Muscovy’s Time of Troubles (1598–1618) quickly expanded beyond the limits of a domestic crisis and became a European event inviting intervention by a number of foreign powers and persons pursuing their own contradictory interests and objectives. The prevailing confusion encouraged various enterprising personalities, projectors, adventurers, filibusterers, and self-aggrandizers to come forward and offer their solutions to Russia’s problems, complicating even further an already entangled situation. Many of their recommendations, prescriptions, and counsels ended buried in the chancellery archives. But there were some projects that were actually implemented.

One such episode occurred late in the Troubles: the landing at Arkhangel’sk in summer 1612 of the hired mercenaries of “senior commander” Baron Adrian Flodorf and Arthur Aston and James Hill, offering their services to save Russia from the Poles. Initially buoyed with enthusiasm, this company subsequently met with a cold reception at the hands of the leaders of the Second National Militia, which refused their help. After a year’s wait due to the closure of navigation on the Northern Dvina and the referral of their proposal to the new government of Tsar Mikhail, Flodorf took part of his company home while another part, under Arthur Aston, remained. Aston’s soldiers managed to participate in the defense of Kholmogory against “brigand cossack bands” and later received the right to enroll in Russian service.

The Arkhangel’sk travails of these foreign mercenaries have been examined in some detail by specialists curious about their character and motives. The spectrum of opinion about their motive ranges from the suspicion that they were an effort to realize an English project to occupy the White Sea littoral to vaguer speculation that they reflected the antagonism among multiple states seeking a sphere of influence in
Russia. Less attention has been given to the backgrounds of the company’s leaders, their careers, their nature of their connections with each other, and their previous and subsequent services. Closer examination of these matters may clarify the event or even cast it in an entirely different light.

According to the documents the chief commander of the company was “Ondreian Floderan i Lit, senator of the Roman Caesar [i.e., the Emperor at Vienna],” and on this basis some commentators have identified him as of Austrian or German petty nobility. His actual identity was more interesting.

Even the most detailed biographical dictionaries and gazetteers are silent about the identity of Adrian Flodorf. Published collections dealing with the establishment of Russo-Dutch contacts have nothing to say about him. Yet in his own time he was an eminent personage.

The Flodorfs comprised a small circle in the aristocracy of the Netherlands, connected by birth to the leading representatives of the local nobility. Descended from the knight Rene van Vlodorp (c. 1290), senior vassal of the counts of Geldern, the Flodorfs had by the late sixteenth century made themselves influential seigniors holding many estates and castles. Their lands were scattered along the frontier of the historical Netherlands with Germany and they were able to slip off the phantom control of the Emperor, the formal suzerain of the Lower Rhine, unlike the other families of variant name (Flodorf, Flodroff, Flodroph, Vlodrop, Vlodorp) with whom historians have confused them. Their high status is confirmed by their privileges, which included the right to coin their own money (like the free imperial barons the Reckheims in 1555–1563).  

Openly Protestant in their sympathies, at times even extending protection to the most radical Anabaptists and Mennonites, the Flodorfs

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