



Roles on Board Merchant Ships during the Seventeenth Century

European Research Council

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| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
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| Capitano | <p>In Venice this was exclusively a military title, reserved for patricians (members of the Major Council). So during the early modern period we do not find <i>capitani</i> on board Venetian commercial vessels.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, the term <i>kapitein</i> was used on military vessels. On mercantile ships, the ‘lord of the ship’ was called the <i>schipper</i> (skipper), although – like in France – he could take on the title of <i>kapitein</i> if he was in command of a large ship.</p> <p>The role of captain as commander, legal superior and chief navigation officer only appears in England in the 1580s; it was particularly claimed by privateers, although sometimes by merchant commanders. In the Royal Navy, the term corresponded to the Venetian as a military role, with ‘master mariners’ to take care of the actual navigation. So the translation</p> | Kapitein | Captain | Capitaine |

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| | <p>is correct for the 16th century, but not in the 21st century understanding of captain.</p> <p>During the 17th century in France, especially on the Atlantic seaboard, <i>capitaines</i> slowly replaced masters on bigger commercial vessels.</p> | | | |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Patron | <p>What was known as <i>patron</i> in early modern Venice could be both the ‘master’ and the ‘owner’, although from the 15th century it appears to have been used only for owners who were also masters. Usually the owner – if he was not working on board – was called the <i>parcenevole</i> (see below). In Genoa, even for the early modern period the term should refer to the owner, but in the documents it frequently appears as being the master on board ship. We know that the two positions – master and owner – regularly overlapped during these centuries. If in Genoa the term was really used only to describe owners we would have a unique situation in which the owner was always on board, so it is legitimate to assume that, like in Venice, <i>patron</i> was also used for masters.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, a ship owner was named a <i>reder</i>. The term <i>meester</i> only occurred in freight contracts when the</p> | Meester | Master | Patron (Mediterranean) Maitre (Atlantic) |

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| | <p>skipper was also (part-)owner of his ship, in expressions such as: ‘skipper and master next to God of his ship named...’</p> <p>In England and France, the <i>patron</i> or master was not necessarily owner of the vessel, and it is worth noting the different French terms used in Mediterranean and Atlantic shipping.</p> | | | |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Scrivano | <p>In Genoa and Venice he was in charge of the administrative and financial running of the ship. He took care of the books, and this is the only role that was given only to properly literate individuals. On Italian ships he acted as public notary on board.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, the <i>schrijver</i> was the person responsible for all that related to writing. He was a bookkeeper, and he took care of the ship’s journal, the muster rolls and all other registers.</p> <p>On English ships, there was no directly comparable officer; the ‘purser’ was responsible for the ship’s finances, and might also combine the role of ‘supercargo’ (see below). In reality, many ships did not have pursers, and the master (and sometimes mate or boatswain) was responsible for finances and cargo. There appears to have been a good deal of flexibility, depending on the exact</p> | Schrijver | [Purser] | Écrivain |

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| | <p>relationships between master, owners and merchants of any particular ship.</p> <p>In France <i>écrivain</i> was an official professional role. They were active in both civil and military vessels, and worked both at sea or ashore in ports (and arsenals) where they acted as bookkeepers and notaries.</p> | | | |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Masser | <p>In Venice he was responsible for the part of the cargo belonging to the ship, such as victuals and provisions including ropes, wood and miscellaneous material necessary for repairs. He worked closely with the <i>scrivano</i>, and there is reason to believe that in some (smaller) ships the two roles – <i>masser</i> and <i>scrivano</i> – were covered by one individual.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, there was no directly comparable officer. The cook or steward (<i>bottelier</i>) took care of victuals, the constable of armament, the carpenter of wood and sails, the <i>schiemman</i> of ropes and the <i>seijlmaker</i> took care of sails.</p> <p>Similarly, on English ships, there was no directly comparable role; individual officers took responsibility – the cook for victuals, the carpenter for wood and repair materials, the boatswain for ropes and sails.</p> | | | Dépensier or cambusier |

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| | <p>In France we find two terms for this role: <i>dépensier</i> or <i>cambusier</i>, the latter derives from the fact that he lived in the <i>cambuse</i> (front part of the ship) where food provisions were kept.</p> | | | |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Nochier | <p>In Italy he was in charge of the crew during navigation. In today's usage the word is synonymous with pilot, whilst in seventeenth century documents he appears to be always distinct from it.</p> <p>In commercial vessels from the United Provinces, the <i>hoogbootsman</i> (alternatively written <i>hoochbootsman</i>), sometimes also abbreviated as <i>bootsman</i>, was the leader of the crew. On military vessels he was the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer. He was also responsible for the sail on the mainmast; he could have a mate, responsible for surveying the stern. <i>Bootsmansgasten</i> were sailors who came directly under the <i>bootsman</i> and ate with him at the same table, but this function was less present, if at all, on the mercantile fleet.</p> <p>In England the boatswain was responsible for supervising the mariners as they worked, and for disciplining them. He was also in charge of the 'boatswain's stores', comprising the rigging and sails, and</p> | <p>Hoogbootsman Hoochbootsman Bootsman</p> | <p>Boatswain</p> | <p>Nocher (Mediterranean) Contre-maître (Atlantic)</p> |

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| | <p>sometimes supervised and recorded stowage of goods, with occasional references to a 'boatswain's book'. However, masters and master's mates also sometimes disciplined sailors and took charge of cargo, so the exact role would vary from ship to ship.</p> <p>In France he was the highest rank among the sailors, answered only to the master, and gave instructions to the crew on rigging, sails and ropes.</p> | | | |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Pedota/Pilota | <p>The pilot was the one which actually navigated the ship. Today's term would be 'helmsman'.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, the <i>stuurman</i> was the person with knowledge of navigation, in charge of the helm and steering the ship. Sometimes, there was also a <i>piloot</i> or <i>loodsman</i> on board. He had to test the depth of the water, using a plummet, which meant he was in charge of guiding the ship out of ports and into the sea, or out or onto river mouths.</p> <p>English ships did not always carry pilots; sometimes they employed pilots only for specific parts of the voyage, especially entering or leaving a port. It is not entirely clear what 'quartermaster' meant in the seventeenth century, but in later times</p> | <p>Stuurman (Stuurman) Piloot Loodsman</p> | <p>Pilot Quartermaster</p> | <p>Pilote</p> |

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| | <p>they were more experienced sailors, capable of taking the helm (but not of navigating themselves).</p> <p>In France the pilot took orders from the captain or master. Local pilots could be hired to enter foreign ports.</p> | | | |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Patron de barca/ paron | <p>In Italy he was in charge of the small boat – <i>barca</i> or <i>cymba</i> frequently in the documents, but could also be a small <i>frigate</i> – that trailed behind the vessel. This was used to go to and from land, to reach harbour or to get water, and was usually the first thing which was let go in case of heavy storm. The French terms are comparable.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, the <i>kwartiermeesters</i> were in charge of those small boats.</p> <p>On English ships, the ship’s boat was often called a ‘cockboat’ or ‘coxboat’, hence ‘coxwain’; not present on all ships.</p> | Kwartiermeesters | Coxwain | Maître or Patron de Bateau / Batelier |
| Marangon | <p>In modern Italian the corresponding term is <i>maestro d’ascia</i>. He was in charge of carpentry repairs on board, and frequently had an assistant (<i>marangoneto</i>).</p> <p>In Dutch the <i>scheepstimmerman</i>, and in English the carpenter, was the craftsman who builds and repairs ships. It was a</p> | Scheepstimmerman | Shipcarpenter Carpenter Shipwright | Maître d’hache (Mediterranean) Charpentier de navire (Atlantic) |

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| | <p>craft, and he could work ashore, independent or for an employer, or he could be part of the crew, in which case he could also have a mate or assistant. In Dutch the person making masts was called a <i>mastenmaker</i>.</p> <p>In France the term seems to be replaced by <i>charpentier de navire</i> in the 17th century.</p> | | | |
| Marangoneto | The assistant of the <i>marangon</i> . | Ondertimmerman Scheepstimmermansmaat | Carpenter's mate | Aide charpentier |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Penese/pennese | <p>In Italy he was in charge of the correct and safe loading of the cargo on board. His responsibilities must have been only operational, as we have never encountered one of them being sued for having stored cargo badly, while masters appear to have been sued for this reason.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, the <i>kommis</i> was in charge of the loading of the cargo on board. This role seems not to have always been present, and the word in itself is only rarely used. The person in charge of the merchandise on behalf of the freighter is often named as such, without a specific term being assigned to him.</p> <p>In English ships, this role was fulfilled either by the master, his mates, or the boatswain.</p> | Kommis Commis | | |

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| | <p>In France it seems that port workers were in charge of loading ships with the help of the sailors and controlled by the scribe and captain/master.</p> | | | |
| Bombardier | <p>In Italy the bombardier was part of the crew, and was paid by the captain/master.</p> <p>In the United Provinces the <i>constabel</i> (or <i>konstabel</i>) was the overseer of the armament, while not necessarily firing it himself. Seamen specifically designed to fire the guns were called <i>Busschieters</i>.</p> <p>The roles of gunner in English and <i>cannonier</i> in French were comparable to the Italian <i>bombardier</i>.</p> | Busschieters | Gunner | Canonier |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Cuogo/scalco | <p>He cooked for everyone on board, although usually officers and crew ate different food and in a separate space.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, the cook was the one who prepared the meals. There could also be a <i>bottelier</i> (steward), responsible for the bottles, and thus the drinks. The latter sometimes managed the food supply as well, and handed over the food to the cook.</p> <p>In England, the cook performed the same role, while in France the <i>cuisinier</i> seems to</p> | Kok | Cook | Cuisinier |

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| | have enjoyed a higher status than seamen. | | | |
| Marinari/ Marineri/ Uomini | <p>This is the term by which ‘able seamen’ were usually referred to in Italian sources. They were paid more than <i>fanti</i> (see below) and were usually ‘career’ seamen.</p> <p>In Dutch freight contracts, crew members are often labelled as ‘good men’. The most common terminologies are <i>bootsgezel</i>, <i>matroos</i> and <i>varensgezel</i>. The <i>(hooch)bootsman</i> was in charge of them. On occasions the high number of ‘bootsmannen’ present make it clear that this term <i>could</i> also refer to ordinary seamen, although this is technically incorrect.</p> <p>English terminology in this period is not very precise, and although there were undoubtedly seamen of different experience and status, these terms appear to be interchangeable.</p> <p>In France, different words were used in the Mediterranean and Atlantic.</p> | Bootsgezel – Bootsgezellen Matroos – Matrozen Zeeman – Zeelui, Zeelieden Varensgezel – Varensgezellen (Bootsman – Bootsmannen) | Seamen Mariners ‘Common seamen’ ‘Common men’ ‘Foremast men’ | Marinier (?Mediterranean) Marin (Atlantic) Matelot (Atlantic) |
| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
| Fanti | <p>In Venice this was the lower level of seamen, below <i>marinari</i> and above <i>mozzi</i>.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, a role existed between common seaman and ship’s boy, the so-called <i>putger</i>. It’s possible its</p> | Putger | | Fadarinier (Mediterranean) |

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| | <p>origins lie in the handling of the ship's pumps. Its lower status is sometimes also reflected in the 1740 definition of 'he who does the dirtiest work on board'. The word possibly comes from <i>puts</i>, a wooden bucket, referring to duties of cleaning the ship.</p> <p>In France, in the Mediterranean shipping, we find the <i>fadarinier</i> was the lowest sailor aboard, but he was older than the 'boys'.</p> | | | |
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Roles which appear to be exclusive to navies:

| ITALIAN | WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID ON BOARD | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
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| <p>Barbier</p> | <p>In Italy this role appears only on navy ships.</p> <p>In the United Provinces, there could be an upper surgeon (<i>opper barbier</i>) and a lower one (<i>onder barbier</i>). Difference with a so-called <i>chirurgijn</i> is that both professions were grouped in different guilds.</p> <p>In England surgeons were employed on naval ships and on some long commercial voyages.</p> <p>In France these roles never appeared on small vessels, which instead carried a surgeon's chest. However, having one on</p> | <p>Berbier Barbier Chirurgijn</p> | <p>Surgeon Chirurgion</p> | <p>Barbier Chirurgien</p> |

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| | board became an obligation in bigger vessels during the seventeenth century. | | | |
| Trombetta | Some crews counted a trumpeter amidst their ranks, he probably had to encourage crews in fights and signal to other ships, and his playing could give commands more volume. Frequently the position was given to a boy. | Trompetter | Trumpeter | Trompette |
| | <p>In the United Provinces, this role was preserved for boys, their age range could go between 13 and 16, and at times also served as learning post for aspiring officers. Even future navy officers could take on a position of ‘cabin watcher’ on mercantile vessels sailing to Surinam or the Mediterranean. He was to attend to those in the cabin, meaning the officers and more specifically, the captain or skipper.</p> <p>In England, this was not necessarily an officially recognised role, but there are numerous references to the ‘master’s boy’ or ‘ship’s boy’, presumably filling a similar position.</p> | Kajuitwachter (Kajuitwachter) | Cabin boy | Valet, Servant |
| | <p>In the United Provinces, this was the youngest of the non-commissioned officers, and in charge of a sloop.</p> <p>In English, ‘quartermaster’ was a term used on both commercial and naval vessels (see above), but does not seem</p> | Kwartiermeester | | Quartier maître |

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| | comparable to the Dutch and French term. | | | |
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Not part of the crew, but also working on board commercial ships, we also find:

| ITALIAN | What he actually did on board | DUTCH | ENGLISH | FRENCH |
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| Sopracarico | <p>The merchants' agent on board. He could also be the freight agent, and was responsible to take decisions about what to load and what to pay for it. He was also involved in decisions about navigation and routes, and sometimes provided credit for the master. He was on the payroll of the merchant/s.</p> <p>In Dutch, this term was not used much. Generally, freight contracts mentioned 'a man goes with on behalf of the freighter'. The freighter himself could be called 'bevrachter' or 'cargadoor'.</p> | Supercargo | Supercargo Cape merchant | Subrecargue |
| Parcenevole | In early modern Venice he was the owner (or part-owner) of a vessel. The ensemble of ship owners in Dutch were called <i>reders</i> . | Reder | Ship owner | Participant Propriétaire de part |

SHIP TYPES

| ITALIAN | ENGLISH | DUTCH | FRENCH |
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| vascello | vessel | vaartuig | vaisseau |
| nave | ship | schip | navire |
| galeone | galleon | galjoen | galion |
| galera | galley | galei | galère |
| barca / cymba | bark, barque | bark, bargje | barque |
| tartana | | tartaan | tartane |

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| felucca | | feloek | felouque |
| battello | boat | boot | bateau |
| polacca | | polakker | polacre |

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