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A Neglected Source for the History of the Commercial Relations between Scotland and the Netherlands during the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries

IT is well known that during the sixteenth and, in a lesser degree, also during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the trade with the Netherlands was the most important part of the commercial relations between Scotland and the European Continent. During the greater part of this period the Scottish trade had its official centre at Veere, and although the monopoly of the staple port was continually infringed by many Scottish merchants, Veere and the neighbouring ports of Middelburg and Vlissingen (Flushing), remained the centre of the intercourse between the two countries.

The Scottish staple at Veere has lately been the subject of two bulky volumes. At almost the same time appeared the thoroughly worked book of Davidson and Gray: *The Scottish Staple at Veere*, and M. P. Rooseboom's *Scottish Staple in the Netherlands*, whose principal merit lies in the great mass of documents printed in the Appendix. Both authors have studied the documents of the State Archives at Middelburg. Unhappily they both left untouched a series of documents containing a valuable source for their work. Neither of them seems to have been aware that the accounts of the 'Waterbaljuw' (Sheriff of the Waters) of the province of Zeeland contained an almost

uninterrupted list of all foreign ships entering one of the ports of Zeeland from 1517 to 1807.

This 'baljuw' collected the so-called 'ankerage-geld' (anchor duty) a recognition due for the use of the harbours. In his accounts of this duty the baljuw had to make a separate entry for every ship entering one of the ports. In this entry is mentioned the name of the ship, the name of its captain, its bulk, the port of departure, and the nature of its cargo.¹ Although these instructions were not always obeyed to the letter, it is clear from the beginning, that these accounts contain very valuable materials for the history of the commercial relations of the Netherlands with other countries. The duty had to be paid by the master of every ship not being 'free.' Although there is nowhere to be found an enumeration of the nations and towns whose inhabitants had acquired this freedom,² and the successive instructions of the waterbaljuw direct this functionary uniformly to conform himself to the 'customary rules,' it may be taken for granted that at least since the beginning of the seventeenth century only the inhabitants of the province of Zeeland and of the other United Provinces³ enjoyed this privilege.

This was the conclusion to which I came during a short stay at Middelburg in the summer of 1918. Afterwards my opinion was endorsed by Dr. Z. W. Sneller, now vice-director of the Royal Commission for the Publication of Historical Documents at the Hague, who⁴ is perhaps the best authority in this matter. At any rate all Scottish vessels since 1581 had to pay the anchor duty. This is made clear by the superscription of the accounts of these years, which state uniformly that the account

¹ E.g. Den XXI. Novembris 1644 is ingekomen Jan de Ridder van Zandwitz met zijn schip geladen met hout en appelen, groot vii lasten . . . 1 Sch. vii gr. vl.

Dito is ingekomen Olivier Danijs van Zandwitz met 't schip de fortuin of London met smeekolen, groot xii lasten, facit . . . 1 Sch. vls.

(7 Maart 1645) is ingekomen Codbert Dunneton komende van London met chip de Spidwell groot vi lasten, facit Sch. vls.

² All I am able to say on this subject is that the 'Easterlings' enjoyed this privilege up to 1477, but in the port of Veere only. The English seem to have been exempt of the payment still longer. In which year they lost it, is not clear, but at any rate they had to pay since 1581, as they are specially mentioned in the instructions of the waterbaljuw issued in that year.

³ Even this last exemption was not always maintained. In a few cases the duty was paid by inhabitants of the province of Holland as well.

⁴ Cf. Sneller: *Walcheren in de 15^e eeuw*, 1917, p. 66.

contains the duty paid by 'English, French, Scottish and other unfree ships.'

Although the terms of this superscription may lead to the assumption that it was the nationality of the ships, *i.e.* of the owners of the vessel, which decided whether the ankerage-geld was due or not, practically only the nationality of the skipper was inquired into. Among the documents, sent in by the waterbaljuw to substantiate his accounts, there are to be found a great many of the original declarations, written and signed by the skippers on their arrival, which declarations served to calculate the amount of the fee, due in each case. As in these declarations only the nationality of the captain is mentioned, it is impossible that any other standard was used to determine whether the ship was free or not. It seems probable however, that the difference practically was not very great. As most skippers in those days held one or more shares in the ship they commanded, the captain was rarely of a nationality different from that of the majority of its owners.

Still a certain number of Scottish ships escaped the payment of the duty. Scottish skippers could be admitted to the freedom of the city of Veere, and so acquired the freedom of the ankerage-geld. There have been years when not a single ship paid this duty at Veere, although many must have arrived at this port.

In 1660, for instance, it is noted in the account that no anchor duty was received in the last named port, 'all the Scottish skippers arriving at Veere declaring themselves citizens of this town.' What were the conditions required to obtain the freedom of this city, whether the line of conduct of its magistrates was always the same, and whether the freedom of Veere exempted the skippers who had acquired it also from payment at Middelburg and Flushing, are things still to be investigated. It seems probable that the magistrates of Veere became more liberal as the custom of frequenting other Dutch ports became stronger.

It must be remembered, furthermore, that the accounts do not mention the Scottish goods carried to Zeeland in Dutch bottoms. According to Rooseboom¹ this had been prohibited by the Privy Council of Scotland in 1617. This resolution cannot, however, have been long in force, or must have been neglected openly. In the account of the conservator of the Staple from 1627² we find an entry: 'resavit for guids comit into sundrie dutch busses L-4/8.' And since 1649 it was certainly allowed, as a

¹ Page 156.

² Rooseboom, Appendix, 119.

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resolution (of the Convention of the Burghs?) of that year¹ permitted expressly, to use foreign ships for the exportation of Staple wares, provided security was given that these goods were transported to the Staple Port.

I do not pretend to have answered all questions which may offer themselves to the student, who uses these accounts as a source for the history of commerce. Probably there remains more than one problem to be solved. It might, for instance, prove of interest to establish a careful comparison between the only account still extant of the conservator of the Staple² and the accounts of the waterbaljuw of these years, 1626-27. By comparing the two documents I was surprised to find that, while the entries in both accounts are fairly the same in 1626, there are a great many differences in the following year. Nearly half of the vessels which, according to the conservator, entered one of the three ports of Walcheren, are omitted from the accounts of the waterbaljuw. I cannot explain this.³ But whatever be the result of later investigations, it is clear that the accounts of the waterbaljuw contain vast and valuable material for the student of the history of commerce, and with an eye to the preponderant place that the intercourse with the Netherlands has taken in the commercial history of Scotland; I think I am justified in specially calling the attention of Scottish scholars to this too little known mass of documents.

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¹ *Ibid.* No. 148, 2nd article.

² The above-mentioned document, printed by Rooseboom under No. 119.

³ It is the more surprising as the administration of the waterbaljuw was evidently kept with more care than the conservator bestowed on his.