‘Princess Hedvig Sofia’ and the Great Northern War
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The struggle for *dominium maris baltici* between Denmark-Norway and Sweden (1563–1720/21)

From the middle of the 16th century until the end of the Great Northern War in 1720/21 Denmark-Norway and Sweden were fighting each other in order to hold supremacy of the Baltic Sea and its coastlands. The concept *dominium maris baltici* characterises these enduring conflicts in Scandinavian early modern history with several wars and controversies between the two kingdoms. Behind the concept lies the perception of a combined rule over the Baltic territorial waters, including the trade routes to and from the Baltic Sea, and at the same time to gain control over the coastal areas. Control over the coastal areas, attainable by dissemination along the coasts in order to reach an encirclement of the Baltic Sea or to create a bridgehead for an attack on the opposite coast, constitutes an important condition for the *dominium maris baltici*. The struggle was, however, not only about how to gain the upper hand at sea, but the possession of a naval fleet also played an important role for the honour of the two Crowns and for other purposes.

The opposite coasts were targets for operations, for instance by blockading or by the rescuing of harbour cities, by escorting and by supporting the war on the land.

The Sound and the Danish straits (the Belts) had played an important role since the Middle Ages. The Sound, the connection between the North Sea and the Baltic, constituted the most important gateway to the Baltic Sea. The Danish waterways were since the medieval period among the busiest waterways in Europe and became the focal point of the whole Baltic traffic. The Sound held a key position of importance for the entire Baltic Sea. The right to travel free and undisturbed on the Baltic waters became more and more a fighting object for the powers situated around the Baltic Sea.

The mastery of the Baltic Sea was dependent on three decisive factors: first, on the ability to control the Sound and the Danish straits (Belts); second, on the strength of the navy; and third, on the extent of control over the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea. Since the late medieval period Denmark had controlled the gateways to the Baltic Sea and from 1524 a Sound Toll (Sound Tolls) was levied at Helsingør on the initiative of the Union King Erik of Pomerania. With the dissolution of the Kalmar Union in 1520 and the independence of Sweden as a kingdom the situation between the realms changed. Both premodern realms had great interests in the Baltic Sea region. For almost 200 years to come the struggle for supremacy in the Baltic (*dominium maris baltici*) became the dominant factor in the foreign policy of both states.

The struggle for *dominium maris baltici* between Denmark-Norway and Sweden (1563–1720/21)
in 1563 a Swedish fleet successfully attacked a Danish naval force near Bornholm. During the summer of 1563 the Northern Seven Years’ War took its beginning. Some months later Poland joined ranks with the Danes. Poland entered into the alliance in order to expel the Swedes from Estonia. The main base of Sweden was above all the southern part of Finland and the northern part of Estonia. Sweden controlled the coastal land on both sides of the Gulf of Finland and possessed a bridgehead position on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Denmark’s power depended especially on the supremacy over the waterways between the North and Baltic Seas. During the next years the Swedish navy showed itself successful. Danish efforts to force their way into the Swedish sphere of interest in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea were mistaken. The military strategy to conquer Sweden by the use of land forces was, however, not successful. The war ended with the Swedish navy superior to the Danish. Denmark was, however, still the strongest realm in Scandinavia, and Denmark’s German mercenaries showed their superiority over the Swedes in several military battles. Sweden lost the strong fortress of Alvsborg, the only access towards the west, and in 1565 its forces were decisively defeated at Axtorna in Halland. Denmark, however, was not capable of winning crucial military advantages. After fatiguing fights and devastating ravages, peace was negotiated and concluded in Stettin in 1570.

The Treaty of Stettin confirmed the status quo ante bellum. Sweden had, among other stipulations, to recognise the Danish possession of Gotland, to pay 150,000 silver Taler for the fortress of Alvsborg and to raise the trading blockade of Narva. Livonia was transferred to Frederick II, who in 1783 handed it over to Poland. The struggle concerning the three Crowns was to be solved by arbitration. The city of Lübeck obtained free trade in Sweden, received, however, no war indemnities and payments. The new Swedish King Johan III (1568–1592) succeeded in making Denmark give up its claim to the Swedish Crown, he himself relinquished claims concerning Norway, Scania (Skåne) and Gotland. The old borders between the realms were re-established. The cherished hope of a Scandinavian kingship under Danish supremacy was not realised. Sweden did not manage to take control of the Russian trade, which was the main target. The Swedish Kingdom had, however, stepped forward as a Baltic power, although Denmark was still able to defend its supremacy in the Baltic.

The Northern Seven Years’ War (1563–1570) did not establish a real winner in the struggle between Denmark-Norway and Sweden. The Treaty of Stettin stipulated that for the future regular meetings were to take place at the border between commissions, composed of council-lors from the two realms. At these meetings conflicts and disagreements should be negotiated and resolved; decisions and settlements were to be binding for the realms and to be respected by the two kings. If it was impossible to reach an agreement, the question was to be settled by international arbitration. These decisions were to be respected by the two monarchs. Only when no solution could be found were the two kings allowed to make their own decisions.

This article in the peace treaty on border meetings had long-ranging consequences for Denmark’s policy towards Sweden. The power to decide over the relations with Sweden was in reality handed over to the Council of the Realm. Sweden became part of Danish domestic policy. A narrow relationship between the struggle for supremacy of the Baltic (foreign policy) and the internal domestic constitutional conflict between the king and the council about the highest authority in the Danish state was established. The Danish Council of the Realm from now on obtained decisive influence on the policy towards Sweden and limited the king’s possibilities to act within important fields of foreign policy. The influence of the Council of the Realm was, however, only possible when conflicts could be resolved peacefully. The Council of the Realm strived during the next decades to avoid an escalation with Sweden. For the young Danish King Christian IV (fig. 1) a war against Sweden became of imperative necessity, also in order to break the political influence of the Council of the Realm.

During the last decades of the 16th century Denmark played only a minor role in the struggle over supremacy of the Baltic. Sweden fought against Russia and Poland-Lithuania over domination in the eastern Baltic region. The Swedish Realm expanded its territories and strengthened its resources by demanding custom duties; especially the income from the trade on the rivers in Prussia became essential to the Swedish Crown. Already during the reign of King Johan III the attention towards the Baltic territories had grown in importance. Through the wars with Russia, Sweden conquered Narva and Ingermanland. The dynastic relationship between Sweden and
Poland during the reign of King Sigismund (1533–1539) led to internal conflicts, which were resolved by the removal of Sigismund from Sweden in 1539. The new king was Charles IX (1604–1611). King Christian IV of Denmark-Norway (1588–1648) had good reasons to seek conflict with the Swedish king. The blockade of Polish ports, especially Riga, and the activities of Swedish ships in the southern part of the Baltic Sea meant a threat to Danish interests and to the income from the Sound Dues (Sound Toll). The Swedes were active not only in the Baltic Sea.

The policy of King Charles IX showed ordinary trade-imperial features. He founded the city of Gothenburg in 1603 as a centre for the Swedish trade towards western Europe. The king also paid attention to Ålvsborg and the Sound area. The anxiety over a sudden Spanish attack followed by a conquest of the Sound area and Ålvsborg was alive in the Danish and in the Swedish

Archangel; in the east the coastal areas of Ingermanland in the Finnish Bay were the most prominent targets of expansion. The Swedish activities constituted a provocation to the Danish King Christian IV, who claimed sovereignty and the right to control the trade along the coast in northern Norway. During the years 1601–1604 negotiations at the Danish-Swedish border were carried on. However, no solution to resolve the conflicts between the realms could be established.

The councillors of the two realms warned their monarchs to act carefully and for the time being it did not come to war. The Kalmar War during 1611–1613 was a result of the Danish domestic power struggle over foreign policy and at the same time the Danes felt threatened by the Swedish expansion. The Danish King Christian IV saw in a war against Sweden the possibility not only to resolve the conflicts in northern Scandinavia, but also to restore the Kalmar Union and at the same time to free himself from the guardianship of the Council of the Realm. He started early to strengthen the border fortifications against Sweden and expanded the number of Danish navy vessels. At the end the king was so strong that he could persuade the weak Council of the Realm to make war, and in April 1611 the war against Sweden was declared. The so-called Kalmar War (1611–1613) was to become Denmark’s last successful attempt to defend its mastery in Scandinavia and in the Baltic.

The Kalmar War was opened by a great Danish offensive on two fronts against the Swedish core lands. The greater parts of the Swedish troops were occupied in Russia and in Livonia, but in spite of this the Danes were unable to conquer the Swedish Realm. The two fortifications at Kalmar and Ålvsborg were besieged and conquered, and through the devastation of Gothenburg the only Swedish passage to the west was closed. A Danish attack on Stockholm in 1612 had to be abandoned. Denmark’s resources simply were not big enough to conquer Sweden. In the Treaty of Knäred concluded in early 1613, the status quo ante bellum was confirmed. Denmark was to receive 1,000,000 silver Taler for Ålvsborg and Gothenburg. The free trade between the two realms was to continue. Sweden had to promise to stop further expansion in Scandinavia. Denmark maintained its position as the most important Baltic power, and King Christian IV felt himself victor. However, the Swedish existence as an independent state was not any more on the agenda of the Danish government.

During the following years King Christian IV expanded his power position in northern Germany, also in order to build up a barrier against Sweden. Through his financial policy, his diocese policy and his princely network the king was able to increase his influence in this area decisively. The founding of the city of Glückstadt in 1617 meant a challenge to Hamburg. The expansion of Sweden followed in the eastern Baltic at first. From the accession of Gustav II Adolf (fig. 2) to the throne in 1611 the Swedish policy to conquer the Baltec regions and Poland showed systematic formations. From the middle of the 1610s Sweden controlled the entire Baltic coastline from the Bothnian Bay to Poland. In this way Sweden challenged the Danish possession of dominium maris baltici.

Because of the Danish territorial dissemination following a line Bornholm-Gotland-Ösel (Estonian Saaremaa) Denmark claimed the greater part of the Baltic Sea as Danish territorial waters. The perception of a distinct Scandinavian divided dominium maris baltici was a fact in these years, despite the strong political rivalry. Both Scandinavian powers agreed not to tolerate foreign naval fleets in the Baltic Sea. This threat came not only from Poland but also from the House of Habsburg. During the years of the Kalmar War (1611–1613) and also during the Thirty Years’ War King Sigismund strove to build up a Polish naval fleet in the Baltic. This was a necessary condition for claiming his part of the supremacy of the Baltic and for a Polish conquest of Sweden. The Polish endeavours to build up a naval fleet were supported by the greater Catholic powers, especially by Spain, which for some time in the struggle with the Dutch had paid attention to Ålvsborg and the Sound area. The anxiety of a sudden Spanish attack was the Sound area and Ålvsborg was alive in the Danish and in the Swedish
government as well. In the first half of the 1620s the fear of an expansion of a Catholic navy seems to have been common in Scandinavia. The Swedish and Danish Councillors of the Realm generally strengthened the competition with Denmark, and the conflict over *dominium maris baltici* escalated. The more the Swedes expanded, the more severe the struggle became with Denmark. A coming war was seriously to be expected, should Sweden expand further towards the south and occupy the southern part of Livonia to Kurland as well as the Pomeranian coast. King Christian IV avoided, for a long time, commenting on the boundaries of the Swedish supremacy in the Baltic. See from over the water, if it was real that the area from Ösel, the Bay of Riga and along the widely extending Pomeranian coast belonged to the Danish *dominium*. However, after the Swedish conquest of Riga in 1621 King Christian IV realised that Sweden had moved into the Danish sphere of interest. In 1622 he held it necessary to ask the Council of the Realm about the boundaries for the Danish supremacy in the Baltic. The Council of the Realm declared a line drawn between Bornholm and Gotland and further over to Ösel to constitute the extent of and the boundaries of Danish territorial waters. It was clear that Sweden had moved under this boundary line through its expansion on the coastland. However, the Councilors of the Realm urged the king to maintain peaceful relations with Sweden back and accepted the new situation.

The declaration by the Danish Council of the Realm marked the first step in Denmark's slow but unavoidable retreat in the Baltic region. After the Swedish conquest of Riga in 1621 Gustav Adolf prepared an attack on Danzig three years later. The relations between Denmark and Sweden were strained and were a consequence of King Christian's engagement in northern Germany. The Danish king decided at the last minute to avoid a war. There was a common Scandinavian interest in fighting the aggressive Catholic powers, but this could not conceal that the conflict of interests between the Scandinavian realms was of a basic character.

From 1625 the central focus between Denmark and Sweden changed from Scandinavia and the Baltic to northern Germany. In this year the Danish king decided to involve himself in the Thirty Years' War on the Protestant side, also as a reaction to halt the Swedish expansion. However, the Danish Council of the Realm did not support this Swedish supremacy in the Baltic. While Sweden dominated in the northern and in the eastern parts of the Baltic Sea, Denmark claimed sovereignty over the southern and western parts of the Baltic territorial waters. The proclamation by the Council of the Realm marked the first step in Denmark's slow but unavoidable retreat in the Baltic region.

Denmark's struggle to survive (1630–1660)

With Gustav Adolf's involvement in the Thirty Years' War as a result of his landing with troops on the island of Usedom during the summer of 1630, the supremacy in northern Europe went over to Sweden. Denmark was apparently still holding the mastery of the Baltic, but King Christian IV was after the Peace of Lübeck not free to operate as he wanted, and thus the war in the capacity as duke of Holstein. Denmark was not formally at war with the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, but the later events document that the facts were in reality the opposite.

With his intervention King Christian strove to fulfill several goals. He wanted especially to stop the further successful military expansion of the Emperor from northern Germany and to create a territory of interest for Denmark as an answer to the Swedish Baltic expansion in the east. Behind the king's decision to involve himself in the war was perhaps also the possibility and danger that Sweden would arrive first near to the River Elbe and place troops south of the Danish border.

The Danish king's engagement in the Thirty Years' War ended in a disaster. After his disastrous defeat by Tilly, the Emperor's general, at Lutter am Barenberg near Hildesheim in August 1632 and the following occupation of Jutland by troops commanded by Wallenstein, the situation grew worse for Christian IV. The siege of Stralsund by Wallenstein and his troops in 1638 caused the king to send 1,000 men to the defence of the town. Facing the common danger Denmark and Sweden in this situation came closer to each other. This was, however, not to last for long.
24  Baltic in change around 1700

Denmark could not be satisfied with the status as number two in Scandinavia. The Danish Realm was prepared for revenge, especially to revive the peace treaty of 1653 and to prevent any enlargement of the Swedish Realm. The occasion for a war against Sweden came when the new Swedish King Charles X Gustav (fig. 3) since 1655 fought against Poland and a broad anti-Swedish coalition was formed constituted by Poland, the Emperor, Brandenburg Prussia and Denmark. When Charles X Gustav and his troops were deeply engaged in Poland, Denmark declared war on Sweden. And this occurred although the Danish Realm financially and militarily was badly prepared for a war. The declaration of war arrived in Poland and came almost as a relief to Charles X Gustav. The war in Poland stuck and the king was now able to escape and to open a new theatre of war. He marched through northern Germany into Jutland, and in the winter of 1657–1658 he crossed the frozen straits (the Bells) and moved towards Copenhagen. King Frederick III and the Danish government in February 1658 were forced to conclude the so-called ‘peace of panic’ of Roskilde, the hardest peace treaty ever negotiated and concluded in the history of Denmark. The Danish Realm had to cede to Sweden the eastern provinces (Scania, Halland and Blekinge), the Norwegian counties Bohuslan and Trondheim and thus the access to the north-western Atlantic as well as the island of Bornholm in the Baltic. Denmark had further to recognise the sovereignty of Holstein-Gottorp. Sweden reached, in Roskilde, the greatest territorial extension in its history.

The stipulations in the Peace of Roskilde concerning the Swedish Sound Dues payments to Denmark were, however, not accepted by Charles X Gustav, who soon decided to conquer Denmark as a whole. Already in the winter of 1658–1659 Swedish troops were again approaching Copenhagen. However, the capital city defended itself successfully supported by a rescue fleet from the Netherlands, and Charles X Gustav had to change his plans. In May 1660, after the sudden death of the Swedish king, and after intervention from the western European powers, a peace treaty was concluded in Copenhagen. Sweden handed back the island of Bornholm (the inhabitants had freed themselves successfully in 1659) and the county of Trondheim in Norway. Further Danish demands were not recognised by the great powers; they wanted no ordinary change in the fundamental balance of power in the Baltic. Sweden was according to these principles not allowed to become too strong. The two wars fought by Charles X Gustav constitute a height of Swedish power in the Baltic region. The three peace treaties with Denmark and Poland in 1660 and with Russia in 1661 (the Peace of Cardis) temporarily ended the Swedish expansion of power.

The three wars with Denmark during the period 1643–1660 set a new agenda in the long-enduring rivalry between Denmark and Sweden over the dominium maris baltici. From now on the question was whether Denmark could survive as a sovereign state or whether it would be incorporated in the Swedish Baltic Empire or not. The Danish Realm had lost about one-third of its territory to Sweden; especially the loss of provinces east of the Sound was painful. The Sound changed into an international territorial water, where each coast now belonged to two opposing powers. This solution was in harmony with the commercial interests of the naval powers. The Netherlands stepped forward as guardian of the power balance and had in a way taken over the old role of Lübeck. The two Scandinavian combatants had weakened each other through the steady wars and on this background the sea powers were given the possibilities to form alliances to secure their power and trading interests.

Fig. 3  Medallion of Charles X Gustav of Sweden and his wife Hedvig Eleonora of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp, silver, 1654.
The Baltic as a subsystem of the European state system (1660–1720/21)

Peace in the Baltic region prevailed mainly in the decades after 1660. Sweden did not want to be involved in new wars, but strived to defend the territorial gains and to keep up neutrality and status quo. The following wars between Denmark and Sweden, the Scanian War (1675–1679) and the Great Northern War (1700–1720/21) were in many respects reflections of the great European conflicts during the reign of Louis XIV of France, like the Dutch War (1672–1679) and the Spanish War of Succession (1701–1714). These wars document a rising integration of the Baltic regions in the European diplomatic system, warfare strategy and economy.

In order to maintain the Swedish supremacy in the Baltic, King Charles XI (1660–1697) allied with France, a connection which had already shown itself valuable during the Thirty Years’ War. As a result Sweden was, as time went on, dragged into new theatres of war. Louis XIV directed a military attack against the Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire in 1672. As an ally to France, Sweden attacked Pomerania east of the Odra in 1674, but already the following year the Elector of Brandenburg Frederick William was able to defeat the Swedish forces in the Battle of Fehrbellin north of Berlin.

Meanwhile the Danish policy and the strategic position in the struggle for supremacy in the Baltic had changed fundamentally. Because of its many territories the Danish Realm was, at the beginning of the 17th century, able to block the entrance to Kattegat for the Swedes, to encircle Sweden and to control most parts of the Baltic Sea. The Peace of Roskilde and the Treaty of Copenhagen (1658–1660) changed this situation, when almost one-third of the Danish territory was ceded to Sweden. After 1660 the Danes strived first and foremost to remove the danger from the Duchy of Holstein-Gottorp, which was allied to Sweden. However, by pursuing this foreign policy goal the rivalry with Sweden had to continue. The second intention of the Danes was to reconquer the lost territories, especially the Scanian provinces. In Denmark the government was well aware that these goals could only be reached with the help of strong allies and a well-equipped war navy.

The new Danish King Christian V allied with Brandenburg in 1675 and opened the war. He had reinforced his position by winning the territories Oldenburg and Delmenhorst in the Holy Roman Empire; the Danish king was further encouraged by the Swedish defeat at Fehrbellin. The Danish navy had meanwhile been improved and had received more vessels. Christian V first attacked Holstein-Gottorp and occupied its fortifications; second, he forced the duke to renounce his sovereignty. Shortly afterwards, Danish troops forced their way into the Swedish outposts in northern Germany. Danish forces also attacked Scania (fig. 4–5). At sea the Danish navy was successful at the beginning, making it clear that the Danish Realm seriously intended to put through its claim as holder of the mastery of the Baltic. However, Denmark had, in December 1676, lost the bloody battle at Lund in Scania. The Danish Realm had gradually to abandon its conquests, in spite of the fact that the Admiral Niels Juel defeated a superior Swedish navy in the Bay of Køge in 1677. In the time to follow neither of the two combatants made real progress and gained considerable results.
Sweden was supported by France and was able to maintain its territory and its position. Denmark was forced by the Great Northern War in 1720/21 to cede its conquests (including Gotland and Wismar). The peace treaty concluded in St Germain in 1673 was a French diktat without consulting Sweden first. This documents the influence of foreign powers concerning the conflicts in the Baltic region. This development had been going on slowly and had already become visible during the earlier Danish-Swedish struggles.

Sweden was still the strongest power in northern Europe after the Scanian War. However, Denmark and Sweden were not the only states to be involved in the struggle for supremacy of the Baltic; Poland, Russia, the Holy Roman Empire, and later on Brandenburg, the Netherlands, Spain and France were also engaged. For almost a century Sweden succeeded to uphold dominium maris baltici. King Charles XI strengthened Sweden’s power by building up a strong permanent army and enlarging the considerable naval force. However, Sweden was as a conglomerate state threatened in the Baltic region. Only as long as the neighbouring powers were weak and the naval powers were positive towards Sweden was it possible to maintain supremacy. However, soon the basis for holding power in northern Europe was repudiated.

In the first decades following the Scanian War, peace was relatively stable and calm, and even a Danish-Swedish alliance was considered. Already soon after the war an agreement on mutual help in case of a possible attack came about in 1675. In the years 1681 and 1685 treaties on armed neutrality between Denmark and Sweden were concluded. Both north European states strove to protect the expanding sea trade against acts of war from the competing European great powers. However, the collaboration did not last for long, the differences between the Danish-Swedish fundamental interests were simply too great.

Especially the question concerning Holstein-Gottorp strained Danish-Swedish relations. The Danish government was concerned about the duke’s endeavours to secure his sovereignty. On the other hand the growing conflicts and distance between France and Sweden were noticed with concern in Copenhagen. In 1681 France showed itself ready to tolerate future Danish decisions concerning Holstein-Gottorp. After a Swedish threat a French navy arrived in the Sound, and Charles XI showed no interest in helping Holstein-Gottorp. However, the duchy still meant a threat to Denmark, and in 1684 Danish troops moved into Gottorp. During the following year the duchy was obliged to recognise Danish supremacy and to pay homage to King Christian V. Further Danish demands for sovereignty towards Hamburg were prevented thanks to pressure from the Emperor and Brandenburg. An international conference in Altona negotiated the problem of Holstein-Gottorp. As a result, the Treaty of Altona (1689) confirmed the sovereign rights of the duchy. Denmark had to accept this and could not hope for support from France.

The question concerning Holstein-Gottorp was, however, still not solved. Denmark watched with anxiety the strengthened relations between Sweden and the duchy and felt encircled and threatened from the south. When the Swedish king died in 1657, the Danes used the occasion and destroyed the newly erected fortifications in Holstein-Gottorp. The Danes reckoned that no European great power would support Sweden. A planned marriage project between the new Swedish King Charles XII and a Danish princess was not realised.

An anti-Swedish coalition was formed in 1659 between Denmark, Russia and Saxony (with Poland in a personal union). The goal was to expel Sweden from its possessions south of as well as east of the Baltic. Denmark intended to reconquer Scania and further to eliminate the duke of Holstein-Gottorp as an enemy at the rear of the kingdom. Russia under the reign of Tsar Peter I the Great wanted to restore the access to the Baltic Sea; Augustus of Saxony was interested in Livonia. Sweden’s allied partners were from the beginning Holstein-Gottorp, England and the Netherlands. For the next twenty years wars and conflicts were to put its stamp on the Baltic region.

References
A discovery in the Oslo National Archives

A closer examination of the history of the Great Northern War (1700–1721) shows that its historiography deals with the protagonist of the war King Charles XII of Sweden (1682–1718) and its antagonist Tsar Peter the Great of Russia (1672–1725). During the period of absolutism the monarchs decided about war and peace for their kingdoms. The battles were fought by many ordinary people who are predominantly falling into oblivion today. Who they were and how they lived is one of the central issues of economic and social history research. Considering the time of the Great Northern War from a maritime perspective one start inevitably thinking about the sailors and seamen giving their lives for their king and country in numerous battles without being named. In the archives of the Baltic Sea region many square kilometres of documents from the time of the Great Northern War can be found. At best they provide insights into the lives of ordinary people in northern Europe in the early 18th century.

An exception is in the Oslo National Archives: the handwritten records of the young Norwegian sailor Nils Danielsen Trosner documenting life on board the Royal Danish-Norwegian Navy in the years 1710–1714. Trosner did his military service on board the Danish ships of the line Dannebrog, Prins Wilhelm, Beskjermeren and the frigate Høyenhald. His self-written records are in the manuscript collection of the Norwegian National Archives. The records are a private diary (fig. 1), which according to chronological principle documents the experiences of the life of the author, day by day. Keeping such a diary in the early modern period was a quite common phenomenon, but primarily among merchants, artists, officers and representatives of the clergy. Consequently, the diary of Nils Trosner is a special self-witness whose value is immeasurable, as the Oslo National Archives have made quite known: ‘The diary is of national importance not only for the story being told by Nils Trosner, but also for many thousands of young Norwegian men who served in the Danish-Norwegian fleet. There is no other handed-down diary or similar reports from the Norwegian seamen from this period.’

In this article, the source will be presented, followed by information about the author and finally the contents of the diary, which due to the length of the source (871 pages) can be understandably sketched only in selected extracts.

The source – the diary of Nils Trosner

The manuscript is divided into two volumes with a total of 871 paginated pages in octavo format. The first convolute is available in bound book form and extends over 519 pages. The first 28 pages and several leaves in both volumes are missing (page numbers 85–92, 109–116, 133–148, 198–206, 213–219, 233–248, 358–365, 448–451, 476–485, 500–523, 534–553, 542–543 and 552–553). The exact number is evident from the continuous pagination. Much more difficult is the determination of an uncertain number of detached pages at the end of the second volume. Therefore the second volume ends with an incomplete register. The last known page of the manuscript is 871. The structure of the individual pages is linear and begins always with a header in which the respective year and the month are entered, as the sheet number could be found in the upper right corner.

The left edge lists the current date in sequential form, to which the subsequent entry in the middle column relates. In the column on the right side, which claimed about a quarter of the pages, there are numerous drawings that belong to the described content and vary in their number per page. The separation of the four areas header, left column with the date, medium text column, and right column with drawings is also graphically differentiated by the author due to the delineation of two parallel dashes. The number of lines is on average about 30 lines of text per page. The author of the records was as his writing shows both practised and experienced. The writing seems neither crushed nor compressed at the line end, but runs in rare cases over the right dividing line into the area of the drawing, unless word separation was performed. To this extent, the author worked exemplarily with the existing space requirements of each entry.
Drawings
As the most concise feature the diary has a continuous illustration through numerous drawings on the right side of every page. With the drawings, the author represents the events even in a visual form. The reasons for graphic representations are different. One main theory is that the contents of the document by means of drawings should also be opened up for illiterate interested. A qualitative assessment of the abilities of the author as a draughtsman is difficult and is of no concern in this article. The illustrated topics are of various natures. However, it is dominated by recurring images such as the tobacco-pipe-smoking sailors (fig. 2) or warships leading a battle against each other.

Graphically, not only, for obvious reasons, ships and sailors were drawn, but also cityscapes, scenes of war on land, the impact of the epidemic of bubonic plague in the 17th and also every-day experiences that provide an insight into the everyday life of a sailor during the early 18th century. On the one hand, the drawings are of an amazing uniformity, but on the other hand provide detailed drawings such as of warships with exact number of cannon, set admiralty flags, signal flags and other pennants, which may reflect the precise eye of the author and his interest in a realistic representation of facts. Concerning the drawings it can be noted that they are formed in two steps. Firstly, a sketch was mapped out, which was in a second step, frequently then in full colours. The colour spectrum is various, but it is dominated by reddish, bluish, greenish and yellowish tones.

Language
An official language analysis of the handwriting has not been done yet. However, the language used in the diary is Danish/Norwegian. It must be noted that a pure differentiation from a linguistic perspective brings some complications. There is a further language-historical problem that the Norwegian written language during the Kalmar Union period, from about 1350, was avoided by the Danish language and writing. During the 16th century, the time of nationalisation, a return to its own written language took place in Norway. The written Norwegian (bokmål) is merely a variant of the Danish written language, which allows the conclusion that the diary was written in Danish. Known from the Danish, special characters ‘ö’ and ‘æ’ are even in Norwegian and also within the manuscript again. The presumed author of the records comes from south-western Norway, which will be explained in more detail in a later section. The conclusion that the language is derived from the origin of the author is quite appropriate. The author Nils Trosner sees himself as Norwegian (”nordmand”), as it is evident from his notes and shown from his interest in Sweedish letters and messages from his home region Rogaland and its closer surrounding area as well, and that fact at the same time supports the interpretation that the language he used is Norwegian.

To the orthography used in the manuscript can be noted that it is in line with the time. It was written as spoken, which explains the flexible spelling of various words and terms. This fact is clearly visible in loanwords and political terms from other languages (for example Ebenezer, Arken, Noah, Neptunis, Mars and Mercury), which then, however, face biblical names such as the Arken Noah, Eleazer, Angel Raphael and St Marcus, which symbolise Christian faith.

Another central issue is the political and military situation in Europe at the beginning of the 18th century. Sweden had passed the arnith of its great power status. With the Battle of Pultava and the major Swedes defeat of Charles XII in 1709 the conditions were changed. Russia was fighting for access to the Baltic Sea, whereas the Turks’ fear – the siege of Vienna in 1683 was just back a generation – was still current and was given a new urgency by the escape of Charles XII to the Ottoman city of Bendor. Messages arrived in the Baltic Sea region reporting the fact that the Swedish king was marching to the Norwegian home region Rogaland and its closer surrounding area as well, and that fact at the same time supports the interpretation that the language he used is Norwegian.

Summary of contents
The chronological entries cover the period from 24 April 1710 to 9 January 1714. In some places the chronological principle is broken in favour of a flash-back, which usually has a reference to that day’s entry. Thematically the diary dealt with the author’s life in the Royal Danish-Norwegian Navy and documents the life of a sailor during the Great Northern War. As expected, the maritime atmosphere dominated, which significantly influenced the author and thus also runs through the records like a thread. The focus is the description of life aboard a warship with all its facets. Trosner describes the shipbuilding and repair after battles at sea or the violence of storms, and also the detailed description of the preservation and enforcement of discipline on board through draconian penalties; flagging, running the gauntlet, lashing and declaring the legitimate methods to punish wrongdoers and offence against maritime law. There are more topics in addition such as how to deal with religion, mythological narratives and the fear of epidemics and plague in the Baltic region and in particular on board.

Often there are also short citations from ancient works such as the ’Iliad’ of Homer, and also the younger astrological evidence of Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) are documented by Trosner and even discussed in parts. The mention of Greek and Roman gods can also be found in the records. In the context of the ship’s name this is not surprising, because the ancient gods played a distinct role in the everyday life of sailors. Often ships were named after the ancient gods; at this point reference is made to the names of the Danish-Norwegian warships Neptunis, Mars and Mercury, which then, however, face biblical names such as the Arken Noah, Eleazer, Angel Raphael and St Marcus, which symbolise Christian faith.

The authenticity of the source can be proven based on the mentioned persons and facts. There is also a consensus between the circumstances described in the written source and the events which took place. Deviations exist in terms of the mention of the army sizes or the amount of losses. A few deviations like the seemingly gigantic size of the Ottoman army; like more than 200000, are partially owed to the transmission and partly to the geographical distance. Also in terms of the names of ships and the captain on board each vessel and exact details of the number of crew, artillery, number of warships and their locations coincide with the other contemporaneous logbooks of the time. It must be added that a journal such as this one would have been invaluable in the hands of the enemy. A detailed list of ships, information about their
cannon and readiness for use and even the discourse about the willingness for war of the popula-
lution of Copenhagen could in the right hands – that means in Swedish hands – be decisive for
the war. In this respect it can be assumed that the diary was written in secret, as it might other-
wise have been confiscated by the authorities.

While there is consensus about the authenticity of the source, it remains questionable whether
Nils Trosner is the real author of the diary. The author himself does not mention his name in
the records; a possible entry about the owner on the first pages of the first volume may be lost.
He also reported from the ‘Lwe’ perspective, so identification is difficult. This again shows the
close affiliation with his crew as a whole. In the volumes there is the entry ‘NITROSNER’, which
Roar Tank interpreted as the inscription of the author Nils Trosner in his publication published
in 1943. Nils Trosner himself could not be detected up to then in any of the crew lists of ships
on which he served from 1710 to 1774. His diary shows that he served on the ship of the line Prins
Wilhelm together with his brother Daniel in 1712. The name of Daniel Danielsen Trosner was
found among the enlisted sailors from Bragernes, but Nils Trosner was not listed.8

It has to be taken into account that it is a personal testimony, which was written from the
perspective of a simple but well-educated man, a Norwegian sailor, and therefore reflects con-
cepts and views of his time. As is usual, even written subjectively and always
has to be interpreted in the context of its time of writing. This is reflected in the critical areas of
the mythological and also in the prevailing piety towards God, as they become evident in the
plague years. The plague, for example, is only interpreted as God’s punishment for sinful human
behaviour. Amazingly, the entire diary of Trosner remains emotionless. This may be sympto-
matic of the callousness of everyday life on board and also of the constant confrontation with
death. There is also a special feature. In his notes, Trosner makes clear what he himself had seen
or what he knows only by hearsay. He leads into rumours and uncertain events with the addition
of ‘Pars.’, which means nothing other than ‘it happened’ or ‘it is said’.

Find history

The whereabouts of the diary from 1714 to 1883 are mostly just guesses. The records of Nils
Trosner end with 9 January 1714. The diary did not appear again before 15 June 1883, as the
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Trosner end with 9 January 1903, af Daniel Olssøn Sæbøe i Bukns Sogn’ for 50 Norwegian kroner from the young
medical student Thormøl Haakon Wedoe (1863–1933). This title of the diary is mislead-
ing and was later revised. Research into the Wedoe family led quickly to the ancestors of Häklum,
Jens Wedoe (1786–1856), who was a royal representative in the State Secretariat from 1814 to
1850. In his role, he served as secretary of the future king of Norway, Christian Frederik (VIII).
Following his employment from 1810 to 1855, he established a private archive with historically
valuable Norwegian writings, containing the diary of Nils Trosner as well. The theory is con-
firmed when considering that Jens Wedoe was born in Kopervik, which is only about a 12-km
linear distance from the birthplace of Trosner in Bokn. By ship this was not a great distance, so
it is obvious that Jens Wedoe certainly had knowledge of Trosner’s diary.

The diary itself came back to Norway after 1714. It can be assumed that Nils Trosner returned
to Bokn and carried the diary with him or, if Nils Trosner had already died, that the diary was
brought back by a relative of his family and returned to this way to a further member or descen-
dant of Trosner. Within the diary there are numerous entries of several owners
who may provide information about its whereabouts for the open years, but this will be only
possible after extensive research.

Biography of Nils Trosner

The Norwegian Nils Danielsen Trosner (1685–before 1734) is assumed to be the author of the
diary. He was born at the farm Trosnavag in Skudeneshavn, Bok in Rogaland, southern Norway,
where he also grew up. His father was Daniel Danielsen (1662–1736), a son of a pastor and
descendant of a bailiff, who was from the region Tyssvær and became rich through herring fis-
ing. The mother of Nils Trosner was the landed gentry woman Berit Olsdatter (1650–1704/05)
of Nordheim in Sjøsund. Trosner himself had two younger brothers, who are known by name:
Daniel (1689–1714) and Rasmus (1691–1766) and a stepbrother named Oddrun. Due to the family
wealth it was made possible for Nils Trosner and his siblings to get education in the form of
reading of teaching and instruction in writing. Whether this was done in the form of a private
tutor or by the local village priest is open. The latter option was more common for rural Norwegians.
It is considered that Nils Trosner likely got elementary knowledge of Latin in addition to read-
ing and writing. This is manifested in his diary on the basis of Latin quotations and excerpts
from sermons and also ancient texts. To what extent he already learned other languages during
his youth is unknown. It can be assumed that he obviously, in addition to the Norwegian lan-
guage, also learned Danish.

All three brothers served in the Royal Danish-Norwegian Navy. In 1709 Nils Trosner enrolled
in the Norwegian district Bragernes and went on board the Danish ship of the line Dannebrog
to Copenhagen, where he was hired on 23 October 1709 together with his younger brother Daniel.
Nils Trosner graduated in naval service first aboard the Dannebrog, which he left on 15 May 1710
in favour of the frigate Høyenhald. In April 1711, Trosner comes on board the ship of the line Prins
Wilhelm, where he served at the same time as his brother. On 18 April 1711 Trosner writes about
the occasion of his change of ship: ‘I came on board with my cooking clothes and goods.’ Whether
Trosner really served as a ship’s cook in just in the area of victuals, for example was employed
as a quartermaster, could not be clearly answered now. His writing and calculation
skills themselves speak for an administrative activity on board. During his service aboard the
Prins Wilhelm, Trosner took part in the Battle of Wittow in September 1712, when the Danish-

Norse navy defeated the Swedish transport fleet, devastating and therefore destroying the
supplies for the army of the Swedish General Magnus Stenhock. On 4 February 1713 the last
documented transfer of Trosner to the ship of the line Bedemuren took place, where he served
henceforth until the end of his records in January 1714. So far there is no information available
about the time after his last entry.

The article about Nils Trosner in the ‘Norsk biografisk leksikon’ indicated that Trosner was
married to Malena Larsdatter. If and when this marriage exactly took place is uncertain and has
to date not been able to be checked. Within the diary itself there are no notes about any evidence
of a girlfriend or wife that Trosner was close to. It seems likely that the knowledge and the mar-
riage must have taken place after 1714. There is no further information about the later life of
Trosner. It could have been expected that he returned to Norway after finishing his naval serv-
vice and took over the homestead of his parents after they died. However, since within the last
will of his father, who died in 1714, no information about his eldest son Nils Trosner can be
found, it is to be assumed that Trosner died either before 1734 and therefore experienced no
 testamentary consideration, or that he had settled in Copenhagen and the contact to Norway
had ceased. The latter theory is questionable, since at least his diary found its way back to
Rogaland and Trosner’s interest in events and news from his home region throughout the diary
was unbroken.
Extracts from the contents of the diary

In order to bring life to the source, five thematic areas of the diary will be presented. The different topics include the following: (1) shipbuilding and repair, (2) dealing with diseases and epidemics on a warship, (3) message transmission in the Baltic region, (4) punishment and discipline on board, and (5) the representation of the supernatural.

(1) Shipbuilding and repair
In the diary itself a large number of ships, both commercial ships and warships, are named. These entries are useful to learn more details about the ships. In the age of sailing ships, there were many different types of ship: ship of the line ("orlogskib"), archipelago boat ("skärgardsbat"), brigantine, frigate, sluyt, snow, ketch, pink, yacht and many more. Size, armament and mission areas also give information about the fleet movements of Denmark-Norway and also illustrate the importance which the fleet held. The fleet alone led convoys of merchant shipping, against payment, even for the foreign powers. Also they patrolled in the Danish-Norwegian waters and saw to the protection of coastal areas in times of war. Their own coordinated larger transport fleets were rarely sent and, if so, then only accompanied by a large number of warships, which provided sufficient protection. But even ships which were bought by the king or captured from the enemy and incorporated into their own fleet are documented by Trosner. The purchase prices or the amount of prize money which was paid to the crew in cases of success are well known.

After sea battles, damaged ships often have to be repaired. Consequently ports and shipyards in particular took an outstanding role within the navy. Essential maritime bases were Copenhagen (Gammel Holmen, Ny Holmen), Christiansø and southern Norway, with its numerous shipyards. The wide variety of maintenance work and their problems with the implementation can be found in Trosner’s records, also graphically (fig. 3).

The maintenance of the fleet was important for its operational capability. For this purpose, the ships were maintained at fixed intervals, including the cleaning of algae and seaweed from the hull. Professionalisation is the keyword. Shipbuilders – for example the well-known English family dynasty Sheldon worked both in Denmark and Sweden – and carpenters were the elite of their departments and had to attend to the permanent operational readiness of the individual ships, even though they did not have many possibilities to react if there was a lack of material or human resources. This was especially the case during long periods of war. Supply was the main problem going into long-term naval warfare. Crews, food and material for ships (canvas, ropes, anchors and ammunition) had always to be available and cost the state enormous sums. This helps to understand that from an economic perspective larger battles were rare.

(2) Dealing with diseases, plagues and death on board
The last epidemic of bubonic plague occurred in the Baltic region and in northern Europe in the 1720s. This was due to the high number of armies and people in a confined space. Regarding the epidemic of bubonic plague, the land armies were affected to a great degree, but the conditions on board a warship were unbearable and moreover catastrophic. About 6500 men lived, all at the same time, on a ship of the line from 1750 with, for example, a 54-m length and 12-m width. The consequences of a disease or epidemic on board were consequently terrible and almost unimaginable. In Trosner’s records important details about the plague and its impact both on land and at sea can be found. Death lists from Copenhagen for the year 1721 are documented, listing from 16,818 up to 22,535 deaths in total, as well as measures that were carried out against the plague. While in Copenhagen young women smoking a pipe ran through the town to drive out the plague using tobacco, or lime was scattered into the houses; on board ships new commands were prescribed for cleanliness and washing of the crews and they also included the exact procedure for smoking out a warship.

Two things are significant: first, all the clothes of the sailors were thrown overboard along with their hammocks and then had to be washed in the water. In a further step the ship was smoked out level by level through means of spices, mainly incense. And all hammocks with the nets should be ventilated – because of the new order (. . .) – the hammocks every day, provided if it was possible because of health, and in the evening at 8 clocks we smoked the intermediate deck again – with incense and other spices, which cost 30 riksdaler a pound. And this is because of the plague and other diseases. If sick sailors were on board they were, if circumstances permitted, brought ashore to prevent the spread of the disease aboard. The Danish region around Stevns, where at times most diseased sailors were ashore, was of particular importance. But even changes in food rations on board, less hard alcohol and more vitamins, for example limonene against scurvy, are documented.

Basically, more people died on board a warship because of injury and disease than in battle and its aftermath. The sinking of a complete vessel together with its crew happened, but was rather rare. To provide financial compensation to the wounded and no longer deployable sailors a new regulation was adopted, providing the payment of sums insured. This is held in the naval war articles of Frederick IV from 1750 and is also found within the records of Trosner (fig. 4).

The regulation differed between the loss of the right and left extremities; the sums payable for the loss of a right hand with 240 riksdaler or the right arm with 300 riksdaler are significantly higher than those of their left equivalents, only 200 and 240 riksdaler respectively. The maximum
The amount of compensation for the loss of both eyes amounted to 1,000 riksdaler, the same amount as for the loss of both arms, while the loss of a foot earned only 130 riksdaler.

The burials on land and at sea were different in their implementation. If a sailor died ashore, for example, he was laid in a coffin at the hospital and then buried in the church cemetery. Trosner reported anecdotaly about a special funeral which was made for a tall Norwegian: "It is said that many people died in the hospital in Copenhagen; among them was a Northern man who died and he was so large that one had to make a coffin for him, which was 1 ½ yards longer than usual."

Dealing with death on board can be divided into two patterns of action. If a lower crew member died, he could be either thrown overboard or – in rare cases – brought ashore and buried by his comrades. In contrast, Trosner describes the procedure that caused the death of an army captain on board as well as the deaths of countless unknown sailors on the following day, in his diary: "The same day in the afternoon the army captain Captain Billy, who died on board the Sophia Hellwig, was buried on Christiansø. The general spoke first. Then the frigate Flygende Fisch was sent to Christiansø with messages. Then he was brought from the ship in a boat with flag at half mast and a flag over the coffin and 14 boats followed him. As he left the ship, 15 gun salutes were shot with intervals of one minute each. And the frigate Ørnen dragged him to Christiansø. In the evening 15 shots were fired for him from the fortress of Christiansø. Then he was buried. And on board the Mercurius were 87 sick men and four have died so far, including a priest. And about 200 men on the Friedrich Quartus were sick and many died. The same day 30 men were well thrown overboard, all ships with flag at half mast and they fired salute for them."

Messages and their transmission

In the early modern period the transfer of news and information played an important role. In the Baltic region, there exists from early on a functioning postal system across the water. Four major lines of communication can be found in the records of Nils Trosner: messages that are usually present in written form as a letter or proclamation letter dominated the time. The problem, however, was that post ships were intercepted by the enemy, so that secret information got into the wrong hands. In the diary of Trosner there are indications that the Danish-Norwegian fleet often chased the Swedish postal ships successfully. The conclusion that the same also happened to the Swedish fleet is entirely legitimate. Placards with public announcements were also announced in the major port cities mainly delivered from the cities of Hamburg, Amsterdam and the eastern Baltic cities of Riga and Revel. Other mediums that could be found are wandering soldiers, drummers, who took dispatches and messages with them and moved drum beating through countries. And in the evening was a drummer come from Scania to Copenhagen with letters for the Admiralty. They conducted written letters and transmitted secret messages often only orally, so that they could hardly get into the hands of the enemy. The fourth way of communication was the unofficial mouth to mouth and ship to ship propaganda of the sailors among themselves. The error rate of the latter option was highest, as can be demonstrated with reference to the documentation by Trosner, but should be also be so understood.
The elementary topic in the records of Nils Trosner is life on board. The crews lived in a confined space on a ship. Therefore a high level of discipline was necessary to survive. The punishment on board were draconian to nip other crimes in the bud. The captain’s command authority can be quite rightly described as ‘Master next God’. The naval war articles of Frederick IV from 1700 served as a legal basis. They prescribed the rights and obligations which the officers and men had to follow and what the punishments for offenders were. If an offender was punished as a result of a crime, the relevant passage of the naval war articles was read aloud before the punishment, moreover so that the non-reading crew could also understand this punishment.

Regarding the punishment methods, a certain hierarchy can be detected. Penalties ranged from imprisonment on board and water up to the death penalty, whether by flogging at the grating, ducking, keelhauling, running the gauntlet, hanging or other punishment methods that were partly left to the imagination of each commander. For example, Trosner documented the flogging of a provost as a result of carelessness. ‘Same day our provost stands at the capten because he had not observed the people.’ The fact that also the captain as supreme commander aboard had a case to answer himself had to be learned by 13 Danish ship captains after events that were partly left to the imagination of each commander. For example, Trosner reported about two sailors who attacked each other with knives and for punishment were bound for two months together on a barrel lid. Each of the delinquents got a hawser in the hand with which they had to beat each other for a certain time.

In addition, there were also representatives of the clergy on board who had to care for the souls of men. Trosner documented also the ‘Jonas’, a person who brings bad luck throughout the ship and is well known as a superstition up until today. Only his elimination saves the ship. But even astronomy plays an essential role in the diary of Trosner. Not only the exact arrangement of the planets and their moons are important but also the documentation and interpretation of comets are undertaken by Trosner. Moreover Trosner calculates his service time based on the last moons, i.e. mondos, at that time a quite common method for determining time. The current phase of the moon can also be found as a pictorial representation at the edge of Trosner’s written records, in which there is a fixed reference for each entry as well as explicit explanations.

**Notes**

1. National Archives Oslo, EA-1665/G/L0048a, Nils Trosner dagbok ført på flåten 1710–1713 Vol. 1; National Archives Oslo, EA-1665/G/L0048b, Nils Trosner dagbok ført på flåten 1710–1713 Vol. II.
2. The quote in the Norwegian original Dagboken is nasjonalt betydningsfull fordi den forteller historien ikke bare til Nils Trosner, men til mange tusen unge norske menn som gjorde tjeneste i den felles dansk-norske flåten.
3. These topics in the realm of the supernatural can be found in the diary of Nils Trosner. The end of epidemics was often celebrated by the survivors through thanksgiving services. To appease God they had to live a godly life, attending church and respecting the Ten Commandments. The end of epidemics was often celebrated by the survivors through thanksgiving services. To appease God they had to live a godly life, attending church and respecting the Ten Commandments. If diseases wrongly seized Dutch ships and declared them as prizes, which led to considerable protest and trade restrictions by the Dutch, so that in the end Frederik IV was finally forced to relent.

In order to strengthen discipline, team spirit competitions were carried out on board. For example, the crews of the different decks competed against each other or the crews of the larboard cannon competed against the starboard side. But even the regular issue of clothing, beer and tobacco caused favour with the sailors. Another possibility was proclaimed prize money, which the crew would get if they gained victory in battle. Around 1700, there were the following generally valid penalties on board: the warships: day by day imprisonment with water and bread, flogging at the grating, ducking, keelhauling, running the gauntlet, hanging or other punishment methods that were partly left to the imagination of each commander. For example, Trosner reported about two sailors who attacked each other with knives and for punishment were bound for two months together on a barrel lid. Each of the delinquents got a hawser in the hand with which they had to beat each other for a certain time.

**References**

1. National Archives Copenhagen, 0008, Admirals- og Kommissariatskollegiet, Nr. 241; National Archives Copenhagen, 0008, Admirals- og Kommissariatskollegiet, Nr. 319.

**Archives sources**


246 Shipping and naval warfare in the Baltic region

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On 25 April 1715, the Swedish Rear Admiral Carl Hans Wachtmeister scuttled his flagship Prinsessan Hedvig Sofia in the Baltic Sea off Bülk, after it had been badly damaged in a naval engagement off Femern during the course of the Great Northern War. In 2008, divers discovered the wreck and shortly afterwards underwater archaeologists were successful in identifying it. As a result, a window was opened into a past which had never had light cast on it in the Baltic region from an international perspective.

In this volume accompanying the special exhibition ‘Of Swords, Sails and Cannon – The Sinking of the Princess Hedvig Sofia’, 37 contributions from authors from Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, and Germany delve more deeply into the topics presented in the exhibition. The key areas are ‘Baltic in change around 1700’, ‘Absolutism in the Baltic region’, ‘Shipping and naval warfare’, ‘Underwater cultural heritage’, and ‘The Great Northern War – memorial culture’.

In addition a German-language exhibition catalogue has appeared.