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DUTCH ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS IN DANZIG AND THE SOUTHERN BALTIC IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

Large numbers of Dutch architects and engineers worked in Scandinavia and the Baltic area during the 16th and 17th centuries. A spot check on the basis of the best-known literature on architecture and urban development will easily give sixty names, and we can assume that this is just the tip of the iceberg. Danish and Swedish kings commissioned much work, but equally as important was the city of Danzig. In 1583 about 2200 ships called in at Danzig to pick up grain, and most of these ships were from the Netherlands. On the way out these ships usually carried herring, salt and cloth, but as cargo this was not weighty enough and they initially carried sand as ballast. This was thrown overboard just before docking at Danzig. This dumping, however, caused problems, and was later forbidden. Carrying saleable materials instead of sand was of course much more profitable and the Dutch ships soon started to carry building materials such as bricks, roofing-, floor- and Delft tiles, for which there was a great demand in the Baltic towns. In the early part of the 17th century Danzig was a very international town, with many Dutchmen, Germans, Danes, Swedes and Italians, whose job it often was to run some company's Danzig branch.

A large group of Mennonites, who had been persecuted because of their faith, had already established themselves in and around Danzig some time before. There was obviously a need for skilled craftsmen in this rapidly expanding area, and Dutch architects and engineers did not let this need go unnoticed. Dutchmen were especially wanted, as the geographical position of the town called for tasks in which the Dutch were specialized, such as dyke building, land reclamation, mill and lock construction and building in a wet environment and with bricks.

The engineers and architects, who at first were mostly from the Southern Netherlands, later more from the North, had by no means all left due to religious persecution: some had been invited by Danzig town council, others had come on their own initiative. Sometimes the town council's choice resolves into the international reputation that the person

in question had acquired, sometimes they came to the council's attention by other ways.

More than twenty architects and engineers have been incorporated in the following survey of Dutchmen who worked in Danzig or other Baltic towns in the vicinity of Danzig. Exhaustive research (that merits translation) has been done in Poland by Habela and others on the Dutch master builders Van Obbergen and Tylman van Gameren, but others will not be found in reference works on the history of Dutch architecture. This applies e.g. to the mysterious 16th century master builder Regnier "of Amsterdam", who was clearly influenced by the then newly-built Antwerp town hall when he built his "Green Gate", and to the 17th century Pieter Willer.

The town of Danzig must have been pleased with her Dutch architects and engineers. For over 100 years the post of town master builder was conferred on Dutchmen only. In 1621 Danzig sent a certain Henricus Thome with a grant to Leyden to read engineering there. A couple of years later we find him in the employ of the King of Sweden, for whom Thome made a "spy map" of Copenhagen. On this map we see what exactly Christian IV planned for his capital city. Such mobility was not unusual for 'real' Dutchmen either. An impression had been created, especially in the 17th century, of the Dutch architects being fairly sedentary: they worked in a certain town and were occasionally given commissions elsewhere in the country. A much more subtle picture of the master builder's and engineer's profession can be given by including those architects who were active elsewhere in the historiography of Netherlandish architecture, and by looking at the 'old' group in a different light. Shorter and longer instances of collaboration and 'networks' are revealed, which may be of crucial importance when we examine buildings for form language and iconological meaning. The following list takes in 25 of such 'new' Dutch architects and engineers who were active in Danzig and the Baltic region.

Regnier 'of Amsterdam' (d. 1573)

In 1563 the town council offered him a 10-year term of office as town master builder.

Works: the Green Gate (pol. Zielona Brama): palace for the King of Poland when in Danzig; armoury.

G. van Belcum (fl. 1652-1672)

Van Belcum was a scion of an old noble family. In 1652 he entered the service of the prince-elector. From 1652 to 1672 he worked on the Memel and Friedrichsburg fortresses. Another Dutchman, Hendrik van Bosch, assisted him during the planning of the Memel project.

Willem Janszoon Bennigh (fl. 1619)

Bennigh worked as a hydraulic engineer in Danzig. In 1619 he won a competition for the construction of a sluice in the southwest of the town. This sluice was required to regulate the river Mottlau, which ran through the fortifications. Another Dutchman, Adriaen Olbrantsz, worked with

him on this project.

The Van de Blocke family

The Van de Blocke family was originally from Mechelen. The most important members are:

Willem van de Blocke

Started his carrier in Königsberg, where he built the memorial stone for Elizabeth, wife of margrave Georg Friedrich. In 1587 he moved to Danzig, where he covered the High Gate (pol. Brama Wyzina) with sandstone and decorated it with coats of arms. He also built some private residences.

Abraham van de Blocke

Born in Königsberg in 1572. Mention is made of him in the Danzig town archives from 1594 onwards. He obtained civil rights in 1596 and was employed by the town as a bricklayer and sculptor. As such he worked under the direction of A. van Obbergen on the armoury, and was later named town master builder after Van Obbergen's death. His largest work was the rebuilding of the south facade of the Artushof, in which his brother Jacob also participated. He also built the Golden Gate (pol. Złota Brama), the Speimannhaus on the Długi Targ and the Royal Granary on an island in the river Mottlau. He died in 1628.

Isaac van de Blocke

I. van de Blocke, son of Willem, was chiefly painter. Like Vredeman de Vries and Willem van der Meer he worked on the decorations of the town hall.

Daniel van Buren

D. van Buren was fortification master in Danzig c. 1620. He worked together with Cornelis Bosch.

Walter Clemens

Clemens was born in Danzig of Dutch parents. He invented a dredging machine with which the harbour of Danzig was deepened from 1595 onwards. He died in 1609.

Dirk Daniels

Daniels was an Anabaptist from Zeeland. In 1560 he built the tower on the town hall, on which a statue of King Sigismund Augustus was placed. The carillon for the tower was furnished by Johan de Moor from Brabant. He also built the no longer existing Kogge bridge. Daniels is supposed to have built a large fountain together with his brother Gerard.

J. Corneliszoon van Doesborch

Van Doesborch's father worked as 'Stadttechniker' in Danzig. At the intercession of the fortification commander of Pillau, Otto Wilhelm von Podewils, van Doesborch was appointed fortification master builder of this town by the prince-elector, on a very high salary. His assistant in Pillau

from 1641 onwards was Johann Gregor Memhardt, an Austrian engineer who had obtained his qualifications in the Netherlands. This collaboration was not without its problems, which eventually led to both men being dismissed.

Paul van Dorne

Originally from Antwerp, van Dorne obtained civil rights in Danzig in 1571. He is believed to have been the builder of the Ankersmid tower.

Like de Grot

According to Galland L. de Grot was an engineer in Pillau. He supposedly worked in Pillau in the beginning of the 1630's. This emerges from archive material concerning his salary. However, nothing is known about his work. After his death in 1640 he was succeeded by J. C. van Doesborch and J. G. Memhardt.

Johan van Hensbeck

Van Hensbeck was a hydraulic engineer in Danzig c. 1600, responsible for the deepening of the harbour.

Nicolaes de Kemp(e)

De Kemp(e) left for Poland in 1602, where he drew town plans of Pillau and Neidenburg. In 1607 he went to Sweden, where Charles IX commissioned him to draw up a new town plan of Gothenburg.

Willem van der Meer

A.k.a. master Barth, van der Meer was originally from Ghent. In 1556 he restored the town hall of the part of Danzig called 'Rechtstad', which had been destroyed by fire. He also decorated the facade of the 'Peinkammer' with sculpture work. He died in Danzig in 1621.

Anthonie van Obbergen (1543-1611)

Van Obbergen worked on the rebuilding of the Kronborg in Elsinore, Denmark, from 1577 to 1585. In 1586 we find him living in Danzig, where he worked on the Weichselmünde fortress. In 1587 he was commissioned to build a new town hall in the Old Town. From 1590 to

III. 3: Gate with 'earrings' of a house under restoration in Elbing (photo: T.

Boersma, 1993)

1591 he fortified the town of Küstrin. In 1592 he succeeded H. C. Vroom as master builder of Danzig, a post he would occupy till his death. He was also granted an annuity and a tied house with a garden near the High Gate. In 1593 he designed a fortification zone around the town. He designed many other buildings, such as merchant's house on the U. Chlebnica (Brotbankgasse) 24, the presbytery of the church of St. Catherine and the houses on A. Korzenna 44 and 47. In 1600 he designed the armoury, which was built in the period from 1602 to 1605. He was also active elsewhere in Poland: from 1601 to 1603 he designed a new town hall for Torún, and was engaged in fortification work.

Pierre de Perceval

P. de Perceval was the son of Adriaan de Perceval, who was commissioned by Christian IV of Denmark to build Glückstadt. Pierre, who like his father was Quartermaster-General, designed the expansion of the town outside of its walls. He also modernized the fortress of Krempe. During the first Northern War he was fortress commander in Danzig.

Simon Stevin

In the early 1590's Danzig's harbour was silting up at an alarming rate. Through a middleman S. Stevin and J. de Groot, the mayor of Delft, offered to combat the problem. The town council found Stevin's plan too expensive, after which Stevin thought up an alternative. However, this did not meet with the council's approval either. The plans were later incorporated by Stevin's son in part 11 of the 'Wisconstich Filosofisch Bedryf: Van den Waterschuring onses Vaders Simon Stevin'. Stevin made similar proposals for Braunsberg and Elbing.

Tylman van Gameren (c. 1632-1706)

Van Gameren was born in Utrecht. At first he worked in Italy, where he was discovered by a young Polish nobleman. The nobleman took him on, and van Gameren built many palaces, country houses and villas in Poland. The only edifice built by him in Danzig is the Royal Chapel (1678).

Johan van Valkenburgh (1575-1625)

Van Valkenburgh was a pupil of the renowned master builder Johan van Rijswijk. He initially worked in Lubeck, and was 'lent' by Lübeck to Rostock, where he designed three plans for the fort. Eleven years later he returned to Rostock to make a fourth design. In 1624 he worked in Stralsund for a short while, and died a year later in Voorburg near The Hague.

Johan Vredeman de Vries (c. 1527-1606)

Like A. van Obbergen, Vredeman de Vries was engaged in 1592 by the town council of Danzig to make a design for the improvement of the town's fortifications, but Van Obbergen's design was accepted. At his

*Ill. 4P. Willer, map of Danzig, from R. Curicke, Der Stadt Danzig
historische Beschreibung (1687)*

request Vredeman de Vries received one more year's salary. With his son Poul he also executed the wall paintings in the Red Hall and the Little Hall of the town hall and in the Artushof.

Frederik Hendrikszoon Vroom

Vroom, a sculptor and master builder, was born in Haarlem. In 1567 he went to Danzig and in 1578 was named town master builder, which he was to be till his death in 1585. The following buildings are attributed to Vroom: the residences at Ulica Chlebnica (Brotbankgasse) 1 and 11, and Dlugi Targ 14. He supposedly also worked in Torun. One of Vroom's brothers, Gerard, was also master builder in Danzig.

Peter Jansen de Weert

From 1626 to 1626 de Weert was responsible for all fortification work in Danzig. His successor was Adam Wiebe.

Adam Wiebe

A. Wiebe, from Harlingen in Frisia, was one of the Mennonites who settled in Danzig and the Danzig-Elbing-Torun area from 1572 onwards. In 1616 he was engaged by the town as a mill-builder. In 1623 he asked for a privilege to be granted to him to reclaim some pieces of land using a new method. The King of Poland engaged him in 1625 and three years later he was put in charge of the Danzig waterworks. In 1631 he built a bridge over the Vistula. Wiebe worked in Riga as well.

Wiebe owes his fame mostly to the cable-way, with which he managed to level the Bischofsberg in Danzig. With the thus accumulated earth the Berg bastion was erected. It was later given the honorary name of 'Wieberondell'. Wiebe owned a sawmill and an oil-mill in Danzig. He stayed in the service of the town till his death in 1653.

Peter Willer

Willer, a pupil of Jacob van Campen, is supposed to have been involved in the building of the town hall of Amsterdam. In 1651 we find him at the court of John Casimir in Warsaw. Willer built a lock and a royal pleasure ground 'Der hollandische Hof' at Nieporent, where the Druga joins the Narew. In Warsaw he built another pleasure ground, at Queen

Marie-Louise's palace. At the outbreak of the First Northern War he returned to Holland, and was involved in town development in Amsterdam. He returned to Danzig in 1661, and in 1666 was named town master builder. The Danzig waterworks were also placed under his supervision. In 1671 he built himself a large residence, with a terraced garden decorated with (partly mechanical) works of art. Willer also had a large collection instruments, books and drawings. He also made the numerous illustrations and the map in Curicke's Danzig chronicle, which was printed in 1687.

During a graduate seminar in 1993/4 research was done on Dutch influences in the Baltic area by students of the Department of History at Leiden University. In the field of architecture and town planning much work was done by M. Kingma and S. Schiller.

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