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THE GDAŃSK NAVIGATION: CONJUNCTIVE OR DISJUNCTIVE A PHENOMENON?

The existing – comprehensive – literature on the subject of the Baltic navigation is devoted to ship construction, types, size, production costs, utility period, and eventually, even though in a slightly limited scope, fleet size of an individual ensign.¹ Also, questions concerning merchant co-ownership in ships have been considered in this literature. In the medieval great trade, both on land and sea, merchant companies was a phenomenon occurring frequently. As early as the beginning of the Middle Ages the so-called *commends*, or else, trade companies established between good and ship owners functioned in Italy.² Regardless of various trade relations existing among members of different trade circles, companies, or, to be more precise, contracts signed by traders and skippers also played an important role. These were the so-called *sendeve*, appearing in large numbers as the time went by. Without analyzing their various forms – such as handing over

¹ O. Lienau: *Danziger Schifffahrt und Schiffbau in der 2. Hälfte des XV Jh.*, “Zeitschrift des Westpreußischen Geschichtsvereins”, 31, 1930, p. 72; Ch. Brämer: *Die Entwicklung der Danziger Reederei im Mittelalter*, *ibid.*, 26, 1922, p. 88, 141 ff.; M. Bogucka: *Gdańsk jako ośrodek produkcyjny w IV–XVII w.* [Gdańsk as a Production Centre in the 4th–17th Century], Warszawa 1962, pp. 41 ff.; W. Vogel: *Geschichte der deutschen Seeschifffahrt*, Bd. 1, Berlin 1915, *passim*; B. Hagedorn: *Die Entwicklung der wichtigsten Schiffstypen bis ins 19. Jh.*, Berlin 1914, pp. 34 ff.; P. Heinsius: *Das Schiff der Hansischer Frühzeit*, Weimar 1956, *passim*; K. F. Olechnowitz: *Der Schiffbau des Hansischen Spätzeit*, Weimar 1960, pp. 11 ff.; N. W. Posthumus: *De oosterse handel te Amsterdam*, Leiden 1953, pp. 77 ff.; H. Samsonowicz: *Późne średniowiecze miast nadbaltyckich* [The Late Middle Ages in the Baltic Towns], Warszawa 1968, pp. 213 ff.

² J. Heers: *Genes au XV s.*, Paris 1958, pp. 200, 309; G. Stefani: *L'assicurazione a Venezia dalla origini alle fine delle Serenissima*, Venezia 1956, p. 234; A. Tenenti: *Naufrages, corsaires et assurance maritimes a Venise*, Paris 1953, p. 125.

money to “faithful hands” in order to perform a transaction, or authorizing one company partner to conduct trade operations on behalf of the entire company³ – it seems worthy of attention to scrutinize those trade associations which are recorded in the preserved Gdańsk sources.

The material in question concerns pale duty records, researched and discussed many times so far, yet, never with regard to the content of established companies.⁴ The preserved late 15th century records inform us on harbor dues collected while entering and going out of the Gdańsk port.⁵ This article will utilize the data from two subsequent years: 1468 and 1469, and, for the sake of comparison, the data from the 1498 record.

It is not clear whether the skipper who paid the duty was traders’ partner, a hired transport entrepreneur, ship owner, or its leaseholder. His position and role, however, does not seem the same in each of the discussed cases. For the last two centuries of the Middle Ages, few contracts have been preserved which would enable us to produce a quick and unanimous answer to this question. It can be nevertheless stated that skippers did not limit themselves to organizing and conducting navigation but carried out trade activities by themselves. We do not know what their exact share in the profits was and whether it concerned only the conducted transactions, or fees paid in return for their activity and abilities as well, or ship maintenance too. Still, it is assumed that, when it comes to sea trade, companies established on the occasion of good transportation played a very important role.

In the literature on the subject an emphasis has always been put on the fact that there existed two main reasons for the establishment of the so-called *Schiffsparten*, that is, the share of several entrepreneurs in trade voyages.⁶ One of these reasons was the savings resulting from renting space on a ship paid for by a few

³ H. Samsonowicz: op. cit., pp. 186 ff.; Ch. Brämer: op. cit., p. 141.

⁴ W. Stark: *Die Danziger Pfahlkammerbücher (1468–1476) als Quelle für den Schiffs- und Warenverkehr zwischen den wendischen Hansestädten und Danzigs*, “Rostocker Beiträge”, 1, 1960, *passim*; G. Lechner, *Die Hansischen Pfundzollisten des Jahres 1368*, “Quellen und Darstellungen zur Hansischen Geschichte”, Neue Folge, 10, 1935; W. Stieda, *Schiffahrtsregister*, “Hansische Geschichtsblätter”, 1884; idem: *Revaler Pfundzollbücher und Quittungen des 14 Jhs.*, *ibid.*, 1887; F. Bruns: *Lübeckische Pfundzollbücher von 1492–1496*, *ibid.*, 1904–1905, 1907, 1908; H. Samsonowicz: *Clā nadbałtyckie w późnym średniowieczu* [The Late Middle Ages Baltic Taxes], “Zapiski Historyczne” [Historical Notes], 1967, *passim*.

⁵ Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku [The Gdańsk State Archives – hereinafter: AP Gdańsk], 300.19.3, pp. 4, 8.

⁶ H. Samsonowicz: *Późne średniowiecze ...* [The Late Middle Ages ...], pp. 83, 185–188; Ch. Brämer: op. cit., p. 33.

of its users; another one – the will to avoid the risk of losing the ship as a result of sinking or robbery and the distribution of carried goods into several units. Such views shaped the opinion that it is first and foremost companies which had been established before – long – voyages to distant lands. Thus an assumption was made that co-ownership in ships had been established mainly in the case of large, capable of travelling for a long time uninterruptedly, units. On the other hand, small vessels were designed for coastal navigation.

These practices had several results. First, in the seagoing trade of the German Hanse merchants large vessels financed by co-ownerships in ships mattered most. Consequently, there existed a silent agreement as to the second assumption, namely, that these large vessels were decisive factors when it came to specifying cities' trade turnover scale. Thirdly, co-ownerships in ships were established, if not exclusively, then in a significant majority, on the occasions of organizing trade expeditions by large vessels. Then a question arises: which ships can be considered "large", and which we refer to as "small"?⁷ It is a well-known fact that in the late 15th century there sailed on the Baltic one-mast koggas, one- or two-mast tow boats, effective also in carrying out war actions, both of these able to transport goods whose total weight amounted to from several dozen to over two hundred lasts (ca. five hundred tons). Smaller ships – boats with sails or mobilized by rowing could carry indeed products only along the coastline, over short distances, and of the weight amounting to probably no more than 20–50 tons. Medium size ships – ice-boats or ballingers mobilized by wind and rows-supported – could go longer distances thus connecting the majority of countries visited by Hanse traders. Their capacity must have amounted to about two hundred tons. Barges were of larger tonnage, yet, the distance they could go was considerably smaller and more weather-dependent. Caravels, the biggest units which could navigate with the use of the so-called lateen sail, also with the cross wind, were of the capacity amounting to over eight hundred tons and appeared on the Baltic still only sporadically.⁸

⁷ W. Vogel: *Geschichte der deutschen Seeschifffahrt*, Bd. 1, Berlin 1915, *passim*; idem: *Zur Größe der europäischen Handelsflotten im 15., 16., 17. Jh. Ein historisch-statistischer Versuch*, in: *Forschungen und Versuche zur Geschichte des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit. Festschrift Dietrich Schäfer zum siebzigsten Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Schülern*, Jena 1915, p. 280.; B. Hagedorn: *op. cit.*, pp. 88 ff.; O. Lienau: *op. cit.*, p. 6.; H. Samsonowicz: *Późne średniowiecze ... [The Late Middle Ages ...]*, pp. 213 ff.; M. M. Postan: *Partnership in English Medieval Commerce*, in: *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori*, vol. 1, Milano 1957, p. 521.

⁸ H. Samsonowicz: *Późne średniowiecze ... [The Late Middle Ages ...]*, pp. 213–214.

More precise, for based on more complete sources, English data allows us to state that when it comes to England's fleet, over 53% of its entire tonnage was carried by small vessels of the capacity amounting to less than 200 tons.⁹ With reference to Gdańsk, we do not have such precise data at our disposal, yet we can use sources which cast light on the 15th century Gdańsk navigation. The records in question are pale duty ledgers, partly preserved from the year 1460 which include harbor dues of ships entering this port, and sometimes even of those which were leaving it. The literature on the subject dealing with the value of these books, their significance, and the methods, not always fully comprehensible, by which they were kept in order, is vast. However, the intention of this paper is not to recount the results of such divagations but to attract attention to the problem of co-ownerships in ships and their role in the Gdańsk sea trade.

An entry in a duty book was performed by city scribes supervised by the so-called *Pfahlherren*, pale masters appointed by city councilors. According to Walter Stark, the information concerning a ship, carried goods, sometimes their value and owners was obtained via the skipper's oral or written declaration which was later on recorded in the ledger at the chamber office.¹⁰ Most probably, in the mid-15th century entries were made in the successive order. From the late 15th century, however, an attempt was made to stick to, alphabetically ordered, skippers' names only to treat the so-called "role" as a rough draft and to subsequently enter the records into the fair copy. The first preserved book is of the year 1460 and includes the entries of ships which both entered and went out of Gdańsk.¹¹ The book does not seem, however, to be the most representative, for the researched issues, source of information, for it originated in the year of the war, one which was particularly unfavourable for the city. Therefore in my further divagations, I will consider two books from the period after the Second Toruń (Thorn) Truce, the period which commenced the big development of Gdańsk trade (1468 and 1469), and, to compare, the book from 1498, the time of the already stabilized, advantageous economic boom of the city.

Without pondering over the amount of the paid duty, of importance is the confirmed information. The latter concerns names and surnames of both owners of transported goods and of the skipper. Merchants, sometimes individually,

⁹ D. Burwash: *English Merchant Shipping (1460–1540)*, Toronto 1947, pp. 186–187.

¹⁰ AP Gdańsk, 300.19.2a; P. Simson: *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig*, Bd. 1, Danzig 1913, p. 54; W. Stark: op. cit., pp. 8 ff.

¹¹ AP Gdańsk, 300.19.1.

and sometimes in large numbers (their number could exceed even twenty people aboard a ship) are considered members of a “co-ownership in ships”, one which included also the skipper.

Particular attention should be paid to mentions of the skipper’s name only and hence ones which inform (or rather suggest) that aboard a ship, he was at once the owner (or perhaps a consignee?) of carried goods. In such cases we would deal not so much with a co-ownership in ships but rather, as the literature on the subject suggests, with an issue concerning coastal navigation. These opinions are confirmed by the data from duty entry books only occasionally. In particular years the ships bringing only the skipper’s goods to Gdańsk comprised the following percentage of all the units recorded in the customs house: 49% in 1468, 60% in 1469, and 52% in the year 1498. The ships whose goods were declared by one owner only regularly constituted therefore over a half of all the units entering Gdańsk. It does not mean, however, that coastal navigation dominated in the port traffic. An analysis of the 1498 data concerning the export ports appears as follows:

Table 1

Ports	Number of ships	Skipper’s goods	Goods
Baie, Brouage	60	58	salt
Lübeck	55	28	salt
Wendish Hanse Towns (Stralsund, Greifswald, Wismar, Rostock)	40	16	salt, corn, flour, malt
The Netherlands	17	12	wine, spice, cloth, oil, sal
Denmark	41	14	herring, meat, leather, horses, tallow
Livonia, Finland	39	12	cod-liver oil, corn, horses, cloth, salt
Sweden	19	5	metal, horses, ash
Scotland	7	2	fur

The above compilation passes over the ports of the Szczecin Pomerania, Royal Prussia, and the State of the Teutonic order from which, it seems, ships carried general cargo in very small amounts. Neither does the compilation in question concern ships from Lübeck, the Netherlands, Livonia, Scandinavia, and England. It is aboard these ships that numerous merchants (according to Table 1) brought

the manifold goods such as: cloth, spice, metal products, wine, foods, herring, and clothes.

It needs to be emphasized that the amount of custom duty had little to do with the distance between Gdańsk and the home port of a ship. Also, not always did the number of payers depend on the covered distance or transported goods. It can only be noticed that many travelers participated in the export of goods from the Netherlands. Of particular interest to us is the question of ships arriving to Gdańsk from the Bay of Biscay which carried mostly, if not solely, sea salt. The economic significance of this product is obvious; therefore, the demand for it has always been a decisive factor when it came to setting sea-going routes.¹² Gdańsk, or, in broader terms, Royal Prussia, could use the salt mined in Kujawy (Kuyavia), Russia (and delivered, much as it took place in the Middle Ages, along the River Bug), in Luneburg's, or Kołobrzeg (Kolberg)'s salt springs (*Travensalz*). The import of low quality, contaminated salt mined from moldy ocean bays and transported by sea for over fifteen hundred kilometers, when seen from the broad perspective might have been a profitable trade. Ships could sail to the Baltic so as to bring back to home ports the mass goods in-demand on the western market such as timber, corn, ash, or tar. A voyage to the east had to be profitable as well. Regardless of the demand on salt, another mass good, it could also serve as ballast. If ships went to Baltic ports to collect needed goods, loading them with salt translated both into additional profit for merchants and easier navigation on the Atlantic and the North Sea.

The duties paid by the ships which carried goods of only one owner – the skipper were different, yet, the amount of the duty paid in Gdańsk by a skipper entering this port without any partners appears as important information to us. The following compilation demonstrates the amount of an average payment made by a ship carrying the goods of the skipper only:

Table 2

	All ships	Ships from Lübeck	Ships from Livonia	Ships from Baie	Ships from Sweden	Ships from Holland
in 1468	23	28	50	110	150	200
in 1498	66	62	40	210	180	310

¹² A. Agats: *Der hansische Baienhandel*, Heidelberg 1904, *passim*.

while the average duties paid by all ships were as follows:

116	82	120	220	200	450
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One can assume that ships coming from Sweden and Holland brought the most of the precious and valuable goods such as metals (osmium), cloth, wine, and spice. It is with such transports precisely that the co-ownerships in ships comprised of the skipper and several to a dozen or so merchants dominated. On the other hand, with the freights going from Baie, Brouage, or, later on, from the Portuguese Setubal, only one user was a standard.

Several conclusions crop up after the analysis of these, fragmentary though, data. One of these conclusions is that co-ownerships in ships was not the commonest form of freight organization, for individual enterprises of shipowners (ship users?) comprised nearly a half of the Baltic navigation. The total weight of goods carried by trade companies must have been higher than the one carried by individual entrepreneurs, yet, the Gdańsk navigation was organized to a great degree by merchants – shipowners. In the seagoing trade which individual merchants conducted together with the Western Europe salt was on top of the list of carried goods. Was this product the easiest to obtain, or was the risk of losing it lower than in the case of other, more precious goods? For pirates, salt was not as desirable loot as were spices, cloth, or wines; what is more, getting rid of it was relatively difficult.

Another one of the above mentioned conclusions concerns the statement that until the late 15th century the *sendeve*, or else, the agreement signed between the carrier and the good owner, did not squeeze individual entrepreneurs out of the market. This view corresponds with the knowledge on a relatively late appearance on the Baltic of more developed organizational forms, by that time already well known on the Mediterranean, North Sea and the Atlantic. On the other hand, however, according to the data from *Libri Testimoniorum*,¹³ in the late 15th century the number of agreements signed between good owners and carriers increased. If in 1458 only five of such agreements had been signed, then half a century later, in 1507 as many as 116 of such transactions were conducted, a number which, in comparison to Italian *commends* of Venice or Genoa was not high either. Also, the new means of transportation requiring high expenditures such as caravels ap-

¹³ AP Gdańsk, *Libri Testimoniorum*, 300.43.196, 197.

peared on the Baltic late, for in 1462.¹⁴ The business drummed up in merchants' offices used relatively primitive methods of data recording at the time when in Flanders, the Netherlands, or Italy double bookkeeping had been already functioning from as early as the 13th century.¹⁵ Even in the "capital of the Hanse" (*Haupt der Hanse*) – Lübeck the co-ownerships in ships appeared which were commonly known as "new style enterprises", that is ones sharing uniform bookkeeping and financial policy.¹⁶

What did this *status quo*, existing as early as in the first years in which the great raw material export to the West began, mark, then? On one hand it was an effect of older, more traditional forms of individual trade. On the other hand, however, it reflected the economic and ownership relations and production structure of the Baltic zone countries.

Translated by Beata Zawadka

ŻEGLUGA GDAŃSKA: RAZEM CZY OSOBNO?

Streszczenie

Nad Bałtykiem, niezależnie od wielorakich związków handlowych istniejących między członkami różnych środowisk kupieckich, ważną rolę odgrywały spółki, czy może ściślej: umowy zawierane między kupcami i szyprami. Były to tzw. *sendeve*, z biegiem lat powstające w coraz większej liczbie. Nie wkraczając w różne formy ich działania, takie jak przekazywanie pieniędzy w „wierne ręce” celem dokonywania transakcji, upoważnienie jednego wspólnika do prowadzenia operacji handlowych w imieniu całej spółki, w artykule przybliżono takie związki kupieckie, których działalność znalazła odbicie w zachowanych źródłach (głównie w księgach cła palowego).

Analiza tych materiałów pozwala na wyciągnięcie kilku wniosków. Możemy stwierdzić, iż spółki okrętowe nie były najczęściej spotykaną formą organizacji frachtu, jako że indywidualne przedsięwzięcia właścicieli statków stanowiły blisko połowę żeglugi bałtyckiej. Łączna masa towarowa przewożona przez spółki handlowe była wyższa od tej, która była dziełem indywidualnych przedsiębiorców, żeglugę gdańską

¹⁴ O. Lienau: *Das große Kraweel "Der Peter von Danzig", 1462–1475*, Danzig 1943.

¹⁵ F. Melis: *Storia della ragioneria*, Bologna 1950, pp. 13, 151, 329.

¹⁶ P. Jeannin: *Lübecker Handelsunternehmungen um die Mitte des 16. Jhs.*, "Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte und Altertumskunde", 1963, p. 35.

w znacznym stopniu organizowali jednak kupcy będący jednocześnie właścicielami statków. Można też stwierdzić, że do końca XV stulecia *sendeve*, spółka zawierana między przewoźnikiem i właścicielem towarów, nie wyparła z wielkiego handlu indywidualnych przedsiębiorców.