

► CHRISTINE OVERGAARD

# The Survival of the Dutch Cod Fishery

## The Benefits of a Family Business

The National Archive in The Hague holds historical records relating to Dutch cod fishery. The records begin in 1818, as earlier records were lost during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> This article is not concerned with the survival of records in world wars. Rather, on the basis of material that does still exist, it considers the survival of Dutch cod fishery during the first half of the nineteenth century. Dutch cod fishing developed in three different regions: the North Sea, the seas near Iceland and the waters along the Dutch coast. This article deals with the biggest of the three, the North Sea cod fishery. It was a seasonal business taking place from December to April, and often it was combined with other seasonal fishing, like herring fishing from June to October.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, North Sea cod fishery was “registered” in towns along the river Maas, Rotterdam being the closest city.<sup>2</sup> A twenty-year period of war and occupation by the French had just ended. The fishermen had lost vessels, and sea fishing was difficult for them. In 1818 they applied to King William for financial support, giving a detailed account of the fishing conditions. They convinced the king of their need for support, but he set certain criteria, one of them being that the fishermen must salt at least half of the cod in barrels. When they put out to sea, the fishermen kept bait for the long line hooks alive in a basin, and on their way back they kept some cod alive in the same basin to sell fresh.<sup>3</sup> The fishermen of Vlaardingen used a “hoeker” vessel, fishing for cod as well as for herring.<sup>4</sup> Several companies had more than one vessel fishing for cod each season. Sometimes they went after cod and her-

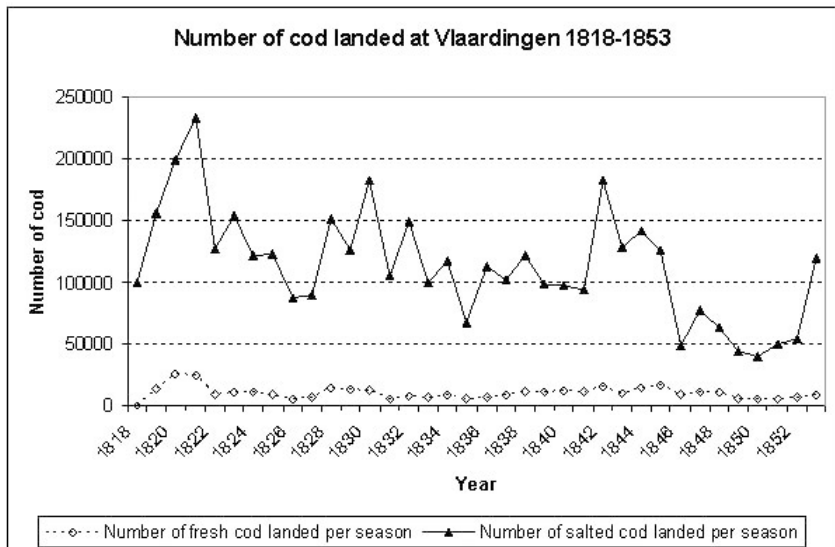


Fig. 1.

ring in the same year, sometimes after herring one year and cod the next.<sup>5</sup> The optional nature of this business makes it worth taking a closer look at the fishermen’s preferences.

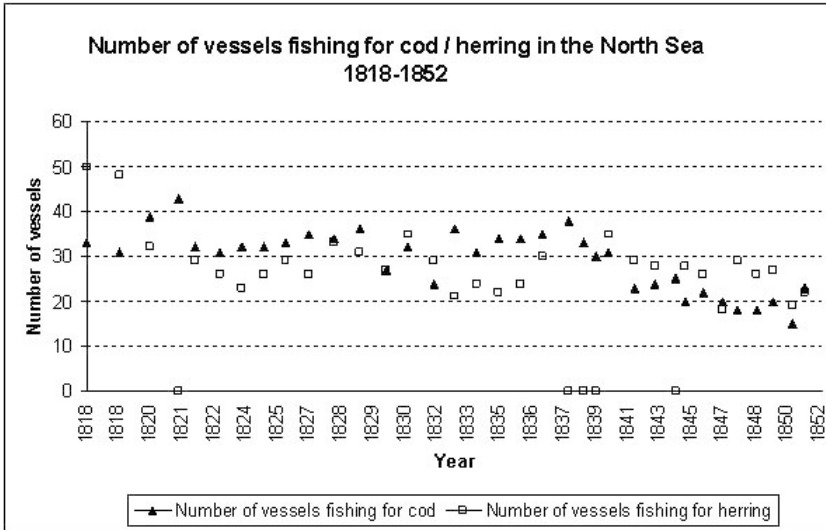


Fig. 2.

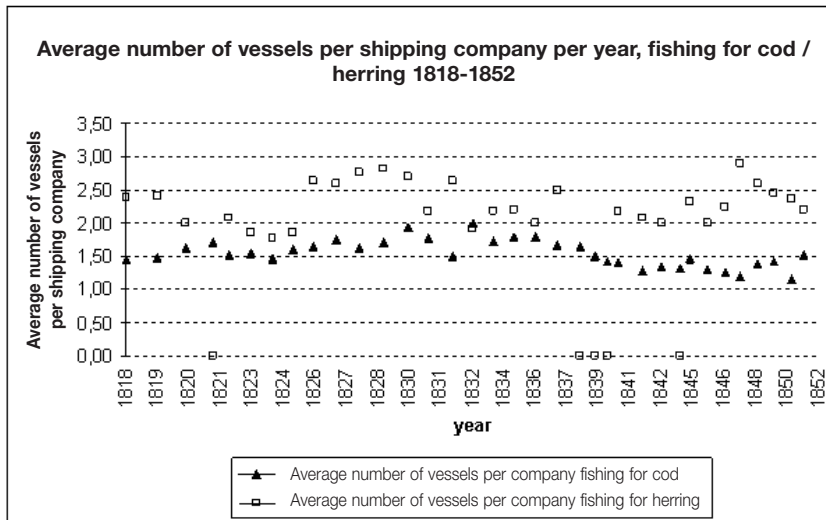


Fig. 3.

A Vlaardingen company, the Rederij de Zeeuw, usually had two vessels fishing for cod at a time.<sup>6</sup> In 1818 these were the WISSELVALLIGHEID and the GELUKKIGE VERANDERING. After that year, the WISSELVALLIGHEID fished for herring. From 1819 to 1836 the VROUW NEELTJE fished for cod together with the GELUKKIGE VERANDERING. Unfortunately the GELUKKIGE VERANDERING was wrecked in 1836, on its first seasonal trip to the North Sea for cod, and never went fishing again. The JONGE ALETTA then fished together with the VROUW NEELTJE from 1837 to 1841, and with the JONGE DIRK from 1841 to 1852. Dirk de Zeeuw died in 1828, and his wife took over the company as his widow.<sup>7</sup> The annual catch, including the by-catch of ling, was reported to the king when the application was made for financial support.<sup>8</sup> No catch was reported in 1836 when the

GELUKKIGE VERANDERING was wrecked. In reality, the second vessel fishing for cod, the VROUW NEELTJE, did have an annual catch, and in addition another vessel, the ZELDEN RUST, was borrowed from a friend for the rest of the year so that fishing could be resumed.<sup>9</sup>

To investigate the survival of the cod fishery I looked at the landings, and I tested the profitability of the cod fishery by using the Chow regression model on different factors of production.<sup>10</sup> The results did not indicate that factors like change of boat, change of captain, change of owner or captain's age greatly affected productivity.<sup>11</sup> Looking at the accounts of the Rederij de Zeeuw there is a decline, but not a net loss, in 1836.<sup>12</sup> The revenue and the expenses include cod as well as herring fishing and the financial support "premium" of approximately 500 guilders per season per species. The overall trend for the period 1818-1852 shows average but declining business. This amazes me and forces me to question the politics of the cod fishery, and the trust-

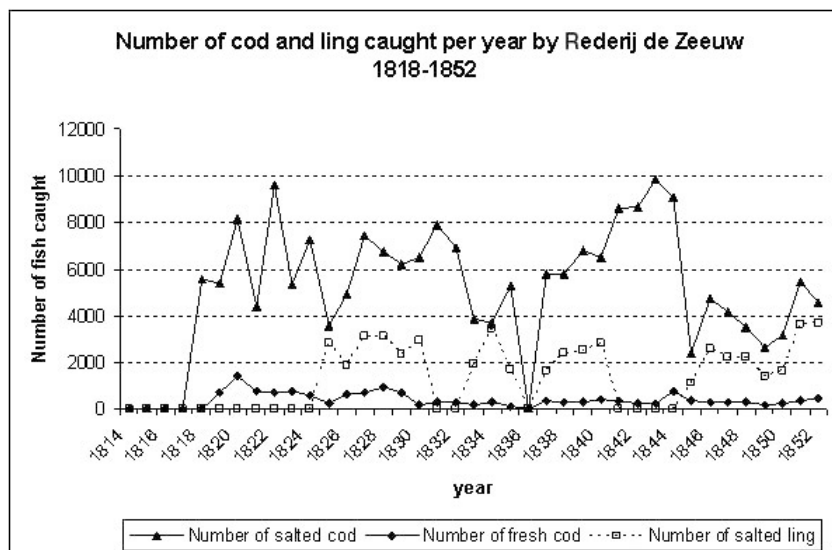


Fig. 4.

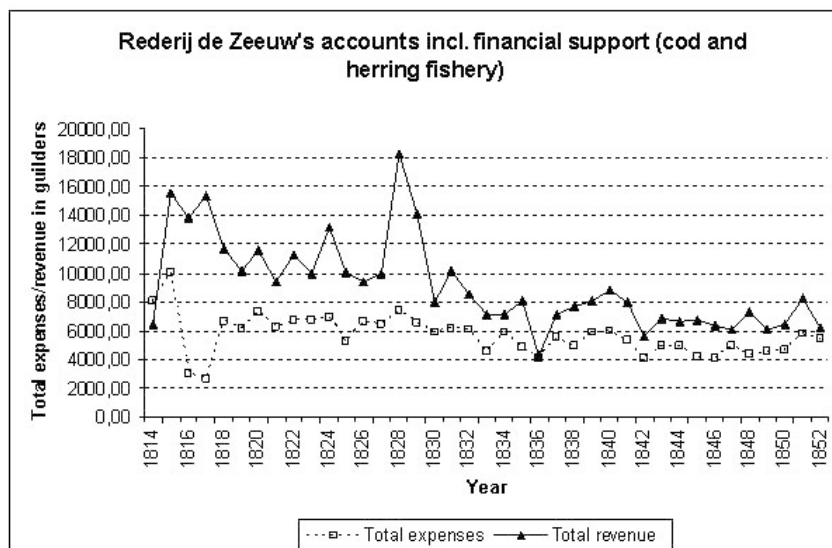


Fig. 5.

worthiness of the archival records – more or less as a consequence of the king’s financial support.<sup>13</sup> I wonder if it was networking in Vlaardingen that sustained the cod fishery as a business. The characteristics of the ship owners’ “partenrederij” (shared ownership) made me examine the interrelationship between fishermen, ship-owners and their families.<sup>14</sup> In pursuing this line of investigation I have looked, for comparison, at literature on networking in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> I concentrate on the town of Vlaardingen and the networking between fishermen and their relatives in connection with a particular company.<sup>16</sup>

Dirk de Zeeuw was the owner of vessels and of a fishing company in Vlaardingen.<sup>17</sup> He was also a merchant, a ship’s carpenter and a naval architect. Dirk de Zeeuw was an active man in many ways; he and his wife Neeltje Drop had ten children, five of whom were sons.<sup>18</sup> Dirk’s father, Cornelis de Zeeuw, was a shipbuilder. Cornelis was married to Johanna Versendaal, the daughter of a ship-owner and sailmaker, Job Versendaal.<sup>19</sup> Job was also the head of the Vlaardingen orphanage, which was more than a home for orphaned children. It provided maritime navigational training to young boys.<sup>20</sup> Dirk de Zeeuw’s father-in-law Hendrik Drop was a baker and a *rentier*, a person able to live on income from savings.<sup>21</sup> Hendrik had married Aletta Wilmart, an only child, and together they had had four girls, one of whom was Neeltje. These interrelated residents of Vlaardingen seem to have had little to worry about, neither professionally nor financially.

Jacobus den Baars and his wife Magteld van Arkel were friends of de Zeeuw.<sup>22</sup> Jacobus den Baars was a ship-owner, a merchant and a wine buyer. This meant that some vessels went fishing in the North Sea while others went south to Spain or Portugal, and perhaps even to the Mediterranean, on commercial trips. Jacobus den Baars’ father, Pieter den Baars, was a baker in the town of Middelharnis. Pieter married Helena Versendaal, the elder sister of Johanna Versendaal, Dirk de Zeeuw’s mother. Jacobus den Baars’ father-in-law, Jan van Arkel was a ship-owner and head of the orphanage in Maassluis, the sister town to Vlaardingen.<sup>23</sup> Jacobus died in 1812

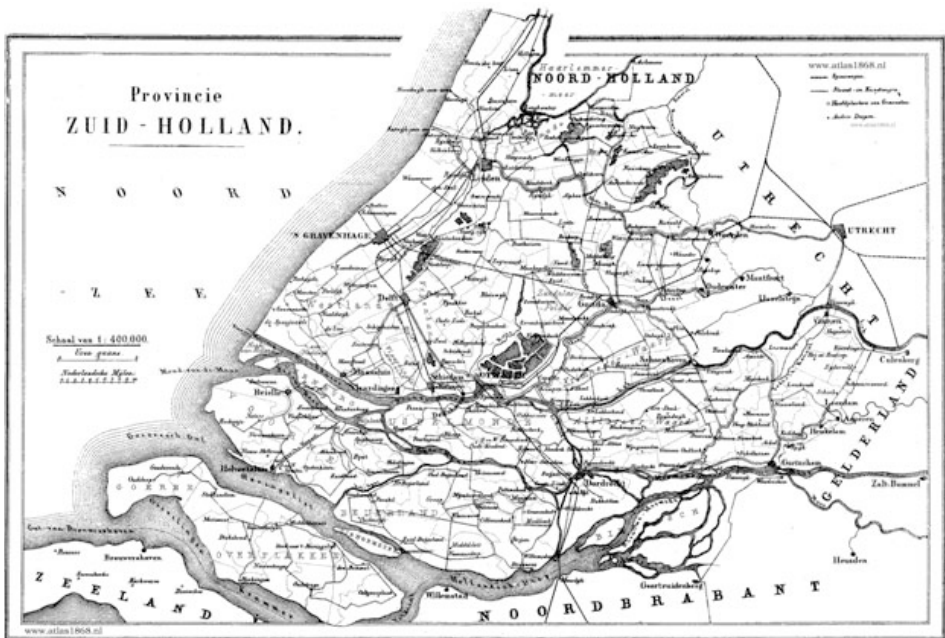


Fig. 6.

when his eldest son was two years old. As his widow, Magteld took over her husband's business, like Neeltje. She ran it until her death in 1836. Her company had one vessel fishing for cod each season.<sup>24</sup> From 1818 to 1824 it was the JONGE JACOB VAN ARKEL, and from 1825 to 1835 the ZELDEN RUST. In 1836 the ZELDEN RUST was fishing for Dirk de Zeeuw's widow. There were probably several reasons why the ZELDEN RUST was lent to the de Zeeuw company. Firstly, the Rederij de Zeeuw had lost the GELUKKIGE VERANDERING in 1836. Secondly, the late Dirk de Zeeuw's mother, Johanna Versendaal, and Helena Versendaal, the mother of Magteld van Arkel of the Rederij den Baars, were sisters. Thirdly, Magteld van Arkel died in November 1836, which may have been the reason why the ZELDEN RUST never returned to her company. Fourthly, it is possible that the Rederij de Zeeuw had shares in the ZELDEN RUST.

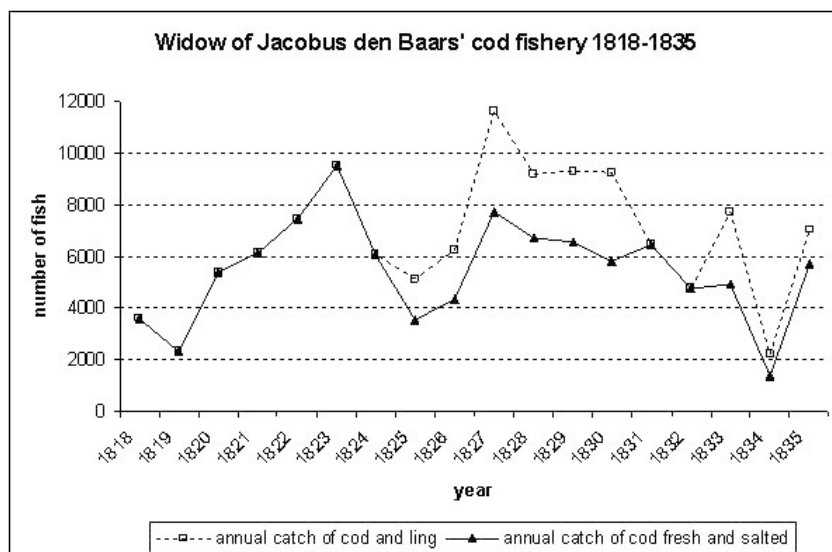


Fig. 7.

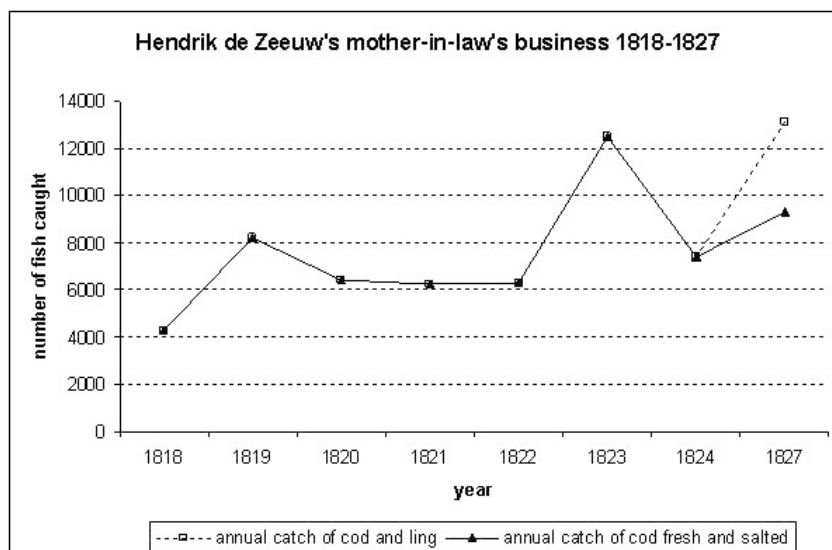


Fig. 8.

In family businesses it is hard to tell the difference between professional networking and personal relationships. Hendrik de Zeeuw became a ship-owner like his father, Dirk de Zeeuw. He also became a naval architect, the owner of a shipbuilding yard and a *rentier*.<sup>25</sup> Hendrik de Zeeuw never appeared in the records as the owner of a cod fishing vessel, but being a ship-builder he may have had capital in vessels, presumably as shares. He married Johanna Bubbesson, who came from a ship-owning family in Vlaardingen. Hendrik's father-in-law, Jacob Bubbesson, was a ship-owner, and when he died his wife, Neeltje Barmond, took over the business.<sup>26</sup> She had one vessel fishing for cod from 1818 to 1827.<sup>27</sup> Hendrik's brother-in-law, Cornelis Bubbesson, became a ship-owner like his and Johanna's father, and a block-maker. From 1820 to 1833 he had one vessel fishing for cod.<sup>28</sup> Cornelis Bubbesson married the daughter of another ship-owning family in Vlaardingen, the Dorsmans.<sup>29</sup>

The family business is characterised by family relationships among the ship-owners, and the inherited nature of the ownership.<sup>30</sup> The corporate form of the "partenrederij" clearly shows the individual ship-owner's interest in different businesses, such as fishing and wine buying.<sup>31</sup> The "hoeker" had multiple uses, and having shares in several vessels increased the chance of profitability.<sup>32</sup> It is difficult to tell exactly by how much, as I do not know the distribution of shares of most of the vessels. The network of the Rederij de Zeeuw is probably representative of the Vlaardingen cod fishery during the first half of the nineteenth century. It may even be fairly representative of Holland during the whole of the nineteenth century. Research shows that marriage and family connections were important in relation to business in Rotterdam in the late nineteenth century, and particularly to shipping.<sup>33</sup> People rarely married outside their social or professional class. The idea was to achieve security. In Vlaardingen the ship-owners married within their own sphere, and the ships' captains married their social equals. The fishermen were not obliged to report their landings to the king. They did so to obtain financial support. In the 1840s the king reduced this support. Simultaneously, and possibly as a consequence, there was a decline in the number of vessels reporting their catch to the king. This is not to say that there was a decline in the volume of cod landed in Vlaardingen. It could perhaps have been a generational change, as when Hendrik de Zeeuw discontinued his parents' cod-fishing activity al-

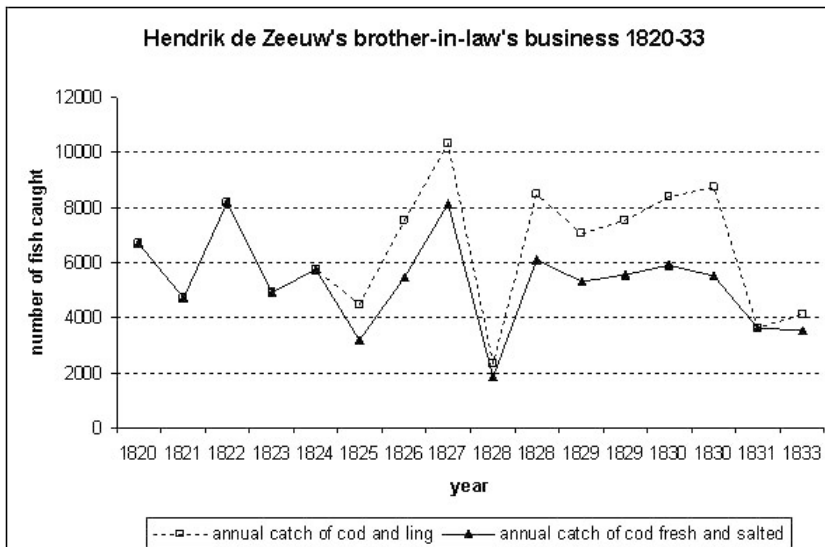


Fig. 9.



though otherwise he did remain in the business. Or it might represent a change of preference. I believe that because of their connections and their flexibility the fishermen were able to survive hard times in the Dutch cod fishing industry, with or without financial support.

#### Notes:

- 1 The Nationaal Archief in The Hague (hereafter: NA), 3.11.05.1, *Handelingen van Gecommitteerden tot de Ijslandse en Kabeljauwvisserijen in Zuidholland 1817-1831 en 1832-1853*.
- 2 During the first half of the nineteenth century there was no formal registry of vessels fishing for cod. I only know of the fishermen who applied for financial support, but it is possible that there were others fishing for cod too. Vlaardingen fishermen fishing for herring kept a seasonal record of owners, vessels and captains throughout the nineteenth century. Maritiem Museum Rotterdam (hereafter: MMR), Naamlijste der Boehouders, Scheepen en Stuurlieden van de Haring-Scheepen, in het Jaar ... van de Maas en 't Noorderkwartier ter Haring-visscherij uitgevaren, A. Groeneveld, Rotterdam.
- 3 See fig. 1 on cod landed in Vlaardingen 1818-1853, NA, 3.11.05.1.
- 4 NA, 3.11.05.1, 1817-1831: 35-38.
- 5 See figs 2 and 3 on the distribution of number of vessels fishing per year and average number of vessels per species per year. NA, 3.11.05.1 and MMR, Naamlijste.
- 6 Stadsarchief Vlaardingen (hereafter: SAV) 0017, 1-6 *Rederij de Hoop*.
- 7 In the archival material Neeltje Drop is registered as "Wed. Dirk de Zeeuw."
- 8 See fig. 4 on the Rederij de Zeeuw's number of cod and ling caught per year 1818-1852, NA 3.11.05.1. (Salted cod measured in barrels were equivalent to 30 cod per barrel, according to A. Jr. Hoogendijk, *Grootvisserij op de Noordzee*, Groningen, 1894).
- 9 I know this from the accounts of the de Zeeuw cod fishery, SAV, 0017, 1-6.
- 10 Calculations made in collaboration with docteur en économie, Montacer Ben Cheikh Larbi, maître de conférences, Université de La Rochelle.
- 11 Economic factors are important, but are not the sole factors. Mary B. Rose, *Firms, Networks and Business Values. The British and American Cotton Industries since 1750*, Cambridge, 2000: 8.
- 12 See fig. 5 on the Rederij de Zeeuw's financial accounts, SAV, 0017, 1-6.
- 13 I am not alone in believing that the financial support had an influence on the behaviour of ship-owners and fishermen. See for example M.A. Beaujon, *Oversicht der Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Zeevisscherijen*, (Leiden, 1885).
- 14 E.J.A. Broeze, J.R. Bruijn and F.S. Gaastra (eds.), *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden, Achttiende eeuw en eerste helft negentiende eeuw van 1680 tot 1850-1870*, vol. 3 (Bossun, 1977): 92-141.
- 15 Huibert Schijf, *Netwerken van én financieel-economische elite. Personele verbindingen in het Nederlandse bedrijfsleven aan het eind van de negentiende eeuw* (Het Spinhuis, 1993), and Rob van Ginkel, *Elk vist op zijn tij. Een historisch-antropologische studie van een Zeeuwse maritieme gemeenschap, Yerseke 1870-1914* (Walburg, 1991).
- 16 See fig. 6 for a map of the Dutch province of Zuid-Holland, showing the towns of Vlaardingen and Maassluis on the river Maas, drawn by J. Kaijper, published by Hugo Suringar te Leezwarden, www.atlas1868.nl (21.10.2006).
- 17 The records at Stadsarchief Vlaardingen call the company "Rederij de Hoop," but Rederij de Hoop is a different company in the national records NA, 3.11.5.1 and in the local registry MMR, Naamlijste.
- 18 Dirk de Zeeuw 05.1773-05.1830 ~ Neeltje Drop 06.1777-11.1855, according to SAV, Internet Studiezaal Informatie Systeem (hereafter: ISIS), www.vlaardingen.nl/isis/ (21.10.2006).
- 19 Cornelis de Zeeuw 07.1740-10.1812 ~ Johanna Versendaal 12.1740-08.1794. SAV, ISIS.
- 20 C.A. Davids, 'Het zeevaartkundig onderwijs voor de koopvaardij in Nederland tussen 1795 en 1875. De rol van het Rijk, de lagere overheid en het particuliere initiatief', in *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis*, Symposiumnummer, December 1985, 4: 164-190.
- 21 Hendrik Drop 09.1736-01.1826 ~ Aletta Wilmart ..-02.1814, SAV, ISIS.
- 22 Jacobus den Baars 11.1768-04.1812 ~ Magteld van Arkel 05.1772-11.1836, SAV, ISIS.
- 23 Jan van Arkel 05.1745-03.1810 ~ Trintje van der Marel ..., SAV, ISIS.
- 24 See fig. 7 on the Rederij den Baars' annual landings of cod and ling from 1818 to 1835, NA 3.11.05.1.
- 25 Hendrik de Zeeuw 08.1802-09.1885 ~ Johanna Bubbesson 04.1803-03.1870, SAV, ISIS.
- 26 Jacob Bubbesson ..-11.1817 ~ Neeltje Barmond ..-03.1826 (second wife) SAV, ISIS.
- 27 See fig. 8 on Hendrik de Zeeuw's mother-in-law's business 1818-1827, NA 3.11.05.1.
- 28 See fig. 9 on Hendrik de Zeeuw's brother-in-law's business 1820-1833, NA, 3.11.05.1.
- 29 Cornelis Bubbesson 05.1795-02.1832 ~ Jaapje Dorsman 06.1794-..., SAV, ISIS.
- 30 The family business was a phenomenon dependent on economic circumstances and the institutional environment. Family partnership, local marriage and distrust of outsiders were characteristics. Rose, *Firms, Networks and Business Values*: 58-66.
- 31 While in Portugal for wine, the ship-owner would probably also buy salt for the salted cod.
- 32 Ginkel, *Elk vist op zijn tijd*: 118-121 on the need for flexibility and the benefits of family business.

33 Schijf, *Netwerken*: 104, 107-124. This book does not discuss the relevance of the corporate structure to the degree of networking, such as shared ownership in "partenrederij".

## Das Überleben der holländischen Kabeljaufischerei. Die Vorteile des Familiengeschäfts

### **Zusammenfassung**

Die Thematik des Aufsatzes untersucht die Struktur und Profitabilität der holländischen Kabeljaufischerei. Dieser Aufsatz ist Teil einer Doktorarbeit. Daher beziehen sich die Ergebnisse einiger Berechnungen der Produktionsfaktoren aus Platzgründen auf den Kernpunkt: die Wechselbeziehungen zwischen den Schiffseignern und deren Bedeutung für das Geschäft. Es handelt sich um die Betrachtung eines ausgewählten Fischereibetriebes in der holländischen Stadt Vlaardingen in dem Zeitraum um 1818-1852 und die hieran beispielhaft dargestellte Relevanz von Familienbanden bezüglich der Kabeljaufischerei.

## La survie de la pêche au cabillaud en Hollande. Les avantages de l'entreprise familiale

### **Résumé**

La thématique de l'article analyse la structure et la rentabilité de la pêche au cabillaud en Hollande. Cet article fait partie d'une thèse de doctorat, c'est pourquoi les résultats de certains calculs des facteurs de production se réduisent par manque de place à l'essentiel: l'interdépendance des propriétaires de navires et de leur importance pour l'entreprise. Il s'agit d'une observation portant sur une entreprise de pêche choisie dans la ville néerlandaise de Vlaardingen, sur un laps de temps allant des alentours de 1818 à 1852, et sur l'importance des liens familiaux, présentés ici de manière exemplaire dans le contexte de la pêche au cabillaud.