
A Small Baltic Port in the Early Modern Period: the Port of Elbing in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century

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Concentration on the history of the larger Baltic ports like Danzig, has meant that the problems of smaller ports along the Baltic coast have often been neglected. One of these lesser known ports was Elbing, long a rival of Danzig. In the present study we will take Elbing as an example of the situation and development of the smaller Baltic ports, that were unable to keep pace with the growth and importance of the large ones, even though they fulfilled specific functions in international trade and maintained close connections with their hinterland.

The best source for the study of Elbing's trade and shipping are the "*Pfahlzollbücher*" (mooring customs books).¹ The origin of these toll records which date from 1585 to 1700 is connected with the English Eastland Company's settlement in Elbing.² In 1577 the city of Danzig refused to acknow-

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¹ Wojewódzkie Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku (WAP Gd.), Archiwum miasta Elbląga: *Libri portorii Elbingenses*.

² Elbing was founded by the Teutonic Knights at the end of the thirteenth century and in 1466 like the other Prussian Hansa towns Danzig and Thorn became subject to the Polish King. On the Eastland Company's settlement in Elbing see S. GIERSZEWSKI, "Die Problematik der kleinen Häfen des ehemaligen Polens (Elbląg 16-18 Jh.)", *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* 5 (1970), pp. 143-156. J.K. FEDOROWICZ, "The Struggle for the Elbing Staple: An Episode in the History of Commercial Monopolies," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, N.F. 27 (1979), pp. 220-230. H. ZINS, *Anglia a Baltyk*

ledge Stefan Batory's election as King of Poland, so he blockaded the city and channelled Polish exports through Elbing. The young English Eastland Company was looking for a suitable staple for its trade with the Baltic and contacted Elbing which was at that time more cooperative than Danzig. In 1580 a treaty was signed between the company and the city magistrates that put the Eastland merchants on equal terms with the merchants of Elbing. Expenses for the maintenance of the harbour were to be shared between the city and the Eastland Company.³ For this the city collected a toll, the "Pfahlzoll," which had to be paid on every commodity imported or exported and amounted 1.11 per cent of value.⁴ 35 toll registers for the period 1585 to 1700 have survived: 1585-1587, 1594, 1596-1597, 1599-1603, 1605, 1607, 1612, 1615-1616, 1618-1620, 1623, 1625, 1653-1655, 1666, 1685, 1687, 1690-1691, 1695-1700.⁵

The data recorded include name and Christian name of the shipper, his domicile, the data of arrival and departure from the port, description and quantity of goods and the custom duty imposed thereon. Also from 1594, in the case of exported goods, the port of destination, and from 1653, in the case of imports, the ports of departure were noted. The toll records may be considered trustworthy and the figures shown therein are valid and accurate. To check and complement the data contained in the Elbing customs registers historians can use the toll records from Pillau between 1638 to 1712 for tolls collected by the Duke of Prussia.⁶ The export figures noted in the Pillau registers were normally slightly higher than those reported in the Elbing "Pfahlzoll" books because ships leaving Elbing completed their return cargoes in Königsberg, Braunsberg and Frauenburg.⁷

w drugiej połowie XVI wieku. Bałtycki handel kupców angielskich z Polska w epoce elżbietańskiej i Kompania Wschodnia, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków 1967, pp. 71-73.

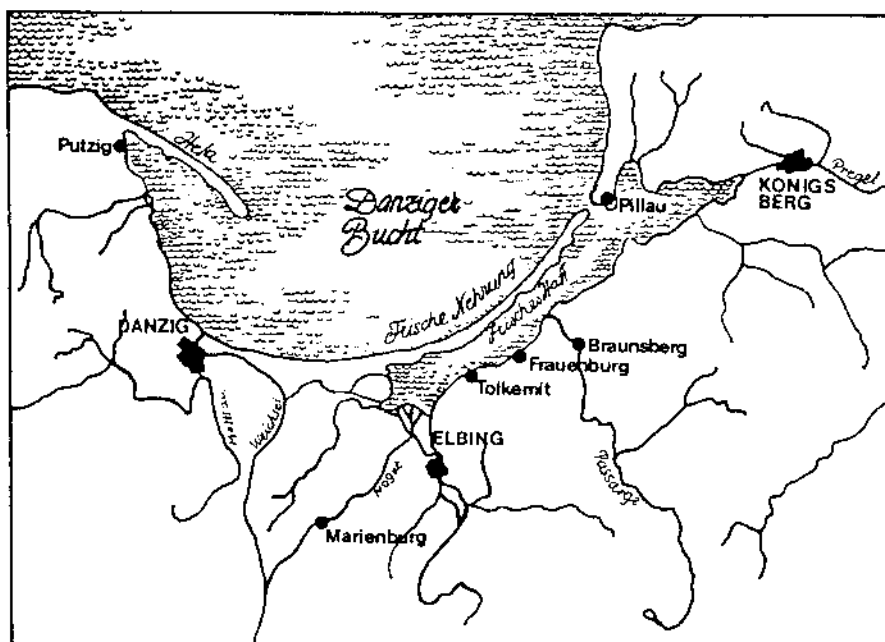
³ ZINS, *Anglia a Battyk*, pp. 81, 85, 87.

⁴ A. GROTH, *Wybrane problemy handlu Elbląga w latach 1698-1711*, *Rocznik Gdański* 37 (1979), p. 135.

⁵ A. GROTH, *Ruch statków w porcie elbląskim w latach 1585-1700*, *Rocznik Gdański* 37 (1977), p. 39. Parts of the toll records concerning Dutch shippers were published by F.B.M. TANGELDER, *Nederlandse Rekeningen in de Pondtollregisters van Elbing 1585-1602*, The Hague 1972.

⁶ GROTH, *Ruch statków*, pp. 39, 44. A. GROTH, *Piławskie księgi celne z lat 1638-1712*, *Zapiski Historyczne* 45 (1980), no. 1, pp. 133-141.

⁷ S. GIERZEWski, *Statystyka handlu zbożowego Elbląga w latach 1642-1795*, *Zapiski Historyczne* 23 (1957), no. 173, pp. 158, 159. That is why the Sound toll records are less suitable for the reconstruction of Elbing trade than the Elbing "Pfahlzoll" registers, for a considerable part of the Elbing exports are often neglected and registered together with the Königsberg export (the bulk of the ship's cargo). On this point see GIERZEWski, *Die Problematik*, p. 155.



The Site of the Seaports of Danzig, Elbing and Königsberg

Shipping traffic and tonnage were closely related to the difficult navigation conditions in the port of Elbing.⁸ The town had been founded by the Teutonic Knights on the small river Elbing for strategic reasons. The harbour was connected with the Baltic Sea by the shallow waterway of the Frische Haff, which was increasingly silted up in the sixteenth and seventeenth century as large amounts of silt were carried downstream from Poland.⁹ In spite of the dredging in the early seventeenth century (1615, 1620, 1628, 1630-1632) bigger ships were often not able to sail loaded directly into the port of Elbing, and had to moor at Pillau and transfer their cargo into smaller lighter vessels, the so-called "Bordinge" or "Schmacken."¹⁰ The largest ships of from 110

⁸ Monthly and yearly statistics on maritime traffic are published by Groth, *Ruch statków*, pp. 40-43 (Tab. 1, 1a).

⁹ S. GIERSEWSKI, *Życie portowe Elbląga w XVII i XVIII wieku, Szkice z dziejów Pomorza*, part 2, *Pomorze nowożytne*, Warszawa 1959, pp. 314, 315.

¹⁰ GIERSEWSKI, *Życie portowe*, p. 339. Groth, *Ruch statków*, p. 45. The "Bording", a one-masted or two-masted ship, was the principal lighter vessel used on the Frische Haff. P. SMOLAREK, *Studia nad szkutnictwem Pomorza Gdańskiego X-XIII*

to 170 lasts, one third of all ships calling at Elbing, entered the harbour in ballast.¹¹ Ships of 30 to 110 lasts formed another third and entered partially loaded. Only ships of the smallest size below 30 lasts, could enter the port fully loaded.¹² The shipping season lasted from April to November. In May and June traffic was most intense and about 30 per cent of the total clearances occurred in these months. In the following months the number of ships calling at Elbing decreased as a result of the seasonal variations in grain prices. In July and August, just before the new harvest, grain prices reached a very high level and grain ships seldom entered the harbour since the grain merchants had already procured their rye on more favourable conditions.¹³

The structure and development of commerce determined the direction of Elbing's exports and determined the city's relations with the hinterland. The Elbing market exchanged manufactured goods from Western Europe, raw materials from Scandinavia, agricultural and forest products from Poland and Ducal Prussia. Elbing played the part of a middleman between domestic production and foreign demand as well as between commodity imports and consumption by the Polish and East Prussian gentry who purchased Western European goods. Grain, hemp, flax, timber and such by-products as pitch, tar and potash were exported by sea to Western Europe. In the trade balance, grain and flax were the most important export commodities.¹⁴ Cereal exports

wieku, *Prace muzeum morskiego w Gdańsku*, vol. 3, Gdańsk 1969, p. 93. For the lighters in Elbing and Königsberg see S. GIERZEWski, *Elbląski cech armatorski w XVIII wieku*, *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* 16 (1953), pp. 241-261. M. NORTH, "Bordingsröhder" and "Schmackenschiffer". *Zur Sozialgeschichte des Königsberger Leichtergewerbes im 17. Jh.*, *Beiträge zur Deutschen Volks- und Altertumskunde* 20 (1981), pp. 71-79.

¹¹ Compare R.W. UNGER, Dutch Herring, Technology, and International Trade in the Seventeenth Century, *Journal of Economic History* 40 (1980), N. 2, p. 269, "The proportion of Dutch ships entering the Baltic in ballast fell from two thirds to less than one half by the end of the 1620's." Groth, *Ruch statków*, pp. 46-51 (Tab. 2, 3, 3 a, 4, 4 a). The last was a dry measure with regionally differing content. It contained at Danzig, Elbing or Königsberg 60 scheffel (grain) respectively 12 tons (beer, honey, salt).

¹² The bigger ships declared their ports of departure and destination almost exclusively in the Netherlands, smaller ships, below 30 lasts, in Gotland and Lübeck. M. NORTH, *Elbinger Schiffsverkehr und Seehandel in der Frühen Neuzeit*, *Beiträge zur Deutschen Volks- und Altertumskunde* 19 (1980), p. 91.

¹³ See J. PEŁC, *Ceny w Gdańsku w XVI i XVII wieku*, Lwów 1937, p. 12-15 (Tab. 2). A comparison between grain prices at Danzig and Elbing shows that in spring grain prices were lower at Danzig than at Elbing, resulting from greater quantities grain shipped to and sold at Danzig. See A. MAĆZAK, *Między Gdańskiem a Sundem. Studia nad handlem bałtyckim od połowy XVI do połowy XVII wieku*, Warszawa 1972, p. 44-46.

¹⁴ A. MAĆZAK, *The Balance of Polish Sea Trade with the West 1565-1646*, *Scandi-*

TABLE 1

GRAIN, FLOUR, AND MALT EXPORTED FROM ELBING 1585 TO 1642

	Wheat		Rye		Barley		Oats		Flour		Malt	
	1	sch	1	sch	1	sch	1	sch	1	sch	1	sch
1585	30	30	82	15	27		—		3			—
1586	254	35	3012	15	42		17	5	20	22,5		—
1587	700		2523	30	100		—		1	52,5		58
1590	108	30	419		268	30	—		—			—
1594	1244		1930	30	965	30	—		10	30		39 30
1596	1344		1762	30	1930		—		3	10		90 20
1597	1909	15	2917	15	1303	30	22		20	15		236
1599	1177		703	30	65	30	—		—			11
1600	439	45	872		27		—		1			15
1601	415	45	726	15	34		—		3	30		1
1602	811	42	795	30	856	23	45	15	2	50		108 42
1603	1366	30	1583	4	208	30	—		8	27,5		19 10
1605	281		898		162		—		—			10
1607	924	15	1961		745	30	—		—			41 30
1612	548	20	804	15	426	30	18	30	—			—
1615	1183	30	2149	30	1409	30	109		—			29
1616	1043	45	1674		860	30	117		—			68
1618	1613		3758	30	1305		733		1			55 30
1619	867		4249	30	935		355	30	—			10
1620	1612		2945	30	1487	30	112		—			77
1623	367		975	45	—		27		—			—
1625	385	30	796		14		88	30	—			—
1638	1110		269	50	1463		227	30	—			14
1642	260	28	1473	15	2074	30	74		7			99 30

Source: WAP Gd., Archiwum miasta Elbląga: Libri portorii Elbigenses

1 = last
sch = scheffel

consisted mainly of rye, wheat and barley; oats, flour, malt and peas were shipped in much smaller quantities.¹⁵

Rye was the main export cereal and only in 1599, 1602 and 1638 did Elbing export more wheat than rye. The rye exports clearly reflect variations

navian Economic History Review 18 (1970), p. 131 (Tab. 2, compiled on the basis of the Sound toll records).

¹⁵ WAP Gd., Archiwum miasta Elbląga: Libri portorii. For the reconstruction of Elbing's exports the author is indebted to Andrzej Groth, Puck (Poland), who supplied the grain export data 1585 to 1642. For 1642 to 1795 see GIERZESKI, *Statystyka handlu*, pp. 169-172 (Tab. 1-4).

in the European grain trade and economic situation. They grew from 1586 and boomed in the last decade of the sixteenth century, but Elbing's cereal trade showed signs of decline (except in 1603 and 1607) at the beginning of the seventeenth century. After a new expansion between 1615 to 1620 (with maximum exports of more than 4000 lasts in 1618 and 1619) a long lasting export depression set in.

In explaining the variations in Elbing's grain trade we will pay attention to the expansion of Danzig and overall Polish grain exports to avoid an interpretation confined solely to the Elbing grain market. The expansion of Polish exports both from Elbing and Danzig show common features, resulting on the one hand from the variations in European cereal markets and on the other hand from productive capacity in Poland. While the late sixteenth century was characterized by brisk cereal demand in Western Europe stimulated by a supply crisis and high prices on the Amsterdam market which resulted from famine and bad harvests in Southern Europe, the seventeenth century saw clear stagnation in demand.¹⁶ Elbing and Danzig merchants were affected by this fall in demand in a special way since the disparity between supply and demand was increased by exceptional harvests in Poland and Prussia. Grain merchants had great difficulties in selling their rye and wheat on the Amsterdam market, and could only obtain minimum prices. Their financial losses were passed back to the producers, who in turn tried to compensate for the reduced returns by increasing the quantities of grain destined for export thereby causing exports to peak in 1618 and 1619.¹⁷ The situation changed in the 1620s when the Dutch cereal demand increased, but Polish and Prussian producers were affected by bad harvests and the damage caused by the Polish-Swedish war, and were not able to satisfy the demand of Danzig and Elbing or of Western Europe.¹⁸ The Dutch obtained their grain from other sources — for example Archangel — and became more and more independent of the supplies from the Baltic. Rising productivity in the Netherlands and in England also proved to be an important factor in the decline

¹⁶ M. BOGUĆKA, *Handel zagraniczny Gdańska w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków 1970, p. 9. Pelc, *Ceny w Gdańsku*, p. 48 (Tab. 16). M. BOGUĆKA, *Zboże rosyjskie na rynku amsterdamskim w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, *Przegląd Historyczny* 53 (1962), pp. 615, 616. Analysing the development of grain prices in Germany, England, France, in the Netherlands, already in the 1930s W. ABEL noticed a general depression of European grain trade. W. ABEL, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur vom 13. bis 19. Jh.*, Berlin 1935, pp. 60, 72-82.

¹⁷ BOGUĆKA, *Handel zagraniczny*, pp. 10-12. Pelc, *Ceny w Gdańsku*, p. 54. For the development of yield ratios in Poland and Ducal Prussia see M. NORTH, *Die Amtswirtschaften von Osterode und Soldau. Vergleichende Untersuchungen zur Wirtschaft im frühmodernen Staat am Beispiel des Herzogtums Preußen in der zweiten Hälfte des 16. und der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jhs.*, Berlin 1982, pp. 25-29.

¹⁸ BOGUĆKA, *Zboże rosyjskie*, pp. 616-618. Bogucka, *Handel zagraniczny*, pp. 162, 163.

of the Polish and, to a lesser extent, the Prussian economy.¹⁹ Exports of timber and by-products such as pitch, tar and potash were of minor importance in Elbing's trade balance, but the export of flax and hemp however exceeded grain exports several times both in volume and value.²⁰

Far more important than Elbing's export function in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was the port's role as an import centre. Elbing was the staple of the Eastland Company and was the main Polish importer of cloth. Moreover salt, herrings, wine — the typical commodities of the West and the South — were also imported.²¹ From 1628, when the Eastland merchants gave up their Elbing establishment, changes in the port's import and export structure took place. Exports of pitch and tar as well as flax and hemp to English markets decreased, cloth imports also fell, but the import of iron, building stone and lime from Gotland increased.²²

From 1594 to 1700, 42 per cent of the ships leaving Elbing declared ports of destination in the Netherlands, 27 per cent in England, 15.4 per cent in Scandinavia and the rest along the German Baltic coast.²³ In the years between 1599 to 1625, when the Eastland Company had established a foothold in Elbing trade, English ports — Hull, London, Newcastle, Ipswich — occupied the first position among all destinations. However, the Eastland Company's withdrawal from Elbing in 1628 changed this situation and after 1628 only 8 to 11 per cent declared an English destination, while the share of Dutch (often two thirds of all sailings), and Scandinavian ports rose. At the end of the century no more English ships were seen in Elbing. For cereal exports the Dutch ports had always dominated and wheat was exported almost exclusively to Amsterdam and to a smaller extent to Enkhuizen. Most of the rye went to Amsterdam and Enkhuizen, with lesser quantities going to Harlingen and Hoorn. In 1586/87, 1596/97, 1615, 1618 and 1619 considerable quantities were also shipped to England, probably because of bad harvests there, but there may have been other reasons as well.²⁴ Rye exports to German ports like Lübeck, Hamburg and Emden were only of marginal importance.

¹⁹ MAĆZAK, *Między Gdańskiem*, pp. 162-164. In Ducal Prussia grain cultivation did not take on monocultural dimensions as in Poland. That is why producers were not affected as badly there as in Poland.

²⁰ MAĆZAK, *The Balance*, p. 131, Tab. 2.

²¹ MAĆZAK, *Między Gdańskiem*, pp. 102-104. GIEŚZEWski, *Die Problematik*, p. 154. On herring imports see UNGER, *Dutch Herring*, p. 266.

²² GIEŚZEWski, *Die Problematik*, p. 152-156. A. GROTH, *Zegluga i handel morski Elbląga z krajami Skandynawii w drugiej połowie XVII wieku*. Zeszyty naukowe wydziału humanistycznego uniwersytetu gdańskiego 10 (1980), pp. 15-17.

²³ See GROTH, *Ruch statków*, pp. 56-65 (Tab. 5 a).

²⁴ According to Zins, *Anglia a Bałtyk*, p. 250, England was able to supply herself and depended on grain imports only in cases of bad harvests.

The most valuable sources for the reconstruction of the commerce between Elbing and her hinterland are the records of the revenues and expense of the East Prussian "Ämter," the local administrative, juridical, economic and military districts of Ducal Prussia.²⁵ These records list the quantities of grain sold to the Elbing merchants as well as the commodities bought in exchange at that port. The hinterland of a seaport includes that region which directly participated in the exchange of commodities with the port; it provided agrarian products and raw materials to satisfy urban and export demand and purchased import commodities like manufactured products, luxury goods, foreign raw materials, and foreign food. The definition of Elbing's hinterland is difficult for two reasons: over time the hinterland changed in area and in the size of supply and demand,²⁶ and secondly economic historians of the seaport have usually neglected relations with the hinterland.²⁷ On the basis of recent research we may however identify the hinterland of the port of Elbing with the East Prussian "Oberland," the south-western part of Ducal Prussia.²⁸

Supply to the port from the East Prussian hinterland functioned mainly through the trade in cereals between the *Oberland Ämter* and the Elbing merchants, and Elbing served as market for the *Oberland*. In the first and second decades of the seventeenth century, as the demand from local markets decreased drastically, the *Ämter Osterode und Soldau* for example supplied Elbing with 71 per cent and respectively with 65 per cent of all rye sold by the Amt.²⁹ After market conditions worsened due to unfavourable trends, the ducal administration ordered the *Ämter* to concentrate all grain sales at Preußisch Holland near Elbing. Local Amt servants had to watch supply and price developments and dispose of the rye produced in the *Ämter* at the most favourable opportunity. The grain produced by the *Oberland* farms of the Prussian gentry also went to Elbing. The peasants were obliged to transport the rye for their landlords to the port. Unfortunately there are only sporadic sources, giving by chance particulars on the grain trade and grain production of the Prussian gentry.³⁰ In addition to cereals (mainly rye), the *Oberland* sold wool and honey in smaller quan-

²⁵ The "Amtsrechnungen" are preserved in the *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin* (GStA PK), XX. Hauptabteilung (Staatsarchiv Königsberg).

²⁶ GIERSEWSKI, *Die Problematik*, pp. 153, 154.

²⁷ See for instance Gierszewski, *Zycie portowe*. GIERSEWSKI, *Die Problematik*, On the hinterland we often find only assumptions which are seldom confirmed by the sources.

²⁸ NORTH, *Die Amtswirtschaften* pp. 34-37.

²⁹ In the second half of the sixteenth century 45 per cent of *Osterode* and 36 per cent of *Soldau* rye were sold to Elbing merchants, so we must increase the *Soldau* percentage since the Amt records did not in every case give the exact name of the purchaser.

³⁰ GStA PK Berlin, XX. Hauptabteilung (Staatsarchiv Königsberg): Adelsarchiv 339 (Finck von Finckenstein), IV, 4. März 1589, fol. 25-25 v. In this case a letter of an

tities on the Elbing market.³¹ The supply of timber and forest products to Elbing is not mentioned in the *Amt* records, but there are some remarks on timber rafting from Osterode to Danzig. Most of the timber trade as well as tar, pitch and potash production was carried on by private individuals. We may suppose therefore that the merchant-entrepreneurs shipped their commodities to Elbing and Danzig at their own expense.

With respect to demand and consumption, the composition of the hinterland was different. Indeed foreign imports like salt, Rhine wine, cloth, paper, ink, iron and steel passed to the *Oberland* via Elbing.³² For cloth imports however the whole Polish territory may be considered to form Elbing's hinterland for demand and consumption. Elbing was in fact the centre for Polish cloth imports, whereas the main purchaser of the English cloth, the Polish gentry, sold their most important product, grain, in Danzig. That is why the Polish gentry's money followed a triangular flow: Danzig-Polish hinterland-Elbing.³³ But the supply hinterland of Elbing, the East Prussian *Oberland*, was very limited in its ability to produce for the market, and could not produce an adequate quantity of goods for the Elbing commodity markets. As a result, prices were usually higher in Elbing than in Danzig or Königsberg. On the other hand, English merchants selling their cloth in Elbing did not seem interested in exporting grain and so they condemned the port to a negative balance of trade.³⁴

To estimate Elbing's role as a port and trade centre more exactly we may compare Elbing's grain export and trade figures with the corresponding data for Danzig. While Danzig was exporting an annual average of 90000 lasts of grain, Elbing's exports did not exceed 6000 lasts until the middle of the seventeenth century. Breaking down the grain export figures of the Baltic ports; Danzig handled 82 per cent of total exports, Elbing 7.4 per cent; Stettin, Königsberg and Riga 10.6 per cent together.³⁵ The trade balance figures clearly reflect Elbing's position in the Polish economy.

"*Amtsschreiber*" tells us that the Prussian nobleman Bartel Finck had transported 13 lasts 58 scheffel grain from his farm to an Elbing merchant's granery.

³¹ The *Oberland* supplied only small quantities of wheat to Elbing, since the *Oberland* soil was not suited for wheat cultivation, GStA PK Berlin, XX. Hauptabteilung (Staatsarchiv Königsberg): Ostpreußische Folianten 8163, 8164, 8165, 8166, 8194, 8236, 10551, 10592, 10623, 10631.

³² GStA PK Berlin, XX. Hauptabteilung (Staatsarchiv Königsberg): Ostpreußische Folianten 8205, 8213, 8224, 8234, 10585, 10610, 10618. Adelsarchiv 339 (Finck von Finckenstein), IV, 4. März 1589, fol. 25-25 v. See also J. MAŁECKI, *Związki handlowe miast polskich z Gdańskiem w XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków 1968, p. 174.

³³ MAĆZAK, *Między Gdańskiem*, p. 104.

³⁴ FEDOROWICZ, *The Struggle* p. 225. MAĆZAK, *Między Gdańskiem*, p. 104.

³⁵ GIERSZEWSKI, *Die Problematik*, pp. 147, 148.

TABLE 2

SHARE OF ELBING EXPORTS IN THE TOTAL VALUE
OF DANZIG AND ELBING EXPORTS (PER CENT)

1565	1575	1585	1595	1605	1615	1625	1635	1646
2.3	8.3	25.9	11.4	14.5	10.3	6.3	1.1	4

Source: Mączak, *Między Gdańskiem*, Tab. 26, 27 respect. Mączak, *The Balance*, Tab. 10, 11.

TABLE 3

SHARE OF ELBING IMPORTS IN THE TOTAL VALUE
OF DANZIG AND ELBING IMPORTS (PER CENT)

1565	1575	1585	1595	1605	1615	1625	1635	1646
1.6	—	73.1	54.8	42.6	45.7	25.3	1.5	4.2

Source: Mączak, *Między Gdańskiem*, Tab. 28, 39 respect. Mączak, *The Balance*, Tab. 12, 13.

While the value of Elbing's exports in relation to total Polish exports varied from 1.1 to 25.9 per cent — on average it was 15 per cent — the value of Elbing's imports related to total Polish imports varied from 73.1 to 1.5 per cent, showing a tendency to fall from the second decade of the seventeenth century. The contrast in trade balances becomes obvious: in spite of its smaller export volume — Danzig was the main exporter of cereals — Elbing was an important import centre and for some time even the main Polish importer, as a result of the Eastland Company's staple. The positive Polish balance was made in Danzig, while Elbing's contribution to the trade balance was negative.³⁶

Finally we should outline the factors that determined the decline of the port of Elbing, while its traditional rival, Danzig, succeeded in improving its position. Historians always mention Elbing's relatively disadvantageous geographical position, the unsuitable navigation and harbour conditions as well as the difficult communications with the hinterland. There was, for example, no canal system.³⁷ But in a recent publication the Polish historian Gierszewski pointed out another factor to be considered in relation to the development of smaller Baltic ports: the high transport costs of imports and exports

³⁶ See MACZAK, *Między Gdańskiem*, p. 102.

³⁷ GIERSZEWSKI, *Życie portowe* pp. 314, 315.

which in the case of Elbing resulted from the toll collected by the Duke of Prussia at Pillau. Ships entering and leaving Elbing had to pay double the duty of ships entering and leaving Danzig.³⁸ Moreover the historian has to consider political changes that unfavourably influenced the importance of the port as a trade centre. From the time of the Eastland Company's settlement in Elbing and the acquisition of Danzig's English trade by the port, Danzig with the support of members of the Polish nobility started to agitate to regain the profitable English trade.³⁹ Offering a better port, greater security and larger markets, Danzig succeeded in persuading the merchants of the northern English ports to move to Danzig, although the Londoners preferred to remain in Elbing. During the Swedish occupation of Elbing between 1626 to 1635, however, Danzig was finally rewarded for its efforts by an act of the Polish *Sejm* (Parliament), which ordered the dissolution of the Eastland Company in Poland and directed all cloth imports through Danzig. The English staple was liquidated, and this also increased commodity, money and credit exchanges as the money of the Polish gentry was no longer forced to flow in a triangle and could follow the direct route between Danzig and its hinterland.⁴⁰

The growth of Elbing's trade in the late sixteenth century resulted above all from Danzig's conflict with Stefan Batory and the staple of the newly formed Eastland Company, which had made Elbing the principal Polish cloth importer. Because of its limited commodity markets Elbing, however, was not able to perform the functions both of an import and an export centre. Therefore it was only a matter of time until Danzig, the main Polish exporter took over the cloth trade *de facto*, even before the *Sejm* ordered the liquidation of the Eastland Company's staple in 1628. After the loss of the English staple, with its economy ruined by the Swedish occupation, Elbing preserved only her role as a regional market for the East Prussian *Oberland*.

³⁸ GIERSEWSKI, *Die Problematik*, pp. 146, 147. See also H. KEMPAS, *Seeverkehr und Pfundzoll im Herzogtum Preußen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Seehandels im 16. und 17. Jh.*, Diss. phil. Bonn 1964, pp. 94, 95.

³⁹ On the following see FEDOROWICZ, *The Struggle*, pp. 225-229.

⁴⁰ MACZAK, *Między Gdańskiem*, p. 175.

