THE GENESIS OF FRANCO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Walther Kirchner *

The close relationship which existed between France and Russia from 1894 to 1914, and which is again in prospect today, is the result of a specific political pattern which is by no means confined to recent years. Franco-Russian relations are of long standing—longer, indeed, than most publications on the subject lead us to suspect. Inasmuch as during the earlier times mention of such relations are neither evidenced by nor recounted in diplomatic documents, they have never been satisfactorily traced. Their main objective consisted in trade; political connections were to serve chiefly the purpose of furthering commercial intercourse. Steps toward this end were undertaken quite some time before Colbert’s era, and hence a special interest is connected with tracing the origins of Franco-Russian relations.

Other powers than France had for a long time appreciated the importance of the princes of Moscovy, Pskov, and Novgorod, as extending far beyond mere political aims. A vigorous trade connected the Russian principalities with the Hansa, Sweden, and Denmark. Poland and Turkey maintained close, though not always amicable, political relations with the Russians. The Catholic Church and the Empire in their respective positions as spiritual and secular leaders and defenders of Christendom had likewise kept contact with the schismatic Slavs of the East. Embassies from both sides found their way into one another’s lands in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Dutch pursued an extensive trade in the East, and ultimately the English also entered the picture. The route around the North Cape, discovered in 1553, opened to England not only a trade route to Russia through Archangel, but gave her an incentive and opportunity for increasing her commercial activities in the Baltic area, in Danzig, Riga, Reval, and Narva.

At first the French were either unaware of the possibilities or, due to internal crises, unable to avail themselves of the opportunities. They remained passive even when the German outpost in the eastern Baltic, the state of the Livonian Knights, collapsed after the great

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Russian invasion of 1558 and Hanseatic predominance ceased in Livonia. Although commerce with Russia was open to the enterprising genius of virtually all nations, and political co-operation with the West was sought by an expanding Tsarist empire, France concentrated her attention on other plans. Travellers from many lands went at that time to the Muscovite dominions and reported on the customs, marvels, and opportunities of that strange country. Yet, of one hundred and nine travel accounts listed by Friedrich von Adelung for the years 1558 to 1610, not more than three came from Frenchmen.\(^1\) Indeed, up to 1653, or even 1680, Russia was almost entirely unknown in France.\(^2\) Louis XIV himself is reported to have addressed in 1657 a letter to Tsar Michael Feodorovitch although Michael had been dead for twelve years.\(^3\)

Nevertheless, France had made a number of early though sporadic attempts at opening direct connections with Russia. The first seems to have been that of 1555, when the French king, Henry II, entertained Hans Schlitte, a German residing in Russia. Schlitte had been sent by Ivan the Terrible to Germany to hire artisans and doctors, but opposition by jealous merchants in the Hansa towns brought his efforts to naught. He had thereupon proceeded to France, where he was well received. Henry recognized the political implications, and at the solicitation of Margrave Albrecht of Brandenburg and in order to weaken the Habsburgs, he made recommendations for renewal of Schlitte's enterprise. He asked the Turkish sultan as well as the Swedish king to further the German's efforts. He also gave Schlitte a letter addressed to the Tsar, in which the agent's futile efforts in Germany were explained and the Emperor denounced for his lack of co-operation. But this letter apparently never reached the Tsar.\(^4\) Artisans, in any case, were not sent by France; not until the time of Peter the Great more than a hundred years later were French craftsmen and doctors to arrive in Russia.\(^5\)


3 *Recueil des Instructions données aux ambassadeurs ... de France ... Russie I*, ed. Alfred Rambaud (Paris, 1890), VIII, ix–x.


The failure to establish political and cultural relations was, however, not paralleled by economic developments. The great profits which others derived from trading with Russia became known and envied by the French. A sizable merchant fleet of their own was not at their disposal, but during the years 1557 to 1568 trade in the Baltic with French goods carried in foreign bottoms was not inconsiderable. Out of a total of 1,150 ships that passed in 1557 through the Sound on their eastward journey, 247 came from ports in France. Most of them belonged to the Hansa, the balance to various foreign powers.

No doubt, the numbers would have increased, had not the dissolution of the Livonian Order in 1562 and the outbreak of a seven years’ war between Sweden, Denmark, Lübeck, and Poland put a sudden stop to Hanseatic trade. Depending almost entirely upon Hansa ships, France had to look elsewhere for carriers. In 1562, French ships began sailing for Russia through the Sound, first in comparatively small, though growing numbers, while the major share of the carrying trade passed into the hands of the Dutch. Figures show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total ships passing the Sound; eastward bound</th>
<th>Hereof total from France</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1558</td>
<td>1,059</td>
<td>218</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>1,322</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>211</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>1,824</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>124</td>
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<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>1,669</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>1,945</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>1,805</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>58</td>
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Most of the ships came from Dieppe. Bordeaux, Le Havre, and La Rochelle played a secondary role. Their chief port of destination was Danzig, but many proceeded further to Livonia with its great ports of Riga and Reval. Since its occupation by the Russians in 1558, Narva likewise began to play an increasingly important role and being Russia’s only “window to the West” soon proved to be well suited to the use of neutral France.

Although trade figures show an upward trend, the French share in eastern trade remained comparatively small. No factories or warehouses were established on Russian territory; and although, in 1628,

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8 Nina E. Bang, *Tabeller over Skibsfart og Varetransport gennem Øresund, 1497-1660* (2 vols.; Copenhagen and Leipzig, 1906-22). All figures referring to shipping through the Sound have been taken from this source.
French merchants asserted in a petition to Richelieu that “about sixty years ago [c. 1568] all traffic with Moscow was in French hands; but frequent wars and revolutions . . . forced them to abandon this trade entirely,” 7 statistics, as above, disprove their statement. Nevertheless, at least the prospects for France in the late ’sixties of the sixteenth century were good. She was in a better position than others to provide the Tsar with essential commodities—especially salt—for his many wars. It is true that the Russians mined salt in Staraia Roussa and Perm and refined it in Astrakhan, 8 but they were in constant need of additional supplies. Political considerations, connected with the struggle over predominance in Livonia, made it impossible for the Hansa as well as for Denmark and Sweden to export salt to the Tsar’s realms. France consequently found herself in the advantageous position of being able to secure for herself a large portion of the trade. Sharing it mainly with Holland and Portugal, she could often maintain a lead over all others combined. Her shipments through the Sound amounted

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>25,623</td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>24,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>27,243</td>
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Of this a substantial part went directly to Russia via Narva.

With regard to other commodities, French trade did not compete successfully with other nations. Some commerce developed in colonial products at this time, dried fruits, figs, raisins, almonds, rice, sugar, pomegranates, etc. But later standard French export wares, such as textile products and wines, were of but little importance. They were mostly provided by England, Spain, and Germany, respectively. Leather goods, glass, paper, and a few other commodities of lesser importance could be found occasionally among French exports to Russia. 9 In exchange, France imported rye and wheat, flax,

7 Dépot des Mémoires et documents, vol. III, pièce 4, Affaires étrangères, Russie, as cited by Rambaud, Recueil, p. 11.
9 Profits must have been very high. A report speaks of French merchants from Narva who as a political reprisal had once been detained for fifteen months in Moscow. Yet upon regaining their liberty they had returned to Narva and had succeeded in buying goods for not less than 2,000,000 livres ("vingt cent mille u"). They had, however, the misfortune of falling ultimately into Swed-
hemp, and some pitch, tar, wax, and talc. But all these products belonged to Russia’s chief export articles for the western world, and the quantities shipped to France were certainly not considerable enough to warrant special political concessions, had France contemplated to secure such from the Russians.

In all their dealings, the French were hindered by the attenuated economic structure of their country. Most of all, the necessary capital could not be raised. Lack of harmony among the French merchants, sectionalism, and provincialism prevented the formation of business enterprises strong and progressive enough to undertake the task which the modern system required. Joint stock companies which lent themselves particularly well to the type of trade suitable for Russia and which constituted the then successful form of business enterprise, were hardly to be found in France. The first “Compagnie du Nord” along such lines was formed in 1644, almost one hundred years later than in England. A second one was organized in 1669, but showed little success, paying in 1670 a dividend of not more than four per cent and disappearing soon thereafter. As a whole, French trade during the sixteenth century remained in the hands of minor companies and under the control of private merchants who unlike their more successful foreign rivals possessed no political backing. Undertakings that were likely to involve state support and to include monopolistic tendencies still met with strong opposition.

Yet, as English experience abundantly proved, it was precisely this type of commercial enterprise which best served both private interests and the state as a whole. Merchants trading with Russia carried out important political tasks. They saw to it that any entanglement of the eastern empire in diplomatic affairs of western Europe was prevented. Nevertheless, they secured advantages which strengthened the political as well as economic position of their homeland. This situation was recognized in France too late to make possible the exploitation of the advantages that offered themselves to the French.

ish hands who deprived them of their merchandise. Charles de Dançay to Queen-Mother, July 8, 1581, Handlingar rörande Skandinaviens historia (40 vols.; Stockholm, 1816–60), XI, 151. (Hereafter cited as Handl. Skand.)


11 George Tolstoy, somewhat exaggerating, states that Russia was “merely a convenient tradmart for the barter of English wares,” but not of “any political importance.” The first forty years of intercourse between England and Russia, 1553–93 (St. Petersburg, 1875), p. xx.

The royal house, which was later to provide capital as well as privileges, was impoverished and weak. With its incapable and dissipated rulers it could neither enforce unified political control of economic affairs in line with the mercantilistic principles of the age, nor induce private interests to subordinate their aims to those of the state. National economic policies had to wait for the reorganization of the state by a Sully and a Richelieu and for the direction of a Colbert.

Significantly, there was a man in the French diplomatic service in northern Europe who was able to recognize the larger issues and practical enough to propose measures for the strengthening of France's position through closer economic relations with Russia. Charles de Dançay represented his country at the court of Denmark for more than a quarter of a century, until his death in 1589. An inveterate busy-body, he was ceaselessly making plans, few of which were carried out; but during the unproductive reign of Catherine de Medici and her sons his labors stand out as perspicacious and constructive. At his listening post in Copenhagen, near to the Sound where he could observe the vigorous trade of other nations, he was generally well informed. His reports, though at times unreliable, show insight and understanding. He realized that the war between the northern powers for the possession of the Livonian harbors controlling Russian trade prevented gainful French undertakings in the Baltic. He was also aware of the necessity for increasing French prestige in the North and East. He therefore set himself to the task first of mediating peace between the warring factions, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, and Lübeck, and then of persuading the French government to take an active interest in the expanding Russian market.

With this aim in view he offered to the belligerents the French king's good services, and in 1570 peace was concluded at Stettin under the auspices of the German emperor and the French crown. Unfortunately, Dançay had concentrated his attention on the wrong partner, Poland. Believing her to emerge as the leading power he had secured guarantees from her regarding undisturbed French trade with Russia. But Poland was ignored at the peace table, and French prestige and interest was in consequence weakened by the Stettin parleys.

Realizing his mistake, Dançay shifted his attention to Sweden.  


As long as King Erik XIV had ruled there, French commerce in the eastern Baltic region had flourished. Even in the midst of the northern war, the king had given special permission to French merchants to ship as much merchandise to blockaded Narva as they delivered—in salt—to Sweden. But King Erik was deposed in 1568, and after his brother John ascended the throne, Swedish policy towards France was reversed. The control which Sweden exercised over the eastern Baltic through her strategic position in Stockholm, Åbo, and Reval enabled her to impede seriously all commerce of the French. The year 1569 saw a sharp decline of their trade. Only 48 ships, as against 380 in 1568, passed through the Sound into the Baltic, and only 3,498 laest of salt as against 27,243 were shipped.

Dançay was certainly right in insisting that French trade with Russia be revived. However, he exaggerated its volume and importance. In reality, the total value of the goods transported in French bottoms through the Sound averaged 20,000 to 30,000 thaler a year; in some years it was less than 10,000; only a few times it surpassed the 100,000 thaler mark. The value of French goods transported in foreign ships must be estimated in its relation to others, with the major share going to Sweden, northern Germany, and Poland, while only a fraction of it actually reached Russia. Yet, Dançay gauged correctly the possibilities and wisely advocated diplomatic steps in Sweden and Russia to advance the interests of his country. But his efforts came to naught when France, much to his surprise and dismay, put forward Henry, Prince d’Anjou, as candidate for the Polish throne and by doing so undermined all chance for an understanding with Russia.

The Polish adventure may be termed the second attempt of France to participate in eastern European affairs. It was injudiciously conceived because it meant that the traditional enmity between Poles and Russians would involve France in rivalry with Russia. Henry himself did not want to go; nor did the strong Catholic party under the leadership of the Guises cherish the thought of his leaving, as Henry’s

16 “Il fait ce que peu pour esmouvoir les subjéctz de sa Majesté à tráfico-quer en Russie, quilz ont seulement commencé depuis six ou sept ans, ou ilz font si grand gaing et s’en ensuyuent tant de commoditez et avantagez pour le royaume de France, quilz ne font voyage qui leur apporte tant de profit ne qui soit plus necessaire audict royaume que destuy la.” Dançay to Monseigneur, Dec. 18, 1570, Indb., p. 115.
17 Dançay to King, July 15, 1571, Indb., p. 132.
18 Same to same, June 5, 1573, Indb., p. 195.
younger brother, the Duke d'Alençon, was next in line for the throne and his sympathies for the "political" party, which was hostile to the Guises, were well known. 19 But the French king intended to rid himself of his brother, and the Queen-Mother, Catherine de Medici, wanted a crown for her favorite son also.

The interests of France and the prospects for an advantageous and closer commercial relationship with Russia were thus sacrificed to the intrigues and ambitions of the royal house and of one party. Although no unfriendliness was intended against the Tsar, who himself was a candidate, it was unavoidable that dissensions would result. Indeed, the French special envoy, Jean de Montluc, dispatched to Poland in September 1572, in order to gain votes was instructed to promise that France would furnish troops against Russia and pay them for six months. 20 In December, the Poles demanded in addition that the navigation of French merchants to Narva be discontinued. It was furthermore suggested that the king of France, like the rulers of Sweden and Denmark, should prevail upon his subjects to transfer all trade from Russia to Poland, provided the same goods could be obtained there at the same price. 21

Montluc thereupon promised the Poles military aid consisting of four thousand harquebusiers from the Gascogne. They were calculated to help Poland conquer Russian-held Livonia with its important trading posts. 22 Describing the Tsar as a brutal autocrat and an enemy of all liberty, he exploited the antagonism between Russia and Poland to the utmost. He thus hoped to win over the lower nobility, the Szlachta, upon which the election depended.

In the pacta finally concluded, the Polish nobility actually secured a formal promise of four thousand soldiers. They were to be shipped to Poland by way of Danzig. France was to equip and provision them for one year. Hostilities against Russia were to begin immediately upon the accession of Henry to the throne. 23

The Tsar was aware of the commitments made to the Szlachta and the hopes of the Poles to find in the French prince a capable leader for the impending wars. He also knew of the connection existing between France and Turkey and the significance of the com-

19 Uebersberger, p. 420.
20 Instruction à Jean de Montluc, Sept. 6, 1572, Marquis de Noailles, Henri de Valois et la Pologne en 1572 (3 vols.; Paris, 1867), III, 6.
21 Noailles, III, 19.
23 Noailles, II, 332; ibid., III, 453.
mercial treaties and political co-operation between the two countries.\textsuperscript{24} The two dangers combined to augment his apprehension of a successful French candidacy. Ivan therefore redoubled his efforts to gain the election for himself or his son, and at the same time supported a third candidate, a member of the Habsburg house, who because of the common struggle against Turkey was equally acceptable to him.\textsuperscript{25} But seduced by French promises, the Poles chose Henry.

Satisfied to see Poland remain outside the Tsar’s orbit through French efforts, the sultan assured the country of his protection against any Russian attack until the arrival of the prince. Henry’s coming was, however, unduly delayed by negotiations with the emperor, who at Ivan’s insistence refused the prince permission to cross German soil. It was the Tsar’s intention to prevent Henry’s arrival before the time stipulated by the Szlachta for his personal appearance. If successful, new elections would have to be held and Ivan could renew his efforts to secure results more favorable to Russian interests.\textsuperscript{26} But this scheme failed also. Henry finally succeeded in securing passports through Germany and arrived on time. With his coming a purposeless war involving distant Russia and France would have broken out, had it not been for the death of Charles IX of France and the ignominious return of his brother from Poland. Once back in Paris, Henry—while insisting upon retaining the Polish crown—refused to return to that country. The promises of French military aid against Russia were forgotten and consequently an early clash was avoided.

Charles de Dançay had not been apprised of France’s Polish policy and was apprehensive of the prospects, if Henry gained the Polish throne. However, he was agile enough to make the most of circumstances, once Henry had been elected and even after his withdrawal. His interesting oral proposal, made on April 12, 1575, to the royal councillor and secretary of State and Finance, Monseigneur Pinart, has been preserved. It gives a picture of his line of thought with regard to French policies in eastern Europe and the relationship to Russia.\textsuperscript{27} Through his knowledge of economic conditions and trade possibilities in northern Europe, Dançay had come to realize that the key to all important commerce in the North was held by

\textsuperscript{24} Karamsin, IX, 295.  
\textsuperscript{25} Noailles, II, 291.  
\textsuperscript{26} Uebersberger, p. 420.  
whoever ruled Livonia with its ports controlling Russian imports and exports. He therefore took advantage of the visit which Pinart on his way to Stockholm paid to the Danish capital and submitted a plan for French hegemony in the North. With an imagination that outran his realistic sense, he proposed to conquer Livonia and turn the country into a hereditary French duchy. Titles to some sections of Livonia existed, as Dançay saw it, by virtue of Henry's position as king of Poland. Other parts could be won by a marriage alliance with Sweden, and again others by treaties with Denmark. Rich in corn, flax, wax, copper, tar, and also oak and other materials for shipbuilding, Livonia could contribute to French prosperity beyond being a gateway to the rich Russian hinterland. If peace between Russia and Livonia could be maintained for just four years, the French crown, Dançay asserted, could derive six times as much profit from Livonia as from all of France. During a period of five years, not less than 10,000 Frenchmen could emigrate into the newly acquired land. The occupation would, of course, include Reval, with its valuable trade opportunities, and Dançay was convinced that for the sake of such advantages the merchants in Normandy, Brittany, Paris, Orléans, La Rochelle, and other places would gladly contribute 100,000 écus to the whole enterprise.

The plan naturally conflicted with Muscovite aspirations to acquire all of Livonia, whose eastern regions were already in Russian hands. But war with Ivan seemed ultimately not too undesirable, inasmuch as after the religious pacification of France many unemployed mercenaries could appropriately and profitably be shipped and used in the East, thus removing a source of serious trouble within the homeland.

The fantastic plan was, of course, never considered seriously by the French government. Normal trade was resumed and once more showed satisfactory increase. In the years 1578, 1579, and 1581 more than two hundred ships coming from France passed the Sound, a considerable number of these finding their way to Riga, Reval, and Narva. In 1580, shipments of salt reached the level of 10,986 last as against a low of 422 in 1575. Shipments of colonial produce improved likewise.

New setbacks threatened, however, when the Russian armies holding Livonia were expelled by Poland and Sweden and when, under pressure of the two victorious powers, Denmark requested the French to desist from their trade with the enemy through the Sound, and
particularly from supplying the Tsar with war materials via Narva. Before a decision was reached, French trade was automatically ended by Russia’s loss of the important harbor to Pontus de la Gardie, a Frenchman in the service of the Swedes. For six years, not a single French ship could sail to Narva. At the same time, the trade of the French with Russia over Riga and Reval began to be seriously impeded by a growing tension with Sweden on the one hand, and between Sweden and Russia on the other.

The ever watchful Dançay, therefore, tried to prevail upon King Henry to shift his attention from the Baltic to the trade route around the North Cape. In September 1581, he proposed that the French king take up negotiations with the Tsar and ask for privileges for French merchants at St. Nicholas on the White Sea. He explained that neither Denmark nor Sweden had control over the northern route. He assured the king that the trip was perfectly safe, taking only four to five weeks, and that the trade in wax, skins, flax, etc., carried on around the North Cape was among the most lucrative of all. A month later Dançay repeated his pleas and referred to the success of the English. He asserted that merchants from Dieppe had already written to him inquiring about the possibilities. He complained, however, about the lack of harmony among French merchants and demanded support and protection of the crown for commercial ventures.

In the meantime, Dançay entered into negotiations with the Danish king, who had begun to assert his sovereign rights over the northern route. Within a year’s time he could report the success of his negotiations. The Danes consented to French voyages around the North Cape in return for payment of a lump sum of six thousand thaler per year to the Danish custom’s collector at Vardöhus. As the extent of the traffic was uncertain, Dançay insisted upon reduction of this sum to two portuguises per ship.

Despite his success in securing this arrangement, Dançay could not feel satisfied with the prospects of Franco-Russian trade relations. He feared the lack of knowledge regarding Russian affairs which prevailed in most western European countries and particularly

28 Dançay to King, Dec. 8, 1580, Handl. Skand., XI, 127.
30 Dançay to Queen-Mother, October 28, 1581, Handl. Skand., XI, 169.
in France. He knew that the Russians kept informed about Europe and studied the internal conditions of the various countries. The disorders within France were well known to Tsar Ivan.\textsuperscript{32} The blood bath of the night of St. Bartholomew had aroused his anger and in a letter to the German Emperor Maximilian II he had protested against the cruelty of Charles IX.\textsuperscript{33} Through an Albanian savant Ivan had also become acquainted with the Sorbonne as a great institute of learning, and some years later Tsar Boris Godunov dispatched six students there.\textsuperscript{34} But the French knew practically nothing of Russia. Dançay therefore proposed that a man who had resided for twenty years in Russia be sent back there to report on customs and business affairs, and that at the same time efforts be made to obtain for the French commercial privileges equal to those enjoyed by the English, a port on the Dwina River, and a safe conduct for their merchants.\textsuperscript{35}

Three years, however, elapsed before steps were undertaken. Although the Russians had always emphasized their desire to improve commercial relations with all powers in the West,\textsuperscript{36} it was not until 1586 that a merchant from Dieppe, Jehan Sauvage, undertook the northern journey. His report stated that he had reached Archangel on June 28, had been well received, and had participated in the customary drinking bouts with the Russian officials (their aquavita burning him like fire). He did not mention what merchandise he had brought in his ships, stating only that he exchanged it for skins, linen, wax, tallow, and hemp.\textsuperscript{37}

In the same year, some other French merchants tried the northern route; but after using false passports and trying to circumvent the rights of the king of Denmark they had been arrested by the captain of the Danish customs’ station at Vardöhus.

The year 1586 also witnessed the first French diplomatic mission to Russia, having as its goal the expansion of trade. François de Carle was dispatched by Henry III to Tsar Feodor and charged to seek assurances for improvement of commerce and for freedom and

\textsuperscript{32} Karamsin, IX, 348.
\textsuperscript{34} Nothing is known about what has become of them. Haumont, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{36} In September 1585, Tsar Theodore (Feodor) had written to Queen Elizabeth that he would refrain from imposing duties on goods from England, but would act likewise with other countries. “Our kingdom is greate,” he explained, “and merchants owte of many realmes have recours with their merchandize into our kingdomes.” Tolstoy, p. 261.
safety of French merchants. As a result of his endeavors, the harbor of Kholmogory near Archangel was opened to France, and in March 1587 a grant of trading privileges was made to the company of one Jacques Parent. A fifty per cent discount on the general import duties was allowed to the company.

Figures for the northern trade are lacking. As we know from the extent of English shipping around the North Cape, a substantial business could not be carried on there, although the profits from an individual voyage were sometimes immense. French trade in the North of Russia, therefore, cannot have been very important, either; but beneficial results of the political arrangements were in evidence in the Baltic area. Three hundred and forty-eight ships from France entered the Baltic in 1587, two hundred and forty in 1588, two hundred and forty-seven in 1590, two hundred and fifty-seven in 1594. Although most of them proceeded only to Danzig, many went to Riga, Reval, and other Livonian ports and, through the mediation of Livonian, Hansa, and Polish merchants, traded French for Russian goods. Salt exports increased again, reaching almost 15,000 last in 1589, more than one half of the total carried through the Sound, and dried fruits, rice, and other colonial products amounted to 46,807 pounds in 1595, out of a total of 102,997 pounds. Likewise, the export of wine became a major item. On the other hand, imports from the East included mainly rye and wheat, yet shipbuilding materials also reached far higher figures than ever before.

It might be expected that the improvement of France's commercial position in the East came with the pacification of the country and the efficient rule of Henry IV, who had finally put an end to the disgraceful period of Valois rule. In reality, however, even under Henry IV French trade did not get the political support which the English and Dutch so largely enjoyed under their trade-minded governments. Henry IV seems to have had no more understanding of Russia than his predecessors. Although the French historian, A. Rambaud, asserts that some correspondence took place between Henry IV and the Tsar, the only one of Henry's letters which is preserved deals with an Italian doctor, Paul (Citadin), and the insignificant incident of his trip to France. Another evidence of French occupation with Russia may be seen in a proposal made by Philippe Canaye

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39 Rambaud, Recueil, pp. 15-16.
de Fresnes, French ambassador in Venice, at the instigation of a captain, Jean La Blanche from Languedoc. He suggested that Henry IV, who had preserved France for the Catholic Church, should become the "apostle" of Russia and help bring her back into the folds of the Holy Roman Church. But in the grand dessin which Henry IV and Sully worked out, Russia was scarcely considered. She was excluded from the European system because, as the authors of the plan feared, the introduction of a nation with a different creed would only increase the religious dissension existing between the various European powers.

Thus Franco-Russian relations remained confined to the activities of private individuals. Merchants continued to be the main link between the two countries. But after the end of the civil wars in France, another group of men began to establish an additional connection. They were the mercenaries, who no longer could find a living in Henry's realms and some of whom eventually went East and entered Russian service. Although the famed English traveller, Giles Fletcher, does not mention any of these men, the memoirs of at least one, who was in Russia at the time of the false Demetrius, have come down to us. The most important among them, however, was Jacques Margeret. He was a French captain who had served Henry IV, Boris Godunov, the false Demetrius, and other princes. "A pious man of understanding" he ranks higher than many other soldiers of fortune. He spent about five years in Russia, until 1606, and he returned there in 1611. He was invited by Henry IV to report about conditions in the strange country, and he wrote his memoirs in the year 1607. He mentions the interest which Demetrius showed for French affairs and his intention of paying a visit to France on an English ship. His memoirs confirm the fact that a number of Frenchmen lived in Russia, both artisans and merchants.

Despite King Henry's personal interest in Margeret's accounts, no steps were undertaken to seek closer political contact and to

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43 Rambaud, Recueil, p. ix. Adelung, I, 177.  
44 Adelung, II, 18. Adelung says that Margeret served also Stephan Báthory, which must be incorrect as he left French service only in 1595. Margeret did serve a "prince of Transylvania," but it was not Stephan Báthory, who died in 1589.  
exploit the commercial possibilities. Franco-Russian trade stagnated and even decreased. In the year 1610, when King Henry was murdered, the number of ships from France entering the Baltic was one hundred and sixty-nine. Of these only eighteen were sailing under the French flag; by far the majority were of Dutch origin, and most of them were destined for Danzig. Trade in salt, products from the East, and wine was still foremost and obviously most profitable, but the incentive to increase it and to add other commodities was still lacking in a France which seemed less dependent upon overseas trade and more in need of internal adjustments than either Holland, England, or even Spain. Trade in shipbuilding materials, which became of such great importance for the national economy of most western nations and which aside from cereals soon constituted the chief export articles of Russia, was neglected by France; or at least considerations of the benefits of overseas commerce were subordinated to plans for internal reforms and external aggrandizement. Disturbances in Russia, Swedish conquests in Livonia, and the decline of Poland with Richelieu's and Mazarin's political aspirations in western Europe combined to prevent successful development of Franco-Russian relations.

As the trade of other nations, so had French commerce with Russia shown promising beginnings in the second half of the sixteenth century. A few farsighted merchants, such as those from Dieppe, and a clever diplomat, such as Dançay, had struggled to put it on a firm and durable basis. Treaties, such as that concluded by François de Carle, had furthered French interests by lending official support to the actions of individuals. On the foundation thus laid during the first half century of French intercourse with Russia, the two countries built their relations for another sixty years, until Colbert inspired them with new ideas and aims.