

Seamen's Organizations and Social Protest in Europe, c. 1300–1825*

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The friend of Havelock Wilson, the founder of the National Union of Seamen, who once told him that true unity among seamen would never be achieved because seamen were like “a rope of sand”, washed away with every tide, would no longer be considered a sage.¹ It was not only Wilson who, during his career as trade unionist, proved beyond any doubt that the “rope of sand” could indeed hold together.² The seamen, too, had shown long before the rise of the new unions at the end of the nineteenth century that they possessed more cohesive power than Havelock's friend was prepared to credit them with – at least, if British employers are to be believed. One of the first occasions on which British employers appealed to the Combination Act of 1799 was during a labour dispute in December 1799, when coal merchants (through the intermediary of the Mayor of London) urged the Home Secretary to take action against an alleged combination of seamen in Shields.³ The Coal Trade Committee of 1800 blamed combinations of seamen for the high wages, which had reached an unprecedented level.⁴

Looking from the bottom up rather than from the top down, Marcus Rediker recently highlighted the growth of a “collectivism of necessity” among seamen in the first half of the eighteenth century. “A specifically maritime occupational consciousness gradually moved toward class consciousness as seamen began to develop wider patterns of association, sympathy and identification”, he claims. In fact, Rediker argues that seamen, as “the most numerous of the mobile workers in early modern England and America” were in a most favourable position for transmitting information, experiences and ideas between different groups of the labouring poor. Far from being merely “a rope of sand”, seamen pro-

* I would like to thank Piet Boon, Jan Parmentier and Paul van Royen for their valuable references and Jan Lucassen and Piet Lourens for their kind permission to use their data base on guilds in the Netherlands.

¹ Havelock Wilson, *My Stormy Voyage through Life* (s.l., 1925), p. 67, quoted in Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *The Seamen. The History of the National Union of Seamen* (Oxford, 1989), p. 1.

² Marsh and Ryan, *The Seamen*, chs 2–7.

³ James Moher, “From Suppression to Containment: Roots of Trade Union Law to 1825”, in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750–1850* (London and New York, 1988), pp. 74–97, esp. p. 85.

⁴ Simon P. Ville, *English Shipowning during the Industrial Revolution. Michael Henley and Son, London Shipowners, 1770–1830* (Manchester, 1987), p. 105.

vided a vital link between the different groups of working people.⁵ Like Hegel, Wilson's friend appears to have been firmly contradicted.

Yet nowhere does Rediker find the collectivism of the common seamen to have crystallized into some kind of permanent, formal organization. He believes that collectivism before the middle of the eighteenth century consisted almost exclusively of collective rituals, such as baptisms or burials and collective action, such as work stoppages or mutinies. Combinations of common seamen did not exist.

A better understanding of labour organization among seafarers requires expanding the horizon in time and scope. First, this contribution will show that the rise of seamen's combinations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which culminated in the establishment of the first trade union in north-east England in 1824, the Seamen's Loyal Standard Association (SLSA),⁶ was actually preceded by the proliferation over several centuries of various kinds of permanent, formal organizations of seafarers. Some of these organizations resembled the types found among other categories of working people in Europe. The propagation of such associations can hardly be captured by restricting our study to the deep sea sailors proudly featured in Rediker's account of seafaring life.

Next, this essay propounds that the extent of organization differed sharply according to the sector of the maritime labour market concerned. Permanent, formal organizations were more prevalent among seamen engaged in merchant shipping in Europe than among seafarers in the East India trade, the Atlantic trades or the Navy. Nevertheless, the incidence and intensity of social protest among seamen was highest in sectors of the labour market where permanent, formal organizations were least common, as mobilization for social protest largely proceeded through informal networks.

The third part of the essay deals with the eventual emergence of the combination of permanent organization and social protest in north-east England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A comparison of Britain with the Dutch Republic, the other leading seafaring nation in Europe in the early modern period, will suggest several factors that explain the confluence of these two trends at that place and time. In conclusion, the essay presents a brief overview of continuities and discontinuities in the evolution of various types of seamen's organizations between c. 1300 and 1825 and an analysis of possible links between this development and other social processes inside and outside the maritime world in early modern Europe.

⁵ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 291, 294.

⁶ D. J. Rowe, "A Trade Union of the North-East Coast Seamen in 1825", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 25 (1972), pp. 81–98.

PERMANENT ORGANIZATIONS OF SEAMEN BEFORE 1800: TYPES AND ACTIVITIES

Permanent, formal organizations of seamen, which arose in Europe before the end of the eighteenth century, include four general types: guilds and corporations, fraternities, insurance boxes and shipmasters' societies. Not all organizations consisted of common seamen and some were not even restricted to seafaring people. All these kinds of organizations, however, included at least one category of seafarers, namely skippers or shipmasters.

From the Middle Ages onwards, guilds, corporations and fraternities were established in regions that had always contained the majority of the European seamen: the North Sea coast, the Baltic, the Channel, the Bay of Biscay and the Mediterranean. While these guilds and corporations were virtually restricted to the North Sea and the Baltic, fraternities of seamen became common in nearly all seafaring areas of Europe. Seamen's insurance boxes were established during the early modern period in both southern and northern Europe. Shipmasters' societies arose in the eighteenth century and began in the north.

Contemporaries did not always distinguish clearly between these categories. A charter for a mutual aid society established by seamen in IJlst in the Dutch Republic in 1693 referred to a *gemeene bos off broederschap en gilde* (a common box or fraternity and guild).⁷ Yet they differed not only in time of origin and area of prevalence, but also in the scope of their operations.

Guilds or corporations of seamen appeared in numerous towns along the North Sea and the Baltic from the late Middle Ages onwards.⁸ There were three different kinds. The first consisted of joint organizations of skippers and merchants, specialized by trade route. For example, shipmasters in Hamburg began to team up with merchants in *Fahrergesellschaften* in the fourteenth century. By the early sixteenth century, the city had separate societies of merchants and skippers involved in trade with Flanders, England, Skåne, Iceland and Bergen (Norway).⁹ The second form entailed guilds of skippers and was also specialized by trade route. In the fifteenth century in Amsterdam, a guild was established of skippers who worked the routes between Amsterdam, London

⁷ G. Bakker, "Een onderlinge verzekering voor bootsgezellen te IJlst uit 1693", *Jaarboek Fries Scheepvaartmuseum en Oudheidkamer* 1966, pp. 38–43, esp. p. 38.

⁸ A general overview: R. W. Unger, "Regulation and Organisation of Seamen in the Netherlands and Germany before the Industrial Revolution", in Paul Adam (ed.), *Seamen in Society/Gens de mer en Société* (s.l., 1980), II, pp. 66–74. In the interest of brevity, guild-like organizations of seamen in Antiquity are not included here.

⁹ Walter Kresse, *Von armen Seefahrern und den Schifferalten zu Hamburg* (Hamburg, 1981), pp. 9–10; Lars U. Scholl, "100 Jahre See-Berufsgenossenschaft", in Klaus-Peter Kiedel, Uwe Schnall and Lars U. Scholl (eds), *Arbeitsplatz Schiff: 100 Jahre See-Berufsgenossenschaft 1887–1987* (Hamburg, 1987), pp. 10–48, esp. p. 12.

and ports in northern France and north-west Germany (*buitenlandvaarders*), in addition to a guild of skippers that worked in the inland trade (*binnenlandvaarders*) and another of merchants and shipmasters engaged in the Norway trade (*Bergenvaarders*). The town of Haarlem in Holland had both a guild of *binnenlandvaarders* and a guild of skippers specialized in the trade with Skåne.¹⁰ The third type of guild, which was probably the most common, included all skippers engaged in seafaring irrespective of their trade route. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such corporations were established in the ports of Danzig, Bruges, Antwerp, Middelburg and Bergen op Zoom.¹¹

These general skippers' guilds increased during the early modern period. Skippers' guilds (or *Schiffer-Gesellschaften*) proliferated in Hanse towns in north-west Germany as a substitute for religious brotherhoods, which had been denounced by the Lutheran Reformation: (*Bruderschaften*). Wherever Lutheranism prevailed, fraternities of seamen eventually made way for guilds. The skippers of Hamburg received a charter for a *Schiffer-Gesellschaft* in 1522. Their *Bruderschaft* was dissolved in 1528/1529. Soon afterwards, its assets passed into the hands of the new society.¹² In Norrköping, Sweden, a shipmasters' guild was at the behest of the local *skuttsskeppare* established in 1641.¹³

In coastal regions south of Flanders, however, guilds of seafarers remained exceptional. Venice was the only major port town in southern Europe where an organization was established that some historians considered a seamen's guild and even there the seamen's guild made a belated appearance. The *scuola dei marinieri di San Nicolò* was not founded until 1573. Moreover, this association differed from the guilds established in northern Europe in that it included both masters and common mariners. Upon its establishment, the *scuola* contained 56 noble captains and 929 common seamen.¹⁴

¹⁰ I. H. van Eeghen, *De gilden* (Bussum, 1965), pp. 11, 15–16; Van Ravesteyn, *Onderzoekingen over de economische en sociale ontwikkeling van Amsterdam gedurende de 16e en 17e eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1906), pp. 56–65; Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, "Ambachtsgilden in Nederland: een eerste inventarisatie", *NEHA-Jaarboek*, 1 (1994) (forthcoming) and data base prepared by Jan Lucassen and Piet Lourens at the IISG, Amsterdam.

¹¹ P. Simson, *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig*, 2 vols (Danzig, 1918–1924), vol. I, p. 88; A. Vandewalle, "Schippers, scheepsbouwers en havenarbeiders", in V. Vermeersch (ed.), *Brugge en de zee* (Antwerp, 1982), pp. 99–118, esp. p. 99; G. Asaert, *De Antwerpse scheepvaart in de XVe eeuw (1394–1480)* (Brussels, 1973), pp. 196–197; Unger, "Regulation", II, pp. 70–71; K. Slootmans, "Bergse schippers vóór 1540", *Oudheidkundige kring "De Ghulden Roos"*, 35 (1975), pp. 114–176, esp. pp. 114–115.

¹² Scholl, "100 Jahre See-Bruderschaft", p. 12; Kresse, *Von armen Seefahrern*, p. 16.

¹³ *Sjöstaden Norrköping. Skeppare gillet & skeppare societeten 1641–1991* (Norrköping, 1991), p. 9. According to the data assembled by Lucassen and Lourens at the IISG, the number of skippers' guilds in the Dutch Republic also increased in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; most of the skippers organized in these guilds were probably involved in the inland trade.

¹⁴ F. C. Lane, *Venice. A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, 1973), p. 420; R. T. Rapp, *Industry and Economic Decline in Seventeenth Century Venice* (Cambridge, Mass. and

Initially, skippers' guilds and corporations served a wide range of functions. In addition to protecting the economic interests of their members, they offered social benefits and catered to their religious welfare. The guild in Bruges, for instance, founded a home for aged shipmasters, the *Schiffer-Gesellschaft* in Hamburg established a hospital for distressed seafarers and the guilds in Danzig and Venice maintained hospitals for sick seamen and provided them with material assistance. Skippers' guilds had their own chapels, altars and votives, arranged regular masses and observed the festivals of their patron saints.¹⁵ The religious activities of guilds, however, were discontinued after the Reformation, except in Venice, of course.

Whereas shipmasters' guilds were largely confined to north-west Europe, religious brotherhoods were nearly ubiquitous. Confraternities, *confréries*, *confraternità* or *Bruderschaften* including seamen devoted to Saint Nicholas, Saint Peter, Saint Julian, Saint Catherine and other patron saints of seamen first arose in Europe during the High Middle Ages and became widespread during the centuries that followed. In Venice, several confraternities in honour of Saint Nicholas already existed before the middle of the thirteenth century.¹⁶ These associations were founded in large numbers along the coasts of Europe between c. 1450 and 1700. They emerged in major port towns like Naples, Genoa, Marseille, Lisbon, Bordeaux, Rouen, Bristol, Hamburg and Danzig, in smaller ports like Dieppe, Fécamp, Honfleur, Etaples, Hull and Lynn, as well as in numerous fishing and seafaring communities along the coasts of Italy, northern Spain, Brittany, Normandy and Flanders.¹⁷ In

London, 1976), pp. 23–25. Considering the distinction between *arti* and *scuole* made by Black and Mackenney, this seamen's guild might also be called a "guild confraternity", cf. Christopher F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 25, 39; Richard Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders. The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe, c. 1250–c. 1650* (London and Sydney, 1987), pp. 4–10.

¹⁵ See for instance Sloomans, "Berge schippers", pp. 153–156; Vandewalle, "Schippers", pp. 107–108; Kresse, *Von armen Seefahrern*, pp. 18–30; Simson, *Geschichte*, vol. I, pp. 88, 383; Lane, *Venice*, p. 420; J. M. G. van der Poel, "Scheepsmodellen in Nederlandse kerken", *Volkkundig Bulletin*, 14 (1988), pp. 188–202, esp. pp. 190–191; Willem Frijhoff, "Scheepsmodellen in Nederlandse kerken. Kanttekeningen vanuit een semiotische benadering", *Volkkundig Bulletin*, 14 (1988), pp. 203–218, esp. p. 213; Willem Frijhoff, "Barquettes votives ou maquettes profanes? Eléments pour une solution du problème des navires figures dans les églises protestantes des Pays-Bas", in A. Cabantous and F. Hildesheimer (eds), *Foi chrétienne et milieux maritimes (XVe–XXe siècles)* (Paris, 1989), pp. 189–208.

¹⁶ Lane, *Venice*, p. 106.

¹⁷ Catherine Vincent, "Les gens de mer dans le fait associatif religieux à la fin du Moyen Age", in Cabantous and Hildesheimer, *Foi chrétienne*, pp. 261–273; Alain Cabantous, *Le ciel dans la mer. Christianisme et civilisation maritime XVIe–XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1990), pp. 192–201; Jacques Heers, *Gênes au XVe siècle. Activité économique et problèmes sociaux* (Paris, 1961), p. 560; A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "Seamen Ashore and Afloat: The Social Environment of the *Carreira da India*, 1550–1750", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 69 (1983), pp. 35–52, esp. p. 42; Jacques Bernard, *Navires et gens de mer à Bordeaux (vers 1400–vers 1550)* (Paris, 1968), pp. 660–670; Kresse, *Von alten Seefahrern*, p. 12; Simson, *Geschichte*,

the wake of European expansion, confraternities also spread to colonial towns overseas. In 1661, seamen of the *carreira da India* founded the brotherhood of Nossa Senhora di Milagres in Goa, and mariners in Rio de Janeiro established the fraternity of São Pedro.¹⁸

Although some of these fraternities were open only to seamen, or (like the brotherhood in Goa) restricted posts on the governing body to mariners, the membership of religious brotherhoods was generally more diverse than that of guilds. These brotherhoods included seafarers of every rank and station and often various groups from the non-seafaring population as well. From 1400 to 1550 in Bordeaux, for instance, fraternities contained “confrères de toutes les professions”.¹⁹ At least until the sixteenth century, the urge to form confraternities came from the constituent groups themselves, rather than from ecclesiastical authorities. Not until the Counter-Reformation did the Catholic Church become actively involved with the organizations and activities of brotherhoods of seamen and did members of the clergy occasionally establish new fraternities. In 1644, the Bishop of Bruges founded a confraternity of the Holy Trinity in Ostend, and in the 1650s Jesuit chaplains organized a congregation of the Holy Virgin on ships of the Navy of Flanders.²⁰

Unlike guilds, fraternities were not primarily concerned with protecting the economic interests of their members (though they were not always averse to this practice).²¹ Fraternities were religious organizations that cared for the spiritual and social welfare of their members. Their main activities consisted of maintaining their own chapels or sanctuaries, celebrating the festivals of their patron saints with masses, prayers, processions and other manifestations of devotion, arranging funerals for deceased members and commemorating the dead with masses and prayers, and providing material assistance to members and their families if necessary. In 1644, the confraternity of the Holy Trinity in Ostend was founded to promote the redemption of “enslaved Christians”.²² Support for captured seamen was also one of the chief functions of insurance boxes, another type of seamen’s organization, which spread in parts of north-west Europe where confraternities ceased after the Reformation.

vol. II, p. 518; Maria Bogucka, “Les gens de mer à Gdansk aux XVIe-XVIIIe siècles. Horizons et structures mentales”, *Revue du Nord, No. 1 Spécial hors série 1986*, pp. 443–454, esp. pp. 448–450.

¹⁸ Russell-Wood, “Seamen ashore”, p. 42.

¹⁹ Bernard, *Navires*, p. 662.

²⁰ Jan Jacobus Bowens, *Nauwkeurige beschrijving der oude en beroemde zee-stad Oostende*, 2 vols (Bruges, 1792), vol. I, p. 114; E. Hambye, *L'aumônerie de la Flotte de Flandre au XVIIe siècle* (Louvain and Paris, 1967), pp. 116–117; Roland Baetens, “La population maritime de la Flandre. Une religiosité en question (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)”, in Cabantous and Hildesheimer, *Foi chrétienne*, pp. 85–108, esp. p. 97; Cabantous, *Le ciel*, pp. 192–201.

²¹ Vincent, “Les gens de mer”, p. 262.

²² Bowens, *Nauwkeurige beschrijving*, vol. I, p. 114.

Insurance boxes for seamen can be traced back to the early decades of the seventeenth century. These boxes were established in both southern and northern Europe, although they never became as widespread as confraternities. Their rise in the south coincided almost exactly with that in the north. Cesare Moschetti found records of these boxes in towns, villages and islands in the region of Naples for the period from c. 1615 to 1690, for example in Torre del Greco (1615), Procida (1617), Naples (1639), Capri (1678) and Atrani (1685). The purpose of these *monti de marinari et pescatori*, which were usually established in the presence of a notary public and registered by the royal bureaucracy, was to provide relief to sick and disabled seamen, dowries to daughters of seafarers, subsistence allowances to mariners imprisoned for non-payment of debts and ransom money to fellow members enslaved by the Turks. The funds for these *monti* came from contributions amounting to a quarter of the wages earned per voyage by members of the box, to be paid by the captain of the ship upon returning. These insurance boxes, which appear to have been founded at the initiative of seafarers themselves, included both shipmasters and common seamen. In the eighteenth century, some began to admit people from other professions for financial reasons. Like fraternities, the *monti* in southern Italy showed a strong religious slant. Boxes also set rules concerning common prayers, reading masses and funerals for deceased members, and the seat of a *monte* was invariably in a chapel or a church.²³

Seamen's boxes in northern Europe first arose in north-west Germany, Scotland and the Dutch Republic. The oldest association of this kind in north-west Germany was the *Casse der Stück von Achten*, founded by shipmasters in Hamburg in 1622. Its purpose was the redemption of masters and mates captured by Barbary corsairs. The creation of this insurance box for navigating personnel was quickly followed by the establishment of a *Sklaven-kasse*, which served all seamen with long-standing ties to the city of Hamburg. Unlike the *Casse der Stück von Achten*, which was private, the *Sklaven-kasse* was entirely public and was established in 1624 after the newly created Admiralty of Hamburg consulted the corporation of shipmasters. According to the regulations of the town government, all skippers sailing westward were obliged to make a contribution on each voyage in proportion to the size of their ships plus an amount based on the wages of their crew; those engaged in coasting were exempted from the latter obligation after 1641. Seamen who owed their release from captivity to ransom money from the *Sklaven-kasse* were expected to pay extra dues for the next year.²⁴ Lübeck and Bremen soon followed Hamburg's example.²⁵

²³ Cesare Maria Moschetti, "Aspetti organizzativi e sociali della gente di mare el Golfo di Napoli nei secoli XVII e XVIII", in Rosalba Ragosta (ed.), *Le genti del mare mediterraneo*, 2 vols (Naples, 1981), vol. I, pp. 937–973, esp. pp. 940–953.

²⁴ E. Baasch, *Die Hansestädte und die Barbaresken* (Kassel, 1897), pp. 202–215.

²⁵ Scholl, "100 Jahre See-Berufsgenossenschaft", p. 13.

Skippers and common seamen in the burgeoning port town of Borrowstounness (Bo'ness) on the Firth of Forth, Scotland, founded a similar (but voluntary) institution in 1634. It was called the Saileris Box, Sea Box or Sailors' Society. According to the rules of the society, which were drawn up in the presence of a notary public in 1640 and signed by over 125 people, the *skipperis* and *marineris* of Bo'ness undertook to contribute eight pennies out of every twenty shillings of their earnings upon returning from each voyage. This commitment also applied to seamen sailing in foreign ships with a fixed abode in Bo'ness, and the box would also receive eight pennies for every cargo carried by a ship having Bo'ness as its home port.²⁶ The monies collected in this seamen's box served a wide variety of purposes. The fund not only provided relief to seamen captured by corsairs, but also supported aged seamen, poor widows and shipwrecked sailors (irrespective of their origin) and also paid church ministers for preaching and schoolmasters for teaching "poor seamen's bairns". Moreover, substantial sums of money were lent with interest to members and outsiders.²⁷

By far the largest number of seamen's boxes in northern Europe was found in the Dutch Republic. So far, records indicate a total of twenty-eight, which should be considered a minimum. The first box was founded in the fishing village of Maassluis, Holland, in 1613 (before the *Casse* in Hamburg or the sailors' box in Bo'ness), and the last one in Flushing, Zeeland, in 1754.²⁸ Table 1 shows that the creation of these *zeevarende beurzen*, *bootsgezellenbeurzen* or *buidels van assurantie* peaked during

²⁶ Thomas Johnston, *The Records of an Ancient Friendly Society. The Bo'ness United General Herald* (s.l., 1890), pp. 5–9.

²⁷ Johnston, *The Records*, pp. 38–41.

²⁸ Archiefdienst Westfriese Gemeenten, Oud-Archief Enkhuizen, 243, fo. 62v–65v (1635) (I am grateful to Dr Piet Boon for providing this reference); Bakker, "Een onderlinge verzekering"; P. Boon, "De sociale en economische positie van schippers in het Westfriese dorp Schellinkhout rond 1700", *Mededelingen van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Zeege-schiedenis*, 39 (1979), pp. 4–14, esp. p. 5; P. Bossen, *Kroniek van de dorpen Aartswoud en Hoogwoud* (Alkmaar, 1938), pp. 36–38; J. C. van den Does, "Een eigenaardige assurantie", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 45 (1930), pp. 53–63; J. W. van Hoboken, "De zeevarende beurs van Buiksloot", *Maandblad Amstelodamum*, 40 (1953), pp. 141–142; C. de Jong, *Geschiedenis van de oude Nederlandse walvisvaart*. Vol. I, *Grondslagen, ontstaan, en opkomst 1612–1642* (Pretoria, 1972), pp. 115, 120–122, 372–374; S. Lootsma, "'Draeght elckanders lasten'. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der 'zeevarende beurzen' in Noord-Holland", *West-Frieslands Oud en Nieuw*, 3 (1929), pp. 12–61; S. Lootsma, "Nog eens over 'Zeevarende buidels'", *West-Frieslands Oud en Nieuw*, 10 (1936), pp. 71–73; P. C. van Royen, *Zeevarenden op de koopvaardijvloot omstreeks 1700* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 118–120, 213; J. Schot Wzn., "De slavenkas' te Zierikzee", *Zeeuws Tijdschrift*, 21 (1970), pp. 21–22; W. Smit (ed.), *De Buul. 400 jaar zeeverzekering op Terschelling 1587–1987* (Urk and Terschelling, 1987), pp. 12–23 (and review by P. Boon in *Tijdschrift voor Zeege-schiedenis*, 11 (1992), pp. 168–169); A. P. van Vliet, "Kapers op de kust: Maassluis en de Duinkerker kapers", 6 (1987), pp. 3–12, esp. p. 9; A. P. van Vliet, "'Ruïner les pêcheres'. Een aanval van Duinkerker kapers op de Nederlandse vissersvloot in 1600", *Tijdschrift voor Zeege-schiedenis*, 12 (1993), pp. 3–11, p. 11, n. 30.

Table 1. Insurance boxes of seamen in the Dutch Republic

Period	Number of new foundations
1610–1629	1
1630–1649	15
1650–1669	1
1670–1689	—
1690–1709	4
1710–1729	—
1730–1749	1
1750–1769	1
Date unknown	5
Total	28

Sources: see note 28.

the final stage of the war between the Republic and Spain (the 1630s and 1640s) and during the Nine Years War (1688–1697) and the War of Spanish Succession (1702–1713).²⁹ The majority of these boxes arose in villages and towns in the north of the province of Holland.

Except for the insurance boxes of Maassluis and Flushing, which were created by the local authorities,³⁰ all seamen's boxes in the United Provinces appear to have been established by the seafarers themselves. Although the rules of these societies were usually established in resolutions of village authorities or town magistrates, they were (like the seamen's box of Bo'ness) essentially voluntary. Their membership included masters, mates and common seamen.

These boxes usually operated according to the principle that in return for dues paid each time members left port (of which the amount depended on the destination of their voyage), they were entitled to benefits in the event of a particular misfortune. Originally, seamen's boxes ordinarily restricted this aid to subsistence allowances for seamen held in captivity by privateers. Some also covered the travel expenses for the voyage home after release. In the second half of the seventeenth century, insurance boxes expanded their services to include disability benefits and compensation for personal property lost in combat or during a shipwreck. From 1667, the box of Broek in Waterland paid a lump sum of fifty guilders to seamen who lost an arm or a leg. The rules of the box of IJlst, which were drawn up in 1693, stated that any member

²⁹ Foundation by period: 1610–1629: Maassluis; 1630–1649: Graft, Landsmeer, Zunderdorp, Buiksloot, Broek in Waterland, Ooster- en Westerblokker, Bovenkarspel, Westwoud, Enkhuizen, Westzaandam, Edam, Warder, Wormer, Harlingen, Oost-Terschelling; 1650–1669: Hauwert; 1690–1709: Aartswoud, Hem, Venhuizen, IJlst; 1730–1740: Zierikzee; 1750–1769: Flushing; unknown: Schellinkhout, Oostwoud, Kwadijk, Opperdoes, Oudendijk.

³⁰ Van Vliet, "Kapers", p. 9; Van Vliet, "'Ruïner les pêcheries'", p. 11, n. 30; De Jong, *Geschiedenis*, vol. 1, pp. 121–122.

who had been captured by the enemy, or had lost his ship, was entitled to a benefit of twenty-five guilders. The seamen's box established by the magistrates in Flushing in 1754, which was funded by dues levied on earnings of whalers and fishermen and by contributions from local residents, provided allowances to old and disabled seamen as well as to seamen's widows and orphaned children.³¹ When the number of claims from members of insurance boxes in the countryside of North Holland diminished due to the decline in seafaring activities in the course of the eighteenth century, the funds of several seamen's boxes (which had increased substantially, thanks to investment in land or public loans) were reallocated for communal purposes, such as poor relief, education or repair of churches at the behest of village authorities.

It is not yet possible to determine whether the nearly simultaneous rise of insurance boxes in southern Italy and north-west Europe was purely coincidental or a result of mutual influence. While overseas links between the Mediterranean and centres of insurance boxes in north-west Europe did exist in the seventeenth century – as data on the voyages of members of insurance boxes in North Holland will show below – they were not very common. Furthermore, the boxes were not identical in nature. Their package of services varied, and the religious overtones of the *monti* were especially strong. The *monti* of southern Italy were more akin to confraternities than to the Sea Box of Bo'ness, the *Sklavenkasse* of Hamburg or the *buidel* of Broek in Waterland. On the other hand, given the close maritime connections between Hamburg, Scotland and Holland,³² influence between these regions in the north is quite likely. Seamen may also have followed the example of other categories of labourers. Insurance boxes of masters and journeymen had existed in Holland for several decades by the time the first seamen's box was established in Maassluis.³³

In England, seamen's boxes appeared much later than in north-west Germany, Scotland or the Dutch Republic, and insurance for seamen long remained a matter of state regulation. An Act of Parliament of 1696 decreed that sixpence would be deducted from the wages of merchant seamen each month to support the naval hospital in Greenwich, which provided pensions to old and disabled seamen who had served with the Royal Navy. A separate provision for relief to seamen in the mercantile marine – who were virtually barred from access to benefits

³¹ Lootsma, "Draecht elckanders lasten", pp. 22–31; Bakker, "Een onderlinge verzeke-ring", p. 40; De Jong, *Geschiedenis*, vol. 1, pp. 121–122.

³² Johnston, *The Records*, pp. 5, 46; A. P. van Vliet, *Vissers en kapers. De zeevisserij vanuit het Maasmondgebied en de Duinkerker kapers (ca. 1580–1648)* (The Hague, 1994), pp. 46, 145–150, 174–177.

³³ Jan Lucassen, *Jan, Jan Salie en diens kinderen. Vergelijkend onderzoek naar continuïteit en discontinuïteit in de ontwikkeling van arbeidsverhoudingen* (Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 27–28.

from the hospital they funded themselves – was created by Parliament through the establishment of a Merchant Seamen's Fund in 1747. This national benevolent fund, administered on a port-by-port basis and also supported by contributions from seafarers, provided both short-term benefits and long-term pensions to seafarers and their widows.³⁴ In the long run, the capacity of the Fund failed to keep up with the increasing need due to the expansion of the shipping industry. By its abolition in 1851, however, there was no longer a shortage of alternative institutions to which seamen could turn. The spread of private insurance plans for seamen resulted in part from the growth of middle-class philanthropy in nineteenth-century Britain. The expansion of philanthropic activities between 1815 and 1860 also included the establishment of provisions for distressed seafarers, such as the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Royal Benevolent Society, founded in 1839, which was funded by subscriptions from seamen and by voluntary donations from the middle class.³⁵ On the other hand, insurance boxes for relief in case of sickness, accident or old age were established by seafarers themselves from the 1790s onwards. For example, nineteen seamen founded a Sailors' Fund in a pub called The Sign of Hope and Anchor in the port of South Shields in 1798, and this society also functioned as a burial club. The number of seamen's boxes increased further after the Napoleonic wars.³⁶

The fourth and last type of permanent formal organization of seamen that preceded the rise of trade unions, were shipmasters' societies. Shipmasters' societies first emerged during the eighteenth century and were essentially separate insurance boxes for masters (though some of them also admitted mates). Some of the oldest shipmasters' societies in Europe actually began as offshoots from seamen's boxes. In 1738 and 1756, a number of skippers who had just seceded from the old Sea Box founded the Shipmasters' Society and the Friendly Society of Shipmasters in Bo'ness.³⁷ Some shipmasters' societies were variations of skippers' guilds and in 1775 the skippers' guild of Norrköping became the *Coopvaerdie skeppare societet*.³⁸ The *Schiffer-Gesellschaft* of Hamburg, which had originated from a religious brotherhood in 1522, was transformed in 1843 into an insurance box providing relief to all captains (or their widows) sailing on ships with the Hamburg flag. The guilds in Bremen

³⁴ Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (2nd ed., Newton Abbot, 1972), pp. 58, 144–145, 157; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World. An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (2nd ed., Glasgow, 1988), pp. 125, 127; Marsh and Ryan, *The Seamen*, pp. 4–5.

³⁵ Marsh and Ryan, *The Seamen*, pp. 4–5; Jon Press, "Philanthropy and the British Shipping Industry, 1815–1860", *International Journal of Maritime History*, 1 (1989), pp. 107–128, esp. pp. 108–109, 119.

³⁶ Jones, "The Community", p. 54; Marsh and Ryan, *The Seamen*, p. 8.

³⁷ Johnston, *The Records*, pp. 56–60, 76.

³⁸ *Sjöstaden Norrköping*, p. 15.

and Lübeck followed suit.³⁹ Other shipmasters' societies did not originate from pre-existing organizations and the oldest society of this kind in the Dutch Republic, an insurance box founded in 1750 by masters and mates in the service of the Dutch East India Company (which in two years enrolled more than a hundred members), was apparently modelled on widows' funds that had previously been established by members of other professions.⁴⁰ The sixteen insurance boxes for shipmasters (*zeemanscolleges*) formed in port cities and seafaring communities in the Netherlands between 1795 and 1881 were entirely new, and the same is probably true of the various shipmasters' associations that arose in Britain during the nineteenth century.⁴¹

Although the primary purpose of shipmasters' societies was to provide pensions and other allowances to shipmasters and their families, they often went on to assume a variety of other functions. The societies could accelerate the flow of information in the shipping industry by encouraging their members to transmit data on ships sighted at sea to shipowners and other interested parties ashore or promote seafaring in the long run by subsidizing schools of navigation, founding libraries and reading rooms and helping to gather data for research. Thus, they enhanced the corporate spirit of shipmasters, the technical competence of their members and the general professional status of sea captains.⁴² By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, this type of seamen's organization also began to wane. Shipmasters' societies made way for trade union-like organizations of navigating officers in the mercantile marine, began to function like trade unions themselves or became minor factors in the shipping industry.⁴³

³⁹ Kress, *Von armen Seefahrern*, pp. 57–61; Scholl, "100 Jahre See-Berufsgenossenschaft", pp. 13–14.

⁴⁰ GA Amsterdam PA 1 No. 5 resolutieboek Administrateurs van 't opperegte Fonds door de hoofd-officieren ter zee in dienst van de Oost-Indische Compagnie, fo. 3–4, 31, 52, 70–71.

⁴¹ Karel Davids, "Technological Change and the Professionalism of Masters and Mates in the Dutch Mercantile Marine, 1815–1914", *Collectanea Maritima*, 5 (1989), pp. 282–303, esp. p. 289; whether there has been any continuity between the first *zeemanscollege*, founded in Amsterdam in 1795, and the fund referred to in the previous note, is not yet clear; Valerie Burton, "The Making of a Nineteenth-Century Profession: Shipmasters and the British Shipping Industry", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1990), pp. 97–118, esp. p. 116. The marine societies formed in Boston, Salem, Philadelphia, New York and other port towns of Colonial America after about 1740 "for the relief of distressed shipmasters and their widows and children" also appear to have been new foundations, see Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946), p. 199.

⁴² Davids, "Technological Change", pp. 289–291; *Sjöstaden Norrköping*, pp. 23–27; Burton, "The Making", p. 116; Robin Craig, "Printed Guides for Mariners as a Source of Productivity Change in Shipping", *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser., 3 (1982), pp. 23–35, esp. p. 27.

⁴³ Davids, "Technological Change", pp. 295–303; Burton, "The Making", pp. 116–117.

SEAMENS' ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL PROTEST BEFORE
1800

Social protest by seamen in the form of collective action (as opposed to individual acts of protest or other types of disputes involving seamen⁴⁴) can be traced back at least as far as the early seventeenth century. Until now, most research on collective action by seafarers has focused on the countries with the largest shipping industries in the early modern period (i.e. the Dutch Republic and Britain, including the American colonies). Far less data are available for other areas of Europe.

According to a recent survey by Rudolf Dekker, sailors' riots occurred about a dozen times in port towns of Holland between the 1620s and the 1740s. These disorders almost exclusively involved seamen of the East India and West India Companies, the Navy and private men-of-war, and most cases were triggered by pay disputes.⁴⁵ Work stoppages and outright mutinies aboard ships were far from exceptional in the Dutch East India Company: there was a total of forty-four known cases between 1602 and 1795 and most of these disturbances concerned labour conditions aboard ships.⁴⁶ The Dutch mercantile marine, by contrast, seems to have experienced less labour unrest, although some collective action by seamen in the European trades did occur. During the war with England and France in 1672, on the merchantman *Hollandia's* return from Spain, the crew refused to take orders from a mate for fear of being captured by the French. Back in Holland, they vigorously defended the legality of their actions in print by issuing a public appeal to the highest naval authority in the Dutch Republic, the Prince of Orange.⁴⁷ Such protests by merchant seamen were comparatively rare, however, and mutinies in the whaling-fisheries were unknown.⁴⁸

The Anglo-American maritime industry was frequently disturbed by seamen's protests from the early seventeenth century onwards. Like in Amsterdam, there was an outburst of riots in London during the late 1620s and during the first Anglo-Dutch War because of pay disputes

⁴⁴ Cf. K. R. Andrews, "The Elizabethan Seaman", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 68 (1982), pp. 245–262, esp. pp. 247, 259–260; Klaus Friedland, "Schiff und Besatzung: Seemännische Berufsgemeinschaften im spätmittelalterlichen Nordeuropa", in Paul Adam (ed.), *Seamen in Society/Gens de mer en société* (s.l., 1980), II, pp. 13–231; Timothy J. Runyan, "Mariners and the Law of the Sea in Later Medieval England", in Adam, *Seamen in Society/Gens de mer en société*, pp. 1–12.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Dekker, "Labour Conflicts and Working-Class Culture in Early Modern Holland", *International Review of Social History*, 35 (1990), pp. 377–420, esp. pp. 405–407.

⁴⁶ J. R. Bruijn and E. S. van Eyck van Heslinga, *Muiterij. Oproer en berechting op schepen van de VOC* (Bussum, 1980), pp. 8, 21.

⁴⁷ *Eenvoudig verhael der gemeene boots-gesellen van het schip Hollandia gedaen aen sijn Hoogheyt den Heere Prince van Orangie wegens de beroerten in 't herwaerts komen, in dat schip zijn geresen* (s.l., 1672) (copy in the Library of the Instituut voor Maritieme Historie, The Hague).

⁴⁸ Bruijn and Van Eyck van Heslinga, *Muiterij*, p. 8.

between sailors and naval authorities.⁴⁹ Both the Commonwealth and the Restoration navies repeatedly faced virtual strikes by sailors over grievances concerning wages, food or other conditions of service, as well as quarrels between captains and their crew about the maintenance of discipline, although full-fledged mutinies at sea were few and far between during this era.⁵⁰ On the other hand, mutinies that involved “an organized, self-conscious revolt against constituted authority, aimed at curtailing the captain’s powers or seizing control of the ship”, certainly became a common form of seamen’s protest in the African, American and West Indian trades of the mercantile marine during the first half of the eighteenth century. Marcus Rediker found no fewer than sixty such revolts between 1700 and 1750, forty-eight of which broke out between 1715 and 1737.⁵¹ Strikes ashore rose sharply in the second half of the eighteenth century. C. R. Dobson found a total of thirty-seven strikes by seamen and ship’s carpenters in the British Isles between 1717 and 1800, rising from one between 1717 and 1740, to three between 1741 and 1760, to sixteen between 1761 and 1780 and finally to seventeen in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.⁵² Most of these conflicts were in the East India trade, the Atlantic trades, the Navy and the coal trade.

Social protest in the eighteenth century was not confined to the navies and mercantile marines of the leading maritime powers of the north. The East India trade from the port of Ostend in the Austrian Netherlands, which coincided almost exactly with the peak in mutinies in the Anglo-American maritime industry described by Rediker, also experienced significant labour unrest. Of fifty-three voyages between Ostend, India and China between 1715 and 1735, six experienced a mutiny or a strike.⁵³ Resistance by seamen against conditions of service in the Royal Navy in France during the reign of Louis XV appears to have been less pronounced than in Georgian Britain. Any seamen’s protest that did occur consisted of a move inland to escape the draft (especially in regions along the Mediterranean coast) during wartime or of desertion by individuals on rare occasions, rather than of collective resistance involving a strike or a mutiny. There were only four minor incidents of mutiny in the King’s Navy during the Seven Years War.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Bernard Capp, *Cromwell’s Navy. The Fleet and the English Revolution, 1648–1660* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 286–289.

⁵⁰ Capp, *Cromwell’s Navy*, pp. 228–230, 286–290; J. D. Davies, *Gentlemen and Taraulins. The Officers and Men of the Restoration Navy* (Oxford, 1991), p. 85.

⁵¹ Rediker, *Between the Devil*, pp. 227–228.

⁵² C. R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen. A Prehistory of Industrial Relations 1717–1800* (London, 1980), pp. 24–25.

⁵³ Roland Baetens, “Le comportement des marins sur les navires ostendais vers l’Orient”, *Revue du Nord, No. 1 spécial hors série 1986*, pp. 385–403, esp. pp. 398–399.

⁵⁴ Timothy J. A. le Goff, “Les gens de mer devant le système de classes (1755–1763): résistance ou passivité?”, *Revue du Nord, No. 1 spécial hors série 1986*, pp. 463–479, esp. pp. 465–475; James Pritchard, *Louis XV’s Navy. 1748–1762. A Study of Organization and*

Was there any connection between the spread of seamen's protest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the development of permanent formal organizations of seafarers? So far, no evidence has been found of direct involvement by such organizations in strikes, mutinies or other forms of collective protest before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Such an involvement appears highly improbable. Most of these protests took place in sectors of the maritime labour market where permanent, formal organizations hardly existed. The sectors in which the majority of known actions occurred were not characterized by an abundance of associations. With few exceptions, seamen on warships, private men-of-war, East Indiamen or ships in the Atlantic trades did not form guilds, fraternities, insurance boxes or (before 1800) shipmasters' societies. These organizations found the bulk of their members among seamen in branches where the incidence of social protest was relatively low (with the exception of the coal trade in Britain), namely merchant shipping in Europe, the fisheries and the whaling industry.

The employment pattern of seafarers subscribing to seamen's boxes in Holland highlights this distinction between action-prone and association-rife sectors of the maritime labour market. Members of seamen's boxes rarely if ever signed on with the Navy or the Dutch East India Company and seldom sailed on West Indiamen. Of the forty-four contributors to the box in Broek in Waterland in 1658 whose employment is known for that year, twenty-one sailed to France, ten to the Baltic and seven to Archangel, while six were reported as registered in the whaling-fisheries. Among the seventy-seven contributors in 1660, twenty-three were listed as leaving for France, eighteen for the Baltic, six for Norway, two for the Mediterranean and twenty for whale-hunting near Spitsbergen; only eight worked aboard an East Indiaman.⁵⁵ Specialization in whaling and merchant shipping in European waters was also evident among members of three other insurance boxes of seamen in Holland with records of their employment for a number of years in the first half of the eighteenth century (Table 2). During this period, demand for sailors in the Dutch Navy (during the War of Spanish Succession) and in the Dutch East India Company rose to unprecedented levels.

The absence of a link between permanent formal organization and social protest among seamen does not imply, however, that collective actions among seafarers, as Dekker claims with regard to sailors in early modern Holland,⁵⁶ were "much more spontaneous" than those of workers in trades ashore. The demonstration of sailors at the main office of the

Administration (Montreal, 1987), pp. 84–87; André Zysberg, *Les galériens. Vies et destins de 60000 forçats sur les galères de France 1680–1748* (Paris, 1987), p. 170.

⁵⁵ Van der Does, "Een eigenaardige assurantie", p. 60; also see P. Boon, "Zeelieden te Schellinkhout omstreeks 1700", *Tijdschrift voor Zeegechiedenis*, 6 (1987), pp. 107–123, esp. p. 112.

⁵⁶ Dekker, "Labour Conflicts", p. 407.

Table 2. Specialization by branch of shipping among members of seamen's boxes in Holland

Branch of shipping	Seamen's box		Hem		Graft		
	Westwoud						
	1700	1710	1703	1710	1703	1715	1740
Whaling	1	6	20	11	42	24	24
Herring fishing	1			1	7	1	5
W-Indies/Africa			1		5	1	1
France/Portugal	5	3	8	1	5	2	1
Mediterranean				1			1
Russia		1			2	5	
North Sea/Baltic	6	6	18	13	2	2	4
Whaling + Portugal			9		2	3	
W-Indies + Russia						2	
Portugal + Russia						2	
France + Baltic		6		2			1
Other combinations	4	1	1	4	2	4	1
Total members	17	23	57	33	67	46	38

Source: Van Royen, *Zeelieden*, pp. 232–235; RA Alkmaar, Archief Zeevarende buul Graft, no. 7.

private navy of Amsterdam in 1652 mentioned by Dekker,⁵⁷ for example, was certainly not a spontaneous outburst. A small group of seamen started planning at the capstan of a private men-of-war in 't Vlie and later assembled in an inn in Amsterdam.⁵⁸ It would be very difficult to justify designating the last series of riots by sailors in Amsterdam between 1737 and 1743 as spontaneous affairs. In 1742 and 1743, the sailors acted at specific moments with well-defined purposes, namely in the middle of August to prevent the enlistment of seamen in the Dutch East India Company under new conditions that the protesters considered grossly unfair (substituting a lump sum paid on return for the opportunities of private trade).⁵⁹ Furthermore, early measures against plotting appear to have prevented the outbreak of a seamen's riot in December 1739.⁶⁰

Several incidents of mutinies and work stoppages aboard ship also followed careful preparation. In his study of seamen in the Anglo-American maritime world between 1700 and 1750, Marcus Rediker mentions a particular cultural form known as the round robin. A round robin was a

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 406, incorrectly speaks of "the head offices of the VOC"; after 1631 local private navies were created by several cities in Holland and administered by burgomasters and merchants.

⁵⁸ Gemeentearchief Amsterdam (GAA), PA 5061/581, fo. 159–159v, 309 fo. 92–92v, 94, 97; Jan Wagenaar, *Amsterdam in zijne opkomst, aanwas, geschiedenissen enz.*, 4 vols (Amsterdam, 1760–1788), vol. I, p. 585.

⁵⁹ *Het ontroerd Holland* (Harderwijk, s.a. [1749]), vol. I, pp. 293–297; Wagenaar, *Amsterdam*, vol. IV, p. 75.

⁶⁰ According to the anonymous author of *Het ontroerd Holland*, vol. I, pp. 256–257.

written list of complaints or demands concerning shipboard conditions, with the names of protesters signed around it in a circle to prevent anyone from being singled out as a ringleader. Rediker calls it “a cultural innovation from below, an effort at collective self-defense in the face of nearly unlimited and arbitrary authority”.⁶¹ In fact, this means of resistance was even more widely used than Rediker was able to prove. Seamen aboard English naval vessels used round robins as early as 1657.⁶² Round robins also appeared in labour disputes aboard the East Indiamen of the Company of Ostend in 1726 (as an *anneau rond*) as well as at least twice (in 1733 and 1750) during mutinies aboard ships of the Dutch East India Company (as a *papier van onwilligheyt*, meaning a paper of unwillingness).⁶³ Sailors' protests thus revealed a consistent pattern over a longer period than has hitherto been assumed. Similar means of expression recurred in different places at different times.

The covert order that apparently underlay part of the seamen's protests suggests that seamen serving in the navy or in the Atlantic and East India trades shared a tradition of collective action, which was transmitted despite the absence of any permanent formal organization. If such a tradition existed, it must have spread through informal channels. Such transmission certainly was possible. It may have been facilitated by the international mobility of labour, an essential feature in these sectors of the maritime industry. By the Restoration, Royal Navy crews already included small numbers of Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Italians and Swedes, and this foreign element on British ships probably increased over the course of the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ After 1700, naval vessels and British-owned merchantmen sailing the Atlantic contained many seamen born in other European countries (including France, the Dutch Republic, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Sweden and Hanover).⁶⁵

In the Dutch Republic, foreigners always formed a substantial portion of crews on whalers, naval vessels, West Indiamen and ships of the Dutch East India Company, especially in the eighteenth century. After 1730, foreigners in the whaling-fisheries, the Navy and the West India trade accounted for anywhere from a third to over half of all crew members. In the East Indiamen Company, over 40 per cent of the seamen and over 50 per cent of the soldiers were not Dutch.⁶⁶ More

⁶¹ Rediker, *Between the Devil*, pp. 234–235.

⁶² Capp, *Cromwell's Navy*, p. 286.

⁶³ Roland Baetens, “Le comportement des marins sur les navires ostendais vers l'Orient”, *Revue du Nord*, No. 1 spécial hors série 1986, pp. 385–403, esp. p. 399; Bruijn and Van Eyck van Heslinga, *Muiterij*, pp. 44–57, 63–66; Algemeen Rijksarchief The Hague, Admiraliteitsarchieven Collectie Van der Velden XXVII No. 42, Archief VOC No. 2269 fo. 6582 and no. 2322 fo. 202.

⁶⁴ Davies, *Gentlemen*, p. 75; Davis, *The Rise*, pp. 326–327.

⁶⁵ Rediker, *Between the Devil*, p. 156; Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p. 158.

⁶⁶ J. R. Bruijn and J. Lucassen, *Op de schepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie. Vijf artikelen van J. de Hullu* (Groningen, 1980), pp. 19–24, 139–140.

significantly, the proportion of foreigners among mutineers was greater than that of crew members. Of about 300 soldiers, common seamen and petty officers known to have been involved in sixteen mutinies in the period 1615–1783 studied by Bruijn and Van Eyck van Heslinga, four out of five were probably of foreign origin. The leaders in mutinies aboard ships of the VOC were in most cases not Dutch, but rather German, Scandinavian, French, Flemish and Asian.⁶⁷

Informal communication was facilitated by the variety of opportunities for contact between seamen of different backgrounds, both at sea and in port. Being aboard a ship provided ample opportunities for exchanging “information, experiences and ideas”. Seamen could meet at the bow, in the rigs, below deck, or (like the protesters in the private navy of Amsterdam in 1652) at the capstan of their ship to discuss any topic on their mind.⁶⁸ They also had regular meeting places ashore. In sectors of the maritime labour market where permanent formal organizations hardly existed, pubs and boarding houses were focal points for socializing between seamen in port. Pubs and boarding houses were not just places for lodging and entertainment. During the sailors’ protest in Amsterdam in 1652, demonstrators used an inn in the Hasselaerssteeg near the main office of the private navy in the *West Indisch Huis* as a kind of “war-room”.⁶⁹ In the eighteenth century in England, public houses could serve as houses of rendezvous, where seamen met with their fellow workers and occasionally banded together to prepare for a demonstration, draft a petition or launch any other form of action they believed would express their demands.⁷⁰

Like the houses of call of craftsmen in eighteenth-century England, pubs and lodging houses were sometimes labour recruitment centres or recruiting houses. In contrast to the labour exchanges in the houses of call, however, recruitment of sailors for the Navy, the East India Company or the Atlantic trades in Britain or the Dutch Republic was not arranged by workers themselves in collaboration with landlords, but was mostly controlled by crimps.⁷¹ Crimps were a vital link between demand and supply in these sectors of the maritime labour market.

The operation of these traders in labour could be another relevant factor in the outbreak of social protest. On the one hand, the unscrupu-

⁶⁷ Bruijn and Van Eyck van Heslinga, *Muiterij*, pp. 25–26, 148–163.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ GA Amsterdam PA 5061/309 fo. 97.

⁷⁰ Dobson, *Masters*, p. 25.

⁷¹ Davis, *The Rise*, pp. 152–153; J. Stevenson, “The London ‘Crimp’ Riots of 1794”, *International Review of Social History*, 16 (1971), pp. 40–58, esp. pp. 41–42; J. R. Bruijn, *Het gelag der zeelieden* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 7–10; Marc A. van Alphen, “The Female Side of Dutch Shipping: Financial Bonds of Seamen Ashore in the 17th and 18th Centuries”, in J. R. Bruijn and W. F. J. Mörzser Bruyns (eds), *Anglo-Dutch Mercantile Marine Relations 1700–1850. Ten Papers* (Leiden, 1991), pp. 125–132, esp. pp. 125–128.

lous methods used by crimps could in times of extremely rapid rise in the demand for labour (and a corresponding increase in recruitment efforts) easily provoke an outburst of anti-recruitment sentiments, and thus indirectly cause a riot, as happened in London in August 1794.⁷² On the other hand, pubs and lodging houses run by crimps were often hotbeds of seamen's protest, and they were sometimes even suspected of being primary agitators of such protests. Both during the riot in Amsterdam in 1652 and during the period of unrest around 1740, crimps were accused of orchestrating the revolts.⁷³ Even though none of them were ever actually charged, let alone convicted, it is quite conceivable that crimps in Amsterdam did indeed do what the allegations claimed they did. They certainly had a stake in the riots' success. After advancing considerable sums to the sailors they recruited for service in the navy, the West India trade or the East India Company by providing them with board and lodging and equipment, crimps had every reason to ensure that sailors earned enough to pay their debts. Furthermore, Amsterdam crimps raised this issue themselves in petitions they submitted to the city magistrate in the last decades of the eighteenth century.⁷⁴ The "plotters" of 1740 may very well have been crimps.

SEAMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL PROTEST IN ENGLAND AROUND 1800

Social protest among seamen was not combined with forms of permanent formal organization until the 1820s, and north-east England was where this combination finally materialized. The Seamen's Loyal Standard Organization, formed on Tyneside and Wearside in late 1824, was involved in the outbreak of a strike on the collier fleet in Sunderland during the summer of the following year. The SLSA was, in fact, the first permanent organization to act as a trade union of seamen. Outwardly, it was a type of association that already existed: a seamen's box.⁷⁵

The creation of an organization such as the SLSA can be viewed as the outcome of a gradual evolution over the preceding thirty years. On the one hand, north-east England had experienced a wave of establishments of seamen's boxes during the 1790s and in 1798 nineteen seamen had combined to found a Sailor's Fund in the port of South Shields.⁷⁶ On the other hand, information on seamen's strikes in the coal trade indicates a progressive increase in co-ordination since the early 1790s.

⁷² Stevenson, "The London 'Crimp' Riots", pp. 43–58.

⁷³ GA Amsterdam PA 5061/309 fo. 97; *Het ontroerd Holland*, vol. I, pp. 255–256, 297.

⁷⁴ GA Amsterdam PA 5061/719 No. 9, 720 No. 18, 725 No. 6, petitions to the magistrates of Amsterdam from "people interested in the lodging and equipment of seamen", c. 1777, 1778 and 1790/1791.

⁷⁵ Rowe, "A Trade Union", pp. 81–98.

⁷⁶ Jones, "Community", pp. 53–54.

While the existence of strike committees during labour disputes on the collier fleet up to 1792 can only be suspected, rather than proved,⁷⁷ the strike on the Tyne in November 1792 for an increase in wages during the winter months shows seamen organizing in two or three watches under chiefs, stationing parties under one of these chiefs at both sides of the harbour entrance and taking effective measures to discipline their own ranks.⁷⁸ At the turn of the century, during the next wage dispute in the coal trade, employers accused sailors in Shields of forming a combination, though this claim was not borne out by the inquiry subsequently ordered by the mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne.⁷⁹ The earliest records of a strike committee representing the seamen of Tyneside are from the seamen's strike over wages and manpower in north-east England in September and October 1815. This committee not only managed to maintain strict discipline among the strikers, but also "devised a system of licences whereby they gave permission to certain ships to sail, provided they satisfied conditions of manning and destination and contributed to the strike funds". The seamen thus retained control over the ports of the Tyne and Wear area for about six weeks.⁸⁰

Why did a confluence of permanent organization and social protest occur at this particular place and time? Furthermore, why was it in north-east England at the beginning of the nineteenth century that a seamen's box began to operate like a trade union? After all, wage labour had long prevailed in the shipping industry, seamen's boxes – and certainly confraternities and guilds – had existed in Europe for two hundred years, the tradition of social protest among seamen can be traced back to before 1650, and the coal trade from Newcastle to London had already undergone vigorous expansion in the first half of the seventeenth century (even though fewer seamen were involved in this industry than at the end of the eighteenth century).⁸¹ To obtain the sharpest possible focus on this issue, it might be best to compare north-east England around 1800 to a region where this transition did *not* take place, namely the northern area of the province of Holland in the Dutch Republic.

As in north-east England, seamen and seamen's boxes abounded in the northern part of Holland in the seventeenth and early eighteenth

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51; cf. Norman McCord and David E. Brewster, "Some Labour Troubles of the 1790's in North East England", *International Review of Social History*, 13 (1968), pp. 366–383, esp. p. 366.

⁷⁸ McCord and Brewster, "Some Labour Troubles", pp. 366–370; A. Aspinall, *The Early English Trade Unions. Documents from the Home Office Papers in the Public Record Office* (London, 1949), pp. 9–18.

⁷⁹ Moher, "From Suppression", p. 85; Ville, *English Shipowning*, p. 105; Aspinall, *The Early English Trade Unions*, pp. 32–33.

⁸⁰ Norman McCord, "The Seamen's Strike of 1815 in North-East England", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 21 (1968), pp. 127–143, esp. pp. 129, 133 and 141.

⁸¹ Davis, *The Rise*, pp. 3–4, 32–39; Jones, "Community", pp. 35–36.

centuries. During this period, seafaring communities were as common north of the Y as they were near the mouth of the Tyne and Wear around 1800. Like the sailors in north-east England, mariners in North Holland usually sought employment in trades close to home, rather than signing on aboard ships in the Atlantic and East India trades or vessels of the Navy. If “effective organization among the North East seamen” really was facilitated by the circumstances that “coasting voyages [. . .] multiplied opportunities for contacts and cohesion more than an emphasis on deep-sea voyages could have done”, as McCord and Brewster have claimed,⁸² this condition should also have affected seamen in the northern part of Holland. In all these respects, the circumstances in both cases were very similar.

Yet several differences not only existed, but must also have been critical for eventually bringing about the transition from seamen’s box to trade union. In contrast to mariners in the communities in the north of Holland, seamen in the north-east of England lived close to groups of workers (keelmen and pitmen) who shared what Wrightson and Levine have called an “antagonistic industrial culture”.⁸³ Before the 1790s, these keelmen and coal miners – and not the seamen – nurtured a tradition of well-organized, collective resistance. The rise of this tradition among keelmen can be traced to at least the 1650s, and among collier workers to the early eighteenth century,⁸⁴ and some historians have therefore surmised that pitmen and seamen may have taken a cue from keelmen.⁸⁵ There is no evidence that this effect applied vice versa.

A second significant difference between the situation in Holland and in north-east England was that seamen’s boxes founded in communities on Tyneside and Wearside from the 1790s onwards were all established and controlled by common seamen and (as far as can be ascertained) catered only to a membership of sailors. Neither shipmasters nor public authorities were involved in any way.⁸⁶ Stephen Jones has suggested that the seamen may have been inspired by the example of the shipwrights of Shields, who set up their own benefit clubs in 1795 and 1798.⁸⁷ Regarding the keelmen, another cause is possible for the appearance of this particular type of seamen’s box in the 1790s. The Sea Box of Bo’ness, Scotland, which had initially contained both skippers and

⁸² McCord and Brewster, “Some Labour Troubles”, p. 366; Marsh and Ryan, *The Seamen*, p. 7 and Ville, *English Shipowning*, pp. 98–99, argue in the same vein.

⁸³ David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society, Wickham 1560–1795* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 392, 406.

⁸⁴ David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *The Making*, pp. 391–394, 406–407; Jones, “Community”, p. 42.

⁸⁵ Levine and Wrightson, *The Making*, p. 406; Jones, “Community”, p. 42.

⁸⁶ As far as the evidence presented in Jones, “Community”, pp. 53–55 makes it possible to conclude.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 53.

common seamen, experienced secessions by skippers following disputes between shipmasters and sailors in 1738 and 1756, effectively leaving the seamen in charge. The emergence of separate organizations of shipmasters and common mariners occurred on the eve of the heyday of the port of Bo'ness, which lasted from c. 1750 to 1790.⁸⁸ Is it not conceivable that the sailors of Shields took their cue from seafarers in this port town in Scotland through the intermediary of the keelmen? After all, keelmen on the Tyne and Wear were in part recruited from seasonal labourers immigrating during the shipping season from Perth and Falkirk⁸⁹ – a town actually located next to Bo'ness.

The experience of seamen in north-east England differed even more from that of seamen in Holland, in the mobility between different sectors of the seafaring labour market. The divisions between various sectors of the maritime labour market were far easier to overcome in Britain than in the Dutch Republic. While recruitment of seafarers into the Dutch Navy from the countryside of North Holland remained low during the massive naval build-up in the War of Spanish Succession (see Table 1), large numbers of seamen from the north-east of England joined the British Navy during the great wars with France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While the exact size of these flows has not been determined, employment levels in the Royal Navy did triple and quadruple following the outbreak of each war between 1739 and 1792 and actually rose by 750 per cent in the period 1792–1800. These increased figures resulted in part from voluntary enlistment, impressment or enrolment under regulations about the supply of quotas in the mercantile marine.⁹⁰ Seafarers on the collier fleet from the north-east were also involved in this massive movement into the naval sector, whether of their own free will or otherwise.⁹¹ After the hostilities ended, some of the seamen who had become redundant in the Navy drifted into the mercantile marine.⁹²

The interactions after 1792 between different sectors of the maritime labour market provided a powerful stimulus for the eventual convergence

⁸⁸ Johnston, *The Records*, pp. 56–60, 69–79, 83.

⁸⁹ Jones, "Community", p. 40; also see Christopher A. Whatley, "The Fettering Bonds of Brotherhood": Combination and Labour Relations in the Scottish Coal-Mining Industry circa 1690–1775", *Social History*, 12 (1987), pp. 139–154, on colliers' organization in Scotland in the eighteenth century, including evidence on pp. 144–145 on an insurance box and quasi-masonic brotherhood in Midlothian in 1728.

⁹⁰ David J. Starkey, "British Seafaring Employment Levels in Peace and War, 1739–1792", in Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordik (eds), *Shipping and Trade (1750–1950)* (Louvain, 1990), pp. 28–37; Ville, *English Shipowning*, pp. 100–101; Rodger, *The Wooden World*, pp. 145–182; C. Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200–1860. A Social Survey* (London, 1968), pp. 198–199; Charles P. Kindleberger, *Mariners and Markets* (New York, 1992), pp. 16–19.

⁹¹ McCord and Brewster, "Some Labour Troubles", pp. 377–382; Lewis, *The British Seaman*, p. 199.

⁹² Starkey, "British Seafaring Employment Levels", pp. 35–36.

of the traditions of permanent organization and social protest. The anger aroused by the activity of the Impress Service in the early months of 1793 led seamen of the north-east to appeal for the first time to seafarers "of the whole nation to form a national association against the press."⁹³ Moreover this huge expansion of employment in the Royal Navy and the variety of backgrounds among the newly-enrolled men provided excellent opportunities for exchanging "information, experiences and ideas between different groups of the labouring poor", as mentioned by Rediker. Well-known cases of this combination that had far-reaching effects were the naval mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in the spring of 1797.⁹⁴ Finally, the demobilization in 1815 not only exerted severe pressure on wage levels, but also released a large number of men with a record of service in the Royal Navy into the mercantile marine. The seamen who joined the strike in north-east England in the autumn of 1815 included many men who had recently been discharged from the Navy, and the strike's leadership is even said to have contained "echoes of that which had managed the Spithead mutinies of 1797."⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

Organizations of seamen existed continuously in Europe from the late Middle Ages until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Although the nature and scope of seamen's associations changed, the actual tradition of organization was never interrupted. Social protest by seamen, on the other hand, recurred continually, at least in north-west Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet these two strands in the maritime industry became intertwined only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In sectors of the seafaring labour market with the most permanent, formal organization, expressions of social protest were rarest. Conversely, wherever the extent of permanent, formal organization was lowest, social protest by seamen was much more frequent. Why were the action-prone and association-rife sectors almost mutually exclusive for a long time?

Quite possibly, the relative absence of social protest in specific sectors of the maritime labour market resulted in part from the spread of

⁹³ Jones, "Community", p. 46.

⁹⁴ Conrad Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester, 1913), especially books V and VI; G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dorée, *The Floating Republic* (London, 1966); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (2nd ed., Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 183–184; Lewis, *The British Seaman*, pp. 198–201. I have not been able to consult the recent article on the linkage between merchant seamen's strikes and the mutinies on the Nore by Joseph Price Moore in Colin Howell and Richard Twomey (eds), *Jack Tar in History. Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour* (Fredericton, 1991).

⁹⁵ McCord, "The Seamen's Strike", p. 128; Stephen Jones, "Bloody Red Roses. The Supply of Merchant Seamen in the Nineteenth Century", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 58 (1972), pp. 429–442, esp. pp. 430–433.

permanent organizations. These organizations may have helped dampen social protest in two ways. Before the end of the eighteenth century, brotherhoods and insurance boxes normally contained both shipmasters and common mariners. They may have fostered consensus rather than conflict among different groups of seafarers, thus virtually discouraging mutinies and strikes, which pitted masters against common seamen. Second, these formal organizations may have adversely affected opportunities for social protest by serving as informal networks for labour recruitment. Common seamen who joined fraternities or insurance boxes were probably less inclined to protest because consistent relations between masters and sailors in such organizations in a particular seafaring community may have provided opportunities for securing regular jobs in sectors of the maritime labour market (whaling, the fishing industry or the mercantile marine in Europe). In many respects, these options were the most attractive, as they were fairly well paid and involved working with familiar masters and fellow crew members as well as the prospect of returning home every few weeks or months. After all, recruitment in these sectors of the seafaring labour market was the shipmaster's task. The shipmaster must also have found such networks convenient for assembling his crew locally. Data on the manning of the Dutch mercantile marine in the early eighteenth century show that masters of vessels from North Holland, Friesland and the Wadden Islands recruited much of their crew from their immediate surroundings. Over a third of the sailors and more than two thirds of the petty officers came from the same region as the master.⁹⁶

On the other hand, the existence of a tradition of social protest among seamen could not automatically have given rise to permanent, formal organizations. The collectivism of necessity aboard was not easily transformed into durable forms of seamen's combinations. A basic barrier may have been the pattern of labour recruitment prevailing in action-prone sectors of the maritime labour market like the Navy, the Atlantic trades and the East India trade. A large portion of labour was not hired from settled, seafaring communities in cities or the countryside, but from the pool of floating, casual labour in port towns, often through a system of crimping or (in Britain in times of war) impressment. Groups of seamen in the Navy, the East India trade or the Atlantic trades who, as a crew, showed temporary cohesion aboard, usually disbanded upon their return, unlike seamen in whaling, the fisheries or the mercantile marine in Europe. They did not remain a community ashore, even though they had their fixed meeting places in port towns. Moreover, there was a perennial danger of dilution. Efforts to sustain collective action in these floating sectors of the labour market by building durable,

⁹⁶ P. C. van Royen, "Manning the Merchant Marine: The Dutch Maritime Labour Market around 1700", *International Journal of Maritime History*, 1 (1989), pp. 1-28, esp. pp. 17-20.

formal organizations of common seamen were doomed as long as employers could draw on a vast pool of casual labour that could freely or forcibly be recruited for work at sea.

When the coalescence between permanent, formal organizations and social protest finally occurred, the organizations arranged social protest, rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, this combination did not come about until two major shifts took place in the pattern of seamen's organizations: first, the rise of seamen's organization that no longer had a religious dimension (insurance boxes in north-west Europe) and secondly, the rift in Britain between organizations for shipmasters and organizations for common seamen. The first shift was a result of the Reformation. The second one was probably to some extent the outcome of earlier changes in the role of shipmasters. The level of education required for masters in the British mercantile marine increased considerably over the course of the eighteenth century. Literacy and numeric competency became a *sine qua non* for shipmasters. They were not only expected to be well-versed in seamanship and to have a solid grasp of the art of navigation, but also to possess business acumen and an expert knowledge of commercial practice at home and overseas. In fact, the responsibilities of shipmasters extended to include the former tasks of supercargos. The rise in educational requirements in turn entailed a differentiation in social background: shipmasters in the eighteenth century in Britain usually came "from a higher social class than the common seaman".⁹⁷ This change in the skills and origins of shipmasters must have increased the distance between them and common seamen, thereby loosening the bonds that held together existing organizations of seamen. The additional influence of the experiences of other groups of workers both inside and outside the maritime industry on common seamen in seafaring communities, as occurred in north-east England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, set the stage for the rise of the first trade union of seamen.

⁹⁷ Ville, *English Shipowning*, pp. 68–86, esp. p. 71; Davis, *The Rise*, pp. 159–174; Craig, "Printed Guides".