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a cura di
VIRGILIO ILARI



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Testiera (Shaffron) per cavallo, Brescia (?) 1560-70
Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York. Public Domain

The Brandenburg Navy Construction of a Fiction

By MARKO RICHTER

ABSTRACT. As of today, the Great Elector's fleet has been referred to in historiography as "the navy". However, this was not a scientific objective, but rather a political purpose. The protagonists of the Brandenburg fleet, especially Benjamin Raule (1634-1707), considered warships important, not as an end in themselves, but for the protection of Brandenburg's merchant ships and for the business of privateering. For this re-examination of the Brandenburg fleet, the identification of a previously unknown painting and the analysis of the content of a frequently cited painting as a source are of great importance. Furthermore, the review of the written sources also supports the new view. However, the unchanged use of terms of modern institutions for historical institutions and concepts must also be questioned.

KEYWORDS. NAVY – BRANDENBURG – ELECTORATE OF BRANDENBURG – PRIVATEERING – MARITIME PAINTING – ADMIRALTY

Introduction

Although the maritime history of the Electorate of Brandenburg represents only a minor chapter in the region's history, many texts have been published on the subject. These texts range from individual academic theses written in recent years, popular science treatises and articles, to novels and stories. However, most of these publications appeared before 1945 and did not consider or exploit all of the available sources. This necessitates a critical examination of the existing published literature on the maritime activities under Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg (1620 - 1688).

The earliest known retrospective appeared in 1688 and was commissioned on the occasion of the death of Elector Friedrich Wilhelm¹. Accordingly, there is no factual knowledge to be gained from this eulogy. The next publication was based on a manuscript dating from 1755 and was not published until 1767 and

¹ Georg Christian SAUR, *Serenissimi atq[ue] potentissimi ... Friderici Wilhelmi magni, Marchionis Brandenburgici ... res gestae marinae ...*, Frankfurt (Oder), 1688.

again in 1864². In 1789 there was another publication of a summary text that had been the subject of a lecture at the Academy of Sciences in January 1781³. There are few details to be gleaned from either of these works, and from today's perspective they can only serve as a general overview. For further research, publications based directly on sources and source editions published from 1839 to 1939 are of greater importance. Surprisingly, given this brief period of time, the source analyses do not merely make a passing reference to Brandenburg's maritime history but, with the Richard Schück's 1889 edition of a small portion of the files from the Prussian Privy State Archives, explicitly refer to colonial and maritime history⁴.

The work of Hans Szymanski dating from 1939 has been selected for the period after the First World War. Szymanski once again turned to the archives to carry out research and publish as much as possible on the "maritime armaments" of the Electorate of Brandenburg, Brandenburg-Prussia and the Kingdom of Prussia from 1605 to 1815⁵. Although the overall number of publications on the theme has fallen, reconstructive model-making has introduced a completely new subject⁶.

After the Second World War, most research using historical sources stopped. It was not until the appearance of publications by Hans Georg Stelzer, Adam Jones, Jürgen G. Nagel and Ulrich von der Heyden in the 1980s that the subject was revisited on a larger scale⁷. By examining a variety of individual aspects of the

2 Heinrich VON BORCKE, *Die brandenburgisch-preußische Marine und die Africanische Compagnie. Nach einem vom Jahre 1755 datirten, in französischer Sprache geschriebenen Manuscripte*, Köln, 1864.

3 Ewald Friedrich VON HERTZBERG, «Abhandlung, welche einige Anekdoten aus der Regierung Churfürst Friedrich Wilhelm des Großen von Brandenburg und besonders Nachrichten von desselben See-Unternehmungen enthält», in Ewald Friedrich VON HERTZBERG, *Acht Abhandlungen, welche in der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin an den Geburtsfesten des Königs im Jänner 1780 bis 1787 vorgelesen worden*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1789.

4 Richard SCHÜCK (Hrsg.), *Brandenburg-Preußens Kolonial-Politik unter dem Großen Kurfürsten und seinen Nachfolgern (1647 – 1721)*, 2 vol., Leipzig, 1889.

5 Hans SZYMANSKI, *Brandenburg-Preußen zur See 1605-1815. Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der deutschen Marine*, Leipzig, Koehler-Amelang, 1939, p. VII.

6 Carl BUSLEY, *Die Entwicklung des Segelschiffes*, Berlin, 1920.

7 Hans Georg Stelzer, 'Mit herrlichen Häfen versehen'. *Brandenburgisch-preußische Seefahrt vor dreihundert Jahren*, Frankfurt (Main), 1981; Adam JONES, *Brandenburg Sources for West African History 1680-1700*, Stuttgart, 1985; Jürgen G. NAGEL, 'Weil nun die See-



Olfert de Vrij, “Grafschaft Mark” (left) and “Herzogtum Kleve” (right), Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Jörg P. Anders, from Thomas Feige (2007), cit., p. 127.

subject, also abroad, for example the biography of Benjamin Raule (1634-1707), or by taking a more up-to-date view of the colonial legacy, it would have been possible to take a fresh look at the history of the maritime activities of the Electorate of Brandenburg after 1990⁸. However, the treatment of the subject remained

fahrt die Seele der Commerzien ist...’. Die Brandenburgisch-Afrikanische Compagnie als Handelsunternehmen 1682-1717, Trier, 2004; Ulrich VAN DER HEYDEN, *Rote Adler an Afrikas Küste. Die brandenburgisch-preußische Kolonie Großfriedrichsburg an der westafrikanischen Küste*, Berlin, 1993.

8 Anneli PARTENHEIMER, *Die Schifffahrts- und Kolonialpolitik des großen Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg*, Mainz, Universität Mainz, 1976; Andrea WEINDL, *Die Kurbrandenburger im ‘atlantischen System’, 1650-1720*, (Arbeitspapiere zur Lateinamerikaforschung, II-03), Köln, Universität Köln, 2001; Thomas WOLLSCHLÄGER, *Die ‘Mi-*

limited to informative presentations in the context of other topics⁹. However, publications have also become known that have no relevance whatsoever. In two articles in “Schiff classic” of 2014 and 2021, Raule, a merchant, was transformed into a “fleet commander” who “left his mark on the entire naval history of Brandenburg”¹⁰. It was deemed especially important to posit the founding of a “Brandenburg navy”¹¹. Consequently, regular or even private shipyards were reclassified as “naval shipyards”¹². The Elector’s “fleet policy” also provided for the “state navy” to be used in a trading company in order to reduce costs¹³. By chance, however, the key to a different interpretation was revealed in the same text. The sources refer to Benjamin Raule both as “Directeur de la Marine” and “Chief Director of Maritime Affairs”. This clearly shows that in Raule’s time, the term *Marine* (navy) was understood in German to refer to the entirety of maritime affairs and not just its military aspect. In his text, Mr Kättilitz also used both versions of the title, though he especially highlighted the military aspects.

This treatise sets out to show that the Elector of Brandenburg and Raule did not intend to establish a *Kriegsmarine* (military navy) – the warships were intended to protect commerce and were subordinate to trading activities.

litary Revolution’ und der deutsche Territorialstaat unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Brandenburg-Preußens und Sachsens. Determination der Staatskonsolidierung im europäischen Kontext 1670-1740, Gießen, Universität Gießen, 2002; Christoph RELLA, ‘*Im Anfang war das Fort*’. *Europäische Fortifizierungspolitik in Guinea und Westindien 1415-1815. Expansion, Fortifikation, Kolonisation*, Wien, Universität Wien, 2008; Torsten MAYWALD, *Preussische Seefahrt 1605-1772. Intension und Hintergründe*, Zürich, Universität Zürich, 2011.

- 9 Hans-Joachim GIERSBERG, «Über die Meere nach Afrika», in *Der Große Kurfürst. Sammler, Bauherr, Mäzen, 1620-1688*, Potsdam, 1988, pp. 46-50; Dirk BÖNDEL, «Seemacht Brandenburg? Holländische Schiffe für die Mark», *Museumsjournal* 3 (1991), pp. 47-49; Ulrich VAN DER HEYDEN, «Brandenburg-Preußens Streben in die Welt», in *Preußen 1701. Eine europäische Geschichte*, vol. Essays, Berlin, 2001, pp. 139-146.
- 10 Christian KÄTTLITZ, «Der Große Kurfürst und seine Marine», *Schiff classic* 5 (2021), pp. 62-68, p. 64.
- 11 Frank MÜLLER, «Die Werft der Brandenburger Flotte», *Schiff classic* 1 (2014), pp. 58-61, p. 59.
- 12 KÄTTLITZ, cit., p. 65.
- 13 KÄTTLITZ, cit., p. 65, 66.

TERMINOLOGY

In existing publications on Brandenburg seafaring, there is a notable lack of discussion on individual terms or a definition of terms, at least in the German language. While the term “Kapererei” (privateering) can boast a respectable number of mentions, there is a lack of independent historiographical references to the terms *Marine* (navy) and *Admiralität* (admiralty)¹⁴. In previous publications on the subject of “Brandenburg seafaring”, it is apparent that these three terms have been used in a contemporary interpretation. This has led to a distorted understanding of historical realities and contemporary perceptions. While this small work cannot close these gaps, it can perhaps serve to initiate an approach to overcoming them.

1. Privateering

In the early modern period, privateering was regarded as an “intermediate form” of piracy and state violence¹⁵. Whereas piracy is described as the lawless private appropriation of other people’s property at sea, state violence at sea means violence against an opponent defined as an enemy. In this context, privateering is regarded as the privately financed and profit-oriented capture of ships. To pursue this enterprise, privateers had to obtain a state concession specifying the scope

14 About *Kaper*: J.R. BRUIJN, «Kaapvaart in de tweede en derde Engelse oorlog», *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 3 (1975), pp. 408-429; Edwin QUAK, *De Nederlandse kaapvaart tijdens de Tweede en Derde Engels Oorlog*, Leiden, Universit t Leiden, 2006; Franz BINDER, *Die Zeel ndische Kaperfahrt 1654-1662*, 1976; Johan FRANCKE, *Utiliteyt voor de gemene Saake. De Zeeuwse commissievaart en haar achterban tijdens de Negenjarige Oorlog, 1688-1697*, (Werken uitgegeven door het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, 12), Middelburg, 2001.

15 Jann M. WITT, «Kapererei und Piraterie zur Hansezeit», in Hartmut KL VER (Hrsg.), *Piraterie, einst und jetzt. Vortr ge des 2. Hamburger Symposiums zur Schifffahrts- und Marinegeschichte*, (Beitr ge zur Schifffahrtsgeschichte, 3), D sseldorf, 2001, pp. 28-39; Andreas KAMMLER, *Up eventur. Untersuchungen zur Kaperschifffahrt 1471-1512, vornehmlich nach Hamburger und L becker Quellen*, (Sach berlieferungen und Geschichte, 37), St. Katharinen, Scripta Mercaturae Verlag, 2005; Philipp H HN, «Pluralismus statt Homogenit t. Hanse, Konflikttr ume und Rechtspluralismus im vormodernen Nordeuropa (1400–1600)», in Roland DEIGENDESCH, Christian J RG (Hrsgg.), *St dtb nde und st dtische Au enpolitik. Tr ger, Instrumentarien und Konflikte w hrend des hohen und sp ten Mittelalters*, (Stadt in der Geschichte, 44), Ostfildern, Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2019, pp. 261-290; Bryan Mabee, «Pirates, privateers and the political economy of private violence», *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 21 (2009), pp. 139-152; Louis Sicking, *De piraat en de admiraal*, Leiden, 2014.

of permissible activities and identifying the issuing state. As logical and wise as this tripartite division might seem, the conflicts with reality, given the vague state borders in the 17th century, are understandable. State structures were still in the process of being established throughout the early modern period and accordingly, the establishment of a standing state fleet was also in its infancy. By contrast, piracy was very much an attribution made by others or a form of undeclared warfare. The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands was an important point of departure for privateers in the 17th century. It was not an opportunistic activity or a surrogate business in times of war; in fact, some large privateering companies were founded¹⁶. Benjamin Raule (1634-1707) was one of the many ship owners and investors in privateer ships. It was only when success failed to materialise and he fell into debt without credit in Zeeland that he changed allegiances¹⁷.

Benjamin Raule's change of allegiances was thus more of an investment in the future, a high-risk venture. After the second Anglo-Dutch War of 1665–67, the privateering business faced more difficult hurdles and greater competition in the Netherlands¹⁸. But the move to Brandenburg not only opened up a new area of business to Raule: Opportunities for making profit now presented themselves to the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm too, since the issuance of letters of marque was usually linked to a percentage of the profits¹⁹. In addition, the Elector exploited the element of surprise against the opposing Swedes, who were not anticipating attacks on their own merchant shipping. Therefore, Raule's offer of privateering on the Baltic Sea offered the Elector the prospect of two outcomes: Firstly, a share in the spoils at no cost to himself, and secondly, a military advantage, by disrupting the supply routes across the Baltic and unsettling the Swedish economy²⁰. Up to this point, there was no indication that Elector Friedrich Wilhelm intended to permanently use the privateer vessels as warships. Hence, it was also a business venture for the Elector and, contrary to what later advocates of a German navy claim, not a makeshift solution for building up a navy in view

16 BRUIJN, cit., p. 27; Quak, cit., p. 16.

17 Gerard RAVEN, *Benjamin Raule een illustratie van de Nederlandse commissievaart in de jaren 1672-75*, 1975, p. 7.

18 QUAK, cit., p. 28, 30.

19 RAVEN, cit., p. 7.

20 RAVEN, cit., p. 8.

of his own lack of funds²¹. Another counter argument to this is that the Dutchman Benjamin Raule's activities were given the disreputable label of piracy when, furnished with Brandenburg letters of marque, he captured Dutch ships carrying Swedish goods²².

2. Navy

In the 1739 edition of Zedler's Great Complete Universal Encyclopaedia, the entry for the German term *Marine* reads: "This is the name given to navigation or seafaring, moreover to the nautic art, and also to all seafaring folk, the state of maritime affairs, Lat. *Res maritimae*, and in general everything that involves seafaring and navigation"²³. In linguistics, the first recorded use of the word "Marine" in the German language dates back to around 1700²⁴. During that period, the meaning of the term had very broad connotations. At the time during which Benjamin Raule was active in Brandenburg, there is no evidence to suggest that the term referred exclusively to state military seafaring. Thus, the meaning of this word back then differs from its later use in the 19th and 20th centuries. The maritime division of the German Federal Armed Forces has been called "Die Marine" (the Navy) since 1995. Thus it is not just *a* navy, but *the* Navy, and it refers to the many precursor navies of the various historic German states: the North German Federal Navy, the Imperial German Navy, the Empire's Navy, the *Kriegsmarine*, the People's Navy and the *Bundesmarine*²⁵. Here, the word *navy* is used to denote the totality of a country's naval forces. However, when treatises on the maritime activities of the Elector make a distinction between the navy as a Brandenburg war fleet and the various trading companies, it is historically incorrect. In Raule's "Deduction", published in 1680, the phrase "Conseillers de Marine" is printed in a typeface used throughout the publication for foreign-

21 SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 1, p. XVI.

22 RAVEN, cit., p. 7, 8.

23 „heisset die Schiff- oder Seefahrt, ferner die See-Kunst, und denn auch das gesamte See-Volck, wie auch die Verfassung der See-Sachen, Lat. *Res maritimae*, und überhaupt alles, was zur See- und Schiff-Fahrt dienet.“ Johann Heinrich ZEDLER, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, Halle-Leipzig, 1739, c. 1558, l. 48-52.

24 Richard James BRUNT, *The influence of the French language on the German vocabulary (1649-1735)*, (Studia linguistica Germanica; 18), Berlin-New York, 1983, p. 366.

25 Jann M. WITT, *Deutsche Marinen im Wandel. 1848 bis heute*, Berlin, Palm Verlag, 2015.

language words²⁶. As used here, the phrase was adopted from the French. The dictionary definition of the French term “La Marine” during that period refers to shipping and maritime affairs in general²⁷. Consequently, Benjamin Raule’s title “Directeur de la Marine” can be rendered as “Chief Director of Maritime Affairs” without any change in meaning. Thus, a narrowing of the meaning from *all things maritime* to *the Navy* cannot be ascertained for the period of maritime activities under the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm.

3. Admiralty

The term admiralty denotes the institutionalisation of the duties and functions of an admiral. In the Netherlands, the office of admiral has a history of development dating back to the 14th century. It has always referred to the task of being the supreme commander of a number of ships. However, these were not necessarily always warships. Also, when merchant ships formed a convoy for mutual protection, one of the skippers could be appointed admiral²⁸. Until the 18th century, groups of merchant ships would sail into unsafe waters under an admiralty. These groups were self-organised, and the only protection they could expect from the state was in the form of armed vessels which would be paid for by the participating ships in the admiralty²⁹.

When Philipp Eberhard von Kleve (1456-1528) was appointed Admiral of the Provinces of the Netherlands under Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519), the duties not only described a monopoly the use of force at sea, but also all the maritime legal aspects³⁰. This also included civil shipping.

Based on an idea by Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517-1586) from 1580,

26 Benjamin RAULE, *Deduction. Von einem Neuen Admiralitets und Commertz Collegio [...] Anfangs in Holländische Sprache gedruckt in Gravenhage Nun ins Hochdeutsche übersetzt [...]*, Königsberg, 1680, p. 17.

27 Jean Philippe ANDRÉ, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Royal*, Frankfurt (Main), 31700, p. 587.

28 Louis SICKING, *Zeemacht en Onmacht 1488-1558*, (Bijdragen tot de Nederlandse Marine-geschiedenis; 7), Amsterdam, 1998, p. 20.

29 G. ASAERT, P.M. BOSSCHER, J.R. BRUIJN, W.J. HOBOKEN, *Maritieme geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Bussum, De Boer Maritiem, 1977, vol. 2, 1977, p. 124; Arie BIIL, *De Nederlandse Convooidienst. De maritieme bescherming van koopvaardij en zeevisserij tegen piraten en oorlogsgevaar in het verleden*, Den Haag, Nijhof, 1951, p. 72.

30 SICKING, *Zeemacht en Onmacht*, cit., p. 46.



Lieve Verschuier, *The Electorate of Brandenburg's Fleet, 1684*.
 Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg & Anders, Jörg P.
 (1970 - 1999) (CC BY-NC-SA)

an “Almirantazgo de los comercios” was to be founded in Seville under which the extant German trade association there was to be subordinated. This admiralty was indeed later founded in 1624 and merchants and traders from the Spanish Netherlands and from the Holy Roman Empire were to be eligible as members. The Hanseatic cities in the empire were also announced as additional members. In addition to increased contact between Spain and the North Sea and Baltic coastal regions of the empire, jurisdiction and escort were also to be mentioned³¹. In Benjamin Raule’s “Deduction” of 1680, the term “Admiraliteits- or Comercio-Collegio” is also found as a simile in both the title and the text. This maintains the notion that merchants and skippers could unite to form an admiralty as long as they share a common route.

31 Karl R.H. FRICK, *Vergessene Flotten. Flotten und Flottenpolitik im Heiligen Römischen Reich deutscher Nation vom 15. Jahrhundert bis 1632*, Graz, Weishaupt, 1990, p. 96.

In summary, it can be said that the meaning of these three terms was formerly much broader than their modern definitions. Thus, *privateering* was more than just an alternative form of warfare; it was regarded as a business in its own right and was intended to generate profit. What fundamentally distinguished privateering from piracy, and legitimized it, was the letter of marque, which could be issued by a public authority or sovereign. An *admiralty* could be described as a specialised institution of the state in the early modern period or the sovereign power over all seafaring matters. It was thus more than just an administrative institution for a battle fleet. Likewise, in the pre-modern sense the term *navy* refers to all aspects of seafaring and is not limited to the battle fleet or the military section of a nation's fleet of ships. It is not clear when the shift in meaning began, but it is conceivable that in the course of the pre-modern formation of the nation state, these general terms were reduced to the sense of "battle fleet".

THE NAVY IN ELECTORAL BRANDENBURG

During the Thirty Years' War, the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg made exploratory efforts to establish a maritime industry. To this end, treaties were signed with England and Denmark³². In addition, the possibility of establishing overseas trading companies was explored and negotiated with various potential partners³³. But more pressing matters were to distract from these activities, which were initially unsuccessful. In the struggle for the *Dominium Maris Baltici* between Denmark and Sweden, the Netherlands were interested in representing their own interests and not letting either side have the upper hand³⁴. The Danish Sound Tolls in the Öresund was a particular burden for Amsterdam's *Moedernegotie* (grain and forest products from Poland, Russia and the Baltic States). But the new duties and levies in the Polish, Baltic and Russian territories conquered by Sweden were not welcome in the Netherlands either. Therefore, not only the Netherlands but also England and France interfered in the situation in the

32 SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 1, p. 24; SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 1, p. 74.

33 NAGEL, cit., pp. 16-19; WEINDL, cit., pp. 8-10.

34 S.P. OAKLEY, *War and Peace in the Baltic 1560-1790*, (War in Context), London 1992; Hielke van NIEUWENHUIZE, *Niederländische Seefahrer in schwedischen Diensten. Seeschifffahrt und Technologietransfer im 17. Jahrhundert*, (Wirtschafts- und Sozialhistorische Studien, 21), Wien, Köln, Böhlau, 2022, pp. 52-60.

Baltic Sea. The fleets of Denmark and Sweden continued to grow throughout the 17th century, and then even surpassed the fleets of Western Europe³⁵.

During the Second Northern War (1655-1660), a naval force was established under Colonel Johann von Hille (c. 1609-1684) to defend Königsberg and Pillau in Prussia. However, this loose association did not achieve institutional status. Of the ships in this flotilla, two vessels, the fluyt “Kurfürst von Brandenburg” and the “Klevischer Lindenbaum”, were used as merchant ships. All the larger vessels were sold by 1663 and a newly built ship, the “Kurprinz”, was also sold soon after³⁶. The fates of the two *frigates* “Herzogtum Kleve” and “Grafschaft Mark” are discussed in the section “Artistic reflections on Brandenburg’s maritime activities up to 1688”.

Right at the beginning of the Scanian War (1674-1679), the Elector tried to charter ships through his envoys in the Netherlands. However, these various attempts failed due to a lack of funds. In 1675, Benjamin Raule (1634-1707) approached the Brandenburg envoys in the Netherlands and offered his services as a privateer. The Elector immediately accepted this offer to use ten privateer vessels against France and Sweden. Raule did not lease out his ships, but was merely given authorisation for the commission³⁷. This entitled him to sail under the Brandenburg flag and engage in privateer warfare against Swedish and French ships and their cargo in the name of the Elector of Brandenburg. He paid a small percentage of the profits to the Elector and the rest was for his own disposal. The decisions of the maritime courts in the Netherlands are less surprising when one considers that Dutch ships or Dutch goods were to be decided there. Moreover, the ships were captured by a Dutchman under a foreign flag. However, he was also liable for all the costs, including the salaries of the crew, the ships’ outfitting, and the ships themselves³⁸. Since foreign maritime courts judged all captured ships as unlawfully seized and demanded their return, this campaign was not a success, at least in financial terms. Nonetheless, Swedish traders now had to navigate the Baltic Sea with greater caution. In order to have the ships captured

35 G. ASAERT, P.M. BOSSCHER, J.R. BRUIJN, W.J. van HOBOKEN, et al, cit., vol. 2, p. 213, pp. 216-220; Milja van TIELHOF, *The ‘mother of all trades’, the Baltic grain trade in Amsterdam from the late 16th to the early 19th century*, Brill, 2002, pp. 4-5.

36 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 22.

37 RAVEN, cit., p. 7.

38 RAVEN, cit., p. 8.

in the future declared “fair takings”, a maritime court was set up in Königsberg as early as 1676³⁹.

Szymanski’s remark of 1939 on the capture of the two Swedish ships “Leoparden” and “Diderich” in June 1676 is of some significance: “The alleged involvement of Brandenburg vessels in this naval battle is one of those persistent legends that keeps cropping up even in more recent works on naval history and in pictorial representations.”⁴⁰ He thus criticises the imagining of an event that he claims did not take place at all. What actually happened is that two Swedish ships were captured after the naval battle between the Swedish and Danish fleets near Bornholm. Brandenburg ships took no part in the battle, and merely exploited the opportunity to capture the two ships that were sailing alone. In the imperial era, publications then claimed that Brandenburg ships had participated in this battle, even implying it as reality in pictures⁴¹.

During the war, Raule’s ships collaborated with the Elector’s troops in various operations. For example, they fended off hostile Swedish attacks during the Brandenburg landing on Rügen in 1678 and also blocked access to the besieged port cities of Stettin in 1677 and Stralsund and Greifswald in 1678. Whereas in 1675 Raule’s ships were granted only a commission, they were subsequently chartered on short-term contracts. However, the Elector had to hand back the entire conquered territory of Pomerania after the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1679⁴².

It appears that the conquest of coastal towns in Pomerania during this war made it possible to establish seafaring institutions. That is why a *Collegium de Marine* was established in 1679. The prospective attendees were to be merchants and lawyers from the port cities that had recently been conquered⁴³. Since the

39 SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 2, nr. 42a, p. 87.

40 „Die angebliche Beteiligung brandenburgischer Schiffe an diesem Seegefecht gehört zu den hartnäckigen Legenden, die selbst in neueren marinesgeschichtlichen Werken und bildlichen Darstellungen immer wieder auftauchen.“ SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 28.

41 inter alia Hans Bohrdt, Bild 48, in *Bilder Deutscher Geschichte*, Altona, 1936; Hans BOHRDT, *Deutsche Schifffahrt in Wort und Bild*, Hannover, 1902; Hans SATOW, *Deutsche Flagge, sei begrüßt! Friedens- und Kriegsfahrten der Hanse, Kriegs- und Friedenstaten der deutschen Marine*, Reutlingen, 1905, image p. 135 «Seeschlacht bei Bornholm. Eroberung des ‚Leopard‘» made by Hans Petersen.

42 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 30, 31.

43 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 41, p. 84.



P. Van der Swalm, Dutch ships near the coast, Sotheby's Amsterdam, Lot 1, 6 Sept 2006.

designated duties overlapped with the *Commerciën-Collegio* and the Maritime Court, these were to be merged into the *Collegio de Marine*⁴⁴. It was decided that the headquarters would be located in Berlin under the direction of Raule and that there would be further branches in Königsberg and Emden. As the war drew to a close, the question arose of how to continue. Raule was facing considerable problems due to his financial obligations, and as a result the Elector even granted him written protection from his foreign creditors. For Raule, there was now no going back to the Netherlands. Firstly, he was a Dutchman who had captured Dutch ships, and had done so in the interests of a foreign sovereign. Furthermore, he had taken out loans and brokered loans for foreigners which were yet to be repaid. For these reasons, he switched allegiances and officially became a Brandenburg subject. In his subsequent activities, he wrote a “deduction” to help

44 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 41, p. 85.

promote the further development of Brandenburg seafaring⁴⁵. In this document, he champions the idea of overseas trading as far as East Asia by a company that would enjoy privileges granted by the Elector. It goes on to outline certain fundamental elements of this business idea, along with several other factors for successful business opportunities, such as shipbuilding and outfitting. Of interest are his remarks on military seafaring, where he states that in Brandenburg only two or more convoys with 30 to 40 guns are to be provided as a “necessary measure to ensure safe navigation”⁴⁶. In order to minimise costs for the paying merchants, the enlisted soldiers were only to be on board at the latest necessary date up to the earliest expendable date⁴⁷. There is no mention anywhere in the text of a navy or even a battle fleet. In 1679, Raule presented the Elector with a calculation of the costs that would be incurred for the construction and maintenance of twelve warships and two fire ships. However, due to their size, these proposed warships would not be able to form a battle line or anything similar, but would instead be limited to security tasks or privateering operations. The largest two ships were to be capable of carrying 40 cannons and then the vessels would be graduated in pairs with 36, 24, 20, 16 and 6 guns⁴⁸. In fact, Raule probably had in mind a concept similar to that of the Hamburg convoy ships and supplemented it with his familiar privateer ships. He presented a concept as it can be found in Lieve Verschuier’s painting. There are no known concepts or documents that suggest otherwise or contradict this view, which is followed through very rigorously.

Upon the establishment of peace, the subsidies negotiated with Hamburg and Spain were due to be collected. Since all diplomatic efforts proved fruitless, other political means were used, and to this end the ships chartered by Raule proved to be just the thing. They were sent as privateer vessels first against Hamburg and then against Spain. But whereas Hamburg paid the due sum following the Emperor’s mediation, Spain ignored all the demands⁴⁹. On 18 September 1680, Brandenburg ships off the Flemish coast were able to capture the “Carolus Secundus”, which was equipped with 28 guns. For the Elector, the profit from the sale of the goods

45 RAULE, cit., p. 6.

46 RAULE, cit., p. 16.

47 RAULE, cit., p. 17.

48 Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, I. HA GR, Rep. 65, nr. 25, sheet 10f, 31. Dezember 1679 (old signatur: Rep 65, Nr. 5b).

49 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 32.

only just covered the costs⁵⁰. But now he had his first battleship, which was later converted to carry 50 guns and renamed “Markgraf von Brandenburg”. Further campaigns against the Spanish, also in the Caribbean, did not yield the expected success. It seemed that the Elector would therefore cease all maritime initiatives⁵¹. However, ships were later sent out against Spain once again. It was hoped that they would intercept a sugar fleet from America, but they missed it and instead four Brandenburg ships ran into twelve Spanish warships at Cape St. Vincent on 30 September 1681. After a battle lasting two hours in which 10 men were killed, the Brandenburg fleet retreated and entered the Portuguese port of Lagos⁵².

In 1680, Raule financed a first voyage to Africa by two ships. Their task was to scout for favourable trading places there. They were also instructed to avoid any conflict, steering clear of the colonies where companies were already established⁵³. This was probably intended as a starting signal, because shortly thereafter the Brandenburgisch-Africanische-Compagnie (Brandenburg-Africa Company) was officially founded.

The first naval budget of the Collegium de Marine dating from 1681 has been preserved. Under item no. 1, all the warships are listed. Aside from two galiots, only the “Roter Löwe”, “Fuchs” and the 50-gun “Carolus Secundus” are mentioned. The Brandenburg-Africa Company is listed under item, which includes six large ships. Item 3 of the budget is somewhat surprising, as it refers to the ships belonging to Raule and his business partners. Moreover, it is made very clear that they are not maintained at the expense of the Elector and are not to be attributed to him. The vessels under construction, being fitted out, or being repaired in Pillau and Königsberg are listed under item 4. This consisted of 14 vessels of different sizes⁵⁴.

The differences to the next surviving naval budget of 18 July 1684 are striking. The ruling councils in the individual dependencies (Berlin as headquarters, Königsberg, Emden) were referred to as admiralty councils and an admiralty house was mentioned for Emden. Sometimes the individual dependencies

50 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 33.

51 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 36.

52 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 37.

53 RELLA, cit., p. 215.

54 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 54, p. 107.

were designated as admiralties. On the whole, this list of costs and income seems much more clear and professional than the budget of 1681. The ships were simply distinguished in terms of their ownership by the Elector or Raule. There is no mention of a trading company. But by 1 October 1684 a new naval budget had already been drawn up⁵⁵. Here too, only the administrative portion of Brandenburg's seafaring was listed. Only items paid for by the revenues attributable to the Elector are to be found in this budget. Nothing belonging to the company or Raule are included. The Brandenburg-African Company itself dated its budget 6 October 1684⁵⁶. The ships listed in the contract of sale, which bears the same date as the naval budget, could be used as merchant ships as well as warships.⁵⁷ In this respect, this naval budget documents the separation of private and company property from the property of the Elector. However, it does not separate items according to their intended use.

However, the distinction between the company and the navy had already lapsed by 1686, when Raule was appointed director of the company⁵⁸. According to a report by Raule⁵⁹ on the state of the company and the navy⁵⁹, in 1687 he was even given unrestricted power of disposal in all naval and company affairs⁶⁰. Raule was thus allowed to deploy all funds and ships to support the Brandenburg-Africa Company. It was only by retaining the structures and the required compensation through shareholdings in the company that a distinction was still possible. In publications, the German term *Marine* (navy) can still be found up to the reign of Friedrich Wilhelm I (1688-1740), King in Prussia⁶¹. But even in this case, the word *marine* was still set in a different typeface, marking it as a foreign term.

55 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 95, p. 238.

56 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 97, p. 249.

57 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 96, p. 246.

58 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 115, p. 292.

59 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 118, p. 299.

60 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 119, p. 309.

61 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, p. 270, Note 20; *Adress-Kalender Der Königlichen Preußischen Haupt- und Residenz-Städte*, Berlin, 1713, p. 44 : «Das Königliche Preußische Admiralität- und Marinen-Collegium [...] H. Johann Ramler / Admiralitäts und Marinen-Raht / welcher zugleich die *marine* Sachen expediert [...]».



View of the east wall of the Great Hall of the Naval Officers' Mess with the painting from Hans Bohrdt. Sammlung Olaf Rahardt, from Olaf Rahardt, cit., p. 34.

Artistic reflections on Brandenburg's maritime activities up to 1688

It is quite surprising, given the short duration and marginal importance of Brandenburg seafaring, that a number of paintings on the subject have survived. It has only recently been discovered that the *penschilderij* by Olfert de Vrij (1635-1699), now housed in the Berlin Gemäldegalerie SMPK,⁶² is one such work⁶³. Conversely, the painting by Lieve Verschuier (1627-1686), now on display in the

62 Inv.-nr. GK II 367, 97,4x139,8cm, Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz

63 Thomas FEIGE, «Brandenburgische Schiffe in der bildlichen Darstellung», *Das Logbuch 3* (2007), pp. 127-135; Thomas FEIGE, «Brandenburgische Schiffe in der bildlichen Darstellung. Eine Ergänzung mit Anmerkungen zur brandenburgischen Schiffsflagge», *Das Logbuch 1* (2011), pp. 19-23.

Schloßmuseum Oranienburg SPSG,⁶⁴ is included in almost every publication. The title of this work seems to vary. It is usually referred to as the “Elector’s Fleet”, but it is also known as the “Landing on Rügen”⁶⁵. Most of the discernible ships can be clearly identified, as according to Dutch tradition they bear their names encoded in symbols on their sterns. Three different scenes can be identified. A third work consists of two objects that form a companion piece. They depict various ships along a coastline, though painted with less artistic quality. This work is signed and dated P. van der Swalm 1688 (ca. 1688). The only artist by whom several works on the subject have survived is Michiel Maddersteg (1662-1709). Although some of these works have only been preserved as prints, a good number of marine paintings are included in the collections of the Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg⁶⁶. However, most of his works date from a period following the death of Friedrich Wilhelm and depict a different epoch which will not be dealt with here.

In keeping with chronological order, the painting by Olfert de Vrij, dated 21.10.1665, will be examined here first (Image 1)⁶⁷. This *penschilderij* on wood was documented without a title of its own until quite recently. It was part of the series of works with the uninformative title “Ships at Sea” and was stored in a depot. It was only after an inspection that it was discovered that the ships depicted were “Herzogtum Kleve” and “Grafschaft Mark”, making it the earliest portrayal of Brandenburg ships. The vessels were two frigates built in the Netherlands in 1661. In fact, the sources only used the term *frigate*. In diplomatic correspondence between Berlin and London – necessitated due to the capture of the two ships by English warships – the view expressed by England was that these ships were far too expensive to transport only wood and salt. For this reason they claimed that the vessels were actually Dutch warships that were to sail into the Mediterranean

64 Inv.-nr. GK I 928, 164x244cm, Palace Museum Oranienburg, Stiftung Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg.

65 about „Landing“: Christoph VOIGT, «Ein holländisches Huldigungsgedicht auf den Großen Kurfürsten», *Das Hohenzollern-Jahrbuch*, 6 (1914), pp. 38-51; p. 39.

66 On the meaning of the term „marine paintings“ in Germany: Hans Jürgen HANSEN, «Deutsche Marinemalerei», in *Deutsche Marinemalerei*, Oldenburg, 1977, pp. 7-26; Lars U. SCHOLL, *Hans Bohrdt. Marinemaler des Kaisers*, Hamburg, Koehler, 1995.

67 John R. BROZIUS, *Met olieverf en penseel. Het leven en werk van de Hoornse penschilder mr. Olfert de Vrij (1635-1699)*, Hoorn, Westfries Museum, 2019.

in disguise to fight the English there⁶⁸.

The advocates of a Brandenburg (military) navy used this claim to interpret these frigates as warships⁶⁹. However, they did not know of this painting and together with the view of these frigates as so-called *straatvaarers*, another intended use of the two frigates can be demonstrated. Frigates were not exclusively warships, but in fact simply faster large ships. This quality naturally made them interesting for military use, though not only that. Well-armed swift merchant ships could also be useful in unsafe waters, such as the Mediterranean, where there was a constant threat posed by corsairs. The so-called *Straatvaarer* or *Levantevaarer* were such well-armed fast merchant ships⁷⁰. Their name suggests their sailing area: through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean and up to the Syrian-Lebanese coast. A *penschilderij* by Willem van de Velde dating from that time portrays such a frigate, where the guns in the forecastle required to form a complete battery are missing⁷¹. On warships, the entire length of the deck is utilized for the mounting of guns. This is precisely what is shown in Olfert de Vrij's painting. The guns in the frigates' forecastle are obviously missing. Thus, the two frigates can be described as *straatvaarers*. They were armed merchant ships and not warships.

The best-known painting of Brandenburg ships is by Lieve Verschuier (Image 2). It is signed and bears a date. The exact year was probably still visible in the past, even if it was already quite indistinct back then. The last digit seemed to be legible as the number 4, though it can hardly be discerned as a grapheme today. Only the first three digits of the year can be assumed as certain: 168 [4?]. However, the last digit can be deduced with some certainty since the narrative content corresponds with the years one can deduce from the picture and a dated accompanying poem of homage.

68 Ferdinand HIRSCH, *Urkunden und Actenstücke zur Geschichte des Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg*, vol. 12, Politische Verhandlungen, Berlin, Reimer, 1892, p. 624 (v. Brandt an den Kurfürsten, 2. Februar 1665).

69 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 22.

70 Reinier Zeeman (ca. 1623-1664) depicted a so-called „Straets-Vaerder“ in a print, with the ship's name „Vergulde Dolphijn“. RP-P-OB-20.517, 13,5x24,7cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

71 National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BHC0860 82,7x113,7cm „Two Dutch merchant ships under sail near the shore in a moderate breeze“.

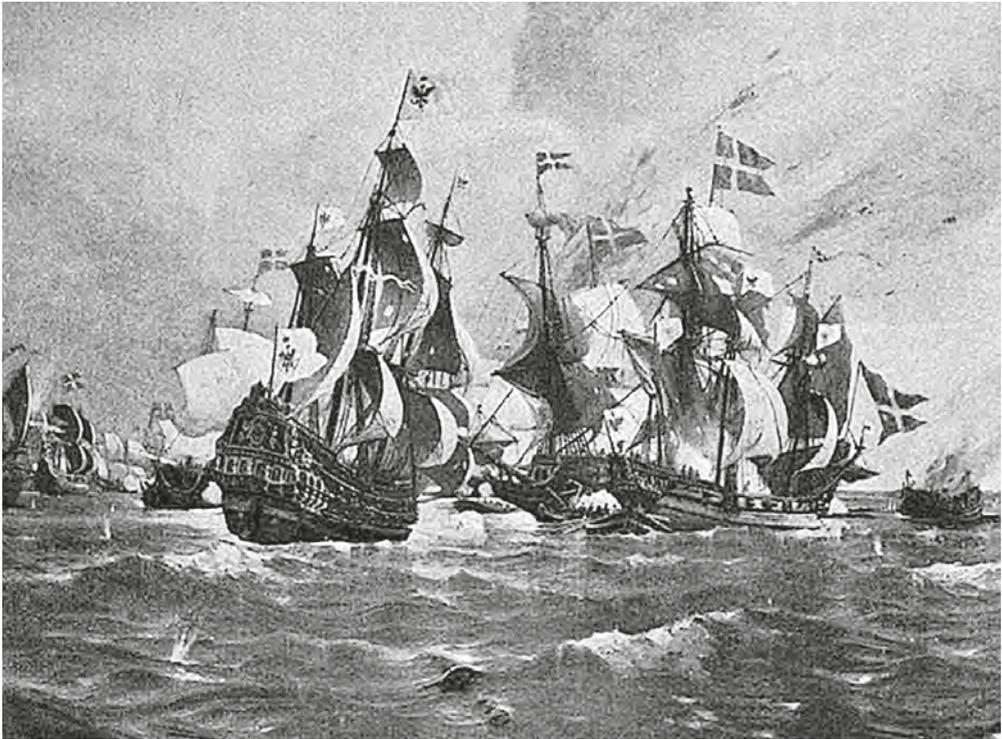
The events forming the temporal framework are as follows: The conquest of the Spanish vessel “Carolus Secundus” on 18 September 1680, the death of the Elector on 9 May 1688, the death of the artist Lieve Verschuijer in 1686, the construction in 1681 and outfitting in 1684 of the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde” and the renaming of the fluyte “Wolkensäule” in 1685 to “Derfflinger”. This actually leaves the year 1684 as the painting’s only possible year of origin.

The three scenes shown in the picture can also be associated with this year. The first thing that catches the eye is the ships, of course. On the left, the large ship, flagged as the new flagship of the centre squadron from 1684, can be identified as the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde” by the horse and rider depicted on its stern. In the right half of the picture the “Carolus Secundus” can be seen, which after its capture in 1680 was employed as the flagship for Brandenburg under the new name “Markgraf von Brandenburg” until 1684. In the picture it is flagged as the Vice Admiral ship of the vanguard. The yacht between the two ships can be recognised by its flags as a ship with the Admiral General on board. The person in golden clothing, is presumed to be the Elector himself as the Admiral General, especially as he is the only person on board who still has his hat on. The yacht has been identified as the “Great Yacht” or “Golden Yacht”. Since the higher-ranking persons on board the admiral’s and vice-admiral’s ship have also removed their hats in greeting towards the yacht or are even waving them, this scene can be interpreted as a homage to the Elector. This scene is framed by the three ships “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde”, “Markgraf von Brandenburg” and “Roter Löwe”, which have lowered topsails. Whereas the Admiral’s ship is also giving an elaborate gun salute on the side facing away from the person being saluted⁷², this seems to have been lost in the picture of the “Markgraf”, where there are only traces of smoke to be seen. It is not certain whether this was the artist’s intention or if it was instead lost during earlier restorations.

On deck of the “Carolus Secundus” a sailor can be seen by the main mast waving a flag bearing the Cross of Burgundy. However, he is holding it in such a way that it appears to be lowered, which is a sign of conquest⁷³. This is a reference

72 Gerard BRANDT, *Het Leven en Bedryf van de Heere Michiel de Ruiter*, Amsterdam, 1687, p. 69, 71.

73 Reinier Zeeman gives an example in his print „Na de zeeslag“, 17,6x26cm, RP-P-1889-A-14340, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



Battle at Bornholm, Hans von Petersen, published in Hans Satow, *Deutsche Flagge, sei begrüßt! Friedens- und Kriegsfahrten der Hanse, Kriegs- und Friedenstaten der deutschen Marine*, Reutlingen, [1913], p. 135.

to the capture of this ship off Ostend in 1680. However, this also includes the two ships at starboard (right) and across in front of the ship. The ship on the far right is the “Kurprinz von Brandenburg”, which took part in the capture, and the frigate lying in enfilade position in front of the bow of the “Carolus Secundus” is the “Roter Löwe”, which also took part in the capture. The frigate, identifiable by the picture on its stern, lies with its mainsail clewed up “ready for battle” and at the same time with its topsails lowered on the main mast and foremast saluting the Elector.

The frigate “Dorothea”, which can be identified by the picture on its stern, is sailing in front of the bow of the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde”. Its flags identify this ship as a rear admiral, or, according to Dutch tradition, *Schout-bij-nacht*, the flagship of the rearguard. This represents the classic three-way division of fleets, and the other ships visible in the picture are assigned to one of these three

squadrons⁷⁴. The fact that the ships visible in the picture do not only form a war fleet is indicated by the fluyts in the middle and background, which are rather deployed as merchant ships. Their positioning in two columns that converge on the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde” is not just a stylistic device – it can also be explained in maritime terms. The formation of merchant ships in parallel columns flanked by warships is a typical escort formation. The three ships “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde”, “Carolus Secundus” and the “Kurprinz” form the secure rearguard of the convoy. The sides are secured by the ships “Goldener Löwe”, far left on the outer edge of the picture, “Dorothea” and “Rote Löwe”. This therefore represents a scenario that Benjamin Raule already presented in his “Deduction” of 1680⁷⁵: Warships are needed, but rather as a necessary and expensive evil than as the goal of all endeavours.

The year 1684 may also be associated with a contract of sale between the Elector and Benjamin Raule. On 1 October 1684, the Elector agreed to buy 9 ships from Raule, which he had been chartering for quite some time already⁷⁶. The vessels were those portrayed in the painting: “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde”, “Dorothea”, “Kurprinz” and the smaller vessels “Fuchs”, “Friede”, “Littauer Bauer”, “Rummelpott”, the boyer “Prinz Philip” and the galiot “Marie”, which are not shown or cannot be recognised in the picture. A sale such as this could of course be considered a suitable occasion for the commissioning of a painting. This also adds further chronological context to the aforementioned poem of homage marking the Elector’s birthday on 16 February 1685⁷⁷. The eulogy is accompanied by the following explanatory text: “Representation and portrayal of a fleet of ships, depicting the imperial court of His Serene Highness the Elector of Brandenburg. Wishing a long life and all the best on the 6th (16th) of February 1685, the birthday of the Most Serene Elector Friedrich Wilhelm and the name day of the Most Serene Electress Dorothea. Written with great goodwill by Johann Clefman, Admiralty Councillor at Cölln on the Spree, Anno 1685”. In the text that follows, the notion of an escort is clearly formulated along the

74 H.A. VAN FOREEST, R.E.J. WEBER, *De Vierdaagse Zeeslag 11-14 Juni 1666*, (Werken uitgegeven door de Commissie voor Zeegeschiedenis, XVI), Amsterdam 1984, S. 40.

75 RAULE, cit., p. 16.

76 SCHÜCK cit., vol. 2, nr. 96, p. 246.

77 Christoph VOIGT, cit., pp. 38-51; The original object with the poem in Dutch was destroyed during the Second World War, so only this translation in German from 1914 has survived.

descending hierarchy in the imperial court. It is thus conceivable that the painting was presented together with the recitation of the poem, but this has not yet been proven. If, however, this poem was introduced by an admiralty councillor, the painting may have been commissioned by a personage above Clefman in the hierarchy. If it was not the Elector himself, the “Directeur de la Marine” Benjamin Raule would be the obvious contractor. This would account for the scene of homage in the painting and the date would also match with the sale of the nine ships. Perhaps the figure at the bulwark of the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde” with a white tie, white sleeve ends and a hat waving downwards can be regarded as Benjamin Raule.

In 2006, two small paintings of lesser artistic quality were sold at Sotheby’s (Image 3). These works, intended as companion pieces, depict various ships flying Zeeland and Brandenburg flags off a coast and are signed P. Van der Swalm and dated 1688. The pictures show various types of vessels, such as fluyt-like ships, a galiot and a richly decorated three-masted yacht. The fluyt-like vessels all bear Brandenburg flags, but no ship’s name can be attributed to them. If they were not used for the “Brandenburg-Africa Company”, they could also have been ships built for sale. Since the shipyards in Pillau and Königsberg could not be adequately financed solely by orders placed by the company, it also built vessels for other clients or for open sale⁷⁸. It would thus be conceivable that the coast in the background represents the approach to Pillau. None of the vessels shown are suitable for military use.

The landing on Rügen in 1676 was the subject of a tapestry⁷⁹ designed by Pierre Mercier. Although the work was commissioned by the Elector Friedrich III and is dated 1695, it portrays ships that were not completed until several years later. Szymanski remarked on this in a critical note of 1939⁸⁰.

It can therefore be concluded that none of the better known artworks suggest an exclusively military perspective. Violence at sea is not denied, but is considered a fact of life that has to be addressed. It is also interesting to note that merchant ships (de Vry) were considered significant and relevant enough by contemporaries to

78 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 55.

79 Tapestry made by Pierre Mercier „Die Landung auf Rügen“, ca. 1695, IX1375, Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg.

80 SZYMANSKI, cit., p. 29

be depicted in their own right. In contrast, only one print has survived depicting military activities (the landing on Rügen) of that time. It shows the landing on Rügen in 1678 from an elevated perspective though without any details. In the numbered explanation, no ships are mentioned, although vessels chartered by Raule took part under the Brandenburg flag⁸¹ as they were apparently considered unimportant.

The Imperial Navy - "Re-"Born from a Fiction

The Imperial Navy came into being at the time of the founding of the German Empire and arose from the navy of the North German Confederation. But it was not until Wilhelm II (1859-1918) came to power in 1888 that the navy gained importance and was significantly expanded. As of 1889, the structure of the navy was to change. The Admiralty was transformed into the Imperial Navy Office. In 1897, Alfred von Tirpitz (1849-1930) was appointed head of this office and subsequently established the Imperial Navy Office Intelligence Department. In addition to gathering information, its task was essentially to influence the public in favour of naval affairs⁸².

In this context, properties also had to be adapted to the growing number of navy personnel. Consequently, a new naval officers' mess was built in Wilhelmshaven. After its inauguration in 1903, visitors could view two oversized paintings on the end walls in the Great Hall (Image 4 and 5). Measuring approximately eleven by four metres and facing each other, they gave a clear idea of how the naval leadership viewed itself. They were arguably the largest German naval paintings in existence. On the east wall was a depiction of the battle at Cape St. Vincent in 1797 between four Brandenburg ships and twelve Spanish galleons. On the west wall opposite was a fictitious battle of the first German warship squadron off Heligoland. This squadron was not formed until 1903, meaning that this pictorial

81 „Prospect der Flotte bey der Insul Rügen, allwo Chur-Brandenburg die Königsmärkische Attaquirt, vnd wie die Völcker, nach deme sie den 13.7bris 1678, ans landt gesetzt, in Battalienen gestelt und die Königsmärkischen Truppen nach der alten fehr Schantz zu Verfolget haben.“, 25,7x37,4cm, *Theatri Europaei Eilffter Theil* [...], Frankfurt (Main), 1682, p. 1328.

82 Werner RAHN, *Deutsche Marinen im Wandel, Vom Symbol nationaler Einheit zum Instrument internationaler Sicherheit*, München, 2009, p. 129.

representation was very up to date⁸³. The paintings were made by Hans Bohrdt (1857-1945), one of the so-called “triumvirate of Wilhelmine maritime painters” along with Carl Salzmann (1847-1923) and Willy Stöwer (1864-1931)⁸⁴. The fact that a rather insignificant, unsuccessful operation involving Brandenburg ships was depicted can only be understood as a desire to portray several large ships in a military conflict. In any case, the twelve Spanish galleons lend themselves to an impressive portrayal, which unfortunately cannot be said for the four Brandenburg ships involved. Whereas the 50-gun “Markgraf von Brandenburg” and the 40-gun “Friedrich Wilhelm” can genuinely be depicted as two-deckers, the 22-gun “Roter Löwe” and the 20-gun “Fuchs” are in fact only frigates. It would appear that the “Markgraf von Brandenburg”, formerly named “Carolus Secundus”, has been substituted for the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferd”⁸⁵. However, this large two-decker was not put into service until 1684. The artist’s intention was to depict an impressively dramatic military operation, a battle, under the command of an ancestor of German Emperor Wilhelm II. On the west wall we can see how this same basic idea, a dramatic military operation under a Hohenzollern ruler, is conceived for the current navy. The aspiration to create a link between the Imperial Navy around 1900 and the Electoral Fleet under the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm is expressed here on a monumental scale. In this context, one is also reminded of the alleged participation of Brandenburg ships in the battle of Bornholm in 1676, which Szymanski dismissed as fiction in 1939. This fantasy was also not only rendered as a text, but also conceived as an image (Image 6)⁸⁶.

Yet it was not only these two works of art that were to establish a historical lineage for the emerging Imperial Navy: There was an extensive repertoire of

83 Olaf RAHARDT, «Superlative und doch unbekannt. Zwei monumentale Gemälde von Hans Bohrdt», *Schiff&Zeit, Panorama maritim*, 120 (2021), pp. 34-36.

84 Lars U. SCHOLL, «Marinemalerei im Dienste politischer Zielsetzungen» in *Seefahrt und Geschichte*, Herford, 1986, pp. 173-190; Lars U. SCHOLL, *Hans Bohrdt. Marinemaler des Kaisers*, Hamburg, 1995, p. 11.

85 The details are not discernible in the surviving photos, but the different silhouettes speak for the „Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde“.

86 Hans von Petersen, Naval battle between the Electorate of Brandenburg and the Swedish fleet. Tempera, Pastel on canvas, municipality Emmering, in Angelika MUNDORFF, Eva VON SECKENDORFF (Hrsgg.), *Hans von Petersen (1850-1914). Ein Marinemaler in Bayern*, Fürstentfeldbruck, 2011, p. 50.

means and media for propaganda⁸⁷. Indeed even the practice of building model ships was discovered for the purpose of propaganda. It is alleged that in 1905 Emperor Wilhelm II had the idea of preserving the rigging of historic sailing ship models in a durable material. Therefore, a series of historical ship models was designed in silver and later presented to the Emperor on his silver wedding anniversary in 1908. Among them was a model of the “Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde”. Oskar von Miller subsequently requested copies of these models in natural materials for his Deutsches Museum in Munich⁸⁸.

Efforts were also made to contrive an ancestral line of outstanding personalities in German naval history. However this proved somewhat difficult, as before the First World War (1914-1918) there were few suitable candidates to choose from. In the auditorium of the naval school in Mürwik, a series of busts (Image 7) was installed to form a gallery of ancestors. Along with a colonel and several admirals, the merchant Benjamin Raule was also represented⁸⁹. Needless to say, Raule was not depicted in this series as a merchant, but as the *Directeur de la Marine* of the Electoral Fleet. As there were no known historical portraits or descriptions of him, the design of the bust was largely invented, including the sash and facial features. Today, this bronze is preserved in the Wehrgeschichtliche Sammlung.

One can trace the construction of the historical line from the electoral fleet to the Imperial Navy in diverse publications. Whereas in 1856 Jordan still refers to the “rebirth” of a “Brandenburg-Prussian navy”, Paul Kayser’s foreword in Schück 1889 only refers to the “birthday of our current Imperial Navy” with the sale contract of 1 October 1684⁹⁰. Thus, Jordan infers an interruption, whereas Kayser infers a continuous line. Interestingly, in the text itself Schück interpreted the date 1 October 1684 merely as the “birthday of the Brandenburg Navy”, not of the Imperial Navy⁹¹. In fact, Kayser goes a step further in the preface, claiming that

87 Wilhelm DEIST, *Flottenpolitik und Flottenpropaganda. Das Nachrichtenbureau des Reichsmarineamtes 1897-1914*, (Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte, 17), Stuttgart, 1976.

88 Jobst BROELMANN, *Deutsches Museum. Panorama der Seefahrt*, München-Bremen, 2005, pp. 84-86.

89 Dieter HARTWIG, «Die Aula der Marineschule Mürwik. Ort der Identitätsstiftung des deutschen Marinekorps?» *Demokratische Geschichte*, 28 (2018), pp. 197-224.

90 A. JORDAN, *Geschichte der brandenburgisch-preußischen Kriegs-Marine. In ihren Entwicklungsstufen dargestellt*, Berlin, Heinicke, 1856, p. 1; SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 1, p. XVI.

91 SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 1, p. 126.

the Imperial Navy had its origins in the Brandenburg-Africa Company⁹². The author of the preface thus interpreted the historical events detached from the sources. The Brandenburg fleet under Elector Friedrich Wilhelm played an important part in creating the tradition of the newly founded Imperial Navy. Other contributions were made by the predecessor navies, the Hanseatic League and the Hamburg convoy network. The Hanseatic League played an equally important role in this during the Middle Ages. It is only in recent years that the role of German medieval research has been critically considered in this context⁹³. However, due to the continuity of the Hohenzollern ruling dynasty dating back to the Brandenburg fleet under the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm, this approach was preferred for constructing the tradition of the Imperial Navy.



Portrait bust of Benjamin Raule, Wehrgeschichtliche Sammlung in Marineschule Mürwik, photo by Marko Richter.

⁹² SCHÜCK, cit., vol. 1, p. XIV.

⁹³ Reinhard PAULSEN, «Die Koggendiskussion in der Forschung. Methodische Probleme und ideologische Verzerrungen», *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 128 (2010), pp. 19-112.

Summary and outlook

It is always a worthwhile undertaking to question established wisdom. This paper addresses three areas that demonstrate the need for a re-examination of the subject of the Brandenburg fleet. Firstly, some important terms have no historical foundation: The term admiralty as a notion along with admiralship and admiral has not been documented for the pre-modern period. Also, the term *Marine* (navy), which is frequently used in German history, has not been examined or at least given due attention although its meaning has changed from the pre-modern period to its contemporary use. Until after the period of the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm, the German term *Marine* was used in its French sense, as referring to all maritime matters. The use of the term in the modern era, referring exclusively to maritime military forces, is an anachronism in this context. It was thus a small step to shift back the foundation of a German navy from around 1900 to the 17th century.

In addition, privateering in Germany has been viewed too much from a military and judicial perspective, and other aspects, such as its business or enterprise aspects, have been neglected. In addition to the necessary terminological definitions, the sources also need to be re-examined. It has become evident that previous historical studies were not unaffected by the political currents of their time, and some documents, such as Raule's "Deduction", were not given adequate recognition and inclusion. The inclusion of art works as historical sources can help supplement written documents. This second area offers as yet unexploited treasures if these art works are not only used as illustrations, but are also interpreted with the art historian's methodology. The works of Michiel Maddersteg, for example, have not yet been examined anywhere. The third area concerns its use during the German Empire from 1871 to 1945. Here, the distorted interpretation of the sources, the selection of sources and the creation of a narrative of the Brandenburg fleet could only be mentioned cursorily. The intention of this article is to demonstrate that new research is worthwhile and can lead to new insights into the subject. None of the three areas has been conclusively dealt with here. In each of the three areas, it was necessary to leave aside key aspects for future treatment.

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Armatura equestre realizzata nel 1548 a Norimberga dall'armaiolo Kunz Lochner (1510-1567)
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