

---

## ARTICLES

---

### *The Sea-borne and the Overland Trade Routes of Northern Europe in the XVIth and XVIIth Centuries*

Pierre Jeannin

École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

There were important changes in the economic relations between eastern and western Europe as the effects of the expansion westward towards the New World began to be felt along the shores of the Atlantic and the North Sea. In the east, the advance of the Russian Empire to the Baltic and the opening to the west inspired by Peter the Great marks another turning point which will serve as the limit of the period we shall discuss. The choice of period might seem a little arbitrary, since the political reshaping of north-eastern Europe that was completed at the beginning of the XVIIIth century did not bring about any fundamental changes in the economic structures of these regions which had been established in the medieval period. But if some justification is required for concentrating on the period selected, that is the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, I would put forward one particular reason which relates specifically to the nature of the problems posed by the subject.

My intention in this essay is not simply to review the existing studies which have described and mapped both in general and in detail the various sea-borne and overland trade routes

between the west and the east, nor to attempt to modify or update what is already known by adding information which for reasons of language or place of publication is not easily accessible.<sup>1</sup> The problem I want to tackle is that of trying to assess the respective roles of the different maritime and overland routes in the trade between eastern Europe north of the Carpathians and the western world, in order to understand how the interplay between them reflected the more general economic structures which they themselves helped to form, and in order to see how the development of one affected the other — was the relationship parallel, rival or complementary? Now, the debates on the trade balances between east and west have touched on a very important aspect of these issues, in that they have shown clearly that the interpretations which can be applied to the XVIIIth century are not valid for earlier periods.<sup>2</sup> This is why our study is limited to the analysis of the commercial system as it functioned in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries.

It is much less easy to give our analysis a fixed geographical boundary. At every cross-roads on the great trade axes which ran across the continent from east to west there were branches moving off towards the south-west and the north-east, and it is not always easy to tell just how trade was distributed along these different directions. While it may be true, for example, as M. Wolanski has claimed, that exports from Silesia to Cracow in the early XVIIth century amounted to a quarter of Poland's imports at Danzig and Königsberg,<sup>3</sup> how can we tell what propor-

---

<sup>1</sup> For a general survey, see: H. KELLENBENZ, *Landverkehr, Fluss- und Seeschiffahrt im europäischen Handel (Spätmittelalter-Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts)*, in "Les grandes voies maritimes dans le monde, XV<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles", Paris 1965, pp. 65-174.

<sup>2</sup> M. HROCH, *Die Rolle des zentraleuropäischen Handels im Ausgleich der Handelsbilanz zwischen Ost- und Westeuropa 1550-1650*, in "Der Aussenhandel Ostmitteleuropas 1450-1650", éd. I. Bog, Cologne-Vienne 1971, pp. 10-11 et 25-26. A. ATTMAN, *The Russian and Polish markets in international trade 1500-1650*, Göteborg 1973, pp. 165-167.

<sup>3</sup> M. WOLAŃSKI, *Schlesiens Stellung im Osthandel vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, in "Der Aussenhandel...", op. cit., p. 137.

tion of these goods was then destined to go north-eastward towards central Poland and Lithuania, and what proportion was simply travelling through southern Poland en route for Transylvania, Moldavia and Walachia, all of which obtained their Silesian and Moravian cloths from Cracow, Kosice and also from Lvov? <sup>4</sup> In the opposite direction the Carpathians were also supplying products often very similar to those arriving from the north-east, such as leather goods for example. We have only one case in which we can see such articles in transit, and even this is well to the west, but it does not allow any certainty over the precise point of origin — the same is true of the wax which passed through Judenburg on its way from Vienna to Venice: had it come from Poland or from Bohemia, and if from the former, from what part of the country? <sup>5</sup>

The situation is a little more clear in the case of the cattle and livestock trades, which occupied far and away the most important place in the exports of the central-eastern countries. This massive transcontinental trade gave rise to a commercial turn-over at least comparable to the value of the cereals exported from the ports of the Baltic. Recent studies have served to reveal in some detail its composition: there were two principal zones of provenance, one to the north, the other to the south of the Carpathians, together with another smaller northern zone of production lying between Frisia and Denmark which must not be overlooked if one is to comprehend the structure of the market as a whole, even though it does lie outside the

---

<sup>4</sup> Z. P. PACH, *The Role of East-Central Europe in International Trade (16th and 17th centuries)*, in "Etudes Historiques", Budapest 1970, pp. 247-248. S. GOLDENBERG, *Les échanges économiques entre les pays roumains et l'Occident (XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle - moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, in "Contributions roumaines au V<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Histoire Economique", Bucarest 1971, pp. 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> F. TREMEL, *Der Handel der Stadt Judenburg im 16. Jahrhundert* (Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Steiermark 38, 1947, p. 130); Aus dem ältesten Mautbuch der Stadt Judenburg (Scripta Mercaturae 2/1968, p. 28); *Der Venezianer Handel Wiens in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts*, in "Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel", Toulouse 1973, t. 1, pp. 624-627.

area of east-west trade at present under consideration.<sup>6</sup> Taking a simplified map of the main outlets, the river Main acts as the principal dividing line. Hungary could rely on a consistently large demand from Italy, channeled through Venice, and also provided Vienna and the markets of southern Germany. The animals in transit through Walachia, when added to those from Hungary, explain the record figures reached in the 1580s — nearly 200,000 head per year — and when this transit trade fell off the figures settled down to an annual average of about 100,000 head throughout the XVIIth century.<sup>7</sup> The cattle of Podolia and Ruthenia were sent from Lvov towards Silesia, passing through Cracow or further north to markets such as Leczyca, in which case they came into Germany via Brandenburg, as did the cattle from the Poznan region.<sup>8</sup> But the markets of Saxony and Thuringia which were also supplied by this route were also provisioned from Silesia. There have been a number of different attempts to estimate the volume of Polish cattle exports, yet they are all based on sources which are much less reliable than those available to those who have studied Hungarian cattle exports. The sources for the Polish exports are all based on the documents of the German towns and princely courts who purchased the beasts, and cannot be used to reveal the contingent additions deriving from the exports from other producing regions. They do, however, enable a number of interesting factors to be established. E. Westermann, for example, has shown how certain

---

<sup>6</sup> E. WESTERMANN, *Zur Erforschung des nordmitteleuropäischen Ochsenhandels der frühen Neuzeit (1480-1520) aus hessischer Sicht* (Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie 23, 1975, pp. 10-15 et carte p. 30).

<sup>7</sup> H. PRICKLER, *Das Volumen des westlichen ungarischen Aussenhandels vom 16. Jahrhundert bis 1700*, in *Die wirtschaftlichen Auswirkungen der Türkenkriege*, éd. O. Pickl Graz 1971, pp. 140-143; But is the evidence drawn by the author from the Viennese documents conclusive? See: L. MARRAI 'Der ungarische Viehandel' in *Der Aussenhandel...* cit. pp. 483-506, which claims that the evolution of the volume of exports is still far from precisely known.

<sup>8</sup> F. W. HENNING, *Der Ochsenhandel aus den Gebieten nördlich der Karpaten im 16. Jahrhundert* (Scripta Mercaturae 1973, pp. 31-32).

purchasers shifted their demands in relation to specific conjunctural changes — the purchases of the Court of Hesse shifted towards the north in the late 1520s and again in 1600 because prices at those times were rising more quickly on the eastern markets.<sup>9</sup> Demand proved equally flexible on the latter, and was due more to the changing pattern of merchant purchases rather than those of the princely courts, since in the commerce carried out by the great private traders the cattle trade was combined with a range of other activities.<sup>10</sup>

Since it was a commodity that was transported by its own energy, livestock needed to be looked after and fed along the roads. The trade was therefore affected by very specific constraints which explains why it was that the buyers and sellers met in specialist markets situated normally outside the major towns, at Brieg rather than Breslau, at Zerbst and Buttstadt rather than Leipzig. But these special factors did not mean that the cattle trade became a branch of commerce carried on apart from other forms of trade. Through this very important trade — although it played a lesser role in the Polish than in the Hungarian economy — commercial activity along the overland routes to the north of the Carpathians became much more closely inter-related with that of central Europe as a whole, than with the trade bound for the north-east and the ports of the Baltic. This does not of course mean that the geography of Polish trade was simply divided between exporters of cattle and exporters of grain, both facing in different directions. It is also worth noting that further to the east, as close as Lithuania, there was no trace of the great exports of live cattle. It is essential to remember, therefore, that when trying to define the geographical movement of

---

<sup>9</sup> WESTERMANN, *art. cit.*, pp. 8-15.

<sup>10</sup> E. WESTERMANN, *Zum Handel mit Ochsen aus Osteuropa im 16. Jahrhundert. Materialien und Gesichtspunkte* (Zeitschrift für Ostforschung 22, 1973, pp. 242-243 et 257-258).

different types of trade you are likely to discover contours which will never have the precision of a coast-line.

This overland trade also included in the south of Poland an opening towards the eastern Mediterranean. This was the route, on which Lvov provided the principal axis, through which Poland obtained supplies of Greek wines, spices and silk. But we should not be unduly impressed by the 2,000 waggons passing annually through Lvov in the mid-XVIth century when assessing the transit trade, since this was already considerably less than in the previous century, despite the activities of Jewish and Armenian merchants. And in the larger Jewish colonies the minority engaged in trade with Constantinople in the late XVIth century seem to have held a much less stable position than the Armenians.<sup>11</sup> Lvov's population was growing throughout the XVIth and early XVIIth centuries, and obtained its supplies of woollen cloths, utensils, and hardware from Poland, and then re-exported them towards the Danubian provinces and sometimes even as far as Constantinople. From Poland it also obtained the wax over which Joseph Nasi, the Duke of Naxos, had conceded a monopoly in the late 1560s, and the furs which Lewes Roberts had seen carried by Polish merchants in the Turkish capital, although they made no great impression on him.<sup>12</sup> Did this amount to a substantial current of trade which played a major role in western commerce? The data which suggest that this was the case are pretty thin. There is, for example, the case of an Armenian merchant who in 1531 bought eleven bales of English cloth at Poznan, where he had contacts with the burgermeister Friedrich Schmaltz, who carried on a major trade in cattle and textiles in Nuremberg, Leipzig and Frankfurt, as well as in Lublin and

---

<sup>11</sup> ELEONORA NADEL-GOLOBIĆ, *Armenians and Jews in medieval Lvov. Their role in oriental trade 1400-1600* (Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique 20, 1979, pp. 345-371). There was another prosperous armenian colony in the XVIIth century at Zamosc, between Lvov and Dublin.

<sup>12</sup> L. ROBERTS, *The Merchants' Map of Commerce*, Londres 1638, ch. 233, p. 176.

Lvov, and who was also a trusted agent of the Hohenzollerns and owned shares and offices in the mines of Transylvania, which in 1537 were to bankrupt him.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most important evidence was the Antwerp enterprise of Martin Huriau. In 1571 he set up a company to trade with Constantinople via Poland which remained in business for a short while. Perhaps some information can be gleaned from the law suit raised against his partner in Torun in 1578, which would shed light on the broader significance of this venture. But whatever the case, it remains a fact that subsequently the Huriaus, like other merchants in the Netherlands, organised their Mediterranean business from Venice where they installed a factor.<sup>14</sup> The journeys made by Tommaso Alberti between Constantinople and Lvov in 1612-13 figure in his memoirs as a rather exceptional exploit, especially since the route through Moldavia became much less safe towards 1620.<sup>15</sup>

The transit trade through Russia poses similar problems but in a rather different form, since there are abundant sources regarding the different projects put forward. Ever since the English in 1553 reached the shores of the White Sea in search for a northern route to the Far East, the idea of reaching the markets of Persia from the Volga gave rise to intermittent hopes linked to diplomatic overtures in the expectation of gaining the assent of the tsar and his participation in a trading monopoly. This

<sup>13</sup> E. WESTERMANN, *Zum Handel...*, *art. cit.*, pp. 249-257.

<sup>14</sup> *Danziger Inventar* ed. P. Simons, Munich-Leipzig 1913; no. 6014 (contract forming a commercial partnership which would start with an exploratory journey to Constantinople by the factor Jacob von Leiden). Cf E. COORNAERT *Les Français et le commerce international à Anvers* Paris 1961, Vol. I p. 187; for Huriau's earlier contacts with Danzig, Breslau and Leipzig, where silk was sold to a merchant from Poznan by a relative called Hans Huriau in 1569 (G. Fischer *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten Leipziger Handelsgeschichte 1450-1650* Leipzig 1929, pp. 248, 257). On the Huriau activities in Venice, where Martin died in 1578, see W. BRULEZ, *Marchands flamands à Venise 1568-1605* Bruxelles-Rome 1965; GERTRUG SUSANNA GRAMULLA *Handelsbeziehungen Kölner Kaufleute zwischen 1500 und 1650* Köln-Vienna 1972, pp. 254-55, 307-8.

<sup>15</sup> F. BRAUDEL *Le Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* 2nd ed. Paris 1966 Vol. I, pp. 182-3.

successively engaged the attention of the English Muscovy Company, Duke Frederick III of Holstein-Gottorp (1634-1636), Duke Jacob of Courland, and the Swedish agent Fabritius in the 1680s. In terms of practical results these chimerical projects are of little interest, but they do, however, reveal that there was a degree of knowledge of the commerce carried on between Russia and Persia. The Armenian merchants who were engaged in the trade certainly hoped to be able to carry it further than Moscow to the north and the west. The publication in Amsterdam in 1699 of an Armenian manual describing trading customs and practices in Europe and in Asia coincides with the activities of Armenian merchants established in Libau and elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> But it is curious that this 'Treasury of measures, weights, numbers and monies' by Lucas de Vanand makes no reference to Lvov in its survey of the principal commercial centres of northern and central Europe, since it reports on the shipping of silk from Astrakhan to Amsterdam via Moscow and Archangel. Although the Armenian diaspora knitted together a web of commercial contacts right the way across the continent and especially in the east, they were still very fragile threads and even though they became a little stronger towards the end of the XVIIth century they certainly did not begin to rival the much stronger network of Jewish merchants. In the very numerous customs registers for this period, it is very rare to discover before 1660 any reference to Asiatic or Levantine goods exported from any Baltic port. Even in the case of the Persian silk seen by Johan de Rhodes at Archangel in 1650 (which comprised 1.2% of the total goods exported), the transit trade from Asia to western Europe comprised a very small percentage of the trade carried on between the latter port and north-eastern Europe.

---

<sup>16</sup> KELLENBENZ *Launverkehr...* *op. cit.* pp. 135-7 & 155-8. K. KEVONIAN *Marchands arméniens au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique 16, 1975 pp. 199-244). In that period the Armenian silk merchants had a warehouse at Narva: S. E. ASTROM *From cloth to iron. The Anglo-Baltic trade in the late XVIIIth century*, Helsingfors 1963 vol. 1, p. 124.

This conclusion makes it a little, although not a great deal, easier to explore the patterns and correlations existing between maritime and overland trade. Let us start by examining the models of inter-action which are either implicit or clearly formulated in existing studies. Then let us move on to examine the determinants and the non-determinants of commercial circulation. Revealing the motive forces and the structures of this circulation will enable us to establish the factors which will explain in varying degree the differentiations that become evident, both between east and west and also between the different regional zones, the existence of which warns against any undue schematisation of the east-west contrast.

1. *Characteristics and bases of the models of interaction*

The interdependence between flows of maritime and overland trade are often explained in terms of schemas of rivalry and substitution. Shifts in traffic are therefore seen as a result of a falling off in one element, balanced by an expansion of the other. It is claimed, for example, that the expansion of Upper German trade towards the north-east was damaging to the position of the Hanseatic towns in the late Middle Ages. But the weakness of such hypotheses is fully revealed when they are applied on any larger scale. A parallel between the decline of the Hanse and the development of the overland routes linking Moscow, Poznan, Leipzig and Nuremberg is far too ambitious and simply falls back into a mass of uncertainty and undemonstrable hypotheses, indicating above all that no serious consideration has been given to what types of trade could and could not be substituted in this manner.

A rather better variant on the same method is to attempt to link generalised changes occurring at a global level with more specific local phenomena. F. W. Henning, for example, has claimed that in the early XVIth century Breslau's role was affected

by the shift in the centre of gravity of the European economy from Italy towards the Low Countries, which was why Poland began to obtain its foreign trade mainly from the north, from Danzig and Poznań in particular.<sup>17</sup> This is a suggestion which does merit careful examination, even though the author himself provides little evidence to substantiate it by defining what commodity trades he was referring to. Let us assume that at least part of this trade was made up of spices. In 1537 the Prussian towns complained, for example, that the Cracow merchants were accustomed to buy their pepper at Breslau and not from them.<sup>18</sup> Of course this one text does not prove that there was any long-lasting change, but it does indicate where we should look for evidence to make the correlation suggested between the development pattern of Breslau's trade and the shifts in the European economy as a whole more convincing.

War is also often invoked as an explanation of shifts in trading patterns, as a result of interruptions to or even the prevention of normal trade. The sudden increase in Baltic maritime trade is often seen as the result of the paralysis of the overland routes caused by the Thirty Years War.<sup>19</sup> Yet even this interaction which might seem self-evident, proves incapable of standing up to serious scrutiny. The first half of the Thirty Years War was by no means a period of expansion in Baltic trade, whereas on the Continent itself, despite the ravages of warfare, the expansion of trade was often dramatic. Business progressed extremely well at Frankfurt right up to the arrival of the Swedes in 1631. In 1629 the exports of cloth from Breslau to Cracow broke all records, as did the movement of leather goods and hides in the opposite direction.<sup>20</sup> Major re-routing of trade due to military

---

<sup>17</sup> F. W. HENNING, *Die Handelsfunktionen Breslaus in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Scripta Mercaturae, 1972, n. 1-2, p. 122).

<sup>18</sup> Danziger Inventar, no. 1070.

<sup>19</sup> F. BRAUDEL, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme XV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, t. 2, *Les jeux de l'échange*, Paris 1979, p. 185.

<sup>20</sup> M. HROCH, *Handel und Politik im Ostseeraum während des dreissigjährigen Krieges*

actions rarely lasted any length of time or left any permanent traces. When Danzig was under seige in 1577 and so out of action, the bulk of the exports carried along the Vistula were diverted to Königsberg — yet in the following year they returned to their normal path. And in the context of the steady development of trade with the Dutch provinces in Königsberg in the late XVIth century, this fortuitous event scarcely left an imprint. Certainly, wars could have very major consequences for a trading town — the capture of Narva by the tsar in 1558, for example, was a catastrophe for Reval which completely lost its role as a transit centre for trade with Russia, and was unable to regain its former position even after the Swedes had regained Narva in 1581. But these changes affecting places geographically close together had little impact on the general orientation of trade in the area, and the decline evident in the latter was not only due to local fluctuations of commerce in the principal combat zone.

Before taking this examination of the actual and supposed alternatives offered by the different routes linking the markets of Russia with those of the west any further, it is worth mentioning that alongside the various constraints and taxes imposed by the political authorities one must also take into account the calculations made by the merchants themselves, since they were rarely prepared to put up with whatever was demanded. In 1533, for example, the Saxon electorate placed a surtax on cattle in transit which raised a huge cry of protest from the merchants who used the route between Brieg and Buttstadt, and gave rise to a certain diversion of trade towards Bohemia — a diversion that was sufficient, or sufficiently threatening, for the surtax to be abolished in 1537.<sup>21</sup> While this provides one example of how effective pressure from merchant bodies might be, one should also remember

---

(Acta Universitatis Carolinae LXIV), Prague 1976, p. 76: according to M. Wolanski the volume of trade between Breslau and Cracow in 1629 was at least twice that of the annual average in the early XVIIth century.

<sup>21</sup> E. WESTERMANN, *Zum Handel...*, *art. cit.*, pp. 245-249.

that preferences for one route as opposed to another were based on calculations of costs which were not solely dependent on the rates of duty charged on different goods. However, it is only very rarely that it is possible to identify accurately the different components of trade costs in the case of major shifts from one route to another. Such a shift in fact indicates that the customary route had become paralysed as the result of a highly complex set of actions and interactions. This was what occurred in the Baltic between 1626 and 1635, and the extremely serious crisis which developed in these years serves to illustrate very clearly the practical limitations on the possibilities for substituting trade routes between the Baltic and the White Sea.

After 1626 it became clear that there were major problems on the cereal market at Amsterdam as Dutch and Danzig prices moved further and further apart, just when Swedish troops began to occupy the Vistula delta. Danzig was tightly blockaded for three years (1627-29), and it was only in 1631 that its trade really recovered. Cereal exports from Königsberg could not make up for the losses. In addition, in normal times the ships that came to load grain often brought salt as their outward cargo — but this element of east-west trade was also drying up and had fallen victim to the war that had broken out near La Rochelle. These politically inspired disturbances to shipping were certainly of major importance,<sup>22</sup> but that is not to say, however, that poor harvests were not also responsible. Rye, which in 1628 was sold at Danzig at about half the price in Amsterdam, reached about 75 % of that price in the two years following. However, Dutch merchants were able to find a partial substitute by buying Russian grain from Archangel — and this was the trade that provided

---

<sup>22</sup> HROCH, *Handel und Politik...*, p. 69. A. ATTMAN, *Stranglehold on the Vistula. The international corn crisis around 1630*, in *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftswege. Festschrift für Hermann Kellenbenz*, 1978, t. II, pp. 545-562. Both authors claim that poor harvests played no part in this; Attman gives some importance to the counter-measures adopted by the Poles in response to the Swedish blockade.

the basis for the subsidies paid in 1629 by the tsar to the Swedes, which took the form of a duty raised on Russian grain exported from Archangel. More interesting for our own analysis, however, is the fact that this increase of Dutch trade at Archangel proved short-lived. Although not amounting to a genuine statistical series, the number of shipments for Archangel registered at Amsterdam provides an important index — there were less than 8 annual charters and departures between 1594 and 1625, then an average of 108 between 1626 and 1630, 221 between 1631 and 1635, while in the 1640s the number fell back to an annual average of only 6.<sup>23</sup> In short, everything quickly fell back into place, and commercial observers in Archangel in 1642 and 1653 confirmed that the export of cereals was only profitable when there were major shortages on the western markets.

The exports of leather and fur goods, tallow and potash from the White Sea were much less irregular, which indicates that these commodities were not normally handicapped in comparison with other similar goods exported from Russia by other routes or from other producing regions in the Baltic. However, the small amount of linen and hemp exported from Archangel in the mid-XVIIth century was almost insignificant in comparison with the exports of the Baltic ports, much of which originated from Russia. This then shows clearly that there were two commodities that could not use the Arctic sea-route in place of that of the Baltic, a fact which would serve to strengthen the reservations of those who have questioned the degree of unity within the Russian market at this time.<sup>24</sup> In general, it could be said that the whole question of the substitution of one trade route for another is often posed as though there were no limit to the variety of permutations possible. We are told, for example, that

---

<sup>23</sup> S. HART, *Amsterdam shipping and trade to Northern Russia in the seventeenth century* (Mededelingen van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor zee-geschiedenis 26, 1973, p. 8).

<sup>24</sup> P. DE BUCK, *Rusland en Polen als markten voor het Westen omstreeks 1600* (Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 90, 1977, pp. 214-216).

the role of the Polish trade fairs in international commerce, and in particular in the east-west transit trade, fell off in the late XVIIth century as a direct result of the rapid expansion of trade passing through Archangel.<sup>25</sup> But it is impossible not to be sceptical of an explanation which suggests a rivalry between overland and a seaborne routes which were particularly eccentric, and which pays no attention to the force of attraction exercised by Riga and the ports of Livonia which were situated between the two.

A second schema of inter-relationships, while not excluding the possibility of straight alternatives and even rivalry between alternative routes, turns more specifically on the complementary character of the seaborne and overland trade routes. Since the countries of the north-east had a heavy surplus of exports from their sea-ports, this had to be balanced in one way or another. In the XVIIIth century two types of compensation can be seen. In 1701 a merchant memoir from Rotterdam stated that the rixdalers that were sent to the Baltic came largely from central Germany into Holland, which the merchants then bought in the Low Countries to sell again in Poland and the Baltic states.<sup>26</sup> In the mid-XVIIIth century there is reliable evidence that eastern merchants were purchasing more at Leipzig than they sold there, and the resulting debts were settled in part by bills of exchange drawn on Amsterdam and discharged there against the credits arising from the export surpluses of the Baltic ports. M. Hroch has hunted everywhere to try to discover data to show that such a mechanism also functioned before 1650, but without success — for which there is a very good reason.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the XVIth century, and well in to the XVIIth century as well, the

---

<sup>25</sup> J. TOPOLSKI, *Faktoren der Entwicklung eines internationalen Jahrmärktenetzes in Polen im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Studia Historiae Oeconomicae 5, 1970, p. 116).

<sup>26</sup> Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der wisselbanken, éd. J. G. VAN DILLEN (Rijks Gesch. Publ. 59), la Haye 1925, no. 371.

<sup>27</sup> HROCH, *DIE ROLLE...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 et 25-27.

trading deficit of the west in the northern maritime trade was paid for directly in precious metals, and in different forms of currency. This has been fully demonstrated for Narva, for example, where the accounts of the merchant Wilhelm von Gohren enable us to see that the imports of thalers registered in the customs accounts were in fact much less than the true figure — probably by as much as two thirds.<sup>28</sup> In the case of Riga, we know that in 1650-52 the 'official' imports of thalers were 2300 bags a year, each containing between 400 and 1000 Reichstaler, which would have been quite enough to satisfy the full trade surplus for 1640.<sup>29</sup> Also, the use of bills of exchange between the ports of Livonia and the west permitted the transfer of balances, but always in the same direction — from the west to the east, without modifying the bilateral character of the system of payments.<sup>30</sup> What is known of currency exchange practices at Archangel conforms to the same picture — Dutch merchants there drew bills on Amsterdam, yet the Amsterdam Exchange did not quote any exchange rate for Archangel since it was not a genuine exchange market. Lewes Roberts describes how the English merchants behaved similarly.<sup>31</sup> So, the development of exchange operations conducted only between two specific places must be carefully distinguished from the function of those exchange operations which formed part of a multi-lateral system

---

<sup>28</sup> P. JEANNIN, *Le commerce à Narva au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et le problème de la balance commerciale russe*, in *Spoleczenstwo. Gospodorka. Kultura. Studia ofiarowane M. Malowistowi*, Varsovie 1974, pp. 141-144.

<sup>29</sup> ATTMAN, *The Russian... cit.*, pp. 140-143. In 1640 the excess had been a little over a million Swedish thalers (equivalent to about two-thirds in Reichsthalers).

<sup>30</sup> The bilateral function of bills of exchange worked in exactly the same way in the cases of Wilhelm von Gohren and Isidore Dalz, the Antwerp agent already mentioned by Attman, and in that of the Wolter von Holstein-Reimers company which was operating between Lubeck and Riga and Narva between 1572 and 1575: cf. Marie-Luise Pelus 'Wolter von Holstein, marchand lubeckois dans la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle' Unpublished thesis. Paris 1975, vol. 2, pp. 492-493.

<sup>31</sup> HART, *Amsterdam shipping...*, *art. cit.*, p. 30. Lewes Roberts, *The Merchants' Map...*, ch. 220, p. 161: "the English sometimes among themselves giving 11 shillings and 11 shillings 6 pence sterling in England for the Rubble here".

of payments, the steady emergence of which after 1660 has been described and explained by S.Z. Åström.<sup>32</sup>

This argument does not bear directly on the much discussed problem of the size of the trading gap existing between the value of the exports and imports of the Baltic ports. Nor is there any attempt to calculate where the surplus lay in the overland trade between east and west. The only established fact is that in the XVIth and early XVIIth century there was no overall compensation, no evidence of a compensatory balance derived from the overland trade in central Europe to form an overall balance with the maritime trade of the Baltic. Hence the models for correlating overland and seaborne trade by means either of substitution or complementarity prove equally fragile and inadequate. In both cases the weakness of the models themselves are compounded by the lack of adequate information, or of information distributed adequately over the periods and areas in question.

In the sea ports, the customs registers do give a certain indication of the entry and exit of different commodities, yet they are accompanied by a number of vexatious imperfections which make it difficult to assess either the overall trade balance or shifts in time.<sup>33</sup> Although it is often impossible to estimate the extent of fraud, it is relatively easy to test the significance of the prices selected by the different administrations to provide the basis for the calculation of customs duty — sometimes these reflected market prices well, at other times not at all; the distortion was particularly evident at Danzig in the second quarter of the XVIIth century.<sup>34</sup> Nearly all the customs registers that have survived contain enormous gaps, although the continuous series of accounts for the Sound customs enable us to make a number of cross-checks.

---

<sup>32</sup> ÅSTRÖM, *From cloth...*, pp. 110-120.

<sup>33</sup> JEANNIN, *Le commerce à Narva...*, *art. cit.*, pp. 133-138.

<sup>34</sup> JEANNIN, *Preis-, Kosten-, und Gewinnunterschiede im Handel mit Ostseegetreide (1550-1650)*, in *Wirtschaftliche und soziale Strukturen im säkularen Wandel. Festschrift für Wilhelm Abel*, Hanover 1974, t. II, pp. 497-499.

But another major drawback for the study of the inter-relationship between different flows of trade is the fact that the customs registers often give neither the provenance nor the destination of vessels, but merely the domicile of the captain — which is quite inadequate as a basis for drawing any map of the trade routes in question. Only in exceptional cases (that of Elbing, for example) do the registers list destinations, and then the essential features become more clear. In 1596, three-quarters of the vessels taking on cargoes at Elbing were Dutch or English, while exports destined for England and Holland exceeded 96% of total exports, and while there were twice as many Dutch as English ships, the cargoes destined to Holland were only 40% of those bound for England.

It is true, however, that even in the absence of adequate information on the geography of the trade of a given port, the combination of the customs registers of the different Baltic ports and the accounts of the Sound do reveal the predominant features, showing clearly the dominant place held by cereals in east-west trade and their gradual decline after the mid-XVIIth century, as well as the changing hierarchy of importance amongst the ports of the east. The roles of Königsberg and Elbing were growing in comparison with that of Danzig up to 1630, and thereafter the increasing importance of Riga reveals a certain shift in western demand away from Poland and towards more distant markets. In some cases we can be even more specific. In 1583, 64 Lubeck ships entered the port of Danzig; a careful analysis of their cargoes makes it clear that at least half of them had been loaded in Lubeck, and there were in addition a further 9 Danzig vessels which had certainly taken on their cargoes in Lubeck as well. Yet this information does not alter the overall picture of Danzig trade, since the Danzig-Lubeck route was in fact of only minor importance.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> J. SCHILDHAUER, *Der Seehandel Danzigs im 16. Jahrhundert und die Verlagerung des Warenverkehrs im Nord- und Mitteleuropäischen Raum* (Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte 1970/III, pp. 159 et 168-169, whose calculations are based on the declara-

What is interesting, however, is that this example reveals that 30% of the pepper imported into Danzig in this year came on the route from Lubeck, which also received 78% of the wax exported that year from the Vistula port. Taking the example of Danzig again, the presence of 6 Swedish ships in the port in 1583 is a rather feeble reflection of the importance of the trade with the Swedish capital, and the Swedish sources register 41 vessels sailing for Danzig. The difference between the two figures corresponds exactly with the 35 Danzig vessels that, when registered in the customs books of *Pfahlgeld*, proved to have cargoes that were distinctly 'Swedish' in composition. This is a very clear example of the way in which it is necessary to off-set the source available for the two ports against one another. A detailed comparison of the trade between Danzig and Stockholm in 1643 leads not only to a better knowledge of the structure and provenance of inter-Baltic trade at this time, but also to a certain scepticism over the reliability of the Danzig customs registers.<sup>36</sup> But at the same time it must be stressed that the sea-ports do provide us with sources of information that can be made more reliable by this sort of cross-checking, and even those errors which cannot be fully eradicated are, in comparison with the sources available for studying the overland trade, of no great moment.

The great problems begin to arise as soon as one attempts to reconstruct the routes linking the ports with their hinterlands, and they become even more complex when it comes to distinguishing between the export and import trades of any of the continental commercial centres. Very few records have survived

---

tions of domicile made by the ships' masters. In this fashion one can identify 32 or 33 Lubeck vessels bound from Lubeck, 6 Lubecker 'Spanienfahrer' arriving under ballast — the majority of the other Lubeck ships were bound from Marstrand.

<sup>36</sup> MARIA BOGUČKA, *Some aspects of commercial relations within the Baltic region on the example of Gdańsk-Stockholm trade in 1643* (communication au 7ème Congrès International d'Histoire Economique, section C 6, dactyl., p. 10): "the suspicion that the customs books regularly lowered the figure concerning Gdańsk's volume of trade may, unfortunately, affect all the studies conducted on the basis of those books".

of the different customs and toll duties raised at various points along these routes, and those that have are extremely difficult to interpret. The Poznan records which have been the subject of many studies make no distinction between goods coming in and going out.<sup>37</sup> The duties on cloth referred to both imported foreign textiles and to locally or regionally produced export goods without distinction.<sup>38</sup> Simply adding the two together makes sense if the object is to evaluate the percentage of textiles in the total volume of trade, but this is of little help in identifying the direction of different trade flows. If the often considerable quantities of furs referred to in the same sources were imported from the east (but from how far away we cannot tell), there is no reason why a part at least of the wax should not have been produced locally. Other customs registers do have the advantage of revealing a trade flow in movement — this is the case of Grodno in 1600, where one can see that furs were moving in the direction of the Gniezno fairs, but one must also take into account the extent to which this was due to the exemptions enjoyed by the merchants of Vilna at Grodno.<sup>39</sup> In the best of cases, these pointillist images of different trade flows throw a brief light on some short branch of a wider route, or on some particular link. But they are never adequate to enable us to compare the simultaneous flows on two

---

<sup>37</sup> H. SAMSONOWICZ, *Über Fragen des Landhandels Polens mit Westeuropa im 15/16. Jahrhundert*, in *Neue hansische Studien*, ed. K. Fritze, E. Müller-Mertens, J. Schildauer, E. Voigt, Berlin 1970, pp. 320-321.

<sup>38</sup> ADELHEID SIMSCH, *Die Handelsbeziehungen zwischen Nürnberg und Posen im europäischen Wirtschaftsverkehr des 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Giessener Abhandlungen zur Agrar- und Wirtschaftsforschung des europäischen Ostens, 50), Wiesbaden 1970, pp. 90-95. The tables extrapolated from Rybarski contain many interesting details, but they can hardly be described as a statistical series.

<sup>39</sup> TOPOLSKI, *Factoren...*, *cit.*, p. 112: this transit tax was paid on some 500,000 squirrel furs and 25,000 precious pelts bound for Gniezno. Cf Nina Antonova Gusakova *Die wirtschaftlichen Beziehungen zwischen den Städten Belorusslands und den Städten Polens und Böhmens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (*Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Jena* 26, 1977 p. 325): in 1605 there were 550,000 squirrel furs, but this figure comes from adding the totals at Grodno with those much further south at Brest Litovsk.

parallel routes, or to evaluate the transit trade as a whole carried on the totality of the routes running through Poland from east to west. Even though the *Geleitsrechnungen* series may eventually yield a valuable guide for a certain area of the Germano-Polish frontiers, the overall state of the documentary sources makes it difficult to dismiss A. Maczak's pessimistic outlook.<sup>40</sup>

The vast majority of the sources on overland trade are like the dust on the documents kept in the municipal registries, arising from law suits or attempts to prove the existence of a debt, or from some other cause. Can these be expected to yield anything more than a collection of individual and disparate information, to throw light on the geographical distribution of the trade carried on by any particular town? An attempt to do this has been made in the case of Poznan, by listing the references to all localities mentioned in these documents as having 'contacts' of some form with the city.<sup>41</sup> Working from this basis it has been estimated that Poznan's contacts with the west provided about half the city's total trade in the second half of the XVIth century, but only 37% in the early XVIIth century. The percentage of contacts with the north (primarily with Danzig and Torún in the late XVth century was 17%, and in the following half-centuries stood respectively at 27%, 12% and 36%. These fluctuations would be extremely interesting, were it possible to place any faith whatsoever in these highly 'ersatz' statistics. They do not meet with the most essential of pre-requisites — to compensate for their highly disparate character it is essential that the sources should at least be numerous.

---

<sup>40</sup> A. MACZAK 'Continental East-West Trade as a factor of development in Central Europe from the middle of the XVIth century to the XVIIth century' in Cinquième Congrès International d'Histoire Economique, Leningrad 1970, vol. 6, Moscow 1976 p. 176: 'We are lacking figures... I do not believe that sufficiently good data yet exist'.

<sup>41</sup> SAMSONOWICZ, *Über fragen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-317. M. Grycz, *Die Rolle der Stadt Poznan im Innen-und Aussenhandel bis ende des XVII Jahrhunderts* in *Der Aussenhandel...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-115; the monograph which Grycz has published in Polish contains extensive documentation, but this essay includes only some of the results of his analysis and concentrates on giving an overall description of the structure.

However, it turns out that the calculation is based on 24 items of information per year on average between 1550 and 1655, and only 4 per year for the period 1449 to 1535. The calculations are then no better than the hopelessly weak statistical base from which they are drawn.

The application of similar techniques is less open to objection when it is directed to series of reasonably homogeneous records. Analysis of a series of acts of attorney approved in Breslau and of a similar series of attachment of property (*saisies-arrets*) has shown the intensity of the commercial relations of the city with the markets of the north-east in the early XVIIth century: 40% of the documents refer to trade with Poland, 10% with Prussia and another 10% (of the acts of attorney alone) with Lithuania and Russia.<sup>42</sup> However, the author of this study rightly doubts whether these figures give an accurate picture of the commercial geography of the city, since the Breslau merchants tended to be more active in the trade with the east, while that with the west was more in the hands of merchants from Upper Germany. But if attention is directed mainly towards specific phenomena, then particular repetitions and frequencies become more significant than when a broader sweep is adopted. There is firm evidence, for example that certain Poznan companies were heavily indebted in the XVIIth century to Nuremberg houses — a fact which is interesting not only in its own right, but also because there is ample evidence (much of which has not yet been systematically studied) of credits going in the same direction.<sup>43</sup>

A judicious sampling of such fragmentary local sources may also throw out some guide-lines but they will never be adequate to make up for the non-existent statistical series. It is also often true that the commerce of a particular locality can be best revealed by outside sources. In the case of the cattle trade, for example,

---

<sup>42</sup> HENNING, *Die Handelsfunktionen...*, art. cit., pp. 107-109.

<sup>43</sup> SIMSCH, *Die Handelsbeziehungen...*, pp. 61 et 67.

one can learn as much from the records of the often distant purchaser as from those of the Polish regions which were exporting the animals. Without the transit records in Grodno, it would be less easy to appreciate the attraction exercised by the Gniezno fairs. Similarly, it is from the registers of shipping on the Danube above Linz that we can detect something on which the Viennese sources are silent — that is the intense activity of Viennese merchants in the area, as well as the reference to the operations of four Jewish merchants whose goods had come from Italy along the river Inn.<sup>44</sup> Although it may not be possible to obtain a rough or plausible estimate of the trade of a particular town, if the historian turns his attention instead to a line of communication it may well be that the information available from the two terminal points will prove reciprocally enlightening, revealing, for example, the fact that the Nuremberg merchants based in Poznan were always very careful to preserve their rights as burgers of Nuremberg. At the same time, however, this type of deduction arrived at from two contrasting poles cannot always escape the risk of leading to conclusions which are then contradicted by evidence drawn from other sources. For example, the red colouring agent known as *czewiec* (in German Schirwitz) disappears from the sources in both Poznan and Nuremberg around 1562, and was replaced by cochineal.<sup>45</sup> However, *czewiec* continued to hold an honourable and special place in exports from Danzig between 1641 and 1649.<sup>46</sup> So, in any study of the overland trade flows an extremely difficult and often thankless exercise in archival marquetry is a fundamental but never sufficient pre-requisite.

---

<sup>44</sup> N. PICKL, Handel an Inn und Donau um 1630, in *Wirtschaftskräfte...*, op. cit., t. II, pp. 212-216.

<sup>45</sup> SIMSCH, *Die Handelsbeziehungen...*, p. 73 (*czewiec*) and pp. 48-49, on the double "nationality" of Ried, a family that has saved a fragment of its book-keeping. See also SIMSCH, *Posener Marktettel aus den Jahren 1579-1580*, in *Beiträge zur Stadt- und Regionalgeschichte Ost- und Neuropas* (Giessener Abhandlungen... 55), Wiesbaden 1971, pp. 157-171.

<sup>46</sup> MARIA BOGUĆKA, *Handel zagraniczny Gdańska w pierwszej Polowie XVII wieku*, Varsovie 1970, p. 41.

The more one looks towards the east, the more the fragments of the mosaic become dispersed, and the effort to reconstruct the original picture begins to pose endless questions without pointing to any clear answers. How can we tell whether those Leipzig merchants who were responsible for the largest stocks of leather goods, hemp, cloth and pepper registered in the customs accounts of Dorpat in 1589-90 had sent their goods by land, or whether they had done part of the journey by sea, perhaps from Danzig? <sup>47</sup> Although the references at Leipzig to merchants of the town actively engaged in trade with regions beyond Poland are rare, they are much more frequent with regard to merchandise coming from the distant north-east. Huge quantities of hides and leather goods were imported there not only from Breslau, Cracow and Poznan, but also from Danzig, Stettin and Lubeck. The Hansatic merchants brought furs from Lubeck and Danzig, while those of Leipzig obtained their supplies from Breslau and Poznan, and in the early XVIth century they even succeeded in gaining the upper hand over the Nuremburg merchants in this field. Even though they are based on rather narrow evidence and lack statistical support, G. Fischer's arguments on this subject still merit close attention. <sup>48</sup>

Will it ever be possible to estimate more precisely the respective strengths of the ties binding Leipzig, on one hand, to the continental centres like Breslau, Cracow and Poznan, and on the other, to the ports of the Baltic coast? The lack of studies on the trade between Danzig and Leipzig is a most regrettable lacuna, and a number of sample investigations suggest that the Danzig municipal archives contain little of value in this respect. This may explain why none of the twenty Danzig merchants whom

---

<sup>47</sup> HROCH, *Die Rolle...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9; the same question is posed by the activities of a Jewish Lithuanian merchant who purchased jewels at Leipzig in 1640 and sold linen in Vilna.

<sup>48</sup> G. FISCHER, *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten Leipziger Handelsgeschichte 1470-1650*, Leipzig 1929, pp. 100, 167, and also the information given on the leading merchants in the various commodities discussed.

G. Fischer discovered to have been operating in Leipzig figure even once in the index to the *Danziger Inventar*. However, the Danzig Council did protest on various occasions to the Elector of Brandenburg to complain about robberies or taxes affecting traffic either going to, or coming from Leipzig. The towns mentioned in these documents show that the trade convoys followed a route which crossed the Oder between Stettin and Kustrin, and then rejoined the main road from Berlin to Leipzig at Wittenberg. Coming from Danzig, then, this route did not touch Poznan, even though it was also used by certain merchants from that city.<sup>49</sup> It should be possible to identify amongst the leading Danzig merchants who were heavily engaged in seaborne trade those like the Plecken who also obtained supplies from the Leipzig fairs.<sup>50</sup> The account books of one Stralsund merchant give some idea of the extent of the attraction of these fairs — and while this is certainly an individual example which is not necessarily very typical, it would not appear to be misleading.<sup>51</sup> Had this document not been preserved quite by chance, we should have only the vaguest information on the trade between Leipzig and Stralsund — for example, that when the Duke of Pomerania wanted to tighten customs controls he advised the five towns principally concerned, Hamburg, Lubeck, Rostock, Danzig and

---

<sup>49</sup> *Danziger Inventar* nos 466, 481, 1111, 1945, 2179, 2213, 2738, 3573, 5252, 6291 give eight examples from the years 1534 to 1572. On the commercial routes in this region see: F. BRUNS & H. WECZERKA, *Hansische Handelsstrassen*, Weimar 1967, pp. 661-668, which however gives little precise information on the ways trade circulated. Cf. SIMSCH, *Die Handelsbeziehungen...*, cit. pp. 26-27.

<sup>50</sup> *Danziger Inventar* nos 2943, 6291. On the activities of this firm in the Low Countries and in Portugal, see: P. JEANNIN, *Lübecker Handelsunternehmen um die Mitte des 16 JAHRHUNDERTS* (*Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte* 43, 1963, pp. 45-46).

<sup>51</sup> K. F. OLECHNOWITZ 'Handel und Seeschifffahrt der späten Hanse' (*Abhandlungen zur Handels- und Sozialgeschichte VI*) Weimar 1965 pp. 125-128: between 1619 and 1627 Henrich Sander went regularly twice a year to the Leipzig fair to buy fabrics and haberdashery.

Leipzig.<sup>52</sup> The incidental nature of the sources that provide such information cannot but pose a serious question mark against many of the studies devoted to overland trade in north eastern Europe.

Since we often lack real knowledge on the effective network of trade routes, and since a proliferation of highly localised studies presents us with a mass of particular variations without pointing to any conclusive general findings, the historian finds himself steering between two different reefs: on one hand, an excess of caution which will lead him simply to add his contribution to the general stock of accumulated 'facts', and on the other an attraction towards broader hypotheses which, although often setting out from a well-justified desire to provide some more general explanation, all too easily lead on to unwarrantedly sweeping generalisation. Yet the narrow course between these two hazards does still offer some valuable guiding beacons. There are a number of comparative studies which do suggest that the overall value of east-west transit trade by land lagged well behind seaborne commerce. In 1605, for example, 100,000 hides (cattle, sheep and goat skins) passed through Brest and Grodno, whereas in 1596 Riga and Narva had exported 200,000 hides, — although leather goods comprised less than 15% of their total exports.<sup>53</sup> Even though furs played a more important part than leather and hides, the overland routes of Lithuania carried considerably less trade than the seaports. However, it proves more difficult to compare the trade of Smolensk between 1673-79 (which had an average annual value of 32,500 roubles) with that of Riga in 1683 (valued at over 900,000 roubles per year,<sup>54</sup> since these values are almost

---

<sup>52</sup> H. LANGER 'Stralsund 1600-1630' (*Abh. zur Handels- und Sozialgeschichte IX*) Weimar 1970 p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> GUSAKOVA 'Die wirtschaftlichen...' *art. cit.*, p. 238; ATTMAN 'The Russian...' *art. cit.*, pp. 46, 48, 81.

<sup>54</sup> ATTMAN *ibid.*, p. 162 (the figure for Smolensk is from K. G. Mitjaev) and p. 140 (the figure for Riga is from C. A. Piirimae who gave the total as more than 1.8

certainly based on quite different calculations, and because Smolensk was not the only transit point linking Russia and Poland. At the same time a gap of this size does give an effective indication of the overall hierarchy of importance. There are other figures, too, which suggest that there was considerable difference between the value of the transit trade on the central and northern branches of the principal east-west axis. The 100,000 pieces of cloth which were exported from Silesia to Poland (although it should be noted that this was the maximum average annual figure in the late XVIIth century) would give a total quantity of about 1.65 million metres, which can then be compared with a maximum quantity of 200,000 metres of cloth travelling towards the east through Brest Litovsk and Godno, much of which never went as far as Russia.<sup>55</sup> The orders of magnitude which begin to emerge from such studies serve to map out a more general picture and also enable us to look beyond the now rather outworn and well-plumbed problems of the rise and decline of different competing routes.

## 2. *The determinants and non-determinants of commercial circulation*

The technical and economic circumstances of the period were such that whenever possible heavy and cumbersome goods that were to be sent over long distances travelled by sea. This could be described as a determining factor which did not extend, however, to lighter goods whose value was sufficiently high to make the incidence of transport costs less noticeable. The

---

million Reichthaler - the rouble was worth 5 Dutch florins and 2 Reichsthaler). But these are the total of exports and imports combined.

<sup>55</sup> WOLANSKI, *Schlesiens Stellung...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129; GUSAKOVA, *art. cit.*, pp. 330-331: for 1605 they give the figure of 55,000 meters of Bohemian and Moravian cloth, which they estimated to be a half of the full total - which would give a figure of some 100,000 meters, but I am rather dubious of this since the trade had become much more important by 1605 than it had been in 1583.

cost differentials can easily be calculated from the surviving accounts, such as those of a shipping company operating on the Elbe between Pirna and Hamburg, which provide a detailed break-down of costs for a means of transport which was identical with all others on the same route. In 1673, for example, freight charges amounted to 4% of the purchase price of tobacco, 25% of the purchase price of wine, and for goods coming in the other direction (from Saxony towards Hamburg) 10% of the price of sail-cloth.<sup>56</sup> Using a range of sources of this type it is possible to arrive at a precise classification of the relative freight costs of different types of goods, which is much more useful than the general contrast between the two extreme examples with which we started. While it would be inconceivable for a shipment of Polish grain or Prussian timber to reach the Low Countries other than by sea, a sack of pepper, on the other hand, might make the return journey by a combination of different routes and using a range of different forms of transports. If these provide two extreme poles of the total gamut, there was a variety of goods which could be carried overland in small quantities, but when carried in larger consignments the freighting charges became, if not prohibitive, at least a strong disincentive.

The factors of constraint and discrimination which affected the distribution of the trade flows along the different routes available were dominated ultimately by geography, and above all by the possibilities of access to the sea provided by rivers. A forestry overseer reported that the same piece of spruce timber would cost 140 *groschen* in the Prussian provinces around Tilsit if it was carted for a distance of seven miles, whereas it would only cost 15 *groschen* if it had been floated by river from Lithuania.<sup>57</sup> Although the accuracy of the figures cannot be checked, this

---

<sup>56</sup> K. BLASCHKE, *Elbschiffahrt und Elbzölle im 16. Jahrhundert* (Hansische Geschichtsblätter 82, 1964, pp. 47-48).

<sup>57</sup> F. MAGER, *Der Wald in Altpreussen als Wirtschaftsraum*, Cologne-Gratz 1960, t. I, p. 254 (rapport de 1736).

report undoubtedly highlights a major differential factor which explains the irreplaceable role of the rivers in channeling exports towards Danzig, Königsberg or Riga. All the descriptions of the commerce of Danzig show that cereals arrived by way of the Vistula, which with its tributaries acted as a fundamental collecting network. At Riga, the 'Strusen' of the Dvina carried vast quantities of supplies down to the city. Even when the river froze in winter, trade was not completely halted, but rather served to intensify the activity of wagons and sled transports.<sup>58</sup> As in the mountain regions, overland transport benefited in winter because of the state of the ground and also because both men and beasts were more available for such work than during the summer. Between Reval and Dorpat, in the mid-XVIIth century, transport charges were much higher in summer than in winter.<sup>59</sup> But even in the milder seasons, road traffic continued to function, especially in Lithuania — unless this impression is falsified by the fact that we do not have sufficient information to make a comparison with the situation in the nearby Prussian hinterland.

Spreading out over an area covering several hundred kilometers around the ports, overland transport was in two senses a peasant activity. It was carried on largely by the peasants and also served to bring together the marketable surpluses from the peasant economy and make them available to large-scale commerce. River navigation, on the other hand, was more directly related to a different type of relationship — it linked commercial contacts over much wider distances and also involved two other categories of participants, bringing together the international merchants of the sea-ports with the merchants of the towns of the hinterland, and also with the owners of the great landed estates.

---

<sup>58</sup> V. V. DOROŠENKO, *Riga und sein Hinterland im 17. Jahrhundert*, in *Hansische Studien IV. Gewerbliche Produktion und Stadt-Land Beziehungen*, éd. K. Fritze, E. Müller-Mertens, J. Schildhauer, Weimar 1979, pp. 159-160.

<sup>59</sup> G. MICKWITZ, *Aus Revaler Handelsbüchern. Zur Technik des Ostseehandels in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Helsinki 1938, pp. 143-148.

The economy of river navigation was based on the weight and distance costs of the goods transported, but it required both considerable organisation and capital. The cereals grown in far distant regions reached Danzig along the Vistula and were produced on the great noble estates. There were many magnates who gained sizable incomes from carrying the produce of their neighbours on their own river flotillas.<sup>60</sup> And when there were no long-distance waterways nearby, the opportunities for selling produce became correspondingly more narrow. In the east of White Russia, the merchants of Szklov who were engaged in overland trade with Vilna and Gniezno also used the Polotsk and Dvina rivers, although this involved loading and unloading. But neither was suitable for carrying grain, with the result that the landowners of the Dneiper basin did not attempt to increase *corvée* requirements to expand cereal production.<sup>61</sup>

If the concept of differential costs is to be a useful analytical tool, we must at all costs avoid any crude schematism. The powerful noble who was delivering his produce to the export merchant could obtain much of his transport free, by using the labour of his dependants. There was also another factor which affected the use of river navigation. Since there was always a much larger volume of goods coming down than returning up the river, many of the boats would never have been able to return had there not been genuine transport companies, such as the one at Pirna which we have already mentioned.<sup>62</sup> Would it not be the case that when a convoy was able to make return journey with a fresh cargo, the overall freight charges would be reduced? Unfortunately we know very little about the ways in which the goods arriving by sea were then distributed through the hinterland.

---

<sup>60</sup> A. MACZAK, *Money and Society in Poland and Lithuania in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries* (Journal of European Economic History 5, 1976, pp. 78-79).

<sup>61</sup> MARIA BARBARA TOPOLSKA, *Peculiarities of the economic structures of Eastern White Russia in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries* (Studia Historiae Oeconomicae 6, 1971, pp. 46-48).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *supra* note 56.

It is impossible to say, for example, whether the existence of boats in need of return cargoes served to encourage the movement of goods capable of sustaining the transport costs back up the rivers towards their sources. And such decisions would also be affected by time factors, if for example use of the waterways involved making long detours which would make the operation too time-consuming, or introduced factors of safety.

The inter-play of these different factors was also influenced in a major way by the relative need for particular goods in the places where they were to be sold. Of the goods arriving by sea from the west, salt and to a lesser extent herrings, were the principal counter-weights to the exports of the Baltic, even though they were greatly inferior to them in quantity. The number of salt shipments passing through the Sound towards the east was generally less than half the shipments of cereals bound for the west.<sup>63</sup> This asymmetry was especially marked at Danzig, where in 1640 salt imports amounted by volume to between 5-10% of cereal exports, and by the XVIth century there was already very little sea-salt being carried up the Vistula.<sup>64</sup> But the regions to the east did not have their own sources of mineral salt like Poland, so that the bulk of the imported sea-salt went to Königsberg (which took about twice as much as Danzig) and to the Lithuanian ports, from whence it reached far into the interior.<sup>65</sup> The trans-shipment on towards Russia via Reval and Narva was often done by land. In this case, then, the determinants acting on the type of transport chosen meant that for the longest stage of the

---

<sup>63</sup> A. E. CHRISTENSEN, *Dutch Trade to the Baltic about 1600*, Copenhagen-la Haye 1941, p. 371.

<sup>64</sup> *Regesta theloni aquatici Wladislaviensis saeculi XVI*, éd. ST. KUTRZEBA and FR. DUDA, Cracovie 1915, pp. 556-563.

<sup>65</sup> In 1634 less than 1900 shipments of salt came into Danzig, but nearly 6,000 at Königsberg (H. KEMPAS, *Seeverkehr und Pfundoll im Herzogtum Preussen*, Bonn 1964, p. 354) and in 1641 respectively less than 3000 and about 8900 shipments. During the 1640s Riga received on average some 7,900 shipments of salt per year: A. SOOM, *Der baltische Getreidehandel im 17 Jahrhundert* Stockholm 1961, p. 322.

journey, from the coastal salt-pans of western Europe through to the Baltic, the sea route was the only one possible. But for the final stage, after arrival at the Baltic ports, the advantages of subsequent river transportation were by no means as clear cut as they were, for example, in the case of Polish cereals.

The combination of the opportunity for large scale export and the choice of the least costly means of transportation within the hinterland tended to have a much more direct impact on the specialisation of production than that exercised even by natural physical propensities for one product rather than another. This is a fact well demonstrated by a comparison of the development of cereal production in the Ukraine, which had no access to the sea, and in the Vistula basin with its close contacts with Danzig.<sup>66</sup> But the flow of commercial surpluses from the hinterland towards the sea was not entirely determined by the geography of navigable waterways. By making partial use of different land routes as well, there were a number of regions which could obtain access to different waterways leading into different river basins. Between the principal commercial areas within which a single port acted as the centralising agent for the flow of exports, there was also a number of marginal and overlapping outlets, which led to intense competition, but the texts which refer to the rivalries between the merchants of the different towns involved do not throw very much light on these phenomena. For example, when in the XVIIth century Königsberg attempted to subject merchandise from Lithuania to rights of staple, the measure was aimed at hitting the transit trade of both the merchants of the Lithuanian towns like Vilna and those of Danzig.<sup>67</sup> But other sources which bear on the commercial relations between Danzig and Lithuania

---

<sup>66</sup> J. TOPOLSKI, 'Commerce des denrées agricoles et croissance économique de la zone baltique aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles' (*Annales E. S. C.* 29, 1974, pp. 430-431).

<sup>67</sup> F. GRAUSE, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg*, Vol. 1, Cologne-Gratz 1965, p. 520. A study of the effective movement of trade between Danzig and Lithuania needs to be undertaken, starting from the Danzig sources.

do not enable us to tell whether the purchases made in the Grand Duchy were sent directly from Königsberg towards the west, or were sent first to Danzig on the *Schmacken* of the Haff, any more than do the arguments put forward in the litigation over the Königsberg staple.

Whether town policies were designed, as in this case, to provide their citizens with an opportunity to profit from a transit trade passing through their territory, or whether they were designed to divert such traffic into their territory, the result would be to add yet another factor in the choice of route to be taken to gain access to the sea, without at the same time necessarily diverting trade from the sea to long overland routes. Since we have no systematic information on the provenance of the goods shipped from the Baltic ports, is it possible to discover some approximate correlation between the type of goods exported from individual ports and the principal products of its hinterland? In fact, we discover that from Pomerania to Livonia virtually every port was dealing in nearly identical commodities, the only distinguishing factor being the particular percentage weighting of each product. There is no lack of information on the differing qualities of identical products, depending on where they came from. At both Danzig and Königsberg it was price that distinguished between Lithuanian and Prussian linen. At Riga, in the late XVIIth century, the hemp of Bielorussia was considered better than that of Moscow and the Smolensk region.<sup>68</sup> After staying in Danzig in 1591, the Venetian merchant Marco Ottobone noted that although Prussian wheat was the best, it was also liable to rot during long sea journeys and for that reason he preferred to take the coarser varieties harvested in the sandy regions of Podolia and Volnhya. He also reported that the cereals which stood up the best to transportation were those of Lithuania, Courland and Livonia «because they are dried in kilns», refer-

---

<sup>68</sup> DOROŠENKO, *Riga und sein Hinterland...*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

ring to the drying - ovens used by the Baltic peasants.<sup>69</sup> Merchants kept careful records of these differences in quality, but in the long run it was more likely to be the availability of supplies in the different regions of production which determined the geography of trade. Königsberg's share in cereal exports rose markedly in the late XVIth and early XVIIth centuries, but in trying to find the reasons for this it is impossible to say whether it was due to the fact that Danzig was exercising less influence over those regions of production which had access to the two ports, or whether it was the result of an expansion of cereal production in the area which made up Königsberg's own commercial hinterland. The destruction of the municipal archives of Königsberg means that we do not have information on the city's trade with its hinterland comparable, for example, with those provided by the administrative and legal archives of Riga. The latter do, however, suggest that in the XVIIth century Riga drew less of its goods from the Moscow region than from Bielorrussia and Lithuania.<sup>70</sup>

Yet however modest such information may be, when added to our knowledge of the geographical map of the main sources of supply, it is of value for the comparative study of the individual ports and their varying economic fortunes, and also gives rise to some more general considerations. A recent contribution to the much debated question of the unity of the Russian market in this period calls for a more careful analysis of the internal structure of regional commerce to reveal the impact of the tsarist policy of prescribing certain routes for foreign trade, and shows that although Archangel was officially designated by the autocracy as an official export outlet it was also the economically 'normal'

---

<sup>69</sup> The dossier on the Ottobone mission which has been partly used by a number of historians was made known to me by M. Aymard with a view to our jointly preparing an edition of it. On the drying-ovens, see: J. AHVENAINEN, *Der Getreidehandel im Mittelalter*, Helsinki 1963, pp. 14-16.

<sup>70</sup> ELISABETH HARDER-GERSDORFF, 'Zur Frage der Lübecker Russlandsimporte durch Rigafahrer im 17. Jahrhundert' (*Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische* 56, 1976, pp. 69-72), estimates the percentage of Russian products at Riga at 15%.

outlet for the hemp of central Russia.<sup>71</sup> However, it must be pointed out that Lithuania and White Russia also constitute an integrated area for any study of these trade routes, and the more information that becomes available on the network of relations that surrounded the ports the greater the chances of discovering the essential conditions and nature of the overland trade conducted between Russia and Poland.

The place held by furs in this trade is quite as striking as the absence of linen and hemp. At the beginning of the XVIIth century, the merchants of Szkolv were sending furs, together with raw hides and leather goods, to the fairs at Gniezno, while in the other direction they owned 15% of the Bielorrussian boats passing through Polotsk towards Riga, with cargoes of linseed, ash and hemp.<sup>72</sup> If this differentiation may be due in part to the relative transport costs, there are other factors too which should not be overlooked and which call into question other structural features. Linen and hemp were not heavier or bulkier commodities than hides, but the production of these textile fibres in the interior of central-eastern Europe probably covered local needs, including those of the regions manufacturing textiles for the market. In certain regions, such as the coastal provinces of Prussia, there was surplus production, while the international demand for these primary materials, of which the western navies were the largest consumers, was concentrated in the ports.

The furs remain important because they tended to be displaced away from the Hanseatic routes leading by sea to Lubeck towards the overland continental routes. This shift began before the end of the XVth century for reasons directly related to Russia, since the furs, and particularly the most valuable ones, came from increasingly distant regions towards Siberia, with the result that control over the trade at source passed from Novgorod

---

<sup>71</sup> DE BUCH, 'Rusland en Polen...', *art. cit.*, pp. 215-216 & 220-223.

<sup>72</sup> TOPOLSKA, 'Peculiarities etc...', *art. cit.*, pp. 46-48.

to Moscow. But these changes in the structure of the supply market are not sufficient to explain why it was that furs, unlike hides, appear so rarely on the export registers that have survived from the mid-XVIth century, with the exception of those of Archangel and Narva.<sup>73</sup> The large quantities of furs that were exported overland and brought to the Polish fairs by the merchants of Bielorrussia and Lithuania, then to be sent on to Breslau and Leipzig, or else down towards Turkey, show that there was a continuing high demand for them in eastern and central Europe, even though changing fashion had greatly reduced their popularity in the west. There is other evidence pointing in the same direction. Between 1562 and 1625 a huge quantity of hides with very little commercial value entered the Baltic via the Sound, on average reaching over a million pieces a year, coming mainly from the British Isles and destined for the ports of Prussia.<sup>74</sup> The flow declined after 1640, and although part of the hides were for tanning, the rest provided a mass of materials for the normal fur trade and so served to force the Baltic ports to turn away similar Russian products, especially squirrel skins, and direct them towards the towns of the interior.

Wax had been the other principal commodity in Russia's medieval export trade, and continued to exceed fur in value in maritime trade until the XVIIth century. It gave rise to a considerable volume of overland trade and merits attention out of proportion to its value in the overall balance of trade because it provides an excellent example of the complexities attending the study of trade flows in general, not least because of the difficulty in identifying its provenance. It is nearly always thought

---

<sup>73</sup> The figure of 46% of total exports from Archangel in 1640 is almost certainly exceptional, in comparison with 11% in 1650. At Narva at the end of the XVIth century furs never reached more than 7% of total exports.

<sup>74</sup> In 1596 and 1597 respectively 715,000 and 582,000 rabbit hides and 530,000 and 110,000 new-born lamb skins arrived at Elbing from England. These were pretty considerable quantities, even comparable with the Russian hides reaching Gniezno and Poznan.

of as being a typically Russian product, yet the exports passing through the Sound from the Prussian ports were always much greater than from those of Livonia. These shipments were, it is true, only a very variable fraction of the total wax exports of each of the ports, since the remainder went to Lubeck.<sup>75</sup> In 1555 the Council of Danzig addressed a letter complaining about the quality of the wax to 16 towns in Poland and Lithuania, and according to the document the production zone stretched from Minsk in the east as far as Lvov in the south-east. There was also large-scale production in Lithuania, White Russia and Galicia, in addition to that in the former Polish provinces, and these together probably provided more of the wax exported by sea towards Poland and central Germany than did Russia. Yet the ubiquitous nature of wax production does not fully explain the complex patterns of a trade that was full of contradictions, and the quantities exported from each of the places studied were subject to very heavy fluctuation during the period. To say, for example, that Poznan dealt more extensively in wax in the XVIth century than Danzig, which held second place after Cracow, is something which cannot at present be verified.<sup>76</sup> Travelling as easily by land as by sea without there being any major factors determining the choice of transport, wax stands out quite clearly from the majority of the other products of the north-east because its channels of transit were very changeable. But this is a characteristic of considerable importance since it conforms pretty closely to the pattern of the principal import flows.

Taken as whole, the type of goods imported into north-eastern Europe was quite distinct from that of the exports —

---

<sup>75</sup> We have already noted that in 1583 Lubeck received 78% of the wax exported from Danzig. The fraction which was exported directly beyond the Straights from Danzig was less than 60% in 1641, but reached nearly 87% in 1649.

<sup>76</sup> SIMSCH, *Die Handelsbeziehungen...*, *cit.*, pp. 30-136, bases his claim for the importance of Poznan on the ground of annual exports of the order of 10,000 Stein and more. But in the 1530s Danzig often exported more than 3,000 Schiffspund (which would be 30,000 Stein).

they were mainly manufactured products and luxury consumer goods, as opposed to the primary materials and foodstuffs which formed the basis of the export trade. The wide range of imports can be simplified by grouping them under general categories which indicate their more general economic and statistical significance. Yet it should be remembered that in practice this fragmented composition was a reality and served greatly to reduce the factor of cost differentials when it came to choosing means of transport. Spanish olive oil sold in Danzig in 1590 at between 1.5 to 2 florins for 24 pounds, that of Italy and Lake Garda 'per condotta' at 3.5 to 4 florins.<sup>77</sup> Presuming that both varieties found buyers, one must conclude that there was a clientele of demanding connoisseurs who were not put off by the price, given too that the market was narrow since supplies arrived only intermittently. This particular detail leads one on to consider Mediterranean products more generally. They reached the north-east either by way of the Atlantic and Baltic, or overland across the continent, or even by way of the Black Sea. We know for certain, however, that the Italian silks which entered Poland came via Cracow not Danzig.<sup>78</sup> But beyond that the picture is much less clear. Further to the east, the silks bound for Russia were imported through the Livonian sea-ports, whether they were manufactured in Antwerp or had arrived direct from Italy at Lubeck via Nuremberg, like those sold by Wilhelm von Gohren at Narva.<sup>79</sup> The studies on the overland trade between Poland

---

<sup>77</sup> From the 'Relatione de negotiis tanto di mercantie, che cambii di Danziga' which was enclosed with a letter from Ottobone (Dec. 1590). The author was the Genoese courtier Ambrosius Lerice who was well known in Danzig where he published a treatise on accountancy between 1606 and 1610.

<sup>78</sup> A. MANIKOWSKI, 'Les soireries italiennes et l'activité des commerçants italiens de soireries en Pologne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle' (*Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Age. Temps Moderns* 88, 1976, pp. 830-833).

<sup>79</sup> Between 1606 and 1608, 70 pieces were sold to 25 different Russian merchants for 10,850 thalers — in comparison with 30 pieces a year imported from Italy between 1680 and 1683 by the Cracow company of the Federicci, contributing to a turnover of 10,000 to 12,000 thalers, according to Manikowski.

and Russia in the period make no mention of silks, but the reasons for this probably lie more with the structure of the trading networks than with any problems posed by the roads themselves.

This is not to say, however, that there were no physical or geographical determinants affecting the trade flows from west to east. Traffic coming from the nearby German countries into Poland naturally moved by road, while on the other hand goods coming from further afield, such as French and Iberian wines or the salt already referred to, travelled by sea. For English and Dutch goods the sea was used as well, although not necessarily for the entire journey. The heavy goods that were taken on board in the ports of the east had to be carried as quickly as possible to their destinations, making intermediate calls difficult. Bales of fabrics and spices, on the other hand, could easily be unloaded and then re-exported either at the cost of the original exporter or at that of the intermediary purchaser. There was then a series of customary halts and stages in the traditional Hanseatic trade of the Middle Ages, as goods moved from the Low Countries to Hamburg, then to Lubeck and beyond to either Cologne or Frankfurt where the branches leading respectively south and east divided, and British trade in the XVIth century remained fairly close to this earlier model.

For as long as the Merchant Venturers were resident at Antwerp they handled the distribution of English cloths throughout the continent, including those destined for the markets of the north-east and adding their own consignments to those sent directly from English ports to the Baltic. The disintegration of the Antwerp market and the shifting of the principal points of access to the continent did not completely change this situation, and English cloth arriving at Hamburg continued to be sent on towards either Frankfurt or Leipzig or Lubeck. The branches opening off from each of these cities enabled the merchants to direct the flow of merchandise in whatever direction the market seemed to offer the most favourable immediate conditions. This is the picture that emerges

clearly from the letters of the agents of Lionel Cranfield in the early XVIIth century. In the summer of 1600 Rawstorm wrote from Emden to stress the contrast between the poor results of castor sales at Nuremberg and the guaranteed outlets awaiting those who sent the same articles on from Emden to Danzig.<sup>80</sup> Although the situation changed constantly, the attraction of the Danzig market grew stronger and the company began to export fabrics there directly, which it brought through from Stade or Hamburg to Lubeck. In 1608 a factor was set up in Danzig, and had in addition the commission to purchase grain in that year of dearth. These commentaries provide a lively picture of the different pressures bearing on the general orientation of trade, and show that at Nuremberg the predominant factor was demand from Vienna and Hungary, supply being dependent on deliveries from Amsterdam, while at Hamburg the main factor was what had happened and what was likely to happen at the fairs of Frankfurt-on-Main and Leipzig.<sup>81</sup> But in comparison with the consignments delivered directly to Elbing by the Eastland Company, the English cloths reaching Danzig by the indirect route were less important, and there is no way of telling whether the traffic of English cloth towards continental Poland from Nuremberg and Leipzig was comparable to that of the Italian silk. At the same time, however, the opinions and reactions of these well-informed English agents leave no doubt as to the importance of the continental German relay points and their role in the east-bound trade in fabrics manufactured in north-western Europe — a role which is confirmed by other sources as well.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Right Honorable Lord Sackville*, Vol. 2, Letters relating to Lionel Cranfield's business overseas 1597-1612 ed. F. J. FISHER (Historical Manuscripts Commission, 80) London, 1966 — especially the letters dated 22-VII-1600, and 2-I and 31-III-1601.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*: letters dated 14-V-1601, 22-V, 25-XI-1602, 29-III-1604.

<sup>82</sup> MANIKOWSKI, 'Les soireries...', *art. cit.*, p. 833: for importing silks from Au-

Concentrating on the composition of the west-to-east trade puts into the background those factors determining choices between alternative routes dictated purely by transport problems, and at the same time serves to highlight the purely commercial pressures involved in the same choices. For both individual trade centres and individual companies, it was such considerations that called into play factors of technical skill, the quantity and quality of information on the state of a series of closely inter-dependent markets, as well as financial capacity. Once such factors had been built up in a commercial town, they proved well able to survive changing conditions. The nature of the export goods from the west moving towards the north-east also served to preserve within the area many traces of the earlier medieval trade structure, with numerous points of convergence where goods and merchants continued to come together to take advantage of the facilities created in the past. We are well aware in general, although not in more specific terms, of the importance amongst such centres held by the great international fairs. In the early days of the rise of the Leipzig fairs, those of Frankfurt-on-Main constituted a relay between west and east of inestimable importance, of which the presence of merchants from Silesia, Poland, Prussia and Livonia reveals only one aspect.<sup>83</sup> Even if we knew, as we clearly cannot, the scale of their transactions in Frankfurt, or even that of the agents of the Frankfurt merchants working in the towns of the east, this would still not give a full measure of a complex of commercial operations which were in large part bound up in the goods changing hands at Leipzig and the other trading centres.

---

sterdam into Poland in the 1680s, the itinerary Hamburg-Leipzig was considered to be 'more suitable and short than that through Danzig'.

<sup>83</sup> A. DIETZ, *Frankfurter Handelsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt 1810, pp. 65-66, mentions that after 1540 the fairs were increasingly visited by Jewish merchants from Bohemia and Poland. As is often the case, the paths opened up by this work require much more methodical study; cf. Vol. 3, pp. 4, 55, 158, 220-221.

One such centre in the north was Lubeck, which provides a striking example of the preservation over time of a role established in the past. Although the port would appear to have been largely bypassed in relation to the main currents of heavy traffic, it still managed to maintain a high level of activity and a particular role in trade between the west and the east. For goods that were not cumbersome, the overland route from Hamburg to Lubeck was still considered practical and was generally preferred to the sea route through the Sound. But this trade would have been much less intense had it not been for the attractions offered by the commercial relay points and the dynamism of the Lubeck merchants. In the early 1580s one can gain a very clear picture of the importance of this redistribution centre sited on the extreme western edge of the seaboard of north-eastern Europe. No other Baltic port had as many contacts with other ports in the area as did Lubeck.<sup>84</sup> To give some weight to this claim, it should be said that the distinctive feature of its trade is revealed by the nature of the cargoes travelling between Lubeck and the principal ports of the east (Danzig, Königsberg and Riga) and not just by the volume of shipping. There were, for example, large numbers of ships from Pomerania, Denmark and the Duchies in all the Prussian ports, but they were nearly all engaged in petty regional exchanges, carrying herrings from Marstrand or stone from Gotland in return for salt or wines to re-export from Danzig. But this coastal trade along the southern and western shores of the Baltic played little part in the export trade of the countries of the north-east, or in the imports of western products — although it should be clear that we do not intend to include under the category of coastal trade the 'Schmaken' journeying between Danzig and Königsberg, since these properly form part of the riverine navigation of the

---

<sup>84</sup> P. JEANNIN, 'Le commerce de Lubeck aux environs de 1580' (*Annales E. S. C.* 16, 1961, p. 42): more than 1800 arrivals and departures a year, whereas Danzig's contacts with the other Baltic ports were around 1,000 in 1583, although Danzig's links with the western seas was of course much greater.

interior.<sup>85</sup> However, it was at Lubeck that the largest number of vessels was engaged in this rather light-weight coastal trade, covering an area that included Mecklenburg, Denmark and the Duchies — but at Lubeck there was also much else besides.

Nearly all the cargoes moving either from Lubeck towards Danzig or Königsberg, or vice-versa, were made up of goods that formed an integral part of the main flows of long-distance international trade, and included in particular a rich assortment of high-value products. The entry taxes paid by ships arriving at Königsberg from Lubeck in 1583 exceeded on average 21 marks, while the average entry taxes paid by all vessels entering the port in the same year (including the Dutch) was rarely above 5 marks.<sup>86</sup> These figures reflect the fact that Lubeck acted as a staging-post for a range of articles of western origin that were imported into Prussia by sea. This gave it an importance out of all proportion to the relatively modest volume of shipping that used this particular route — indeed a volume that becomes almost insignificant when expressed as a percentage of the total. In 1581, about a third of all the cloth and about 90% of the English tin imported into Königsberg had been carried from Lubeck. Another example has already been mentioned: pepper in Danzig. Also the remarks already made regarding the export of wax to Lubeck should be compared with the no less interesting situation vis-à-vis Riga, which in 1596 was sending nearly 19% of its total exports to Lubeck.<sup>87</sup> This means that Lubeck's strong trading

---

<sup>85</sup> KEMPAS, *Seeverkehr...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-350, has published a table which shows the importance of the arrivals at Königsberg of the 'Schmacken' from Danzig in 1644 (especially for the import of fruits, colonial goods and other high value commodities' — probably including haberdashery). This trade does not seem to have been included as re-exports in the Danzig sources, or in the table of re-exports given by Bogucka *Handel zagraniczny...*, *cit.*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>86</sup> The average of 21 marks is based on the 32 or 33 vessels mentioned above (note 35); the general average is based on Schildhauer's table which also shows that for ships entering the ports sited between Lubeck and Danzig the average duty paid on cargoes at entry was under 4 marks.

<sup>87</sup> V. V. DOROSENKO, 'Eksport Rygi na zachod wokresia przynalezności do Rzecz-

position in Livonia, which became even more marked in Narva around 1600, was also maintained in the principal port of Livonia despite the fact that it had been drawn into the Dutch orbit — and it was maintained at pretty much the same level right through to the end of the XVIIth century when Lubeck was still providing about a quarter of Riga's imports and taking some 11% of her exports.<sup>88</sup>

Lubeck's role, whether or not one sees it as a form of survival, was largely due also to the high percentage of German manufactured goods which featured amongst its exports to the north-east. These included German haberdashery and hardware goods, as well as textiles, all of which were easy enough to find in the Prussian ports too by about 1580. Nor were there any problems in transporting such commodities by land, and they could almost certainly be obtained from the overland trade. The fact that they were instead generally to pass through Lubeck seems to provide support for the thesis that in certain circumstances it is the existing structure of trade which determines routes, and not vice-versa. And in many cases, the routes used did in fact describe some pretty remarkable detours. Between 1572 and 1575 the Von Holstein-Reimers company sent German cloth from Lubeck to Livonia, 60% of which came from Brandenburg and Lower Lusatia and had reached Lubeck mainly from the fairs of Frankfurt-on-Main:<sup>89</sup> but Frankfurt was no great distance from Poznań, which means that the attraction exercised in this case by Lubeck as a trade relay undermined the simple logic suggested by the existing road network.

To conclude, let us come back again to spices since the problem

---

zypospolitej 1562-1620' (*Zapiski Historyczne* 31, 1966) — which gives a total of exactly 19.6% by combining the information given in the tables on pp. 32 & 34. Lubeck received roughly 16% of the linen and hemp, 74% of leather goods and about 80% of the tallow.

<sup>88</sup> HARDER-GERSDORFF, 'Zur Frage...', *art. cit.*, p. 73, following the figures given by Dorosenko.

<sup>89</sup> PELUS, *Wolter von Holstein...*, *cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 309-310 & 332-333.

of the relationship between the maritime and overland continental routes has often been approached from the perspective of the spice trade. For our present purposes, the distribution of spices in north-eastern Europe, whether the starting point was Venice or whether it was Lisbon and Amsterdam, indicates the existence of some very distant determining factors (who controlled the entry of the spices into Europe?), and no-one would suggest that the situation had been straightforward even before the Dutch East Indies Company gained a dominant position in the trade. The revival of Levantine commerce in the late XVIth century is itself a subject surrounded by a myriad of controversies.<sup>90</sup> Poland was supplied both from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean routes, although we cannot be sure in what proportions respectively. The order of importance of the two flows may well have been reversed around 1590, if it is true that previously the price of pepper had been higher at Danzig than at Cracow, and thereafter dearer at Cracow than at Danzig.<sup>91</sup> The author of this ingenious observation believes that some firmer evidence is called for, and the sources available on commercial relations do suggest that some conclusions may be reached in so far as pepper is concerned.

Between 1563 and 1589 pepper was imported at Königsberg from Lubeck by the Königsberg 'Spanienfahrer', and very little from trade with the the Dutch. The arrivals were irregular (varying between 10 to 50 sacks a year), but began to increase in 1593 when for the first time the *Pfundzollbucher* registers the arrival of large quantities on Dutch ships (over 80 sacks). Danzig was a much bigger market, five to ten times bigger to judge from the customs registers for 1583 (over 223 sacks, over half of which were carried on Dutch ships, but normally in these

---

<sup>90</sup> C. H. H. WAKE, 'The Changing Pattern of Europe's Pepper and Spices Imports c. 1400-1700' (*Journal of European Economic History* 8, 1979, pp. 392-395) where in opposition to N. Steensgaard the author argues that at this time the Levantine spice trade was of only marginal importance.

<sup>91</sup> HROCH, *Die Rolle...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-16. But are the prices that are available really typical?

cases charged against the accounts of Danzig merchants). The same sources suggest that the exports came mainly from Lisbon, and that they were carried as much by Hanseatic merchants as by the Dutch, with a large share being re-exported towards Lubeck, which again bears out what we have already said. One single commercial company there, financed by Hermann Carstens, in the 1550s had a turn-over of about 40 sacks a year, and in the 1590s a certain Heinrich Carstens, probably the nephew of the former, was the representative of the 'contractors' for Portuguese pepper.<sup>92</sup> The importing of other spices such as southern fruits was, however, a much more fragmented commercial activity, and it was mainly the Dutch who were responsible for bringing them to the Prussian ports. But in the case of pepper, the most interesting fact is the identity of the merchants involved. When the Cunertorf-Snel company in Lisbon sent 30 sacks of pepper to Danzig between 1578-9, the cargo of this Dutch company was divided among five Danzig and two Dutch ships. This particular operation reveals that in 1579 sales in Danzig proved slow, and when his agent claimed that the problem was that the purchase price had been too high, Cunertorf replied that he had made the purchase in 1578 just before news had arrived of a new consignment arriving in Venice from Alexandria.<sup>93</sup>

If there are many features of the trade which remain unclear, there are others than can be established with greater certainty. The market for pepper at Poznan was smaller than that of the ports of Danzig and Lubeck,<sup>94</sup> and there was an enormous ten-

---

<sup>92</sup> P. JEANNIN, 'Lübecker Handelsunternehmen...', *art. cit.*, pp. 44 & 53-54. The sack was not a constant unit of weight — for those recorded in the customs registers, I have valued the sack at 15 Stein, each Stein being equivalent to 24 livres.

<sup>93</sup> *Een Kamper Handelshuis te Lissabon 1572-1594* ed J. Nanninga Uitterdijk, Zwolle 1904, pp. 124, 241, 258, 260. The account of the sale (pp. 440-446 & 450-451) mentions one buyer from Warsaw together with 8 other merchants who appear to have been Danzigers.

<sup>94</sup> SIMSCH, *Die Handelsbeziehungen...*, *op. cit.*, p. 80: there were some 60 sacks in 1553-4, which the author cites as a particularly heavy year.

fold increase in imports at Danzig between 1583 and 1634. Can further research identify more precisely the chronology of this expansion? Such as they are, the data on pepper imports confirm the picture given for other comparable markets and point to the fundamental importance of the XVIth century and show the wide asymmetry between incomings and outgoings. On one hand, the exports from north-eastern Europe were rigidly channeled through the Baltic towards the North Sea, while in the other direction the multiple ramifications of trade followed a very much more complex geographical pattern.

It was only when Amsterdam became the focal centre of the world market that this asymmetry was reduced, but it never disappeared completely. But from then on it was the sea route that became the one preferred by the imports from the west. In the debate on the types and degrees of influence determining the directions taken by different trade flows, sound arguments have been put forward to show that even in the XVIIth century this primacy of the sea routes did not bring about the decline of activity on the overland arteries. But there was still in the long run a dynamic change at work, which was to result in the victory of the maritime routes. Yet such a statement is of little value if it does not lead us to look for explanations grounded on what the roads really were, and what their function was.

### *3. The international and regional driving forces*

Both a historical and an economic analysis of the chronology of this change lead to the same conclusion: the driving force behind the shift towards maritime trade lay in the western demand for heavy goods that could not be obtained elsewhere. Although this trade covered only a fraction of what was needed for consumption in the west, as has rightly remarked with respect to the cereal trade, it is essential when trying to comprehend the nature of the commercial relations between the two areas to re-

member that for the western economies the principal interest in the markets of the north-east lay in what they supplied. This meant that the need to buy in the north-east was a much greater factor than the desire to find outlets for exports. This was the overall structure, even though it may well not conform to the objectives of every individual company. In general, the tonnage of the shipping sent to the Baltic was geared to the size of the cargoes that they would be loading there.<sup>95</sup> In the first half of the XVII century, the number of vessels entering the Baltic in ballast had fallen in comparison with previous years. This tendency probably reflected two types of changes which are impossible to distinguish in order of importance: part of the trade which had previously been sent overland was now going by sea; and in addition, and perhaps in particular, there was also an increase in the volume of western imports into north-eastern Europe.

To move then to the other end of the line, the capacity to purchase these products in the east depended on the profits made from exports. If we follow A. Maczak's claim that Poland's surplus balance on maritime trade began to decline, this may well be because a growing proportion of her surplus was being devoted to the consumption of foreign goods, which in turn served to increase considerably the size of the two trade flows.<sup>96</sup> In the process of increasing accumulated value, the import trade began to take on the character of a secondary motor, while never depriving the export trade of its primary role — and indeed, any break-down there would have upset the whole mechanism. The decline in the vital grain exports after the mid-XVIIth century is generally explained by Polish historians in terms not only of the material and human disasters of the 'deluge', but in particular

---

<sup>95</sup> CHRISTENSEN, 'Dutch trade...', *cit.*, pp. 281 & 369-376.

<sup>96</sup> A. MAÇZAK, 'Der polnische Getreideexport und das Problem der Handelsbilanz 1557-1647' in *Der Aussenhandel*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-46; despite certain flaws in the detailed calculations, the general picture given is highly plausible. The table on p. 41 shows that at constant prices exports changed little, whereas imports grew by 140% in sixty years, the addition of the increasing by 32%.

by the fall in agricultural profits and productivity. But such an explanation takes too little account of the demand factor, since it is surely significant that in the middle term the decline in the volume of grain exports should also have been accompanied by a fall in prices. But also such interpretations are based almost exclusively on the difficulties of the cereal trade, and do not take into account the now dominant role played by maritime trade in the whole area which encompassed both Poland and its eastern neighbours. The figures we have cited above justify the epithet dominant, even if this maritime trade did not bite into the overland trade between Poland and Germany and central Europe.<sup>97</sup> But it is not just a question of figures.

Exports by sea were fed by the most fundamental and extensive local forms of production. They drew into the international market either directly or indirectly a major part of the population, whose links with transcontinental trade were otherwise slight or non-existent. In the majority of the intermediary relay points merchants dealt mainly with other merchants, rather than other types of clients, and from these merchants the ordinary people made their own small purchases, which amounted to very little in relation to consumption as a whole — an observation which is also valid, incidentally, for virtually all the imported goods, no matter where they came from, since they hardly penetrated into the material life of the country people. By way of contrast, let us turn to the bonds that existed between the cultivators and the exporters of grain, linen, hemp and forestry products. Here the peasant economy became a direct contributor to international trade in the regions lying around the sea-ports. The *corvée* on demesne lands also represented an indirect link. In the first case, the pressure of domination inherent in the export operation had the very concrete result of leaving the peasant indebted to the merchant. There is no need to repeat yet again what was well

---

<sup>97</sup> See above

demonstrated in the classical study of the *söbber* in Livonia. A similar pattern can, with some modifications, be applied to the relations between the merchants of Danzig, Riga or Königsberg and the nobles and the merchants of the small towns of the interior. The purchaser who amassed stocks for export in the sea-ports paid for the consignments made to him partly in advance. However, this traditional payment of an advance before the operation had been concluded did not necessarily mean that the sellers were always bound to the same purchasers. On the contrary, it would appear that when the opportunity arose to bargain, the sellers were well able to wage a war of nerves prior to finally fixing the price.<sup>98</sup> But in the end the effects of such action were limited, because in general terms what determined the level of export prices in the ports was Dutch demand, since not only was this the largest but also the best equipped with means of payment.

The wide-spread use of cash payments and exchange rates jointly created a chain of credits stretching from the Low Countries into the hinterland of the Baltic. Amsterdam financed the commercial enterprises of the ports of the north-east, and they in turn advanced capital to the merchants and the producers of the hinterland and the interior. The part played by the exchange system in all this throws interesting light on one of the advantages enjoyed by the maritime routes, since they offered a technical potential that was much greater than that generally operating for overland trade circuits. For overland trade, the fairs were the main centres for organising long distance exchange operations, and their timing in the year enabled the continuous circulation of bills and currencies. No great detour was involv-

---

<sup>98</sup> *Zestiende-eeuwse koopmansbrieven*, ed. H. E. Van Gelder (Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek, V, 1919, nn. 48, 49, 51, 52, 56: the Dutch agent had sent his factor from Danzig to Torun on the 28th February and hoped to make purchases of rye there at 32 florins; the noble held out, and at the would only settle for 33½. Cf. Sooin *Der baltische Getreidehandel...*, *cit.*, pp. 213-218, which contains an excellent analysis of the different forces and manoeuvres that came to play in the formation of prices.

ed if balances unsold at the close of the St Bartholomew's Fair at Gniezno were sent on to the Michaelmas Fair at Poznan, but it was much less convenient when goods from one of these two fairs reached Lublin and were then purchased by a merchant from Lithuania. In order to visit these different fairs the merchants had to be permanently on the move, which not only took up time but also made systematic business management difficult, except for those companies which employed numerous factors and whose operations were directed by a single organiser who was normally resident at a fixed head-quarters. But this was really only the case for the 'great companies' of Upper Germany and Italy, and the situation for the vast mass of merchants who made up the bulk of those operating on the routes between Lithuania and White Russia or between Silesia and Bohemia. One must fully subscribe to the view that the trade fairs represented an archaic form of organizing exchange operations.<sup>99</sup> This is also borne out by the example of Antwerp, since its continuous functioning as a trade centre from the 1530s began to eclipse the more traditional fairs.<sup>100</sup> In the early XVIIIth century, however, Marperger observed that the merchants from Hamburg, Lubeck and other places who traded with Russia could have ordered their silks and silver goods directly from Augsburg and even Italy, but that they preferred to go to see the full range of goods available at the Leipzig fair.<sup>101</sup>

This network of trade fairs in eastern Europe was of fundamental importance for the functioning of credit, for the settlement of ordinary merchant bills and promissory notes. None of these effects had either the precision or the regularity of proper bills of exchange, which were the instruments of a cash market. In this

---

<sup>99</sup> F. BRAUDEL, 'Les jeux de l'échange...', *cit.*, p. 74, which uses Turgot's entry in the *Encyclopedie*.

<sup>100</sup> H. VAN DER WEE, *The Growth of the Antwerp market and the European Economy* Louvain, 1963, vol. 2, pp. 328-330.

<sup>101</sup> P. J. MARPERGER, *Beschreibung der Messen und Jahrmärkte*, Leipzig, 1711, p. 67.

respect Danzig was different from the other Polish towns, and Lerice noted that there were regular exchange transactions taking place there with London and especially with the Low Countries ('it is quite common for large amounts to be changed by means of reciprocal drafts on merchandise'), and that there were also many opportunities for exchanging money between Venice and Danzig, by way of Nuremberg, Frankfurt or Leipzig, or even through Cracow. Ottobone added the useful detail that: 'there is here no ordinary exchange between Nuremberg and Danzig', which meant that it was necessary to seek out a merchant who had purchases to settle at one of the fairs or at Nuremberg, and who would be willing to avoid the necessity of having to carry cash with him on his journey by making a money payment in Danzig in return for an invoice from Venice subsequently remitted on Nuremberg and from there to one of the fairs. The drawback was that the practicality of such transactions on Danzig was determined by the timing of the fairs, but there were others too. The Florentines who came before Ottobone had drawn money using letters of credit on the Torrigiani house in Nuremberg, but the Danzig merchants on whom the letters were drawn would not pay them unless Ricciardi, the grain buyer for the Duke of Tuscany, was accompanied by an agent of the Torrigiani. Transfers via Vienna or Cracow carried similar risks.

In a word, then, by the end of the XVIth century Danzig did not have 'open' exchange relations with the main commercial centres of central Europe, never mind with Italy.<sup>102</sup> Within central Europe itself, it is not clear that Leipzig had any exchange facilities other than those provided by the fairs, and there was no regulation of exchange transactions until 1682.<sup>103</sup> The Amsterdam

---

<sup>102</sup> DIETZ, *Frankfurter Handelsgeschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 229-230, refers, however, to a list of current prices published in 1608 in Dutch by the Danzig merchants which gave exchange rates on Amsterdam, Hamburg, Leipzig or Nuremberg, and Frankfurt.

<sup>103</sup> G. PHILIPP, 'Die Bedeutung Leipzigs für den Ausgleich der Handelsbilanz im Ost-Westhandel' in *Cinquième Congrès...*, *cit.*, vol. VI, p. 148; but this paper unduly plays down the importance of exchange operations at Leipzig.

Bourse quoted exchange rates for Hamburg and Danzig from 1585 onwards, for Frankfurt from 1609, but not until 1676 for Leipzig and 1683 for Breslau. The development of more regular systems for conducting currency transactions was the pre-condition for the evolution of a more modern form of commercial credit, and formed part of a wider series of innovations. The great ports like Danzig and Riga, in particular, began to detach themselves and to become western-style outposts against the backdrop of a hinterland whose commercial centres retained a more traditional style. The contrast between these two levels of commercial practice also reflected a hierarchy existing between the different towns and the different types of commercial operations, and nearly always the most noticeable changes were those relating specifically to currency transactions. In 1583, for example, a Dutch factor delayed drawing a bill on one of their patrons because the exchange rate was too high, and amongst the money-lenders who they thought would be able to make the rate go up they included the pedlars returning from the fairs at Lublin and Poznan.<sup>104</sup>

To the west and the south-west, Poland's land frontiers opened on to countries where 'grand commerce' had reached high levels of organisation and consistency. Once again, Ottobone proves an excellent witness. The cash that he needed for his purchases of wheat came from Danzig through the hands of Bartholomeus Viatis of Nuremberg, who offered him credit, without fixing any limit, against repayment either in Venice or in Nuremberg. In offering his services free, Viatis was almost certainly hoping that the Venetian government would do him some favour. The episode reveals the breadth of the means at the disposal of this great dealer in Silesian cloth and his willingness to make an agreement which fitted the needs of the situation. As

---

<sup>104</sup> *Zestiende-eeuwsche...*, cit., n. 34: 'doch de Kramers uyt de marcht comende van Lublyn en Poosen, mach ick sien wat se gaven willen'; Van Adrichem's agent did not want to draw the bill until he could get 94½ groschen for a Flemish livre.

soon as Ottobone arrived he sent his secretary to Breslau to Georg Fürst, a former partner of Viatis, and the 40,000 florins were then brought without problems from Breslau to Danzig.<sup>105</sup> As well as adding a detail to the biography of this well-known merchant, the episode also poses a question. How can we obtain an accurate picture of the intensity of the commercial operations carried on in the north east by companies in Nuremberg and elsewhere in the interior of Germany, which we are certainly mistaken to consider stagnant at this time?

No matter how deceptive the sources may appear to be, further research will certainly yield valuable information if it is conducted with the same care as that devoted to reconstructing the activities of the Italians.<sup>106</sup> Although this particular study shows the need for more information about those individuals that have been identified, our knowledge of these Italians begins to throw light on some structural features of major importance. In most of these cases, the skein of activity was spread over an area stretching from Cracow to Nuremberg, Vienna and Frankfurt — which were only the places most frequently visited amongst a host of others. But they also went much further afield, and in the case of the Montelupi even as far as Russia.<sup>107</sup> We can only give a few examples here, but the Saliti, for example, had bases in Florence and Nuremberg, were active at the fairs of Frankfurt and Leipzig in 1519, and had clients in Lubeck, Breslau and Poznan,

---

<sup>105</sup> The reference to the 40,000 florins is in Ottobone's letter dated 12th Aug. 1591: 25,000 supplied by the agent of Viatis, 10,000 by Fürstand, 5,000 by the merchants of Poznań on Viatis' orders.

<sup>106</sup> DANUTA QUIRINI-POPLAWSKA, 'Die italiensiche Einwanderer in Krakow und ihr Einfluss auf die polnischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zu österreichischen und deutschen Städten im 16 Jahrhundert' (*Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich Schiller Universität, Jena. Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe* 26, 1977 pp. 337-354).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344. In Florence it was claimed that their partner Bernardo Soderini dealt exclusively in silk, and that all his business was in Poland (1583): F. RUIZ MARTIN, *Lettres marchandes échangées entre Florence et Medina del Campo*, Paris, 1965, p. 274. The Montelupi and the Soderini also played a part in the transfer of cash for political reasons.

and the recently published records of their commercial companies enable us to follow their operations in considerable detail.<sup>108</sup> The Italians were all great sellers of silks, although we do not know whether they also exported other goods back to Italy as well. It would be worth comparing them with the other great suppliers of luxury commodities who operated in the same area — such as Henrich Cramer of Leipzig who sold jewellery, precious stones and gold-ware in Russia, or the Frankfurt company of the great jewel vendor Daniel de Briers which had clients in Bohemia, Silesia and Poland.<sup>109</sup> If a systematic list of such individuals could be reconstructed, who can tell whether it would not force us to revise our ideas about the balances of trade in central Europe? What has already been collected, even though it hardly as yet amounts to more than a few important scraps, does suggest the breadth of this flow of imports going into the countries of the north-east, which the customs registers have always underestimated.

The great magnates and their wives had wardrobes whose value was that of vast herds of cattle or flocks of sheep. But our understanding of the economic importance of this type of trade will only become clearer if the studies of consumption are brought together with those on trade. The same routes that brought in these relatively small quantities of luxury goods, also carried huge quantities of middle quality textiles, Styrian scythes and other utensils manufactured in the nearby German provinces. By putting the main emphasis on one component or the other of this flow of overland trade, we will reach differing conclusions to a major issue in social history — did the expansion of foreign trade overall tend to increase the gap between the nobility, who

---

<sup>108</sup> M. SPALLANZANI, 'Le compagnie Saliti a Norimbergo nella prima metà del Cinquecento' in *Wirtschaftskräfte...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 603-620 gives a preliminary survey. Lorenzo Villani and Raffaele Torrigiani seemed to have come to Germany in this same early wave, and their operations seem to have been between Frankfurt, Lubeck and Poznan.

<sup>109</sup> DIETZ, *Frankfurter Handelsgeschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 230-238.

profited from it, and the masses, who were exploited by it? Or were there not also opportunities for the intermediary social groups to catch some of the crumbs?

The nature of the motive forces behind the sea-borne and the overland routes suggest a number of general conclusions. We have stressed the dominant function of maritime trade, which increasingly drew the countries of the north-east into the commercial orbit of Amsterdam. In the perspective of this predominance, a general picture of the relationship between east and west begins to take shape which reveals a total contrast between two quite different types of potential, and the mechanisms inherent in this relationship served to drive their evolution in divergent directions. In the case of overland trade, the dynamism of this divergence was much weaker. It reveals the continuing vitality of those forces which would eventually be outpaced by the advance of Dutch commerce, but to an extent that should not be exaggerated. The journey from west to east was benchmarked by a series of gradual differentiations between different regions, which served to soften and absorb many of the impulses radiating from a international trading system.

