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# Guardians of Trade Secrets: Brokers and Wine Distribution in the United Provinces in the 18th Century

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## **Guardians of Trade Secrets. Brokers and Wine Distribution in the United Provinces in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

Various 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century writers of merchant handbooks have drawn attention to the key position of brokers in Dutch wholesale and intermediate trade<sup>1</sup>. The French writer and merchant Jacques Accarias de Sérionne [1768], reports for instance : “Ce sont des agents dont le commerce ne peut se passer, principalement dans les grands entrepôts, tels que Rotterdam et Amsterdam. [...] C’est chez eux qu’on trouve en même temps tous les prix relatifs de chaque article : ils en connaissent l’abondance et la disette sur place, ils sont les dépositaires de la demande, & pour ainsi dire, du secret du commerce”<sup>2</sup>. Accarias’ words refer to brokerage in general, but in reality, brokers were particularly active in certain services and in sectors of commerce, where product differentiation was large, such as the wine trade. In the United Provinces, hiring a broker when selling or purchasing wine was not mandatory, but widespread both for locals and foreigners. Wine brokers mediated in various positions within the distribution channel: between wholesalers but also, and probably more often, in semi-retailing between importers and specialized wine merchants and sometimes between wine merchants and retailers. Some

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of them had a wide range of activities: they were not just matchmakers, but also provided all kinds of services and specialized information<sup>3</sup>.

Traditionally, brokerage was a municipal office that was supposed to be awarded free of charge by the mayors to the people “most qualified” for the job. In many towns, only male citizens (often Christians as well as Jews) could become a broker. Upon acceptance of their position, brokers had to take an oath, promising to act in the interest of both their clients and the city, to apply the official brokers’ rates, to renounce trading on their own account (at least in the product they were brokering), to keep contracts secret and to perform their duties in accordance with local ordinances. Formally, commercial intermediation was the monopoly of the brokers’ guild, but Amsterdam and Rotterdam also had numerous illicit brokers, who were more or less tolerated by the authorities<sup>4</sup>. The position of illegal brokers differed in several respects from that of sworn brokers. They were not allowed to organize voluntary auction sales of goods and since they were not under oath, their word was not legally binding. However, they also had a number of advantages compared to official brokers. For instance, they were not required to adhere to the official brokers’ rates, which could be highly beneficial in a seasonable trade.

The Dutch wine market was characterized by indirect distribution channels, often involving various interconnected intermediaries between the importer and the consumer. This complexity of trade networks was in part a consequence of tax policy. Urban and provincial

<sup>1</sup> Ricard J.P., *Le négoce d’Amsterdam: contenant tout ce que doivent savoir les marchands et banquiers*, Amsterdam, Etienne Lucas, 1722, p. 324-328 ; Krünitz J.G., *Oeconomische (Oekonomisch-technologische) Encyclopädie*, Berlin, Joachim Pauli, 1781, p. 405-408.

<sup>2</sup> “No trade can be conducted without these agents, especially in cities with a warehouse function, such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam. [...] They can provide the relative prices of each item : they know the abundance and the scarcity on the spot, they are the depositories of demand, and so to speak, of all trade secrets”. Accarias de Sérionne J., *Le commerce de la Hollande ou tableau du commerce des Hollandois dans les quatre parties du monde*, Amsterdam, Changuion, 1768, II, p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview : Ogilvie S., *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 369-371.

<sup>4</sup> Ricard J.P., *Op. cit.*, p. 324.

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authorities levied heavy excise duties on wine, payable by consumers and retailers. In order to control the collection of these taxes, an artificial (and unworkable) distinction between wholesalers, semi-retailers and retailers had been introduced<sup>5</sup>.

Unlike wine-producing countries, and especially France, where some in-depth research has been conducted on the history of wine brokerage,  
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the profession has attracted hardly any attention in the Netherlands<sup>6</sup>. Some studies on Dutch trade history, however, do contain a chapter on brokerage in general<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, most of these are, as Velinov has recently pointed out, largely based on regulation, whereas documents reflecting commercial practice have hardly been studied<sup>8</sup>. Historians have moreover exclusively focused on Amsterdam wholesale trade. Transaction cost analysis is the dominant explicative framework.

Instead of compressing the object in a preconceived model, this research on the contrary, makes a case for an empiricist study of the praxis of wine brokerage, based on merchant letters, books and bills. I will investigate why semi-retailers hired wine brokers, even though this was not compulsory. The first section discusses the main features of the Dutch wine market and the organization of the brokers' profession in the foremost distribution centers: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Middelburg and the inland port of Dordrecht. The second and third parts examine the circumstances under which specialized wine merchants appealed to a broker. The backgrounds and careers of these intermediaries in trade are also discussed here. Finally, special attention is given to the brokers' role in the provision of information, as this has always been a central aspect of wine brokerage.

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### **Brokerage and wine distribution in the United Provinces**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch wine market had some stable features, but also went through a number of significant changes. In the first half of the century, the United Provinces were the chief market for French wine and conversely French wines had an overwhelming share of the Dutch wine trade. Outside periods of war, the vast majority of Dutch maritime wine imports

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<sup>5</sup> Wholesalers were allowed to sell at least one cask of wine per transaction (about 900 liters); semi-retailers could sell quantities of at least 4 stoops at a time (approximately 9,6 liters) and only retailers were allowed to sell wine by the glass or by the can. Purchase was not bound by legal restrictions. This all applied to Amsterdam: the boundaries between wholesale, intermediate trade and retailing differed from one town to another.

<sup>6</sup> Brennan T., *The Wine Trade in Early Modern France*, Baltimore/London, John Hopkins University Press, 1997; Musset B., "Le courtage des vins de champagne du XVII<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle", in Lavaud S. (dir.), *Vendre le vin de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Bordeaux, Féret, 2012, p. 255-265; Lachaud-Martin, S., "Les courtiers bordelais, intermédiaires de commerce du vin aux XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles", *Revue historique*, n° 686, 2018, p. 321-346.

<sup>7</sup> Gelderblom O., *Cities of Commerce: The Institutional Foundations of International Trade in the Low Countries, 1250-1650*, Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 57-75; Lesger C., *The Rise of the Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange: Merchants, Commercial Expansion and Change in the Spatial Economy of the Low Countries, c. 1550-1630*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 224-226; Tielhof M. van, *The "Mother of All Trades": The Baltic Grain Trade in Amsterdam from the Late 16<sup>th</sup> to the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, p. 153-156; Boerner L. and Quint D., Medieval matching markets. Economic History Working Papers (241/2016). The London School of Economics and Political Science, London. Online : <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/43870/1/643936505.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Velinov D., "Parasites ou abeilles ? Le rôle des courtiers dans les marchés médiévaux et modernes (Bruges, Anvers, Amsterdam, XIV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)", in Demont V., Scherman M. and Wegener Sleeswijk A. (dir.), *Le pouvoir des courtiers. Unvers marchand et acteurs du courtage en Europe XIV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> s.*, Paris, Éditions rue d'Ulm/Presses de l'ENS, 2018, p. 41, 42.

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(70 to 90% depending on the year) came from France. High tolls were levied at the Rhine, preventing Rhine and Mosel wines from gaining a large market share<sup>9</sup>.

Amsterdam and Rotterdam were the main ports for imports of wine in Holland, the former increasingly surpassing the latter. The town of Middelburg in Zeeland, which had dominated maritime wine imports up to the first decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, still played a second-rate role, with a share of approximately 15%. The former staple of Dordrecht controlled part of the distribution of German wines, a greatly reduced branch of trade.

Over the course of the century, several independent phenomena such as the falling purchasing power of the middle classes and the increasing profitability of Dutch and French West-Indian trade, contributed to a decrease in wine imports in the United Provinces. However, at the same time, the increasingly complex structure of the Dutch wine market may have furthered the need for specialized intermediaries. Around the middle of the century, elite consumer preferences shifted from the sweet white wines of the Garonne Valley and the Bergerac area to the red wines of Médoc, Cahors, Languedoc and Spain. Improvements in conservation techniques encouraged wine aging, and producer names and regional brands became ever better known among regular consumers. Diversification also occurred at the lower end of the market. There was a strong demand for cheap processed wines (for instance from Poitou), softened by the addition of sugar syrup and also for locally produced Ersatz. Small consumers, whose daily drink consisted of beer and tea, attached great

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<sup>9</sup> Unless mentioned otherwise, this paragraph is based on: Wegener Sleeswijk A., *Les vins français aux Provinces-Unies au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Négoce, dynamiques institutionnelles et organisation du marché*, Thèse de 3<sup>ème</sup> cycle, Université d'Amsterdam and EHESS Paris, 2006.

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**Fig. 1. The Amsterdam brokers' guildhall, built in 1633**



Above the door: “t maekelaers comptoir” (“The brokers’ hall”).

Above the upper window : “Vryheid is voor geen geld te koop” (“Freedom is not for sale”).

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importance to drinking “wine” at special occasions: christenings, weddings, funerals and the annual fair.

Given the dominant position of Amsterdam in imports, it seems logical that this city had the largest number of wine brokers. Around 1720, according to Jean-Pierre Ricard, sixty to eighty brokers -both official and illicit- specialized in the wine and brandy trade<sup>10</sup>. However,

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some of them hardly practiced, because they were either too old or combined wine brokerage with other activities. The 1730 official brokers’ directory for Amsterdam mentions twenty-three names of professionals who considered the wine and brandy trade as their specialization<sup>11</sup>. In Rotterdam, the number of official wine brokers was at least eleven in

<sup>10</sup> Ricard J.P., *Op. cit.*, 1722, p. 325. For an overview of total numbers of official brokers in Amsterdam in the early modern period: Stuart T., *De Amsterdamsche makelaardij. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis onzer handelswetgeving*, Amsterdam, Spin en Zoon, 1879, p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Demont V. and Wegener Sleeswijk A., “Milieux du courtage à Amsterdam et à Hambourg (fin XVIIe-début XVIIIe siècle)”, in Demont V., Scherman, M. and Wegener Sleeswijk A. (dir.), *Op. cit.*, p. 185, 186.

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1735<sup>12</sup>. Eight sworn wine brokers were active in Middelburg in 1648; in 1754 they were only four<sup>13</sup>. In Dordrecht, the number of brokers allowed to mediate in any trade except for grain was set at six in 1726<sup>14</sup>. Newspaper advertisements show that Dordrecht brokers did not specialize and those involved in the wine trade also settled transactions in other goods and services<sup>15</sup>.

In all four cities, brokers were required to join the local brokers' guild. Whereas the Middelburg wine brokers formed a separate guild from 1648 onward, with its own ordinance and guild house, the Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dordrecht wine brokers belonged, to the general brokers' guilds. In other respects there were also major differences between the four cities. Brokerage rates for wine varied considerably for instance from one city to another. They were the highest in Amsterdam, but hardly ever exceeded 3% of a wine's value<sup>16</sup>.

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Brokers were responsible for two major commercial institutions that held a key position in the provision of commercial information. The Dean and the Council of the Amsterdam brokers' guild were in charge of the publication of the commodity price lists, the *Amsterdamsche Prijscourant*, which had appeared weekly or bi-weekly since 1585<sup>17</sup>. Every week, the Amsterdam wine brokers had to transmit current wholesale prices. They also selected the types of wine to be mentioned, changing the classification several times in the course of the century. Between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *Prijscourant* thus mentioned the wholesale prices of sixteen to twenty-eight categories of French wine, three to fourteen Spanish and Portuguese wines and occasionally an Italian wine. German wines were not included as they were imported by wine merchants and generally sold without brokers' intermediation.

In all four cities, brokers also had the privilege of organizing voluntary auction sales of merchandize, under the supervision of a city official. Wine was one of the goods most frequently sold. Around 1720, in Amsterdam, about a quarter of all imported wine was sold at the auction. Most sellers were wholesalers; the buyers were mostly wine merchants, distillers and institutions such as trading companies and old people's homes. Only sellers at the auction were obliged to hire a broker, but buyers also often did so. In Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dordrecht, wine auctions took place in specialized inns, whereas the Middelburg auctions were organized at the wine merchants' guild house<sup>18</sup>.

While regulation gives an idea of the contours of the wine brokers' profession, correspondence between wine merchants and their brokers provides more insight into the position of these intermediaries in distribution networks.

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<sup>12</sup> Stadsarchief Rotterdam (from now on SR), 1 Oud Stads Archief (from now on OSA), 2192, Dossier van het geschil tussen wijnkooplieden en makelaars gebracht voor burgemeesteren, 1735.

<sup>13</sup> Zeeuws Archief (from now on ZA), 3/68, Ordonnantie voor de makelaars van de wijnen binnen de stad Middelburg in Zeeland, met aanvullingen tot 1723; *Naamwyzer, aantonende alle de namen en woonplaatsen van de Edele achtbare magistraat der stad Middelburg in Zeeland* [...], vol. 8, Middelburg, Callenfels and Taillefert, 1758, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Regionaal Archief Dordrecht (from now on RAD), 134, 6, Ordonnantie op 't makelaars ambt, 21 Sept. 1726.

<sup>15</sup> Advertisements for wine and timber auctions in Dordrecht, *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant*, 11 June 1722; 29 April 1723; *'s Gravenhaegse courant*, 18 April 1725; 27 May 1726. Online: Delpher.

<sup>16</sup> SR, 1 OSA, 2192, Dossier van het geschil tussen wijnkooplieden en makelaars, 1735.

<sup>17</sup> Mc Cusker J. and Gravesteyn C., *The Beginnings of Commercial and Financial Journalism*, Amsterdam, NEHA, 1991, p. 44, 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Middelburgsche courant*, 17 Dec. 1776. Online: Delpher.

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### **Formal representatives and troubleshooters**

In January 1750, the Dordrecht wine merchant Matthijs Marshal wrote to his Rotterdam broker, Pieter van Overzee, that he had received in good order, the six hogsheads of new Bergerac wine that the latter had

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shipped to him. He also asked him to buy some barrels of a red Bordeaux from the 1748 vintage, preferably of a *cru* that he had previously sampled, provided that the wine was “clean” and not too expensive. Finally, he enquired how his broker valued the latest “vin du Haut-Pays”. Had he already tasted these wines? Where they “good and sweet” and at what prices did they sell<sup>19</sup>? Pieter van Overzee was Marshal’s regular Rotterdam broker. Purchase orders and information on prices and on the quality of wines formed the main subjects of their correspondence.

Matthijs Marshal was born in Dordrecht in 1705. In spite of his English sounding last name, he was probably of German descent: he spoke and wrote German fluently and belonged to the Lutheran congregation. He learned the wine trade with his father<sup>20</sup>. Only one archival piece has survived for his enterprise, a messy copybook of outgoing correspondence for the period 1745 to 1762, also containing some copies of bills. Marshal was well-to-do: he owned several houses and warehouses in his hometown, and possessed a carriage and a country house near Wioldrecht, where he enjoyed spending the weekend. He belonged to “De Veertigen”, the council of representatives of the guilds that compiled the lists from which the Dordrecht aldermen and the town councilors were chosen<sup>21</sup>. By the end of his life, Marshal was appointed Dean of the wine merchants’ guild<sup>22</sup>.

As a “wijnkoper”, Marshal specialized in semi-retailing. However, like many of his Dordrecht colleagues, he also imported Rhine and Mosel wines on his own account. He had a stable network of suppliers in the German hinterland including merchants and producers from Trier, Trarbach, Bingen-am-Rhein, Mainz and Cologne (fig. 2). His German correspondents acted as commission agents, but he also regularly

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<sup>19</sup> The term “Vin du Haut-Pays” was used to refer to all wine from outside the city of Bordeaux jurisdiction. In Holland, this was mainly Bergerac, Cahors and Gaillac wine. RAD, 9 Gerecht van Dordrecht, 1390, Matthijs Marshal Letter copybook (from now on MML), Letter to Pieter van Overzee, Rotterdam, 20 Jan.1750.

<sup>20</sup> RAD, 3 Stadsarchieven, 3849, Auction sale of wine, 29 July 1700; 3850, Auction sales of brandy and wine, 16 Oct. 1700; 27 Dec. 1700; 12 and 17 May 1701.

<sup>21</sup> RAD, 32 Collectie van eigendomsapieren van huizen en landerijen, 32, 15-1, Akte van transport, 18 april 1769, f. 31; RAD, 9 Gerecht van Dordrecht, 1663, transportakte 27 okt. 1761, f. 130; Frijhoff W., *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht van 1572 tot 1813*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1996, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> RAD, 3 Stadsarchieven, 3520, Lijst houdende een opgave van de toegelaten wijnkopers [...] 1773.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

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**Fig. 2. Wine supply network of Matthijs Marshal, Dordrecht, 1745-1762**<sup>23</sup>



traveled to Germany to purchase wine on the spot. He imported a wide range of German wines: both “modest” Mosel from Wehlen, Bernkastel and Piesport, as well as Rhine wines from Rudesheim, Bodenheim and even the very best Hochheim, from the vineyards of the Dean of Mainz Cathedral<sup>24</sup>. He also dealt in French and Spanish wines, which he

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purchased from Rotterdam and Amsterdam wholesalers or at the brokers’ auction in his home town<sup>25</sup>.

Marshal’s clientele was composed of dozens of customers in Dordrecht and other Dutch towns as distant as Leeuwarden and Groningen<sup>26</sup>. Most of them belonged to the local elite, others were military officers. They usually ordered a basket containing 45 bottles (one *anker*) of wine once or several times a year. Marshal also occasionally supplied fellow wine

<sup>23</sup> RAD, 9 Gerecht van Dordrecht, 1390, Matthijs Marshal Letter copybook, 1745-1762.

<sup>24</sup> RAD, 1390 MML, Letters to Jean Georg Voith, Mainz, 15 Oct. 1745 and 9 Nov 1745.

<sup>25</sup> For instance: RAD, 3 Stadsarchieven, 3852, Brokers’ wine auctions, 22 Aug. 1723 and 22 Aug. 1727.

<sup>26</sup> RAD, 1390 MML, Letters to Jacoba Guerre, Leeuwarden, and Johannes Smith, Groningen, 20 Aug. 1746 and 27 June 1748.



Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

merchants in other cities of the United Provinces with German wine. In 1760, he even made an attempt to export Rhine and Frontignan wine to Batavia, but this proved unsuccessful<sup>27</sup>. The volume of his wine sales is only known for one year: from November 1745 to October 1746 they amounted to approximately 47 thousand liters.

Marshal mainly used brokers in two cases: when he sold Rhine or Mosel wines at the auction in his hometown and when he bought French or Spanish wine in Amsterdam or Rotterdam. As his dealings with Dordrecht brokers have proved to be difficult to document, we will concentrate on his metropolitan brokers.

Between 1745 and 1762, Marshal maintained exclusive and long-term relationships with one Rotterdam broker and one Amsterdam broker. The two men had very different backgrounds. Pieter van Overzee from Rotterdam belonged to a prosperous and influential brokers' clan. He had been active as a broker since at least 1723, but like his father, he focused initially on the timber trade<sup>28</sup>. He started to specialize in wine from the 1730s, probably as a consequence of his marriage, in 1733, to a daughter of Florens Eilbracht, one of the foremost Rotterdam wine brokers<sup>29</sup>. Van Overzee's career is interesting because it shows that in

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Holland a successful wine broker was not necessarily in the first place a wine expert.

Usually, Van Overzee bought batches of four to eight hogsheads of wine for Marshal. Before carrying out his assignment, the broker would send sample bottles of different producers and vintages. Sometimes, Marshal also traveled to Rotterdam himself (about 18 kilometers from Dordrecht) to taste wines in the company of his broker. It is noteworthy that Marshal even appealed to his metropolitan brokers when purchasing wine with importers he knew quite well himself. He seems to have hired his brokers not in the first place to reduce search costs, nor to enforce contracts. He essentially turned to them because they provided him with a "package" of services. They had barrels cleaned up if necessary, took care of payment and import taxes and also acted as shipping agents<sup>30</sup>.

From 1748 on, Marshal also employed an Amsterdam broker, Arent van Eldick<sup>31</sup>. At the time, Van Eldick, who seems to have established himself in Amsterdam around 1730, worked as an illicit broker. He only obtained a license in 1758 after a long career<sup>32</sup>. Initially, there was some confusion about his position, as Marshal's German correspondent had presented him as "an Amsterdam wine commissioner"<sup>33</sup>. However, Van Eldick charged a broker's fee and not a commission (a percentage) and acted in every respect as a broker<sup>34</sup>. This confusion is remarkable because it bears witness both to the proliferation of all sorts of middlemen in 18<sup>th</sup> century trade and to the blurring of boundaries between official and illicit brokerage. Young brokers often worked as illegal brokers before obtaining an office. Moreover, although strictly forbidden, official and illicit wine brokers regularly collaborated.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, Letters to Willem Welborn, Batavia, 28 March; 30 Oct. 1760 and 19 Sept. 1761.

<sup>28</sup> SR, 18 Notarissen Rotterdam, 3856 Gerrit Post, Report of a timber auction, 23 May 1684. Advertisements for timber auctions: *Amsterdamse courant*, 28 Sept. 1723 and 6 April 1726; Advertisements for wine auctions: 's *Gravenhaegse courant*, 23 June 1724; 5 May 1732; *Leydse courant*, 4 Feb. 1733 and 17 May 1734, Online: Delpher.

<sup>29</sup> SR, DTB 1-02, 73, Marriage certificate for Elisabeth Eilbracht and Pieter van Overzee, 22 Nov. 1733.

<sup>30</sup> RAD, 1390 MML, Letter to Pieter van Overzee, Rotterdam, 12 Feb. 1750.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, Letter to Arent van Eldick, Amsterdam, 21 Nov. 1749.

<sup>32</sup> *Lyste der naamen en woonplaatsen van de makelaars [...] der stad Amsterdam*, 1760, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> RAD, 1390 MML, Letter to Adolf Böcking, Trarbach, 18 Nov. 1749.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, Letter to Arent van Eldick, Amsterdam, 1 Sept. 1751.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

Attitudes towards illegal brokerage changed considerably in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Amsterdam city council had enacted many laws to counter this practice<sup>35</sup>. However, from the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, the

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brokers' guild filed fewer and fewer procedures against the so-called "beunhazen"<sup>36</sup>. At the same time, illegal brokers increasingly declared themselves as such in public. In 1742, on the occasion of the "personele quotisatie", a one-off tax on income and property, several well-to-do illicit wine brokers such as Wiggert Winter and Justus de Rolder even officially stated "beunhaas" as their profession<sup>37</sup>.

Marshal contacted Van Eldick with a special purpose: to get rid of an unsalable lot of wine, which he had exceptionally received as a commission from his correspondent Adolf Böcking from Trarbach in the Palatinate<sup>38</sup>. In September 1748, Böcking had sent Marshal about 30 pieces of old low-quality Mosel wine<sup>39</sup>. At the time of shipment, Marshal had expected a quick sale to the States army, which was stationed close to Dordrecht to fight the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). However, due to all kinds of setbacks, transport took more than two months and when the wine finally arrived in Holland, peace had been signed and most army units had been demobilized<sup>40</sup>.

Marshal then asked a Dordrecht broker to sell the wine at the local auction. The brokers' auction was often successfully used when a quick sale was required, for example because wine started to spoil, or because a merchant needed cash. However, this particular auction became an outright failure: although advertisements were published to announce the sale, not a single potential buyer from outside town showed up. The main part of the wine therefore went unsold and had to be stored again in Marshal's cellar.

A year later, after having incurred substantial costs, Marshal and Böcking at last decided to ship the wine to Amsterdam and charge Van Eldick with its sale<sup>41</sup>. The remaining barrels were sold to four Amsterdam wine merchants, including Jan Bols, a relative of the famous distiller

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Lucas Bols, whose company still survives today<sup>42</sup>. Prices were so low, that it seems likely that the wine was indeed only suitable for distillation.

Marshal's small brokers' network was thus characterized by sustainable personal relationships. His brokers had different backgrounds and may not have been knowledgeable wine experts. In addition to purchasing wine for him, they provided a wide range of other (paid) services, and can best be regarded as all-round metropolitan business agents. They also kept Marshal informed about prices and vintages, a role that appears even more clearly in the brokers' correspondence of the Middelburg wine merchants Van der Poest and Clement.

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<sup>35</sup> Stuart T., *De Amsterdamsche makelaardij. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis onzer handelswetgeving*, Amsterdam, Spin en zoon, 1873, p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> SA, 366 Guilds, 1289, Register van de bijloopers, 1682-1723.

<sup>37</sup> Oldewelt W., *Kohier van de Personeele quotisatie te Amsterdam over het jaar 1742*, Amsterdam, Genootschap Amstelodamum, 1945, II, p. 251, 267.

<sup>38</sup> RAD, 1390 MML, Letter to Arent van Eldick, Amsterdam, 21 Nov. 1749.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, Letter to Adolf Böcking, Trarbach, 17 Sept 1748.

<sup>40</sup> War ended on 18 October 1748 with the signing of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. RAD, 1390 MML, Letters to Adolf Böcking, Trarbach, 22 and 26 Nov. ; 6 Dec. 1748.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, Letter to Adolf Böcking, Trarbach, 21 and 27 Nov. 1749 ; Letter to Arent van Eldick, Amsterdam, 27 Nov. 1749.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, Letters to Arent van Eldick, Amsterdam, 5 and 12 Feb. 1750.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

### Information from the brokers' auction

In the third quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Andries van der Poest was a considerable Middelburg wine merchant<sup>43</sup>. He had started out in business with his father-in-law and established his own company around 1750<sup>44</sup>. Elected Dean of the wine merchants' guild shortly thereafter, he also held various offices<sup>45</sup>. He was related to the "French" families of Middelburg and for a long time, he was an Elder in the Walloon church<sup>46</sup>.

Around 1775 -possibly to secure his old age-, Van der Poest hired Johan Clement as a bookkeeper. The young Clement had studied law

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and in addition to being a wine merchant, he also worked as a lawyer. In 1781, Clement became a partner in the company. After the death of Van der Poest in 1783, Clement continued the firm with his widow. Deeply involved in the revolutionary patriot movement, the wine trade however soon became secondary among his activities<sup>47</sup>.

Van der Poest and Clement traded in all sorts of wine, but mostly in French wines from Bordeaux, Bergerac and (from the late 1760's onward) Languedoc. Like Marshal, they were not only involved in distribution, but also imported wines themselves. Over the period 1766-1793, they had suppliers in Nantes, Bordeaux, Bayonne, Marseille, Sète and Toulon (fig. 3). They purchased German wine, Champagne and Burgundy from colleagues from Liège, Namur, Maastricht and Dordrecht. However, sometimes they also ordered wines from trading houses in Reims and Beaune and occasionally, they imported from Cologne, Frankfurt-am-Main, Düsseldorf and Mainz. In peak years, the volume of their imports was up to about 25.000 liters of wine, which was substantial for a semi-retailer, but modest when compared to wholesalers.

Van der Poest and Clement had a diverse clientele. Customers in Middelburg were numerous, but remain largely invisible in the outgoing correspondence. Letters occasionally mention them though, as in 1791, when Clement wrote to a Rotterdam supplier that he needed wine must for Middelburg innkeepers and operators of music halls for the production of *piquette*, as their clients wanted to drink white wine but could not pay much for it<sup>48</sup>. They also supplied the local Chamber of the East India Company with wine. Outside of Middelburg, customers mostly belonged to the Zeeland and Holland urban elite. Just like Marshal, they also had clients in distant cities, such as Arnhem and Maastricht and in the Austrian

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<sup>43</sup> The outgoing correspondence and excerpts from accounts have been preserved for this company for the period 1766-1803 including letters to brokers for 1766 to 1793.

<sup>44</sup> Extract uit de resolutien ten raade der stad Middelburg in Zeeland, 22 Sept. 1753, in *Ordonnantie voor de aanslagers van de kraan binnen Middelburg*, Middelburg, 1780, p. 77-80. ZA, 87, Verzameling Verheye van Citters, 1111-1824, 12d, Stukken rakende imposten op bier, wijn, brandewijn, azijn [...], Request aan de Staten, van Jan Wybo, met apostille van 27 April 1733. BHIC, 5122.152 Index schepenprotocol Schijndel, 20, 37, Machtiging door Willem Roessing door Jan Wybo burger en koopman te Middelburg, 17 Feb. 1723; Verklaring van Antony van Turnhout inwoner van de stad Helmond, 14 Feb. 1726.

<sup>45</sup> *Naamwyzer, aantonende alle de namen en woonplaatsen van de Edele achtbare magistrat der stad Middelburg in Zeeland. Verder alle de hooge en aanzienlijke amptenaren [...]*, Middelburg, Callenfels et Taillefert, 1743, vol. 1, p. 4; 1758, vol. 8, p. 27, 1763, vol. 9, p. 23, 106. *Middelburgsche courant*, 7 Feb. 1769. RAZ, 483 J.C.

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*, 1743, vol. 1, p. 42; 1743; *Idem*, 1747, vol. 4, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> Augustinus van Cauwenberg, J. de, *Omstandig verhaal van het voorgevallene te Middelburg in Zeeland, bij gelegenheid der revolutie in den jaare 1787*, s.n., 1796, p. 102, 103.

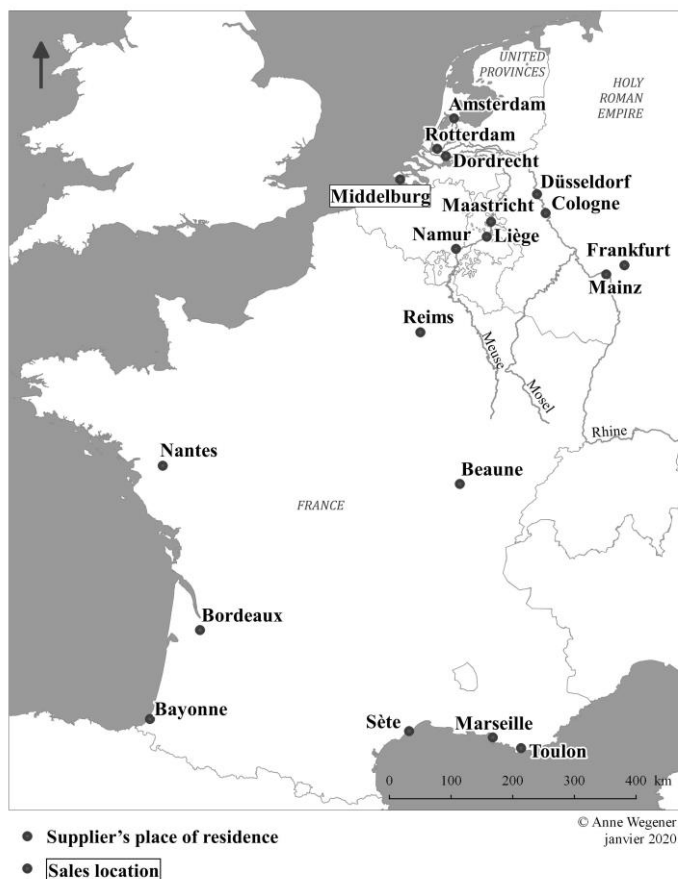
<sup>48</sup> ZA, 483 J.C. Clement, Letter copybook (from now on JCCL), 85, Letter to Cornelis van der Kun and son, Rotterdam, 13 March 1791.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

Netherlands<sup>49</sup>. Occasionally, they even exported French wine to Batavia and Demerara (nowadays Guyana)<sup>50</sup>.

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**Fig. 3. Wine supply network of Van der Poest (& Clement), Middelburg, 1766-1793<sup>51</sup>**



Despite their impressive international network, Van der Poest and Clement also regularly bought wine from Rotterdam and Amsterdam wholesalers. Depending on the political circumstances and the quality of the vintage, this may have involved about half of their annual purchases. Like Marshal, they entrusted their purchase orders in Holland to a small number of regular brokers.

Between 1766 and 1793, the Middelburg merchants subsequently employed three Rotterdam brokers and one broker in Amsterdam (table 1)<sup>52</sup>. Business with Jan van Raalt from Rotterdam remained

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, Letters to la Veuve Hardy, Maastricht, 10 Oct. 1791 and 28 Oct. 1792.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, Letters to Caspar Schlebusch, Cologne, 9 Dec. 1791 ; Letters to J.F. Boode, Rio Demerara, 30 Oct. 1786 and 15 Dec. 1791.

<sup>51</sup> ZA, 483 J.C. Clement, Letter copybooks, 81-85, 1766-1803.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, 81-85, 1766-1793.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

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**Table 1. Wine brokers hired by Van der Poest and Clement, 1766-1793**

Name	Address	
Jan van Raalt	Rotterdam	(at least) 1766-1770
Gerard Verboom	Rotterdam	1771-1775
Jacobus van Overzee	Rotterdam	1775-1789 and 1793
Jan Rademaker	Amsterdam	1768-1778

ZA, 483 J.C. Clement, Letter copybooks, 81-85, 1766-1803.

occasional<sup>53</sup>. Van Raalt practiced as a broker for nearly thirty years until his death in 1785<sup>54</sup>. Throughout his life, he collaborated intensively with his brother Nicolaas, a wine merchant who lived near him at Wijnhaven<sup>55</sup>. Cooperation between brokers and relatives who were wine merchants or wholesalers was common and allowed brokers to circumvent the strict regulations that forbade private trade to brokers.

Van der Poest regularly hired Gerard Verboom from 1771 to 1775. Their relationship was often tense, the merchant needing to remind his broker repeatedly, that his letters had remained unanswered or that he was late in executing his modest purchase orders<sup>56</sup>. In the 1760s to 1780s, Verboom regularly sold huge quantities of wine at the Rotterdam auction, up to two hundred casks at a time, on behalf of the main “French” wine importers of Rotterdam, such as Jouhanneau, Laregnère and Cornelis Balguerie<sup>57</sup>. It seems that Verboom largely focused on the Rotterdam bulk trade at the expense of provincial wine merchants such as Van der Poest.

A serious crisis of confidence arose in 1773, on the occasion of a purchase order of six hogsheads of five year-old red Cahors wine, for which the choice had been based on test bottles that Verboom had sent to Middelburg. On delivery, the wine turned out to be totally different than

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the sample. Van der Poest hence blamed his broker, for not having tasted the wine himself, supposing that he certainly would have noticed that at least half of it was of the latest vintage, and not even from Cahors<sup>58</sup>! In accordance with breach of contract law, Van der Poest then sent the wine back to Rotterdam at the broker’s expense. This affair shows that wine brokers were not always as sincere and committed as they had promised when taking the oath.

Between 1775 and 1793, Van der Poest and Clement employed Jacobus van Overzee as a broker, a son of Pieter van Overzee, who had worked for Marshal some twenty years earlier. In the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, brokers’ dynasties seem to have become increasingly widespread<sup>59</sup>. Van der Poest used this broker as a matchmaker, as an informant and as a

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, 82, Letter to Jan van Raalt, 10 Dec. 1766.

<sup>54</sup> Advertisements for wine auctions, *Leydse courant*, 23 July 1755; *Rotterdamse courant*, 27 oct. 1785. Online: Delpher.

<sup>55</sup> SR, DTB 1-02, 25, 26, 32, Christening of Jan van Raalt, 2 March, 1732; Christening of Nicolaas van Raalt, 19 Sept. 1734; Christening of Jacobus Adrianus van Raalt, 3 Oct. 1764. Ad for a wine auction, *Rotterdamse courant*, 7 April 1796. Online: Delpher.

<sup>56</sup> ZA, 483 JCCL, 83, Letter to Cornelis van der Kun, Rotterdam, 11 April 1775.

<sup>57</sup> Advertisements for wine auctions, *Leydse courant*, 26 Oct. 1767; 21 Feb. 1783; 23 Nov. 1785.

<sup>58</sup> ZA, 483 JCCL, 83, Letters to Gerard Verboom, Rotterdam, 17 Jan. 1773 and 27 Feb. 1773.

<sup>59</sup> For 52 Amsterdam wine brokers appointed in the period 1698-1791, I have been able to trace the father’s profession. 14 were sons of wine merchants; 9 were sons of wholesalers or “commissioners” and 20 were brokers’ sons. Stads Archief Amsterdam (from now on SA), 5033 Burgemeesters, Civil deeds, 4-29.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

networker asking him for instance to put him into contact with “a good house in Mannheim”<sup>60</sup>.

Until 1778, Jan Rademaker from Amsterdam was the broker with whom Van der Poest corresponded most. Rademaker was the son of a painter, but there had been several brokers in his family<sup>61</sup>. By the time he dealt with the Middelburg firm, he had become one of Amsterdam’s most active wine brokers. In the printed *Directory of Brokers*, he systematically indicated wine brokerage as his specialization<sup>62</sup>. However, throughout his career, he was also involved in other trades and brokered for instance at auctions of ships and real estate<sup>63</sup>. While some successful wine brokers specialized, others on the contrary seem to have prospered thanks to diversification.

Van der Poest mainly ordered Spanish and rare French wines from Rademaker. This involved, for instance, Benicarlo used for adding color

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and tannin to French wines, Rota “tint” imported from Cadix, fortified “sack” wines from Malaga and the Canary Islands, sweet white wines of the Pedro Ximénez grape variety and red Burgundy from Macon<sup>64</sup>. Spanish wines were seldom directly imported to the small harbor of Middelburg but were sought after by the Zealand Chamber of the VOC, for the Company’s ship victuals and for the wine supplies of the trading posts in the East Indies<sup>65</sup>.

Just like Marshal’s brokers, Rademaker performed diverse tasks, but he seems to have been more of a “connoisseur”. On several occasions, he carried out wine assessments, as in 1777, when he expertized a batch of damaged Côteaux nantais Muscadet wines that had been recently unloaded from a ship involved in an accident at sea. Van der Poest needed the evaluation to decide whether he should sell the wine at auction in Amsterdam, or if it was worth having it shipped to Middelburg<sup>66</sup>.

The exchange of information about wine tastings, prices and other merchants’ dealings played a central role in the correspondence with Rademaker. Letters were often detailed, mentioning producer brands and parishes for wine producing regions in France (Médoc, Graves, Bergerac, Béarn). The Middelburg merchants gathered most of their information at the local brokers’ auction. In 1769, Van der Poest informed Rademaker for instance: “Yesterday evening the La Guere brand from Bordeaux was sold at the auction for 30 Flemish pounds. The wine was pretty good for this vintage. As for the Bordeaux red wines, the Médoc of the parish of St Estèphe satisfies me most<sup>67</sup>”. Van der Poest regularly tasted wines for sale at the auctions for other merchants, as wine brokers usually organized public tastings on the eve of the sale. On this occasion, he took notes, indicating types of wine, producer brands, names of sellers and buyers and quality appreciations.

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<sup>60</sup> ZA, 483 JCCL, 83, Letters to Jacobus van Overzee, Rotterdam, 24 Jan. 1778; 24 May 1779.

<sup>61</sup> SA, 5033 Burgemeesters, Civil deeds for Dirk Rademaker and Jan Rademaker 4, 8 Feb. 1676, p. 149; 19, 7 Nov. 1741, p. 766.

<sup>62</sup> *Lyste der naamen en woonplaatsen van de makelaars [...] der stad Amsterdam*, 1765, p. 10; 1773, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> *De Maandelykse Nederlandsche Mercurius*, nr. 1, 4 Oct. 1756, p. 148, 149; nr. 9, 15 Dec. 1760, p. 234; nr. 27, 4 Sept. and 16 Oct. 1769, p. 117, 172, 174.

<sup>64</sup> ZA, 483 JCCL, 82 et 83, Letters to Jan Rademaker, Amsterdam, 18 July 1768; 22 Dec. 1769 ; 31 March 1770 and 20 Feb. 1775.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, Letters to Jan Rademaker, Amsterdam, 11 April 1770; 16 April 1773; 23 April 1773; 5 Oct. 1774.

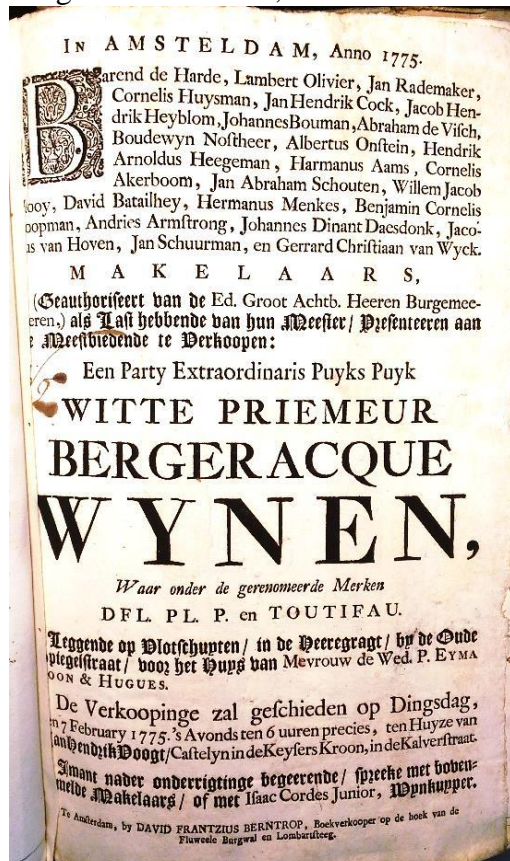
<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, Letter to Jan Rademaker, Amsterdam, 21 Sept. 1777.

<sup>67</sup> “Gisteren avond is van de Bordeaux van ‘t merk van La Guere tot L30 int bekken verkogt. Dezelve was nogal redelijk na ’t gewas. De roode Bordeaux vinde integendeel nog het beste te voldoen principaal de Medocq en daar uyt van de parochie van St Estephe”. ZA, 483 JCCL, 81, Letter to Jan Rademaker, Amsterdam, 13 Jan. 1769.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

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Fig. 4. Advertisement for a sale at the Amsterdam brokers' auction of a batch of new Bergerac white wine, 1775



In Amsterdam, in the year 1775.  
 Barend de Harde, Lambert Olivier, Jan Rademaker and  
 twenty other  
**BROKERS,**  
 With permission of the honorable gentlemen mayors, as  
 representatives their master, intend to sell to the highest  
 bidder:  
 A lot of excellent extraordinary  
**WHITE BERGERAC**  
**PRIMEUR WINE**  
 including the renowned brands  
 DFL. PL. P. and Toutifau.  
 Displayed on barges at Heerengragt close to Oude  
 Spiegelstraat in front of the house of the Widow P.  
 Eyma son & Hugues.  
 The sale will take place on Tuesday, 7 February 1775, at  
 6 p.m. precisely, at the house of Jan Hendrik Voogt,  
 publican at the Keizerskroon in Kalverstraat.  
 Anyone who requires further information, should  
 address the aforementioned brokers or Isaac Cordes,  
 wine cooper.

Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 5069 Burgemeesters, Register van verkopeningen door makelaars, 73, 7 Feb. 1775.

Prior to the auctions, wine brokers typically placed advertisements in newspapers and had posters printed to announce the sale (figure 4). Through these ads, which mentioned factual as well as subjective information, wine knowledge also reached a larger number of people.

However, the brokers' auction was not a transparent market. Brokers shared private information with befriended clients and frequently colluded. In 1735, for example, Marshal's Rotterdam broker, Pieter van Overzee and his father-in-law Florens Eilbracht were involved in a major scandal. They were accused of forming a bidding ring to keep prices low. Evidence brought against them was blatant, but they were maintained in office, as they had strong personal ties with members of the urban government<sup>68</sup>. Wine brokers and their auctions were indeed not just cost saving and trade facilitating devices.

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Official and illicit wine brokers occupied an important place in 18<sup>th</sup>-century wine distribution in the United Provinces. Wine brokers were employed by wholesalers who were often of foreign origin and who were not allowed to sell in semi-retail for fiscal reasons.

<sup>68</sup> SR, 1 OSA, 2192, Dossier van het geschil tussen wijnkooplieden en makelaars, 1735.

Dans: Stéphanie Lachaud-Martin, Corinne Marache, Julie McIntyre, Mikaël Pierre (Eds.), *Wine, Networks and Scales. Intermediation in the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Wine*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2021, p. 95-114.

Specialized wine merchants also often hired brokers. Close investigation into the affairs of two of these semi-retailers, Matthijs Marshal from Dordrecht and Van der Poest & Clement from Middelburg, reveals that wine brokers commonly acted as their general metropolitan business agents. They were at the same time informants, consultants, problem solvers, network builders, legal representatives and matchmakers.

Many Amsterdam and Rotterdam wine brokers no doubt got only a small part of their income from the modest fee they received for their mediation between individual sellers and buyers. They also earned from the organization of auctions, the storage and handling of wines and from their mediation in insurance and payments and they combined wine brokerage with other (trade) activities.

Unlike their colleagues in wine producing countries, Dutch wine brokers were not always wine experts. Some of them were more specialized than others, depending on their training and on the possibility of collaboration with relatives involved in the wine trade. The degree of specialization also differed from one city to another, urban regulation explaining for example the absence of specialized wine brokers in Dordrecht.

Dutch wine brokers constituted an exceptionally heterogeneous group. They had different social backgrounds, though many came from families involved in wine trade or in brokerage. The scale of their activities varied greatly. Some brokers mainly worked for wholesalers while others chiefly carried out purchase orders for semi-retailers.

The brokers' auctions largely contributed to the supply of information on prices, the quality of wines and the activity in trade. The brokers' privilege regarding the organization of commercial auctions also allowed them to control part of the market. The study of wine brokers' correspondence indeed reveals that practice was sometimes at odds with the model of the neutral mediator in charge of a public service under the supervision of local authorities that emerges from ordinances. For most brokers, however, sincerity and loyalty to their clients were the guiding principles in their business and this undoubtedly largely explains the sustainability of their relationships.