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Tar ruling the waves

Seventeenth-century Dutch trade connections with Finland

The trade between the Dutch Republic and the Swedish kingdom has been one of the central elements in early modern Northern European economic and business history. For the Dutch maritime sector, Sweden's rich resources, like tar and pitch, were of central importance. Tar prevented the wooden construction of the ships from rotting. Majority of the Swedish tar came from the Finnish part of the realm. Until the establishment of the first tar company in 1648, Dutch trade connections with Finland remained intact. Especially between Amsterdam and Åbo, a lively trading community flourished. This article sheds light on the international business patterns between Åbo and Amsterdam, especially with reference to the tar trade. The article argues that the ruling elites in Åbo functioned as the central node of these various connections. Although tar was not the only product exported from the Swedish kingdom to the Dutch markets, it was highly important, not only in quantitative terms, but also in regard to the international business organisation of Finnish port towns and ultimately the Swedish kingdom as a whole.

INTRODUCTION¹

In Finland, tar production and consumption hold a special place in contemporary popular culture and everyday life. Even today, tar-related products, especially related to hygiene, are highly sought after, and Finns go as far as to regularly chew tar-flavoured sweets. However, in the early modern period, tar played a more crucial role. Tar was essential for the shipbuilding sector globally. Tar and pitch were used to preserve ships, since they prevented wooden material from rotting. In short, there could have been no shipping sector without tar and pitch.²

Historians have long taken an interest in the production and trade of this

1 This research was made possible thanks to generous funding of the Kone foundation. I am thankful for the local experts of Nedervetil Hembygdsförening, for hosting me and generously sharing their knowledge

about how tar was produced in Finland during the early modern period.

2 Pitch was produced from tar. When this article refers to 'tar', it includes pitch under this term.

commodity during the early modern period, especially within the territory that was once part of Sweden and that is present-day Finland.³ During the seventeenth century, the Swedish kingdom was the single largest global provider of tar and pitch, used for shipbuilding, naval maintenance and repairs. Indeed, the majority of the world's tar was produced within the Swedish kingdom, and roughly two thirds of the raw materials for this production originated in Finland.⁴ Swedish and Finnish historiography has focused on how tar was produced and how the structure of the tar trade changed as a consequence of the establishment of tar companies in the mid-seventeenth century.⁵ Research about regions, communities and towns has defined the areas that were central to tar production and export.⁶ Historical research about the tar companies demonstrates that Finland exported large quantities of tar to the international markets, especially to the Dutch Republic, Europe's main entrepôt for Baltic products during the seventeenth century.⁷

However, with the exception of Sylvi Möller's work on the early modern merchants of Finnish towns, the connections between the Dutch and Finnish tar trade prior to the establishment of the companies (1648–1658, 1661–1670, 1672–1682, 1689–1712) has been overlooked.⁸ This article unveils these connec-

3 'Finland' is used for the sake of clarity when matters relating to the eastern part of the Swedish realm are discussed. The Administrative model of the Swedish kingdom was a conglomerate model, resembling those of its contemporary Iberian counterparts. For six hundred years (1200–1809), Finland was part of the Swedish kingdom. Finland followed the same laws and rules as Sweden. Finland hosted central administrative institutions such as courts, universities, churches, etc. It thus differed from the Northern German provinces and Baltic states that Sweden annexed during the seventeenth century. Harald Gustafsson 'The Conglomerate State: A Perspective on State Formation in Early Modern Europe', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23: 3–4 (1998) 189–213. The model is familiar to students of the Iberian composite monarchies, on which see Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez and Gaetano Sabatini eds., *Polycentric Monarchies. How did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?* (Eastbourne 2012).

4 Petri Karonen, *Pohjoinen Suurvalta, Ruotsi ja Suomi 1521–1809* (Helsinki 1999) 181. For more information on the quantities of tar exports from Finland, see A. Luukko, 'Suomen todellinen tervanvienti ensimmäisen tervakompanian aikana (1648–1659)' in:

S.E. Åström, Y. Blomstedt and I. Hakalehto eds., *Näkökulmia menneisyyteen. Eino Jutilkalan juhlaKirja* (Porvoo 1967) 59–64.

5 Most recently, Katja Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia – Ruotsin ensimmäiset kaupakompaniat 1600-luvulla* (PhD dissertation, Helsinki; University of Helsinki 2020). See also N.E. Villstrand, 'Med stor möda i en hop gropar i marken. Tjärbränning kring Bottniska viken under svensk stormaktstid', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 1 (1992) 31–72; Annagreta Hallberg, 'Tjäreexport och tjärhandelskompanier under Stormaktsiden' in: *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier* no 34 (Helsinki 1959); Karl Oskar Fyhrvall, *Svenska Handlagstiftningens historia. Tjärhandelsskompanierna* (Stockholm 1880).

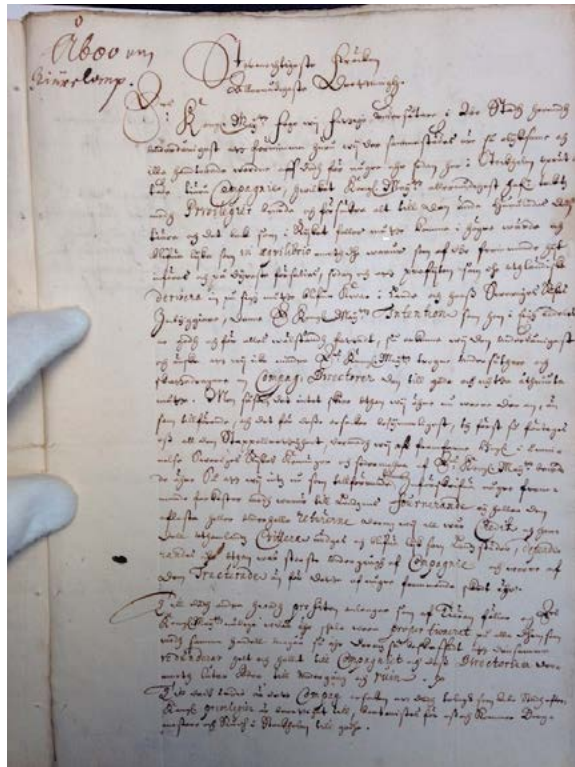
6 Heikki Waris, *Tervakaupakompania vuosina 1648–1661* (PhD-Dissertation, Helsinki; University of Helsinki 1940); Elmo Kaila, *Pohjanmaa ja meri 1600- ja 1700-luvulla: talousmaantieteellis-historiallinen tutkimus* (Helsinki 1931); Armas Luukko, *Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia* (Vaasa 1945) 161–198.

7 Peter Klein, '17th Century Monopoly Game: The Swedish-Dutch Trade in Tar and Pitch' in: Jürgen Schneider ed., *Wirtschaftswege und Wirtschaftskraft*. Vol. 2. (Stuttgart 1978).

8 Unfortunately, her work is only available in Finnish. Sylvi Möller, Suomen

Riksrådet, Stockholm,
Handel och sjöfart, vol.63,
*Complaint against the
company from the burghers
in Åbo.* PICTURE BY KATJA

TIKKA



tions and unpacks how the trade between Dutch and Finnish merchants was organised before the establishment of the first chartered tar company (1648). The focus will be on the commercial relationship between Amsterdam and Åbo (Turku) – the most important Finnish port town on the west coast during the period of Swedish rule. Although local histories of Åbo have emphasised the importance of international trade, the pivotal role of Dutch trade has been neglected.⁹ While the article focuses primarily on the town of Åbo, it is necessary to take into consideration the western coast of Finland as a whole, since tar was exported to Åbo from the upper parts of the Gulf of Bothnia, especially from the region of Ostrobothnia. The history of the Finnish tar trade ought thus to be written as an account of a commodity chain that connected several layers of social and trade networks, and which was instrumental in the development of early modern European maritime expansion.

This study relies on different sets of primary sources. Exception made to

tapulikaupunkien valtaporvaristo ja sen kaupankäyntimenetelmät 1600-luvun alkupuolella (PhD-Dissertation, Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto 1954). Klein's article focuses only on the period after the tar company was established, Klein, '17th Century Monopoly'.

9 Carl von Bondsdorff, *Bidrag till Åbo Stads*

historia, Vol 1-2 (Helsinki 1894); Tor Carpelan, *Åbo i genealogiskt hänseende på 1600-och början af 1700-talen*. Bidrag till kännedom af Västra Finland III (Helsinki 1890); Veli Pekka Toropainen, 'Skottirotta ja Ruotsin koira – Turun ulkomaalainen porvaristo vuosina 1600-1660', *Genos* 4 (2003) 199-215.

toll records, Finnish (and Swedish) archives contain little material on the trade between Amsterdam and Åbo.¹⁰ Although court records portray disputes between town burghers, they shed little light on how trade was organised with Amsterdam.¹¹ For this reasons, this article makes generous use of sources located in Amsterdam.¹² As a result, we can understand how international business connections between Finland and the Dutch Republic was organised, mapping the key merchants behind the organization of this trade.

WHAT BROUGHT THE DUTCH AND THE FINNS TOGETHER?

The trade between the Dutch Republic and the Baltic kingdoms has been one of the central elements in early modern Northern European economic and business history. The Baltic was a sea system that offered trading opportunities and connected several European powers. It was also a contested space, where Danish and Swedish kings disputed maritime supremacy. The lucrative proceedings of customs and tolls made it imperative to both kingdoms to attain hegemony over the whole region. For this reason, the control of waterways and tolls often functioned as a catalyst for violence between the Baltic powers.¹³

The Baltic was the cornerstone of Northern European commerce certainly since the Hanseatic period. More specifically, the Baltic was central to the development of the Dutch and the Swedish economies.¹⁴ Trade connections

10 In the company archives, there is information about shipments of tar during the company period. Riksarkivet, Stockholm, Handel och Sjöfart, vol. 63, Tjäruförbundet och Förnyade tjäruförbundet 1648–1672. In the Finnish archives, there are no archives of individual merchants from Åbo, Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien, 4.

11 Petri Karonen, *Patruunat ja poliitikot; yritysjohdajat taloudellisina ja poliittisina toimijoina Suomessa 1600–1920* (Tampere 2004) 157; Veli Pekka Toropainen, 'Valtaporvari Thomas Trällin perhe Turussa 1630-luvulta 1730-luvulle' in: Sirpa Juuti and Kari-Paavo Kokki eds., *Barokki – Barock* (Lahti 2014) 1–11, 5. In Sylvi Möller's work, the information about the international trade of Åbo merchants is based on the court records. Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien.

12 Given that I am less concerned with questions regarding quantities of trade, I have chosen to not include the information from the Sound Toll register. For further quantitative research, it would be advisable

to consult the Sound Toll archives. However, there are several issues related to the usage of the Sound Toll register, for example, regarding the variation in spellings of the town Åbo. On quantitative research on Finnish exports through the Sound, see Timo Tiainen, *Suomen ulkomaankaupan kasvu 1600–1800-luvuilla, Juutinrauman tullitilien uudelleenarviointi* (MA Dissertation, Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä 2018).

13 Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford 1989); Hanno Brand and Leos Müller eds., *The Dynamics of Economic Culture in the North Sea and Baltic Region: In the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* (Hilversum 2007).

14 Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge/New York 1997); Milja van Tielhof, *The "Mother of All Trades": The Baltic Grain Trade in Amsterdam from the Late 16th to the Early 19th Century* (Boston/Leiden 2002).

stood at the core of Swedish economic development, as collaboration with extensive Dutch entrepreneurial networks made available, capital, knowhow and access to a staple market (Amsterdam) that stood as a gateway to world trade.¹⁵

The early modern Dutch economy, which was partly based on an intensive shipping industry, was perhaps one of the strongest economies in Europe.¹⁶ For the Dutch maritime sector, Sweden's rich natural resources were of central importance. Historiography has been keen to focus on the trade in iron and copper, although other resources, like tar and pitch, were as important but have eluded the interest of researchers.¹⁷ This relative absence of interest is justified by the rather reduced knowledge of trading entanglements between the Dutch Republic and Finland, notwithstanding the broad knowledge about Dutch-Swedish maritime connections.¹⁸

EARLY MODERN TAR PRODUCTION AND TRADE IN THE GULF OF BOTHNIA

Finland became increasingly important as Dutch demand for tar and pitch increased after the 1610s, while the traditional tar and pitch production outlets in Prussia disappeared because of deforestation. During the early modern period, Finland was a sparsely populated, with an almost completely rural society. The economy was mainly based on subsistence agriculture, with trade primarily conducted with Russia, Sweden and the Baltic region. The manufacturing sector was modest, and only few Finnish products were exported. There were only a few towns that were involved in international trade, particularly Vyborg (eastern Finland, presently Russian territory) and Åbo (on the western coast of Finland). Finnish port towns such as Åbo were modest in size vis-à-vis larger European port cities such as Amsterdam, Hamburg or Cadiz. During this period, Åbo was the largest town, with a population of 5,000 inhabitants.¹⁹ This was modest in comparison with that of Amster-

15 Michiel de Jong, 'Dutch entrepreneurs in the Swedish Crown trade in copper and iron, 1580-1630' in: Hanno Brand ed., *Trade, diplomacy and cultural exchange – Continuity and change in the North Sea area and the Baltic* (Hilversum 2005) 36-57; Leos Müller, 'The Dutch Entrepreneurial Networks and Sweden in the Age of Greatness' in: Hanno Brand ed., *Trade, Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange: Continuity and Change in the North Sea Area and the Baltic c.1350-1750* (Hilversum 2005) 58-74; Maj-Britt Nergård, *Mellan krona och marknad, Utländska och svenska entreprenörer inom svensk järnhantering från ca 1580-1700* (Uppsala 2001).

16 Karel Davids, *The Rise and Decline of Dutch*

Technological Leadership: Technology, Economy and Culture in the Netherlands, 1350-1800. Vol 1 (Leiden/Boston 2008) 89-100, 137-141.

17 Markku Kuisma, *Metsäteollisuuden maa, Suomi, metsät ja kansainvälinen järjestelmä 1620-1920* (Jyväskylä 2006) 35; Thomas Lindblad, *Sweden's Trade with the Dutch Republic 1738-1795: A Quantitative Analysis of the Relationship between Economic Growth and International Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Assen 1982) 12.

18 Kaarle Wirta, *Early Modern Overseas Trade and Entrepreneurship: Nordic Trading Companies in the Seventeenth Century* (New York 2020) especially chapter 2.

19 Helsingfors/Helsinki became the capital of

dam that numbered approximately 200,000 inhabitants. Trade was mainly conducted in order to sustain ordinary life, rather than to procure lavish luxury products. However, some burghers, especially in Åbo and Vyborg, were wealthy, while also occupying prominent political positions within their local communities.²⁰

By Nordic standards, Åbo was a lively trading town, and previous Hansa connections had brought international trade to the port. During the seventeenth century, the connections between Åbo and the outside world intensified, particularly because of the trade with Amsterdam. Timber, timber-related products and salt stood central in these trading exchanges. Salt was imported from Southern Europe, via Amsterdam, and played a crucial role in Finnish society, since it was needed to preserve fish and meat, both consumed in Finland.²¹

While the burghers of Åbo certainly welcomed the arrival of Dutch skipper, it was the Finnish freeholders (*bonde*) who stood to gain most from trading with Dutchmen looking to buy tar.²² In the seventeenth century, Swedish participation in several wars had increased the need for new sources of revenue, and the kingdom had begun to apply greater tax pressure to Finnish freeholders, who were expected to pay in either cash, crops or tar.²³ To pay in crops was problematic, especially because of unpredictable harvesting seasons created by the harsh climate conditions in Finland. Nils Erik Villstrand has convincingly demonstrated that Finnish freeholders could cover their tax obligations by selling tar, which they did by producing and selling it to town burghers, as an alternative to payments in crops or in tar. The increasing Dutch demand for tar in the market in Åbo, provoked a chain reaction to the Finnish countryside, where the individual wealth of freeholders translated into comfortable means for the payment of royally imposed taxes. For the freeholders, the production and trade of tar, from the countryside to Åbo translated into improvement on their quality of daily life.²⁴

In Finland, tar production was divided geographically into two sepa-

Finland in 1812. During the period of Swedish rule, Åbo was the administrative centre of Finland.

20 Karonen, *Pohjoinen Suurvalta*, 170–172.

21 Kustaa Vilkkuna, 'Jokapäiväinen ravinto' in: Kai Häggman et al eds., *Suomalaisen arjen historia, savupirttien Suomi* (Helsinki 2006) 138–140; On the importance of Portuguese salt export through the Amsterdam shipping sector, C. Antunes 'The Commercial Relationship between Amsterdam and the Portuguese Salt-Exporting Ports: Aveiro and Setubal, 1580–1715', *Journal of Early Modern History* 12 (2008) 25–51.

22 'Freeholder' is commonly used in a Nordic

context to refer to the rural population involved in farming and trade. A freeholder was a relatively wealthy farmer who paid taxes, owned his own household, cultivated his own land and was, unlike the tenants, in control over his own resources. About the social structure in the early modern Nordic agricultural societies, Ulla Koskinen ed., *Aggressive and Violent Peasant Elites in the Nordic Countries, C.1500–1700* (London 2017).

23 Villstrand has shown that payments of tar also enabled the sons of freeholders to avoid compulsory service in the Swedish army. Villstrand, 'Med stor möda'.

24 Ibidem.

rate corridors: the eastern part of Finland, around the area of Savonia; and the western part of Finland around the area of Ostrobothnia. This article is primarily concerned with the western corridor of tar production. Around the Gulf of Bothnia, the tar trade became, as a result of Dutch demand, the key commercial sector during the first half of the seventeenth century. Tar was also produced in Sweden proper, but Swedish tar never gained quite the same momentum as its Finnish counterpart. Various reasons have been proposed for this divergence. For example, it has been suggested that in Sweden, the iron and copper industries required firewood and therefore there was insufficient cheap timber available to produce tar.²⁵

However, local geography and its effects on transportation costs and distribution may have been more important than the existence of competing industry for the woodlands available. Finnish coastal towns enjoyed good river connections to the hinterland and as far as the tar production areas. In terms of the logistics of tar transportation, Finland's geography was excellent. The tar produced in the hinterland was mainly transported through the local river systems to the coastal towns. Specially designed boats were used to carry the tar barrels to the towns.²⁶ Furthermore, in Savonia, the lake region of Finland, the lakes facilitated the transportation of tar. The frozen rivers and lakes were able to support sleds during the wintertime. Carrying tar barrels on the ice was easier than through the forest, where there was a lack of good roads.²⁷ Tar production thus became a large-scale business and by mid-seventeenth century, Finnish freeholder households produced roughly 80,000 barrels yearly.²⁸

The production process for a barrel of tar was long and took several years before the finished tar was conditioned for transport. In continental Europe, tar was usually produced in ovens, whereas in Finland, tar was produced in pits in the ground (so-called "tar kilns").²⁹ The production process took place inland, in the forested areas. The preparation of the kilns was labour intensive. First, it was important to choose the right pine trees to be used for tar. Only pine trees yielded the high-quality tar that the international market demanded.³⁰ In between harvest seasons, the workers first peeled the pine trees during three consecutive summers in order to make it easier for the tree sap to rise to the surface. After the peeling, the trees were left to dry for at least one year. In the meanwhile, the workers dug a large pit in the ground, where the trees would eventually be piled up. The following year, when the pines were dry and ready, they were cut and stacked densely in the pit in a specific

25 Luukko, 'Suomen todellinen tervanvienti', 64,

26 Long (between 7-10 meters) and narrow rowing boats, which were easy to maneuver in the Finnish water systems.

27 Villstrand, 'Med stor möda', 50-51.

28 Luukko, 'Suomen todellinen tervanvienti',

36; Villstrand, 'Med stor möda', 36.

29 Tjårdal (Swedish) and tervahauta (Finnish).

30 Another reason why Finland became the main supplier of tar was that the trees there were suitable for large-scale tar production.



Reproduction of a tar kiln, Seljes, Nedervetil, Finland. PICTURE BY KAARLE WIRTA



Reproduction of a tar kiln, another angle, Seljes, Nedervetil, Finland. PICTURE BY KAARLE WIRTA

formation. A coat of peat was then added and the whole stack was set alight. However, the fire was kept at minimum, and the stack was only to glow. Peat was used, in order to slow down the burning process and to create an optimum balance for heating and burning.³¹

In the pit, underneath the pile, was a pipeline that channelled the black liquid into barrels. The actual burning process lasted from days to weeks and had to be monitored in order to avoid forest fires, which could have severe consequences. Successful burning processes yielded large quantities of tar. One tar barrel could hold 40 to 60 liters of tar and one burning could provide several

31 I learned about the process through discussions with the local tar experts from Nedervetil (see footnote 1). Villstrand, 'Med

stor möda', 53-56, 62-64; Luukko, 'Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia', 172-175.

barrels of tar, depending on the size of the kiln and the number of trees used. The production process was always conducted outside the harvest season.³²

After the barrels were ready, the first quality control was performed, and after that the transportation took place. As already mentioned, during the winter, transportation was by sled, and during the summer months, by boat. Tar had an expiry date, as the quality suffered as time passed and as such, it was important to transport the tar barrels in good time. Having reached the towns, the tar was sold to local burghers who managed the trade, and they, in turn sold the tar to Dutch skippers.³³

In order to purchase the tar produced by the freeholders and sold by the town burghers, Dutch skippers, who had by the beginning of the seventeenth century become regular visitors to the Finnish archipelago and the Gulf of Bothnia, made several voyages to the Baltic, with stopovers in Finland. Before 1648, there were no formal trading companies. Individual merchants conducted the trade, and the terms of business between Dutch skippers and Finnish merchants were negotiated locally.³⁴

Several notarial contracts in the Amsterdam city archive stand witness to this trade. Usually, the Dutch ships called at Finnish coastal towns to trade in tar and some other goods in exchange for salt and, at times, other products. Dutch ships took up port to port trade throughout the Baltic. Often, ships called at Stockholm, Åbo, Dantzig and Riga, in random combinations of routes. Thus, notarial contracts demonstrate that tar was not necessarily the only commodity the Dutch ships imported from Finland. For example, fish and grains were imported, too. However, already in 1612, there were instances of direct specialized tar trade. In that same year, Dutch skipper Agge Andriessen was commissioned to sail to Åbo carrying only ballast and transport tar in his homebound trip.³⁵ This early example illustrates the special interest the Dutch market was starting to develop about Finnish tar. In the following decade, in 1628, Eelcke Mejnertz sailed to Åbo and stayed for fourteen days with the intent of buying as much tar as possible.³⁶

In January 1629, at the request of the Åbo merchant Jacob Wolle, some Dutch merchants transported two large shipments of salt from Amsterdam to Åbo. Wolle paid for the custom duties in the Sound. Indeed, the connections between Dutch merchants and Åbo merchants was well established, payments being planned and agreed upon in their contracts.³⁷ Similarly, in November

32 Tar production can be compared to other early modern complementary trading activities such as fishing. Fishing activities were complementary to agricultural production and were used as a means to earn extra income for large nuclear families and extended households throughout most of the medieval period and in many regions well into the twentieth century.

33 Villstrand, 'Med stor möda'.

34 Möller, *Suomen tapulikaupunkien*, 105-107.

35 Stadsarchief Amsterdam (SAA), Notarieel archief (NA), inv.nr. 197, fol.381, 17.09.1612.

36 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 236, fol.137, 11.09.1628.

37 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 238, fol.31, 27.01.1629. This is confirmed by Möller, who has explained that Åbo merchants had established connections with merchants in Amsterdam. Möller, *Suomen tapulikaupunkien*, 126-136.



The coat of arms of city of Karleby (the tar barrel is often present in the coat of arms of port cities in Ostrobothnia). PICTURE BY KAARLE WIRTA

1637, the famous Dutch merchants Selius and Gabrelis Marselis commissioned skipper Jan Arent to sail to Lisbon with different goods in order to procure salt there. Upon loading the salt, Arent was to sail to ports in Sweden, Finland and Riga, where the salt was to be exchanged for Baltic goods.³⁸

THE RULING BURGHERS IN ÅBO TRADE WITH AMSTERDAM

Before the establishment of trading companies, Åbo was the central marketplace for tar. This might seem strange because tar was not produced in the hinterland around Åbo, but was transported from the northern parts of the Gulf of Bothnia. The reason was the organisation of international trade in the Swedish kingdom, which provided the main reasons for Dutch skippers to visit the port of Åbo. Because of lack of know-how of the local geography and trading customs in Finland, Dutch skippers could not trade directly with the tar producers in the hinterland. Indeed, this was why the port towns became key nodes in the tar trade. The domestic tar in Finland ran through a web of smaller towns and was exported from the northern town of the gulf to the south, all the way to Åbo.

The organisational structure was implemented in 1614 through the *Royal Trade and Sailing Act* of king Gustav II Adolf. This forced foreign ships seeking to trade in Finland to sail to either Vyborg or Åbo. The reason for the act was to better control custom revenues, to secure control of international trade in a mercantile fashion and to promote the export sector through the agency of certain key merchant groups.³⁹

38 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 676, fol.164, 13.11.1637.

39 Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien, 15–16; On international trade in Åbo, see Bondsdorff, 'Bidrag till Åbo', Vol.1, 423–446.

40 In Finland, the terms used for these merchants are *handlandenens klass* (Swedish) and *valtaporvari* (Finnish). Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien. Välimäki, Keskinen and

In this context, only certain port cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg, Vyborg and Åbo were able to conduct international trade, since they enjoyed privileged rights with regard to staple products. At the same time, in these towns, only specific privileged groups were allowed to trade internationally. Åbo had two merchant groups of which the most powerful, the ruling burghers, were allowed to participate in international trade, whereas the least powerful group was only allowed to trade domestically (within Finland).⁴⁰

The ruling burghers were merchants who combined local and international trade in a structured manner. Ruling burghers founded individual enterprises with the support of their families.⁴¹ Usually, the head of the family was responsible for the actual trade, including the maintenance of business relationships both internationally and locally, bookkeeping and business correspondence. The same *pater familias* also planned strategic marriages, for himself and his children, so as to attain upward social mobility and consolidate accumulated wealth.⁴² The supporting system behind these powerful ruling burghers was constituted by social networks of family members, with whom the burghers maintained patron-client relationships. Sons and in-laws made an especially important contribution to trade. However, also women and particularly widows were able to act as heads of these family firms.⁴³

In 1638, there were around seventy ruling burghers in Åbo, of whom the majority were involved in the wholesale trade. Many of these ruling burghers had a foreign background themselves.⁴⁴ In the seventeenth century, foreign families began to migrate to locations throughout Sweden. For example, Gothenburg and Stockholm became home to an increasing number of Dutch, German, Belgian and Scottish migrant families. Many of these families brought with them capital, knowledge and experience of participation in international trade. Some of these families migrated due to religious conflicts in their countries of origin. However, for many, tax breaks, opportunities for social advancement and prospects of ennoblement provided major incentives for migrating to the Nordic kingdoms.⁴⁵

Toropainen, calls these merchants the *higher bourgeoisie*. J. Keskinen, V.P. Toropainen and M. Välimäki, 'The Iron Lady Elin Säger: Head of a Family Business' in: Jarna Heinonen and Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen eds., *Women in Business Families: From Past to Present* (New York 2018) 44–66. On the earlier history of the Åbo burghers, see Mika Kallioinen, *Kauppias, kaupunki, kruunu; Turun porvariyhteisö ja talouden organisaation varhaiskeskialta 1570-luvulle* (Helsinki 2000).

⁴¹ This should not be confused with larger merchant houses, see Leos Müller, *The Merchant Houses of Stockholm, C. 1640–1800: A Comparative Study of Early-Modern Entrepreneurial Behaviour* (Uppsala 1998).

⁴² Something which was also familiar in the Dutch Republic, see Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY 2005).

⁴³ Karonen, 'Patruunat ja poliitikot', 156; Keskinen, Toropainen, Välimäki, 'The Iron Lady'; Veli Pekka Toropainen, *Päätäväiset porvarskat. Turun johtavan porvariston naisten toimijuus vuosina 1623–1670* (PhD-Dissertation, Turku: University of Turku 2016).

⁴⁴ Karonen, 'Patruunat ja poliitikot', 158; Bondsdorff, 'Bidrag till Åbo', Vol.1, 475–476; Möller, *Suomen tapulikaupunkien*, 46–47.

⁴⁵ Wirta, *Early Modern Overseas*, chapter 2; Veli Pekka Toropainen, 'Valtaporvari Thomas

Some of these merchant families settled in Åbo, including the Trelle (Träll or Trail) family from Scotland.⁴⁶ According to Veli-Pekka Toropainen, the Trelle family specialized in international trade and sold goods especially to the Baltic ports. Toropainen has shown that the Trelle family had representatives (agents) stationed at Ostrobothnia, who purchased tar, which was then resold in Åbo. From Åbo, the family dispatched imported salt to Ostrobothnia.⁴⁷

Connections to Amsterdam merchants were organized through Hans Trelle. Initially, Trelle was involved in the development of the international salt trade through his connections to Amsterdam. In 1628, Trelle had bought salt from Cornelis van Goor, merchant in Amsterdam. The salt was then insured and transported to Åbo by skipper Jan Jacob Boyerman. According to the contract, the voyage was to be completed within fourteen days.⁴⁸ Amsterdam notarial records show that Hans Trelle also played an important role in the tar trade with the Amsterdam merchants. As early as October 1630, Trelle freighted a ship from Amsterdam to Åbo in order to export tar back to Amsterdam.⁴⁹ During the years 1630 and 1631, Trelle himself travelled to Amsterdam. In January 1631, as revealed by a notary statement, Trelle was in Amsterdam, from where he managed his affairs.⁵⁰

This shows a shift in power relations, too. The increasing Dutch shipbuilding sector needed to secure even more tar and having capable providers was crucial for the shipbuilding sector. At the same time, however, the cases show how merchants from Finland learned how to do international business with Amsterdam. Through his own means, Trelle was able to insure ships, use Dutch transport services and operate the business also outside Åbo. The case of Trelle shows that merchants in Finland were not simply passive bystanders, but learned how to plug themselves in the international maritime sector.

In 1631, Hans Trelle owed the Amsterdam merchant Pieter Wijmer for the textiles he had obtained. By way of payment, Trelle promised to pay in tar. Wijmer and Trelle maintained business partnerships throughout the 1630s, continuing to trade in various occasions. In August 1631, however, Trelle transferred all his assets in Amsterdam and Åbo to Wijmer, as Wijmer had taken over Trelle's business, and proceeded to regularly dispatch ships from Amsterdam to Åbo in order to purchase tar.⁵¹

In Åbo, the position of Trelle was eventually taken over by an even more influential merchant, Peter Terworste (Thorwöste), who like Trelle

Trällin', 2-3; Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien, 61-69.

46 Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien, 56.

47 Toropainen, 'Skottirootta ja Ruotsin koira'; Toropainen, 'Valtaporvari Thomas Trällin'; Toropainen, 'Päättäväiset porvarskat'.

48 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 237, fol.47, 16.10.1629.

49 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 242, fol.173, 14.10.1630.

50 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 242, fo.180, 17.10.1630; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 664, fol.141, 07.01.1631.

51 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 665, fol.177-178, 05.08.1631; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 694(b), omslag.62, fol.685, 02.06.1634; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 695A, fol.107, 19.03.1635; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 695A, fol.329, 14.03.1636.



Miniature model of a tar production site, from the Vaasa-400 exhibition, Österbottens museum, Vasa, Finland. PICTURE BY KAARLE WIRTA

belonged to the migrant communities of Åbo.⁵² Terworste stemmed from a prominent merchant dynasty in Germany. Originally from Lübeck, he settled in Åbo around 1630. He initially arrived to serve as an apprentice to the town's wealthiest merchant, Jacob Wolle.⁵³ In 1631, Terworste married the daughter of Johan Såger, another distinguished merchant. In this way, Terworste had already advanced his social standing prior to taking over the tar trade. With regard to the latter, his experience and connections with merchants in Amsterdam enabled him to rapidly become the main tar merchant in Åbo. Having established a career as a tar merchant, he later became involved with the iron industry, being the owner and founder of manufactories in Fiskars, Svartå and Antskog. In this way, the accumulated capital of tar trade was reinvested in the iron industry. This shift was motivated by the altered prospects of the tar trade, which were transformed by the establishment of formal trading companies in 1648.⁵⁴

During the 1630s and 1640s, Terworste became the most influential tar merchant in Åbo. For example, in 1637, on behalf of Terworste, Dirck van Dans freighted the ship *De Witte Windhondt* to sail with goods to Åbo, where it would exchange the latter for tar, before sailing back to Amsterdam.⁵⁵ Between 1637 and 1648, several other such voyages were freighted by van

52 In several places of her book, Möller presents Terworste and his role in Åbo. Möller, *Suomen tapulikaupunkien*.

53 Also, Wolle was from foreign origin and belonged to the group of ruling burghers.

Carpelan, '*Åbo i genealogiskt*', 143.

54 Keskinen, Toropainen, Välimäki, '*The Iron Lady*'; Carpelan, '*Åbo i genealogiskt*', 99-105.

55 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1407, fol.27, 06.04.1637.

Dans on behalf of Terworste. Some incoming voyages carried only ballast, demonstrating that the sole intention was to trade in tar.⁵⁶ However, in 1648, Terworste's tar business was effectively terminated due to the establishment of the Tar company. The company was initially set up because the state council (riksrådet) in Sweden was worried that if the tar trade was not regulated, the profits would disappear abroad because foreign merchants could dictate the prices but also in order to better monitor customs and toll revenues (see next section). Once the company was established, Terworste had little choice but to sell his warehouses to the company. Along with a group of other burghers from Åbo, Terworste appealed to the king against the company, but to no avail. After the company was established, the Dutch ceased to send ships to Åbo to buy tar from independent merchants.

TOWARDS AN ORGANISED TAR TRADE

Prior to the establishment of companies, the market was more unregulated, which had its downside from a Dutch point of view. On various occasions, the Dutch buyers complained about the quality of the tar and about the way in which Finnish merchants calculated quantities and prices of tar barrels. This is clearly demonstrated by an Amsterdam notarial deed from September 1641. Two Dutch tar buyers complained to the notary that a large part of the tar they had bought from Jacob Jensen, a merchant in Åbo, was of poor quality. According to their complaint, of the 80 tons of tar, 37 tons were merely "black water".⁵⁷ Åbo merchants and Dutch skippers also argued over who was responsible for toll and custom duties. Moreover, Finnish and Dutch measurements were sometimes inconsistent.⁵⁸ Occasionally, the climate also posed challenges. Especially during winter time, trading with Åbo was almost impossible, because of the frozen sea. In 1639, the sea surrounding Åbo froze over for several months, making it difficult to trade with the town.⁵⁹

Also, from the Swedish perspective, the challenges of unregulated trade, lack of quality control and price negotiation, caused concern. The matters were also discussed by the state council in Sweden, which had begun to plan the reorganization of the international tar trade. Already during the 1630s, the Swedish state council discussed the idea of placing the tar trade under state control. In particular, the council was worried about foreign merchants that could dictate the prices in the market, while carrying off their earnings abroad. In 1636, Sweden renewed the trade and sailing acts, binding foreign trade

56 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1407, fol.69, 13.05.1637; SAA, NA, inv.nr.1407, fol.75, 15.05.1637; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1407, fol.174, 31.08.1637; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1407, fol.186, 15.09.1637; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1407, fol.432, 18.09.1638; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1530, fol.66-67, 06.04.1646; SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1532,

fol.82, 29.08.1648.

57 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1568, fol. 264, 07.09.1641.

58 Also, in Bondsdorff, 'Bidrag till Åbo', Vol.1, 433.

59 SAA, NA, inv.nr. 1611, fol.30-32, 15.06.1639.

tighter to Stockholm and Åbo. The idea was to tense the grip of the state over the growing number of foreign traders, especially Dutch skippers. The new act provided for an annual three-week open market in Stockholm and Åbo. In part, this was an attempt to better monitor foreign ships and to be better equipped to deal with quality controls but created also more competition for Dutch shipping, which increased the prices for goods locally.⁶⁰

In August 1636, the chancellor Axel Oxenstierna claimed that if the state did not act to improve the situation of the kingdom's own merchants, foreign merchants would "take the bread from their mouths". He emphasized the need to organize international trade more efficiently and to thus follow the example of the Dutch Republic.⁶¹ Later that same year, while Terworste was active in international tar trade, the council first discussed the prospect of establishing a trading company for tar.⁶² However, even in 1645, the idea of such a company remained a cause of dispute in the council.⁶³ Worried voices were raised regarding how a company would affect the economies of both producers in rural areas and the burghers in the towns.⁶⁴ At the same time, the council also discussed possible means to maximise tar production. Indeed, the council had been approached by a Dutch tar producer, Hans van Swinderen, who had proposed a scheme to render the kingdom's tar production more efficient.⁶⁵

The state wanted to control international trade in all the key sectors of the economy. To this end, over the course of the century, iron, copper, salt, tobacco and finally tar were all placed under monopoly licenses.⁶⁶ In 1648, the Swedish crown granted privileges to a Stockholm-based tar trade consortium. The consortium was spearheaded by van Swinderen, who had offered the king his expertise in return for permission to establish a tar company. Over the next twenty years, the company would be solely responsible for all tar exports from the kingdom.⁶⁷

From then on, freeholders would sell their tar directly to the company instead of selling it to ruling burghers in Åbo. Ultimately, this meant that the

60 Möller, *Suomen tapulikaupunkien*, 18–19; Anders Anton von Stiernma, *Sveriges Rikes commerce. politie och oeconomie uti gemen uppå Hans Kongl.Maj:ts nodigsta belfallning, Andra delen* (Stockholm 1750) förordning om städernas seglation och fri marknad, 20.11.1636, 65–69; Angeående lilla tullen i städerna, 06.11.1636, 70–71.

61 'att fremmande skulle taga them brödet uhr munnen', Severin Bergh, *Handlingar rörande Sveriges historia. Svenska riksrådets protokoll 1636, tredje serien*. v1 (Stockholm 1889) Riksrådets protokoll, 23.08.1636, 569.

62 Bergh, 1889, Riksrådets protokoll, 27.10.1636, 677.

63 Bergh, 1905, Riksrådets protokoll,

08.03.1645.

64 Bergh, 1896, Riksrådets protokoll, 19.03.1641, 604.

65 Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia*, 136; RA, *Handel och sjöfart* vol. 63, *Tjårukompaniet och Förnyade tjårukomp 1648–1672*, Letter from the King 13.8.1629; Bergh, 1903, Riksrådets protokoll, 21.02.1645, 28; 11.12.1645, 255.

66 On these monopolies, see Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia*.

67 There are plenty of documents in the Tar Company archives regarding the establishment of the company. RA, *Handel och sjöfart* vol. 63; Privileges printed in Stiernman, *Privilegium för Tiäru Handels Compagniet*, 525–526.



Many ruling burghers in Åbo, both of native and of foreign origin were buried in the Åbo Cathedral, Finland.

PICTURE BY OTSO
KORTEKANGAS

company's privileges overruled the staple rights of Åbo.⁶⁸ This effectively removed the reason why tar producers traded with burghers in Åbo, and ultimately transforming the entire structure of the tar trade.

Åbo had dominated the tar trade for some time, but the freeholders on whom it depended had begun to turn away from the town. In Ostrobothnia, a local shipping sector emerged and increasingly the freeholders found ways to export tar barrels to the Netherlands through selling the tar to the company at its headquarters in Stockholm. By doing so, they were able to circumvent the middlemen in Åbo and develop the local economy through “the freeholder shipping sector” (bondeseigration).⁶⁹ For the latter, this created a problem in the terms of balance of payments, since Åbo remained a major importer of foreign goods. In short, due to the changing circumstances of the tar trade and the new strategies of the freeholders, the profit margins of the Åbo burghers began to recede.⁷⁰

Through the company, the trade became institutionalised, and came to depend far less on old merchant connections. New agents became involved in the tar trade, to the detriment and exclusion of the wealthy ruling elite in Åbo. The burghers in Åbo sent several protests to the king, but to no avail.⁷¹

68 On the tar companies and their role in legal history, see Tikka, Laivojen tuomaa lakia.

69 Bondeseigration (Swedish) and Talonpoikaispurjehdus (Finnish).

70 Karonen, 'Patruunat ja poliitikot', 159.

71 These protests were discussed in the

council, and the council was aware of the disappointment of the ruling burghers in Åbo: Bergh, 1912, Riksrådets protokoll, 20.02.1649, 18. RA, Handel och sjöfart, vol. 63, *Complaint against the company from the burghers in Åbo*. Also in Möller, Suomen tapulikaupunkien, 78..

Although trade between Åbo and Amsterdam did not entirely die out, it did heavily diminish. From 1648 until the eighteenth century, the tar trade remained under a chartered company. However, in the end, the company in its various incarnations never made its investors rich, as well as doing nothing to improve the condition and prospects of the local burghers and freeholders.

CONCLUSIONS

Until the establishment of the tar companies, Dutch trade connections with Finland remained intact. Especially between Amsterdam and Åbo, a lively trading community flourished. This article has shed light on the international business patterns between Åbo and Amsterdam, especially with reference to the tar trade. Tar was the thick black liquid that bound the previously unconnected merchants together. This article has also illuminated the mutual interest that existed between the merchants of the two towns. During the seventeenth century, Dutch-Finnish trade was vital for both parties. As this article has shown, the ruling elites in Åbo functioned as the central node of these various connections. With their background in international trade, they were able to secure salt imports to Finland, while also providing vital naval resources for the Dutch maritime sector. In this way, they were instrumental in the development of the global Dutch maritime empire and ultimately the globally growing maritime sector.

The intensified connections between Amsterdam and Åbo, especially in tar trade, offered the ruling burghers in Åbo new business opportunities. As the examples of Trelle and Terworste show, they got more experienced in trading with the Dutch and in developing their international business connections, not only with, but also in Amsterdam. However, the establishment of the first Tar company diminished their lucrative tar trading possibilities and they had to divert their businesses in other sectors.

Although tar was not the only product exported from the Swedish kingdom to the Dutch markets, it was highly important, not only in quantitative terms, but also in regard to the international business organisation of Finnish port towns and ultimately the Swedish kingdom as a whole.

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