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11 ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR AND FAMILY NETWORKS IN DUTCH TRADE WITH RUSSIA, 1590–1750^{*}

Jan Willem Veluwenkamp

The Dutch were the main European commercial nation from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century.¹ Most Dutch trade, by far, was conducted within Europe, by countless individual family firms. These firms were interconnected by multiple commercial and family ties, as merchants frequently had many relatives who were active in the same line of business, often trading with the same countries and in the same commodities.² It is, consequently, easy to find examples of family ties and even family networks within individual lines of business within the Dutch commercial system in the Early Modern period. These ties and networks clearly form a pattern, which was the result of social and commercial behaviour, induced by strong and unambiguous forces. In earlier publications, I analysed this behaviour and these forces to find an explanation for the pattern of family ties and networks and developed a theoretical framework consisting of a combination of ideas about entrepreneurial behaviour and family networks in the Dutch commercial system.³ I applied this framework in a study called *Archangel*, published in 2000, about the Dutch merchants trading with Russia during the long period from 1550 to 1785.⁴

This chapter is largely taken from *Archangel*. It offers an outline of my ideas about entrepreneurial behaviour and about the mechanisms by which this behaviour resulted in commercial family networks. It also offers an illustration of how these ideas may help to explain what went on among the Dutch in the commerce with Russia. I suspect that this theoretical framework is not unique to the Dutch commercial system, but can be applied fruitfully to the study of merchant communities and commercial systems in other European regions in the Early Modern period.

Dutch merchants' business strategies

A motivating force leading to the development of multiple family ties between Dutch merchants working in the same line of business was the deeply felt obligation to preserve and enhance the social position of the family and to pass it on to the next generation. This motivation was exercised by the merchants' social environment – family, church, income bracket, professional peers.⁵ The basic elements of the social position were, as Max Weber taught, wealth, power, and prestige. Among businessmen at least, these three elements were mainly defined by the size of their income and capital, which, in their turn, resulted chiefly from the size and yield of their businesses. Therefore, merchants felt the strong obligation to maintain the continuity of their firms, to realise the best possible results, and to transfer their firms to their sons or sons-in-law by the time they grew too old to manage it themselves.⁶ Continuation of the business was vital for the family. Potential successors in the business would consider only one alternative to taking over the business: a more prestigious and lucrative position such as a political or important administrative function, which gave access to higher levels of society.⁷

Merchants could pass on their firm to the next generation quite straightforwardly, as the most common type of firm in the Dutch commercial system was the family business, usually a one-man concern. These firms were, as a rule, mainly – for two-thirds or more – financed with their own funds and for most of the rest with suppliers' credit. The assets of commercial firms consisted mainly of commodity stocks and debtors, and only to a small extent of fixed assets like real estate, installations, tools, and ships.⁸ At first sight, this was what the merchant left to his successor: commodity stocks, debts, and claims. There were however other assets, which did not appear on the balance sheet but were no less important, namely business knowledge, business relations, and business associates. They sprang from the three main business strategies merchants pursued to accomplish lasting commercial success: they specialised; they maintained permanent relations with customers and suppliers; and they cooperated, especially with relatives.⁹

The strategy of specialisation was aimed at achieving optimal knowledge of markets and commodities. Merchants needed to know which commodities were supplied and demanded, in what quantities and qualities, for what prices, in which markets, and at what moment in time. This information was an important weapon in the struggle for profit and market shares. As it was impossible to know all markets for all commodities, entrepreneurs specialised to some extent according to commodity and areas of production and consumption.¹⁰

I use the terms "specialisation" and "line of business" quite loosely. Indeed, it does not make much sense trying to be too precise in this respect. All kinds of specialisations and lines of business shaded into one another. Merchants became easily involved in adjacent businesses. Everything depended on ever-changing market conditions and the ability of the entrepreneur to adapt to new circumstances and benefit from new developments. The expertise specialisation brought had great benefits, but also carried the danger of becoming obsolete when market conditions changed. Conversely, spreading one's interest over too many combinations of products and markets carried the danger of becoming ill-informed.¹¹ In addition, merchants usually had numerous sidelines, which were of secondary importance in relation to total turnover and profits, but were, nevertheless, necessary for business.

Sidelines resulted sometimes from opportunism or an inclination to experiment, and, as a rule, from the necessity to oblige customers and suppliers, even if they requested something that had little to do with the established specialisation. A linen merchant, for example, would provide a cask of Spanish wine, if one of his suppliers ordered one.¹²

Obliging friends to keep them was part of the second commercial strategy aiming at accomplishing lasting commercial success: the maintenance of permanent relations with customers and suppliers. Permanent relations with customers generated to a certain extent certainty about the size of the turnover and the conditions of sale while steady relations with suppliers enabled the entrepreneur to tune the quantity, the quality, and the price of purchases to expected sales.¹³ Consequently, commerce was conducted largely within limited and familiar circles, where personal relations kept risks within bounds.¹⁴ An additional important advantage of steady business relations was that they generated trust and, accordingly, recommendations, guarantees, and credit. Trust was probably even more important than the company's own funds, the principal function of which was – as it is today – to generate trust and, accordingly, credit. Money is trust; and the equation is reversible.¹⁵

Practices to ensure customer loyalty may be called "monopolistic competitive", after the market form they generate. Monopolistic competition is the quite common market structure where many firms sell products that, basically, are the same, but differentiated, so that each seller has some control over the price of his own product. Product differentiation may be based upon characteristics of the product itself – such as quality – or upon the conditions surrounding its sale – such as the reputation of the seller. It pairs buyers with sellers according to their preferences. It protects sellers to some extent from the harsher conditions they would have to face in a perfect competitive market.¹⁶

While the one-man firm was a basic part of the Dutch commercial system, it was not, however, unusual for two or more merchants to cooperate in a company either permanently or for a limited period. They contributed to their company with funds or labour or both.¹⁷ This kind of cooperation was the third commercial strategy. The purpose of cooperation was to benefit from each other's knowledge, connections and funds, to increase turnover and profits, and to share risks. It often involved a degree of division of labour, which was practically necessary when the interests of an enterprise had to be looked after simultaneously, in places far apart. Cooperation was also natural when large investments were required and the spreading of the risks involved was desirable. Cooperation did not necessarily imply that a company was the sole enterprise of its participants. Each of them could, whether in cooperation with others or not, invest capital and energy in several projects at a time, varying from simple transactions for common account to commercial and industrial undertakings, ships, commercial voyages, or privileges granted by local or national authorities.¹⁸

Cooperation generated not only benefits but also risks of failure and deceit, especially when partners entrusted each other with large amounts of money and the responsibility for far-reaching decisions. Entrepreneurs had to be sure that they could trust their business partners, especially as they lived in a world with alarmingly little legal security. Therefore, they preferred to work in partnership with relatives as they shared with them the responsibility for the family's wealth and social position. In the final instance, these were the only people they could really trust.¹⁹ Consequently, many entrepreneurs were married to a daughter or a sister of a businessman working in the same branch of industry. Sometimes, entrepreneurs married a daughter, sister, or widow of a business associate. In this case, the marriage deepened the trust within the existing business relationship. In other cases, entrepreneurs began to cooperate with relatives of their wives only after they had married. In these cases the wedding created kinship and thereby a strong basis for cooperation. Perhaps relatives of both sides had been active in the same line of business before. In other cases, one side changed or broadened its commercial activities after the marriage.²⁰

At the outset of this section, I mentioned that the merchant left to his successors not only commodity stocks, debts, and financial claims but also knowledge, relations, and associates. We now know what that means. Knowledge of markets and commodities, relations with suppliers and customers, and business associates were benefits no less important than money and commodity stocks.²¹ We also have an answer to our original question regarding the origin of family networks among Dutch merchants in the same line of business. These commercial family networks were the direct results of four widespread business strategies. Merchants specialised, maintained long-term business relations with buyers and suppliers, cooperated with merchants in the same line of business, preferably with relatives, and transferred their businesses to the next generation.

The analysis sketched above is mainly based upon the study of company archives containing the accounts and correspondence of individual enterprises. Only a few company archives, however, are preserved, and among these are the records of only one Dutch merchant trading with Russia. This merchant was Amsterdambased David Leeuw (1682–1755). His records are in the Municipal Archives of Amsterdam.²² They give a rare inside view of the trade with Russia. Leeuw was, nevertheless, not very successful in this business. He set up as a businessman at the beginning of the eighteenth century and traded mainly in all kinds of textiles. He did business with connections in England and Germany, and to a lesser degree in the Baltic Sea area, the Dutch Republic, and the Southern Netherlands. In 1712, Leeuw tried to establish himself in the trade with Russia via Arkhangel'sk, but his Russian turnover never became large or regular. By 1724, after 12 years of effort, his Russian venture ended in disappointment.²³

The general lack of company records means that for any extensive test of the theoretical framework presented above one has to resort to less straightforward, "indirect" sources, such as the records of churches and public notaries. Church registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials allow us to analyse the merchants' family relations in detail – but do not tell us anything about their businesses. The records of public notaries are another rich source for commercial history, but they are, for our purpose, quite fragmentary. Notary deeds shed some light on the circle of a merchant's business partners but reveal only glimpses of his enterprises and tell us little of the level of his specialisation and the continuity of his relations with clients and suppliers

I have tested the theoretical framework on the history of the Dutch merchants trading with Russia in the study mentioned above – *Archangel*. For that purpose, I resorted, through lack of company records, to indirect sources and the historiography. I found that the entrepreneurial behaviour of these merchants confirms the theoretical framework. The study also shows that the theoretical framework helps us to understand what structures and processes lay beneath the rather superficial evidence of the indirect sources and that it deepens our insight into the actions of individual merchants. In what follows here, I give – as context – an outline of the development of the Dutch trade with Russia and – as substance – an impression of the business of one family line of Dutch merchants trading with Russia.

Dutch trade with Russia

Dutch trade with Russia became significant around 1560, after Tsar Ivan IV (r. 1533–1584) had forced direct access to the sea for Russia by conquering the Livonian port of Narva in 1558. The Dutch, at that stage mainly merchants from Antwerp, traded with Narva into the 1570s. But the Swedes subsequently blockaded the port and took it in 1581, so that Russia again was without a Baltic port. The Dutch had in the meantime begun to use an alternative sea route to Russia, leading far north to the White Sea and the mouth of the Northern Dvina River. This route had been discovered and opened by the English in the 1550s. In 1583, here, in the Dvina delta, Ivan IV founded the harbour town of Arkhangel'sk, and, in 1585, his son and successor Fëdor decided that this should be the only port for Russia's trade with Western Europe.²⁴

The big time for the Dutch in the Russia trade began in the 1590s, when they surpassed the English to the extent that, in the first half of the seventeenth century, Russia's trade with the Dutch Republic – Amsterdam in practice – accounted for perhaps 75 per cent of Russia's trade with Western Europe. The Dutch remained dominant in Russian commerce throughout the seventeenth century. Their competitive strength was that they conducted multilateral trade so that they could buy what was in supply and could supply what was in demand. All competitors, of which the English were the most important, traded bilaterally and, therefore, on a much smaller scale. The English essentially bought commodities destined for their domestic market and sold commodities produced in England.²⁵ Dutch dominance in the Russian market was not unique. The Dutch rose to "primacy in world trade"²⁶ in the sixteenth century and dominated international business in the seventeenth century, to the extent that they were "the economic leaders of Europe".²⁷

Dutch trade with Russia boosted Arkhangel'sk's export from a volume of almost 149 thousand roubles or about 1.1 million guilders in 1604 to approximately 430 thousand roubles or 2.3 million guilders in 1642, so that Arkhangel'sk developed into one of Northern Europe's main commercial centres. In the first half of the seventeenth century, almost half of Russia's export consisted of furs and the other half mainly of Russia leather and tallow. In some years, Russia exported large quantities of rye, wheat, and barley, but that only happened when the grain price in Western Europe was exceptionally high and when, in addition, the Russian government gave permission. Throughout the seventeenth century, Russia's imports consisted mainly of silver and gold, pearls and gems, precious textiles, firearms, gunpowder, nonferrous metals, exotic foodstuffs such as wine, sugar and spices, dyestuffs, writing paper, and glass.²⁸

The Dutch did business with the Russian merchants in Arkhangel'sk in August, during the annual fair, under supervision of the Russian authorities. Every year, dozens of Dutchmen travelled with their commodities from Amsterdam to Arkhangel'sk, and each year great numbers of Russian merchants came from the vast Russian interior. The Dutch made the journey to Arkhangel'sk as passengers aboard merchantmen. Most of them bought small but valuable amounts of fur and leather and sent them back to Amsterdam on ships chartered by the relatively few merchants who transported large cargoes. All Dutch ships left Holland in May and arrived at Arkhangel'sk about four weeks later, in time to prepare for the fair. The shipmasters aimed to weigh anchor for the return journey in September. If they left it too late, they risked running into heavy storms on the way home, which might force them to winter in some Norwegian fjord.²⁹

At the centre of the Arkhangel'sk fair were the gostinye dvory or "Merchant Courts", a large building where Russian and foreign merchants were lodged during their stay in Arkhangel'sk, where they stored their merchandise, and where they paid the customs duties. The large majority of the Dutch merchants trading with Russia only had Russian permission to do business in Arkhangel'sk. They could travel to the interior and do business there, but they had to apply for a Russian pass for every single journey. Most of them failed to overcome that obstacle, and only came to Arkhangel'sk for the fair. A small number of foreigners had a zhalovannaia gramota, a Russian trade permit, which allowed them to live in Russia permanently and to travel and do business in the Russian interior. As a rule, these permit holders did not actually live in Russia and rarely travelled there themselves, but had their interests in Russia promoted by members or representatives of their firms, often relatives, who settled in Russia for a long time. In winter, these associates and representatives lived in Moscow. Just like the Russian merchants, they travelled to the Arkhangel'sk fair every year. And like their houses in Moscow, so they had their own dwellings in Arkhangel'sk, where they and their entourage could lodge in the summer. Only a few merchants wintered in Arkhangel'sk as business there was over when the foreign ships and the Russian merchants left after the closing of the fair.³⁰

Furs and Russia leather, the main Russian commodities, were exported, as a rule, without limitations. The export of many other commodities was restricted in many ways. Tar, potash, train oil, hemp, grain, caviar, raw silk, and rhubarb – a popular medical drug – were "protected"; they could be exported only by the tsar or by his special permission. The tsar farmed out trade in some protected commodities. The farmers, usually foreigners, rented the monopoly of the export of

these commodities for a period of five or ten years. The line between protected commodities and commodities that could be freely traded seems to have been defined mainly by the tsar's financial needs and the changing market conditions. The tsar regularly ordered that commodities he had received as taxes in kind should temporarily be a state monopoly. This meant that nobody could market these commodities before the exchequer had sold its own stock. Sometimes the tsar had the entire supply of some commodity in a region bought up for a price he had fixed himself, after which he also dictated the price when the merchandise was sold to both Russian and foreign merchants.³¹

The volume of Arkhangel'sk's exports doubled around 1650, and it remained at a level of about 800 thousand roubles, four million guilders, per year during the entire second half of the century. By then, the Dutch dominated the Russia trade as never before. Trade with Amsterdam accounted for perhaps 90 per cent of Russia's trade with Western Europe. The English position worsened accordingly, mainly because the tsar was outraged by the execution of King Charles I of England in 1649 and forbade the English to continue their trade in the Russian interior.³²

The increase in Arkhangel'sk's exports coincided with a drastic change in its composition. The share of furs decreased to about 10 per cent. Russia leather became dominant instead, with 47 per cent in 1674. Tallow decreased to about 2 per cent in 1674. Besides these traditional goods, potash and hemp became important. Just as in the first half of the century, Russia only exported large quantities of grain when the prices were high in Amsterdam and when the tsar gave permission. Tar and masts became significant by the end of the century.³³

The number of foreigners' houses at Arkhangel'sk increased fast after 1650, from 8 in 1649 to 25 in the second half of the 1670s. Most of the owners were, presumably, Dutchmen. The sharp increase was connected with a change in the way the Dutch did business. Dutch merchants continued to make the annual journey from Holland to Arkhangel'sk aboard the Dutch ships, but the number of these "summer migrants" quickly decreased. This was the result of the development of commission trade. It became common practice that Dutch merchants who were permanently settled in Russia did business on behalf of third parties. Ever more Dutchmen contacted a Dutch commission agent to represent them at the fair, rather than make the tedious journey northwards every year. In this way, they not only saved a lot of time but also benefited from the fact that the agents could do business with the Russians before the ships arrived at Arkhangel'sk and could continue to take care of their affairs in Russia after the ships had left. As a result, while the number of summer migrants decreased, the number of Dutch commission agents at Arkhangel'sk rose. Some of them had a permanent Russian trade permit and could pass the winter months in Moscow or elsewhere in the country. It was, nevertheless, attractive for them to own a home in Arkhangel'sk as they lived there for a protracted time during the summer. Others did not have a trade permit and, consequently, no right to live in the interior. They had to live in Arkhangel'sk throughout the year, including the arctic winters, so having a comfortable home there was vitally important.34

During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), the Arkhangel'sk commerce flowered as never before, benefiting from the fact that the war severely hampered the Baltic trade. The volume of Arkhangel'sk's exports rose to almost 1.8 million roubles, 5.8 million guilders, in 1710. The town's chief exports now consisted of leather, hemp, and tallow. As had always been the case, in some years the grain export was of great significance. Textiles, arms, and metals dominated Arkhangel'sk's imports.³⁵

The increase in Arkhangel'sk's commerce after 1700 was mainly the result of the rise of Russia's trade with England. The English demand for naval materials, such as tar, timber, and hemp, had increased rapidly since about 1675, and found a ready supply of hemp, in particular, from the 1690s, when Russia's government permitted the English to do business in the Russian interior again. Accordingly, the Dutch share in Russia's commerce decreased to about 45 per cent, to which level it remained into the second half of the eighteenth century.³⁶

Russia's trade underwent another major change immediately after the Great Northern War. In 1703, Tsar Peter (r. 1682–1725) had founded Saint Petersburg, and in the early 1720s his decision that Petersburg instead of Arkhangel'sk should be Russia's main port became effective. Arkhangel'sk's position was reduced to that of an outlet for its direct hinterland, exporting mainly grain, tallow, linseed, and tar from the Russian North and the basin of the Viatka River. In 1726, Arkhangel'sk's exports totalled about 285 thousand roubles, one-third of the pre-war level, and in 1741 about 426 thousand roubles, half of the pre-war level. Petersburg gained what Arkhangel'sk lost. By 1726, the value of Petersburg's exports amounted to more than eight times that of Arkhangel'sk.³⁷

The English did not hesitate to exchange Arkhangel'sk for Petersburg. They did little business in the old port of the Russian North after 1721. Some Dutchmen, too, moved their business to the new port on the River Neva, but, unlike the English, many of them stuck to Arkhangel'sk, and the Dvina port continued to be the main Russian destination for their ships. Consequently, the British acquired the larger share in the trade with Petersburg, while Dutch merchants dominated the Arkhangel'sk commerce as they had done before the war.³⁸

After about 1760, a new period of commercial prosperity began for Arkhangel'sk. This time, Russians, not foreign merchants, benefited. The Dutch merchants based in Arkhangel'sk still accounted for a quarter of the port's turnover in the 1770s, but their position had become unstable. By the end of the eighteenth century, Arkhangel'sk's small remaining Dutch community began to assimilate into the town's German community.³⁹

The house of Ruts and related families

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, hundreds of Dutchmen traded with Russia. Most of them were based in Amsterdam, but many also in Russia.⁴⁰ The commercial behaviour of these merchants was characterised by the four basic strategies I presented above. To illustrate this, I shall wander through the

story of one of the many Dutch "houses" trading with Arkhangel'sk – that of Ruts and some of its related families.

In about 1616, the Cologne silken cloth merchant Nicolaes Ruts moved with his wife and children to Amsterdam. There, the Ruts family entered the Russia business. In 1622, Nicolaes Ruts chartered a ship for a journey to Vardø, in northern Norway, or, if required, to Arkhangel'sk. His eldest son, David Ruts, soon established himself as a merchant in Russia. In 1627, in Moscow, he married Maria de Moucheron, a daughter of Cosmo de Moucheron, who stemmed from a family of prominent Dutch merchants trading with Russia and who served the tsar as an architect.⁴¹

After 1622, Nicolaes Ruts and one of his other sons, Caspar Ruts, both living in Amsterdam, chartered, every year, one or two ships for a journey to Arkhangel'sk, ordering the shipmasters to report to David Ruts or his representative. After Nicolaes died in Amsterdam in 1638, Caspar continued to charter the ships to Arkhangel'sk. After his death in 1653, his younger brother Isaac Ruts took over this task.⁴² It is unknown what commodities the ships carried.

In 1626, David Ruts became, besides his cooperation with his father and brother, the Moscow representative of the Hamburg merchants Gabriel Marselis and Albert Baltzar Berns, exporting grain from Russia on their behalf. In 1629, he found a new principal, the prominent Dutch merchant Karel Janszoon du Moulin. Du Moulin was active in the Russian fish and grain trade, and in the production of cables and potash. He manufactured cables in Kholmogory, not far south of Arkhangel'sk, and produced potash in the districts of Tot'ma, Ustiug, and Nizhnii Novgorod. Together, du Moulin and Ruts supplied large quantities of Swedish iron and sulphur to the Russian government in the years 1630–1632, when Russia armed itself for war with Poland.⁴³

David Ruts probably spent the rest of his life in Russia and continued to do business there. Little is known of his affairs in the 1640s and 1650s. In 1649, he exported Russia leather, in 1650 potash. He imported silken cloth, silken clothes, and lace. In 1650, he acted as surety for John Aborn, Moscow agent of the English Muscovy Company, who farmed the caviar monopoly between 1638 and 1643, and between 1649 and 1654. Resulting from this surety, Ruts had to pay 9,000 rix-dollars. In 1651, Aborn reimbursed this sum in the form of 100 casks of caviar, which Ruts sent to Venice on an English vessel. Via Aborn's caviar farm, Ruts and his Hamburg business partners Zacharias Belkens and Philips Verpoorten bought, in Arkhangel'sk, in 1651, 11,419 poods (187,043 kg) of black Armenian caviar directly from the tsar.⁴⁴

David Ruts died in 1659. His four sons and two daughters probably stayed in Russia. The eldest, Nikolaus Ruts, was, in 1690, director of the iron enterprises of the house of Marselis near Tula, south of Moscow. Hardly anything is known of two other sons, Isaak and Georg. The fourth son, David Ruts Jr., probably succeeded his father in his company. In 1702, he built a gunpowder mill outside Moscow but went bankrupt in 1711. Subsequently, from 1715 on, he managed the gunpowder

mills of the Russian state at Okhta, outside Saint Petersburg, but he was relieved of this office two years later "on account of old age and forgetfulness".⁴⁵

David Ruts Sr.'s daughters married Dutch entrepreneurs already established in Russia. Maria married Johan van Sweeden, while Susanna Catharina married Hendrick Swellengrebel. Johan van Sweeden had come to Moscow in 1646 as a wine cooper in Ruts's service. In 1648 and 1649, he was on the tsar's orders in Astrakhan' to develop viniculture there. A few years later, after his marriage to Maria Ruts, he settled as an independent merchant. Hendrick Swellengrebel had been born in Stettin in 1626. He followed his elder brother Erdman Swellengrebel to Russia and was a "merchant of Holland" in Moscow and Arkhangel'sk since 1643. Erdman Swellengrebel had moved to Russia in the 1630s. In 1634, at the age of 17, he entered, for a period of eight years, the service of the Amsterdam merchants Daniel and Jean Bernards. He worked in their Amsterdam office but also travelled to Russia and wintered there when necessary to carry on trade on behalf of his masters, under the supervision of Hendrik Haax. He apparently settled in Moscow after this contract had expired. By that time, his younger brother Hendrick had joined him in Russia. Both brothers were active together in Arkhangel'sk in 1650.46

The two brothers-in-law Swellengrebel and van Sweeden did business separately as a rule but joined forces to supply the tsar with weapons during the Russian– Polish War for the possession of Ukraine (1654–1667). During the years 1659– 1662, they were the Russian state's main arms suppliers, providing large quantities of muskets, carbines, pistols, swords, and armour. To purchase these weapons, van Sweeden travelled as the tsar's commissioner to Hamburg and Holland in 1659 and 1660. The Russian state paid Swellengrebel and van Sweeden in kind, with furs, hemp, potash, pitch, tallow, and Russia leather.⁴⁷

After this major deal, van Sweeden and Swellengrebel continued their own businesses separately. Hendrick Swellengrebel exported sable furs and Russia leather in the 1660s. By 1675, he was in big financial trouble. In 1676, he was appointed as a guard of the Moscow Kremlin's arsenal. He kept this position until 1688. Hendrick Swellengrebel died in Moscow in 1699, at the age of 73.⁴⁸

Johan van Sweeden had a keen eye for his own interests and those of the Russian government. He exhibited sweeping entrepreneurship in several lines of business that had hardly, or not at all, developed in Russia before. In May 1665, he agreed with the Russian government that he would order newspapers from abroad and organise postal communication with Western Europe to provide for the needs of the Russian authorities and the foreign merchants in Russia. Initially, the war with Poland prevented van Sweeden from realising his plans, but when Russia and Poland made peace in December 1667, van Sweeden still failed to benefit, as the tsar took the postal services away from him in May 1668. By that time, van Sweeden had initiated several new projects. In 1655, Patriarch Nikon had had built a paper mill on the River Pakhra outside Moscow, to supply the government's printing establishment. The mill became operational but was swept away by a flood, probably in 1666. Van Sweeden took up the task of rebuilding the mill and continuing the operation. The government transferred the mill to him and, in addition, farmed its grain mill on the River Pakhra out to him until 1672. The paper mill had to produce writing paper of the best foreign quality. For that purpose, van Sweeden engaged a millwright and a master-papermaker in the German town of Essen and five additional craftsmen in Amsterdam.⁴⁹

In about 1667, van Sweeden founded a woollen cloth factory in Moscow – the first of its kind, as this industry did not exist in Russia before. The same year, on the tsar's request, van Sweeden used his organisational talents for the development of again a completely different line of business. The tsar set up a shipyard on the River Oka to build a number of light warships to protect the commercial navigation. To facilitate this, he sent van Sweeden to the Dutch Republic to contract shipwrights and sailors and to buy equipment. Van Sweeden hired, on behalf of the Russian government, 4 shipwrights and 15 sailors, including captain David Buthler. Buthler was a son of Agneta Ruts, who was a sister of van Sweeden's father-in-law. The shipwrights completed the first Russian warship, Orel' – Eagle – in 1669. David Buthler was its captain.⁵⁰

Johan van Sweeden died unexpectedly in 1669, a year after he had started his last feat, the production of "Venetian" glassware. His wife, Maria Ruts, inherited his businesses. She kept the paper mill going until at least 1674, the cloth factory into the 1680s. In 1673, the Russian state transferred to her an existing gunpowder mill, which she converted into a paper mill. In 1676, probably after Maria Ruts's demise, this converted paper mill was farmed out to her son-in-law, Herman Löfken, who was married to her only daughter, Maria van Sweeden. On the Russian state's orders, Löfken reconverted the mill into a gunpowder mill in 1682. After his death, his widow continued the mill. In 1693, her son-in-law, Rudolf Meijer, who was married to her daughter Katharina Löfken, was included in the contract. He continued it alone from 1696 and exploited the mill until it burned down in 1722.⁵¹

The exploitation of the gunpowder mill was only part of Rudolf Meijer's endeavours. He exported grain from Russia and imported weapons for the tsar's armies. In addition, he supplied paper to the Russian authorities and foodstuffs and wine to the tsar's court. He developed a close relationship with Tsar Peter. He lived in Moscow's foreign quarter and first met Peter in 1690, when the young tsar began to turn up there regularly. Meijer made himself useful to Peter in several ways, for example by contracting craftsmen and ordering instruments abroad. Peter was among the guests at the wedding of Meijer's daughter Elizabeth to Hendrik van Jever and Meijer's son Herman to Anna Lups.⁵²

Both Anna Lups and Hendrik van Jever came from families of well-known Dutch Russia merchants. Anna Lups's father was Jan Lups, one of the big Dutch merchants who supplied Tsar Peter with weapons for his new armies, and who lived in Russia from about 1690 to 1718. Hendrik van Jever's father was Volkert van Jever, who settled as a merchant in Moscow and Arkhangel'sk in the late seventeenth century. Hendrik continued his father's business at Arkhangel'sk. Initially, he imported mainly woollen cloth and exported large quantities of fish and train oil. After van Jever had married Elizabeth Meijer, his brother-in-law, Herman Meijer, and Jan Lups junior, full cousin of Herman Meijer's wife Anna Lups, involved him in their business. Meijer and Lups acquired the Russian monopoly of the tar export in 1725. In that same year, they called in van Jever to look after their business following from their monopoly in Arkhangel'sk. Hendrik van Jever remained involved in the Arkhangel'sk tar export throughout his life.⁵³

Hendrik van Jever's vounger brother Volkert van Jever moved to Amsterdam and was established there as a Russia merchant by 1730. He was Hendrik's main business connection in Amsterdam. Several contracts from 1740 and 1741 show that the two brothers cooperated with one another. In these contracts, Volkert acts, in Amsterdam, as a charterer of ships for journeys to Arkhangel'sk to transport tar, grain, linseed, and, on a few occasions, tallow, mats, and brushes from there to Amsterdam. In almost all instances, he ordered the shipmasters to report in Arkhangel'sk to his brother's company. The fact that many ships were loaded with tar, resulted, no doubt, from the role Hendrik played in the exploitation of the tar monopoly of Jan Lups and Herman Meijer. Volkert van Jever married in 1731, outside the circle of the Russia merchants, in the city of Haarlem - this was to Quirina Catharina van Sijpesteyn, daughter of a schepen (town magistrate) of the city of Alkmaar - but he could make this "sacrifice" as the marriage connected him with the patriciate of Holland. In due course, he made the acquaintance of Prince Willem Karel Hendrik Friso, and the two men became friends. In 1748, the prince appointed him as a member of the city council (vroedschap) of Amsterdam and he held that position until he died, in 1774.54

This account of the business and the relational ties of the families Ruts, van Sweeden, Swellengrebel, Löfken, Meijer, Lups, and van Jever could easily be extended, and similar stories could be told about many other families in the Russian trade. The sketch gives an impression what went on and what the sources generally reveal. There are hints of the four basic entrepreneurial strategies – specialisation, long-term business relations, cooperation, preferably with relatives, and business succession – and the family networks resulting from these tendencies.

The people I have discussed were specialised Russia merchants – many of them to the extent that they had settled in Russia. At the same time, it is not clear how far their specialisation went. I would suspect that most Russia merchants traded in a limited range of products, while not hesitating to change them whenever it was necessary. This is illustrated by the shifts of focus of the company of three generations of the Dutch merchant families de Vogelaer and Klenck. In the period from 1589 to about 1650, this company bought in Russia fish, train oil, tallow, skins, and caviar, and, in addition, from about 1624, grain. After about 1650, train oil, skins and caviar were replaced by potash and hemp, so that the range of products then consisted of fish, tallow, grain, potash, and hemp. After 1670, fish and tallow also disappeared, so that, from then on, the range of goods only consisted of the "new products" grain, potash and hemp. This shows that merchants specialised but that they were not rigid. If they wanted to be successful in the long run, they had to have an open eye for market developments and always be ready to pursue new courses. Their commercial behaviour included, indeed, specialisation but also flexibility.⁵⁵ At least the big and successful Russia merchants were quite versatile, as they had to cope with large fluctuations of demand and supply. When Russia waged war, the demand for weapons sprang up. When the grain price surged, Russia was a huge supplier for a few years. In addition, the tsar monopolised products, such as grain, potash, and tar, and claimed the exclusive right to do business with them and farm them out at will. In all these instances, the clever and the daring won the day.

The sketch presented above hardly gives evidence of the second mechanism of entrepreneurial behaviour, namely the inclination to nurse fixed relations. We hardly know anything about buyers and suppliers. To what extent did Dutch merchants trading with Russia maintain permanent relations with business connections? The only surviving set of relevant business records shows that early eighteenthcentury Amsterdam merchant David Leeuw's connections with his correspondents in Arkhangel'sk always failed very quickly. However, they also show that, in all cases and all the time, both sides hoped that the relationship would last. The failure to maintain lasting relations was caused by the fact that Leeuw entered the Arkhangel'sk market as an importer of luxury goods in the second decade of the eighteenth century, at a time when the sales prices of those commodities were low in Russia. As a result, Leeuw's relationship with his Arkhangel'sk correspondents soon came under pressure, time after time.⁵⁶ No doubt, business relations persisted longer when market conditions were more favourable.

The interest of businessmen in maintaining steady business relations can also be gathered from the fact that the company of de Vogelaer and Klenck farmed the catching of fish in the Ponoi and Iokan'ga Rivers on the Kola Peninsula from about 1623 to 1665. This long-term involvement may be explained at least partly by the certainty the company sought in the supply of fish. The same tendency is shown by the many farm contracts for the purchase, production, and export of such "protected" commodities as caviar, tar, and potash.⁵⁷

The inclination to cooperate, especially with relatives, and, therefore, the inclination to intermarry within the line of business, is evident from the story of the Rutses and related families. The Ruts family worked together to make their business pay, and so did the brothers Swellengrebel, the brothers-in-law Johan van Sweeden and Hendrick Swellengrebel, and the three brothers-in-law Herman Meijer, Jan Lups, and Hendrik van Jever. All these families and firms were interconnected by marriage. They also show clear instances of the desire to hand on the business to the next generation. The sons of Nicolaes Ruts continued their father's business, and one of them, David Ruts, was succeeded by at least two of his sons. One of David Ruts's daughters, Maria, married Johan van Sweeden and, after his death, inherited his businesses. At least one of her mills was passed on to her sonin-law Herman Löfken and then on to his son-in-law Herman Meijer.

Conclusion

The analysis of the commercial behaviour of the Dutch Russia merchants confirms and illustrates the theoretical ideas explaining the existence of commercial family networks among Dutch entrepreneurs in general. Conversely, these theoretical ideas help to explain what happened in the Russian business. The family networks were the direct results of four widespread business strategies: merchants specialised, maintained long-term business relations with buyers and suppliers, cooperated with merchants in the same line of business, preferably relatives, and transferred their businesses to the next generation. These strategies are the substance behind the fragments of business life the sources reveal.

The family networks resulting from these strategies were integral to the Dutch commercial system. Their function in this system was, in the final analysis, to produce the security, stability, and trust indispensable for the making of big business decisions at a time when most entrepreneurs risked their family capital every day, running their operations without the protection of social security and with very little protection of the still feeble international legal system. They needed the protection of their commercial family network to be able to operate responsibly in a dangerous world. This does not imply that family networks guaranteed commercial success. There were always businessmen who ran into trouble. Some lacked luck or talent and went down even if circumstances were favourable. Others may have been talented and lucky, but lived in a time of hostile market conditions. They could either struggle on or quit their line of business and look for alternatives.

That the commercial family networks gave stability and vigour to the Dutch commercial system does not imply either that they were rigid and unchanging in their family composition and commercial orientation. There was a constant influx of new persons and families into the networks, while others left. Many newcomers were employees of well-established entrepreneurs. Some entered a partnership with their employers, others married their bosses' daughters. Among those who left the commercial family network were, on the one hand, those who failed and pursued their luck elsewhere and, on the other hand, those who were so successful that they rose to a higher rung of the social ladder and entered the patriciate.

The other aspect of the plasticity of the networks was the fact that their commercial orientation constantly changed. This happened when new opportunities arose and entrepreneurs within the network adapted to the new circumstances. In this way, the network could, gradually or suddenly, switch from one line of business to another. It could also fall apart, after which its "members" regrouped in new networks with other commercial orientations. In this way, the Arkhangel'sk trade and its family networks sprang up in the last quarter of the sixteenth century when participants came flocking in from the Baltic and Scandinavian trades. In the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Dutch Arkhangel'sk merchants constantly adapted to ever-changing market conditions but retreated one after the other from their businesses when opportunities faded in the later eighteenth century. Some regrouped into other networks, such as those of the Petersburg merchants, while others gave up active trading and lived off their interest or profits.⁵⁸

After all, a businessman was not loyal to his business or his network or the commercial system of which he was a part. He was loyal to his family. His goal was to uphold its social position. His businesses and his relations were instruments to achieve that goal. Networks and commercial systems were side effects.

Notes

- * This chapter is a translated, abridged, and revised version of: Veluwenkamp, "Kaufmännisches Verhalten."
- 1 Israel, Dutch Primacy.
- 2 See, for example, Klein, "Little London," 122, 128, 131-132; Lindblad, Sweden's Trade, 54.
- 3 See, for example: Veluwenkamp, Ondernemersgedrag; idem, "Familienetwerken."
- 4 Veluwenkamp, Archangel.
- 5 See, for example: Kooijmans, "Risk and Reputation."
- 6 See, for example: Müller, *The Merchant Houses of Stockholm*, 24–27, 276–277; Kooijmans, "Risk and Reputation," 25–34.
- 7 Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 104.
- 8 Klein and Veluwenkamp, "The Role of the Entrepreneur," 36-39; Veluwenkamp, Ondernemersgedrag, 68-72; Klein, De Trippen, 426.
- 9 Veluwenkamp, "Familienetwerken," 666.
- 10 Ibid., 667; Veluwenkamp, Ondernemersgedrag, 23–28, 113–114, 117–122; Klein, De Trippen, 422–424.
- 11 Veluwenkamp, "The Role of the Entrepreneur," 41; idem, Ondernemersgedrag, 121–122.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., 7–8, 22–28, 104, 113, 117–120.
- 14 Klein, "Handel, geld en bankwezen," 177.
- 15 Veluwenkamp, "Familienetwerken," 667.
- 16 Veluwenkamp, Ondernemersgedrag, 7–8, 84, 92, 94, 98–99; Lipsey and Steiner, Economics, 920; Chamberlin, The Theory of Monopolistic Competition, 56.
- 17 See for example: Klein, De Trippen, 418-473. Also: Israel, Dutch Primacy, 45, 60, 64.
- 18 Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 63; Müller, The Merchant Houses of Stockholm, 31; Veluwenkamp, "The Role of the Entrepreneur," 36–37.
- 19 Müller, The Merchant Houses of Stockholm, 31–32, 246; Kooijmans, "Andries & Daniel"; idem, "Risk and Reputation," 28.
- 20 Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 192; idem, "Familienetwerken binnen," 667-668.
- 21 Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 104; idem, "The Role of the Entrepreneur," 38–39; idem, "Familienetwerken," 667.
- 22 Eeghen, Inventaris van het familie-archief Brants.
- 23 Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 169-175.
- 24 Ibid., 16-21, 27-32.
- 25 Veluwenkamp, "Ekonomicheskie otnosheniia," 32; idem, Archangel, 37, 43, 67, 107–108.
- 26 Israel, Dutch Primacy.
- 27 North, Structure and Change, 154.
- 28 Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 67-69, 110-111.
- 29 Dëmkin, Zapadnoevropeiskoe kupechestvo, vol. 1, 26, 41–43, 57, 62; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 70–71.
- 30 Popova, Arkhangel'sk, 21; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 70, 72, 74-76.
- 31 Amburger, Die Familie Marselis, 141; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 68.
- 32 Idem, "Ekonomicheskie otnosheniia," 32; idem, Archangel, 107-109.
- 33 Buck, "De Amsterdamse handel op Archangel," 30; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 110.
- 34 Zakharov, "Torgovlia zapadnoevropeiskikh kuptsov," 192; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 112–115.
- 35 Zacharov, "Jan Lups," 80; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 153-158.
- 36 Ibid., 154–156, 180.
- 37 Zakharov, "Inostrannye kuptsy v Arkhangel'ske," 361; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 153, 179–181.
- 38 Veluwenkamp, "The Archangel Connection," 32–33; idem, Archangel, 180.
- 39 Amburger, Die van Brienen und ihre Sippe in Archangel, 14–15; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 197–199.

- 40 Ibid., 70, 159.
- 41 Amburger, Die van Brienen und ihre Sippe in Archangel, 70, 81, 213; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 99.
- 42 Ibid., 99, 101.
- 43 Kellenbenz, "The Economic Significance of the Archangel Route," 552; Veluwenkamp, *Archangel*, 93, 99–101.
- 44 Bushkovitch, The Merchants of Moscow, 155; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 101-102.
- 45 Kovrigina, "Inozemnye kuptsy-predprinimateli Moskvy"; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 148.
- 46 Ibid., 149.
- 47 Witsen, Moscovische Reijse, xxxvi; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 149.
- 48 Ibid., 149-150.
- 49 Kulischer, Russische Wirtschaftsgeschichte, 367-368, 393, 399, 401-402; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 150.
- 50 Cordt, "Beitrage zu einer Russisch-Niederländischen Bibliographie," 265–266; Veluwenkamp, Archangel, 150–151.
- 51 Ibid., 151.
- 52 Ibid., 189.
- 53 Veluwenkamp, "Potekha v Nemetskoi slobode," 348-349, 354; idem, Archangel, 188-190.
- 54 Ibid., 189-192.
- 55 Veluwenkamp, "Kompania 'De Vogelar i Klenk'," 63-64; idem, Archangel, 176-177.
- 56 Ibid., 169-176.
- 57 Ibid., 176.
- 58 Ibid., 33, 201.

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