

## *Johannes Fåhraeus, Amsterdam merchant and representative of the Swedish naturalist Carl Peter Thunberg*

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**Abstract:** The development of science in the seventeenth and eighteenth century is marked by the exchange of ideas and research results on a transnational scale. This led to an extensive exchange of letters and – in the case of natural history – of materials such as (dried) plants, seeds, and minerals. Logistical support by all kinds of go-betweens was essential in this process. This is where merchants could be useful. This article explores this logistical role of merchants, based on a collection of thirty-nine letters from Sweden-born Amsterdam merchant Johannes Fåhraeus to Swedish botanist Carl Peter Thunberg. These letters show that for fifteen years Fåhraeus operated as Thunberg’s representative in Amsterdam. Due to his transnational commercial contacts, he could offer Thunberg financial services, arrange shipping of letters and parcels to and from Sweden, and provide political and economic information. This role of go-between implied a real bond of trust. Fåhraeus’ activities for Thunberg demonstrate that merchants played an important facilitating role in the development of modern science.

### *Introduction*

‘The parcel for Professor Burmannus and the casket for Doctor Houttuin have arrived in good order and according to the enclosed have been well delivered,’ the Amsterdam merchant Johannes Fåhraeus wrote in 1781 to Swedish botanist

*Keywords:* history of science, botany, logistics, intermediaries, merchants, Sweden

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Carl Peter Thunberg in Uppsala.<sup>1</sup> Why did Fåhraeus write this? Was it common at the time for merchants to write to scholars? What was the relationship between the two?

This letter is one of the 39 letters from the Amsterdam trading firm Fåhraeus & Swarth – later called Fåhraeus & Laurin – addressed to Carl Peter Thunberg in Uppsala, which are to be found in the collection ‘Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg’ (Letters to Carl Peter Thunberg) in the Uppsala University Library.<sup>2</sup> At the time, Thunberg was a professor of botany and already an renowned scholar.<sup>3</sup> He maintained extensive contacts with fellow scholars in other countries, including what was then the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. In addition to letters and books, he exchanged live and dried plants, seeds, and bulbs. At a time when goods of any weight were usually sent by ship, this required practical, logistical support. The 39 letters indicate that Fåhraeus provided that support for some 15 years and acted as Thunberg’s representative in Amsterdam. Together with several other members of Amsterdam’s Swedish community, he played an important facilitating role in Thunberg’s transnational network.

This article explores the role of intermediaries – and in particular merchant firms – in the development of science. It starts with a reflection on scholarly transnational networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the logistical support they received from third parties. An overview of Carl Peter Thunberg’s life and work is followed by a description of the firm Fåhraeus & Swarth and an analysis of its logistical activities for Thunberg. This is followed by a brief description of some other intermediaries in Amsterdam, who together with Fåhraeus & Comp. provided practical support to Thunberg as a logistical network. The analysis shows that this type of logistical support was invaluable to scholars like Thunberg.

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 29 September 1781 from Fåhraeus & Swarth to Carl Peter Thunberg in Uppsala, Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 k. ‘Het gesondene Pakie voor Professor Burmannus en het kassie voor Doctor Houtuijn, zijn wel overgekoomen en blijkens bijgaande wel besorgd.’

<sup>2</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 k Fåhraeus & Schwartz. This inventory contains 39 letters, 18 in Swedish and 21 in Dutch. Quotations of the letters were translated by the authors. The extensive Collection Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg contains letters from 1385 correspondents.

<sup>3</sup> Marie-Christine Skuncke, *Carl Peter Thunberg Botanist and Physician. Career-Building across the Oceans in the Eighteenth Century* (Uppsala, 2014); Peter Rietbergen, ‘Becoming famous in the eighteenth century: Carl-Peter Thunberg (1743–1828) between Sweden, the Netherlands and Japan’, *De Achttiende Eeuw* (2004), pp. 50–61.

*Intermediaries in the Republic of Letters*

From the early sixteenth century, a transnational network of scholars developed in Europe, usually based on personal relationships. Scholars communicated intensively with each other about new ideas and research results. As meeting one another in person was rarely possible, exchanging letters, books, and publications was the main mode of communication. Many studies emphasise that scholars also sent each other presents and (small) gifts. These exchanges were based on mutual trust. Senders of such letters expected a reply and preferably something special in return: a thought, an opinion, an article, or, in the case of naturalists, a physical gift, such as a dried plant or plant seeds.<sup>4</sup>

The Republic of Letters, as this intellectual community is often referred to, at first consisted mainly of theologians, philosophers, and lawyers. Later, they were joined by naturalists. By then, developments in shipping had made voyages to distant regions possible and those – primarily commercial – voyages provided a lot of knowledge about previously for Europeans unknown parts of the world and their natural worlds. Nature research was a broad concept in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nature researchers collected and studied living and dried plants, seeds, bulbs, but also (stuffed) animals and all kinds of rocks.

The activities in the Republic of Letters raise the question of how transnational communication between scholars took place. How did their letters arrive at their destinations intact? How did scholars send each other books and other objects, sometimes precious or rare? Presumably, a scholar of repute did not walk to the port himself to negotiate the terms of shipment of a package with a skipper. Beneath this world of passionately writing scholars lay a network of intermediaries or go-betweens, who made their exchanges as smooth as possible.

In recent decades, extensive studies have been published on the exchange of knowledge and information in the early modern period and the role of intermediaries in it.<sup>5</sup> Intermediaries occurred in all sorts of fields, such as in politics and diplomacy, trade and economics, the world of art and book collections, and the development of science.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the term intermediary should be

<sup>4</sup> Hans Bots, *De Republiek der Letteren. De Europese intellectuele wereld 1500–1760* (Nijmegen, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange. Commerce Medicine and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (Yale University Press, 2007); Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science. Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (London, 2007); Simon Schaffer et al., *The Brokered World. Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, MA USA, 2009); Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek & Badeloch Noldus, *Your Humble Servant. Agents in Early Modern Europe* (Hilversum, 2006).

understood not so much as a profession, but as a function that could be exercised by members of very different professional groups based on specific skills and personal networks.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes scholars took on the role of intermediary themselves; after all, a correspondence relationship was usually established on the basis of a recommendation by a colleague, as simply writing to an unfamiliar scholar was against the code of conduct.<sup>8</sup> Ambassadors and consuls also regularly acted as contacts, as providing support to compatriots abroad was one of their official duties.<sup>9</sup>

Sending letters and parcels required a different kind of intermediary. Postal services were developing rapidly at the time, allowing communication between European scholars via letters to flourish.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it was certainly not unusual – if possible – to give letters to trusted persons, because using postal services carried a certain risk.<sup>11</sup> Postal services often did not provide naturalists, who exchanged many parcels of naturalia, with the services they needed. Especially when sending large parcels over long distances, transport by ship was the first – and often the only – option. Captains of the major trading companies therefore played an important role by sending naturalists' letters and parcels from distant places to their home base.<sup>12</sup>

Merchants with transnational trade networks and related experience in logistics were also well suited to the role of intermediary. Many studies describe their function as intermediaries in general terms. However, a proper picture of the role of trading firms in knowledge exchange requires an understanding of the concrete, practical activities of such intermediaries at the micro level. Thus, Orrje analyses in detail the logistical functions of the Swedish-born merchants Abraham Spalding and Gustavus Brander, who, with their London-based trading firm, handled the exchange of letters, books, and other scientific objects between Swedish

<sup>7</sup> Marika Keblusek, 'Introduction. Profiling the Early Modern Agent' in: Cools, Hans, Maria Keblusek & Badeloch Noldus, *Your Humble Servant. Agents in Early Modern Europe* (Hilversum, 2006), pp. 9–15.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret O. Meredith, 'Friendship and Knowledge, Correspondence and Communication in Northern Trans-Atlantic Natural History, 1780–1815' in: Schaffer, Simon et al., *The Brokered World. Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, MA USA, 2009), pp. 155–156.

<sup>9</sup> Leos Müller, *Consuls, Corsairs and Commerce. The Swedish Consular Service and Long-distance Shipping, 1720–1815* (Uppsala, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Bots, pp. 128–130; Heiko Droste (ed.), *Connecting the Baltic Area. The Swedish Postal System in the Seventeenth Century* (Stockholm, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Meredith, p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> Christina Skott, 'The VOC and Swedish Natural History. The Transmission of Scientific Knowledge in the Eighteenth Century' in: Huigen, Siegfried, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 361–392.

and English scholars between 1750 and 1760 and arranged financial transactions for them.<sup>13</sup>

This article discusses the logistical activities of a similar trading firm, Fåhraeus & Swarth, which was part of Carl Peter Thunberg's network of Amsterdam intermediaries between 1778 and 1795. It aims to flesh out this hitherto little-explored role of such trading firms. To understand the role of merchants Fåhraeus & Swarth the following paragraph first focuses on their client Carl Peter Thunberg and his need for logistical support.

### *Carl Peter Thunberg, a famous pupil of Linnaeus*

From the seventeenth century on, the study of nature in its broadest sense was one of the fast-developing scholarly activities in many countries. A great name in this respect is the Swedish botanist and physician Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), who at the Uppsala University conceived and developed the system of binominal nomenclature, which basically is still in use today. Linnaeus' goal was to describe nature on a global scale. To this end he encouraged his students to travel to distant countries to study nature.<sup>14</sup> With more or less success they came up with descriptions of hitherto for Europeans unknown plants, animals and/or minerals and sent examples of these to Linnaeus in Uppsala. These travelling students are called Linnaeus' apostles. Carl Peter Thunberg was one of them.

Thunberg was born in 1743 in Jönköping, Sweden. He studied medicine at Uppsala University, where he was taught botany by Carl Linnaeus. A thorough knowledge of (medicinal) herbs and other plants was an important part of medical training at that time. After completing his studies, Thunberg conceived the plan to gain experience as a doctor in a hospital in Paris. Linnaeus and several other Swedish scholars – Abraham Bäck, Lars Montin and Peter Jonas Bergius – supported the idea, including financially.<sup>15</sup>

Thunberg left Sweden in 1770. On his way to Paris, he first visited botany professor Johannes Burman and his son Nicolaas Laurens in Amsterdam. Burman senior, a friend of Linnaeus, was director of the Amsterdam Hortus Botanicus and moved in the city's higher circles. He introduced Thunberg to influen-

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Orrje, 'The logistics of the Republic of Letters: mercantile undercurrents of early modern scholarly knowledge circulation', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 53 (3) 2020, 351–369.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Nyberg, 'Linné, apostlarna och de utrikes forskningsresorna', in *1700-tal: Nordic Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 2 (2005), 38-58; Kenneth Nyberg, 'Linnaeus' apostles, scientific travel and the East India trade', in *Zoologica Scripta* 38 Suppl. 1 (2009), 9–16.

<sup>15</sup> Skuncke, pp. 48–49.

tial Amsterdam citizens such as mayor Egbert de Vrij Temminck and the regents Jan van de Poll, David ten Hove, and Jean Deutz. They had a great interest in botany, as is shown by their collections of exotic plants at their beautiful country estates.<sup>16</sup>

After visiting Amsterdam, Thunberg travelled on to Paris, where he continued his studies in medicine. Meanwhile, his Amsterdam contacts, always on the lookout for new plant species, devised a plan for Thunberg to travel with the Dutch East India Company (VOC) from Amsterdam to the East Indies, and even to Japan, to study the plant world there and bring back ‘new’ species. Mayor Temminck arranged for Thunberg to join the VOC as a surgeon to travel to Japan via Batavia, present-day Jakarta.

However, Japan only allowed Dutchmen on Deshima, the artificial island in the port of Nagasaki that served as Japan’s only trading post with the western world. It was therefore agreed that Thunberg should first spend a few years in the VOC colony of the Cape of Good Hope to learn Dutch there. After consulting with Linnaeus – who always encouraged his pupils to visit distant countries and send him naturalia for his collection – Thunberg accepted this proposal with both hands. He travelled back from Paris to Amsterdam and left for the Cape in December 1771 on the VOC ship *Schoonzicht* as third surgeon.<sup>17</sup>

Thunberg eventually stayed at the Cape for three years. He made several expeditions into the hinterland, which gave him much new knowledge about nature, and sent many as-yet unknown plants and seeds to Amsterdam and Sweden.<sup>18</sup> He then travelled on to Batavia and subsequently to Japan. Although the Dutch had little freedom of movement on Deshima, Thunberg managed to gather a lot of information about the plant world and Japanese culture.<sup>19</sup> After a year on Deshima, he returned to Batavia, from where he travelled on to what was then Ceylon (Sri Lanka). There, too, he did nature research.

Six months later, he left Ceylon for Amsterdam, where he arrived in October 1778. In December he travelled to London, where he visited the well-known British naturalist Joseph Banks and several botanists.<sup>20</sup> In early 1779, Thunberg returned to Amsterdam, only to travel on to Sweden a few weeks later. Via Groningen, Hamburg, and Stralsund, he arrived by mail boat in Ystad, Sweden, on 14

<sup>16</sup> D.O. Wijnands, E.J.A. Zevenhuizen and J. Heninger, *Een Sieraad voor de Stad. De Amsterdamse Hortus Botanicus, 1638–1993* (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 103–131; Skuncke, pp. 56–60.

<sup>17</sup> Skuncke, pp. 68–71; NL–HaNa, arch. 1.04.02, inv.nr. 6562, fol. 19, ship’s pay ledger *Schoonzicht*.

<sup>18</sup> Skuncke, pp. 71–83.

<sup>19</sup> Skuncke, pp. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Skuncke, pp. 176.

March 1779 and travelled on to Uppsala.<sup>21</sup> After almost nine years, Thunberg was back home.

Throughout his journey, he had sent letters and packages containing botanical information and materials from his various posts to his Amsterdam and Swedish contacts, who had welcomed his accounts and Asian finds with great appreciation. In particular, his unique trip to Japan had made him famous amongst scholars. As a result, a reception by the Swedish king and an appointment as assistant professor of botany awaited him on his return to Uppsala. A few years later, Thunberg succeeded Carl Linnaeus the Younger – who had succeeded his father Carl Linnaeus – as professor of botany in Uppsala and published several famous works, including the *Flora Japonica* and his extensive travelogue *Resa uti Europa, Africa, Asia, förättad Åren 1770–1779*, a comprehensive account of his journey to Japan.<sup>22</sup>

During Thunberg's journey, all kinds of people had played a practical supporting role: Amsterdam mayor Temminck in relation to the VOC, various sea captains who brought letters and packages, Swedish doctor Montin as the central contact in Sweden and the Amsterdam entrepreneur Eric Floberg as Montin's representative in Amsterdam. As the voyage ended, logistical support entered a new phase. Thunberg was to receive packages and money from the East Indies and Cape of Good Hope for several years to come through the VOC in Amsterdam. Although ships of the Swedish East India Company could be used too, shipping via the VOC was often an obvious – and sometimes necessary – choice. Swedish ships on this route were far less in number than Dutch ships and in some cases Swedish Company ships did not call at the Cape at all. Shipping via the VOC meant a transfer at Amsterdam as the main VOC home port. Furthermore, as a renowned naturalist, he now also developed and maintained extensive correspondence, including exchanges of botanical material, with many scholars at home and abroad, including the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup> That's why he needed a go-between with logistical expertise and adequate relations in Amsterdam.

Eighteenth-century's Amsterdam – in the seventeenth century the centre of trade in Europe – had lost its dominant position to other European cities, especially London and Paris. Trade between Sweden and the Dutch Republic had gone down in volume too. The Republic still imported huge quantities of the main Swedish export products iron, pitch and tar, but due to the mercantilist policy of

<sup>21</sup> Carl Peter Thunberg, *Resa uti Europa, Africa, Asia, förättad Åren 1770–1779, fjärde delen* (Uppsala, 1793), p. 307.

<sup>22</sup> Skuncke, pp. 16 and 252–270. The travelogue was published in four volumes between 1788 and 1793. Some years later it was translated into German, English, and French.

<sup>23</sup> As far as known, five letters from Thunberg have survived in Dutch libraries, one to Nicolaas Laurens Burman, two to writer and government official Johan Meerman, one to mycologist Christiaan Hendrik Persoon, and one to an unnamed person.

the Swedish government Dutch shipments of all kinds of commodities had decreased.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the commercial ties between the Republic and Sweden were still strong, as the Swedish government borrowed huge amounts of money from Dutch Amsterdam-based merchants to balance its national deficit. The financial relations between Amsterdam and Sweden at the time were dominated by rich merchant houses like Hope & Comp., Horneca, Hogguer & Comp., Horneca, Fizeaux & Comp., Fizeaux, Grand & Comp., and Jan & Carl Hasselgreen.<sup>25</sup> However, when in 1778 Thunberg had to choose a financial representative he chose – for reasons to be discussed later – the smaller firm of Fåhraeus & Swarth.

### *Fåhraeus & Swarth, Thunberg's representatives in Amsterdam*

The trading firm Fåhraeus & Swarth had been founded in 1778 by Johannes Fåhraeus, born in 1745 in a prominent family in Visby, on the Baltic island of Gotland. Grandfather Olof Fåhraeus, originally from Fårö, headed a Gotland trading company. Father Lars Fåhraeus and his brother Olof were also merchants and owners of several ships. So, it was no wonder that one of the sons went to Amsterdam – still of importance for Swedish-Dutch trade at the time – to try his luck. Johannes Fåhraeus came to Amsterdam in 1767, where he established a thriving trading house. From 1778 to 1790, he worked with Gerrit Swarth in the firm Fåhraeus & Swarth. In 1790, he formed a partnership with his nephew Johan Joachim Laurin under the name Fåhraeus & Laurin.<sup>26</sup>

Gerrit Swarth, born in Amsterdam in 1758, was the eldest son of Swedish immigrant Jacobus Swarth. Jacobus had made it from sailor to skipper with the VOC and had then set up a successful trading company in Amsterdam, together with his partner and half-brother Hans Nicolaas Lunge. Like Fåhraeus, both were from Visby on Gotland. The Swarth & Lunge firm had links with merchants at the Cape of Good Hope, in the East Indies, and elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

Fåhraeus & Swarth initially traded mainly with merchants around the Baltic and the Mediterranean, combining this with activities in shipping. Gradually, however, the partners came to focus more on the Caribbean. They traded in plantation products such as coffee, sugar, and cotton, and were also active in financ-

<sup>24</sup> J. Thomas Lindblad, *Sweden's Trade with the Dutch Republic 1738–1795. A quantitative analysis of the relationship between economic growth and international trade in the eighteenth century*, (Assen, the Netherlands, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Lindblad, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> Els Vermij och Willem-Jan van Grondelle, 'Johannes Fåhraeus och Johan Joachim Laurin, Gotländska köpmän och redare i Amsterdam', *Släktforskarnas Årsbok 2022*, pp. 216–233.

<sup>27</sup> Vermij & Grondelle, p. 218.

ing plantations and buying and transporting enslaved Africans to the West Indies colonies.<sup>28</sup>

As far as can be ascertained, Thunberg's relation with the trading firm Fåhraeus & Swarth began in 1778, when Thunberg's voyage was drawing to a close. On 1 October that year Thunberg arrived with the VOC ship *'t Loo* at the roadstead of Texel, the island at the entrance to the then Zuiderzee, and a few days later he was in Amsterdam. No doubt he first went to visit his old friend and benefactor Johannes Burman and his son Nicolaas Laurens. Of course he also had to arrange some practical matters. For starters, he needed financial services, as he had collected his wages at the VOC headquarters and was expecting money orders from the East Indies. In addition, he wanted to be able to exchange letters, books, and parcels with his Dutch contacts from Uppsala in the years to come. That's why he engaged an transnational trading house.

Why Thunberg chose Fåhraeus & Swarth is unknown. As mentioned, Amsterdam hosted several large merchant houses with strong Swedish business relations, but perhaps Thunberg preferred a compatriot in the first place. Then he could also have picked the Swedish trading firms Jan & Carl Hasselgreen or Swarth & Lunge, both based in Amsterdam. Johannes Fåhraeus' and Gerrit Swarth's broad interest in scholarly subjects and distant lands may have played a role here. Gerrit Swarth was a member of Felix Meritis, a learned society aimed at promoting the ideals of the Enlightenment. In the eighteenth century many of these cultural and scholarly societies were established by groups of citizens promoting the arts and the development of knowledge. Members of these societies met on a regular basis to discuss their ideals, experiment with physics, debate art and paintings, and make music. Felix Meritis – founded in 1777 – became a prominent learned society with members from the higher circles of Amsterdam.<sup>29</sup> Gerrit Swarth held important positions there for fifty years. Johannes Fåhraeus was a member of Felix Meritis for decades as well. His interest in distant lands and far-flung travels is also evident from the extensive collection of books he left behind at the time of his death.<sup>30</sup>

Still, Thunberg apparently had good relations with the other Swedish firms as well. In his travelogue, published more than ten years later, he wrote fondly of the friendly contacts with his compatriots, Messrs Hasselgreen, Floberg, Fåhraeus, Swarth, and Lunge during his 1778 stay in Amsterdam.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Vermij & Grondelle, pp. 220–221.

<sup>29</sup> Loes Gompes & Merel Ligtelijn, *Spiegel van Amsterdam, Geschiedenis van Felix Meritis*, (Amsterdam, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Willem-Jan van Grondelle. 'De boedel van Johannes Fåhraeus op de buitenplaats Bolenstein', *Periodiek van de Historische Kring Maarssen*, nr. 4–2021, p. 143–150.

<sup>31</sup> Thunberg, p. 300.

*Banker, post office and parcel service*

After having engaged Fåhraeus & Swarth as his representatives, one of Thunberg's first actions was to open a current account with their firm.<sup>32</sup> On 15 November 1778, he deposited Dfl 2100 in that account, slightly more than the Dfl 2017 in wages he had collected from the VOC 13 days earlier.<sup>33</sup> From this account Fåhraeus<sup>34</sup> paid several large sums to Thunberg's creditors. Thunberg himself – by then back in Sweden – also withdrew Dfl 500 in Stockholm from the firm Anders Bolin Hendrikson, a business associate of Fåhraeus & Swarth. This way Thunberg didn't have to travel from Amsterdam to Uppsala with 500 guilders in his pocket. The trading firms settled this amount among themselves; this was the usual way of transferring money at a time when banks did not yet exist.

In the following years Fåhraeus reported all kinds of payments to third parties in his letters to Thunberg. These were mostly payments to booksellers for books Thunberg had ordered. Fåhraeus sent the receipts to Uppsala. Annually, he informed Thunberg of the state of his affairs.<sup>35</sup> In case of a negative balance, Thunberg was asked to transfer money. This raises the question if, and if so, how much Thunberg had to pay for the services of Fåhraeus & Swarth. Unfortunately, only one annual statement of account has been preserved, viz. the statement of 17 March 1780, the first one after the account had been opened. In this statement Fåhraeus charged Thunberg 8 guilders and 14 stuivers for transportation costs of two chests from Amsterdam to Stockholm, but he didn't mention service costs in general. It seems hard to assume though that Fåhraeus worked for free. Maybe he waived his service costs in the first year as a sign of goodwill.

Occasionally, Thunberg received quite large sums through the VOC. The VOC acted here as intermediary, as money transfer from East-India or the Cape to Holland was only allowed via the VOC's financial system with bills of exchange. In 1780, for example, there was an assignment (a bill of exchange) of over 166 guilders, to be collected at the VOC office in Rotterdam.<sup>36</sup> Fåhraeus & Swarth arranged an authorisation for a trading firm in Rotterdam to collect the money

<sup>32</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 k Fåhraeus & Schwartz (from here: 'Fåhraeus to Thunberg'), account statement dated 17 March 1780, attachment to letter dated 18 March 1780.

<sup>33</sup> NL-HaNa, arch. 1.04.02, inv.nr. 6562, fol. 19. Ship's pay ledger *Schoonzicht*.

<sup>34</sup> Although the letters are always signed with the name of the firm Fåhraeus & Swarth, later Fåhraeus & Laurin, for reasons of readability the text sometimes refers to Fåhraeus instead of the full name. When the text refers to Johannes Fåhraeus in person, this is indicated explicitly.

<sup>35</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, for instance letter dated 12 January 1782.

<sup>36</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 16 September 1780.

there. Regrettably, the origin of this payment is unknown. It cannot have been overdue wages from the VOC, as Thunberg had received his wages in full soon after his arrival in Amsterdam. Maybe it was related to Thunberg's earnings from his private medical practice during his stay at Java.<sup>37</sup> Some ten years later, in 1791, there was another assignment, this time of Dfl 301 from the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>38</sup> Fåhraeus & Swarth arranged for an agent in Zeeland to collect the money and deposited the amount – after deduction of the handling costs – in Thunberg's account. The money came from Carl Gustav von Bratt, a Swede who lived at the Cape and who regularly exchanged letters with Thunberg between 1786 and 1801.<sup>39</sup> Von Bratt acted here on behalf of Christiaan Marthinus Sederblad, a compatriot at the Cape. Sederblad had asked Thunberg to give 100 *Riksdaler* to his [Sederblad's] mother, who lived in Sweden. The already mentioned Dfl 301 was meant to repay Thunberg.<sup>40</sup>

Besides this function of banker, Fåhraeus & Swarth also operated as post office and parcel service for Thunberg. The aforementioned 'Brev till Thunberg' collection shows that Thunberg corresponded, among others, with Dutch scholars Nicolaas Laurens Burman, Maarten Houttuijn, and Matthias van Geuns about the discovery and description of new plant and animal species. Thunberg regularly enclosed letters to his Amsterdam contacts with a letter to Fåhraeus, asking him to deliver these letters (or have them delivered) to the addressees.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, Thunberg's Amsterdam contacts took their letters and packages to Fåhraeus for forwarding to Uppsala.<sup>42</sup>

For the books and packages that Fåhraeus & Swarth sent to Thunberg in Sweden, the firm had no regular shipping company or captain. In the letters appear fourteen names of captains who took parcels to Stockholm for Fåhraeus & Swarth. When offering a parcel for shipping, Fåhraeus received from the captain a 'bill of lading,' proof that the cargo had been taken on board. Fåhraeus then sent this document by letter to Thunberg in Uppsala. Letter mail went via Hamburg, at the time an important hub in various postal routes, and from there via Denmark and Helsingborg or via Stralsund and Ystad. Even in those days, overland mail delivery from Amsterdam to Sweden was faster than by ship. Thus, Thunberg knew in time that a

<sup>37</sup> Skuncke, p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 5 December 1791.

<sup>39</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 e, letters from Carl Gustaf von Bratt to Carl Peter Thunberg.

<sup>40</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 å, letters from Christiaan Marthinus Sederblad to Carl Peter Thunberg, letters dated 8 February 1789 and 20 June 1792.

<sup>41</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 16 March 1782.

<sup>42</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 10 February 1784.

parcel was on its way and that he had to arrange someone to collect it in Stockholm on presentation of the bill of lading. It is not known whether he also used a regular intermediary for this purpose, such as Fåhraeus & Swarth in Amsterdam.

Shipping parcels by sea was not without risk. Headwinds and other weather conditions regularly caused considerable delays.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes goods did not arrive at all, as in the case of the VOC ship *Woestduin*, which sank off the coast of Zeeland on its way home from the East-Indies.<sup>44</sup> Fåhraeus informed Thunberg that this shipment had to be considered lost. Sailing to Sweden was not always without problems either. In late 1785, for example, Captain Rampe's ship sank off the coast of Gothenburg with on board the many-volume magnum opus *Natuurlijke Historie* by the Amsterdam physician and naturalist Maarten Houttuijn, which Thunberg had bought for Dfl 125.<sup>45</sup> Fåhraeus therefore suspended payment to Houttuijn. After an extensive correspondence, Thunberg and Houttuijn reached a solution, whereby Houttuijn sent a new copy of his *Natuurlijke Historie* and Thunberg paid Dfl 200 for two copies.<sup>46</sup>

Generally, however, the parcels arrived in good order. In 1789, for example, Thunberg successfully sent several copies of his travelogue to his contacts in Amsterdam. Fåhraeus replied enthusiastically: 'We have received the package of books and we have delivered the copies of your East Indian travelogue for Professor Burmannus, Doctor Houttuijn and Messrs Floberg and Holmberg. Many thanks for the two copies with which you have honoured us. We will be happy to return a favour as a token of our gratitude.'<sup>47</sup>

### *Political and personal information*

Besides these administrative affairs, Fåhraeus & Swarth occasionally reported on the often turbulent political, social, and economic situation. In 1780, the Dutch

<sup>43</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 16 September 1780.

<sup>44</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 23 December 1780.

<sup>45</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letters dated 3 December 1785 and August 1785. See also: D.O. Wijnands, 'The letters of Maarten Houttuyn to Carl Petter Thunberg (1780–1790)', *Proceedings of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* 93(1) 1990, p. 87.

<sup>46</sup> Wijnands, 'Letters', p. 89, letter Houttuijn to Thunberg dated 22 January 1786 and 7 September 1786, 90, letter Houttuijn to Thunberg dated 8 December 1786 and 92, letter Houttuijn to Thunberg dated 25 October 1787.

<sup>47</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 10 October 1789. 'Den oss till sände Paquetten med böker, hafwe wj wäl emottagit, och af lämnat de till Prof Burmannus, Doctor Houtuijn, Herrar Floberg och Holmberg destinerade exemplaren af MH Ostindiska resebeskrifwning; För de twenne exemplaren hwarmed MH varit god ihågkomma oss, tanke wj skuldigast och skall wara oss fögnad att wid något tillfälle kunna lämna MH wedermälen af wår tacksamhet.'

Republic got involved in a war with England, the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. Besides, large groups of citizens in the Republic – the so-called Patriots – had rebelled against the rule of Stadholder William V and his supporters, the Orangists. Revolutionary developments in France also caused a lot of unrest. All of this had major consequences for trade and shipping, which caused Fåhraeus great concern. In his letters, he often wrote about relations with the Indies and the Cape of Good Hope, which were of interest to Thunberg because of his earlier voyage and the naturalia he could still expect from there – like some years later the already mentioned chests from Carl Gustav von Bratt

In June 1781, Fåhraeus wrote, referring to the war situation and the ensuing shipping blockades: ‘Today we have received the first favourable news regarding six homebound Indiamen, but three others of the second fleet have set course around the North [of Scotland], and [we] have yet to await their fate.’<sup>48</sup> And a year later: ‘Preparations for the East Indian Fleet are underway, but it is not known when it will leave’ and ‘We have tidings from Batavia and the Cape that everything there was in order and they would chase off the enemies valiantly, the same tidings also come from Ceylon.’<sup>49</sup>

The above might give the impression that the correspondence between Fåhraeus and Thunberg was purely businesslike and detached in character. But this was not the case. Of course, every letter ended with the submissive formulations common at the time, such as ‘We sign with the highest esteem, my lord and friend, your obedient servants Fåhraeus & Swarth’.<sup>50</sup> But in addition, almost every letter conveyed remarkably cordial greetings and wishes, both from Fåhraeus himself and on behalf of the trading firm of Jacobus Swarth and Hans Nicolaas Lunge. ‘Our greatest joy will always be to learn that you are in good health and we hope the new country house will give [you] the pleasure for which it is intended,’ Fåhraeus wrote, for example.<sup>51</sup> And also: ‘Messrs Swarth & Lunge and their family

<sup>48</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 23 June 1781. ‘Heede hebben wij de eerste aangename tijding ontfangen weegens ses indische retour scheepen, maar drie andere van het 2e smal-deel hebben om de Noord gesteevend, en hun noodlot moeten nog afwagten.’

<sup>49</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 16 March 1782. ‘De Oost-Indische Vloot word gereed maakt maar men weet niet wanneer dezelve zal vertrekken’ and ‘Wij hebben tijding van Batavia en de Caap als dat daar alles in order was en zij de vijanden met Moed zouden afwagten, dezelve tijding komt ook van Ceijlon.’

<sup>50</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 29 September 1781. ‘Teekenen wij met waare agting, WelEdele Heer en Vriend, UwelEd DWDienaaren Fåhraeus & Swarth.’

<sup>51</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 18 March 1780. ‘Wår största fågnad skall altid ware at förnimma MHs helsosamma tillstånd och wålgång önskandes at de anlagde Buijtenplaat-sen, må förskaffa de nöjen, hvilka kunna wara swarande emot ändamålet.’

are doing well and greet your excellency with esteem.<sup>52</sup> And: ‘The old Mr Swarth is suffering from podagra [gout] again and requests his humble compliment to your excellency, also on behalf of Mr Lunge.’<sup>53</sup>

Thunberg’s career was closely followed in Amsterdam, as shown by phrases such as: ‘Furthermore it has come to our attention that you have been appointed Professor Extraordinarius of the University by his Majesty. Please receive our sincerest congratulations. We wish that the Academy may profit from your lessons for many years to come and that you may hold this position with pleasure.’<sup>54</sup> and ‘Nothing will please us more than to hear of the promotion of your excellency to first Professor, which would make the Academy excel with all the more lustre.’<sup>55</sup> In the first letter of each year, Fåhraeus also conveyed New Year’s wishes. Apparently, Thunberg had made a very positive impression during his visit to Amsterdam, resulting in a friendly relationship.

Fåhraeus’ service to Thunberg ended in the 1790s. The last letter from Fåhraeus & Laurin dates from 1793. In 1798, Johannes Fåhraeus sent Thunberg a letter signed only by himself, saying that while clearing out his warehouse he had found a box of Italian books destined for Thunberg. Fåhraeus would soon send the box by ship to Stockholm, with many apologies.<sup>56</sup> And in 1800 Fåhraeus informed Thunberg – again in a personally signed letter – that he had received a package for Thunberg from the Utrecht professor Van Geuns, which he had since forwarded to Uppsala.<sup>57</sup> That was his last known letter to Thunberg.

Why Fåhraeus wrote those last two letters in a personal capacity is not clear. The firm Fåhraeus & Laurin still existed and thrived until Johannes Fåhraeus’ death in 1821. It is plausible that from 1800 onwards Fåhraeus was less actively involved in the firm, as around that time he moved to his new country house in Maarssen, some 30 kilometers from Amsterdam.<sup>58</sup> Why the intermediary role of

<sup>52</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 23 June 1781. ‘De Heeren Swarth & Lunge benefens famielle zijn welvaarende en groeten UWEd op het minzaamst.’

<sup>53</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 16 March 1782. ‘de Oude Heer Swarth zukkelt weder aan ‘t Podagra en verzoekt zijn nederig Compliment aan UWEd benefens de Heer Lunge.’

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem. ‘Voorts vinden wij nog dat UWEd door zijn Majesteijt tot Professor Extraordinarius van de Universiteit zijt aangesteld, waarmede UWEd van harten feliciteeren, wenshende dat de Academie nog lange jaaren van UWEd lessen mag profiteeren en UWEd deeze bediening met genoegen mag waarnemen.’

<sup>55</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 10 February 1784. ‘Niets zal ons aangeneramer zijn dan de bevordering van UED HoogGel. tot eerste Professor te verneemen waardoor de Academie a Costij met zoveel te meer Luister zoude uijtblinken.’

<sup>56</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 25 September 1798.

<sup>57</sup> Fåhraeus to Thunberg, letter dated 12 July 1800.

<sup>58</sup> Vermij, ‘Johannes Fåhraeus’, p. 224.

the firm Fåhraeus & Laurin came to an end at all is also unclear. Was it because Thunberg no longer had business in Amsterdam? Or have some letters from that period been lost?

### *A network of intermediaries*

The above clarifies the main functions that Fåhraeus & Swarth – later Fåhraeus & Laurin – fulfilled as Amsterdam intermediaries for Thunberg: banker, post office, and parcel service. However, Thunberg also worked with other intermediaries, such as the aforementioned Amsterdam entrepreneur Eric Floberg. Born in Sweden, Floberg had come to Amsterdam around 1770 and set up a small silk stocking factory there.<sup>59</sup> Representing Lars Montin, one of Thunberg's Swedish sponsors, he facilitated the communication between Thunberg and his Swedish contacts during Thunberg's journey to Japan.<sup>60</sup> When Thunberg returned to Amsterdam in 1778, he chose to stay with Floberg until his return, some months later, to Sweden. They developed a good relationship, as evidenced by correspondence in the fifteen years that followed.<sup>61</sup>

After Thunberg had settled in Uppsala, Eric Floberg arranged for Thunberg to buy books from the Amsterdam bookseller Schneider, for which payments and shipment were then arranged by Fåhraeus & Swarth. He also made efforts to sell Thunberg's books in Holland. Floberg thus successively fulfilled the role of middleman, host, and literary agent. This relationship was not purely businesslike either. In his reports to Thunberg, Floberg talked confidentially about his family and the increasingly difficult economic situation in Holland due to political and social developments. He also regularly sent Thunberg gloves and silk stockings.

For financial services, Thunberg did not exclusively use the firm Fåhraeus & Swarth. When he stayed briefly in Amsterdam after his return from Asia in 1778, he also engaged the Amsterdam trading firm Jan & Carl Hasselgreen – also of Swedish origin – for two years to receive large sums of money from the East Indies.<sup>62</sup> And sometimes he used other contacts when sending letters. In his correspondence between 1797 and 1804 with the Utrecht professor of medicine Matthias van

<sup>59</sup> Els Vermij and Willem-Jan van Grondelle, 'Erik Floberg, fabrikör, mellanhand och filantrop i Amsterdam', *Släktforskarnas Årsbok 2024*, 276–297.

<sup>60</sup> Skuncke, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 i, letters from Eric Floberg to Carl Peter Thunberg, for instance the letters dated 25 July 1780, 31 May 1785, and 5 August 1792.

<sup>62</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 m, letters from J. & C. Hasselgreen to Carl Peter Thunberg, account statement dated 22 May 1779.

Geuns, already mentioned, Thunberg sent his letters via Nicolaas Holmberg, also from Sweden and residing in The Hague.<sup>63</sup>

All in all, it is clear that Thunberg had a network of intermediaries in Amsterdam who supported his transnational scientific activities with all kinds of practical services. Understandably, in doing so he showed a preference for (former) compatriots. These intermediaries spoke his language and could also easily maintain contact among themselves. The firm Fåhraeus & Swarth with its international trade contacts and vast financial and logistical experience was a logical choice.

### *Conclusion*

Both during his journey to the Cape of Good Hope and Japan and during his working life afterwards at Uppsala University, Thunberg used the services of friendly relations, entrepreneurs, and trading firms to develop and maintain his transnational scientific network. The use of a trading firm – such as Fåhraeus & Swarth – was crucial for him to be able to receive and transfer money. For shipping parcels over longer distances, he depended on merchants with their contacts and their logistical knowledge and experience in the maritime world. Only through their efforts could he maintain long-distance contacts, publish his research papers, send and receive parcels of naturalia, and arrange his finances across national borders. The commitment of these intermediaries to the work of scholars like Thunberg was invaluable.

Moreover, the relationship between scholar and intermediary was sometimes more than just business. Thunberg's long-standing relationship with Johannes Fåhraeus and Eric Floberg was clearly also of a personal nature. The fact that they had met Thunberg during his brief stay in Amsterdam in 1778 will certainly have contributed to their appreciation of his person and their genuine interest in his life in Uppsala. Since letters from Thunberg to these intermediaries have not been preserved, it is unknown how he himself assessed these relationships.

The correspondence we have examined illustrates how, in the eighteenth century, trading firms played an important role in the development of science. Additional research may shed more light on the intensity and quality of the relationship between scholars and these types of intermediaries and on their importance for the rapid development of science in the eighteenth century.

<sup>63</sup> Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Brev till Carl Peter Thunberg, sign. G 300 I, letters from M. van Geuns to Carl Peter Thunberg, letter dated 8 June 1800.

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