
*Anglo-Polish Commercial Relations in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century**

Jan K. Fedorowicz
King's College, Cambridge
The University of Western Ontario

In the minds of most English observers, Poland has traditionally occupied an ambivalent middle-ground; too far away to be familiar, too close to be exotic. Seen through the prism of the country's political collapse and dismemberment in the eighteenth century, and its disappearance from the international stage throughout the nineteenth, Poland could hardly be of much interest to those traditional historians who considered Great-Power intrigue and the biographies of great men to be the stuff of history.

Modern historiography has broadened its interests so that economic considerations have amplified more traditional ways of regarding the past; because of this, one may observe the emergence of an emphasis on Poland's historical role as a major supplier of raw materials to precolonialist Western Europe.¹ The fact of active

* This article is a summary of doctoral research carried out at Cambridge University under the supervision of Professor C.H. Wilson and in Poland with the advice of Professor A. Maczak of the University of Warsaw, and Professor H. Zins of the Marie Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin. It evolved from a paper read to an economic history seminar held at Cambridge in December of 1975.

¹ As is to be expected, this change is most striking in Poland itself, where the emphasis of historical research in the last thirty years has focused on economic questions. Among significant works dealing with Poland's trade with Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the following: M. BOGUĆKA, *Handel zagraniczny Gdańska w pierwszej połowie XVII w.* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1970); M. BOGUĆKA, *Udział*

commercial ties between England and Poland has stimulated the interest of some historians, giving the blessing of relevance to a study of Anglo-Polish relations which has hitherto seemed excessively episodic and esoteric.²

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Commonwealth of the two nations of Poland and Lithuania was a vast agglomeration of territories stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, from the borders of the Ottoman Empire, to the very gates of Moscow. Politically, the country was unique in Europe as being its only active and fully elective monarchy, with a completely parliamentary form of government selected by the universal franchise of that ten percent of its population which constituted the ancient and registered nobility of the country and was regarded as its citizenry. Though the Polish government in the sixteenth century had not yet degenerated into the aristocratic ochlocracy which was to be its major distinguishing feature in the eighteenth, Poland was only indifferently administered by a central government which limited its influence in the provinces to the collection of taxes and troops for the conduct of the wars perpetually raging on one or another of its extensive frontiers.

The most significant economic feature of this society governed by a warrior aristocracy was that it lay athwart some of the richest agricultural land in Europe. From the early medieval period, in-

szyprow gdańskich w handlu bałtyckim w pierwszej połowie XVII w., "Zapiski Historyczne" XXIX (1964), no. 4; A. MĄCZAK, *Między Gdańskiem a Sunde* (Warszawa 1972); R. RYBAŃSKI, *Handel i polityka handlowa Polski w XVI stuleciu* (Warszawa 1958, reprint of 1928 edition); A. SZELAGOWSKI, *Z dziejów współzawodnictwa Anglii i Niemiec, Rosji i Polski* (Lwów 1910); H. ZINS, *England and the Baltic in the Elizabethan Era* (trans. H.C. Stevens, Manchester 1972). This list is hardly meant to be exhaustive, but it offers some of the most important Polish material on the subject.

² In addition to works by Szelagowski and Zins, cited in footnote 1, the most important works dealing with Anglo-Polish commercial relations are the following; N.R. DEARDORFF, *English trade in the Baltic during the reign of Elizabeth*, "Studies in the history of English commerce in the Tudor period" (New York 1912); R.W.K. HINTON, *The Eastland trade and the common weal in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge 1959); also B. SUPPLE, *Commercial crisis and change in England 1600-1642* (Cambridge 1959) includes important information about the depression of 1620 and its course in Poland. For a German account of English trade with Elbing see E. VOLCKMANN, *Elbing als Resident der Eastland Company oder Sitz der Englischer Stapels*, "Der Grundstein britischer Weltmacht" (Wurzburg 1923). For a published collection of source material relating to the Eastland Company, the standard work is of course M. Sellers, *The Acts and Ordinances of the Eastland Company* (London 1906).

creasing numbers of West European merchants made their way eastwards to avail themselves of the natural wealth of the Polish lands. Selling West European manufactures in the industrially less developed East, these merchants laid the basis for a type of colonial relationship between the two halves of the European continent, long before the Western nations embarked on the more familiar classical colonial ventures overseas. Eastern Europe had the same relation to Western Europe as a colony in a later age was to have to its metropolis — it produced and exported abundant and cheap raw materials, and imported manufactured goods from the embryonic industries of the West.³

Poland was a society ruled by an aristocracy of the sword whose contempt for merchants and mercantile activity was born not only of aristocratic disdain, but also of a fear that a rising middle class, established behind town walls, and in alliance with a monarch intent on reversing the course of Polish decentralization, would some day overthrow the aristocratic privileges which it had taken three hundred years to secure. Thus the middle classes of Poland were subject to discriminatory legislation intended to restrict their influence and limit their capacity to challenge the wealth of the landowning aristocracy.⁴ As these burdens became heavier, Polish commerce became strongly passive; foreign merchants willingly came to Poland, but increasingly fewer Polish subjects ventured beyond the borders of their state.⁵

Another important feature of Polish commercial activity was the fact that much of it was not in Polish hands. The products of the Polish hinterland descended by barges along the river networks, but at the mouths of each of these were port towns inhabited largely by Germans, members of the Hanseatic League, with a language,

³ A prominent advocate of this thesis is M. MAŁOWIST. See his *Wschód a Zachód Europy w XIII-XVI w.* (Warszawa 1973).

⁴ Z. KACZMARCZYK, B. LEŚNODORSKI, *Historia Państwa i Prawa Polski od połowy XV w. do 1795* (Warszawa 1957), pp. 59-63.

⁵ For example P. DOLLINGER, *The German Hansa* (trans. Ault, Steinberg, London 1970), p. 358 notes complaints of a decrease in Danzig's fleet from 200 to 50 vessels in the early sixteenth century. See also M. BOGUĆKA, *Udział szyprow...*, where a steady decrease is noted in the number of voyages made by Danzig captains through the Sound; from 180 in 1544-1547 to only 27 in the period 1625-50.

culture and interests distinct from those of the Polish interior. The most important of these ports was Danzig, which alone attracted well over half of the West European shipping into the Baltic in the sixteenth century.⁶ Originally a Slavic settlement which had fallen into the hands of the Teutonic Knights and was thoroughly Germanized as a result, Danzig placed itself under Polish protection in the middle of the fifteenth century. It hedged this submission with a series of conditions which made it impossible for the Polish government ever to exercise absolute control over the city.⁷ Poland did indeed now have access to the Baltic, but only through the mediation of the citizenry of Danzig. The latter carefully preserved its privileges, above all that of the Hanseatic law which prohibited "guests" of the town from trading directly with each other. Danzig's subsequent power and prosperity was based on enforcement of this jealously guarded privilege of being the professional middleman between Polish and West European merchants.

Danzig was not the only port available to Poland, but its location at the mouth of the Vistula, Poland's most extensive river network, certainly made it Poland's most important seaport. Of the other cities of the Baltic seaboard, Königsberg was in the hands of the Duke of Prussia, Riga did not come under Polish rule until 1561, and was lost to the Swedes in 1621, while the small port of Elbing had only limited river communication with the interior and a harbour which was slowly silting up. Furthermore, it should be noted that Riga and to a lesser extent Königsberg, were primarily concerned with the Lithuanian hinterland rather than with Poland proper. Thus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the primacy of Danzig in Poland's commerce was beyond question.

The products supplied by Poland through Danzig were of crucial importance to Western Europe. The natural riches of the Polish Commonwealth included rye, wheat, barley, oats, flax, hemp, timber, and the timber derivatives pitch, tar and ashes. The grains were

⁶ A. K. CHRISTENSEN, *Dutch Trade to the Baltic about 1600* (Copenhagen 1941), p. 289.

⁷ J. BARDACH, *Historia Państwa i Prawa Polski do połowy XV w.* (Warszawa 1957), pp. 586-587. For an account of Danzig's legal position in the Polish Commonwealth, see also Z. KACZMARCZYK, B. LEŚNOBORSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72, 210-211.

of importance to the West European economies as a reliable source of cheap food which augmented supplies during a famine and allowed heavily populated countries such as Holland to concentrate their energies on commerce and industry. The remaining products in the above list may be loosely classified as "naval stores" since they were essential for the manufacture of such diverse items as sailcloth, cordage, yarn, masts, planking, beams, oars and caulking, all of them essential for any country wishing to construct and maintain a fleet. The great Dutch navy of this period was in large part the product of the preeminence which the Dutch enjoyed in the Baltic, and Sir Thomas Roe called the Baltic the "root of all other marine trade" since "all the bountiful fruits of navigation are supplied from it in the materials for shipping".⁸

The Dutch had learned the secret of the Baltic at an early date and by the sixteenth century about two thirds of all shipping into the Sound was Dutch.⁹ At the same time, the importance of Poland to the Dutch was beyond question; between one half and two thirds of the Dutch ships sailing into the Sound visited the port of Danzig, while about a fifth sailed to Königsberg and perhaps a tenth to Riga.¹⁰ The overwhelming predominance of the link between Holland and Poland in the Baltic trade must always be kept in mind when discussing the role of the English in the Baltic.

English contacts with the Baltic area go back at least to the ninth century when the Anglo-Saxon sailor Wulfstan made a voyage to "Trusco" indentified by modern historians as Lake Drużno in northern Poland.¹¹ Over the succeeding centuries, English sailors and merchants developed a regular trade with the area. As early as 1390, Richard II granted a charter of privileges to English

⁸ Public Records Office, State Papers 88, vol. 7, f. 350, "Concerning Trade". Sir Thomas Roe was sent as ambassador to Poland and Sweden in 1629, and upon his return remained a champion of an active English policy in the Baltic, holding that trade to be "of as great importance for England as any other".

⁹ CHRISTENSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289. These estimates are for the period up to the year 1620.

¹¹ ZINS, *England and the Baltic*..., p. 8; also S. MIELCZARSKI, *Truso*, "Rocznik Elbląski" II (1963), pp. 3-36. The account of Wulfstan's voyage appears in R. HAKLUYT, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*... (New York 1927) II, pp. 60-61.

merchants trading into the Baltic,¹² and despite numerous vicissitudes, this trade seems to have continued throughout the period until it becomes clearly visible in the documentation available to us.¹³

The emergence of the Eastland Company in the late sixteenth century as the main agent of English trade in the Baltic was the result of a combination of several events; the revolt of the Netherlands, and the fall of Antwerp had temporarily upset Dutch commercial activity in Northern Europe; the revolt of Danzig in 1577 against the newly elected Polish King, Stefan Batory, temporarily blocked all trade with Poland; finally the Danish Crown strongly asserted its claim to customs on all shipping through the Sound and threatened seizures and reprisals if its claims were ignored.¹⁴ In the midst of this very fluid situation, English merchants trading into the Baltic joined together, obtaining a charter from Queen Elizabeth in 1579, thereby obtaining a monopoly of England's Baltic trade, government sanction and protection. Henceforth, the Company could speak with one voice in the various negotiations which needed to be undertaken in order to reestablish a secure commercial position in the Baltic area. Among the first acts of the Eastland Company was the negotiation of an agreement with the small Polish port of Elbing for a Company staple and residence.¹⁵

Why Elbing? Though the port was small and badly connected with the Polish hinterland, these disadvantages made it tractable. Proud, wealthy and powerful Danzig felt its monopoly position as unassailable and was therefore unwilling to give the Eastland

¹² ZINS, *England and the Baltic* . . . , p. 11.

¹³ The major source for this trade is by N. BANG, K. KORST, *Tabeller over Skibsfart og Varetransport gennem Øresund* (København-Leipzig 1906, 1922, 1933) vols. I, IIa, IIb. The Danish Sound Toll Tables have only fragmentary data before 1557, and it is not until the entries for 1574 that we have the beginning of a long and unbroken data series.

¹⁴ For accounts of the international situation and its effect on the genesis of the Eastland Company see A. SZELAGOWSKI, N.S.B. GRAS, *The Eastland Company in Prussia, 1579-1585*, "Transaction of the Royal Historical Society" 3rd ser. VI (1912); H. ZINS, *Geneza angielskiej Kompanii Wschodniej (Eastland Company)*, "Zapiski Historyczne" XXIX (1964), no. 3; H. ZINS, *Przywilej I z 1579 r. dla angielskiej Kompanii Wschodniej*, "Rocznik Elbląski" III (1965); H. ZINS, *England and the Baltic* . . . , chapters 3 & 4; N. DEARDORFF, *English trade in the Baltic* . . . ; R. PRZEZDZIECKI, *Diplomatic Ventures and Adventures (Some experiences of British envoys at the Court of Poland)* (London 1953).

¹⁵ For the diplomacy involved in establishing the residence in Elbing see especially the works by Deardorff and Przewdziecki cited in footnote 15.

Company the guarantees of free trade and exemption from the Hanseatic guest law which was deemed the bare minimum sought by the Company. Elbing was eager to attract merchants whose business could only help it prosper, and was therefore much more willing to forgo its Hanseatic privileges; it did not insist on the guest law, and it refused to become embroiled in the running battle between the Hanseatic League and the English Crown. An agreement was arrived at between the Eastland Company and Elbing in 1581 and though never ratified by the Polish Crown, it was to remain the basis of the English Company's presence in Poland for the next forty-five years. Despite frequent attempts on the part of the English to obtain formal Polish approval of the agreement, the Polish Crown preferred to steer a middle course between its two subject cities of Elbing and Danzig; though it allowed the English to remain at Elbing, it refused to antagonize Danzig by formally acknowledging the treaty upon which that presence was based. Thus, the English position in Poland would remain tenuous at best, subject to the whims of the rather unpredictable Polish administration and continually threatened by the open enmity of Danzig which felt cheated of a lucrative trade now enriching its diminutive commercial rival, Elbing.

The English commercial interest in Poland was two-sided; on the one hand, as did other West European countries such as Holland, France and Spain, England looked to Poland as a source of grain, timber and naval stores; on the other, it considered Poland as a reliable market for almost one tenth of its annual cloth exports.

As regards Polish grain, England's need for it was never as strong as that of the Dutch or Spaniards, though approximately 3,000 tons of various grains were annually shipped westwards from Poland in English vessels.¹⁶ England had been largely self-sufficient in its grain needs until the Tudor period.¹⁷ From the late sixteenth

¹⁶ The Sound Toll Tables show a reasonably steady yearly average grain import of about 1,400 lasts carried by English vessels westwards in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. According to R. RYBARSKI, *Handel i polityka handlowa* . . . , p. 13, though the size of the last varied in different places, it normally weighed about 2,000 kilograms, or about two tons.

¹⁷ N.S.B. GRAS, *The Evolution of the English corn market from the twelfth to the eighteenth century* (Cambridge Mass. 1915), Harvard Economic Studies XIII, pp. 100-101.

century, however, substantial emergency supplies of grain were shipped from the Baltic, to ease the famines of 1586-1587, 1595-1596, 1608 and 1623.¹⁸ Eventually, England managed to solve its food supply problem in the first half of the seventeenth century, even becoming a minor grain exporter by the latter part of the century.¹⁹ Polish grain was imported by the English in large quantities only in times of serious dearth — otherwise, the small regular importation noted above constituted a return commodity the main function of which was to lubricate the other branches of the trade.

Naval stores were of much greater importance to England. As early as 1538, we read of a special English royal agent active in Danzig, purchasing supplies for the Royal Navy.²⁰ Polish supplies of cordage, tackle, sailcloth, pitch, tar and some grades of timber were of crucial importance to the expansion of the English fleet, a dependence recognized by succeeding generations of English politicians. In 1568, certain merchants recommended that England develop the newly discovered route to Russia through the White Sea as a means of rendering the country independent of Danzig's monopoly in naval stores.²¹ As long as England remained in alliance with the Protestant powers which controlled access into the Baltic, that is Holland and Denmark, its supplies of Polish naval stores were reasonably secure, but when the Swedes captured Riga and blockaded Danzig in the 1620's, an accommodation had to be achieved with the new Baltic power, while at the same time improvising alternative sources of supply. When England went to war with the Dutch, the collusion of the latter with the Danes in 1653 successfully denied England any access whatsoever to the

¹⁸ Dramatic rises in English grain imports can be noted for these years in the Sound Toll Tables.

¹⁹ GRAS, *English corn market* . . . , pp. 102-110, 116. The Sound Toll Tables do show an increase in English importation of Baltic grain in the thirties and forties of the seventeenth century, but this has less to do with English needs, than with the rise of an English entrepôt trade based on the Dutch model and known as the "Dover composition trade". For more on this trade, see HINTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-50.

²⁰ R. ALBION, *Forests and Sea Power* (Cambridge Mass., 1926), pp. 153-4; H. ZINS, *England and the Baltic* . . . , p. 26.

²¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, Elizabeth, 1566-1568*, p. 518, T. Bannister and G. Duckett to Cecil, 12 Aug. 1568.

Baltic, underlining once again the dependence of England's naval development on a fragile conjunction of factors, the lack of any one of which could upset the entire edifice.²²

As a market for English products, until the third decade of the seventeenth century, Poland was a reliable purchaser of English broadcloths and kerseys. Though the Polish market was by no means as large as the Dutch and North German one, its purchases were restricted to certain specific types of cloth such as Suffolk shortcloths and northern kerseys which gave the trade a regional significance strongly felt in times of commercial crisis.²³ Furthermore, Poland took dyed and dressed cloths, thus supporting the embryonic English cloth finishing industry which everywhere else was having trouble in meeting Dutch competition.²⁴

In a sense, England needed her Polish trade more than Poland needed English commerce. English cloth was hardly essential to the Polish economy; its impact was limited to the wealthier classes who could afford to indulge themselves in paying for the expensive English broadcloths and kerseys, the former being a staple of the aristocracy, the latter of the wealthy townspeople.²⁵ Furthermore, Poland had alternative sources of cloth in Moravia, Silesia, Holland, Germany, and even in the products of small native cloth industry.²⁶ On the other hand, England's need for naval stores and emergency grain supplies was of more fundamental importance to the security of the English state as long as English agriculture did not develop complete self-sufficiency, and as long as reliable and diverse alterna-

²² G. MARCUS, *The Naval History of England*, vol. I: *The Formative Centuries* (London 1961), pp. 137-150; also G. JONES, *The Diplomatic Relations between Cromwell and Charles X Gustavus of Sweden*, "State Journal" (Lincoln, Nebraska 1897) for background information on England's Baltic policy during the Commonwealth.

²³ Cf. HINTON, *The Eastland trade*..., p. 23.

²⁴ A. FRITS, *Alderman Cockayne's Project and the Cloth Trade* (Oxford and Copenhagen 1927), pp. 60 and 224 ff. for an account of the attempt in 1602 by the Eastland merchants to obtain the right to export unfinished cloths.

²⁵ A. MĄCZAK, *Rola kontaktów z zagranicą w dziejach sukiennictwa polskiego*, "Przegląd Historyczny" XLII (1952), no. 2, pp. 248-249 for a description of the penetration of English and competing cloths into the Polish market.

²⁶ *Ibid.* and also by the same author, *Sukiennictwo wielkopolskie XIV-XVII w.* (Warszawa 1955), as well as *Zagadnienie produkcji sukienniczej w Polsce w XVI i XVII w.*, "Pierwsza Konferencja Metodologiczna Historyków Polskich" vol. 1 (Warszawa 1953), pp. 474-477 for further information regarding the native Polish cloth industry.

tive sources of naval stores in Scandinavia, Russia and North America remained untapped.

This importance may be demonstrated through a study of English shipping into the Baltic.²⁷ In the last two decades of the sixteenth century, 97% of the English shipping passing out of the Baltic sailed from the three ports of Königsberg, Danzig and Elbing, with almost 65% of the total accounted for by the port of Elbing alone.²⁸ Clearly, during this period, as far as England was concerned, trade into the Baltic meant trade to Poland. Adhering to the privileges of the Eastland Company, most English merchants respected the status of the staple at Elbing, concentrating their exports there and only sailing to Königsberg and Danzig when Elbing's constricted markets could not supply English buyers with the required return commodities. Unlike the Dutch, the English pursued a conservative commercial policy in the Baltic, adhering to familiar and traditional markets, venturing only unwillingly beyond the southern shores of the Baltic where their privileges and trade had been established for centuries.²⁹

This was the state of English commerce in the Baltic at the end of the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth, a series of important changes took place which ultimately forced England to a commercial and political reappraisal of its role in the Baltic.

These difficulties may be grouped under various headings for the sake of clarity. In the first place, there was the alarming growth of Dutch competition, which from the second decade of the century, after the Spanish-Dutch truce of 1609, managed to flood the Polish market with an increasing number of cloths.³⁰ England's virtual monopoly over cloth shipments into the Baltic was broken and the Dutch competed effectively by providing the Polish market with

²⁷ The main source for this study is of course the first volume of N. Bang's edition of the Danish Sound Toll Registers.

²⁸ For a summary of the Sound Toll Tables for the last two decades of the sixteenth century see ZINS, *England and the Baltic*..., p. 138.

²⁹ The only exception in the late sixteenth century was the brief efflorescence of the Narva trade following the capture of that port by the Russians in 1558. This led to its temporary integration with the Russian hinterland which tempted West European merchants eager to trade with Russia but loth to use the long and dangerous route through the White Sea. See ZINS, *England and the Baltic*..., chapter 2.

the cheaper types of cloth known as "new draperies". This occurred at a time when the Polish economy was faltering and the traditional Polish purchasers of English cloth could no longer afford the more expensive English product.³¹

In Poland itself, a continuous series of wars from 1598 onwards disrupted communications, sapped the energies of the country, dislocated commerce and ruined the populace. The dynastic struggle between the Polish King Sigismund III and his uncle Karl IX over the hereditary Vasa throne in Sweden soon developed into a general war for command of the Baltic. At the same time, the Polish state drifted into an expansionist war in Muscovy, while periodically being forced to ward off the military threat from the Ottoman Empire. The 1620's saw a general crisis in Polish affairs brought about by currency manipulation, Ottoman invasion, and the Swedish conquest of Livonia and occupation of Poland's Baltic coast. This last event severed Polish grain and naval supplies to Western Europe, and provoked an energetic response on the part of the French, English and Dutch governments, which collaborated in mediating between Poland and Sweden at the truce of Altmark in 1629. The restoration of peace and communications with Western Europe which this truce secured allowed Poland to embark on a brief period of recovery, reversing to some extent the collapse which threatened Anglo-Polish commercial relations. This was largely because the English attempted to copy Dutch methods in developing an entrepôt trade in Polish return commodities,³² rather than as a result of reviving English cloth sales in Poland.

³⁰ For a description of the Eastland Company's difficulties in meeting and dealing with Dutch competition, particularly during the depression of 1620, see HINTON, *The Eastland Trade* . . . , chapter II.

³¹ The STT show that the Dutch share of the total number of cloths shipped through the Sound rose from 16.4% in 1616 to 48.7% in 1621, then fell back to 38.7% by 1625. For the same years, the English share was 80.7%, 45.6% and 58.2% respectively. These figures suggest the extent to which Dutch competition became a critical factor during the depression of 1620. By the 1630's, the Dutch shipped over 50% of all cloths carried eastwards through the Sound, while the English share had shrunk to just over 40% and was destined to shrink to about 30% in the following decade.

³² For an account of the English entrepôt trade in the 1630's and 1640's, see HINTON, *The Eastland Trade* . . . , chapter III.

Even though it upset English cloth production and export, the English Civil War did have the effect of stimulating demand for strategically significant Polish goods. The final crisis in Anglo-Polish commercial relations came with the outbreak of the Chmielnicki in the Ukraine in 1648, an event which inaugurated a period of twelve years of chaos in Poland. During this time, the Polish state virtually ceased to exist, while the Polish economy was ruined irretrievably. The year 1660 saw the restoration of peace to Poland and the Stuart monarchy in England, but by that time, English commercial interest in the Baltic had shifted decidedly, following the shift in the balance of power in the region. The struggle of sixty years between Poland and Sweden had ended with a clear victory by the latter; from the peace of Oliwa, if not earlier, Sweden decisively enters the European economic system as an important element of the new commercial order.³³

Increasing English interest in Sweden is noticeable from the end of the third decade of the seventeenth century, however, at a time when Swedish victories in Livonia and Prussia made it an influence to be reckoned with. Furthermore, several non-military factors encouraged a growth in this interest.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, English agriculture was on the verge of solving the English food problem.³⁴ Improved methods of cultivation, drainage of fenland, increased acreage and agricultural incentives meant that England would be able to feed itself in all save the most vicious of famines. On the other hand, the expanding English navy, growing colonial ventures and commitments, and rivalry with the other naval powers of Europe all demanded increasing development of the country's naval strength, which in turn demanded greater imports of the basic naval stores mentioned above. If Poland had been able to continue and increase this supply, then it would have continued to enjoy the privileged position which it had occupied in the sixteenth century as England's major Baltic trading partner.

³³ The most important study of the Anglo-Swedish trade in the latter half of the seventeenth century has been done by S. E. ÅSTRÖM, *From cloth to iron: The Anglo-Baltic trade in the late seventeenth century* (Helsingfors 1963, 1965), 2 vols.

³⁴ HERBERT HEATON, *Economic History of Europe* (New York 1968), pp. 312-313.

Poland, however, could no longer be relied on as a dependable source of naval stores. The favourable markets for Polish grain in the late sixteenth century had induced the landowners of Poland to increase their grain output as a fast way of increasing their incomes. To this end, forests were cut down and the land they had stood on converted to grain production. The concomitants of this policy were that the peasantry was plunged ever deeper into serfdom, the middle classes increasingly circumscribed in political rights and commercial possibilities, while with the general decrease in Western European demand for Polish grain in the seventeenth century, even the poorer gentry yielded up their lands and their services to the great magnates whose mushrooming latifundia were the last remaining alternative in the struggle to maintain profits in a contracting market for grain.

By the first half of the seventeenth century, England no longer needed large shipments of Polish grain, but its interests in timber and other naval stores continued to grow. As Poland's production of these materials declined, English merchants were forced to turn their attention elsewhere in the search for the forest wealth which could guarantee them their navies. A natural and immediate object of their interest were those Swedish ports with links to the vast timber-producing regions of Russia, Finland and Sweden itself.

One may see confirmation of this course of events in an analysis of the prices of certain goods shipped westwards by the English from the Baltic. While prices generally tended to rise during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, those of timber products seem proportionately to have risen faster than did those of grains.³⁵ Polish timber was becoming more expensive and difficult to obtain as forest clearance proceeded farther inland, away from the river routes which provided the main means of transporting such

³⁵ This conclusion is based on a study of the prices contained in the STT. A comparison of price indices for certain products was made on the basis of the sample years in the STT (1575, 1585, 1595, 1605, 1615, 1625, 1635, and 1646) which contain total values for goods shipped by English, Scottish and French merchants through the Sound. If a base index of 100 is assigned to each product for the year 1575, then by 1646, the indices have varied as follows; rye - 141.5; wheat - 112.0; wainscot (vognskud) - 503.3; clapboard (klapholt) - 552.2. Clearly timber increased in price to a far greater extent than grain.

products. On the other hand, Polish grain was becoming relatively cheaper as West European demand for grain diminished.

In this situation, it was natural for those merchants used to trading into the Sound to search for other sources of timber. Admittedly, Norway had been a long-established supplier, but precisely because of this, newer alternatives had to be developed. As a result of its conquests, Sweden had expanded around the shores of the Baltic, turning the sea into a virtual Swedish lake. It was entirely logical for England to come to terms with this newly-emergent Protestant power which held the key to continued English commerce in the area.

Initially, the English reaction to Sweden had been cool. The accession of Sigismund III Vasa to the thrones of both Poland and Sweden had promised an era of co-operation and Baltic tranquillity, but the deposition of the Catholic Sigismund by the Lutheran population of his hereditary Swedish kingdom soon turned the Baltic into a battleground. The legitimist inclinations of James I of England, and the long-standing English commercial interests in Poland initially led the English government to favour the Polish side in the conflict, even to the point of refusing the Swedish ambassador a royal audience with James.³⁶ As religious warfare flared all over Europe, the luxury of legitimist principles had to yield before the need for Protestant solidarity. Poland's invasion of Muscovy threatened English privileges there,³⁷ further alienating English sympathy. Finally, as Poland's economic crisis deepened, England's commercial interests followed her shifting political and diplomatic orientation, northwards across the Baltic to Sweden. The story of England's Baltic policy in the first half of the seventeenth century is the story of a gradual shift from a Polish to a decidedly Swedish orientation, both in diplomatic and commercial terms.

This shift was made all the easier by the terms of England's commercial affiliation with Poland. The act of residency, negotiated with Elbing in 1581, had never been ratified, leaving English

³⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian 1603-1607*, p. 202, 26 Mar. 1604.

³⁷ For an account of anti-Polish policies pursued by England in Russia during the "Time of Troubles" see I.I. LYUBIMENKO, *A project for the acquisition of Russia by James I*, "English Historical Review" XXIX (1914).

merchants prey to increasing harrassment in Poland, most of it engineered by the envious burghers of Danzig. The lack of properly ratified agreements guaranteed by the Polish Crown made it easy for the latter town to foment discord in its campaign to regain the lost English trade.

The first crisis in Anglo-Polish relations grew out of the conflict between England and Spain in the late sixteenth century. The English policy of denying its enemy the fruits of commerce threatened a complete rupture between England and Poland inasmuch as Poland exported considerable amounts of grain to the Iberian peninsula.³⁸ Much of this grain was carried in the ships of Danzig and several of these were seized by the English, while threats of Polish reprisals hung gloomily over Anglo-Polish trade.³⁹ Ultimately, the Polish government did not respond energetically to the English seizures and the crisis eventually passed. The major loser, however, was Danzig, the ships and merchants of which had borne the brunt of England's aggressive naval policy.

More determined than ever to break the Eastland Company, Danzig counterattacked by orchestrating an anti-English campaign at the Polish Court, accusing the Eastland Company of violations of Polish customs regulations and promoting the appointment of a government-sponsored commission to investigate the charges.⁴⁰ English abuses were indeed found to be considerable, but diplomatic intervention by the English King through his agent in Poland

³⁸ P. DOLLINGER, *The German Hansa*, pp. 344-346, discusses the expansion of Hanseatic trade into the Mediterranean in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Along with Hamburg and Lubeck, Danzig was one of the most important participants in this trade, known as the "Spanienfahrt".

³⁹ See Public Records Office, State Papers 88, vol. 1, ff. 166-196 for the complaints of 31 citizens of Danzig, sent in April 1589, regarding massive seizures of Danzig vessels by the English. The same volume also contains numerous items relating to the Anglo-Polish crisis, including an explanation of the English position, and papers relating to the missions of Christopher Parkins to Poland in 1591 and 1595 to procure an accommodation. See also British Museum, Cottonian, Nero B. II, ff. 172-220 for similar materials relating to this dispute.

⁴⁰ The Polish government appointed a commission headed by Samuel Łaski to investigate abuses in the royal customs. Łaski's findings were summarized in a report in 1605, a copy of which (transcribed from an earlier version in the nineteenth century) may be found in the Gdańsk Archives (*Wojewódzkie Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku*) Elb. III/255.196.

averted the blow which seemed ready to fall on the Eastland Company.⁴¹

Danzig was not ready to yield, however. With the help of renegade English merchants who had broken with the Eastland Company, it developed its campaign by accusing the Company of usurping the royal Polish prerogatives of regality and judicature inasmuch as the Eastland Company courts claimed to adjudicate all of the company's internal disputes without recourse to Polish law, even if these disputes took place on Polish soil.⁴² Again, the English Crown intervened to prevent a strong Polish reaction and the case which had been the test of the principle was ultimately referred to the English Privy Council, a tacit admission by the Polish Court of the Eastland Company's right to decide disputes among its members.⁴³

These reverses served merely to strengthen Danzig's determination to break the English residence in Elbing and its opportunity came in April 1626 when the Swedish King, Gustav Adolf, occupied the port of Elbing without any resistance being offered

⁴¹ The agent, William Bruce, was sent to Poland probably in the latter part of 1605. He kept a journal of his negotiations at the Polish court which has been preserved in the Gdańsk Archives, *Biblioteka Archiwi*, 300 R/Bb 32. See particularly his journal, ff. 16-18 for the speech and demands which Bruce made at the Polish court, and an account of his success in obtaining concessions from the Polish King.

⁴² The chief Eastland Company renegade was Richard Lewis, formerly an Assistant and founding member of the Company. He and his grievances against the Eastland merchants became the centre of a legal battle between the Eastland organization and those forces in Poland opposed to it. For details of the original grievance, see British Museum, Lansdowne 160, ff. 179-183. For papers relating to the conduct of the case in Poland, see William Bruce's journal and correspondence, Gdańsk Archives, *Biblioteka Archiwi* 300 R/Bb 32, especially ff. 4-13 which contain letters passing between Bruce and various Company officials concerning the Lewis case. See also F. VOLCKMANN, *Katalog des Elbinger Stadtarchivs* (Elbing 1875), p. 97, no. 376, Rescript of Sigismund III 21 Mar. 1608.

⁴³ *Acts of the Privy Council 1616-1617*, p. 29, 30 Sept. 1616; p. 34, 4 Oct. 1616; and 1618-1619, p. 114, 19 Apr. 1618 contain the judgements of the Privy Council in the matter. For the repercussions of the Lewis case, see M. SELLERS, *Acts and Ordinances...*, pp. 13-14. Fearing further tedious if not dangerous disputes of the same nature, the Company enacted that henceforth if any Eastland merchant involved in an internal company dispute appealed to the Polish Court, the goods in question were to be returned to him, but he was to be expelled from the Company and barred from trading within its privileges.

him by the townspeople.⁴⁴ The Polish King was outraged, the Polish nobility frightened by the threat to the security of their grain exports, and Danzig determined to use the opportunity to its own advantage. In return for a promise of loyalty to the Polish Crown, Danzig extracted the promise of substantial sums of money, and it procured the abolition of the Eastland Company's privileges in Poland.⁴⁵ By the same act, it also obtained a monopoly over all foreign cloth entering Poland by sea; such henceforth had to be inspected and sealed by the officials of Danzig.

The Polish government was anxious to encourage Danzig in its loyalty to Poland but, at the same time, it suspected that the Protestant English were in collusion with the Swedes. Such suspicions were justified in view of the forced loan which Gustav Adolf extracted from the Eastland Company to finance his war effort,⁴⁶ and in view of the presence of large bodies of English and Scottish mercenaries in the Swedish army.⁴⁷ The Polish reaction was to ban all Polish trade with the disloyal city of Elbing, to expel the Eastland Company from all of the lands of the Polish Crown, and to require that henceforth all English cloth entering Poland was to come not through the former residence of Elbing, but rather through the loyal port of Danzig. The latter was not about to

⁴⁴ For an account of the Swedish occupation of Elbing and its effects on the commerce of that town, see N. DRABIŃSKI, *Z dziejów okupacji szwedzkiej Elbląga w latach 1626-1635*, "Rocznik Elbląski" II (1963).

⁴⁵ *Volumina Legum* (St. Petersburg 1859) Sejm of 1628, no. 12.

⁴⁶ *Acts of the Privy Council* 1626, p. 312, 9 Oct. 1626 and 26 Nov. 1626.

⁴⁷ For introductory materials relating to the history of English and Scottish mercenaries in the armies of Sweden and Poland, see *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1622-1625*, pp. 363-365, Gustav Adolf to the Privy Council of Scotland, 23 Sept. 1623; *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian 1623-1625*, pp. 233, no. 289 8 Mar. 1624; *ibid.* 1625-1626, p. 343, no. 487, 6 Mar. 1626; and *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 2nd ser. 1625-1627*, 13 Feb. 1627. In all of these documents, there are echoes of the struggle between Poland and Sweden at the English Court to obtain permission to recruit levies for their respective armies. The struggle was eventually won by the Swedes, much to the disgust of the Poles. Ultimately, the English agent in Poland could only advise his government that «if (Charles I) would have his subjects, who are here in great numbers, to trade and live in this king's dominions peaceably, his Majesty would do well... to recall by public proclamation all his subjects who do serve either the King of Poland or Sweden in the wars...». See Public Records Office, *State Papers* 88, vol. 4, fol. 160, Gordon to Conway, 24 Aug./3 Sept. 1627. Such a proclamation would have hurt Sweden more than it would Poland, but it might have restored some pretence of English neutrality in the conflict.

accord English merchants the ample privileges which Elbing had been so eager to bestow upon them.

At a stroke, the English position in Poland which had been so carefully preserved since 1581 was overthrown. After 1626, the main objective of English commercial policy in Poland was to procure a restoration of the former staple privileges, either at Elbing or if need be in Danzig. The obvious first step was to mediate a peace in the dispute between Poland and Sweden which had precipitated the crisis and in 1629, England sent Sir Thomas Roe as its ambassador to the international conference at Altmark which engineered a cessation of hostilities, though not an end to the Swedish occupation of Prussia and the accompanying ruinous tolls which that occupation brought.⁴⁸

The success in halting (albeit temporarily) the Polish-Swedish war across the Baltic trade routes was not matched by a corresponding English success in procuring the complete restoration of a free commercial staple on Polish soil. Danzig refused to make any concessions to the Eastland merchants regarding the town guest law, free trade, or its newly acquired privileges of sealing English cloth. It knew that the Swedish occupation of Elbing had ruined that port irretrievably, eliminating it as a commercial alternative for the English. If the Eastland Company was to continue its trade into Poland according to the old practices, there was really no alternative for it but to come to terms with Danzig, even at the expense of its most cherished free trade principles. Negotiations between the Eastland merchants and Danzig continued for a full decade after Altmark, but Danzig refused to move from its insistence on the guest law, despite the pressure of the Polish government which wished to regain English friendship and military assistance against

⁴⁸ Roe's detailed accounts of the negotiations leading to the truce of Altmark and to his subsequent activities in Poland have been preserved in the Public Record Office, State Papers, vols. 5-7. From this account, it emerges that the main preoccupation of the English negotiator was the settling of an accommodation between the Swedes and Danzig. The return of peace would only become meaningful if the English could trade freely through Polish and Swedish zones of occupation. The insistence of the Swedes that tolls be imposed on all goods passing through Danzig, with largest part of the proceeds going to the Swedish Crown worried the English government, which attempted to ensure that low rates would be adhered to.

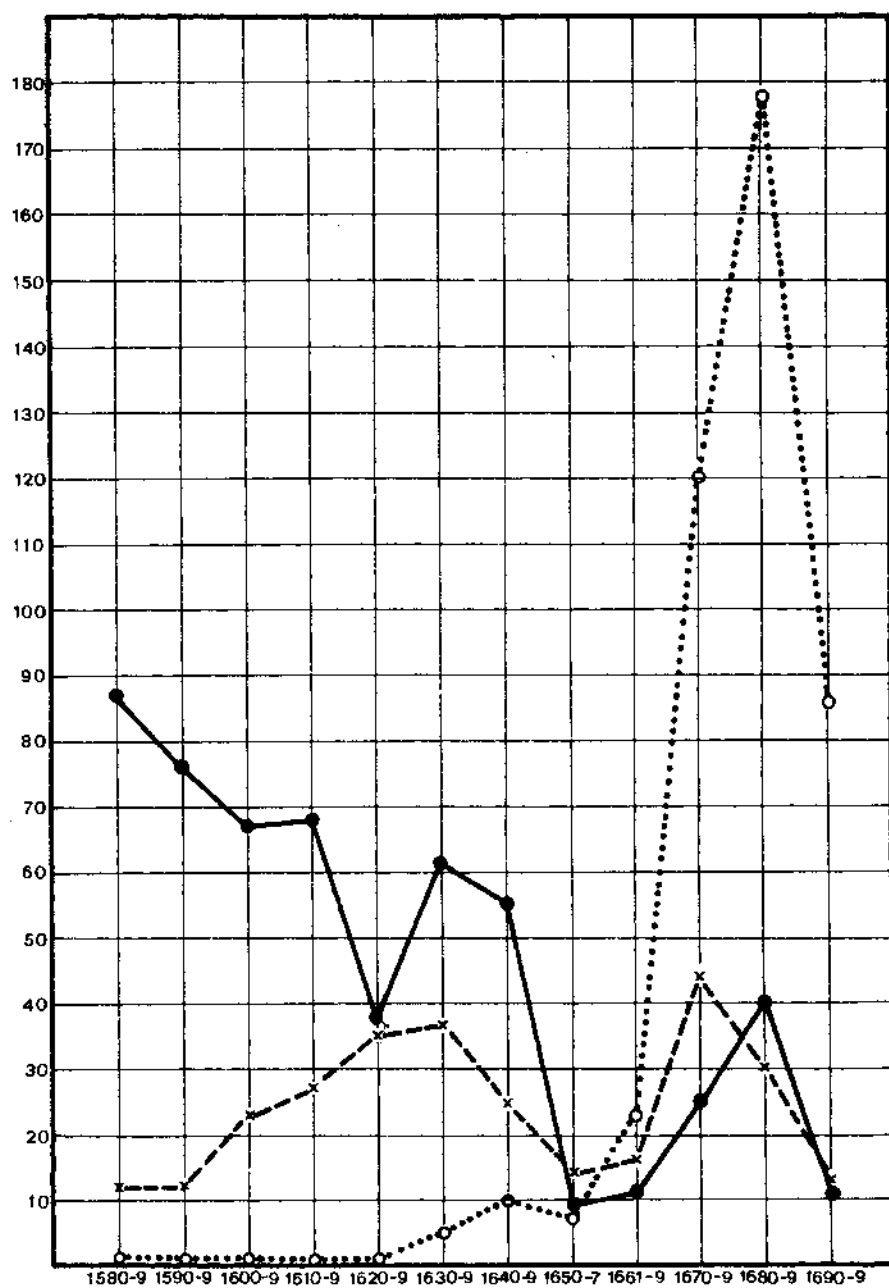


Fig. 1 English Shipping from Baltic Ports (decennial averages); sailing from-

Polish Ports



Prussian Ports



Swedish Ports



(based on the Sound Toll Tables)

Sweden and thus wanted Danzig to manifest a more compliant attitude towards its prospective ally. In the end, Danzig rejected Poland's claim to intervene in what it called the internal affairs of the city, while refusing to budge from its insistence upon its privileges.

This lack of concrete commercial agreement and the resultant feeling of insecurity felt by the Eastland merchants in Poland accelerated the shift to Swedish ports and markets. The overthrow of the staple in 1626 dealt a serious blow to the concept of a regulated company under government sponsorship which attempted to monopolize and organize English trade within a specific geographical area. Though English interlopers had existed in significant numbers before 1626, after the collapse of the staple, it was more difficult to assert the Company's privileges and keep non-members out of the Baltic. England's Baltic trade no longer possessed a focus and consequently it was free to diffuse itself over the entire sea, increasingly turning its attention northwards.

English trade with Poland continued throughout the thirties and forties of the seventeenth century, but an increasing percentage of English vessels sailing westwards through the Sound declared Swedish ports as their last ports of lading. The crisis of mid-century was the ultimate turning point, as can clearly be seen in figure 1, based on the English shipping totals contained in the Danish Sound Toll Tables. The proportion of English ships declaring Polish ports as their last port of lading fell steadily to mid-century, after which its recovery was minimal as compared with the boom in English shipping from Sweden. Swedish timber, pitch, and tar, and Swedish mediation in obtaining access to the flax and hemp of Russia had supplanted Poland's previous dominance in these products. England's rapidly growing navies looked to the northern Baltic for sustenance, having become indifferent to the grain available on its southern shores.