

Gdansk and naval warfare during the dissolution of the Union of Kalmar

Summary

Wars between Denmark, Sweden and Lübeck during the dissolution of the Union of Kalmar, that lasted until 1523, were a maritime conflicts involving privateering as well. Privateer activity on a Baltic Sea was the cause of numerous incidents involving Hanseatic ships. They were often confiscated as a prize and their skippers were (wrongly or not) charged with practicing clandestine trade with the enemy. The conflict's impact on Gdansk – the largest Hanseatic trade centre on the Baltic sea after the Lübeck at that time – is the object of this study.

The final dissolution of the Union of Kalmar took place during the rule of Danish kings John (1481-1513) and Christian II (1513-1523). This thesis covers the period of 1497-1512, when king John conducted a wars with the regents of Sweden (1497, 1501-1512) and with Wendish cities (1509/1510-1512). Contrary to the period of 1518-1523 no monograph has been written on the history of the Union's dissolution impact on Gdansk and his maritime trade in 1497-1512.

The main focus of this study is to analyse the conflicts between Gdansk and Danish or Lübeck authorities around the privateering activity. The thesis is based on the research in State Archives in Gdansk (Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku – primarily city's correspondence until 1525) and comparative research in Archive of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck (Archiv der Hansestadt Lübeck), Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet) and Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet). This thesis is organised chronologically, with different chapters on periods: 1497, 1501-1509, 1509-1512. Only the first chapter has topical structure with subsections on late medieval Gdansk's shipping conditions. The remaining ones discuss Gdansk City Council policy and the conflicts resulting from the activity of privateers in each period separately.

First chapter deals with the persons and institutions responsible for Gdansk's foreign relations (including the questions of city's autonomy within the Kingdom of Poland and its Hanseatic relationships), territorial range of the Gdansk's maritime authority since the 1454-1457 privileges granted by Polish king Casimir IV, the legal aspects of topics presented in this thesis (Gdansk maritime law), situation of the crew of ships involved in discussed conflicts and the problem of distinction between 'pirate' and 'privateer' in the late medieval Northern Europe. Finally this chapter presents the topics of commercial connections between Gdansk and Sweden in the turn of 16th century and two maritime routes – essential for Gdansk trade –

from Baltic to the Western Europe: under the control of Wendish cities (by land between Lübeck and Hamburg) and Denmark (the Sound).

Second chapter presents the impact of 1497 war between king John and Swedish regent Sten Sture the Elder on Gdansk's political and commercial situation. That year the Danish monarch successfully invaded Sweden, where Sture's regency was weakened due to war with Russia, and took the throne in Stockholm. During this short conflict he tried to enforce the embargo on maritime trade with Sweden. As a result, among others three ships from Gdansk or carrying Gdansk merchant's goods were confiscated by Danish privateers. Despite of this Gdansk authorities decided to remain neutral (in the then sense of the word) and to maintain good relations with Danish king John, contrary to Lübeck. Also the City Council's restitution efforts were successful and confiscated property of Gdansk burghers was recovered.

Third chapter outlines the history of the first phase of Dano-Swedish conflict of 1501-1512 when Sten Sture the Elder (d. 1503) and Svante Nilsson (since 1503) strived to hold the regency after the deposition of king John from the Swedish throne in 1501. This phase of war lasted until the treaty of Copenhagen in 1509. First subsection presents the Gdansk's shipping situation in the years 1501-1504, when only two Gdansk's ships became Danish privateer's prize. Second subsection covers the period of 1505-1509. The direct result of the Gdansk City Council's neutrality policy was involvement in the Dano-Hanseatic negotiations and treaty of Nykøbing in 1507. This agreement resulted in Hanseatic neutrality in Dano-Swedish war. Involvement of emperor Maximilian I in Scandinavian conflict since 1504, rapid change of political situation in 1508-1509, when Wendish cities strived for war with Denmark to support the regency of Svante Nilsson in Sweden, diplomatic contacts between Denmark and Poland and primarily Gdansk's efforts caused in Polish 1509 diplomatic mission to Lübeck and Copenhagen, when the peace treaty between king John and the Swedish delegation was negotiated. In that period seven Gdansk's ships were confiscated by Danish privateers. Despite the Gdansk City Council and merchants restitution efforts, including two legations send to Copenhagen in 1508 and 1509, only one ship (with armament for Malbork castle) was returned due to the support of aforementioned Polish envoy in Denmark.

Fourth chapter presents the threats for Gdansk maritime trade in the period of 1510-1512, when the Wendish cities joined the war on the Swedish side and started to fight with Dutch shipping at the same time. In two years thirty ships from Gdansk or carrying Gdansk merchant's goods were confiscated: eight by Danish privateers, three by the Dutch and nineteen by Wendish (mainly Lübeck's) ones, which is presented in third and fourth subsections of this chapter. Not to mention a certain number of Gdansk's ships stopped in a ports of Lübeck

and Travemünde in 1510 and the attack of Lübeck's fleet on Dutch convoy by the Hel Peninsula in August 1511 (discussed in the fifth subsection). This naval battle and the activity of Wendish privateers close to the Vistula estuary were a violation of Gdansk-Lübeck 1511 agreement (discussed in second subsection) and caused a crisis in relations between two Hanseatic cities that ends with trial and execution of fifteen Lübeck's sailors in Gdansk in September 1511. In this situation it was very hard for Gdansk city councillors (with limited support of Polish king Sigismund I) to become neutral, to make any restitution efforts and to protect their essential maritime trade with Western Europe. The Danish king John's conflict with Sweden and Wendish cities was finally settled by the Treaty of Malmö in 1512 but the Gdansk's unsuccessful restitution efforts in Lübeck dragged on until 1518 and even later.

During the whole discussing period Gdansk City Council tried to stay neutral in Scandinavian conflicts due to the risk of distortion the commercial routes, especially with the West (shipping to Sweden was not as significant as to Netherlands or England). Nevertheless Gdansk burghers still conducted a maritime trade with Sweden and sometimes they became victims of Danish privateers. Wendish privateering activity of 1510-1512 was however more dangerous for the city's commerce. The crisis in relations between Gdansk and Lübeck shows the conflicting commercial and political interests of different Hanseatic cities. Polish king's limited support was usually a result of Gdansk's initiative. The final results of legal and above all diplomatic measures taken by Gdansk in the cases of privateering depended ultimately on the Danish or Lübeck authorities decision – as a consequence of Gdansk's neutrality policy. Burghers of Gdansk rather did not make any restitution efforts on their own because it was above all a matter of politics. But the Gdansk City Council did not treat the Danish and Wendish privateers like a sea robbers (in the then sense of the word), except for 1511 case of beheaded Lübeck's sailors.