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# The Kapers of Augustus II Wettin in 1700–1701: Military and Political Significance in the Light of the Newest Research\*

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During the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795), Polish monarchs made several more or less successful attempts to establish naval forces. The complexities of the State's republican political system, coupled with relatively low income, the high autonomy of the coastal cities, and the hostile attitude of neighbouring states, made it difficult to secure a foundation for a regular royal navy, which in practice was only achieved by Sigismund III (reigned 1587–1632) and Ladislaus IV (1632–1647).<sup>1</sup> A decidedly less expensive and faster way to establish a naval force was to appoint kapers (as privateers<sup>2</sup> were typically called in the Baltic region). Privateering under Polish patronage began during the reign of Casimir IV Jagiellon (1447–1492) and reached its peak under Sigismund II Augustus (1548–1572). The last Polish monarch to issue

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1 Eugeniusz Koczorowski, *Flota Polska w latach 1587–1632* (Warszawa: Wyd. MON, 1973), 48, 55, 74–75; Kazimierz Lepszy, *Dzieje Floty Polskiej* (Gdańsk-Bydgoszcz-Szczecin: Instytut Bałtycki, 1946), 50–51, 61, 213, 223; Lucjan R. Lewitter, "Russia, Poland and the Baltic, 1697–1721," *Historical Journal* 11 (1968): 5–6.

2 The term *kapers* originates from Dutch and refers to privateers active in the Baltic and North Sea regions during the early modern period. These two terms (primarily referring to ships rather than sailors) will be used interchangeably in this article.

letters of marque was Augustus II Wettin. Some of the naval projects undertaken during his reign has already been documented in Polish and German historiography. Still little known, however, is the case at the beginning of the Great Northern War (summer 1700), when the king decided to appoint a small squadron of kapers to fight the Swedish freight in the Baltic. It took more than two centuries for the first modern research in this area to be carried out. It was initiated in 1960 by Przemysław Smolarek, who, in an article citing extracts from numerous Swedish and Danish archival documents, briefly outlined the genesis of the royal privateers and provided a framework for their activities.<sup>3</sup> However, he did not link their commission to the King's other maritime projects, as pioneering research on the subject was only then being undertaken and was not yet known to historians. It was only in the following years that articles by Johannes Kalisch, Józef Gierowski, and Bogusław Dybaś were published, delving deeper into various aspects of Augustus II's naval policy.<sup>4</sup> In the works of non-Polish historians, the problem is basically non-existent; it has been addressed only fragmentarily by Scandinavian researchers.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, research into the history of the privateer squadron from 1700–1701 remains preliminary. In undertaking this study, it was necessary not only to review the findings of previous historians, but also to conduct extensive research in Swedish, Danish, and, above all, Saxon archives. A range of valuable information on the political context of the issue in question can be found primarily in the diplomatic correspondence of Sweden (Riksarkivet Stockholm: *Diplomatica Polonica, Diplomatica Danica*), Denmark (Rigsarkiv København: *Tyske kancelli, Udenrigske afdeling*) and Saxony (Hauptsatsarchiv Dresden: *Geheimes Kabinett*), as well as in the archives of the Scandinavian navies (Riksarkivet Stockholm: *Flottans Arkiv*; Rigsarkivet København: *Admiralitetet /Søetaten*). Contemporary newspapers, as it turned out, with a vested

3 Przemysław Smolarek, "Próba zorganizowania floty kaperskiej w latach 1700–1701," *Studia i Materiały do dziejów Wielkopolski i Pomorza* 6 (1960): 327–353.

4 Johannes Kalisch, "Sächsisch-polnische Pläne zur Gründung einer See- und Handelskompanie am Ausgang des 17. Jh.," in: *Um die Polnische Krone: Sachsen und Polen während des Nordischen Krieges 1700–1721*, eds. Johannes Kalisch, Józef Gierowski (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1962), 45–69; Bogusław Dybaś, "Przyczynek do polityki morskiej Augusta II w pierwszych latach panowania," *Zapiski Historyczne* 55 (1990): 137–141; Józef Gierowski, "Problematyka bałtycka w polityce Augusta II Sasa," in: *Strefa bałtycka w XVI–XVIII w. Polityka, społeczeństwo, gospodarka. Ogólnopolska sesja naukowa zorganizowana z okazji 70-lecia urodzin Profesora Edmunda Cieślaka*, ed. Jerzy Trzoska (Gdańsk: Marpress, 1993), 51–62; Jerzy Trzoska, *Kaprzy króla Augusta Mocnego (1716–1721). Z problematyki morskiej czasów saskich* (Gdańsk: Wyd. Gdańskie, 1993); Krzysztof Kuczyński, "Kaprzy Augusta II Wettina w latach 1700–1701 w świetle nieznanych szwedzkich poloników wojennomorskich," *Zapiski Historyczne* 88 (2023): 5–23.

5 Einar Wendt et al., *Amiralitetetskollegiets historia*, vol. 2: 1696–1803 (Malmö: Allhems förlag, 1974), 67, 69; Hannes Saarinen, *Danzig und Karl XII. im Nordischen Krieg* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1997), 44–45.

interest in the activities of the kapers in the Baltic, also provide valuable information.<sup>6</sup> The result of the research is this article. The aim is to recall the maritime venture of the king of Poland, Augustus II, in 1700–1701, and to depict the (hitherto widely unknown) establishment, operations and impact of the royal privateers on the early stages of the Great Northern War, with reference not only to the military but also to the political context.

### **Before the War, 1697–1699**

From the beginning of his reign in Poland, Augustus II made numerous efforts to consolidate his position as king of Poland. He saw such an opportunity in regaining some of the formerly lost provinces of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and making them a hereditary dominion of the House of Wettin. This would ensure that the Polish elites, eager to maintain their connections with the recovered province, would be compelled to elect Saxon princes as kings of Poland.<sup>7</sup> Augustus II initially pursued this policy within the framework of the Commonwealth's participation in the Holy League, inherited from John III Sobieski. In June 1698 he launched a military campaign aimed at capturing the Danube principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. Already during the campaign, a meeting took place between Augustus II and the tsar of Russia, Peter the Great in Rawa Ruska. The tsar then proposed to the king an offensive alliance against Sweden, which was to result in a joint partition of its eastern provinces. Peter's intention was to gain access to the Baltic Sea, which would facilitate trade in Russian goods, hitherto exported via Archangelsk. Embracing the idea and forging the alliance with the tsar created an opportunity for Augustus II to conquer Livonia<sup>8</sup> and make it his own hereditary dominion. The alliance was joined by Christian V of Denmark, and upon his death, by his successor, Frederick IV. The Danes wanted to regain their lost sovereignty over the Duchy of Holstein, which was then a Swedish satellite. Of the alliance members, only Denmark had a strong navy capable of facing the Swedish fleet and was to cover the military activities of the other allies at sea.

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6 The article uses the Gregorian calendar by default. In 1700, the Julian calendar (with a difference of 11 days back) was still used in some European countries, and in Sweden also the original Swedish calendar (10 days back). Accordingly, quoted documents are double dated where necessary. Individual newspaper publishers used various numbering systems. The article retains their original numbering, with non-Gregorian dates marked as [j.s.] for Julian, or [s.s.] for Swedish.

7 Jacek Burdowicz-Nowicki, *Piotr I, August II i Rzeczpospolita. 1697–1706* (Kraków: Arcana, 2013), 112–115, 144–145.

8 Lost by the Commonwealth to Sweden because of the wars of the 1620s and ultimately as a result of the Treaty of Oliva, signed in 1660, see: Lewitter, "Russia, Poland," 3–4.

According to the seventh point of the alliance treaty concluded on 25 September 1699 between Saxony and Denmark, the king of Poland was to have two ships of the line, armed with 40–50 cannons and three frigates at his disposal in Riga (implicitly, in the event of its rapid capture) or in any Livonian port designated by him. The Danes also undertook to support sea transports to Livonia.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted at this point that Augustus II himself, from the first years of his reign, also tried to activate maritime policy in Poland. A general declaration of the restitution of the King's and the Commonwealth's maritime rights on the Baltic Sea already appeared in his *Pacta Conventa*,<sup>10</sup> while in a memorial entitled *How to transform Poland into a prosperous country enjoying the respect of its neighbours*, drafted around 1697, he included demands for the construction of seaports and a strong fleet.<sup>11</sup> In the spring of 1698, Johann Friedrich von Thilow proposed the establishment of a maritime trade company in Poland, aiming to engage in European and colonial trade. The plan was to gain a foothold on the Black Sea coast, thereby making the Commonwealth a key trade route to the Middle East. Warships under the Polish royal flag would protect the company's vessels, with management by a newly established admiralty. Despite the support of Augustus II's court, the project collapsed due to the signing of the Peace of Karlovitz in January 1699, which undermined its eastern prospects, and the poor response from western European investors. Nevertheless, the King endeavoured to establish a small navy. Such a postulate was passed in 1699 at the general assembly (sejmik) of Royal Prussia, on the initiative of people associated with the court: Voivode of Malbork, Jan J. Przebendowski and Standard-Bearer Piotr E. Kczewski. However, the Sejm of 1699 did not engage in debate on this proposal. In fact, the Council of the City of Gdańsk reacted with considerable hostility to the plans, perceiving them as a threat to the security of its interests. However, on the king's orders, the revitalisation of the port of Palanga (located on the coast of Samogitia) was undertaken, which also served as a justification for the concentration of Saxon troops in Lithuania.<sup>12</sup>

9 For the Treaty of Dresden (Saxon-Danish) of 25 September 1699, and the Treaty of Préobrazhenskoye (Russian-Saxon) of 21 November 1699, see: Carl Hallendorff, ed., *Handlingar angående konung August den starkes utrikespolitik före hans afsättning år 1704*, in: *Historiska Handlingar*, vol. 19, part 2 (Stockholm: Kungliga Boktryckeriet, 1908), 80–86, 97–101.

10 Text of Augustus II's *Pacta conventa* in: *Volumina Legum*, vol. 6 (Petersburg: nakładem i drukiem Jozafata Ohryzki, 1860), 23.

11 Augustus II, *Umb Pohlen in Flor und in Ansehung gegen seine nachbaren zu sehzen*, in: Stanisław Piotrowicz, "Przyczynek do charakterystyki Augusta II," *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 26 (1912), 83–87. The political plans of August II were discussed by: Jacek Staszewski, "Jak Polskę przemienić w kraj kwitnący..." *Szkice i studia z czasów saskich* (Olsztyn: OBN, 1997), 69–95.

12 Kalisch, "Sächsisch-polnische Pläne," 51–54, 63–65, passim; Dybaś, "Przyczynek," 138–140; Idem, *Sejm Pacyfikacyjny 1699* (Toruń: TNT, 1991), 194–195.

## The Beginning of the War and the Establishment of the Privateers

The establishment of privateers by Augustus II in the summer of 1700, was the outcome of events at the outset of the Great Northern War, which, contrary to the plans of the anti-Swedish coalition members, proved entirely unfortunate for them. In March 1700, the Danish army, advancing south, was halted at Tönning. Charles XII of Sweden, backed at sea by the guarantors of Holstein's independence, England and the Netherlands, received considerable naval support when a squadron of twenty-four warships under Admirals George Rooke and Philips van Almonde was dispatched to the Baltic. The Swedish fleet under admiral Hans Wachtmeister, working in coordination with the Anglo-Dutch squadron, effectively neutralised the Danish navy by blocking it at the Sound. Following this, the Swedish army landed on Zealand and advanced towards Copenhagen, which was left almost defenceless. King Frederick IV was compelled to sue for peace, which resulted in the Treaty of Travendal, signed on 18 August 1700. The guarantees given to the treaty by England and the Netherlands prohibited Frederick IV from supporting his former allies. Meanwhile, Augustus II's plans to swiftly capture Riga in February also faltered. Instead of a quick victory, the Saxon army found itself besieging the city, managing only to capture the fort of Kobron on 14 February 1700 and the fortress of Dünamünde (vainly renamed *Augustusburg*) a month later. But without the support of the Tsar, who delayed his entry the conflict until the conclusion of Russia's ongoing war with Turkey, there was little hope of quickly concluding the campaign. Augustus II, who did not achieve any spectacular success, could not count on official support from Poland either. Waging war against Sweden, he acted as Saxon elector, though he officially held the highest title of the king of Poland. He deployed both the Saxon army and Polish volunteers, but in May 1700 the Senate of the Commonwealth categorically refused to officially involve the state in the war.<sup>13</sup>

In this situation, the Saxon army in Livonia found itself in a difficult position, strongly dependent on seaborne supplies (particularly heavy artillery), which were to be sent between Gdańsk and Palanga (or Memel) and then overland to Riga. The route began to be used as early as in 1699 and, in accordance with the Saxon-Danish alliance, Danish ships were to secure it. By April 1700, however, these had still not arrived, while it was reported from Dünamünde that several Swedish kapers had appeared in the roadstead of Riga.<sup>14</sup>

13 Jørgen H. Barfod, *Niels Juels Flåde* (Copenhagen: B. Thorgils, 1997), 117–124 passim; Burdowicz-Nowicki, *Piotr I*, 216, 244, 253–254. The legal fiction that Poland did not participate in the conflict (even though Swedish troops had been marching through it since 1702) was maintained until 1704, when a Polish-Russian offensive treaty was signed in Narva. See: *Ibidem*, 461.

14 Sächsisches Staatsarchiv–Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (hereinafter HStAD), Geheimes Kabinett (hereinafter GeKa), loc. 3610/01, fol. 119, Arnold O. Paykull to prince Ferdinand Kettler, Dünamünde, 12 April 1700.

This prompted the Saxons to intensify their diplomatic issues. In early May 1700, Balthazar Heinrich von Nischwitz, a Saxon diplomat, arrived in Copenhagen with the objective of accelerating the dispatch of the requested ships. The mission proved successful, and three Danish frigates set course on 9 May for Elbląg and Gdańsk, from where they were to escort ships with supplies for the Saxon army.<sup>15</sup> Nischwitz's exact instructions are not known, but it seems likely that he was also ordered to investigate the possibility of enlisting captains-shipowners directly into the service of the king of Poland as privateers.<sup>16</sup> Difficulties in cooperation at sea, alongside with news from Livonia must have prompted the royal entourage to dust off the idea of creating the king's own naval forces, and thus become independent of Danish assistance. Indeed, as early as in mid-May, both Nischwitz and the Saxon resident in Copenhagen, Johann de Schade,<sup>17</sup> began to report to their superiors that the first captains (Musman and Jens Jenssen) had volunteered to privateer against the Swedes and asked for further instructions on the matter.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, these activities were not cancelled after the dispatch of the Danish frigates, which arrived at Dünamünde on 18 June 1700.<sup>19</sup> Regardless, Augustus II approved the recruitment of privateers and assured Nischwitz of the imminent issuance of letters of marque. In a report dated 8 July, the diplomat advised the King not to delay, stressing that even more volunteers had emerged.<sup>20</sup> This indicates that the kapers were intended primarily to counter Swedish shipping, rather than for convoy escort. This had already been provided by Danish frigates, which, however, returned to Denmark at the end of July due to the increasingly difficult situation in the Sound. This put a question mark over further Saxon-Danish cooperation at sea, which soon after the conclusion of the Swedish-Danish

15 Rigsarkivet København (hereinafter RK), Admiralitets- og Kommissariatskollegiet, Admiralitetet, Generalkopibog, package no. 247, fols. 1501–1502, Adm. Jens Juel's orders to Capt. Daniel Wilster, commanding frigate "Hejren," 7 May 1700.

16 It is not known exactly who came up with this idea. Saxon General and Augustus II's favourite Jacob Heinrich von Flemming's later claims (recorded in his memoirs dated 1706), that such a move was suggested by Antoine Moreau (Polish envoy in Copenhagen from 11 August 1700) after the Treaty of Travendal, are not supported by the sources accessed. See: Jacob H. Flemming, *Mémoires concernant l'élection d'Auguste II pour roi de Pologne et les débuts de la guerre du Nord (1696–1702)*, ed. Urszula Kosińska (Warszawa: Neriton 2017), 211–212. A similar dating of the origins of recruitment was also erroneously adopted by: Smolarek, "Próba," 334. See: Ludwig Bittner, Lothar Gross, eds., *Repertorium der diplomatischen Vertreter aller Länder sett dem Westfälischen Frieden 1648*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1936), 414.

17 Bittner, Gross, *Repertorium*, 451.

18 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 2704/02, fol. 12v, Schade to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 11 May 1700; HStAD, GeKa, loc. 3610/01, fol. 422v, Nischwitz to Augustus II, Copenhagen, 15 May 1700.

19 RK, Generalkommissariatet (Søetaten), V. Skibsjournaler, package no. 24A– 25D, [no pagination], Logbook of the „Hejren” frigate, entries of 9 May 1700, 10, 18 June 1700, 27 July 1700. According to the logbook, the frigates did not call at Memel or Palanga but continued on as far as Dünamünde. See: Barfod, *Niels Juels*, 118.

20 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 3610/02, fol. 207, Nischwitz to Augustus II, Rednsburg, 8 July 1700.

peace became definitively impossible. Having gained operational freedom, the Swedes began moving their troops across the sea to Livonia. With their domination of the Baltic, continuing to send convoys for the Saxons became very risky.

However, the King did not wait for the situation to develop. On 15 August 1700, even before the news of the Treaty of Travendal reached Riga,<sup>21</sup> Augustus II officially authorized the establishment of his own privateers through a special letters patent. By virtue of the document, they were entitled to attack any Swedish subjects at sea and bring their prizes into the harbours of Courland<sup>22</sup> or any others within the king of Poland realm. The letters patent also entrusted the organisation of the flotilla to Johann de Schade, granting him full authority and royal patronage to all his activities concerning the matter.<sup>23</sup> The documents, issued to every recruited captain, were not yet proper letters of marque. These were to be issued by Schade, who, after the conclusion of Nischwitz's mission and his departure from Copenhagen in late July 1700, became the main organiser of the flotilla. The role proved difficult, as the resident acted through official channels under the authority of the then head of Saxon foreign policy, Chancellor Wolf Dietrich von Beichlingen. Lacking precise guidelines for recruitment, in late August and early September 1700, Schade continually asked the chancellor for them.<sup>24</sup> It seems that he received proper instructions only on 21 September, when August Wygand, another Saxon diplomat with whom he was to collaborate, came to Copenhagen from Hamburg.<sup>25</sup>

From this point onwards, the organisation of the kapers gathered pace. Wygand was soon reporting to Beichlingen on the details of contracts made with the captains, while Schade mentioned a total of "four or five" ships preparing to go to sea at the end of September 1700.<sup>26</sup> Letters of marque issued by Schade to volunteer captains generally repeated the content of the royal letters patent of 15 August 1700, but included a few new details: a commitment by the captain not to attack neutral ships and not to take any booty until it had been confirmed by royal officials as legitimately captured.<sup>27</sup> The king's share

21 On 29 August 1700, see: Burdowicz-Nowicki, *Piotr I*, 209.

22 The Duchy of Courland was then a fief of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

23 Letters patent of Augustus II on the kapers' establishment, Saxon camp by Riga, 15 August 1700 – the copy in: Riksarkivet Stockholm (hereinafter RS), *Diplomatica Polonica* (hereinafter DP), II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 19 March 1701. See: Kuczyński, "Kaprzy," 11–13.

24 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 2704/02, fol. 26r, 46r, 50r, Schade to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 17 August 1700, 14 and 18 September 1700.

25 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 2704/02, fol. 51v, Schade to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 21 September 1700.

26 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 2704/02, fol. 53r, Schade to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 25 September 1700. HStAD, GeKa, loc. 2762/01, fol. 73, Wygand to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 28 September 1700.

27 Letter of marque issued by Schade to Cornelis Neuvell, Copenhagen, 19 October 1700 – the copy in: RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 19 May 1701. See: Kuczyński, "Kaprzy," 11–13.

from the sale of the booty was set at 10%, with a further 5% allocated to Beichlingen and 2.5% each to the Schade and Wygand. Having received letter of marque, the captain had to pay a bail of 100 *Reichstaler*. He and his entire crew also had to take an oath of allegiance to the King of Poland, and obedience to the *See-Articul* (sea articles), consisting of thirty-one points and regulating the duties of sailors of all ranks.<sup>28</sup>

Despite these advances, a key issue remained unresolved: the establishment of prize officials in the ports, who would confirm the booty as legally seized and thereby enable its legal sale. The diplomats' repeated requests for this, made throughout October 1700, went unanswered by the Chancellor for a long time. They suggested establishing prize officials in the ports of Courland: Windau, Libau and Angern (present-day Ventspils, Liepāja, and Engure in Latvia), as well as in Dünamünde and Palanga. When Beichlingen finally appointed Johann Friedrich Bötticher, Saxon resident in Gdańsk, as prize officer, Schade and Wygand greeted this with concerns about the port's remoteness from the coast of Courland – the planned epicentre of privateering.<sup>29</sup> These problems were probably the reason for the further delay in entering the battle against Swedish shipping. Captain Cornelis Neuvell (former lieutenant in Danish navy),<sup>30</sup> commanding the frigate<sup>31</sup> "Postillion," was preparing to go to sea as early as the end of September, but in fact he received his letter of marque on 16 October 1700, and set sail from Copenhagen three days later.<sup>32</sup> Shortly afterwards (before 26 October), it was also issued to Captain Abbe Seribs commanding the ship "Fliegender Wolf," who planned to sail from Lübeck after equipping himself there. The next two ships were also preparing to set sail.<sup>33</sup> In the autumn of 1700, a separate project for commissioning privateers was also developed by Polish General Michał Brandt, likely unaware of the measures already undertaken by Augustus II.

28 They drew on the established customary maritime law of the era, but some of the provisions of the articles sounded identical to the naval articles of the earlier kaper fleet of Sigismund II Augustus and the royal navy of Sigismund III. The resemblance was most likely unintentional. See: Stanisław Bodniak, "Polska a Bałtyk za ostatniego Jagiellona," *Pamiętnik Biblioteki Kórnickiej* 3 (1946): 131–132; Koczorowski, *Flota Polska*, 98–102.

29 HStAD, GeKa, Loc. 2762/01, fo. 81v, Wygand to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 30 October 1700. See: Bittner, Gross, *Repertorium*, 451.

30 RK, Admiralitets- og Kommissariatskollegiet, Admiralitetet, Generalkopibog, package no. 247, fol. 1591, Cornelis Neuvell's dismissal from service by the Admiralty, Copenhagen, 23 September 1700. The date of dismissal suggests that he most likely deliberately transferred to the service of the King of Poland.

31 Neuvell himself referred to his ship by this term, but her exact type remains uncertain, as the term *frigate* at the time could denote both light three-masted ships (e.g., French *Fregate Légère* or English 6th rates) and any agile corsair vessels, regardless of rig or armament. See: Nicolas Aubin, "Navire fregaté," in: Idem, *Dictionnaire de Marine* (Amsterdam: P. Brunel, 1702), 578; Krzysztof Gerlach, *Historia Fregat żaglowych* (Gdańsk–Warszawa–Józefów: ACAD, 2019), 164.

32 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 3610/01, fol. 288, Schade to Beichlingen, 19 October 1700.

33 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 3610/01, fols. 280–286v, Schade to Beichlingen, 16 October 1700. HStAD, GeKa, loc. 2704/02, fol. 69, Schade to Beichlingen, Copenhagen, 26 October 1700.

The undated project assumed privateering not primarily in the Baltic Sea (as controlled by the kings of Denmark and Sweden), but rather in the North Sea, with guarantees of the inviolability of royal privateers being obtained from England, Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal. Brandt also proposed the implementation of one of two variants: the voluntary recruitment of 10–30 captains with ships, or the direct king's purchase of only four frigates, but heavily armed and manned by a crew of 120 each.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, his project was somewhat tardy, although it is possible that some of Brandt's suggestions were considered.

The five-month interval between the initial idea of establishing the kaper flotilla and its implementation – from May to October 1700 – may seem long at first glance. However, considering the official procedures, the lengthy mail route between Copenhagen, Warsaw, and Riga, as well as the time needed to prepare ships and recruit crews, the delay appears quite explainable. By contemporary standards, it was conducted relatively swiftly. Nevertheless, the kapers began cruising in autumn, just as the Baltic storm season was starting. Furthermore, the onset of winter was imminent, bringing with it the freezing of ports.

### Activity of the Polish Royal Kapers

The first privateering action took place on 5 November 1700, when a Swedish skipper Ewout Hillebrantz, sailing his ship “3 Salmen” from Stockholm to Amsterdam, was passing Bornholm from the north. There he encountered a small frigate, approaching under the Swedish merchant flag and two pennants – red on the fore topmast, and blue on the main topmast. This aroused distrust in Hillebrantz, who raised his colours. In response, the frigate lowered the Swedish flag and raised a *bloody flag* depicting an arm wielding a sabre. Realising he was dealing with a kaper, Swedish skipper began to flee. The frigate set off in pursuit, which lasted until two o'clock in the afternoon. Her crew tried to board the Swedish ship several times, but only one of them succeeded. Seeing himself abandoned, the sailor surrendered to the Swedes. Hillebrantz eventually escaped pursuit and reached Elsinore, where he reported the attack

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<sup>34</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Zbiór Bartoszewiczów, no. 69, fol. 6, Michał Brandt, Project wie Ihro Mayst. von Pohlen Schiffe unter dero Flaggen im Baltischen Meer haben Könten [undated]. The only clue to the dating of the Project is the mention of “congratulations on the crown to the King of Prussia.” The coronation of Frederick William was not approved by Emperor Leopold I until 16 November 1700. Therefore, I believe that the project could not have been submitted to the Polish court before that date. See: Albert Waddington, *L'acquisition de la couronne royale de Prusse par les Hohenzollern* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1888), 140.

to the Swedish commissar Peter Barchman.<sup>35</sup> From the testimony of the captured sailor, the frigate in question proved to be Captain Neuvell's "Postillion." Barchman immediately passed the news on to his superiors as well as to the Swedish envoy in Denmark, Anders Leijonkloo, who, in his own report to Charles XII, promised to investigate the matter.<sup>36</sup> The incident received wide coverage in the European press. The "Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant," mentioned that the frigate was in "Saxon or Polish service"<sup>37</sup>; English newspapers described the episode in similar terms. The "Leipziger Post- und Ordinar-Zeitung" claimed that the Polish kaper pursued the Swedes "as far as the coast of Rügen,"<sup>38</sup> while the Swedish "Ordinarie Stockholmske Post Tijdender" provided the most detailed description of the flag, depicting "an arm wielding a sword on a red background."<sup>39</sup> The failure did not discourage Captain Neuvell, who achieved his first success on 9 November 1700, when he captured the Swedish smack "Jung Frau Elizabeth" from Stockholm. The ship was then manned with a skeleton crew under the command of Barents Thomsen and sent back to Gdańsk.<sup>40</sup> Neuvell released the captured smack's crew members on Bornholm, issuing them with a document confirming the capture of their ship.<sup>41</sup> It is likely that the action was also mentioned by "Wochentliche Post-Zeitung" of Braunschweig, which in a communiqué of 13 November 1700 claimed that unknown Polish kaper "had captured another Swedish ship laden with copper."<sup>42</sup>

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- 35 Ewout Hillebrantz's account of a meeting with a Polish kaper, Elsinore, 9 November 1700, copy in: RS, Flottans Arkiv, Flottans centrala ledning, Amiralitetskollegium, kansliet 1630–1807 (hereinafter FFA), E II b, vol. 5, fol. 56–57v, Kanslikollegium to adm. Hans Wachtmeister, Stockholm, 7/17 November 1700.
- 36 RS, Diplomatica Danica (hereinafter DD), 3 a, vol. 437, [no pagination], Barchman to Charles XII, Elsinore 12 November 1700. RS, DD, 1, 13, vol. 110, fol. 341–341v. Leijonkloo to Charles XII, Copenhagen, 16 November 1700. The envoy noted that Capt. Neuvell's ship carried a crew of 32 and four cannons, though most newspapers and later Swedish reports indicated her armament as eight.
- 37 "[H]et Kapertje te Copenhage gehuurt was en met Poolse of Saxise Commissie voer." *Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant* 46 (1700), 16 November 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011227879>.
- 38 *The London Post* 225 (1700), 11–13 November [j.s.] 1700; *The English Post* 13 (1700), 8–11 November [j.s.] 1700. *Leipziger Post- und Ordinar-Zeitung*, 3/45 (1700), accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1527456>.
- 39 "[E]n röd Flagga hwaruti en Arm med et i handen hållande Swård." *Ordinarie Stockholmske Post Tijdender* 46 (1700), 12 November [s.s.] 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://tidningar.kb.se/k3wbsn-pw1h0br7p>.
- 40 RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 19 March 1701.
- 41 RS, Riksarkivets ämnessamlingar. Militaria, (hereinafter RM), 4, vol. M 1858, Om den polsk kapare, [no pagination], Cornelis Neuvell's pass for the crew of "Jung Frau Elizabeth," on the frigate "Postillion," 14 November 1700 (copy); RS, DD, 1, 13, vol. 110, fol. 355v. Leijonkloo to Charles XII, Copenhagen, 4 December 1700.
- 42 "[E]in ander Schwedisches Fahrzeug aber mit Kupffer beladen soll aufgebracht sein." *Wochentliche Post-Zeitung (Wöchentlicher Mercurius zur Ordinaei Post-Zeitung)* 46 (1700), accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1149726>.

Neuvel kept cruising in the southwestern Baltic, reaching the port of Prestø<sup>43</sup> before the end of November. Subsequently, as the “Amsterdamse Courant” reported, the “Polish privateer «Postillion»” sailed from there on the pretext of “searching for negroes in the West Indies” [sic!] and, on 3 December 1700, captured the galliot of skipper Michael Levestael bound for Stralsund.<sup>44</sup>

What is intriguing in the above accounts is the appearance of the flag used by the privateers. Schade and Wygand in their correspondence to superiors never proposed its specific design, which indicates that the vexillum was imposed by the king. The sign of a sword-armed hand on a red background, known as the *bloody flag*, appeared on Polish warships as early as the 1620s, functioning as a naval battle jack similar to those used by other fleets of the time (e.g. Dutch or Swedish).<sup>45</sup> Seven years prior to the events discussed here, Pieter Mortier published an atlas of nautical charts, where, for unknown reasons, he described the *bloody flag* as the Polish royal flag.<sup>46</sup> It remains unclear whether Augustus II, in equipping his privateers with this flag, used the existing design from the atlas or whether he intended to evoke the tradition of the Polish royal navy. Nevertheless, now it was clearly treated as a sign of political affiliation, not only as a battle jack or as a “no quarter” signal customarily displayed by corsairs of the time in the event of resistance by a pursued ship.<sup>47</sup> It should also be noted that sources continually referred to the privateers of Augustus II as Polish (or less frequently as Saxon), despite the fact that none of the captains or crewmen were likely to be ethnic Poles (or Saxons). This was an obvious mental shortcut, indicating primarily political affiliation – the privateers remained in the service of the king of Poland and operated under his royal flag. The ethnic affiliations of the crews, which – as usually in the era – consisted of a mixture of several nationalities, were not relevant here.<sup>48</sup>

43 Town on the east coast of Zealand, located in the bay of Prestøfjord.

44 “[E]en Poolsche kaper de Postillion, gemonteerd met 8 stukken, 4 bassen, en 30 man (die van Brestog (...) was uytgelopen, ondet voorwendsel van in West-Indien op de Negers te kruisen) het galiot van Schipper Michiel Levestael (...) haest genomen.” *Amsterdamse Courant* 151 (1700), 18 December 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMSAA06:165528151>. This was the sole occasion any of said newspapers mentioned the Polish privateer by name.

45 The Polish naval ensign of the time depicted a white eagle on a red background. Marian Huflejt, *Bitwa pod Oliwą 1627: Fakty i Mity* (Olsztyn: Mantis, 2019), 108–110.

46 Pieter Mortier, *Le Neptune françois, ou Atlas nouveau des cartes marines* (Amsterdam: Mortier, 1693), Feuille de Pavillons no. 9.

47 Benerson Little, *The sea rover's practice: pirate tactics and techniques, 1630–1730* (Washington: Potomac, 2005), 112–113.

48 The Saxon archives preserve no official data (e.g. muster rolls) identifying the nationality of crewmen. Sparse Swedish records indicate Danish-Norwegian, Hamburger, Ingrian, Dutch, or even Latvian origins only for certain sailors. There is no evidence as to whether already experienced privateers were among them, although this seems probable.

Another action by an anonymous Polish kaper also received wide attention and was described in the most detail by the “Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant” of 30 November 1700. The newspaper, in a communiqué of 29 November from Amsterdam, relayed news from Königsberg, where a merchant going from Lübeck called in. The skipper reported that near Bornholm, they encountered a small ship (*dubbelde Boot*<sup>49</sup>), manned by forty men, armed with four cannons and several swivel guns. She approached the Lübeckers and forced them to stop. The privateer captain removed the Lübeck skipper from his vessel, trampling the imperial passports that were presented to him, and subsequently ordered his men to loot the ship. The Lübeck crew, however, resisted, and a fight ensued during which the privateers killed the ship’s boy. After this incident, they retreated and allowed the Lübeck skipper to sail on. He testified that the kaper carried a “red flag with a golden sword,” and that “he saw two more of such ships.”<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to ascertain what exactly prompted the privateer to intercept a vessel flying a neutral flag, which, after all, was not allowed according to the stipulations in the letters of marque and equalled piracy. Moreover, the vessel’s documentation should have dispelled any suspicion of links with Sweden. The ship’s boy thus appears to have been the first (most likely unintended) verified casualty of the Polish privateers.

The unluckiest was to be Captain Seribs, partly due to his own recklessness. Upon arriving in Lübeck, he purchased four cannons along with ammunition, small arms, and food supplies, loaded them onto an old punt and sailed down the Elbe to Travemünde, where his ship was to await him. At the time, Seribs also became acquainted with a Dutch merchant, Stoffel Heneckes, to whom he not only secretly confessed that he was a privateer, but even displayed the weapons and supplies he had purchased, together with the “red Polish flags,” one of which depicted “white hand wielding a sabre.” Almost immediately after Seribs set sail on 16 November 1700, the aforementioned Dutchman reported all he had witnessed to the Lübeck authorities, who in turn alerted nearby Wismar (then part of Swedish Pomerania).<sup>51</sup> The news caused a great stir,

49 The term used by Dutch publisher appears to derive from the French *Double Chaloupe* – small, deckless, lightly or unarmed, two-masted vessel used for corsair and liaison tasks. The latter term was also occasionally applied to somewhat larger, fully weather-decked, two-masted vessels carrying several light carriage guns, known as *Barque Longue*. The ship’s armament suggests that she belonged to the latter type. In the Netherlands both types were also collectively referred to as *Snauw* (ang. Snow). See: Walter Debrock, “Het Vlaamse kaperschip der 17de eeuw: de Snauw,” *Mededelingen van de Marine Academie van België* 11 (1958–1959), 17–18; Jean Boudriot, *Historique de la corvette La Créole, 1827: Monographie* (Paris: Ancre, 1990), 6, 12–15.

50 “De Lubecker verhaelde verdet, dat dit Kapertje een roode Vlag met een vergulde Swaert voerde (...) Hy had noch 2 diergelijcke Kapertjes gesien.” *Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant* 48 (1700), 30 November 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011227886>; *The English Post* 19 (1700), 22–25 November [j.s.] 1700; *The London Post* 230 (1700), 25–27 November [j.s.] 1700.

51 RS, FFA, E II c, vol. 22, fol. 603–605, Niels Stromberg to Swedish Amiralitetskollegium, Stralsund, 22 November 1700.

and some of the vessels bound for Norrköping and to other Swedish ports did not dare put to sea.<sup>52</sup> The governor of Wismar, Bernhard von Liewen, dispatched a ship with a strong detachment of soldiers to search for and destroy the “Polish privateer.” On 25 November, the Swedes finally located the “Fliegender Wolf” anchored off the shore of Fehmarn.<sup>53</sup> They approached and launched a surprise attack, killing two crew members with the first broadside and then bombarding her deck with grenades. During the fight with the enemy boarding his ship, Captain Seribs shot one of the Swedes in the arm but, after being wounded by two others, he jumped in desperation into the hold to set fire to the powder magazine. However, the ship, torn apart by grenades, had already begun to go down, so the Swedes tried to take their own wounded and anything else they could get in their hands. Seribs lost his life in combat and went down with the ship, along with four of his crew. The Swedes took 13 prisoners, together with the “great Polish flag” and pennants as a trophy. The entire clash was said to last no longer than half an hour and was described in detail by “Hamburger Relations-Courier” of 2 December 1700.<sup>54</sup> Only the “Leipziger Post- und Ordinar-Zeitung” provided information about Captain Seribs (not mentioning him by name though), suggesting he was a citizen of Altona and a successful privateer during the Nine Years’ War.<sup>55</sup> The captured crewmen (some of whom proved to be Hamburgers and Ingrians, as well as even former sailors of the Swedish navy) were taken to Wismar for interrogation. As the preserved protocol stated, they claimed they had boarded the ship unaware that she was a privateer, which they only discovered later. During a short cruise the captain had tried to intercept a Swedish ship sailing from Västervik, in which they did not want to assist and firmly opposed it. Some even accused him of being a scoundrel and an insane man.<sup>56</sup> There is no doubt that with these unprovable statements, the captured sailors were trying to save their endangered lives.

52 “[E]ine grosse Alteration unter denen Negotianten allhier enstanden, und einige nach Norköping und andern Schwedischen Plätzen seegelfertig liegende Schiffe, sich nicht getrauen abzugehen.” *Stralsundischer Relations-Courier* 94 (1700), 22 November [s.s.] 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1164448>.

53 The island off the northern coast of Rügen.

54 “Sie haben 13. Gefangene, nebst der grossen Polnischen Flagge, zween rechte wimpels (...) bekommen.” *Hamburger Relations-Courier* 183 (1700), 2 December 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1276698>. Reprinted in *Wöchentliche Post-Zeitung* (“Freytags-Ord: Beylage, zur Wöchentlichen Post-Zeitung”) 48 (1700), accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1149750>.

55 “[W]elcher vor einigen Jahren, unter waehrenden Krieg zwischen Frankreich und Holland, auch auf Caperey gefahren, und damahls gute Beute gemacht.” *Leipziger Post- und Ordinar-Zeitung* 3/48 (1700), accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1527486>.

56 RS, Wismariensia, I, vol. 38, [no pagination], Relation aus dem Wismarischen General kriegsgericht Protocoll vom 24n Novemb. bis d. 3n Decemb. wegen das d. 25n November genommen Capers.

In the second half of November, the privateers headed towards the Bay of Gdańsk, which did not go unnoticed by the Swedish commissioner in Gdańsk, Per Cuypercrona. In his letter to Charles XII dated 24 November 1700, he reported the arrival of a ship armed with six cannons, four swivel guns and a crew of 40. Her captain, a Dane named Jan Tansen Huxbrie,<sup>57</sup> presented the royal Polish letter of marque to the Gdańsk magistrate, demanding permission to sell the captured Swedish prize he had brought there. As this was refused to him, he sent the prize to Puck, but anchored his ship near Hel,<sup>58</sup> because her draft was too deep. Cuypercrona added that he had received news from Elsinore about the passage to the Baltic Sea of two Dunkirk corsairs in Polish service.<sup>59</sup> In his subsequent relations, the Swedish commissioner reported that three more privateers, with another prize, actually arrived in the roadstead of Gdańsk.<sup>60</sup> Their arrival (two Dunkirkers, a Dutchman, the aforementioned Dane) was also reported in the “Hamburger Relations-Courier,” and the “London Gazette.” The latter noted that the magistrate of Gdańsk justified the ban on the sale of prizes by the absence of a state of war between the Commonwealth and Sweden.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, in a letter to its representative at the court of Warsaw, Laurentius Gereth, the city council ordered him to oppose the kapers’ activity, out of concern for the safety of trade.<sup>62</sup> The city’s attitude was noted with approval in Stockholm. Gdańsk, as the most powerful city in the Commonwealth, was well aware that it risked retaliation by Charles XII if it openly supported Augustus II’s war effort. Its highly autonomous status, guaranteed by the old privileges of the Polish kings, coupled with an awareness of its crucial role in the Polish economy, enabled the city to effectively manoeuvre between the Polish and Swedish monarchs.<sup>63</sup> On 9 December 1700, another privateer reached the Polish shores (as Cuypercrona noted, armed with eight cannons and six swivel guns, manned by crew of 40). The ship turned out to be Captain Neuvell’s “Postillion”, which entered the Bay of Puck and anchored there for winter. The Swedish diplomat repeatedly urged his monarch to send several

57 Most likely the commissioner misspelled the name of Capt. Jens Jessen, mentioned earlier.

58 Puck and Hel – ports located, respectively, at the end of the bay and at the tip of the peninsula of the same names.

59 RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 24 November 1700; report published by: Smolarek, “Próba,” 344.

60 RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, 27 November 1700, 1 December 1700.

61 *Hamburger Relations-Courier* 185 (1700), 6 December 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1276702>; *The London Gazette* 3658 (1700), 28 November – 2 December [j.s.] 1700, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/3658/page/1>.

62 Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, sygn. 300 R, Dd 18, fol. 506, City Council to Gereth, Gdańsk, 22 November 1700.

63 As a matter of fact, in July 1700, Augustus II had demanded from Gdańsk the expulsion of Cuypercrona – a demand that the city council resolutely opposed. Saarinen, *Danzig*, 20, 33–35.

frigates to block the corsairs' nest and recapture the Swedish vessels that had been brought there.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that the privateers sent their prizes to Puck indicates that, according to royal plans, this port was to become one of their bases. Puck harbour was also advantageous because the city did not have the extensive privileges that Gdańsk had and could not oppose the King's will to sell the prizes as strongly. It was separated from the Bay of Gdańsk by a strip of shallows that caused difficulties in navigation but theoretically could also protect against the approach of bigger enemy warships. Moreover, at the end of the year, General Brandt arrived there as a garrison commander, apparently also assuming tenancy of the Puck starostship. His arrival was undoubtedly connected to his earlier theoretical project. He promptly undertook the construction of coastal fortifications to protect the ships anchored nearby.<sup>65</sup> Privateering under Polish royal flag was soon to be halted by upcoming winter, during which the privateers managed to sell captured goods from the prizes in Puck.

### The Counteraction of the Danes and Swedes: Legality Controversy

News of the presence of Polish privateers in the Baltic caused confusion and disrupted shipping. On 14 November 1700, a group of Swedish merchants, sent a memorandum to the Swedish board of trade in which they described the threat. In the ports of Skåne there were 15 to 20 ships, loaded especially with Swedish copper, whose destination was the ports of the Sound and northern Germany, where their skippers did not want to go except under convoy. They also presented the college with the (undoubtedly exaggerated) gloomy forecast: that the abundance of vessels carrying Swedish goods would attract numerous privateers, whose activities would lead to stagnation, if not the ruin, of Swedish trade in the coming years.<sup>66</sup> The Swedish Admiralty assigned several warships to convoy Swedish vessels and to seek and combat privateers, ordering that the latter be treated by throwing overboard in the same way as pirates. Orders to sub-commanders emphasised that Augustus II, "having no ports in Poland, had no right to send privateers

64 RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 11 and 15 December 1700; RS, FFA, E II c, vol. 25, fol. 144v–145, Cuypercrona to Wachtmeister, Gdańsk, 2 February 1701. In a previous article I stated incorrectly that only 3 privateers had arrived. The error was due to an over-interpretation of Cuypercrona's report of 1 December 1700. See: Kuczyński, "Kaprzy," 14.

65 Smolarek, "Próba," 350. HStAD, GeKa, loc. 03611/01, fol. 266–269, Böttlicher to Beichlingen, Gdańsk, 8 April 1701. The information about Gen. Brandt tenure the Puck starostship is not confirmed by Marek Wagner, *Słownik biograficzny oficerów polskich drugiej połowy XVII w.*, vol. 2 (Oświęcim: Napoleon V, 2014), 35–36.

66 RS, RM, vol. M 1858, Om den polsk kapare, [no pagination], Hendrick Siquet et al. to Kommerskollegium, 21 November/ 1 December 1700.

against the Swedes.<sup>67</sup> The Swedish argumentation was not new, as it had been employed for nearly half a century beforehand.<sup>68</sup> Sovereignty over the sea was a subject of intense debate in the early modern period. However, the concepts advanced by Hugo Grotius (*Mare Liberum*), William Welwod, and John Selden (*Mare Clausum*) were not merely abstract theoretical reflections but were tied to the interests of their respective states. By the early 18th century, Cornelis van Bijnkershoek's postulate was accepted: sovereignty extended as far as it was enforceable (then considered the range of a cannon shot). Although the Baltic region differed from the wide oceanic perspectives of the West, Sweden's approach stemmed from a similar pragmatic rationale: declaring the whole Baltic Sea a specific *Mare Clausum*, to which only two Scandinavian monarchs were entitled, enforceable by their strong navies (*Dominium Maris Baltici*).<sup>69</sup> Thus, the Swedish interpretation was undoubtedly intended also to discourage the Danes from supporting Augustus II's privateering venture; yet, even independently of this, it became a matter of concern for them.

Frederick IV initially did not believe the incoming reports of privateers (at least officially), but when they were confirmed, bound by the imposed peace, he categorically refused to have anything to do with such dangerous enterprise. On 16 November 1700, he ordered his envoy extraordinary in Warsaw, Adam F. Trampe, not only to dissuade the king of Poland from further promoting privateering, but also, if possible, to persuade him to cancel the issued letters of marque and recall privateers from the sea.<sup>70</sup> In response to the remonstrance presented by the envoy, Augustus II replied that the privateering was aimed solely against the Swedish crown and did not threaten anyone else. Furthermore, he justified it as fulfilling the oath he had sworn to the Commonwealth during the coronation. There was also the matter of prestige – the king of Poland emphasized his “rights to use the sea, on an equal footing with those of his neighbours,” rejecting

67 RS, FFA, B I a, vol. 74, 1742–45, Amiralitetskollegium's orders to Capt. Grubb, Karlskrona, 22 November/ 12 December 1700; vol. 75, 425–427, Amiralitetskollegium's orders to Capt. Lewen. 26 March/ 4 April 1701. See: Wendt, *Amiralitetskollegiets historia*, 69.

68 Alleged plans to re-establish the Polish navy in 1654 and sporadic attacks by Polish privateer in 1658 provided Sweden with pretexts for wars against its neighbours in the following years. Wojciech Krawczuk, *Samuel Pufendorf and some stories of The Northern War 1655–1660* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2014), 118.

69 Ibidem, 122; Richard J. Blakemore, “Law and the sea,” in: *The Routledge Companion to Marine and Maritime Worlds, 1400–1800* (London – New York: Routledge, 2020), 256, 396–397; Martine J. van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595–1615* (Brill: Leiden-Boston, 2006), liv–lxi passim, 396; Lewitter, “Russia, Poland,” 6. Such a policy, paired with the course of the Baltic borders in the second half of the 17th century, resulted in political and economic impairment for Brandenburg, Russia and Poland – in the case of the latter, often accompanied by actions that could be seen as breaches of the mutual agreements concluded earlier.

70 RK, Tyske Kancelli, Udenrigske afdeling (hereinafter TKUA), Polen: Adam Frederik Trampes gesandtskabsarkiv (1700–1702), package no. 71–53, [no pagination], Frederick IV to Trampe, Copenhagen, 13 November 1700; report published by: Smolarek, “Próba,” 341.

the Danish demands. According to the Envoy's account, Augustus II was said to have as many as 15 privateers in the Baltic. Trampe, however, obtained a promise from Beichlingen that they would shortly be ordered to cease operations, under the pretext of the approaching winter.<sup>71</sup> On 20 November 1700, without waiting for the outcome of the negotiations, Danish monarch issued a universal edict forbidding his subjects, under threat of severe punishment, from enlisting aboard privateers cruising the Baltic.<sup>72</sup> The Danes indeed were not going to tolerate privateers' activities, and such a case occurred not long afterwards. On 17 December, an unknown Polish kaper brought the Swedish galliot "Maria" to Prestø, where it was seized; by royal decree of 25 December 1700 the vessel was then handed over to Leijonkloo, at his request.<sup>73</sup> In early January 1701, "The English Post" reported that Augustus II had indeed decided to recall his privateers from the Baltic, which, according to the newspaper's publisher, was supposed to herald an imminent truce between the warring parties. However, no agreement was reached, and "Wochentliche Post-Zeitung" in a communiqué of 2 April 1701 from Copenhagen reported on plans to send the kapers back to sea.<sup>74</sup> Then, however, the Swedish counter-attack took a turn for the worse.

On 4 April 1701, two Swedish frigates entered the Bay of Gdańsk, where their commander, Captain Heinrich von Lewen, sighted a lone Polish kaper accompanied by a prize. Unfamiliar with the local waters, Swedish commander dispatched two launches to secure the prize and capture the privateer. The ship in question proved to be the "Postillion," which greeted the approaching Swedes with gunfire, but realising their superiority, Captain Neuveill decided to retreat to Puck, where his ship ran aground near the harbour. Meanwhile, the Swedes seized the prize and pursued Neuveill, but as they approached Puck they were fired upon and repulsed by the local garrison, which came to the kaper's aid. The Swedish attack prompted an intervention at Cuypercrona by the Voivodes of Pomerania, Jan Gniński, and of Inowrocław, Franciszek Gałęcki (present in Gdańsk at the time), who demanded that Poland – as a non-belligerent in the ongoing conflict – be spared from hostile actions. The commissioner promised to investigate the matter, but immediately afterwards the voivode

71 RK, TKUA, Polen: Gesandtskabsrelationer og -beretninger, til dels med bilag, fra gesandter, korrespondenter og andre (1645–1770), package no. 71–25, [no pagination], Trampe to Frederick IV, Warsaw, 2 December 1700, 10 December 1700, report published by: Smolarek, "Próba," 346–347.

72 Frederick IV's placat on privateering in the Baltic, Copenhagen, 20 November 1700, in: *Livonica Oder einiger Zu mehrer Erläuterung Der Mit Anfang des 1700. Jahrs in Liefeland entstandenen Unruhe dienlicher Stücke und Actorum Publicorum, Fasciculus Quartus* (s.l.: s.n.), 71–72. See: Kuczyński, "Kaprzy," 16.

73 RS, DD, 1, 13, vol. 110, 378–378 v, Frederick IV's decree regarding the galliot "Maria," 25 December 1700 (copy).

74 *Wochentliche Post-Zeitung (Freytags-Ord: Beylage, zur Wöchentlichen Post-Zeitung)* 15 (1701), accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1588959>.

reported to him that the Swedes had also plundered the village of “Esther,”<sup>75</sup> which belonged to the Puck starostship. This particularly angered General Brandt, who demanded an explanation in an official letter to the commander of the Swedish squadron.<sup>76</sup> In response to the official Cuypercrona’s inquiry, Captain von Lewen emphatically denied that he had plundered any coastal villages or fired on Polish shores, claiming that his ships were anchored at a distance from the town exceeding the range of cannon fire; he also asked what should be done with the privateer lying aground. The commissioner suggested not to escalate the conflict and break the peace in the face of the upcoming Sejm. In Cuypercrona’s view, Lewen could have demanded that the garrison hand over the privateer or attempted to burn her, claiming that “what occurs at sea does not concern the Commonwealth.”<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, undaunted by failure, Captain Neuveull sought to refit the ship and set sail again. However, his efforts proved futile, as on 7 June 1701, the Swedes conducted a night attack using two launches under the Captain Peter Rosenwall, commanding the frigate “Postiljon” (note the coincidence of the Swedish and Polish ship names!).<sup>78</sup> Having confused the soldiers on shore – who mistook them for night fishermen – the Swedes managed to set fire to the “Postillion,” which burned down to the waterline. As Bötticher reported, the ruined Captain Neuveull, wounded in the hand, decided to entrust himself to the mercy of Augustus II.<sup>79</sup>

However, this event did not end the activity of Polish royal privateers in the Baltic. One of the Charles XII’s reasons for imposing a blockade of Courland was that the Courlanders tolerated bringing prizes into their harbours by Polish privateers – and presumably helped with sale.<sup>80</sup> “The English Post” of 2 June 1701 reported that one of the conditions for removing the blockade was to demand that the Courlanders forbid the privateers from entering the harbours.<sup>81</sup>

75 Most likely misspelled “Heisternest,” today Jastarnia on the Hel Peninsula.

76 HStAD, GeKa, loc. 03611/01, fol. 266–269, Bötticher to Beichlingen, Gdańsk, 8 April 1701. RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 9 April 1701. *The London Post* 290 (1701), 11–14 April [j.s.] 1701.

77 RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 16 April 1701. *Stralsundischer Relations-Courier* 46 (1701), 6 June [s.s.] 1701, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1430970>; Kuczyński, “Kaprzy,” 17–18. Such an argumentation shows how far Sweden’s claims to the Baltic Sea as its exclusive *Mare Clausum* extended – denying Poland military sovereignty even over its nearest coastal waters.

78 RS, DP, II, 5, vol. 256, [no pagination], Cuypercrona to Charles XII, Gdańsk, 23 April 1701; *Stralsundischer Relations-Courier* 49 (1701), 17 June [s.s.] 1701, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/zeitungen17/periodical/titleinfo/1430982>; *Ordinarie Stockholmske Post Tijdender* 26 (1701), 24 June [s.s.] 1701, accessed 1 March 2025, <https://tidningar.kb.se/k3wbnsnw0bt2vdm>.

79 HStAD, GeKa, Loc. 03611/01, fo. 307–308, Bötticher to Beichlingen, Gdańsk, 10 July 1701.

80 For the Swedish full reasons of the blockade. See: Daniel Schneider, ed., *Theatrum Europaeum*, vol. 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Heinscheidt, 1717), 421–422; *The English Post* 95 (1701), 19–21 May [j.s.] 1701.

81 *The English Post* 101 (1701), 2–4 June [j.s.] 1701.

As it seems, one of the last active kapers surrendered to the Swedes in July 1701, when they blocked her on the Boulderaa River near the fortress of Dünamünde, taking 36 crewmen prisoner.<sup>82</sup> This event was likely reported in “The English Post” at the beginning of September, and it was the last communiqué on the activity of Augustus II’s privateers in the Baltic that appeared in European newspapers.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusions

Privateering under the flag of king of Poland, which began in the autumn of 1700, did not yield spectacular results. This was due not only to the late start of operations, but above all to the small size of the kaper flotilla, which most probably did not exceed six ships (counting those confirmable by sources), two of which were destroyed by the Swedes and one captured. Their effectiveness was also unimpressive, with only a few captured prizes. Nevertheless, even the mere presence of privateers in the Baltic briefly paralysed Swedish freight, forcing the Swedes to protect it and to detach forces to counter them – which was beneficial for Augustus II’s war effort. The Saxon-Polish court’s propaganda, which exaggerated the size of the force in the Baltic, may have served a similar purpose.

In light of the above considerations, the aims of establishing a privateer flotilla seem clear: undermining the enemy’s trade and transport potential. The latter aspect is indicated by the plan to make the harbours of Courland, located relatively close to Swedish communication routes, the main bases of privateers. However, it should be noted that the first steps to send the latter to sea were taken in mid-May 1700 – almost at the same time as the Senate of the Commonwealth refused Augustus II to engage the State in the war. Despite this, the kapers operated under a flag commonly identified as that of the king of Poland, not of the Saxon elector. This was probably due to prestige considerations and Augustus’ ambitions to have his privateers use the vexillum associated with his highest title. They were also most often described as Polish, while the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth did not officially participate in the war. Assuming, therefore, that the initial rationale for the establishment of the privateer flotilla was military pragmatism, one must ask whether it did not also (or perhaps primarily) acquire political significance, being a royal attempt to drag Poland into the war. By drawing the wrath of the Swedes – particularly by challenging their claims to exclusive sovereignty over the Baltic – for the activities of ships under the (so called) Polish flag, the Commonwealth would eventually

82 Christian Kelch, *Liefländische Historia. Continuation 1690 bis 1707*, ed. Johannes Lossius (Dorpat: Schnakenburg’s, 1875), 224.

83 “The King of Poland’s Privateers near the Dunamunder Schans, have submitted to the Swedes.” *The English Post* 142 (1701), 5–8 September [j.s.] 1701; Kuczyński, “Kaprzy,” 20.

be forced to participate in the conflict by the method of *fait accompli*, thus helping the unlucky Saxons in carrying its burden. Regardless of this hypothesis, it should be noted that, in Augustus II's political narrative, the flotilla at one point was presented as enforcement of the Polish king's – and thus also the Commonwealth's – justified claim to the *Dominium Maris Baltici*, which in this sole respect could be seen as aligned with the Polish interest. Nevertheless, it was the most successful and resilient naval venture of Augustus II's reign. Although he would later return to similar ideas, they either ended at the planning stage or never reached such a scale.<sup>84</sup>

It is also worth noting that even the short-lived activity of Polish royal privateers attracted the attention of publishers. The total number of reports in the above-mentioned newspapers exceeds fifty over ten months. Ironically, it was the first and last case in the early-modern era when military operations of ships flying the flag identified as Polish were so widely reported in the European press. A similar case did not occur until more than two centuries later, after 1918, when the independent Polish state was reborn, and the naval jack depicting the arm wielding a sword once again fluttered over the decks of Polish warships.

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<sup>84</sup> Kuczyński, “Kaprzy,” 20.

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#### SUMMARY

At the beginning of the Great Northern War, the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, August II Wettin, established a privateer flotilla under his own flag, whose task was to combat Swedish shipping. The aim of this article is to show the reasons for its establishment, organization, military operations in the Baltic, and the influence it had on the early stage of the war. The study is based on the analysis of documents available mainly in the Riksarkivet in Stockholm, the Rigsarkivet in Copenhagen, and the Hauptsaatsarchiv in Dresden, as well as using reports from European press titles at the time. The presented research shows that the reasons for establishing privateers were problems in Danish-Saxon cooperation at sea. The organisation of the flotilla began in May 1700, yet the privateers did not appear in the Baltic until late October of that year. Their small number (most likely no more than 6 ships) resulted in low effectiveness; Only a few Swedish vessels were captured. However, this was enough to cause a short-term stagnation in Baltic shipping and provoke an armed response from the Swedes by engaging part of their fleet in fighting the kapers, who were finally pacified in July 1701. The circumstances of their establishment also prompt the question of to what extent the flotilla's activities had only a military basis, and to what extent they were political, calculated to draw the neutral Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into the conflict. The actions of the privateers, conducted under a flag identified as Polish, also found wide resonance in the European press, which was the first and last such case in the early modern era.

## Kaprzy Augusta II Wettina w latach 1700–1701: znaczenie militarne i polityczne w świetle najnowszych badań

**Słowa Kluczowe:** Wielka Wojna Północna (1700–1721), korsarstwo, flota, August II, Polska, Saksonia, Inflanty, Morze Bałtyckie

### STRESZCZENIE

Na początku wielkiej wojny Północnej Elektor Saski i król Polski August II Wettin, powołał flotyllę kaperską pod własną banderą, której zadaniem miało być zwalczanie szwedzkiego frachtu. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie przyczyn jej powołania, organizacja, działania militarne na Bałtyku oraz wpływ jaki wywarła na wczesny etap wojny. Opracowanie sporządzono na podstawie analizy dokumentów dostępnych głównie w Riksarkivet w Sztokholmie, Rigsarkivet w Kopenhadze oraz Hauptsaatsarchiv w Dreźnie, jak również wykorzystując doniesienia ówczesnych europejskich tytułów prasowych. Z przedstawionych badań wynika, że u przyczyn powołania kaprów leżały problemy w duńsko-saskiej kooperacji na morzu. Organizację flotylli rozpoczęto w maju 1700 r., jednak kaprowie pojawili się na Bałtyku dopiero pod koniec października. Ich niewielka liczebność (najprawdopodobniej nie więcej niż 6 okrętów) skutkowałą niską skutecznością; zdołano przechwycić jedynie kilka szwedzkich statków. Wystarczyło to jednak do spowodowania krótkotrwałego zastoju w żegludze bałtyckiej i sprowokowania zbrojnej odpowiedzi Szwedów angażując część ich floty w zwalczanie kaprów, których spacyfikowano w lipcu 1701 r. Okoliczności ich powołania skłaniają również do pytania, na ile działalność flotylli miała jedynie podłoże militarne, a na ile polityczne, obliczone na wciągnięcie neutralnej Rzeczypospolitej do konfliktu na północy. Działania kaprów, prowadzone pod banderą identyfikowaną jako polska, odbiły się także szerokim echem w europejskiej prasie, co było pierwszym i ostatnim takim przypadkiem w epoce nowożytnej.

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