

## Olof Rönling, First Swedish Consul in the Regency of Tunis (1738-1759): A Diplomatic and Commercial Agent

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### Abstract

**Objectives :** The purpose of this research is to shed light on the diplomatic, maritime, and commercial role of the first Swedish consul in Tunisia in the Mediterranean.

**Methods:** Swedish documents have been utilised as a source of study, specifically Consul Olof Rowling's correspondence between Hussein Ben Ali and Ali Pasha between 1738 and 1742 amidst the civil war that took place in the Eyalet (Regency) of Tunis, and were analysed using historical research methodologies. The study aims to reveal the consul's commercial transactions, whether from the Swedish capital or through the Mediterranean Sea and the city of Izmir, based on documentary sources consisting of correspondence.

**Results:** The study concluded that the Swedish consul in Tunisia played a substantial part in trade and maritime transport, facilitating shipping opportunities for Swedish captains to many Mediterranean ports. Furthermore, the consul negotiated the peace treaty and sent appropriate gifts to the Eyala, demonstrating that the consular institution supported Swedish trade and seafaring.

**Conclusions:** The study recommended numerous studies on the diplomatic relations and interactions between Maghribi's provinces (*Eyalet/Regency*) and Scandinavian countries, which rely on a wide range of sources, both local and Scandinavian, to correlate against one another.

**Keywords:** Swedish consul, trade, Regency of Tunis, Diplomacy, Navigation, Civil war, treaty of 1736.

### أولوف رونلينغ، أول قنصل سويدي بإيالة تونس (1738-1759): عون تجاري ودبلوماسي

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#### ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على الدور الذي لعبه أول قنصل سويدي بتونس في البحر الأبيض المتوسط على المستوى الدبلوماسي والملاحة البحرية والتجارة.

المنهجية: جرى اعتماد الوثائق السويدية مصدرا للدراسة، وتحديدًا مراسلات القنصل أولوف رونلينغ بين عامي 1738 و1742 في فترة الحرب الأهلية التي شهدتها إيالة تونس بين حسين بن علي، وعلي باشا، وتحليلها باستخدام منهج البحث التاريخي. وتُحاول الدراسة الكشف عن المعاملات التجارية لهذا القنصل سواء انطلاقًا من العاصمة السويدية أو مرورًا بالبحر الأبيض المتوسط ومدينة إزمير، استنادًا على مصادر وثائقية تتكون من مراسلات

النتائج: وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن القنصل السويدي بتونس قد لعب دورًا رائدًا في التجارة وفي النقل البحري حيث قدّم فرصًا للشحن للقباطنة السويديين إلى العديد من موانئ البحر الأبيض المتوسط. فضلًا عن ذلك وُفق القنصل في التفاوض بخصوص معاهدة السلام وإرسال الهدايا المناسبة إلى إيالة مما يدل على أن المؤسسة القنصلية كانت في خدمة التجارة والملاحة البحرية السويدية.

الخلاصة: أوصت الدراسة بالإكثار من الدراسات المتصلة بالعلاقات والتفاعلات الدبلوماسية بين إيالات المغرب والبلدان الاسكندنافية التي تعتمد على مصادر متنوعة أي محلية واسكندنافية لمكافحة بعضها ببعضها بعضًا. الكلمات الدالة: القنصل السويدي، التجارة، إيالة تونس، الدبلوماسية، الحرب الأهلية، معاهدة 1736، الملاحة البحرية.



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## Introduction

Sweden built up a real diplomatic and economic system in the Mediterranean throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, allowing it to take full advantage of business opportunities despite being only a minor player on the European chessboard. To leverage the relative safety of their navigation obtained by the State in this region, Swedish ship-owners and captains adding the benefits derived from the neutrality of their country. The status of neutral, in a Europe at war, allows them to provide maritime transport at a lower cost than the merchant navies of belligerent countries.

Leos Müller notes that both experts in maritime history and those who study international politics generally overlook this. The researcher's goal is to assess how the consular service contributes to the growth of Swedish trade and navigation. To do this, it uses the tools developed by neo-institutional economics (Leos Müller 2004). In particular, the author asks whether Sweden's attitude toward the Barbary powers and the implementation of the consular system to lower the costs of protection and information, as well as, more broadly, all of the transaction costs for the Swedish commerce. Leos Müller studies the entrepreneurial behavior of trading houses in Stockholm for his dissertation thesis, and he now wonders if there may be a connection between state policy and the directions that marine trade takes. The consuls constitute an entry likely to be approached from multiple points of view-political, economic, institutional, social or cultural history- and according to plural approaches, where the visions "from above" of the consular systems and their structuring can rub shoulders with visions at ground level, based on the agency of a consul and the relational networks in which he inscribes his action. Swedish consuls in North Africa are therefore salaried by their government, unlike their colleagues established in European ports who do not receive a fixed salary from their country.

Thus, consular action aims to reduce the risks to which Swedish captains are exposed and, in doing so, lowers the transaction costs of Swedish navigation in the Mediterranean. Additionally, the consular service can be seen as an official institution that temporarily outsources and reduces the transaction costs of those involved in Sweden's foreign trade and maritime transport. To what logic is Rönling's decision-making action subject to? Who guides him in his action? On what models does he base his decisions? Is it a more or less spontaneous, or on the contrary, an organized and rationalized character of this economic role of the consul?

The Swedish historian Leos Müller (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 31) makes this idea very clear; to what extent, therefore, does the case of Rönling allow us to explore in the same direction and in the idea that the Swedish consuls were settled in the Mediterranean promote the boom of the Swedish shipping and commerce?

The method used in this research is microhistory. To comprehend the position of the Swedish consul in Tunis as a mediator in business deals between the towns of Tunis and Smyrna, one follows the commercial role of a social actor for a brief period of time. In this instance, the researcher gathers, examines, explores, archives, and documents the information directly related to the consul as a primary source that supports and is relevant to the research study's goal. It is essentially a register, written in English and Swedish, which covers the term of office of Consul Rönling, but I use only the folios relating to the period from the end of the Civil War (1738-1740), i.e. folio 27 to folio 392. The use of English at this date may seem surprising, but it's important to remember that the Mediterranean was multilingual, and that the majority of the consul's addressees were English-speaking (National archives of Sweden : N. A. S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7].)

. Then the author gathers, examines, and assesses the content of the study data before describing the findings objectively and descriptively using deductive and inductive techniques. The qualitative component of the study aims to trace the routes of goods sent from Sweden to Tunis and Smyrna and analyze their itinerary as a merchant consul.

### 1- The diplomatic role of the consul

The Swedish merchant elites have the opportunity to actively participate in their country's economic policy after 1718, and their interests became an essential part of Swedish policy. Thus, the interests of the various mercantile groups become an essential feature of Swedish policy (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 40). The establishment of a Swedish consular system in the Mediterranean, in relation to the policy of neutrality, is then intended to protect Swedish navigation (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 31). In 1730s, it is accompanied by the ratification of a series of treaties with the North African regencies (Algiers 1729, Tunis, 1736, Tripoli 1741, and Morocco 1763), aimed at protecting Swedish ships from competition. The ratification of the

treaty of friendship and commerce with the regency of Tunis in 1736 is thus integrated within the framework of a reorientation towards a more volitional economic policy on the part of the Swedish government, which is also manifested by the promulgation of the navigation laws of 1724. In fact, Swedish shipping laws prohibit imports to and from Sweden on all vessels other than those of the Swedish or flag of the exporting country.

The Tunisian-Swedish treaty of 1736 is a major milestone in Swedish trade expansion in the Mediterranean. It is the first peace treaty negotiated between the regency of Tunis during the reign of Ali Pasha, which is in a period of political and social turmoil, and a European nation (Mehdi Jerad, 2014, p.237-240). This treaty, like its predecessors of the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is part of a series of "unequal" treaties (Michel Morineau, 1976, p.145-184) imposed on the regency, reflecting the balance of power (Sadok Boubaker, 1987, p. 41) between the two contracting parties.

More historians consider that the expression "unequal treaties", coined by Sun Yatsen to qualify the treaties signed between European and Asian countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is questionable. In addition, it seems even more so for those signed with the Maghreb regencies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially since European countries were often dependent on the regencies, which suggesting that the treaties were rather more favorable to the regencies – at least in some cases –than to European signatories. Additionally, and more generally, historians dispute the very existence of a balance of power favorable to European countries in the Mediterranean before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The European powers finally understand the weakness of the Sublime Porte vis-à-vis the Maghreb regencies, which is why they orient their diplomacy in order to establish direct relations with these regencies, at least from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to conclude peace and trade treaties without going through the Ottomans. After the phase of commercial opening of the regency of Tunis with Europe at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, we see the phase of unequal treaties signed in favor of European powers, notably France and England. Youssef Dey (1610–1637) was able to cope at an early stage with the regression of privateer activity and its income, by deciding to conclude agreements with the European powers in the hope of increasing the number of foreign merchants in Tunis, while the European states want to force the regency to apply the capitulations obtained from Istanbul and impose their clauses, by practicing maritime warfare.

The treaty was asymmetrical in its provisions (Mehdi Jerad, 2014, p.237–263) and lacks of reciprocity (Christian Windler, 2019, p. 941-961), and is characterized by the establishment of consular posts and the conclusion of treaties with the North African regencies, the Sublime Porte and the countries of Europe.

George Logie is the main actor in the diplomatic negotiations. He is a Scottish trader residing in Sweden and is very familiar with trade in the Mediterranean. As a result, he is appointed Swedish consul general with the goal of making peace with the North African regencies. Logie is mentioned in the Arab draft of the treaty as Swedish consul in Algiers, a position he held when Ali Pasha seized power after ousting his uncle. We owe the negotiations of the treaty signed with Algiers in 1729 to Logie, and it is likely that the negotiations with Tunis began in early 1736.

The consul in charge of negotiating the peace treaty with the regency was undoubtedly aware of the events of the civil war, particularly the intervention of Algerian troops, before beginning discussions with the Beylical court. Rönling writes to George Logie, informing him that his son James has been involved in the negotiations of the Tunisian-Swedish treaty of 1736, reminding Logie that his son was successively the secretary of Mr. Reftelins, Mr. Ehrenprens and M. Giedda in Algiers, asking for some form of recompense for his services ( N. A. S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to George Logie, fol. 103, November 24, 1738.)

. Logie is an experienced negotiator and a knowledgeable trader, making him an ideal candidate for the job.

Negotiations with Tunis last a year or more. Language barriers complicated negotiations' process with the bey's Khaznadar (Treasurer, in charge of the income and expenses of the Beylik and the management of the property of the reigning family). Confidence however is established through the personal relations of the Scottish merchant Logie with the bey, enabling him to dispute, "with Gautier [the French consul] the first place with the bey"(Eugène Plantet , 1894, p. 304). Logie also forges strong connections with European diplomats stationed in the regency, notably with Hudson, the Dutch consul in Tunis and Stanifford, the English consul in Algiers, who is his brother-in-law (Eugène Plantet , 1894, p. 304). Logie is able to take advantage of the market information circuits to help him accomplish his mission such as relying on

the merchant world to learn about the movement of shipping in the Mediterranean and Captain Thomas Douglass, who has married his sister and has extensive trading experience. Furthermore, Logie is a central player in the redemption of Swedish and European captives (Joachim Östlund, 2010, p. 157) between 1737 and 1758, ( N.A.S., Kommerskollegium Huvudarkivet skrivelser Från Konsuler, Livorno E VI, aa 229 correspondence from George Logie, October 3, 1738.) through his network.

Additionally, and by virtue of the provisions of the Tunisian-Swedish treaty of 1736 (Art. 16), the Swedish consul has the right to fly the flag of “His Majesty the King of Sweden” (Mehdi Jerad, 2014, p.260). The first Swedish consul in the regency lives in a house belonging to the bey and wishes to enjoy his consular prerogatives. Since his establishment in Tunis, Rönling strives to build the Swedish consulate to utilize this favor, like the French and English consuls. A few months after his establishment in Tunis, he describes the construction of the consular house in these terms:

“The New House begins to grow pretty forward they having brought thither the piling for the marches so that the wood work, will be wanted soon: I have considered, that it would be needless to write about it to the court, who will never grant it; but if you would please to write to Madame Konig and order her to send it out in the spring, or if not to be had at Stockholm, to write to Narva one of the cheapest places for timber in the Baltic, of which she may correspond and have the timber out over the winter to be ready in the spring and then at it beginning to freight a large Fur vessel at the cheapest rate to bring it hither when she may arrive here in the summer”.( N. A. S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to George Logie, fol. 66, August 23, 1738.)

The consul demands that quantities of timber be sent from the Baltic region for use in building the new consulate. The following two passages provide further details on the progress of the work:

“The house building goes on apace the pillars are all raised in the warehouse, and partly covered and will be wholly covered in a week’s time after which they are to begin on the dwelling rooms so that the timber will be soon wanted the builder said when you was here that it would require 400 balks 18 foot long and 7 a 8 inches thick: it would prove a great detriment of the building should stop for want of the timber at which many would be sneering” ( N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to John Clason and Company, fol. 178, March 12, 1739.); “The magazines under the new house are finished and the stairs made to the first floor where they will begin to make the dwelling rooms, but as there is a mosque near the house, there is allowed no windows that look thither, which will make those apartments dark, the timber is not yet come to town, when it comes shall consult the master builder of what dimensions may be required and advise you by my next”. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to George Logie, fol. 189 and 190 on June 12, 1739.)

At the end of 1740, he recommends Raid Alström to send him the cabinets of Sweden and the images of Swedish kings, so that they can be displayed inside the consular house (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 360, December 15, 1740). During his mission, Rönling negotiates common affairs and carries out the stipulations of the concluded treaty with the bey or his officers, especially the Khaznadar. He also holds private audiences (Mehdi Jerad, 2019, p. 149-175) with the bey, providing a form of conversation that is not bound by the ceremonial rigors. Rönling collects and transmits economic and political information to the Swedish capital. This information is available to merchants in Stockholm.

The practice of Tunisian-Swedish interactions from the reign of Ali Pasha (1735–1756) is characterized by the multiplication of contacts during public hearings. Olof Rönling, for instance, travels from the city of Tunis to the beylical palace (the Bardo) to maintain contact with the court (Christian Windler, 2002, p. 453-455), with the frequency of his visits varying between once or twice or sometimes even three or four times a week ( N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to Wasenberg, fol. 41, April 22, 1738.) . Rönling's first letter sent from Tunis on March 21, 1738 to William Chalmers in Gibraltar reveals that he arrives in Tunis on January 19, 1738 and is well received in Bardo accompanied by George Logie. Furthermore, he sends cargoes of wool to Logie, which are not appreciated by the customers, suggesting that his trip is primarily motivated by commercial reasons.

On January 21, George Logie and Rönling ride on horseback to the Bardo with the dragomans [translator]. They were welcomed by the bey and present him with the letter of provision, and after a few compliments, Rönling informs Ali Bey

of the arrival of his Swedish king's presents, which are on the ship's board. They were very well received and appreciated by the bey. After the ratification of the peace and trade treaty, both parties express their hope that peace will continue until the end of time.

The Swedish king sends Ali Pasha a present of twenty-four pieces of cannon, cannon balls, tar, 1,800 building boards, a few gold watches set with diamonds, and two clocks (Eugène Plantet, 1894, p. 309). The French consul in Tunis reported that the king is also obliged to build two ships of 40 guns for the regency. This is a voluntary but "compulsory" (Christian Windler, 2002, p. 491) donation, as the regency expects presents as confirmation of a treaty. In return, Ali Pasha agrees to respect Swedish navigation and commerce and to offer them customs privileges. To demonstrate his appreciation, Ali Pasha sends his own presents to the Swedish king through Captain Dickerson.

"The Bey send with him two horses with its furniture and three scarfs for his majesties and for her majesties to embroidered stomachers and three paid towards shippers made after this country fashion but not finished he would also have sent an Osbridge but it dyed since I came here". (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 27, April 04, 1738.)

The exchange itself is a manifestation of Swedish naval power, and so Sweden sends a ship under the command of Captain Dickerson loaded with gifts of war ammunition and boards for shipbuilding (Mehdi Jerad, 2015, p. 21).

These gifts are of great value and usefulness for the naval force of the regency of Tunis, while the bey's gifts, which consisted of wild animals such as lions, had only symbolic value (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 124). This exchange of presents highlights the unequal relations between Tunis and Sweden, with the arms and ammunition testifying to the weakness of certain European powers and their inferior position vis-à-vis the Muslim rulers. Furthermore, Rönling gives horoscopes to the bey and other members of the court, as well as to one of the gatekeepers of the Bardo, on specific occasions. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to George Logie, fol. 162, March 12, 1739.)

In addition to other consular functions, one of the most important is granting passports to privateers of the regency. According to the Tunisian-Swedish treaty of 1736, Swedish ships have to prove their identity with a special passport issued by the Royal Council of Commerce. This passport, also known as an Algerian passport (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 144.), is necessary for all ships sailing beyond Cape Finisterre. It is used to certify the nationality of the boat, which privateers can verify at the time of the visit, in accordance with the peace treaties in force. Regulations concerning this passport are published on January 13, 1730. All ships sailing beyond Cape Finisterre are required to carry an *Algerian passport*. This document is necessary for all ships travelling in waters frequented by the Barbarians, mainly to certify the nationality of the boat. The visit consists of checks carried out by privateers aboard merchant ships stop, which can range from simple checking of documents (such as passports) to searching ships. Due to the frequent use of false flags and other deceptions to avoid capture, privateers frequently attack cargoes belonging to Allied Powers. The modalities of the visits are precisely specified in the peace treaties, as are the number of men authorized to make them. However, the concealment of these passports, such as boats with a crew of different nationalities than the one indicated on the papers or suspicion of smuggling, can create a diplomatic crisis, giving the corsairs a perfect excuse to resume hostilities based on proven and suspected irregularities (Matteo Barbano, 2018, p. 258).

The consul gives the Tunisian privateers blank templates of leaves and passports. Each passport is cut into two parts or two pieces, one sent to the consular post and the other kept on board the ship. When the privateers inspected the ship, the captain has to prove the nationality of the ship with the correct passport document (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 144-145). As soon as he settles in Tunis, Rönling recommends the harmonization of the form of the passport like the other European powers and the dispatch of a model consular seal:

"The other day I gave a pass to a cruiser who bought me also the English and the French consuls Passes printed with the arms of their courts on the top and the seals opposite to their names of which enclosed copies please to observe that their public acts terminates in the plural number; that I may not appear inferior to them I have asked leave of the Colleges for a seal of the Arms of Sweden with these words or the like round it *Sigillum Consularis Suecica Tunitensis* which may be used here in future times. In case they give leave please to cause a seal to be made of the bigness of half a crown on a piece of steel with which one could make the impression by a mallet on a wafer such as are commonly used by the notary



Publicks...” (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 28, April 04, 1738.)

On July 25, 1739, he receives orders from the Swedish Trade Board to issue a pass to privateers of the regency:

“I had lately two letters from the college of commerce the one ordering me to grant to the cruisers tops of passes which I think is prejudicial to our navigation as long as the Suzeens?[corsairs] can send barks and rowboats a cruising such passes may fall in their hands and prove a trap to the Swedish ships, besides that it would make up the cruisers of this place more insolent, thinking they may thereby have letter requires an inspection on Sweden deal boards that come out in Swedish ships to report of what quality they are”. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Fol. 199, letter from Rönling to George Logie.)

Certainly, Rönling expresses his anxiety to grant these passes, fearing their use by the corsairs of the regency of Tunis for other purposes, especially since the laissez-passer gives the corsairs a certain authority, which may hamper Swedish navigation in the Mediterranean. The following passage illustrates well this anxiety:

“... in my humble opinion, these tops of passes seem to give [some] sort of authority to the cruisers, to search the Swedish ships, the shadow of which ought to be prevented and avoided these cruisers are mostly ignorant and rapacious fellows the less power or show of power they have the better it is; other Consuls here give to the cruisers only their passes and never made use of any tops and their shipping go unmolested and why not ours? It’s death for a cruiser to molest any shipping in peace with the bey which on complaint would be executed with rigor.” (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Fol. 205, letter from Rönling to Jonas Alström, August 02, 1739.)

Rönling is an exemplary figure of integration into the local society of Stockholm, being well off and providing a variety of services to businessmen and merchants. He is appointed Swedish consul in Tunis on the recommendation of George Logie, but goes beyond his diplomatic role to serve both the London and Stockholm communities. His position as a trader and consul demonstrates the role of market intermediaries in the process of combining diplomacy and commerce. Rönling had previously worked for Jonas Alström's London office, which is also involved in Mediterranean affairs, and he shares the same interests as Logie (Gustaf Fryksén, 2018, p. 283-288). An analysis of diplomatic reports reveals the extent of Rönling's maneuverability in the economic field.

## **2-An intermediation agent at the service of a merchant lobby!**

To fully understand the role played by Rönling as a commercial intermediary, it is useful to recall that the Swedish consular network functioned as a relay of mercantilism, within the framework of the construction of the national state (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 18-20). To further explore the consular institution, its missions, and its usefulness, historians utilize the concept of *agency* (Natividad, Planas, 2013, p. 37-56), which refers to the capacity to act of a historical actor in a given social and institutional configuration. The consul, then, works in the interest and under the direction of third parties who sponsor them, and it is precisely this relationship that Rönling is a part of.

“the identity of these third parties, the nature of the means they use to limit and control the action of the consuls to their own service...” (Arnaud Bartolomei, 2018, p. 391) which seems essential at this stage.

As a figure shared between public service and particular interests, Rönling finds himself involved in the dialectical and dynamic relationship established by the merchants with the state in which he settles temporarily or permanently. He is guided by the expansionist designs of his nation and his personal trajectory, making him an archetype of a merchant consul who is faithful to the cause of his nation and has his entries into the social environment he integrates. However, the ambiguous position of the consul as a representative of merchants and as a diplomatic representative of a state often causes conflicts of interest.

Leos Müller, a Swedish historian, believes that the consuls in North Africa have an essentially diplomatic role and are the only salaried consuls, apart from the consul of Smyrna (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 83). However, the correspondence of Rönling, a consul in Tunis, reveals that he is more of a commercial agent and a commission agent and works on his own account to support himself. In a letter addressed to Raid Alström on April 12, 1740, Rönling expresses his refusal to move to Algiers and justified his presence in Tunis by his familiarity with the regency’s trade circuits and his potential usefulness to his king and his country:

“I thank you kindly for your hints about Alger [Algiers] where a man of vigor and strength is required, my years have crept on me, so that I must own that it is not now as it was in former days. Besides that, I have just attained the manners of these people and their trade so that I can be more serviceable [better serve] my king and country in this place than the other there being many of more ability, to deserve that place in case M. Logie should go home to Sweden...” (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 296.)

The exchange between Rönling and the various interlocutors in London, Stockholm and other Mediterranean consular posts between 1738 and 1742, provides a great deal of valuable information. Moreover, the Swedish consul continues to engage in trading activities, turning the consular house into a trading center.

The new consul, freshly settling down in Tunis, notes with regret the little encouragement granted to trade with this regency and advances several reasons for it, in particular, the outbreak of the civil war (1728–1740) and consequently the high price of products there. Thus, the Scandinavian consul is unable to sell first-hand clothes and fabrics purchased in London. The locals are unwilling to venture out and stake their fortunes in the trade, according to the consul’s words. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Letter from Olof Rönling to Chalmers, March 21, 1738.)

But, aside from the effects of the civil war, the Jews exercise a certain monopoly on several branches of the regency’s commerce by paying certain sums of money each year to the bey.

Despite this, the consul is able to demonstrate his commercial utility by verifying the accounts of certain agents or merchants and dispatching current prices to Tunis (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Fol. 120, December 14, 1738). He also draws up Logie’s accounts with the bey and his Khaznadar as well as the accounts of other Stockholm merchants.

In addition, several letters written by George Logie reflect his own interests in commerce and commercial transactions. These letters discussed topics such as the currency used in the Mediterranean and exchange rates. This is in line with the objectives of Swedish mercantilist policy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which includes the sale of items such as naval ammunition, sawn timber and iron bars. The latter was the backbone of the Swedish export trade (Leos Müller, 2011, p.60). It represents at least half of the value of products exported in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Logie and Olof Rönling are both involved in this type of business. A few months after his installation in Tunis, there is question of the transactions of quantities of iron on behalf of Rönling:

“Enclosed you have endorsed bill of loading on 657 barrs 100 sh 4 ½ t of iron in the sveriges ship Captain Gabriel Askbohm from Stockholm for my acc:t [account] but the abstract of consul Logie’s letter, I think needless to send, as the contents concerned Captain Askbohm cargo only who I suppose is dispatched from your place before now; I am sorry that my orders for selling my iron was retarded in the manner aforesaid, but having recommended to Consul Logie thereof, I hope it has reached him before his packet was dispatched from Leghorn to your place after the sale of the iron you’ll please to send the proceed in specie to Consul Logie by Livorno for my account”. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 29, April 1738; fol. 120 and 121, letter from Olof Rönling to George Gordon, December 26, 1738.)

It is evident that Rönling takes part in the bar iron trade and tries to profit from it as much as possible, like other Swedish merchants and trading houses. In a letter to Jonas Alström, he does not hesitate to list the different uses of iron in Tunis and to indicate the current prices for this item:

“The most use they have here for iron, is for ploughs, shoes for horses mules and borricoes, and for reaping sickles: the first is made of board iron in giving it only few twists, a man, and a boy to the bellows can work up 2 quintals iron one day, and the shoes are sold at 26 aspers by dozen/ 52 aspers make a dollar/ one with another making no difference of those for horses and barricoes by this it is plain that no iron manufactures can be imported here, expected those of the finer sort, which comes from Venice, as for their household implements they use very little or none at all in their kitchen are nothing of iron work to be seen but of Earthen ware pots, and copper the latter comes from...” (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Fol. 124, January 8.)

Rönling uses his position as a merchant intermediation agent to benefit himself and the Swedish trading houses, as he receives commissions from them. However, Ali Pasha, who is at war with his uncle who has taken as refuge in the city of Kairouan, monopolizes (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 105, letter from Rönling to George Logie on November 24,



1738.) the iron trade for his own profit.

In response, the Swedish consul advises Logie to write a letter to the bey informing him that he would will not receive any more quantities of iron as long as it was monopolized, and thus no gunpowder either.

Jonas Alström and John Clason are also involved in the iron trade through Logie and Rönling. Johan Clason (1704–1790), does not hesitate to enter into a marriage "of interest" – no doubt – with Maria, Alström's sister. While the latter marries Margareta, Clason's sister (Gustaf Fryksén, 2018, p, 284) in 1731. The two families entered into a marriage of mutual exchange, which recalls the principle of equivalence, contracted in a compensatory logic.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Logie and Alström families form a family constellation at the economic and social levels, likely driven by a desire to strengthen their commercial activities. This is evident in their involvement with the Swedish East India Company (1731) and the Swedish Company of the Levant (1738) (Gustaf Fryksén, 2018, p, 285). Johan Clason provides capital to the consul Rönling (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 177, Letter to John Clason, March 12, 1739.) , who then invests it in transactions in iron or other commodities. Olof Rönling acts as an intermediary for the sale of Swedish iron in Tunis and Algiers, partly on his own account, but mainly as a commission agent for large merchants such as Logie, Clason and Alström.

At the same time as exploiting his relational capital with the men of the court and the great merchants of the regency, Consul Rönling is also an exporter of quantities of wool to Sweden. His various roles enables him to become a buyer of goods that he receives in commission, which he uses to his own advantage, as well as those of his relatives and protectors. This influence is evident in the information he provides to other merchants and at the Trade Office. In his correspondence, the expression "when the country is settled I hope some trade may be carried on to that place with advantage" (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 125, letter to Jonas Alström, 8 January 1739.) often comes up. On August 12, 1738, Rönling procures two bales of wool on behalf of Consul George Logie, from Sfax, through a merchant from that city: Ibrahim al-Ush. (N. A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 57, letter to Tho. B. Bocchini (Sfax).

Members of the al-Ush family are involved in Sfax's maritime trade since the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Ibrahim al-Ush has commercial depots within the city (Ali Zouari, 1990, p. 97). Although Ali Zouari does not mention wool as an export product from the port of Sfax during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, several letters from Rönling confirmed the shipment of wool (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 116, Letter to George Logie, December 11, 1738.) and skins bound for Sweden.

To export wool and skins to Sweden, Rönling relies on the services of local dignitaries such as Ibrahim al-Ush, the *caid* (District governor) of Sfax Ali Djellouli, Mohamed Saïdi, captain of the port of the Goleta, and the bey's Khasnadar. The Khasnadar is responsible for obtaining a *Teskéré*, an authorization signed by the bey, to receive the proportionate quantity of wool (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 116, Letter to George Logie, December 11, 1738.). Additionally, Logie used to send quantities of iron to the Bey of Tunis through Captain Robert Dickerson, who is George Logie's father-in-law.

Rönling serves as an intermediary between Swedish merchants and the Tunisian trade office, providing useful information to help determine Swedish trade policy and briefing individual actors. In return, Ali Pasha supplies him with wool from the port of Sfax, which Rönling is responsible for collecting and storing in a warehouse belonging to the Consul George Logie (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 162, Letter to George Logie, March 12, 1739.)

. Once the requested quantities of wool are collected, Rönling sends a ship to transport them to Alström, who distinguishes between washed and unwashed wool. we must recognize here that Rönling orders the collection of wool in the right season in April, May and June, a process that takes time when loading a ship takes time. Additionally, he rents warehouses in Tunis to deposit the various goods, reflecting a commercial logic. In June 1741, Rönling has to buy 150 quintals of unwashed wool from Bey Mohamed, one of Ali Pasha's sons, at a price of 9 piastres per quintal in favor of Alström. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 404, Letter to George Logie, June 30, 1741.)

During the first years of his tenure as consul in Tunis (1738–1742), Rönling keeps in touch with Swedish merchants and serves as an intermediary in various commercial transactions. He provides the trade office with useful trade information of the regency who helps determine Swedish trade policy, and he briefs individual actors, including a small circle of Stockholm merchants.

The foreign trade of the Regency of Tunis is based then on the export of agricultural products to Europe and to the Levant, as well as the import of the raw materials necessary for the manufacture of Chechia (Sadok Boubaker, 2016, p. 236) caps. So, between 1758 and 1773, 60% to 70% of Tunisian imports from Europe are made up of raw materials intended for chechia. These caps then exports to the eastern Mediterranean as a finished product (Sadok Boubaker, 2003, p. 47). According to Rönling, the consumption of cochineal is estimated to be around 312 quintals per year, Spanish wool values at between 120 and 140 piastres per quintal ( N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 54, Letter to Mr. William Chalmers by Littlejohn, June 10, 1738.) in Tunis (The price of a quintal of cochineal fluctuates between 225 piastres from Portugal and 130 piastres from Morea in 1739). With the effects of the civil war, the consul notices the decline of trade in the regency, and an increase in the export of fez area "red caps" which the Mohammedans wear under their turbans. Large quantities are exported to the different parts of Levant. This is the only place where they are made and there are over 40,000 men (Sadok Boubaker, 2016, p. 236) employed for this purpose (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], Fol. 149, letter to Jonas Alström, February 28, 1739.) . Rönling recommends – under condition - to Logie that he invests his capital in the cochineal trade and English pepper in order to sell it to Tunis and profit from it. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], letter to George Logie, July 25, 1739.)

He is able to observe the increased involvement of the French in this trade because they supply Tunis almost exclusively with Spanish wool (from Bilbao but especially from Segovia) and dye products. This allows for the production of the fez, which is then sold in the Levant, particularly in the city of Smyrna.

Swedish consul in Tunis sees this as a great opportunity for Swedish merchants and the Swedish Levant Company, and he seeks to promote the success of the convoys that dock in Anatolia. Thus, he encourages the shipping of the chechia on boats bound for the Levant. A dozen chechia is sold in Istanbul for 15 piastres (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 223, letter to George Logie, August 21, 1739.) while in Smyrna the price did not exceed 9 piastres per dozen. He does not hesitate to seize the good opportunities to participate in the hat trade and send dozens to Smyrna. It should be noted that one of the most active circuits of Swedish navigation, departs from Stockholm through the straits of the Sound and Gibraltar, heading to the ports of Algiers and Tunis (timber, iron, tar, etc.). On the return journey, the merchants procure supplies of wool, oil and especially salt from Cagliari. Rönling's instructions are aimed not only at developing Swedish commerce, but also at contracting profit-making transactions.

In practice, therefore, the figure of a "hybrid" consul emerges, divided between the service of the state and that of the merchants, between the general interest and his particular interests, which dominates (Arnaud Bartolomei, 2018. p.392). Rönling also serves as a sentry when trade resumes in specific spaces. He writes to the various Swedish addressees, encouraging them to seize the opportunity to restart the tea and silk trade in India as well as the alum mines near Smyrna. In one of his letters to Rad Alström on April 12, 1740, Rönling puts forward some guidelines of Swedish trade (Leos Müller, 2003, p. 28-44) policy not only concerning the chechia trade in Tunis, but also affecting other articles and other geographical areas,

“...I have hinted the same to M. Kierman and also to send from hence to Smyrna red caps which are manufactured in this town and of which great many are yearly sent to Smyrna and Constantinople ; if the trade from Bengal succeeds something may be done here in Muslins, of which the turbans are made up, and which they now have from the Indies by the way of the red sea those goods I believe are liable to heavy charges which come that way and that consequently those from Sweden may come cheaper; for all goods imported here I pay but 5 by current customs for yours government. I should be glad to be of any service to you and friends that may tend to their advantage and where a quick return may be made but to have dealings of consequence with the government I must desire to be excused from giving any encouragement”. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 296.)

Rönling is, in fact largely dependent on the Stockholm trading circles, which played a decisive role in his appointment and with which he maintains close correspondence. The Swedish case is not unique (Arnaud Bartolomei , 2018, p. 394), other European consuls are in close contact with the big merchants, notably the Dutch and the French. Beyond his role of merchant intermediation, Rönling provides services to the captains of ships, and promotes the interests of Swedish

navigation in the Mediterranean.

The economic information (Pierrick Pourchasse, 2006, p. 205) contained in the letters sent to the various Swedish addressees is fairly standard compared to other countries. It includes the record of vessel movements and the circuit of Swedish vessels in the Mediterranean, as well as the description of the cargo and a rough estimate of their value. Generally, Swedish ships are loaded with iron and wood, in return with salt, oil and wool. The obligation to provide commercial information by consuls is perceptible especially in the Scandinavian countries, due to the directives of supervisory authorities, which are organizations with an economic vocation managed in part by traders.

To take advantage of this trade, Rönling proposes sending a ship loaded with fir trees, (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 29, April 4, 1738.) captained by an experienced sailor, to Tunis to sell the cargo and return with salt to Gothenburg. In August 1738, Rönling provides Captain Nicolas Wiseman with a charter to Bône (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 56, letter to George Gordon, August 6, 1738.) from the Goleta and in November of the same year, he offers to help Captain Barthelemy secure good freight with passengers bound for Alexandria and noted that there were several freights for English and French ships from Tunis. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 110, letter to the brothers Butini and Fölsch, 30 novembre 1738.) Rönling provides genuine merchant services to Swedish shipping (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 451, letter to George Logie, December 22, 1741.) and trade in a legal manner. This is exemplified by their adapted reactions to the Mediterranean charter market, showing their great control over it. The questions regarding the sinking of ships and the redemption of captives constitute other types of particular cases in which Rönling is regularly called upon to intervene. This demonstrates that Rönling is able to provide services that allow Swedish shipping and trade to be successful.

Most often, the charter is established for the entire ship, but if the contracts indicate the type to which it belongs, they fail to specify its displacement (Daniel Panzac, 2004, p. 94). In the shelter of the fortress of the Goleta and its lake, Tunis ensures the safety for the boats that frequent it. Sandals or small, flat-bottomed boats carry goods and men. Rönling complains about the additional expense of freighting the sandals.

The goods on board the ships can not go up the lake of Tunis, due to the water level and the effects of the heat. To solve this problem, the Bey grants the fleet of sandals a *teskéré* or sort of authorization to bring these goods to Tunis. However, according to the Swedish consul, (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 189 and 192, June 1739, letters to George Logie.) these additional charges for the freight of the sandals reach four and a half piasters.

It still seems from Rönling's epistolary exchanges that captains Young and Wardlaw occasionally make their way to the port of Sfax to load their ships with wool, skins and oil. The consul then coordinates with the local authorities to ensure the availability of the requested items and to limit the waiting time.

At that time, a war breaks out between Spain and England (1739–1742), threatening navigation in the Mediterranean. Rönling advises Logie to take advantage of this situation to employ his three Swedish-flagged ships between Livorno, Tunis, Algiers and Tripoli; moreover, the merchants of the regency are asking for Swedish ships. They don't want to resort to English or French ships because of the war:

“As the war is broke out between England and Spain, I think your three vessels could get good employ [use] between your place, here, Alger [Algiers] and Tripoli under our Bandera, some of the Moors have enquired for Swedish ships, being no willing to trust themselves on English or French bottoms by reason [because] of the war”. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 217, letter to George Logie, August 18, 1739.)

Swedish neutrality during the conflicts between France, Spain and Great Britain is a major factor in navigation in the Mediterranean. The protection of the Swedish flag reduces the risk of losing the cargo due to privateer attack or belligerence (Leos Müller, 2011, p. 64). Thus, a ship called the *diligence*, belonging to (Leos Müller, 2004, p. 72) Gustaf Kierman, one of the founders of the Levant Company, arrives from Smyrna to Tunis in March 1740, under the command of Captain Christian Backman. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 290, letters to the brothers Butini and Fölsch, March 5, 1740.) The ship carries goods to Stockholm, and freight for merchants in Tunis. According to Rönling, the captain intends to sail for Cagliari to load salt for Stockholm, the consul provided him with a letter of credit in the name of Gustaf Kierman to help facilitate this. In May 1740, the Board of Trade sends a letter to Rönling, ordering him to closely monitor Swedish ships to

ensure that captains follow the regulations of January 13, 1730 concerning Mediterranean passports or Algerian passports, and those of August 2, 1731, which state that no other ship should interfere with the freedom of navigation of Swedish ships. (N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 338, letter to George Logie, September 6, 1740.)

This indicates that the success of Swedish shipping is partly due to the development of a powerful fiscal state, which is able to bear the costs of naval protection instead of relying on private actors (Thierry Allain, 2018, p. 429).

### Conclusion

Over the past fifteen years, consular studies have been incredibly lively, indicating a strong and unwavering interest in the field. Researchers have been able to collaborate internationally despite the challenges of compartmentalization, by openly and constructively debating their questions and results. Writing the history of the first Swedish consul in Tunis is a difficult task, and we have only begun to scratch the surface. Despite the diversity and richness of local situations, we can still draw a few lines of analysis from this sample, which could be useful in other cases. The ratification of peace treaties between Sweden and the Maghreb regimes in the eighteenth century opens up new horizons for Swedish trade and for peaceful relationship, yet Tunis is seen here as a necessary step in supplying Swedish trade to the Levant. The case of the Swedish consul shows that, in addition to his diplomatic role, he is involved in commercial transactions, which undermines the idea that Swedish consuls in North Africa have essentially diplomatic prerogatives.

The case of the Swedish consul in Tunis demonstrates that the consular institution is at the center of divergent interests. Rönling, the consul, acts like a private entrepreneur, independent of the institutional changes occurring in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. His tenure in Tunis (1738-1742) shows that he favors the commercial interests of the Stockholm merchants, operating within a chain of multiple merchant networks, such as those of Logie, Clason and Alström. The Swedish consular system is neither fully autonomous nor totally subject to a clearly defined state authority, instead appearing to evolve in complex institutional configurations, intertwining state, national and particular interests at various levels. We remark that this is a unique situation and thank the case of the Swedish consul in Tunis for revealing this.

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- N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 189 and 192, June 1739, letters to George Logie.
- N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 217, letter to George Logie, August 18, 1739.
- N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 290, letters to the brothers Butini and Fölsch, March 5, 1740.
- N.A.S., [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 338, letter to George Logie, September 6, 1740.
- N.A.S., *Kommerskollegium Huvudarkivet skrivelser Från Konsuler, Livorno E VI, aa 229* correspondence from George Logie, October 3, 1738.
- National archives of Sweden (N. A. S.), [Konsulatet i Tunis 7].



Appendix: letter from Olof Rönling to George Logie.

National archives of Sweden (Arninga) [Konsulatet i Tunis 7], fol. 80, August 24, 1738,

