and political changes that took place in the Low Countries during the period under investigation. Most of the towns in the Eastern Low Countries had come into being well before the beginning of the thirteenth century and experienced a period of growth during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. From the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, however, the towns of the neighbouring county of Holland rose to prominence. They developed an economy that was characterized by a high degree of functional specialisation between towns, some of them concentrating on export industries such as beer (Delft, Haarlem, Gouda) and cloth (Leiden, Naarden, Haarlem) and others serving as centers for shipping and commerce to England, Flanders, Brabant and the Baltic (Dordrecht and Amsterdam). Fishing towns and villages, as well as salt-producing settlements, were integrated into this system. These developments in the Northern Low Countries would continue, with some interruptions, right into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the major international markets of the Low Countries of the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth century were to be found in the southern part of the Low Countries, notably in Brabant and Flanders. Bruges was without a doubt the leading market of the Low Countries, and probably of North-West Europe as a whole, during the fourteenth and most of the fifteenth century. Yet from the second half of the fifteenth century the Brabantine town of Antwerp made serious inroads on the position of Bruges, and by the year 1500 Antwerp had clearly surpassed its Flemish rival as the leading town in the urban hierarchy of the Low Countries.

The Low Countries underwent far-reaching changes in the political arena as well. Between 1384 and 1543 the dukes of Burgundy and their Habsburg successors gradually obtained power in all the territories of the Low Countries. This process of Burgundian expansion started with the acquisition of Flanders by Philip the Bold in 1384, and in the next seventy years an impressive number of counties and duchies were added to the

Burgundian possessions: Namur (1429), Brabant and Limburg (1430), Hainault, Holland and Zeeland (*de facto* 1428, *de jure* 1433) and Luxemburg (1451). The Burgundians went on to establish a foothold in the Eastern Low Countries as well. During the fifteenth century they obtained a profound political influence in the bishopric of Utrecht, but a first attempt to conquer the duchy of Guelders proved unsuccessful. It was not until the reign of Charles V that the territories of the Eastern and Northern Low Countries were incorporated in the Habsburg state. Frisia came under Habsburg rule in 1515, the prince-bishopric Utrecht and Oversticht in 1528, Groningen in 1536 and finally Guelders in 1543.

These economic and political developments form the backdrop for the current study of river trade. Did changing political structures have an impact on trading networks? In what ways did the rise of Antwerp and Holland influence trade and transport on the Rhine, Waal and IJssel?

Methods

At the heart of this dissertation lies a quantitative analysis of river trade, based on three series of toll accounts from the duchy of Guelders that are held in the *Gelders Archief* in Arnhem. The dukes of Guelders taxed the river traffic in their territory by levying tolls at strategic points along the various river branches that ran through the duchy. Records of these tolls have been preserved from the late thirteenth century onwards, but only for single fiscal years. In this book however, series of several years have been used rather than single years, in order to reduce the risk of using a ‘freak year’ as the basis for the analysis. Furthermore, it was necessary to select years for which toll records would be available from toll stations on all the branches of the Rhine, i.e. Nijmegen and Zaltbommel at the Waal, Arnhem at the Lower Rhine and IJsseloord and Zutphen on the IJssel. Ideally the data from these stations can be compared with those from Lobith, the most important ducal toll station, which was located at the spot where the Rhine forks into the Waal and the Lower Rhine. Theoretically all Rhine trade was taxed at Lobith, but only until 1473, when it fell in the hands of the duke of Cleves. After the Burgundians left Guelders in 1492 the toll at Nijmegen took over Lobith’s position as the primary toll within the Guelders toll system.

The process of source selection yielded three data series, each of which are the pillars of the three larger parts that make up this study. The first part (chapters 2-4) deals with the late fourteenth century, starting from a series of Guelders toll records from the years 1388-1399. The middle of the fifteenth century is the central period of part two (chapters 5-6). Since less toll registers have survived for this period, the quantitative focus in chapter 5 is on a period of only a few years: the Lobith and Zaltbommel records from the years 1437-1440 are analysed and compared to those of the *Kamper pondtolregister* of 1439-1441. The latter register records all traffic from Holland and Frisia sailing up the river IJssel from the Zuider Sea to the fairs of Deventer. During the years 1437 and 1438 the whole of Western Europe suffered immense grain shortages, and Bruges, the most important market of the Low Countries, was moreover in revolt against Philip the Good from 1436 to 1438. The short period under scrutiny in part two therefore covers a period of severe economic crisis and provides insight into how this affected Rhine trade. The third part covers the period 1543-1557, beginning in the year the duchy of Guelders was transferred into the hands of Charles V. The economic and commercial impact of this power shift is studied in chapters 7 to 9. The most interesting material for comparison is found in the registers of the hundredth-penny-tax that was levied on all exports from the Burgundian lands, including Holland, during the 1540s.

While the quantitative data from the toll records make up the backbone of this study, chapters 1 and 6 add a qualitative approach to the subject. The first chapter deals with the commercial urban networks of which the river towns of the Eastern Low Countries were a part. As a result of their trading interests in the Baltic and North Sea trade, these towns sought cooperation with the North-German towns of the Hanseatic League. Towns like Deventer, Zutphen, Harderwijk and Kampen took an active part in the military and diplomatic endeavours of the League that would ensure trading privileges and tax exemptions for hanseatic merchants in Scandinavia. This made them *de facto* members of the Hanseatic League, which was still an open and fluid organisation until the beginning of the fifteenth century. Some towns from Holland and Zeeland, that have traditionally been regarded as the great competitors of the German Hansa, were also part of this merchant community, as long as their mercantile interests coincided with those of towns from other hanseatic regions. After 1400 the towns of Holland started to

take an independent course, while the towns of the Eastern Low Countries held on to the Hansa. By that time the League was closing its ranks, under the guidance of Lübeck. Between 1402 and 1441 a number of Guelders, Overijssel and Frisian towns applied to the League for formal membership. This is not to say that these towns always agreed with the policies laid down by Lübeck, quite the contrary. Within the Hanseatic League the towns from the Eastern Low Countries, together with those from the territories along the Rhine, formed a power block with interests often quite distinct from those of the Wendish, Prussian or Livonian hanseatic towns. The power of the Hanseatic League on the Northern and Western European scene diminished quickly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most Oversticht and Guelders towns, however, still adhered to the organisation, because the League could still prove valuable for securing trading privileges and structuring commercial diplomacy with the non-hanseatic world on a regional scale.

Yet the river towns of Guelders and Oversticht did not enter into commercial relations solely within the framework of the Hanseatic League. The commercial ties with neighbouring regions, such as Holland, Westphalia or Cleves, predated the rise of the League and were maintained on a bilateral basis. The dynamics of these regional relations are examined in Chapter 7, which presents a case study on a conflict between Deventer and the count and towns of Holland, over taxes, tolls and regulations at the fairs of the former town. The conflict was evoked by complaints of the city council of Cologne about irregularities in the butter trade at the fairs of Deventer. Merchants from the county of Holland, the main suppliers of butter, were accused of selling spoiled butter for good butter, and cheating with the size and weight of the butter tuns. After repeated complaints, the town of Deventer issued a new ordinance on the butter trade in 1463. The ordinance evoked a fierce response from the Hollanders. They sought and found the support of their ruler, Duke Philip the Good, who struck the Deventer fairs with a boycott. The Hollanders decided to conduct their business elsewhere. From 1463 onwards they searched in vain for an alternative to the Deventer fairs. They tried the markets of Zwolle, Zutphen, Kampen and a few Holland towns, but after several rounds of negotiations, the merchants of Holland returned to Deventer in 1473. The conflict shows that the Hollanders were unable to change the commercial infrastructure of the Eastern Low Countries unilaterally. Deventer could control shipping on the IJssel to a

large extent and thus undermine the position of Kampen and Zutphen as serious alternatives. Moreover, while Philip the Good saw the conflict as an opportunity to subdue the town of Deventer politically, the merchants of Holland did not see the benefits of a long-term boycott of Deventer. They had vested interests in the Oversticht town, where they maintained commercial and credit relations with local citizens.

Furthermore, Deventer boasted a commercial infrastructure that made it the perfect meeting point for merchants from Holland and Frisia on the one hand, and from the German hinterland on the other. Deventer had a relatively efficient administration of justice; inns that served as lodging, storage and small credit facilities; a river port with a crane and all the equipment needed to transport goods to and from the fairs; the large 'Brink' square that served as the venue of marketplace activity; and strict quality inspection at the fairs. None of these elements were exclusive to Deventer, but together they worked to ensure that Deventer would remain the unsurpassed focal point of trade between Holland and the German hinterland until the middle of the sixteenth century. Other Oversticht towns had their own niches: Kampen concentrated on shipping, Baltic trade and fishing, and Zwolle was the primary centre for the oxen trade and the trade in sandstone from the county of Bentheim. Even the nearby town of Zutphen, ruled by the duke of Guelders, decided to adjust the dates of its fairs to the larger ones in Deventer, in order to attract merchants on their way to and from Deventer. This crude functional specialisation was the strength of the IJssel region and one of the main reasons that the Hollanders did not succeed in annihilating Deventer as the pivot of the IJssel market system.

Quantitative results

The Guelders toll accounts show that trade on the Rhine, Waal and IJssel was remarkably constant throughout the fourteenth to sixteenth century. First, the hierarchy among these Rhine branches as trade arteries remained unchanged. For almost all types of commodities the Waal was the most important waterway, connecting the staple towns of Dordrecht and Cologne. Transport on the Lower Rhine (which connected Cologne with Arnhem, Utrecht and Amsterdam) and IJssel (toward Zutphen, Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen) was clearly of a smaller scale. When measured in the number of recorded

shipments, both IJssel and Lower Rhine traffic annually accounted for about half of the volume of transport on the Waal, at the very most. These proportions seem to have been fairly constant during these centuries.

The exact composition of the flow goods differed slightly on the various Rhine branches, but generally the same merchandise was transported throughout the whole period: Rhine wine, timber, building stone and millstones, steel and iron, earthenware and wheat were sent downstream, while salt, herring, and other sorts of fish and dairy products were the major commodities in the upstream trade. A third group of products was sent both upstream and downstream in relatively small quantities, mainly rye and fruit. Surprisingly, beer and cloth, two of the major export commodities produced in Holland are missing in the river trade. Beer was probably produced in sufficient quantities in the German hinterland, whereas cloth was mainly imported overland, directly from Flanders and Brabant.

Of all products, Rhine wine was by far and large the most important. Rhine wine made up the lion's share of the total volume of cargo. In absolute terms the transport of Rhine wine displayed a steadiness that explains the generally constant character of river trade. Most of it was transported over the river Waal to the Rhine wine market of Dordrecht. On this stretch, at least 25 percent of all registered loads of merchandise consisted of wine, with the share climbing up to 50 percent in peak years. Less wine was shipped on the Lower Rhine and IJssel, the waterways serving Dordrecht, Amsterdam, Utrecht and the IJssel region, although even on these rivers it still accounted for a considerable percentage of the transported goods.

Furthermore, Rhine wine was one of the few luxurious and thus valuable commodities in the river trade. The amounts of toll paid – a crude indicator for the value of the product – make the dominance of wine abundantly clear. Both in the late fourteenth and mid-sixteenth century the toll on wine alone could account for over 80 percent of the total annual toll income in peak years. In other years the proportional share would be less, but still over fifty percent. The fluctuations in the wine trade, and in fact in most of the river trade, were the result of three factors. First, meteorological circumstances had a huge impact. Success and failure of the grape harvest determined the quantity and quality of the wine, both of which had an effect of the price of the product.

The same argument can be made for other agricultural products. Furthermore, high water levels and ice could hinder river trade in general. The second factor is also of a more general character: human intervention, through wars and boycotts, made river trade impossible from time to time. Several examples have been treated in this study, among them the internal party strife in Cologne of 1391-1396, the trade war between Dordrecht and the 'bovenlandse' towns during the 1440s, the Deventer-Holland conflict, and the wars of the Burgundians and Habsburgs in the Northern Low Countries. Lastly, the demand on the markets of North-Western Europe obviously was of influence on the price of certain commodities. Rhine wine, again, is a good example. From the late fifteenth century onwards prices of Rhine wine on the urban markets of Flanders, Brabant and Holland rose, partly as a result of the rise of good quality hopped beer as a competitor. This rise in prices, however, did not induce a complete collapse of Rhine wine production and trade, but it made Rhine wine a more luxurious product than before, occupying a niche of its own on the beverage market.

The dominance of Rhine wine had a profound influence on the ratio between both the volume and value of downstream and upstream trade. Return cargo upstream was often paid for with the profits of the wine trade. Especially the transport of salt was dependent on the wine trade, since salt made for convenient bulk cargo that was in constant demand and could be stored easily. Yet not all ships sailing downstream returned with cargo. Some of them came back empty, others were dismantled at the port of destination (mostly Dordrecht), where their parts were sold as lumber. In the latter case the ship's crew, usually consisting of at least four to six men, had to be employed by other shipmasters or return home on foot. In general, of all ships recorded in the Nijmegen toll accounts of 1543-1557, about 60 percent were headed downstream and about 40 percent upstream. Traffic on the Lower Rhine saw even (slightly) higher percentages for downstream shipments. On the other hand, data from the years 1543-1548 suggest that on the IJssel the ratio between up- and downstream was more even; from 1543 to 1545 upstream transport even seems to have been more voluminous than downstream transport.

The volume of timber trade grew from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Timber was transported either in the form of sawed wood, or as big rafts made of raw

trunks of trees from the woods around the small river Lippe. In 1550 at least three times as much of these rafts were registered at the Guelders toll stations than some 150 years earlier. In contrast to the wine transport, relatively large amounts of timber were shipped on the Lower Rhine and IJssel, to the timber market of Deventer and to the county of Holland. The IJssel region itself was an important market for building timber and so was Holland, especially since it had developed a sizeable shipbuilding industry that was expanding from the early sixteenth century onwards. Trade and transport of raw timber was almost entirely in the hands of merchants from Wesel. The registers of the late fourteenth century already point in that direction, but they are not always unambiguous about the origins of the toll payers. The sixteenth-century records, however, show an unequivocal dominance of 'Weselers' in the timber trade. No other product in the river trade was subject to such a degree of local specialisation.

Other building materials that were transported on the rivers were natural stone and lime. In small but steady quantities, stone from the Drachenfels (a stone quarry south of Bonn on the Rhine), Gadenscheider stone (from the Eiffel region) and Baumberger limestone found their way to the markets of the Low Countries throughout the entire period. The import of slate on the other hand increased between the 1390s and the 1550s. The number of mill stones that passed the Guelders toll stations varied sharply each year. They were mainly exported from the area around Andernach to Dordrecht, which served as the prime mill stone market for Holland and Zeeland. Slaked lime made from stone, an ingredient for the production of mortar, was also imported from German regions upstream. During the late fourteenth century it was used in the towns of Guelders and Oversticht, as opposed to the coastal provinces where (cheaper) lime made out of shells was preferred. In the sixteenth century the import from Germany virtually disappeared, which might be an indication that the Eastern Low Countries had gone over to using shell lime.

Upstream, two products stood out: salt and fish. Salt was bought at the staple market of Dordrecht and shipped over the river Waal towards the German hinterland. It is not clear whether the salt was produced in the salty peat regions of the Holland-Zeeland delta, or that it was imported from Bretagne and the Iberian Peninsula and only refined in Holland and Zeeland. As stated above, salt served as a bulky return cargo for skippers

and merchants that brought wine to Dordrecht. The exact volume of trade is difficult to measure, since the toll accounts did not register the size of all single salt loads. In all, the upstream salt trade seems to have experienced very limited growth between the fourteenth and sixteenth century.

The German hinterland was a small but steady market for the fishermen and fish traders of the coastal region of Holland. Salted herring was by far the most exported type of fish. Around 1550, about 7 to 8 percent of the total estimated herring catch of South Holland was exported to Jülich, Cleves, the Rhineland and above all to the fish market of Cologne. The fish trade towards these territories had probably expanded since the late fourteenth century. Before 1400 no more than 60 ships laden with fish passed through the toll of Lobith each year, while in the sixteenth century at least a hundred of those ships, in some years even two hundred, were registered on the Waal and Lower Rhine. During the crisis years 1438-1439 the export of fish from the Low Countries was exceptionally high, probably to compensate for the extra imports of grain from Cleves and Jülich that were needed in those years. Apart from herring other fish sorts were exported, such as plaice, turbot, smoked herring, dried cod and smelt, the latter being a Zuider Sea specialty that was exported through the IJssel river.

The last important commodity on the rivers was grain. Different types of bread grains were shipped, both upstream and downstream. Sporadically, rye from the Baltic was sent upstream, while wheat from Jülich and Berg was sent in the opposite direction. Crisis years, however, such as 1438-1440 and 1544-1546, turned the latter regions into subsidiary granaries for the Low Countries. Grain transports would rise from a few dozen in years with normal grain prices to a few hundred during crisis years. The focal point for these imports was the grain staple market at Dordrecht that was still enforced successfully during the middle of the sixteenth century, when the position of the Dordrecht staple market in general was crumbling.

Organisation of trade and transport

Between the late fourteenth and mid-sixteenth century, small but significant changes in the organisation of transport and trade occurred. Around 1400 the skipper-merchant was very much the dominant type in river trade. In the first place, he traveled with his own

goods, and considered shipping for other parties only a secondary activity. The skipper-merchant usually worked within the framework of a family-based business. This pattern is visible even in the ranks of the wealthiest Cologne wine merchants of the fourteenth century, who traveled to Bruges in person to sell their wines. This is not to say that merchants did not hire transporters at all, but most of these were not specialized skippers but merchants in their own right, who took on some of their fellow merchant's loads on their trips. The sources hardly give any insight into the legal transactions that underpinned these types of cooperation, but throughout the later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century transactions were relatively simple. At no time were more than three freighters involved in a single trip. It is plausible that the cooperation between merchants and skippers formally lasted for one return trip, after which a new trip would be undertaken. These associations then could last for several years and even decades. In this respect, trade and transport on the Rhine closely followed the organisational features of Hanseatic trade in general. A remarkable characteristic of Rhine trade is that skippers and skipper-merchants overwhelmingly resided in one of the 'bovenlandse towns', i.e. river towns in Guelders, Oversticht, Cleves, Jülich and the Rhineland. Hollanders hardly sailed up and down the rivers themselves.

In the sixteenth century a more explicit functional specialisation between shipping and commerce can be discerned. The skipper-merchant did not disappear; quite the contrary, he still played an important role in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, a certain division in sectors can be observed in the Nijmegen toll accounts. The toll payers can be divided in three categories, bearing in mind that they overlap to some degree:

- I. Skippers, whose prime activity and source of income was the transport of goods that were not their own.
- II. Skippers-merchants, whose strategy was diffuse; they owned at least one ship and acted as both transporters for others and merchants on their own account.
- III. Merchants, who managed their business from an office in their place of residence, usually worked with factors at the big trading centres of North-

Western-Europe and contracted third parties for the transport of their goods.

The skippers of Nijmegen provide a good example for category I. In the course of the fifteenth century a number of Nijmegen families shifted their attention from trade proper to shipping in the service of other merchants, mostly wine and drug merchants from Cologne, who themselves are the prime example of category III. Other sedentary merchants resided in Dordrecht and Antwerp, but also upstream in Mainz and Strasbourg. The specialized timber merchants of Wesel can be considered as skippers-merchants from the second category: they always traveled with their timber to the markets of destination, be it on a ship or on a raft.

On the macro-level, river trade in the Low Countries was to a large extent dominated by two institutions in the later Middle Ages: the staple markets of Cologne and Dordrecht. Both towns had obtained a set of staple privileges during the thirteenth century that made them compulsory ports of call for anyone transporting goods on the river Rhine (Cologne) or Waal, Lower Rhine/Lek and Meuse (Dordrecht). Both towns were 'gateways' where goods were redistributed in several directions. Most of the river trade took place between Cologne and Dordrecht. For the northerly route along the IJssel the towns of Deventer and Kampen together formed a similar gateway, Deventer being the main market town while Kampen connected the IJssel region with the overseas world.

Both the Cologne and Dordrecht staple privileges were a source of discontent among merchants from other towns engaged in the river trade between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, and as a rule there were always merchants trying to evade them. Yet most of the complaints were not about the staple privileges as such, but about the enforcement of its specific contents – whether merchants of a certain town should be exempt, for instance, or whether tax and toll rates on the staple market were not intolerably high. The fundamental existence of the staple markets was hardly contested before the middle of the fifteenth century, since they obviously fulfilled a useful function. At Cologne and Dordrecht merchants could be sure to find a secure, well-regulated, year-round market that ensured the sale of their goods.

Yet after 1450 it became increasingly more difficult for Dordrecht and Cologne to enforce their staple rights. Dordrecht repeatedly clashed with both 'bovenlandse' towns and other Holland towns over questions of staple exemption and enforcement from the 1440s onwards. By the middle of the sixteenth century the Dordrecht staple market was still in use, but its grip on the trade flow had diminished considerably. The Cologne staple market was hit with a similar development. With the rise of Antwerp and the increase of trading relations with Southern Germany, overland transport became more important. The wagons that transported wares from Southern Germany to Antwerp and vice versa easily passed by the Cologne river staple market. The diminishing power of the Cologne and Dordrecht staple rights did not mark a crisis in the river trade. On the contrary, it offered some (skipper-)merchants from other 'bovenlandse' towns, such as the steel merchants of Wesel, to develop independently, in the wake of developments on the modern markets of Western Europe, at least until the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt.

