

# Antwerp, Emporium of the European Economy in the Sixteenth Century

Katsumi NAKAZAWA

Antwerp was one of the most important centers of European economy in the early modern times. During the first three-quarters of the sixteenth century, Antwerp was the commercial and financial metropolis of Europe. Europe had some economic centers, that is, Lisbon, Genoa, Sevilla, Lyon, Rouen, London, Hamburg, etc., and these centers formed their own economic networks at that times. Antwerp was a core market town on the top of these networks<sup>1</sup>.

## I

During the second half of the fifteenth century Antwerp had become the meeting place of the long-distance trade merchants, particularly from Cologne and London<sup>2</sup>. Another, equally important, was to do so in connection with this development. Exploring the islands of the Azores, the Canaries and Madeira, and the western coast of Africa, the Portuguese discovered gold and spices, which were called malagueta. They could sell the African spices in northern Europe. The West African spices were already an important commodity before 1500. The expansion of the Portuguese spice trade required increased imports of copper and silver from the northern Europe.

Antwerp became the principal northern outlet for ivory and African pepper, though at least until 1488 it had to share the sale of Madeira sugar with Bruges<sup>3</sup>. The imports could be found most easily at Antwerp fairs. At Antwerp, merchants from Germany, in particular the Aachen area and the south Germany were selling metal and metalwares in increasing quantities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Only a small selection can be listed here. The standard exposition is H. Van der Wee. *The Growth of Antwerp Market and the European Economy (14th-16th centuries)*. The Hague, 1963; The classical study for the rise of the Antwerp market is J.A. Van Houtte, 'La genèse du grand marché international d'Anvers à la fin du moyen âge'. *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 19 (1940). id., 'Anvers aux XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles: expansion et apogée'. *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 16 (1961); W. Brulez, 'Brugge en Antwerpen in de 15de en 16de eeuw: een tegenstelling?', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 63 (1970). Only a few studies have hitherto appeared concerning the European-wide networks at early modern times, except a few exceptions such as; J.N. Ball, *Merchants and Merchandise: The expansion of trade in Europe 1500-1630*, London, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Van Houtte, 'La genèse du grand marché'.

<sup>3</sup> J. Denucé, *Afrika in de XVI<sup>e</sup> eeuw en de handel van Antwerpen*, Antwerpen, 1937, blz., 39. For the Portuguese spice trade with the Low Countries, see: V. Magalhães-Godinho, *L'Economie de l'empire portugais aux XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris, 1969, pp. 374-75; H. Kellenbenz, 'Wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Aspekte der überseeischen Expansion Portugals', *Scripta Mercaturae*, 2 (1970); E.W. Herbert, 'The West African copper trade in the 15th and 16th centuries', in: H. Kellenbenz, ed., *Precious Metals in the Age of Expansion*, Stuttgart, 1981.

The sale of metal goods of Central Europe in Antwerp was attracting the Portuguese to the Scheldt marts. In the early phase of the discoveries, Venice has supplied much of Portuguese copper needs, but with increasing competition from the Low Countries. By about 1490 Antwerp had usurped Bruges' position as main supplier to the Portuguese<sup>4</sup>. She would maintain her supremacy until the Ducth Revolt of the end of the 1560s. The copperware had proved to be very popular as a barter object in the West Africa and Asia. Its purchase in Antwerp for export to Asia became a great source of profit to the Portuguese. Henceforth they sold their African and Asian spices on the market of Antwerp. Portuguese traders settled in Antwerp, buying German copper-wares for the African trade from the 1470s, and silver for Asia after 1504; they sold sugar and spices from Atlantic islands and the Indian Ocean. In 1494 the Fugger sent their first deliveries of copper to the Portuguese crown in Antwerp. Professor Van der Wee pointed out that the the Hungarian copper of the Fuggers (1497-1504) reached the Antwerp market partly through middlemen, such as the Schets, one of the typical Netherlandish merchants of the sixteenth century<sup>5</sup>.

The Portuguese interests suddenly widened in 1499, when Vasco da Gama had reached Calicut and returned to Lisbon. Thus was created a Lisbon-Antwerp commercial axis in the end of the fifteenth century. In 1501 the first Portuguese vessel discharged Asian pepper at the Scheldt harbour. From 1503 onwards, shipments arrived largely and regularly. In 1508, the Feitoria de Flandres was established as a branch of the Casa da India. Thus, between 1510 and 1515, the Portuguese offensive reached a climax. At the same time the Fuggers' shipments (copper) to Venice sharply declined. Portuguese pepper was distributed from Antwerp over large areas of Europe.

On the other hand, English cloth exports were growing rapidly from the end of the 1470s, though interrupted at times of international tensions. Until the middle of the sixteenth century, the main export of England was undyed woollen cloth. Most of it (2/3 at least) was destined for Antwerp market where it was exchanged for a variety of foreign goods. The expansion of English cloth was almost continuous throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. An important aspect of Antwerp's economic rise was the development of finishing and dyeing of English undyed white cloths. The English cloth, the national industry of England, was so dependent on Antwerp market, and London was becoming the sole export harbour of England's exports at the expense of provincial ports from the second half of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. London became a satellite city of Antwerp for a half-century or so<sup>6</sup>.

In 1542-43 two-thirds of Antwerp's overland trade to Italy consisted of fabrics manufactured outside the Netherlands<sup>7</sup>. The importance of the Mediterranean market is revealed

---

4 For the Bruges' trade of sugar with the Portuguese Atlantic islands at the late fifteenth century, see: O. Mus, 'De Brugse compagnie Despars op het einde van de 15<sup>e</sup> eeuw', *Annales de la Société d'Emulation de Bruges*, 101 (1964).

5 H. Van der Wee, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 125-7.

6 E.M. Carus-Wilson & O. Coleman, ed., *England's Export Trade, 1275-1547*, 1963; R. Davis, *English Overseas Trade 1500-1700*, London, 1973; id., 'The rise of Antwerp and its English connection, 1406-1510', in: D. C. Coleman & A.H. John, ed., *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England*, London, 1976; G.D. Ramsay, *The English Woollen Industry, 1500-1750*, London, 1982.

7 W. Brulez, 'L'exportation vers Italie par voie terrestre au milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Annales, Economies*,

by the export of a number of kerseys almost equal to that of traditional 'broadcloths' by the Merchant Adventurers in 1549-50—approximately 50,000 pieces of each year, though of course the smaller size and value of the kersys meant that the trade was still dominated in value by the traditional cloth. The broadcloths were sent through London in an unfinished state to Antwerp, and dyed and finished in this city to meet the standards of their continental markets<sup>8</sup>. London's merchants cemented their hold on the Antwerp trade. And kerseys were sent to Antwerp for carrying by overland routes to Italy and Levant. This traffic to Italy, and into the Balkans and east Europe through Ancona, Venice and Ragusa, accounted for much of the growth of London's Antwerp trade in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

And the crisis of the late 1550s hit English cloth trade very seriously. In the three decades that followed the mid-century boom, the English connection with Antwerp was first weakened and completely broken<sup>9</sup>. After 1572 Antwerp's commercial attractions faded rapidly. When the Dutch rebels closed the Scheldt to traffic and cut Antwerp off from the sea in 1585, the glorious history of Antwerp ended.

## II

We have the data extracted from the export registers of the Netherlandish overland's export trade<sup>10</sup>, and the data concerning the Antwerp's maritime export trade in the mid-1540s<sup>11</sup>. Thus, we have nowadays a full view of the Antwerp's export trade, though only covering a few years in its zenith. The collected amount of 1 per cent levy on exports in all directions (export tax on the total export from the Netherlands) by land and by sea shows that Antwerp held by far the first rank under all the trade centers of the Netherlands in 1543-45. During the period from 10th February 1543 to 22nd September 1545, more than two and a half years, was 199,058 guilders collected as the 1 per cent levy, of which amount collected at Antwerp reached 151,874 guilders, that is, 76,3 per cent. Furthermore, Professor W. Brulez argued that the English were exempt from this tax, and O. de Smedt may assess their exports from England at 1,800,000 guilders a year<sup>12</sup>. Thus, W. Brulez calculated the estimated collected amount of 1 per cent levy of Antwerp at 109,568, that is 82,2 per cent<sup>13</sup>. And, Amsterdam held the second rank of market by land as destination reached 9,939 guilders, 5 per cent.

Sociétés Civilisations, 10 (1959); id., 'Les routes commerciales d'Angleterre en Italie au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in: Studi in Onore di A. Fanfani, IV, Milan, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> For the Antwerp's finishing industry of cloth; A.K.L. Thijs, Van "Werk-winkel" tot "Fabriek" de Textielnijverheid te Antwerpen (Einde 15de beg in 19de eeuw), Brussel, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> For the movement of the Merchants Adventurer's during the second half of the sixteenth century; G.D. Ramsay, The Queen's Merchants and the Revolt of the Netherlands (The end of the Antwerp mart, Vol. II), Manchester, 1986; W.R. Baumann, The Merchants Adventurers and the Continental Cloth-trade (1560s-1620s), Berlin New York, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> W. Brulez, 'L'exportation'.

<sup>11</sup> Katsumi Nakazawa, 'L'exportation maritime d'Anvers vers la Péninsule Iberique au milieu du seizieme siecle', in: Mediterranean Studies Research Group at Hitotsubashi University, Studies in the Mediterranean World. Past and Present, XI, Tokyo, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> W. Brulez, 'The balance of trade of the Netherlands in the middle of the 16th century', Acta Historiae Neerlandica, IV, 1970. p. 31; O.de Smedt, De Engelse Natie te Antwerpen, II, Antwerpen, 1954, blz., 349-351 en 434-435.

<sup>13</sup> W. Brulez, 'Handel', in: Antwerpen in de XVI de eeuw, Antwerpen, 1976, blz., 120.

Chief export harbours:			Chief cities for export by land:		
Antwerp	64,568	(73.1%)	Antwerp	87,30	(78.8%)
Amsterdam	9,939	(11.2%)	Aachen	8,521	( 7.7%)
Arnhemuiden	4,791	( 5.4%)	Valenciennes	4,655	( 4.1%)
Middelburg	2,557	( 2.9%)	Namur	2,357	( 2.1%)
Sluis	1,288	( 1.4%)	Gorinchem	1,949	( 1.7%)
Flushing	1,240	( 1.4%)	Bois-le-Duc	1,169	( 1.0%)
Veere	776	( 0.8%)			

Meanwhile, we have analysed the Antwerp's maritime export trade covering the periode from 28th March 1543 to 4th February 1544, more than 10 months<sup>14</sup>. We have not calculated the valuation (value) of merchandise, but the collected duty at the the imposing the levy on the Scheldt harbour. I think the collected levy as the indice of trade movement. Because most goods were taxed 1 per cent of value as the levy, but some goods, for example some clothes were taxed according to the number or weight of the merchandises, thus we could not calculate the total value of the Antwerp's export trade<sup>15</sup>.

**Table 1** Exports from Antwerp  
(Destinations and value in 1% levy)

	Ships	Collected levy			%
1 Arnemuiden	140	1078£	8ß	0d	30.5
2 Amsterdam	111	908	6	4	25.7
3 London	97	765	11	3	21.7
4 Lisbon	32	282	18	9	8.0
5 Lescluyse	9	176	10	1	5.0
6 Veere	28	103	10	11	2.9
7 Campen	12	68		10	1.9
8 Flushing	41	41	13	10	1.1
9 Middelburg	31	36	19	7	1.4
10 Dordrecht	13	28	10	2	0.8
Total	586	3529£	10ß	8d	100

Table 1 should represent a broad picture of the Antwerp's export trade by sea in the mid-1540s. Arnemuiden held the first rank in the number of ships as well as the total levy as destination, Amsterdam the second, and London the third. The first three occupied about 78 per cent of total 1 per cent duty collected, and the first four (that is, Arnemuiden, Amsterdam, London and Lisbon) accounted for 86 per cent of the total value exported from Antwerp. Now the question is: were these destination declared the final destination or not? Eight harbours in the table 1 were in the Netherlands, only except London and Lisbon. As every body knows,

<sup>14</sup> K. Nakazawa, 'L'exportation', this data were extracted from the following archives: State Archives, Brussels, Rekenkamer (Chambre des Comptes), nos.23367-23368. These registers have not ever been studied.

<sup>15</sup> Brulez, 'The balance', pp. 37-8; O. de Smedt, II, pp. 441-442.

Arnhemuiden, Veere and Middelburg were out-ports of Antwerp on the river of the Scheldt, these out-ports had small population and very small background, therefore these could not be the final destination of ships. Therefore, I think that these destinations declared were not final destinations, and most of these contained the first ports of call.

Let us turn now to examine the ware exported from Antwerp by sea itself. Table 2 below should present exports in the collected duty.

**Table 2** The Goods Exported from Antwerp by Sea (collected levy)

Cloth*	450£	11s	3d	12.7%	Haberdashery & Material	520£	17s	14.7%	
cloth of England	150		8		haberdashery	380	17		
Flanders	108	9	11		thread	12	9		
Holland	17	10	1		flax	22	12		
Malines	6	13			paper	10	10		
Louvain	5	15	1		book	5	1	4	
kersey	69	9	2		wool	20	15	8	
demi-ostade	31	15	2		cotton	6	18	1	
outrefin	12	10	7		alum	61	19		
frise	10	3							
Cloth of silk	88£	5s	8d	2.5%	Spice & Dyestuff	361£		10.2%	
Linen	308£	10s	7d	8.7%	pepper	277	19	3	
linen of Audenarde	6	11	4		ginger	3	8	9	
linen of Flanders	5	4			spice	12	18	2	
linen of Brabant	4	17	11		woad	10	1	4	
linen of Holland	2	3	4		madder	36	5	1	
linen of Hainaut		15	8		bresil	5	18	1	
linen of Herenthals	1	6	2						
Various Textiles	305£	19s		8.6%	Metal	134£	5s	3.8%	
say	124	13	11.5		copper	107	12	3	
camelotz	34	19	7		iron	15	3		
canifas	19	2	10		lead	3	12		
silk	20	8	2		nail	7	4	3	
fustain	69	10	11						
satin	3				Food & Others	597£	6s	16.9%	
nappe	11	3	7		sugar	48	18	2	
					hop	26	15	1	
					rice	1	2		
					divers merchandise	144	10	7	
Tapestry & Carpe	31£	18s		0.9%	Levy not divided	741£	1s	2.5d	21.0%
tapestry	27	15	7						
carpet	3	12	5		Total	3529£	10s	8d	

\* Contained cloth only recorded as 'cloth', whose place of production is not recorded, and so forth.

We know from the data in Table 3 that Antwerp's exports covered a vast range of the wares, from fine textiles such as silk or velours to the exotic products such as pepper from Asia in contrast to England's exports at the same times<sup>16</sup>. I have impression that Antwerp had all the conveniences of a hyper-market or a department store for European-wide buying and selling. Textiles constituted the most important goods exported from Antwerp by sea. Cloth accounted for a sizeable share of the cargoes of the ships which departed from Antwerp. It is very important for us to confirm that English clothes are exported to Amsterdam and Lisbon through Antwerp. Linen and various textiles together accounted for 19 per cent.

Finally, let us to turn the trades of the merchants. The following table 3 shows the contributions of main merchants.

**Table 3** Chief 10 Merchants of Antwerp's  
Export Trade by Sea

		Country	frequency	Ttotal levy		
1	Erasmus Schetz	Ne.*	42	225£	19s	3.5d
2	Factor of Portugal	Ib.	1	82	12	8
3	Athonio de Goesman	Ib.	20	63	3	2
4	Loys Ferraryn	?	40	59	9	10
5	Jan Balbany	?	26	57	10	7
6	Des Salviaty	It.		49	0	4
7	Loys Peres	?		48	17	4.5
8	Alonso de Santagadea	Ib.		40	10	7
9	Arnout del Plano	?		37	0	11
10	Geerit vanden Broucque	?		36	11	11

\*Ne.= Netherlands, Ib.= Iberian, It.= Italian

Erasmus Schetz, as well known, was the most important merchant of the Netherlands, but we could not specify all the native places of merchants<sup>16</sup>. I show four merchants' activities such as, destination and the nature of merchandises, except the factor of Portugal, who appeared only one time in sources.

Erasmus Schetz, the most influential merchant, who appeared 42 times in the sources of no. 23367-23368, traded 225£ as the amount of levy collected, but most of his goods (43 in the numer of times, 67 per cent of the levy) were sent to Amsterdam. He exported a variety of goods, cloth, pepper, alum and sugar, He did not export linen and haberdasheries.

Next, Anthonio de Goesman, Iberian merchant, appeared 16 times in the sources, and he exported the linen, tapestries and habersdashries to Arnemuiden, Lescluyse and Lisbon (see Table 4).

Loys Ferraryn, whom we could not specify the native country, appeared 39 times, but he exported his goods largely to London, except to Flushing 7, Arnemuide 2. He exported chiefly the linen and canifas.

Jan Balbany appeared 26 times, and exported chiefly various textiles, such as silk, cloth of silk, cloth of England, linen of Holland, kersyes, and the other goods like hops and habershdasheries largely to London except Arnemuiden 10 times.

Table 4 shows the trade courses of Iberian merchant, Anthonio de Goesman, in these sources.

16 L. Bril, *De handel tussen de Nederlanden en het Iberisch Schiereiland (midden XVI<sup>e</sup> eeuw)*. Een kwantitatieve peiling. Licenciaatsverhandeling, Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, 1961-1962; E. Coornaert, *Les Français et le commerce international à Anvers. Fin du XV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1961.

**Table 4** Export Activities of A. de Goesman

Folio	Date	Destination	Levy	Merchandises
23367 (1543)				
14	7-IV*	Lescluyse	2s 5d	haberdashry
135v	25-V	Armemuiden	10£ 8s 7d	linen
"	"	"	34s 4d	say
182v	9-VI	Armemuiden	5£17s 1d	
"	"	"	10s 5d	
229	24-VI	Lisbon	3£ 9s 9d	haberdashry
248v	30-VI	Armemuiden	2£ 5s 8d	haberdashry
285	5-VII	Armemuiden	8£12s	
307	8-VII	Lescluyse	23s 7d	tapestry
340v	20-VII	Armemuiden	8£ 2s 5d	
"	"	"	2£ 7s 4d	tapestry
345	23-VII	Lescluyse	3s	tapestry
349v	24-VII	Armemuiden	8s 1d	
378v	4-VIII	Armemuiden	5s	linen
398	7-VIII	Armemuiden	2£ 3s10d	linen, nappe
23368				
45	31-VIII	Armemuiden	12s 1d	linen
53	5-IX	Armemuiden	3s 5d	say
181	10-XII	Armemuiden	19s	tapestry
186v	11-XII	Lisbon	26£19s 2d	diverse merchandise
187	11-XII	Lisbon	8s	haberdashry

\*IV means April.