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Swedish Copper and Financial Skullduggery in Amsterdam, 1610-1625

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ABSTRACT

In 1611 the young Gustav Adolf Vasa ascended the throne of Sweden as Gustav II Adolf. Along with the throne, the king inherited a disastrous war with Denmark, which he ended by signing the onerous Peace of Knäred. The terms included the obligation for Sweden to pay a one million *rixdaler* reimbursement to redeem the strategically important fortress at Älvsborg. With an empty treasury, the king turned to his fellow Protestants in the United Provinces for financial assistance. Fortunately, Sweden possessed one major asset, the largest copper mine in Europe. The crown sent copper ingots to Amsterdam, for security, and borrowed against them. This sparked an intense rivalry as two factions of royal servants in the Netherlands sought to obtain the lucrative monopoly for the sale of copper. On one side there was Louis de Geer, a successful weapons dealer. His faction was defended by F.W. Dahlgren whose twentieth-century biography of the merchant was commissioned by de Geer's descendent, Baron Louis de Geer. The rival faction included a distinguished nobleman and member of the States General, Hugo Muys van Holy who promptly mounted a viscous smear campaign against de Geer and his partner. This rivalry quickly descended into accusations of treason and corruption.

Introduction

Starting from 1618 a business rivalry developed in Amsterdam over the monopoly rights to sell imported Swedish copper on the local market. The conflict was observed by the king of Sweden,

Gustav II Adolf, and his capable chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, both of whom would ultimately decide on the recipient of the monopoly. On one side of the rivalry, there was a successful local merchant, Louis de Geer, and his friend and colleague, Dr. Johan van Dijck, the Swedish ambassador to the United Provinces. On the other side there were Jan Rutgers, a young humanist and a direct commissioner of the king, and his uncle, Hugo Muys van Holy. Muys was a nobleman, statesman, and influential member of the States General, the ruling diet of the Dutch Republic.

The rivalry was well grounded because the monopoly right was lucrative. The owner of the monopoly would agree to pay the king a fixed price for each shipment of copper. The purchase price would be lower than the market price. The owner could then sell the copper locally at the best price he could negotiate. This was also beneficial to the king, ensuring him a fixed price, a ready market, and prompt payment for his copper. In some cases, the monopoly holder would pay the crown even before the shipment left Stockholm.¹ As an example of how the system worked, in July 1618, de Geer wrote a note to the Swedish chancellor offering to buy copper at 39 *rixdalers* (hereafter RD) per *skeppund* (hereafter skd), directly from the Swedish crown.² Two months later, in September 1618, de Geer, who needed materials promptly, bought 711 skd of copper located in Amsterdam, from the monopoly holder at 45 RD per skd. This produced a premium of 4,268 RD over the price he previously offered the chancellor, thus illustrating the attractiveness of the monopoly to the owner.³

It appears that Muys van Holy's only motive for seeking the monopoly was financial. It was a profitable income in exchange for a minimum effort. For de Geer, however, the stakes were higher. In 1618, he was already an important arms supplier to the Swedish

¹ Dahlgren (1934), p. 26.

² The *rixdaler* was the currency of the Holy Roman Empire and the reserve currency of its day in Northern Europe. Skd is an abbreviation for *skeppund*, literally "ship pound", an early modern weight. It is the equivalent of about 130 kilograms.

³ Dahlgren (1934), p. 28.

crown, and one advantage he had over his competitors was his willingness to take payment in copper in lieu of currency. For a crown with acute cash flow problems this was an asset. It would not have been possible, however, if each copper purchase allowed a large cut for the monopoly holder. In addition, de Geer wanted to develop, and therefore, dominate the copper trade between Stockholm and Amsterdam. In November 1619, de Geer formed a syndicate of prosperous Amsterdam merchants to finance the purchase of 4,500 skd of copper. This was an unprecedented quantity, and it underscored de Geer's ambitious goal of dominating the trade. He needed to own the monopoly to proceed. In the course of this study, we will explore the rivalry between the two factions, and shed additional light on the topic of early modern trading practice. In addition, we will explore the relationship between politics and business in the early seventeenth century.

This topic inevitably involves Louis de Geer's biographer, the distinguished early twentieth-century Swedish geographer, E.W. Dahlgren (1848-1934). While he was not a historian in the modern sense of the word, he was, nevertheless, asked to write a biography of Louis de Geer by a direct descendent, Baron Louis de Geer (1854-1935). The Baron was a prominent Swedish statesman who served briefly as prime minister between 1920 and 1921. As a member of the commission Dahlgren was granted unfettered access to the family archives in Leufsta. The archives are currently located in the Riksarkiv in Stockholm and are easily accessible.

In addition to exploring the struggle between the two factions, the article will consider Dahlgren's objectivity in his biography of de Geer. Dahlgren consistently praised de Geer and Ambassador van Dijck for their work on the king's behalf, while ignoring less flattering evidence to the contrary. On the most obvious level, we assume that Baron de Geer would not have commissioned a biography that would present his famous relative unfavorably. Or perhaps Dahlgren was merely sympathetic toward the hero of his epic, prompting a certain bias in his favor. When the biography was first published, for example, critics accused Dahlgren of exaggerating de

Geer's role in pre-industrial Sweden.⁴ Like any published biography or collection of letters, it's paramount to consider such material knowing the author's or editor's predilections.

Apart from the objectivity issue, there is no question about Dahlgren's accomplishment. His extensive notes are still present in the archives today. In all, Dahlgren spent six years researching and writing the biography which he published in 1923. A year later he was awarded a gold medal from the Swedish Academy. His work remains the only serious biography of the Amsterdam merchant and industrialist, Louis de Geer.⁵

The most helpful documents in evaluating Dahlgren's impartiality were the letters of Johan Skytte to the king and the chancellor, written between September 1617 and December 1618 from Germany and the United Provinces. Skytte was there to assist and observe the crown's lobbying efforts to obtain loans and subsidies from the States General. He was a formidable scholar, and an occasional diplomat. More important, Skytte enjoyed the king's confidence. He had been the king's principal tutor and was, therefore, responsible for his formal education. By the time the king ascended the throne, in 1611, he had mastered no fewer than seven modern languages.⁶ Because of Skytte's role in the king's life, their relationship was one of mutual trust and affection.

After introducing King Gustav II Adolf, it's necessary to supply some background information. He was, by most accounts, an extraordinarily talented young monarch who inherited an unstable country with hostile neighbors. His early years on the throne were also a time of financial disruption. To understand the politics and intrigue occurring among the king's servants in Amsterdam we must first review the king's strategy for financial survival. This will include a brief look at the king's relationship with his uncle, the king of Poland, and an examination of his conflict with the hostile king of Denmark, Christian IV (1577-1649).

⁴ Nováky (2002), pp. 20-21.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Roberts (1958), 1, p. 50.

Fortunately for the crown, Sweden did possess one major asset, the Stora Kopparberg, the largest copper mine in Europe. Faced with the burden of financial distress, Gustav Adolf began direct crown supervision over the mine. The king's actions clearly demonstrate the crown's efforts towards political centralization and tax reform. With the help of his trusted agent at the mine, Karl Bonde, the king was able to transform the administration from a medieval feudal model to a tax paying asset.⁷

The reforms also included capital expenditures to improve the smelting, refining, minting, and manufacturing facilities at the mine. The king's primary goal was to increase production and improve the quality of copper exports. Along with his trusted chancellor, the king understood that exporting semi-finished products was preferable to exporting raw materials. The solution was to sell refined copper, mainly in the form of ingots, to foreign markets. The Stora Kopparberg became as important to Gustav Adolf as the Potosi silver mine in Spanish Peru was to the King of Spain. The undignified squabbling over the right to sell Swedish copper in Amsterdam is the main topic of this study. For it was copper that funded Gustav II Adolf's larger-than-life political and military ambitions.

The king's bellicose posture was partly a reaction to his uncle, King Sigismund Vasa of Poland (1566-1632), who was elected monarch of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1587, while still being the apparent heir to the Swedish throne. As a Counter-Reformation Catholic, however, Sigismund was deeply unpopular in Lutheran Sweden. He inherited the throne of Sweden at the death of his father, King Johan III (1537-1592), and it was his intention to rule Sweden by uniting it with the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, but in 1599 his uncle and regent, Duke Karl, staged a coup and overthrew the absentee Catholic king. With the compliance of the *Riksdag*, the national diet of Lutheran Sweden, Karl proclaimed himself King Karl IX in 1604. The young Gustav Adolf was Karl's son and heir.

⁷ For a broader description of the reforms in administration see: Böhme (1983), pp. 51-58 and Rystad (1983), pp. 59-70.

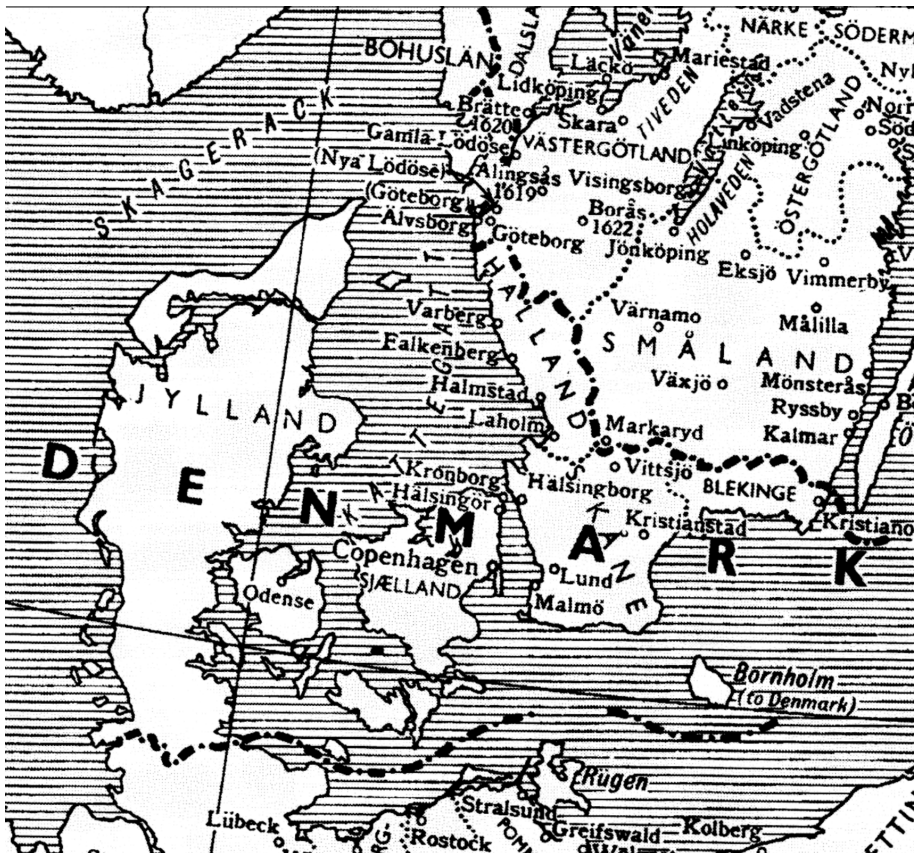
Sigismund did not, however, quietly give up his Swedish claims; he waged intermittent warfare against Karl between 1600 and 1611, a period called the Swedish-Polish War. Karl, nonetheless, remained firmly in control until his death in 1611. As the result of his father's legacy, the young, newly crowned king, Gustav II Adolf, was forced to focus on crown finances from the beginning of his reign. Along with the throne, he inherited a protracted conflict with Sigismund, and an unfortunate war with Denmark, the War of Kalmar (1611 to 1613), which threatened to push the royal treasury into insolvency.

In January 1613, slightly over one year into his reign, the king accepted an onerous treaty with Denmark, the Peace of Knäred. During the War of Kalmar, the Danes had captured the fortress of Älvsborg, which protected the port city of Göteborg, and the southwestern coast of Sweden. The terms of the peace included a reimbursement of one million riksdaler,⁸ payable to the Danish sovereign in four yearly instalments, starting from 1616. This was so unrealistic that the king of Denmark probably assumed that the Swedish crown would forfeit the fortress and leave the valuable Göteborg area open to a future Danish incursion. The Älvsborg reimbursement added an unwelcome new burden on the already desperate crown finances.

At this point one should wonder "why pay the reimbursement?" The king was, after all, still at war with Poland and was known as a warlike monarch. To understand just how vulnerable the area was, and the reason why the king agreed to pay the reimbursement, we should consider the geographical boundaries of southern Sweden when the Peace of Knäred was negotiated (see fig. 1). Denmark controlled most of the coast facing the Kattegatt and the Skagerack as well as all of Norway. Only a small band of land, north of Danish Halland, was Swedish territory. The crown built the fortress of Älvsborg to protect Göteborg, because it was the only major Swedish port with open access to the North Sea and the Atlantic. It permitted mer-

⁸ King Kristian insisted that payment be in *riksdaler*, instead of Swedish *daler* (hereafter SD) or Dutch Guilders (hereafter DG) just to add another level of difficulty.

FIGURE 1
Map of the Danish Sound



chant vessels from Sweden and the West to avoid passing through the Danish Sound.

The Danish Sound was located just south of the narrows between the two Danish fortress towns of Hålsingör and Hålsingborg. At that time, Denmark controlled all possible routes from the Baltic to the Atlantic; however, the passage through the Danish Sound between Hålsingör and Hålsingborg was by far the most navigable route, and therefore, the most widely used. During the Middle Ages, the Danish crown began to impose a toll on all shipping moving through the Sound and it jealously guarded this right as it became

the Danish crown's largest source of revenue. Avoiding it would be advantageous to the Swedish because the tolls were onerous. Additionally, the control of the Sound gave the Danish king the ability to impose a boycott on deliveries to Sweden coming from the West in times of war.

Karl IX also sought a land route to the North Sea through Lapland, north of the populated Danish-Norway. As a first step, he declared himself the "King of the Lapps." In response, King Kristian IV of Denmark declared war on Sweden in 1611. Recognizing the advantage that would accrue to Sweden if the settlement at Göteborg was left intact, Kristian captured the area, razed the town, and occupied the Älvsborg fortress. As long as he remained in the fortress, his dominance of the area was guaranteed, and any vessel sailing between Sweden and the West was forced to use the Sound and pay the tolls.⁹

The signing of the Peace of Knäred aggravated the crown's financial situation because the king lacked ready funds to pay the reimbursement. Sweden's already discontented aristocracy resisted the king's demands for donations to pay the reimbursement, and he faced a series of regional rebellions caused by his tax increases. Clearly, Gustav Adolf had to exploit every possible revenue source if he hoped to hold the kingdom together and, at the same time, pay the Älvsborg reimbursement.¹⁰

While the king's most immediate concern was the Älvsborg reimbursement, he was also at war against Poland and Russia. This combination of reimbursement and military expenses forced Gustav II Adolf to a "total, ruthless mobilization of resources."¹¹ In other words, the king took Sweden on a crash course of centralization and bureaucratization. But the results were still insufficient. The military adventures required additional funding. Raising such funds as loans was difficult in Sweden because the Country lacked credit facilities.

⁹ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 2, p. 137.

¹⁰ Heckscher (1936), p. 442.

¹¹ Rystad (1983), pp. 16.

On the other hand, sophisticated banking houses were already well established in some major capitals of Europe. The king of Spain, for example, had access to banking facilities in Genoa and in Flanders. France and England both had prosperous merchant bankers who handled credit issues. Sweden, however, was financially immature, forcing the King of Sweden to appeal to his political allies in Amsterdam and in The Hague to help fund the Älvsborg reimbursement.¹² The United Provinces were, unfortunately for the king, under threat from Spanish armies to the south and the west and, therefore, had their own defense to consider. At first, the States General did offer help, but over time they were increasingly reluctant to make loans because the crown had a poor repayment record. It is against this background that we begin our examination of Swedish representatives in Holland, whose job was to purchase weapons and seek loans from the States General in The Hague.

In the first section of the study, we will examine the extensive work done in Amsterdam and The Hague by Jan Rutgers and his noble uncle, Muys de Holy, to obtain loans, backed by copper. It's clear that the pair succeeded admirably in obtaining support from the States General and the Holland States; and Rutgers, with his frequent correspondence with the crown, made certain that he and Muys received full credit for their successful lobbying.

The second section shows the critical position that de Geer held in the arms industry. Van Dijck wrote letters to the crown explaining the business transactions, but it was de Geer who assembled the quantities of gun powder, muskets, etc. With de Geer's prodding, van Dijck explained to the crown the dubious techniques their arms dealing competitors practiced to increase profits, in contrast to their own honest efforts. All of which was designed to show the crown the advantage of working with them, rather than with Rutgers and Muys, for future copper sales in Amsterdam.

The gloves came off in the third section where we are greeted by

¹² See Heckscher (1936), pp. 370-371, for a discussion the lack of credit facilities.

open hostility between the two factions. The main weapon was an increasingly strident correspondence between the participants and the crown. As we will explain later in the text, the king continued to favor the interests of Rutgers and Muys, and through a secret correspondence the crown granted the monopoly to Muys. While covering this series of events, E. W. Dahlgren accused Muys and Rutgers of outright treason because a Dutch politician told van Dijck that Muys was secretly working against Swedish interests at the States General to promote his own personal agenda.

In the fourth section the conflict between the factions descends even further into acrimony and deceit. At the peak of the controversy, de Geer composed a long and detailed report documenting, in detail, the conflict between the two factions. It was a stunning polemic recounting the abuses perpetrated by Rutgers and Muys against van Dijck. In this section the king finally grew tired of the unproductive conflict and recalled van Dijck to Stockholm.

In section five we encounter de Geer still in pursuit of a copper monopoly in Amsterdam. He now directed his efforts to purchasing substantial quantities of copper directly from the crown. Unfortunately, King Gustav II Adolf proved, once again, that doing business with ruling potentates can be fraught with risk. In November 1619, de Geer managed to purchase 4,500 skd of copper from the crown for delivery at the rate of 1,500 skd per year. To mitigate the risk, de Geer recruited several fellow merchants to join the venture. As part of the deal, de Geer's consortium agreed to loan the crown 60,000 RD. The enterprise was a disaster since the very beginning. The king decided to use a different sale outlet and walked away from the contract while keeping the 60,000 RD. When de Geer protested, the king discovered a financial discrepancy from a previous transaction and used it as an excuse for breaching the contract.

In the final section, save the conclusion, we concentrate on the correspondence of Johan Skytte. We compare his observations with the commentaries written by E.W. Dahlgren in his biography of Louis de Geer. We find that Skytte was less sympathetic to the van Dijck and de Geer faction.

This study will make extensive use of Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna's published correspondence; work began in 1888, and there are now thirty volumes of this remarkable original source. We will also rely heavily on the business-related letters of Louis de Geer, most of which were published in 1934 by his biographer, E.W. Dahlgren. In addition, we shall make limited use of documents from the de Geer family archives located in the Riksarkiv in Stockholm.

The King's Early Success in Amsterdam. Section One

Sweden was represented in Amsterdam, as mentioned earlier, by Ambassador Dr. Johan van Dijck. He, in turn, hired a classically trained humanist, Jan Rutgers. Young Rutgers was well received during his first visit to Stockholm, and both King Gustav Adolf and Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna were quite taken by his erudition. During the next several years the chancellor and Rutgers carried out an extensive correspondence in Latin.¹³

In the introduction we explored the importance of Göteborg for the future of Sweden. We also explained the reasons why Gustav Adolf could not simply walk away from the Älvsborg reimbursement and forfeit the town. The primary responsibility of van Dijck and Rutgers was to obtain loans in the United Provinces for the payment of the reimbursement. In this endeavor they were greatly assisted by Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the leading politician in the province of Holland. This relationship went back to 1610 when Johan Skytte was in the United Provinces promoting a Protestant alliance.¹⁴ Oldenbarnevelt was already familiar, therefore, with the Swedish cause when Hugo Muys van Holy introduced him to Jan Rutgers, his nephew.

Hugo Muys van Holy, as mentioned earlier, was a distinguished

¹³ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), pp. 225-586.

¹⁴ Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 1, p. 149., A. Tjaden, "The Dutch in the Baltic, 1544-1721", in Rystad (ed.), *The Baltic in Power Politics, 1500-1990*, Stockholm, 1994, pp. 65-67.

statesman and member of the States General as well as a delegate to the local Holland States. His high stature among his colleagues was confirmed by his selection to attend the Synod of Dort, in 1618, as a lay representative of the Holland States.¹⁵ The Synod performed the important business of clarifying Calvinist doctrine for the United Provinces by settling the rivalry between the Calvinists and the Arminians.¹⁶ Unaccountably, Dahlgren failed to mention this singular vote of confidence from Muys' fellow delegates.

Rutgers and Muys van Holy's first meeting with Oldenbarnevelt, in July 1616, was not encouraging. Although he was sympathetic to the crown's need for a loan, he revealed to Rutgers that James I of England was calling in an old loan dating back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth in the amount of 28 barrels of gold. This meant that new expenditures by the States General were not currently possible. Oldenbarnevelt remained, however, a friend of the Swedish cause.¹⁷

A couple of months later the atmosphere had changed considerably. In earlier correspondence the king asked van Dijk and Rutgers to approach the States General for a loan covering the second installment of the Älvsborg reimbursement (250,000 RD).¹⁸ When the diet met, in October of 1616, van Dijk and Rutgers visited each delegate in private. Oldenbarnevelt also asserted his valuable influence, and after a complicated negotiation, the States General agreed to provide a loan in the amount of 150,000 RD, to be granted on 27 December 1616. By early January Rutgers was on his way to Göteborg with the lion's share of the Dutch contribution. It is noteworthy that Rutgers, the junior partner in the official Swedish diplomatic team, brought the funds to pay the reimbursement. It's also important to note that at about that time, Rutgers took over the responsi-

¹⁵ Dewald (2004), p. 163.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 13, p. 231. The cities of Brill and Flushing plus other properties were security for the loan, so payment was necessary.

¹⁸ Dahlgren (1923). 1, p. 53.

bility of corresponding with the chancellor from van Dijck. This allowed him to promote his own agenda as well as show off his Latin to the chancellor. Both would prove significant in time.

Now, we must explain how the loans worked. In theory, each loan was secured by future copper shipments from Sweden. The States General charged the crown interest on the loans and the crown made interest payments by shipping copper to Amsterdam and selling it there. Unfortunately, the crown was often tempted to use the copper revenue for other purposes, such as weapon procurement, or payments owed to armies in the field. For that reason, the crown's representatives in Amsterdam were constantly asking for more copper to be sent. Also, the loans to the crown from the States General were almost always in arrears.

Meanwhile, Rutgers, no sooner back in Amsterdam, was asked by the king to pursue a new loan to help cover the third payment of the reimbursement. Rutgers replied that the provisional Holland States would not be in session for several months, and that a new loan so soon was unlikely. But he could try to extend the terms of the current loan to avoid paying down principal for a year. This would be possible if the interest payments were up to date. In that regard Rutgers urged the king to ship copper as soon as possible so it could be sold to make interest payments.¹⁹

On 16 September 1617, Rutgers wrote that he was in Dordrecht, once again meeting with Oldenbarnevelt. The senior statesman was not optimistic about further loans. The most revealing part of the letter to the king and the chancellor was Rutgers' praise for his uncle. He related that Oldenbarnevelt complimented Muys van Holy because of his continued efforts to persuade his fellow delegates to vote more financial support for Sweden.²⁰ In fact, Rutgers mentions his uncle's efforts no fewer than 31 times in his correspondence with the chancellor.

Rutgers wrote again to the chancellor in July 1618 and proposed

¹⁹ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 13, p. 253.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

another lobbying campaign as soon as the overdue copper arrived. The king responded to Rutgers with the promise of letters of nobility for him and an estate in either Estonia or Älvsborg for Muys if they succeeded in floating another loan for the fourth payment.²¹

At about this time the fragile cooperation between the Rutgers and Muys van Holy faction, on one side, and de Geer and van Dijck on the other, began to break down. In a letter dated 19 May 1618, Rutgers requested that the chancellor withhold sensitive information from van Dijck. Again, on 16 July 1618, Rutgers wrote that he no longer trusted van Dijck.²² This overt sign of conflict was a direct consequence of the ongoing rivalry between Muys and de Geer over the copper monopoly for Amsterdam, and it's apparent that the quest for loans in the United Provinces quickly became a contest for crown approval leading to the monopoly.

Despite the king's poor payment performance, the States General agreed to a further loan of 150,000 RD to help Sweden make the final payment. Rutgers personally delivered the payment to the Danish port city of Korsör. By any measure this was a positive achievement for Rutgers and Muys van Holy. The key was gaining the support of the provincial Holland States located in Amsterdam. Muys, a member of the States, helped Rutgers carry on a lobbying campaign. Their efforts included visits to the mayor of Amsterdam and meetings with individual city council members.²³ According to Dahlgren the Rutgers, Muys van Holy team managed to negotiate a total of 293,000 RD in loans from the States General toward the Älvsborg reimbursement. This is just shy of 30 percent of the total obligation.²⁴ This left Rutgers and his uncle clearly ahead in the struggle for royal favor.

²¹ Dahlgren (1923), 1, p. 54.

²² Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 13, pp. 285, 296.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁴ Dahlgren (1923), 1, p. 61.

De Geer and van Dijck in the Arms Business. Section Two

In the early part of the seventeenth century Louis de Geer was already a successful merchant in Amsterdam operating mainly as a weapons dealer. He soon made the acquaintance of Dr. Johan van Dijck, the Swedish crown's representative most involved in arms procurement. As we shall see, de Geer's arms business made him indispensable to the crown. He had the ability to supply large shipments to the Swedish army, and he took payment in copper, a great convenience to the crown. Although it was not apparent at the beginning of the rivalry, de Geer's stature as an important arms dealer was key to his bid for the copper monopoly. We will explore his critical partnership with van Dijck in this section.

The first transaction we will examine was an early direct arms sale Louis de Geer made to the Swedish crown. Few arms merchants, even those operating in Amsterdam, were capable of supplying the quantities of gun powder, muskets, pikes, bandoleers, etc., needed by the Swedish war machine. Yet, how was Louis de Geer able to assemble such large quantities of arms needed by the crown? The correspondence we have, does not explain de Geer's success, but it does contain some intriguing hints.

In a letter to the king dated April 1624, de Geer complained that the shortage of weapons in Europe was causing problems for his normal practice. He explained that his suppliers were small, family-owned enterprises, located in Liège, Cologne, Namur, Aachen, and Solingen. Liège and Namur were in the Southern Netherlands, or Spanish Netherlands. This area was ruled by the Infante Isabella (1566-1639), the daughter of Phillip II (1527-1598). In the above message de Geer asked the king of Sweden to issue a passport and a letter convincing the Infante to allow his agents to operate in her districts. It was already too late in Namur where the Spanish Procurer General had arrested a family of workers and confiscated 40,000 RD that de Geer had advanced to them.²⁵

²⁵ Dahlgren (1934), p. 77.

Apparently, Louis de Geer had assembled a network of small family firms in the provinces he mentioned above. These probably consisted of a master craftsman, and his workers and apprentices.²⁶ If de Geer received an order for 4,000 muskets, for example, he would distribute the business among several small shops and make advances so they could buy the necessary raw materials and pay for labor. This was doubtless a common model of proto capitalism for pre-industrial Europe, reminiscent of the “putting out” economic model found in the textile market.²⁷

Now that we know the source of de Geer’s armaments, we can return to the sale of weapons to the Swedish crown. The first meeting between buyers and sellers took place on 24 January 1618, in Amsterdam. Louis de Geer, the seller, met with the Swedish ambassador Jacob van Dijck. Johan Skytte was also present.²⁸

What emerged from the meeting was not a formal contract, but rather a “letter of intent.” The terms were straightforward. The king of Sweden was prepared to spend 60,000 DG on arms and ammunitions. Louis de Geer’s nephew, Steffen Gerard, traveled to Stockholm with a list of available weapons and prices. The king or his agent negotiated with Gerard and established a list of purchases. The prices were agreed before shipment so there was no ambiguity. De Geer would collect and ship the weapons and armaments in April, or as soon as the harbor at Stockholm was clear of ice. Finally, the king agreed to pay “the majority” of the 60,000 DG before the weapons sailed.

The next meeting between the parties did not take place until May 1618, and to understand the nature of the agreement some background information is necessary.²⁹ Louis de Geer, merchant of Amsterdam, would now provide weapons and ammunition for

²⁶ Ibid. De Geer used the term “les ouvriers” to describe the workers involved.

²⁷ For a further explanation see Dewald (2004), 3, p. 380.

²⁸ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 10, p. 208. Skytte was in Amsterdam for meetings with Count Maurice and Count William of Nassau.

²⁹ Dahlgren (1934), p. 15.

80,000DG, a substantial increase compared to the value discussed in January. In the interim the States General had agreed to provide a 40,000 DG subsidy to the Swedish cause to be used to fund weapons procurement. This was a generous contribution because the crown was still in arrears to the States General for the loans mentioned earlier. The 40,000 DG balance was to be provided by the Swedish crown. Naturally the crown did not have cash on hand, so de Geer agreed to extend credit to the crown for the missing 40,000 DG. In return, the ambassador pledged that de Geer would receive the next 300 skp of copper to arrive in Amsterdam from Stockholm.³⁰

In his dealings with de Geer and the crown, Jacob van Dijck was a careful and meticulous administrator. He sent the prices and quantities of weapons to the king via de Geer's nephew and received approval from the crown for each item at a fixed price. The list survives and was signed by van Dijck. Significantly, not only did van Dijck list the items available, but he also explained to the king the many shady tactics practiced by the Amsterdam merchants to inflate their profits.

Let's take the example of gunpowder, an absolute necessity for a seventeenth-century army. The figures are in Swedish *daler*, or SD. A Swedish dollar contained 30 stuver, and the ongoing rate for gun powder in Amsterdam at the time was nine Swedish stuver per pound. An Amsterdam *skeppfund* was the equivalent of 300 pounds, and the issue was the difference in weight between Amsterdam and Stockholm. A *skeppund* in Stockholm weighed 13 percent more than in Amsterdam. So, for example, if 1,000 skd weighed 300,000 pounds in Amsterdam, their weight went up to 339,000 pounds in Stockholm. Van Dijck stated that "on every 100 skd, merchants had a profit of 13 percent if they used the Stockholm *skeppfund*."³¹ In effect they were buying in Amsterdam *skeppfund* and selling the same quantity for 13 percent more in Stockholm. Or, the Amsterdam mer-

³⁰ Ibid., p. 16. For information on the king's use of copper for payments see Stryker (2017), vol. 65, no. I, pp. 52-69.

³¹ Dahlgren (1934), p. 17.

chants were buying 870 skd in Amsterdam and selling 1000 skd at the same price per *skeppfund*.³²

Including the normal profit plus the 13 percent bonus, van Dijck calculated that the uninformed procurement agent would pay 148,312.5 SD for 1,000 skd of gun powder on a “delivered Stockholm” basis. Van Dijck, then, listed the costs from the warehouse in Amsterdam to the port of Stockholm as in table 1.

TABLE 1
Gunpowder

Cost of 1000 skd of 300,000 lbs at 9 stuver per lb	SD	90,000
As profit for his majesty's trusted servant 6%	SD	5,002
Inland freight and barge freight	SD	100,000
Ocean freight from Amsterdam to Stockholm at 7 SD per last. If we get a better rate it goes to His Majesty	SD	600,000
Insurance for over 80,000 SD at the rate of 2.5%	SD	2,000
Total cost to Stockholm	SD	97,762
Amount saved	SD	50,500
Normal Cost	SD	148,312

Source: Dahlgren (1934), p. 17.

In fact, van Dijck was proposing a 50 percent saving for the 1,000 skd of gun powder. In addition, he suggested a strategy for future purchases:

“The merchants here respect Your Majesty, but the best prices for the purchase of gun powder are not to be found here, but in Cologne, Liège and other locations.”³³

He mentioned that the price of gun powder could increase by two to three stuver per pound if “a great party” came into the market and bought up the available inventories. Van Dijck reminded the king that he needed powder regardless of the price so it would be

³² Ibid., p. 20.

³³ Ibid.

advisable for him to buy regularly when an opportunity was available. Looking to alternative sourcing locations (such as Hamburg), he counseled, is not always the answer because “what is dear in Amsterdam is dear everywhere.”³⁴

Van Dijck made a similar calculation for shipments of muskets, horse harnesses, and carbines for the mounted troops and rapiers for the infantry. He listed each item and the details of the transactions.

Van Dijck ended with a little self-promotion. He explained to the king that he was the master of such arms deals and an expert at arranging the deliveries. Without his help no other prince could buy at such favorable terms, for van Dijck’s stated goal was to earn the king’s trust with his good service.

Despite the occasional lapse into self-congratulations, this is a noteworthy document. Van Dijck provided the king with a transparent schedule of prices in Amsterdam, for the full range of weapons, ammunitions, and war materials. It provided the crown the opportunity to regulate, in fine detail, the procurement of arms and ammunitions. By exposing the apparently normal merchant practice of profiting from the weight differences between Amsterdam and Stockholm, van Dijck gave the crown a powerful tool for limiting corruption. One would expect Gustav Adolf to be deeply grateful to his ambassador for this complicated document, especially since a major weapons purchase was successfully negotiated on his behalf and shipped.³⁵

In reviewing the material above, two aspects are notable. First, we notice the close cooperation between van Dijck and de Geer. They supplied the king with a thorough and complete survey of the contemporary arms market. No subsequent arms purchase contained even a fraction of the information and advice. See, for example, the weapons contract negotiated between Rutgers and de Geer on 16 June 1622, after van Dijck’s departure from Amsterdam. It contained

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁵ Oxenstierna (1888-Present, 2, 13, p. 214.

none of the advice and market information in the first contract.³⁶ Van Dijck and de Geer developed a fruitful working relationship. Later, when van Dijck fell out of favor, de Geer mounted a spirited defense of his friend. The second point is related to the first; considering van Dijck and de Geer's thoroughness on the weapons contract, why did the crown ignore them and reward their rivals with the copper monopoly?

The Award of the Monopoly Leads to Open Hostility Between the Factions. Section Three

A legacy from the first weapons contract was the immediate cause of the break between the two factions. The reader will recall that de Geer granted credit to the crown as part of the first arms deal and, therefore, he was entitled to receive the first 300 skd of copper shipped to Amsterdam as partial repayment.³⁷ On 8 June, 1618, Johan Skytte announced by letter that the first 130 skd of copper would arrive in Amsterdam shortly, and they were to be followed by a much larger quantity.³⁸ De Geer was prepared to take delivery of the first shipment in compliance with the contract. On 12 July, however, Muys van Holy announced that he had a letter from the king, dated 26 March 1618, granting him (Muys) a complete monopoly on the import of Swedish copper. This meant he had the privilege of receiving and distributing the shipments. It also meant he had the right to make a profit on the eventual sale of the copper.

The king granted the potentially lucrative monopoly to Muys as a reward for the work he did in securing the loans from the States General. The real mystery, therefore, was not the monopoly itself, but why it was concealed until de Geer was ready to receive the delivery. The king further instructed Muys to use the 130 skd for im-

³⁶ Dahlgren (1923), p. 65.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁸ Dahlgren (1934), 1, p. 56.

mediate necessities and the balance should go to Rutgers to be used to pay crown officials in the United Provinces.³⁹ Smarting from the humiliation of this treatment, de Geer sent an envoy from Amsterdam, named Balthasar van Camitz, to meet with Oxenstierna in Stockholm.

De Geer's instructions to van Camitz have survived, and they reveal the deep animosity that existed between the factions in Amsterdam. De Geer, in fact, accused Muys of carrying out a campaign of slander against Ambassador van Dijck. He complained that his misinformation against the ambassador brought disgrace and discredit to the Swedish crown. In the instructions, de Geer accused Muys of telling his colleagues in the provincial Holland States that the Swedish king no longer trusted van Dijck and did not want him involved in the sale of copper in Amsterdam. He even stated that van Dijck had been relieved of duty as the official ambassador of Sweden. Naturally, that made it nearly impossible for van Dijck to be an effective advocate for the Swedish crown.⁴⁰

The most serious complaint de Geer made against Muys was that the nobleman quietly worked against additional loans or loan guarantees to the crown in the Holland States and in the States General. His motive was to gain time to improve his position as the monopoly seller of copper in Amsterdam.⁴¹ Dahlgren alleged that Oldenbarnevelt already suspected Muys' treachery early in 1618, and that he warned van Dijck. This was confirmed in a letter from the chancellor to van Dijck dated 15 September 1618.⁴²

The accusation of treachery is sufficiently serious to merit some additional comment. First, it's noteworthy that the evidence is based solely on the correspondence between de Geer and the crown. Dahlgren does not cite any additional sources. Second, de Geer did not enjoy a spotless reputation for honesty in his dealings with the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dahlgren (1934), p. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Dahlgren (1923), 1, pp. 56-57.

king and the chancellor.⁴³ Given this record I am skeptical of the accusation. In addition, one should note that Johan Skytte was in Amsterdam observing the Muys and Rutgers' lobbying efforts and he, far from raising alerts, was full of praise for the team effort.⁴⁴

De Geer's Memorandum and van Dijck's Recall. Section Four

During the continuing intrigue, de Geer composed a detailed memorandum documenting the argument between van Muys on one hand and Jacob van Dijck on the other. Unfortunately, we do not know for whom the document was intended. Most likely it was sent to the chancellor, but we cannot confirm that. It was, however, one of the documents transcribed and published in the collection assembled by Dahlgren from the Leufsta archive.

In the report, De Geer mentioned that Muys insisted, from the beginning, that he would concentrate on the Holland States because he was a member of the august body and directed van Dijck to concentrate on the other six diets. Since the Holland States were located in Amsterdam, they were the wealthiest and most influential of the regional diets. Keeping the Holland States to himself allowed van Muys to secretly plot with its members. Also, according to de Geer, Muys' goal was to use the loan requests as a means to keep the copper monopoly. If he could gain time, he could use a potential loan agreement as a bargaining chip with the crown. As mentioned previously, Oldenbarnevelt suspected van Muys' strategy and informed van Dijck.⁴⁵

On August 10, 1618, Oldenbarnevelt was arrested for treason and executed after a sham trial. This was the retribution for his role in the Arminian heresy controversies, discussed earlier in connection with the Synod of Dort. The Swedish delegation was now without

⁴³ Stryker (2014), Issue 3, pp. 131-162.

⁴⁴ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 13, p. 247.

⁴⁵ Dahlgren (1934), p. 32.

an independent sponsor in the States General. De Geer alleged that Muys took advantage of the situation by writing to the crown complaining about van Dijck. In addition, he accused Muys and Rutgers of withholding critical information from the ambassador on the progress of the negotiations.⁴⁶

According to de Geer's report, during the second half of 1618, van Muys openly stated that van Dijck was no longer authorized to negotiate business on behalf of the crown, and that the king distrusted him. For this reason, all future crown business should be conducted through Muys' nephew, Jan Rutgers.⁴⁷ This included the monopoly on imported copper that Muys enjoyed during all of 1618, and which, according to de Geer, brought excessive profits to Muys and his nephew. Finally, de Geer accused the pair of profiting when they exchanged the Dutch Guilders lent by the States into *rixdaler* required by the Peace of Knäred for reimbursement payments. De Geer claimed that the pair was making a profit of three or four percent on every transaction⁴⁸ but this complaint sounded hypocritical. Other research demonstrates that de Geer was not shy about squeezing every last *stuver* from his own transactions.⁴⁹

We do know that Gustav Adolf had mixed feelings about van Dijck and eventually replaced him as ambassador, despite the seniority of van Dijck's service to the Swedish crown, that went back to the reign of Erik IX. There was, moreover, a single incident that Dahlgren blames for the crown's loss of confidence in van Dijck. In a letter dated 20 February 1619, the king requested that the States General allow him to repay an earlier loan for the Älvsborg reimbursement over the course of six years, instead of the four years originally negotiated. He so informed Muys, Rutgers, and van Dijck by letter and asked them to lobby the States General for the desired result. Muys and Rutgers were encouraging. Van Dijck, to the contrary,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁹ Stryker (2014), pp. 131-162.

was decidedly against the proposal.⁵⁰ Van Dijck was convinced that such a request, if pursued, would undermine all his efforts to improve the kings' credit in Amsterdam. In April van Dijck expressed his misgivings in a letter to the king. Gustav Adolf was apparently highly displeased with this reaction and ordered van Dijck to make a presentation to the States General asking for the delay. He did make the presentation on 28 August and on 3 October the States General unanimously rejected the request. Muys was present at the States General for the vote but the king blamed van Dijck for the outcome. According to Dahlgren, this incident was the proximate cause of van Dijck's downfall.⁵¹

In April 1620, the king finally lost patience with van Dijck and recalled him. The king appointed a native Swede, Peter Falck, as the ambassador's replacement. Dahlgren observed that perhaps van Dijck was too expensive for poor Sweden, but, on the other extreme, Falck made an unfavorable impression because his clothes were not appropriate for an ambassador to the United Provinces.⁵² Despite Falck's wardrobe the king ordered him to seek out Muys and to express the king's gratitude for his assistance with the loans from the States General. The king also asked Falck to arrange for van Dijck's immediate departure for Sweden.⁵³

Dahlgren does not say, but one has the impression that Muys was poisoning the king's mind regarding van Dijck's motives.⁵⁴ This was probably aimed at discrediting him before he reached Stockholm where he could tell the king his side of the story, face to face. In fact, Rutgers voiced concern that van Dijck, upon his return to Sweden, would take legal action against Muys van Holy. He expressed this fear in a February letter to the chancellor.⁵⁵ The king's displeasure with van Dijck was, in fairness, short lived. In 1621 the

⁵⁰ Dahlgren (1923), 1, p. 62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 13, pp. 330-331.

king appointed van Dijck to the board of governors of the newly rebuilt Goteborg.⁵⁶

De Geer wrote one last letter to van Dijck on the eve of the latter's departure for Sweden. In it he promised to look after van Dijck's affairs in Amsterdam after he left. De Geer also made one amusing remark to van Dijck about their mutual nemesis, Muys van Holy, "When the Schout [Muys] gets his foot on the rope ladder he scurries up [to the loft] and eats all the peaches." In other words, Muys was greedy as well as furtive.⁵⁷

De Geer's Temporary Fall from Grace. Section Five

Not accepting defeat, de Geer continued to pursue the illusive copper monopoly. His current strategy was simply to ignore Muys and purchase a substantial quantity directly from the king. His goal remained to dominate Amsterdam copper trade. In November 1619, de Geer's nephew, Steven Gerard, signed a contract on behalf of his uncle to buy 4,500 skd of copper for 40 RD per skd. (Muys' monopoly must have, by this time, expired.) Delivery was to begin in October 1620, at the rate of 1,500 skd per year for three years. The payment of 60,000 RD per year, was to coincide with the deliveries. The contract also stipulated that the buyer would make an unsecured loan to the crown in the amount of 60,000 RD. It's important to note that de Geer was not the sole buyer; to spread the risk he organized a syndicate of investors.⁵⁸

The contract was a problem for de Geer and his syndicate from the beginning. While the king was in negotiations with Gerard, he was also working to establish a chartered firm, called the Copper Company. It was loosely modeled after the Dutch East India Company, and its role was to market copper in Europe. By the time the

⁵⁶ Dahlgren (1923), 1, p. 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43. This was also a play on words. Muys was similar to the Dutch word for mouse, Muis.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

first shipment was due on the de Geer contract, the Copper Company was functioning. The king chose to favor his new entity and he sold all available copper through it. He simply ignored his contract with the de Geer syndicate, which had lent him 60,000 RD shortly after they entered into the contract. This was, no doubt, highly embarrassing to de Geer, whose business depended on his reputation with the Amsterdam's commercial elite.⁵⁹

De Geer wrote a series of letters in February and March 1621, to Ambassador Falck and to the States General explaining the financial hardship he and his syndicate were enduring because of the king's failure to ship according to the contract. After being prodded by a letter from the king,⁶⁰ he also admitted that he had in his possession a total of DG 17,494 DG (equal to 6,998 RD) that belonged to the Swedish crown. He was now holding it as security. The amount was insignificant compared to the value of the copper contract. It was the remaining balance in de Geer's account after he made an interest payment to the States General for the king. Holding back 17,494 DG, however, infuriated the king who, in turn, made a series of impossible demands to settle the dispute.⁶¹ De Geer rejected the king's demands.

Curiously, it does seem that the king was mean-spirited in his threats to de Geer. It was the king, after all, who reneged a large contract. In the letter quoted above, the reported amount was originally 173,594 DG (69,438 RG), a significant amount, and the king had every right to be angered by such a brazen maneuver. It turned out, however, that someone in the king's financial administration had made a miscalculation error and the actual outstanding amount was 17,464 DG, or slightly more than ten percent of the original amount. Before the original letter was sent, someone in the king's treasury crossed out 173,594 DG and wrote in its place 17,494 DG. The ques-

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See Riksarkivet. SE/RA/1112.1/B/135 (1620), pp. 219-220. Letter from Gustav Adolf to Peter Falck. Stockholm, 6 November 1620.

⁶¹ Ibid.

tion, of course, is: did the king know of the mistake before he made the series of unreasonable demands?⁶²

The matter dragged on for months until it was settled by necessity. In August 1621, the king led an invasion force of 14,000 men into Polish Livonia and occupied the strategic port city of Riga. Suddenly the crown needed de Geer's expertise as an arms dealer and the dispute over the unshipped copper and the 17,494 DG was quietly dropped. In December 1621, the crown reached an agreement with de Geer's syndicate for the repayment of 60,000 RD.⁶³ By the summer, de Geer and the crown had completed another major arms supply contract.

In the sources examined so far, van Dijck and de Geer appear misused and ignored by the crown. For example, we examined the thoroughly detailed armament presentation that de Geer and van Dijck made to the crown in 1618. The result was the movement of two full shiploads of arms and ammunitions with a commercial value of 80,000 DG, to Stockholm. Later, in November 1619, de Geer's nephew, Steven Gerard, negotiated a major copper purchase with the king. The king was personally involved in the negotiation and introduced the contract with the words *Wir Gustaff Adolph*. Yet he never sent one *skeffund* on the contract, an embarrassment to de Geer.⁶⁴ Then came the unseemly row between de Geer and the king over a missing payment amounting to 17,494 DG. According to Dahlgren, van Dijck was deeply involved in lobbying both the States General as well as the regional diets during this period. And this leads to the question: Why did the crown treat de Geer and van Dijck so poorly while rewarding Muys and Rutgers with the copper monopoly and the promise of land and titles? As we shall soon see, Dahlgren failed to mention other factors that persuaded Gustav Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna to believe and reward Rutgers and Muys, and distrust van Dijck and de Geer.

⁶² See Riksarkivet. SE/RA/1112.1/B/135 (1620), pp. 113-115, Letter from Gustav Adolf to Peter Falk concerning the contract with Louis de Geer. Stockholm, 6 September 1620.

⁶³ Dahlgren (1934), p. 63.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Johan Skytte. Section Six

Since the appearance of the de Geer biography in 1923, Dahlgren's interpretation of the relationship between Muys, Rutgers, de Geer, and van Dijck has been generally accepted. That's not to imply that Dahlgren was wrong, only that like any dominant figure, his assumptions should be periodically re-examined. Ironically, the documents for such a forensic exercise have been available since 1900, 23 years before Dahlgren's biography. The evidence is contained in the letters of Johan Skytte to the king and the chancellor published in volume ten of the letters received by Axel Oxenstierna.

As mentioned earlier, Johan Skytte was traveling in Europe on diplomatic business from September 1617 to December 1618 and spent much of the time in the Dutch Republic. From this vantage point, Skytte maintained a lengthy and detailed correspondence with the king and Oxenstierna. In October 1617, for example, he wrote that Rutgers and van Dijck worked well together in their lobbying efforts with the States General. Soon thereafter, however, Skytte became disillusioned with van Dijck. In a letter dated 11 November 1617, he reported to the king that he was staying with van Dijck in Amsterdam, and his house was a *mechte Kaasteligit*, a mighty castle.⁶⁵ He further observed that the ambassador spent lavishly to live in grand style. He even related that van Dijck was spending 32 DG per day for his (Skytte's) food; surely this was an exaggeration to make a point. Later, in the same letter, Skytte stated categorically that van Dijck spent too much.⁶⁶ He implied, thereby, that the sources of van Dijck's income might be worthy of suspicion.

In the same correspondence, he told the king not to worry about supplying him with cash, explaining that the local businesspeople including van Dijck, routinely wrote bills of exchange to one another for amounts ranging from 6,000 to 8,000 DG. Skytte was clearly impressed by the prosperity on display. He observed that de Geer sup-

⁶⁵ Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 10, p. 206.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

plied him with funds, and that he was not expecting favors in return.⁶⁷

Finally, and most disturbing, Skytte made an assertion that surely doomed van Dijck's efforts to remain in Amsterdam as Swedish ambassador. On 28 September 1617, Skytte wrote to the king and the chancellor, alleging, in confidence, that van Dijck had done nothing to help the effort to obtain loans for the reimbursement.⁶⁸ Adding to the mystery, Skytte related, again in confidence, that van Dijck had "irregular" religious beliefs which were odd, even for liberal Holland. He did not elaborate, but this news alone would have given pause to the strict Lutheran crown.⁶⁹

Later, on 12 October 1617, Skytte turned to Rutgers. Initially he had reservations, fearing that Rutgers lacked the kind of confidence necessary for an effective lobbying effort. He observed, for example, that Rutgers did not mix well with the members of the States General in large groups.⁷⁰ In fact, Skytte suggested to the king, that Muys and Oldenbarnevelt should do the direct lobbying because, as he observed, they had the same rank as the deputies and were familiar with current controversies, including the pending religious crisis.⁷¹ Above all, haste was necessary. The final reimbursement payment was due in January 1619, and a whole year was needed to organize the copper shipments and the bills of exchange.

Oddly and surprisingly, just one month later, on 11 November, Skytte's opinion of Rutgers had completely changed. Presumably this was the result of traveling together with Rutgers and watching him interact with people of influence and power. Skytte now sang Rutgers' praises to the king. "Regarding Rutgers I can declare that he is truthful and objective. He spares no pain in promoting Your Majesty's interests." Skytte went on to observe that Rutgers had

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 220.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 202.

⁷¹ This is the Arminian controversy mentioned earlier.

many influential relatives and friends who helped him to persuade the States General and the Holland States to extend loans for the reimbursement. "They were especially helpful in getting a contribution for the third-year payment of the reimbursement [due January 1618]." In summary, Skytte now found Rutgers exemplary; "Rutgers, *Herr Kanseler*, is a reliable man with a great knowledge of the king's affairs. He has his eye on the future and he comes from a good family with many friends."⁷²

The correspondence clearly shows that since their first encounter, in October 1617, Skytte also looked with favor Rutgers' uncle, Hugo Muys van Holy. Upon Skytte's arrival in the United Provinces, Rutgers whisked him to The Hague and introduced him to Muys, whom he described as his *maderbroder*, or uncle. Muys immediately demonstrated his value as a lobbyist by introducing Skytte to the most important deputies in the States General. "It was done with great solemnity and order."⁷³ In the same letter Skytte described Muys' friends in The Hague as "people of wealth and quality, and ready to help our efforts."⁷⁴ This was certainly not the Hugo Muys that Dahlgren accused of treachery.

Skytte was impressed by wealth and power. After only a brief acquaintance with Muys and Rutgers he decided that, henceforth, they should handle all diplomatic correspondence between Sweden and the United Provinces. "It is sensible for Mysius [Muys] to take over the correspondence with Sweden that was originally handled by Dijkio [van Dijck]."⁷⁵ This was a serious and startling move, because it undercut van Dijck's role as the Swedish ambassador without any further explanation. What was even more mysterious, is that the king and chancellor appeared to accept the change without comment.

In December 1617, Muys took Skytte to Dordrecht to meet his

⁷² Oxenstierna (1888-Present), 2, 10, pp. 220-221.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210

brother, the Bailiff of Soedner Haalland, together with the mayor and the town council. Muys also introduced Skytte to his numerous friends and family including Jan Rutgers' relatives. They spent several days there wining and dining with members of the local elite. This was followed by a visit to Middelburg where they were met by Admiral Haultain of Zeeland. The admiral escorted them to their lodgings which Skytte considered a great honor. The following day Maurice, Count of Nassau and Bailiff of Vlissingen, organized a meeting with the wealthy burgers of the important harbor town. Despite, or perhaps because of, his common birth, Skytte was clearly impressed with the level of hospitality offered by the leading members of the States General and the local nobility. He kept the king and the chancellor informed on the details of the visit, because it signaled a favorable disposition toward Sweden's plight.⁷⁶

By early 1618, the crown was beginning to panic over the final reimbursement payment due on 20 January 1619. As explained, the process was tedious and time consuming. Even if copper was in Stockholm, ready for shipment, it could not be moved until the port was clear of ice. In some years this occurred only in May. Shipments from Sweden were normally not possible after St. Martin's Day (11 November).⁷⁷ Once delivered to Amsterdam, however, the crown's representative had to sell it. (By this time Rutgers and Muys had taken over the responsibility from van Dijck.) Normally they received the funds in Dutch Guilder which they had to change into *rixdaler*. Once converted, Rutgers would personally deliver the funds to Denmark. The process was prolonged, and all those involved must have been frustrated by the slow and irregular shipments from Stockholm.

Despite the slow progress, Skytte made excuses for his new friends. In a missive of 2 January 1618, Skytte informed the king that while Muys was accepted and trusted by the members of the States General, he could not perform miracles. "I can praise his trust and

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 223

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 246

sincerity in pursuit of His Majesty's business." He expressed the same sentiment for Rutgers who "works for His Majesty's interest with zeal."⁷⁸ Skytte recommended that the king reward these two faithful servants of the crown with payments. Later, in the same letter, Skytte again praised Muys and Rutgers for their tireless efforts to obtain funding for the reimbursement and suggested that Muys be given the title "His Majesty's Extraordinary Legate" as a reward. He also repeated the request that both be granted a cash payment for their loyal efforts. It's noteworthy that Skytte did not include van Dijck in the request.⁷⁹

Skytte was, moreover, an astute observer and his letters to the crown during this period are a veritable gold mine of information on the politics and commerce of the time. For example, he informed the king that copper was being smuggled out of Sweden and sent illegally to Lübeck, where it was being sold at a discount. This was affecting the prices in Amsterdam, making it more difficult to sell copper for the Älvsborg reimbursement.⁸⁰ On the political side Skytte reported that a certain Dr. Witte of Mecklenburg told him that Duke William of Kurland had been deposed, by his liege lord, the king of Poland, and was looking for allies to help him regain his throne. Skytte admonished the king not to get involved in the conflict. The king ignored the advice with unfortunate consequences. These are just two gems of information that Skytte forwarded to the crown.

Johan Skytte had influence with the crown and was responsible, at least partly, for the favoritism bestowed on Rutgers and van Holy. Tellingly, the suggestion that the monopoly be awarded to Muys van Holy came from Johan Skytte. On 23 December 1617, Skytte wrote to the king that "the best path forward is for Rutgers and Muys to coordinate all future shipments of copper to Amsterdam. They have all the right connections and Rutgers can travel to Älvsborg to make payments for the reimbursement."⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 197

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

Dahlgren never fully acknowledged Skytte's role, and his lack of objectivity towards the political factions in Amsterdam is disturbing because there is no competing narrative. We observed that Dahlgren was not a classically trained historian, yet his efforts were prodigious. The relevant sections of the commercial archives in Stockholm are riddled with his handwritten transcriptions of documents in both Swedish and Dutch, evidence that he did his homework. If we judge Dahlgren's motives, therefore, we must, once again, restate that the de Geer biography was commissioned by a direct descendent, Baron Louis de Geer, an early twentieth century Swedish politician. Perhaps a strictly objective bibliography was never the patron's intention. Maybe the goal was simply to portray de Geer as a talented merchant and a proponent of industrial investment in early modern Sweden.

Conclusion

The theme of this study is the bitter conflict between de Geer and van Dijck on one side, and Rutgers and Muys on the other, over the right to sell Swedish copper in the active Amsterdam market. Equally important is the question of why, E.W. Dahlgren, de Geer's biographer, heavily favored the de Geer faction, to the point of ignoring strong evidence in favor of Muys and Rutgers. The question we asked repeatedly in this article is why did an enlightened monarch and his competent chancellor neglect one faction of their servants stationed in the United Provinces? According to de Geer, Ambassador van Dijck worked side by side with Rutgers and later with Muys lobbying the members of the States General, yet the latter got all the credit and the unfortunate van Dijck was ignored.

We saw the attention and enormous effort that went into the arms shipments supervised by de Geer and van Dijck. It was a tutorial on how to structure an arms and ammunition purchase without falling victim to the overly clever Amsterdam merchants. No subsequent Swedish arms purchase in Amsterdam, documented in the de

Geer correspondence, was as transparent as the one involving van Dijck. This is the picture created by Dahlgren. He praised the efforts of de Geer and van Dijck and implied that van Dijck was the victim of Muys' treachery.

The Hugo Muys described by Dahlgren was ruthlessly in pursuit of the copper monopoly that was granted to him by the crown in the early 1618, but Muys only announced the charter on 12 July 1618, as de Geer was about to take delivery of 130 skd owed to him by the crown. As a result, de Geer paid Muys an extra 4,268 RD for the shipment.⁸² Dahlgren, we learned, even accused Muys of outright treason because he allegedly worked to delay a loan decision by the States General and the Holland States. The crown desperately needed the loan.

We have examined many other instances of the crown favoring van Muys and Rutgers. The reason for the favoritism can nearly always be found in the correspondence of Johan Skytte, and his influence can hardly be exaggerated. Yet it is surprising that Dahlgren tended to ignore or downplay Skytte's role in the politics of reimbursement loans and copper distribution. We know that Dahlgren was aware of Skytte's exhaustive correspondence with the king and the chancellor because he clearly cites the collection in his notes for chapter three.⁸³ Dahlgren does not, however, cite any specific letters from Skytte to the crown. It's difficult to say, therefore, the extent to which Dahlgren used the correspondence, if at all.

De Geer wanted to represent the king for copper sales in Amsterdam, Skytte recommended that the monopoly be handled by Muys and Rutgers, and the latter were granted the lucrative charter. At the same time, De Geer praised van Dijck's lobbying efforts for the reimbursement loans, and Skytte, in another scathing remark, told the king and chancellor that van Dijck was no help at all in obtaining loans from the States General. There are numerous additional examples. The rivalry between van Muys and Rutgers on one

⁸² Dahlgren (1934), p. 28.

⁸³ Dahlgren (1923), 2, p. 578.

hand, and de Geer and van Dijck on the other, cannot be understood by reading Dahlgren alone. Without the Skytte correspondence, the position of the crown towards de Geer and van Dijck is impossible to explain.

Epilogue

By 1620 it appeared that Rutgers and his uncle had won the day. It's true that the advent of the Copper Company had blunted Muys' claims on the copper sales monopoly, but young Rutgers was firmly entrenched as the leading representative of the Swedish crown in Amsterdam. The king and the chancellor sent him on a series of foreign missions, and he performed admirably on all of them. Tragically, Rutgers' promising career was cut short by a sudden illness in 1626. He died at the age of 36.⁸⁴ His uncle, Muys van Holy, remained active in Dutch Republic politics and was last mentioned by Rutgers as member of a civilian delegation at the siege of Breda in April 1625.

Despite departing Amsterdam under a cloud, van Dijck soon regained the royal confidence. In addition to receiving landed estate from the crown as a reward for his service, van Dijck was appointed to the board of governors of the newly rebuilt Göteborg in 1621.

De Geer's subsequent career was the most brilliant of the group. After defaulting on the 4,500 skd copper purchase, the crown established a permanent relationship with de Geer. He continued to supply weapons to the Swedish army in the following decades. Starting from the late 1620s, de Geer also began investing in iron and copper smelting works in Sweden. Within a couple of years, he was the leading industrialist in Sweden. He died in 1652, and he was one of the wealthiest capitalists of his time.

⁸⁴ Oxenstiern (1888-Present), 2, 13, p. 19.

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