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TRADE MUST GO ON.  
THE TAR TRADE, NORDIC RIVALRY,  
AND CROSS-IMPERIAL COMMERCIAL  
DIPLOMACY, 1675–79\*

**Abstract**

The Scanian War fought between Sweden and Denmark (1675–1679) is an example of an armed conflict, which uncovers the clash between the commercial and political interests. This article analyses the dispute between the political allies, the Danish Crown and the Dutch States General considering the trade with Sweden. The Danish naval officials had captured and confiscated the cargoes of seven Dutch tar vessels, heading to Amsterdam from present-day Finland in 1677, which resulted in a major political dispute between Denmark and the Dutch Republic. By drawing upon the methodology of new diplomatic history, the article analyses the negotiations between the diplomatic actors involved in the disputes relating to the confiscation of the ships, all of whom represented the various powers involved in the Baltic export trade.

**Keywords:** commercial diplomacy, privateering, empires, Baltic trade, Swedish Empire, Dutch Republic

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1677, the merchant elites of the Dutch Republic received distressing news from the Baltic Sea region. Danish naval officials had confiscated seven tar vessels heading to Amsterdam, flying the Dutch flag. According to the report from the Dutch secretary at the Danish Sound, the cargoes had comprised some 1090 lasts of tar and pitch and had been bought by the Amsterdam merchants Philip Botte and Samuel van Breda.<sup>1</sup> Because the case was considered an issue of foreign policy, the States General protested directly to the king of Denmark regarding the confiscation of the ships. Suddenly, the Danish king found himself embroiled in a major commercial dispute with the States General, which until then had been a political ally in the Scanian War against Sweden (1675–1679).

Such captures and confiscations of tar vessels during the Scanian War serve as a point of departure for this article. The article examines international trade from a cross-imperial perspective, inquiring into why the Danish empire chose to confiscate Dutch-Swedish tar ships arriving from Finland (and subsequently from the eastern part of the Swedish realm) on their way to Amsterdam. The article shows how these confiscations were a part of the *Dominium Maris Baltici* and a matter of financing and sustaining the Swedish empire, which had significant commercial interests in north-western Europe. By analysing this case study, the article contributes to our understanding of early modern empires as complex systems with several layers of power relations, often of asymmetrical nature. As such, it goes beyond teleological narratives of the expanding power of state actors. At the heart of the article are the negotiations between the diplomatic actors involved in the disputes relating to the confiscation of the ships, all of whom represented the various powers involved in the Baltic export trade.

Recent methodological discussions have underlined the importance of widening the scope of inquiry from the traditional study of international

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<sup>1</sup> Extract of the dispatch written by the Dutch secretary in the Sound, Jan van Deurs, 12 Aug. 1677, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, HaNa, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv. no. 7181; One last (Swedish) tar = 12 barrels. Annagreta Hallberg, 'Tjärexport och tjärhandelskompanier under Stormaktsiden', *Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier*, 34 (1959), 86.

relations to agents such as merchants, cultural brokers, and other cross-cultural arbitrators.<sup>2</sup> Following this methodological approach, the article focuses on the conflict of interest between those Dutch financiers who aimed to maintain the Baltic trade during the Nordic power political conflict and those Danish state-actors willing to constrain commerce as part of a military operation.

The methodological approach applied here is *commercial diplomacy*, which we define as practices that officially aimed at resolving disputes regarding trade and commerce between sovereigns but were heavily shaped and driven by the economic interests of different individuals, groups, and business organisations.<sup>3</sup> The interactions between the Swedish and Danish authorities and the merchant networks of Amsterdam outlined above were representative of such commercial diplomacy. On the one hand, the actions and aspirations of states represented the political and diplomatic processes discussed here. On the other hand, the agency of merchant networks and business executives as embodied by Botte and van Breda highlights the multifaceted character of international commerce. These two aspects of the development of early modern European empires sometimes came into conflict, even though merchant interests could become part of the state-building process. Tar was a product that demonstrated just how dependent the European empires were upon one another, despite their ongoing political rivalries.

Thus, commercial diplomacy aims to link the actions of merchants as non-state actors to early modern political institutions and the diplomatic representatives of sovereigns. By bringing state institutions into the analysis, the concept differs from that of 'business diplomacy', as discussed by Wirta, Tikka and Björklund.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tracey Sowerby, 'Early Modern Diplomatic History', *History Compass*, 14, no. 9 (2016), 441–56; Louis Sicking and Maurits Ebben, 'Nieuwe diplomatieke geschiedenis van de premoderne tijd. Een inleiding', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 127, no. 4 (2014), 541–52; Maurits Ebben, 'Uwer Hoog Moogenden onderdaenigsten dienaers. Nederlandse consuls en Staatse diplomatie in Spanje, 1648–1661', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 127, no. 4 (2014), 649–72.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Hannula's current research project is investigating the conceptual frameworks of commercial diplomacy, Free Ships, Free Goods. Dutch-Scandinavian Disputes upon Trade and Commerce 1675–1697, University of Helsinki, Helsinki.

<sup>4</sup> See the article by Tikka, Wirta and Björklund in this issue (pp. 21–51).

The article illustrates the profound international entanglements of the Swedish export trade in tar, which profited merchants abroad and stood at the centre of the commercial dispute between the States General and the Danish Crown. From the perspective of Dutch subjects, the tar trade was a legitimate business secured by commercial treaties. In contrast, for the Danish Crown, it was an unacceptable form of collaboration with the enemy. Thus, the article argues that the Swedish trade in naval stores should also be studied from the perspective of the end of the supply chain, rather than solely from the perspective of the domestic production of tar.

#### INTERNATIONAL TAR TRADE AND INTERTWINED EMPIRES

Since the beginning of the century, the Swedish empire had been the leading exporter of tar in the world.<sup>5</sup> Tar and pitch were indispensable to the entire maritime sector, particularly for maintaining the sailing capacity of ships against the rotting of the woodwork. The quantities of tar needed for the navies in France, England, the Iberian kingdoms and the Dutch Republic underline the importance of the Swedish naval stores at the time. For example, during the 1670s, the Anglo-Dutch wars, the Dutch-French wars, and the colonial conflicts in Asia and the Atlantic forced imperial powers to build and expand their navies significantly, for which tar was essential.<sup>6</sup>

The Swedish empire, and especially its eastern region, Finland, specialised in producing and exporting tar.<sup>7</sup> As such, the international tar trade had significant strategic importance for European maritime expansion as a whole. Around the middle of the seventeenth century,

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<sup>5</sup> Kaarle Wirta, 'Tar Ruling the Waves: Seventeenth-Century Dutch trade connections with Finland', *Tijdschrift voor Zeegechiedenis*, 2 (2020), 42–58.

<sup>6</sup> Markku Kuisma, *Metsäteollisuuden maa – Suomi, metsät ja kansainvälinen järjestelmä 1620–1920* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1993), 27–31; Elmo Kaila, *Pohjanmaa ja meri 1600- ja 1700-luvuilla. Talousmaantieteellis-historiallinen tutkimus* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1939; Historiallisia Tutkimuksia, XIV), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Sven-Erik Åström, *From Tar to Timber. Studies in Northeast European Forest Exploitation and Foreign Trade 1660–1860* (Helsinki: Societas scientiarum Fennica, 1998).

the Swedish empire produced approximately 20,000 tons of bar iron, 21,000 tons of copper and 16,000 tons of tar and pitch. By the mid-seventeenth century, the eastern part of the realm produced roughly 80,000 barrels per year, and most of these goods were exported. Together, these three products accounted for 90 per cent of all exports from Sweden (incl. Finland).<sup>8</sup>

From the perspective of its overall resale value, tar was less lucrative than metals, which Müller has dubbed the ‘rich trades’ of Northern Europe.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, exporting tar and pitch was not a bulk trade: it was a finished product with paramount strategic importance, indispensable to early modern shipbuilding.<sup>10</sup>

Until the 1670s, tar was predominantly exported to Amsterdam, but slowly, more and more tar came to be exported elsewhere, especially to France and England. Since establishing the first chartered Tar Company (1648), tar was tightly organised as a monopoly. The company aimed to benefit from the growing international tar trade and, in this way, to fill the pockets of its investors. However, maintaining a monopoly was expensive, and due to issues with financing, the trade and the company had to be re-established several times. Export volumes of tar grew steadily throughout the century. However, the company still ended up in financial difficulties, as the foreign company factors (officials) stationed in Amsterdam reaped the benefits of the trade.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Armas Luukko, ‘Suomen todellinen tervanvienti ensimmäisen tervakomppanian aikana (1648–1659)’, ‘Suomen todellinen tervanvienti ensimmäisen tervakomppanian aikana (1648–1659)’, *Näkökulmia menneisyyteen. Eino Jutikkalan jublakirja* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1967), pp. 59–64; Michiel de Jong, ‘Dutch entrepreneurs in the Swedish Crown trade in copper and iron, 1580–1630’, in *Trade, Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange. Continuity and Change in the North Sea Area and the Baltic*, ed. by Hanno Brand (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2005), pp. 223–39.

<sup>9</sup> Leos Müller, ‘The Dutch entrepreneurial networks and Sweden in the Age of Greatness’, in *Trade, Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange*, pp. 66–68.

<sup>10</sup> Åström, *From Tar to Timber*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Pieter Klein, ‘A 17th-century monopoly game. The Swedish-Dutch trade in tar and pitch’, in *Wirtschaftswege und Wirtschaftskräfte*, vol. 2: *Wirtschaftskräfte in der europäischen Expansion. Festschrift für Herman Kellenbenz II*, ed. by Jürgen Schneider (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), pp. 459–470. For recent research on the tar companies, see Katja Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia. Ruotsin ensimmäiset kauppakomppanijat 1600-luvulla* (Helsinki: Unigrafia, 2020).

Throughout the era of the companies, the financially powerful entrepreneurs of Amsterdam, such as the Trip family, were responsible for selling the tar in the Republic. Initially, they attained their position in Amsterdam by lending money to the tar companies at a considerable interest rate in exchange for privileges. For example, as collateral for a loan, they received the monopoly rights to resell the tar in Amsterdam. This, however, created a vicious circle, whereby the company constantly remained in debt to the Amsterdam entrepreneurs.<sup>12</sup>

In 1662, the company was again re-established. A Dutch firm that of Joseph Deutz and Christoffer van Gangelt paid the company's debts to the Trip family in return for the exclusive right to sell tar.<sup>13</sup> In this way, Dutch entrepreneurs kept the profitable tar trade under their control. From a purely business point of view, this was not unique: other major Swedish exports, such as copper and iron, were also maintained through extensive loans in exchange for monopolies.<sup>14</sup>

A decade later, in 1672, the company's debts had increased to the point that it again had to be re-established.<sup>15</sup> The new company was initially formed by a business network that included the Swedish elite and the entrepreneurs of Amsterdam. The re-establishment was proposed by an Amsterdam merchant, Philip Botte, who lived in Sweden for years. He was partnered with Jean de Flon, Klas Wilckens, the mayor of Stockholm Märten Bunge, and a group of other merchants in Stockholm. The driving force in the company was Botte, who also became a member of the Board of Directors, but soon moved to Amsterdam, where he became the factor of the company.<sup>16</sup>

This system, which relied on Dutch factors in Amsterdam, was no different from the earlier business model as Joseph Deutz and the Trip

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<sup>12</sup> Pieter Klein, *De Trippen in de 17e eeuw: een studie over het ondernemersgedrag op de Hollandse stapelmarkt* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), pp. 467–70.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 470–72.

<sup>14</sup> Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia*, p. 124; Michiel de Jong, 'Dutch Entrepreneurs in the Swedish Crown Trade', in *Trade, Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange*, pp. 223–39.

<sup>15</sup> Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia*, p. 198.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Oskar Fyhrvall, *Svenska Handelslagstiftningens historia, Tjärhandelskompanierna* (Stockholm: Akademisk afhandling, 1880), p. 31; Hallberg, 'Tjärexport', 122; Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa lakia*, p. 198.

family practised. Curiously, Botte was the agent of Joseph Deutz, and in this way, Deutz remained involved in the company, although he had withdrawn from its administration. Throughout the active years of the Tar Company, Deutz remained in the background, pulling the company's strings through Botte.<sup>17</sup>

Oscar Gelderblom et al. have shown that Deutz preferred to do business through direct financing. He was an entrepreneur who offered short-term credit instead of becoming involved in the actual tar trade. He had become sufficiently wealthy to remain in the background offering credit services. The interest that accrued filled his coffers, and he was aware that eventually, there would be problems with retaining the monopoly on the tar trade. Furthermore, Deutz was versatile in his approach to financing.<sup>18</sup> When difficulties with exporting tar from Sweden to Amsterdam began, he was quick to finance English tar buyers. As Roseveare has shown, Deutz was also involved in financing the Swedish–English tar trade. When the English agents agreed in 1676 to buy tar from Sweden, Deutz financed them. This was done by offering credit to the English tar agents in return for a rate of interest.<sup>19</sup>

In this way, he could reduce his own risk while creaming off the benefits of controlling the supply of tar. It had become apparent towards the end of the previous company, in which Deutz had been the factor, and he had quarrelled with the company's directors regarding the credits he had provided. A convenient solution for Deutz was to stay involved in the trade by ensuring that one of his own men was placed in charge of the company. Until his death, he continued to lend money to Botte

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Roseveare, 'Stockholm – London – Amsterdam: The Triangle of Trade 1660–1680', in *The Interactions of Amsterdam and Antwerp with the Baltic Region, 1400–1800: De Nederlanden en het Oostzeegebied, 1400–1800: Papers presented at the third international conference of the 'Association internationale d'histoire des mers nordiques de l'Europe', Utrecht, August 30th – September 3rd 1982*, ed. by Wiert Jan Wieringa (Leiden: M. Nijhoff, 1983), pp. 85, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Oscar Gelderblom, Joost Jonker, and Clemens Kool, 'Direct finance in the Dutch Golden Age', *Economic History Review*, 69 (2016), 1178–98.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Roseveare (ed.), *Markets and Merchants of the Late Seventeenth Century. The Marescoe-David Letters, 1668–1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 164–65.

and the company.<sup>20</sup> This is important for the argument of this paper since it shows that when the Danish authorities confiscated tar ships, it not only had an impact on the Swedish export trade but also on the entrepreneurs in Amsterdam that financed it.

Even the contemporary Dutch entrepreneurs who traded with Sweden were vocal about the connection between Amsterdam and the Swedish international trade. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Dutch merchants petitioned the Swedish king to decrease the tolls. Merchants involved in the trade of salt, copper, iron, and tar asserted that the entire Baltic region was heavily influenced by Amsterdam, its institutions, its infrastructure and its inhabitants, to the point that the city had become the centre for all trade, on which all other powers were dependent. According to a lengthy description by Amsterdam merchants, such connections to Amsterdam had given Sweden great wealth and flourishing trade.<sup>21</sup> The participation of the Dutch fleet in the Nordic War during the late 1650s demonstrated that direct naval operations could protect these commercial interests.

This underlines the importance of Amsterdam and its entrepreneurs as a factor of analysis. The role of Amsterdam in the Swedish international trade is of paramount importance to understanding the ambitions of the Swedish empire internationally. It is thus no surprise that the Amsterdam factor Philip Botte was furious about any disturbance of his businesses. During the 1670s, there were two intertwined conflicts, both of which disrupted the Swedish maritime trade. First, the outbreak of the Franco-Dutch War and the Dutch Disaster Year (*Rampjaar*) in 1672 abruptly halted Swedish exports of tar to the Republic.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, as noted above, the company began looking for new customers in England and France.

The second blow was the spread of the Franco-Dutch War to Northern Europe. In particular, the alliance formed between Sweden

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<sup>20</sup> Klein, '17th-century monopoly game', pp. 465–66.

<sup>21</sup> Riksarkivet, Stockholm (hereafter cited as RA), Handel och Sjöfart, vol. 10, Nootwendich vertook over den oosterschenhandel tot opmerkinge in deses tijts gelegenheijt, date unknown, probably 1646.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press–Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 294.



and France in 1674 led to the outbreak of the Scanian War in 1675. In this conflict, the anti-French alliance between Brandenburg and the Dutch Republic was joined by the Danish king, who wished to retake the region of Scania.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the Scanian War was part of a much wider European conflict. Following the articles of the alliance treaty of 1675, the Dutch Republic supported the Danish king by sending a naval fleet to the Baltic Sea. The aim was to undermine Swedish military strength by jeopardising its operations against Brandenburg, the enemy of the French king. Although scholars have argued that this was part of the Republic's struggle against Swedish protectionism, there is hardly any evidence that the merchants of Amsterdam wished for war in Northern Europe.<sup>24</sup> As the following analysis will show, the reality was quite the contrary. The outbreak of the Scanian War posed a severe threat to Dutch trading interests in Northern Europe. It endangered the established trade with Northern Europe and risked jeopardising the vital deliveries of grain from the Southern Baltic ports as well as of naval stores from Sweden.

#### ATTACKS AGAINST THE TAR TRADE AND THE ACCELERATION OF THE DUTCH-DANISH COMMERCIAL DISPUTES

The Scanian War heavily disrupted Dutch-Swedish commercial ventures.<sup>25</sup> Even though the Vroedschap (council) of Amsterdam had wished for the continuation of trade despite the mutual declaration

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<sup>23</sup> Göran Rystad, 'Sweden and the Nijmegen Peace Congress', in *The peace of Nijmegen 1676–1678/79: International congress of the tricentennial = La paix de Nimègue: colloque international du tricentenaire, Nijmegen, 14–16 September 1978*, ed. by J.A.H. Bots (Amsterdam: Holland Universiteits Pers, 1980), pp. 131–32; Joan Römelingh, *De diplomatieke betrekkingen van de Republiek met Denemarken en Zweden, 1660–1675* (Amsterdam: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij Jacob van Campen, 1960), pp. 174–78.

<sup>24</sup> Israel, *Dutch Primacy*, p. 300; Pepijn Brandon, *War, Capital, and the Dutch State (1588–1795)* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> This article focuses solely on Dutch–Nordic interactions. However, for a complete perspective of the events related to the Nordic rivalry of the 1670s, the English impact should not be neglected. See: Åström, *From Tar to Timber*; Roseveare (ed.), *Markets and Merchants*; Adam Grimshaw, 'Aspects of "British" Migration to Sweden in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century', in *Facing Otherness in Early Modern Sweden*, ed. by Magdalena Naum and Fredrik Ekengren (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), pp. 169–86.

of war, the Swedish riksråd (council) issued a general ban on trade with the Republic, as well as ordering Dutch subjects to either leave the country immediately or – as was the case with some wealthy individuals – to obtain Swedish burgher rights.<sup>26</sup> During these troubled months, several Dutch merchants and shipping magnates were arrested.<sup>27</sup>

During the autumn, the Swedish Tar Company protested vociferously against the trading embargo enacted against Dutch subjects, which had jeopardised crucial deliveries of more than twenty shiploads of tar and pitch. Here, the discrepancy between economic and political interests was particularly evident: not only were the tar ships banned from continuing their trade with Amsterdam, but Swedish naval officers also planned to requisition the tar ships in order to reinforce the Swedish fleet.<sup>28</sup>

Fortunately for the Swedish Tar Company, the blockade against the Dutch was not maintained for long. Even though trading with the enemy was not particularly attractive for the Swedish riksråd, the latter nevertheless saw a commercial settlement with the Dutch as a potential first step towards peace.<sup>29</sup> This combination of political and economic calculation resulted in the Dutch-Swedish commercial treaty of 1675, which was signed in November of the same year and ratified in the following summer.<sup>30</sup> What did this economic settlement stand for, and what were its effects on the Swedish export trade?

<sup>26</sup> Stadssarchief Amsterdam (hereafter cited as SAA), Resolution of the Vroedschap of Amsterdam, 31 July 1675, Archief van de Vroedschap: resoluties met munimenten of bijlagen, 30, 28 Feb. 28 1674 – 16 March 1676.

<sup>27</sup> NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv. no. 7180, C.C. Rumpf to Griffier Fagel, 13 July 1675.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Rumpf to Griffier Fagel, 31 August 1675: 'De geinteresseerde in de TeerCompagnie verleeden woensdagh naer Upsael – alwaer den Ryxdaegh deesen morgen synen aenvangh staet te neemen, en d'eerste generaele propositie te geschieden – met voorschryvens van eenige heeren senateuren aen syne Co.Maj. vertracke moeten openbaeren, off d'overige hiernoch leggende aengehaelde en met gelycke bondige passen gemunieerde Holl. Zout en TeerScheepen mede sullen vlot en wegh raecten'.

<sup>29</sup> Ragnar Hoffstedt, *Sveriges Utrikespolitik Under Krigsåren 1675–1679* (Uppsala, 1943), pp. 95–96; Sven Palme, *Sverige och Holland vid Lundakrigets Utbrott 1674–1675* (Stockholm: Karolinska Förbundets Årsbok, 1938), p. 150.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Hannula, 'Commercial Diplomacy from Below: Dutch Baltic Merchants as an Economic Interest Group in Dutch-Swedish relations 1675–1688', *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis*, 40, no. 2 (2021), 39–55.

Essentially, the articles of the commercial treaty were similar to those of the treaties enacted between the Dutch Republic and England in 1674, which had secured extensive rights to trade for as long as the state of war continued between the Swedish Crown and the States General.<sup>31</sup> They enabled the ships from both nations to load and unload at each other's harbours and continue trade without the threat of confiscation by the belligerent nation.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the merchants' rights were restored, thus enabling the Dutch agents to operate in the port cities. This was a major victory for the Dutch, as it guaranteed, at least on paper, the continuation of the Dutch Baltic trade, removing the threat of a Swedish blockade or Swedish privateering. Interestingly, the Dutch principle of 'free ships, free goods'<sup>33</sup> was now applied to trade with a belligerent power.

However, the Dutch-Swedish commercial agreement provoked disputes between two political allies, the Dutch Republic and Denmark. From the Dutch perspective, the Swedish tar was both Dutch-purchased and Dutch-shipped. From the point of view of the Swedish Tar Company, it was a Swedish export trade conducted by vessels flying the Dutch flag. As a factor, Botte acted as a dummy for the company. Nonetheless, the Danish Crown interpreted this Swedish-Dutch trade as anything but neutral, even though this was the intention of the Amsterdam merchants. Therefore, those Danish officials who arrested tar ships arriving from Sweden targeted not only the Swedish export trade but also the Dutch business of tar imports. The confiscation of ships carrying tar and pitch,

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<sup>31</sup> Peace Treaty between Great Britain and the Netherlands, signed at Westminster, 19/9 February 1674, see *Oxford Historical Treaties, Parry's Consolidated Treaty Series*, Oxford University Press reference: 13 CTS 123.

<sup>32</sup> *Tractaet Van Navigatie En Commercie, Tusschen Den Koningh Van Sweeden ... Ende De Heeren Staten Generael ... Den 26 November 1675, Tot Stockholm Gesloten* ('s Gravenhage: J. Scheltus, 1676.)

<sup>33</sup> The doctrine of 'free ships, free goods' originally dictated that all enemy cargoes onboard a neutral vessel were protected from confiscation, even though neutral cargoes in enemy ships were subject to confiscation. It was applied for the first time in the Dutch-Spanish commercial treaty of 1650; Kinji Akashi, *Cornelius van Bynkershoek: His Role in the History of International Law* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1998), pp. 102–03; Martinus Franken, *Coenraad van Beuningen's politieke en diplomatieke activiteiten in de jaren 1667–1684* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1966), p. 8.

both essential naval stores, was not a minor issue since it impacted European maritime trade, traffic and expansion more generally.

The Tar Company, which was already struggling to maintain its solvency, could not face another significant economic setback. Even though the Dutch-Swedish commercial treaty of 1675/76 secured the tar deliveries to Amsterdam, the application of the Dutch doctrine of freedom of navigation was challenged by the intensification of warfare. In the summer of 1676, campaigns on both land and sea began. During the summer of 1676, the Danish-Dutch fleet won a significant victory over the poorly led Swedish war fleet in the Baltic Sea. Swedish troops, however, managed to defeat the Danish at the battle of Lund at the end of the same year, thus ensuring that neither of the belligerents gained the upper hand.<sup>34</sup>

As a wide range of scholarship has shown, capturing merchant vessels was part of the essence of early modern naval warfare. Privateering and arresting merchant vessels also became an important aspect of the Scanian War. On the one hand, privateering was a means to control the flow of resources to the enemy and channel these resources into maintaining one's own military capacity. As Müller states, it was during the period between the Peace of Westphalia and the French Revolution when the 'theatre of warfare partly shifted from the European continent to the seas and colonies and the profits and benefits that states could derive from them'.<sup>35</sup> Even though this was a period of rapid professionalisation of naval warfare, privateering flourished, and state and non-state violence boundaries were obscure.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, privateering was also a language of international politics, as Gijs Rommelse puts it, since it could be used as a signal for expressing discontent with the Dutch approach of free trade.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Göran Rystad, *Karl XI: En Biografi* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2001), pp. 48–56.

<sup>35</sup> Leos Müller, *Neutrality in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> Halvard Leira and Benjamin de Carvalho, 'Privateers of the North Sea: At World's End. French Privateers in Norwegian Waters', in *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires. Private Violence in Historical Context*, ed. by Alex Colás and Bryan Mabee (London–New York: Hurst–Columbia, 2010), pp. 81–82.

<sup>37</sup> Gijs Rommelse, 'Privateering as a Language of International Politics: English and French Privateering Against the Dutch Republic, 1655–1665', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17, no. 2 (2015), 183–94.

Capturing merchant vessels was a crucial part of the campaigns between the belligerents in the Scanian War. Such manoeuvres were used both to constrain Swedish military strength and set limits to the Dutch approach to free trade. However, the Danish authorities' attacks are better understood as manifestations of organised state violence and naval control directed against non-state actors.

Thus, merchant ships sailing in northern European waters faced increasing risks relating to privateering, arrests and confiscations. First, trade was disrupted by the Danish blockade of the exchange of business correspondence.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after that, both the Swedish and the Danish intensified their privateering campaigns. While the Swedish and the French privateers attacked Danish and Dutch merchant vessels in the North Sea, Danish officials used their control over the Danish Sound to capture ships that they considered to be trading with the enemy. Ultimately, these manoeuvres demonstrate the level of international entanglement and the extent of the fragility of the Swedish empire-building project. This course of events reveals the severe clash of economic and political interests, that is, between an empire with cross-imperial economic links and state actors with their own political aims.

Already in 1675, Philip Botte had feared the challenges that his tar vessels might have to face in the Danish Sound. On one occasion, he commissioned several vessels to export tar from Vyborg, Helsingfors and Stockholm to Amsterdam, carrying a total of 3700 lasts. After petitioning the States of Holland, the States General made an official request to the Danish king to guarantee the safe and unhindered passage of the tar ships through the Sound. The argumentation of Botte's letter reveals how the Amsterdam merchants perceived the Swedish trade: the goods had been lawfully bought from Swedish subjects and were now sailing under Dutch licenses. Accordingly, they should pass freely through the Sound. As the diplomatic dispatches and other information in the Sound toll register show, this was precisely what happened.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hoffstedt, *Sveriges Utrikespolitik*, pp. 165–66; Roseveare (ed.), *Merchants and Markets*, pp. 155–56.

<sup>39</sup> 'Philip Botte, Coopman ende Burger tot Amsterdam, heft Ons bij requeste te kennen gegeven, dat hij in de voortijdt van desen jegenwoordigen Jare aen Jan Matthijsz Bax, Coopman tot Dordrecht hadde vercocht het getal van drie duisent

As the Swedish attacks against the Danish trade and vice versa intensified from late 1676 onwards, the Dutch neutral traffic, which was (at least on paper) legitimate trade from Sweden to the Republic, was under threat. According to the declaration of the Danish king, any trade in food supplies with Sweden was banned. Furthermore, tar was now considered contraband. The case of the captured Dutch tar vessels was thus part of a much wider war that the principal belligerents waged against each other's trade. In the summer of 1676, the cities of Holland had urged the Grand Pensionary Fagel to lobby the extraordinary Danish envoy Henning Meyercrone in The Hague.<sup>40</sup>

In the autumn of 1676, a Scottish privateer working under a Swedish license captured a merchant vessel heading from Norway to Iceland and brought the prize to Gothenburg.<sup>41</sup> According to the diplomatic report written by Rumpf in Stockholm, the ship was loaded with codfish (Stockfisch) on account of an Iceland merchant (Islands Koopman), Thomas Janssen. What made this particular seizure serious from the perspective of the Dutch was that the skipper and the crew were, as was often the case, from Friesland, and the ship was flying the Dutch flag. Thus, it was supposed to be a free merchant ship, according to the commercial treaty between the States General and the Swedish Crown. Nevertheless, from the Swedish perspective, it was considered trade with the enemy since the Danish Crown granted the privileges of the merchants.<sup>42</sup>

The capture of the vessel, which was a violation of trade from the Danish perspective, was followed by reprisals in the following year.

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seven hondert lasten soo Wijburger ende Elsenvosser als Stockholms Teer alle op deselve plaetsen leggende', Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen (hereafter cited as RAC), Tyske Kancelli, Udenrigske Afdeling, Nederlandene: Breve, til dels med bilag og koncepter til svar, fra Generalstaterne til danske konger og enkelte andre (1582–1770).

<sup>40</sup> NL-HaNa, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01, inv. no. 109, Resolution of the States of Holland, 14 July 1676.

<sup>41</sup> In the Dutch documents these are referred to as 'Commissie-Vaarders'.

<sup>42</sup> NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv. no. 7181, Rumpf to Griffier Fagel, 30 Nov. 1676; *ibid.*, Le Maire to Rumpf, 22 August 1677. The last available information in the Sound toll registers online confirms that a vessel of the Dutch shipper Jan Janssen Kross was heading to Copenhagen from Stockholm, sailing in ballast with the crew in late summer of 1676.

According to the decision of the Danish king, naval officials were authorised to seize the tar vessels arriving from the Swedish ports and confiscate the sum of 1090 lasts of tar and pitch. According to the Danes, this was equivalent to the losses of Janssen.<sup>43</sup> Even though the resale value of the codfish compared to the tar is impossible to estimate accurately in retrospect (prices of consumer goods fluctuated, especially during times of war), it is nevertheless evident that over 1000 lasts of tar were hardly proportionate to the losses entailed by privateering a vessel filled with bulk consumer goods. Confiscating the cargoes of Janssen provided a pretext for taking measures against the Swedish export trade, which was protected by the Dutch-Swedish commercial treaty. Attacks could now be presented as legitimate countermeasures.

By analysing the data in the Sound toll registers online (STRO) and comparing them against the diplomatic source material, we can establish which specific convoy left the port of Vyborg before being captured at the Danish Sound. According to STRO data, two different convoys left for Amsterdam from the port of Vyborg before arriving at the Sound on 29 and 30 July 1677, respectively.<sup>44</sup>

This matches the data from the diplomatic source material relating to Dutch-Scandinavian issues. A letter from Griffier Fagel, including instructions to the Dutch resident Le Maire in Copenhagen, mentions the seizures, as does a letter from the Dutch secretary in Elseneur van Deurs to the Dutch resident in Stockholm Christiaan Constantijn Rumpf.<sup>45</sup> Both sources imply that the ships arriving at the Sound on 29 July 1677 were van Breda's and that those arriving on the following day were Botte's. After these ships were assembled, four of them were taken from Breda's convoy and three from Botte's.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv. no. 7181, Rumpf aan Griffier Fagel, 19 Nov. 1677.

<sup>44</sup> Sound Toll Registers Online <http://dietrich.soundtoll.nl/>. Advanced search results with standard geonames. Route: Wiborg–Amsterdam. Nationality: Dutch. Year 1677.

<sup>45</sup> NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv. no. 7181, Extract of the dispatch written by the Dutch secretary in the Sound, Jan van Deurs, 12 Aug. 1677; RA, Handel och sjöfart, vol. 10, Extract uijt het register den resolutie van de Ho: Mo: Heeren Staeten General van den vereenighde nederlanden, 25 Aug. 1679.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

It is crucial to highlight that the confiscations of the cargoes of Botte and van Breda were of considerable economic importance, even if the capture of a few vessels might not seem too important at first sight. One thousand lasts were, in fact, an enormous amount when viewed in context. One Swedish last of tar consisted of 12 barrels. In total, six or seven vessels carried over 12,000 barrels of tar, which constituted a large proportion of the total tar exports to Amsterdam.<sup>47</sup> For the Swedish Tar Company, losing such an amount to the Danes caused enormous trouble, both for the Dutch merchants and the Swedish company.

Indeed, the disputes concerning the Danish seizures of the Dutch tar vessels encapsulate something essential about the nature of the Swedish international trade in naval stores. They demonstrate how the Swedish tar trade cannot be understood sufficiently through an examination of Swedish documents. On the contrary, it must be considered from the perspective of international commercial diplomacy. Indeed, the case of the captured Dutch tar vessels opens up a whole world of conflicting political and economic interests.

Why did the Danish king risk the political alliance with the Dutch Republic by seriously disrupting the trade of the Amsterdam merchants? The answer has to do with the differing interpretations of the freedom of navigation. While the Dutch perceived the right to conduct trade with the enemy as inviolable and guaranteed by the commercial treaties, the Danish king was keen to promote the idea of *mare clausum*, which extended the right to exercise legal power over vessels that violated his own interests. From the Danish perspective, Dutch trade from the Swedish ports was contraband, even though tar was implicitly excluded from the lists of contraband in Dutch-Swedish treaties.

Thus, Swedish tar exports have to be understood in their inter-regional and imperial context. During the Scanian War, this means understanding the Swedish tar trade from the perspective of the Dutch-Danish political alliance and the simultaneously prevailing state of commercial war. It is important to stress that the Dutch perception of the 'freedom of navigation' contradicted the ideas of the Danish.

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<sup>47</sup> One last (Swedish) tar = 12 barrels. Hallberg, 'Tjälexport', 86.



Therefore, the reason behind the Danish seizures of the Dutch ships was that there were no universally accepted practices or legislation regarding neutral shipping.

Time and time again, the same arguments pro and contra the *mare liberum* occur in the diplomatic correspondence relating to the dispute between the Dutch and the Danish Crown. This shows that while coordinating the political alliance between the Dutch Republic and the Danish king was far from easy, regulating early modern commerce during an armed conflict was practically chaotic. The Danish monarchy did not intend to sever its ties with the Dutch. However, the level of entanglement between the Amsterdam merchants and the Swedish export trade in naval stores made it impossible to separate the Swedish trade from the Dutch.

The Dutch protests against the Danish privateering were channelled via Dutch political institutions. After merchants, usually those from Amsterdam, had made their petitions at the local level, the cases were taken to the higher level of the States of Holland, provided they were considered important enough. There is no doubt that the Danish seizures of the tar vessels were a top priority. Not only was the case dealt with in the States of Holland, but it was also considered at the highest diplomatic level as a question of foreign policy between the States General and the Danish Crown.

In October, the Griffier (Chief Clerk) of the States General, Hendrick Fagel, expressed his disappointment to the Danish king regarding the lack of change in the treatment of Dutch skippers. Indeed, this continued in a manner 'directly conflicting against the treaties', which 'very expressly announce and agree that the ships of these lands should not be inspected but should be left free and pass by unhindered'.<sup>48</sup> According to the Griffier, these measures were not only serious in that they violated the agreements between the states but were also 'bringing

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<sup>48</sup> Griffier Fagel to Christian V: 'Staat directeljk is srydende tegens de tractaten met Uwe Coninghlijke Majesteyte aangegaan en opgaende als waar bij expresselijck ter neder gestelt en verdragen, dat de schepen deser Landen, niet en souden mogen werden gevisiteert, maar vrij, ende onverhinder passeren', RAC, Nederlandene: Breve, til dels med bilag og koncepter til svar, fra Generalstaterne til danske konger og enkelte andre (1582–1770).

about the ruin of the commerce of this State and causing unimaginable damage to the good inhabitants trading in the Baltic Sea'.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the efforts of Dutch diplomats in Denmark and Nijmegen, the case appears to have remained unresolved.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the case of the Swedish-Dutch tar ships became an essential part of the quarrel that eventually led to the souring of Dutch-Danish relations in the 1680s. This becomes evident in documents from 1679 dealing with the general commercial relations between the Republic and the Danish Crown. While the resolutions of the States General show that the Dutch were unwilling to make any concessions in the matter, the Danish Crown argued that it had a legal right to conduct seizures.

Danish attacks against Dutch vessels continued from 1678 until the end of the war. The Crown's response to the complaints of the States General summarised the Danish stance on this matter:

Your High Mighty Lords are accustomed to writing about the general rule: Free Ships, Free Goods; Then, besides that such [a rule] has never been perceived or practised as universal, both older and more recent practices reveal contrary examples so that in this case, it cannot be applied.<sup>51</sup>

It is thus clear that from the Danish perspective, the Dutch were the carriers of the Swedish export trade, which did not enjoy neutral status. The letter also argues that the very reason behind these measures was the Swedish privateering of vessels belonging to Danish subjects. Nevertheless, as noted above, this was only the officially formulated

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<sup>49</sup> 'aanwysinge dat de Commercie van desen Staet in de grondt is geruineert, indien de Schepen Deser Landen gevisiteert ende aenghehalet mogen worden'; 'Strydich was tegens het Tractaet tusschen syne Koninghlijck Majesteyt van Denemarcken ende desen Staet gesloten'; 'te meer, daer het genoechaem is geworden een algemeyn recht tusschen alle Koningen, Princen ende Staten, welckers Ingezetenen de Zee frequenteren, dat vry Schip vry Goedt maeckt'.

<sup>50</sup> NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 8592, Deel 2, 'Vry Schip Vry Goed', p. 1803.

<sup>51</sup> NL-HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv. no. 7260, Christian V to the States General, 4 Jan. 1679: 'U. Ho:Mo beroepen haer wel in haer schrijven op de gemeene regel: Vrij Schip Vry Goet; dan behalven dat sulck noyt universaliter is aengenomen noch gepracticeert geworden, maer dat soo van oude als nieuwe bedryven vele exempelen in contrarium connen warden geallegueert, soo can hetselve noch in dese caju geen plaetse vinden'.

reason. What really mattered were the endeavours of the Danish to limit the Swedish export trade. Here, Dutch merchants were perceived as important middlemen, and Danish toll officials continually accused them of colouring their vessels Swedish to avoid paying the Sound toll. Similarly, organising the trade purely as Dutch would have offered the possibility to continue the trade by flying the foreign flag.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in 1678, one of the most prominent newspapers in Holland reported that ‘the King of Denmark let us all the ships arriving here be inspected in order to ascertain whether goods or contents belong to the Swedish’.<sup>53</sup>

The re-established Tar Company, which had suffered from these confiscations, faced great difficulties as its revenue streams were blocked at the Sound. This, in turn, had a direct impact on the streaming of the commodity chain. For example, the company had issues paying for its various expenses, including salaries, the warehousing of goods, and customs and tolls. Also, it became increasingly difficult to pay the local merchants and producers in Finland for the tar. Since the tar was under a monopoly, it could not be sold to other customers. Slowly, the local warehouses were filled, and over time, the quality of the tar deteriorated as the producers grew impatient with the company’s lack of purchasing capacity. Because the producers could not sell the tar to the company, they could no longer pay the Crown taxes. For the Crown, this meant a deficiency of funds. The growing unrest amongst the people involved

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<sup>52</sup> In 1681, this became evident in the disputes concerning the renewal of the Dutch-Danish commercial treaty. The Danish king argued that the abuses and frauds that directly violated the intentions of the treaty should be suppressed through some changes to the original treaty. Here, he referred to the allegations that the Dutch skippers were purchasing Swedish sea passes in order to avoid toll payment: ‘men oock billick ende noodigh oordeelde, dat de abusen ende defraudationes, soo tegens den sin ende de intentie der Tractaten ingekropen waren, mochten afgeschaffet, ende door eenige veranderinge in ’t toekomende voorgebouwet worden’; ‘Dat de Schiippers ende Koopluyden oock Sweetsche Zee-passen ende Certificatien voor Geldt koopen’, Resolution of the States of Holland, 10 Dec. 1681, NL-HaNa, Staten van Holland, 3.01.04.01, inv. no. 114.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Den Coningh van Denemarcken laet de Schepen, die van hier komen, in de Sont visiteren, om te vernemen of in de selve oock Goederen of Contenten zijn, die in Sweden horen’, ‘Oprechte Haerlemsche courant’, Haerlem, 1678/11/08, 2. Accessed on Delpher on December 7, 2020, <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010759189:mpeg21:p001> (accessed 10 Sep. 2021).

in the tar trade culminated in several petitions against the company. In turn, this created new difficulties for the Crown and the empire.<sup>54</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The various letters, petitions, reports and documents analysed in this article attest to how intertwined the Swedish empire and its international commerce were with the general European maritime expansion. The sheer complexities of coordinating political and commercial interests, so evident in these sources, demonstrate that it is impossible to understand the prospects of the Swedish empire purely from the perspective of the Swedish fiscal-military state.

The confiscated tar ships show that fighting over *Dominium Maris Baltici* could have severe repercussions for the international flow of naval stores and vice versa. The international tar trade was not entirely in Swedish hands, but was dependent on several foreign interests, especially regarding the financing, transporting, and maintenance of the export of tar. For this reason, the commercial conflicts concerning the Swedish tar trade took place outside of Swedish foreign policy negotiations. It was the Amsterdam merchants who protested against the Danish Crown by presenting their case to the Dutch States General rather than the Swedish Tar Company that sought to guarantee the free flow of tar to Amsterdam.

The conflict between two powers that were otherwise allies against Sweden in the Scanian War (1675–79) provides an example of the clash between Dutch commercial interests and Danish political endeavours to regain power in the Baltic Sea. When the Danish authorities captured the barrels of tar en route to Amsterdam, the protests of the tar merchants provoked a diplomatic dispute between the Dutch States General and the Danish Crown. Despite its threat to an essential political alliance, confiscating tar was a convenient way to disrupt Swedish military capacity. After all, the tar in the barrels was one of the empire's most important international exports.

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<sup>54</sup> About the internal issues of the company see Tikka, *Laivojen tuomaa*; Hallberg, *Tjärexport*.

The methodological approach of *commercial diplomacy* shows that the dynamics of the Swedish international trade in tar cannot be sufficiently understood by analysing domestic Swedish archival sources. Instead, one must also analyse the Dutch and Danish sources regarding this international export sector. By analysing the negotiations between the different parties involved in the disputes concerning Swedish tar exports, it becomes evident how strategically important tar was as a commodity to the European maritime expansion. The article shows that the seventeenth-century Swedish empire was an arena of international entanglements via its various levels of connections not only with different European sovereigns but also with foreign merchant networks. Intriguingly, the Swedish trade in tar became a battleground between the Dutch States General, whose foreign policies were heavily influenced by Amsterdam merchants, and the Danish Crown, which endeavoured to set limits to Swedish exports and curb the role of the Dutch as middlemen in this trade. While the Dutch merchants aimed at securing the neutral status of the Dutch-Swedish tar trade by underscoring the principle of ‘free ships, free goods’, for the Danish Crown, this was perceived as illicit trade with the enemy. In sum, the case of confiscated tar constitutes an intriguing case study at the crossroads between European empires, international trade and commercial law during the late seventeenth century.

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