

Annette Christine Vogt. *Ein Hamburger Beitrag zur Entwicklung des Welthandels im 19. Jahrhundert: Die Kaufmannsreederei Wappäus im internationalen Handel Venezuelas und der dänischen sowie niederländischen Antillen.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003. 453 S. EUR 68.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-515-08186-3.



Klaus Weber. *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680-1830: Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cádiz und Bordeaux.* München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2004. Tables, charts, maps. 403 pp. EUR 59.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-406-51860-7.



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Klaus Weber and Annette Christine Vogt, both of whom submitted dissertations to the University of Hamburg in 2001, offer data-laden analyzes of the engagement (direct and indirect) of German-speaking merchants in trade with the Americas. Weber's and Vogt's accounts, beginning with the late seventeenth century in Weber's case and ending with the beginning of the twentieth century in Vogt's volume, overlap chronologically in the early 1800s. Both cover the watershed in Atlantic history represented by the age of revolution and independence, which resulted in Vogt's businessmen confronting a different set of opportunities and challenges than those encountered by Weber's chosen subjects. Pursuit of the widely dispersed sources needed to illuminate the far-flung ventures and networks of individuals whose busi-

ness interests and life experiences cut across multiple states, colonial empires and cultures led the two authors to an impressive range of archives. In addition to research by both in German repositories, Weber drew upon archives in Spain, France and the Netherlands, and Vogt upon archives in Denmark, the Netherlands and Venezuela.

For the early modern merchants of central European origin who are the focus of Weber's study, an obvious obstacle to entry into transatlantic trade was the exclusionary policies of the colonial powers, among which German states did not number. Mercantilist barriers erected by the western European imperial regimes did not, however, keep enterprising outsiders from profiting from the Atlantic economy. Exploring how and to what extent such restrictions were circumvented,

Weber focuses his attention on the experiences of German businessmen who established themselves in two major Atlantic ports, Cadiz and Bordeaux. In the eighteenth century, Cadiz was the most important center of Spanish colonial trade, while Bordeaux functioned as a hub for the re-export of products of the French Antilles to the rest of Europe.

Weber's ambitious study is an exercise in prosopography. He has pieced together from disparate sources biographical information on 239 German merchants he identified as active in Cadiz and 225 he identified as active in Bordeaux during the years covered by his study. He included in his lists not only merchants born in the Holy Roman Empire, but also those originating in German-speaking border areas such as Alsace and Switzerland. In addition, he included those Spanish- and French-born sons of German merchant fathers who in their turn became part of the business communities of Cadiz and Bordeaux.

Weber claims near completeness for his lists of German merchants in Cadiz and Bordeaux. He has particular confidence in the completeness of his listing for Cadiz. For that city, the possibility of computerized searching of the provincial archive greatly facilitated the collection of data on foreigners connected to maritime trade. Weber found particularly useful Spanish notarial records that yielded information on questions relating to property holdings, business transactions and family relationships. For Bordeaux, in contrast to Cadiz, electronic assistance in accessing archival sources was not available and French notarial records proved less useful. The contrast is evident in the kinds of documentation Weber cites on merchants in the two cities. For information about mercantile life in Bordeaux, he relied more heavily on secondary literature than he did in the case of Cadiz. In the extensive appendices to his volume, Weber provides lists of the 464 central European merchants he identified, the sources he consulted on each, and a summary of relevant in-

formation gathered. For some individuals, he uncovered little more than a name. For most, however, he lists at least geographic origin and year of first recorded presence in Cadiz or Bordeaux. For better documented individuals, he provides a range of information about business and family relationships. For a handful, he is able to discuss aspects of their personal lives and community involvement. Unevenness in the amount of information available on such a large body of individuals inevitably means that the experiences of the more notable, better documented merchants weigh more heavily in Weber's account than do those of their less prominent compatriots.

Weber devotes a core chapter each to Cadiz and Bordeaux. In eighteenth-century Cadiz, German merchants, though prohibited from establishing themselves in Spain's colonies, were active participants in the channeling of central European manufactures (especially textiles and metal wares) to that port for shipment to the Americas. That the Spanish crown was not more rigorous in its efforts to exclude foreign traders was a function of the failure of Spanish manufacturing to supply the quantities of goods needed to meet colonial demand. Inflated prices in Spain—a by-product of the massive import of precious metals from the New World—discouraged the growth of Spanish manufacturing and favored the import of cheaper goods from farther east. Weber emphasizes the resulting opportunities for dealers in the products of such central European proto-industrial areas as Silesia, Bohemia, the Rhineland, northern Westphalia and the German southwest. One indicator of such linkages, Weber asserts, was the significant number of German merchants in Cadiz who originated not from major port cities but from land-locked manufacturing regions. According to Weber's count, for example, Bohemian merchants in Cadiz were second in number (47) only to those from Hamburg (88).

Beyond placing German merchants in Cadiz within the context of both central European and

Atlantic economic developments, Weber also delves into the degree and nature of their integration into local society during their years of residency abroad. He offers information about the types and location of property acquired, membership in local organizations, honors received and social contacts and intermarriage with local families. In the case of Cadiz, Weber emphasizes the obstacles to integration. An obvious barrier, at least for Protestants, was religion. Throughout the eighteenth century, for example, Protestants could not be buried in the city. In such an environment, opportunities for intermarriage with the daughters of Spanish families remained limited, at least until the end of the century.

When Weber turns his attention to Bordeaux, he finds a different set of circumstances. More capable than Spain of covering the needs of its colonies from domestic production, France found in the lands to its east less a source of manufactured goods than a market for the products of its empire. As a consequence, while merchants from central European manufacturing regions formed a significant component of the German merchant colony in Cadiz, the same was not true in the case of Bordeaux. German traders in Bordeaux originated first and foremost from commercial and financial centers, with Hamburg, Bremen and Frankfurt heading the list. From Bordeaux, they helped direct trade in colonial goods, as well as French agricultural products such as wine, to consumers in central and northern Europe.

Comparing the merchant colonies in Cadiz and Bordeaux, Weber concludes that German traders found integration into local society easier in the French than in the Spanish port. Again Weber utilizes intermarriages (more numerous in Bordeaux than in Cadiz) as the best indicator of assimilation. He ascribes the greater openness of Bordeaux society in large measure to the influence of Huguenots prominent within the city's business elite. Huguenots also play a significant role in Weber's chapter on foreign businessmen

in Hamburg. This chapter represents his attempt to provide a comparative look at the other end of the Atlantic-central European trade nexus. Weber's discussion of foreign merchants in Hamburg is, however, briefer and less detailed than the chapters focused on Cadiz and Bordeaux. He reports finding archival sources and secondary literature less adequate for his purposes in the case of the city on the Elbe than for the two western European ports.

In the context of his discussion of foreign merchants in Hamburg, Weber gives particular attention to trade in sugar. Lower wages and cheaper, more reliable sources of fuel, compared to circumstances in France, favored the building of facilities in Hamburg for the refining of sugar from the Caribbean. Weber views Hamburg's advantage with respect to access to English coal as one example of the benefits derived from the city state's general condition of neutrality in the context of the recurrent great power struggles of the eighteenth century. With the establishment of independent republics in the Americas, goods coming from or destined for central Europe no longer needed to be routed through imperial ports such as Cadiz or Bordeaux. The German merchant colonies in those cities contracted. A minority of descendants of German merchants who had intermarried and had significant local investments remained in place. Meanwhile, in Hamburg, new mercantile and shipping enterprises emerged to carry on direct trade with customers on the other side of the Atlantic. As an example of such nineteenth-century initiatives, Weber, in a footnote, directs his readers to Annette Christine Vogt's study of post-Napoleonic trade between Hamburg and the Caribbean.

To provide a context for her study of commercial links between Hamburg and the Caribbean, Vogt presents a detailed accounting for the middle decades of the nineteenth century of ships visiting and cargos being loaded or unloaded in Curaçao (Dutch West Indies) and St. Thomas (Danish West

Indies), as well as in the Venezuelan Caribbean port of La Guaria. In the interest of making certain that her listings of sailings would be as complete as possible, she chose the labor-intensive alternative of investigating sources generated on both the sending and receiving ends of these journeys. She emphasizes the substantial number of voyages she would have missed had she relied solely upon sources available in Hamburg. In appendices even more extensive (a total of 166 pages) than those in Weber's book, Vogt reports all the voyages she documented, listing the names of the ships, their owners and captains and the nature of their cargoes.

Of the three harbors she singled out for particular attention, Vogt finds the Dutch port to have had minimal significance for Hamburg shippers. St. Thomas, although itself neither an important market for nor supplier to central Europe, received the most visits of the three. The Danish port served as a source of provisions and information for European traders entering the Caribbean. La Guaria, which served the Venezuelan capital, ranked between the two islands in numbers of visits by ships from Hamburg. Of the three harbors, La Guaria figures most prominently in Vogt's study. Overall, she concedes, trade with the Caribbean played only a minor role in Hamburg's nineteenth-century commerce.

Following her detailed report on shipping into and out of the three Caribbean ports, Vogt shifts her attention to the merchants and shippers who presided over trade with Hamburg. Whereas Weber chose a prosopographical approach for his research, compiling a group profile of over 460 merchants, Vogt opted to focus her investigation primarily on business and personal networks centered on a single Hamburg-based family. Her chosen subjects, the Wappäus family, serve her purpose well, both because their activities are comparatively well documented (at least after the earliest decades of the century) and because their

participation in Caribbean trade spanned the entire nineteenth century.

In the early nineteenth century, Georg Heinrich Wappäus, originally from Hanover, established himself, after a period as a sea captain, as a prominent Hamburg merchant and shipper. He was able to enter the Venezuelan trade on the ground floor. Vogt speculates (but cannot document) that G. H. Wappäus, who sent his first ship to the West Indies in 1818, was among those who profited from the sale of arms to forces fighting for Venezuelan independence. By the mid-1820s, trade links between Hamburg and Venezuela were well enough established that Wappäus was able to provide reliable, individualized service to a developing Venezuelan clientele. Helping to cement the firm's transatlantic ties was the stationing of Wappäus's stepson, J. W. A. Lorenzen, in La Guaria from the mid-1820s to the mid-1830s. Vogt (as does Weber with regard to the previous century) stresses the central importance for family firms of having trusted relatives in place at both ends of long-distance trade routes.

When G. H. Wappäus died in 1836, his firm was liquidated. His son, Adolph Heinrich Wappäus, following extended stays in the United States and Venezuela, returned to Hamburg in 1856 and in 1857 established a trading and shipping enterprise of his own. This firm survived until his death in 1904. A. H. Wappäus's business and personal affairs are better documented than those of his father. Vogt, as a consequence, is able to provide a more detailed accounting of his network-building strategies than she could for his father. In particular, she provides examples of the lengths to which the younger Wappäus was willing to go to win and retain the favor of his customers. For example, he undertook frequent trips to England to select goods to suit the individual preferences of his clients. Vogt returns repeatedly to the theme of the central importance for family firms of personal relationships. Personal and business ties overlapped and merged into each

other. Through an examination of household expenditures, business and personal correspondence, visits and charitable donations, Vogt provides insight into A. H. Wappäus's life in Hamburg and the way he and his family tended social and business contacts on both sides of the Atlantic. Readers interested in business history will likely find these sections of Vogt's account of particular interest.

In her discussion of relations among men engaged in the Venezuela trade, Vogt emphasizes the cooperative as well as competitive nature of their contacts. Differences in nationality among merchants and shippers did not prevent common action. Her discussion of the role of consuls helps illustrate her point. In the nineteenth century, four members of the Wappäus family, operating on both sides of the Atlantic, assumed for at least brief periods the duties of this honorary post. Among them, the four carried out consular functions for the United States, Chile, the Argentine Confederation and Venezuela, as well as for Prussia and Hamburg.

Weber's and Vogt's works have much in common and are in many ways complementary. The volumes can profitably be read together. Of the two, Weber's book has the broader scope. In addition to reporting on his prosopographical research, Weber discusses extensively his understanding of early modern transatlantic exchange as it related to central Europe. Vogt's work, in comparison, has a narrower focus. She concentrates first and foremost on giving a detailed report of what she found in the archives.

One important topic on which the two studies complement each other is the role of ports. Weber, especially, highlights the significance of the relationship of ports and their hinterlands and the function of ports as nodal points in an expanding Atlantic economy. Weber focused on three of the largest and most important of Europe's port cities, each with populations in the 100,000 range in the late eighteenth century. Vogt

concentrated on lesser known, and less studied, colonial or formerly colonial ports on the other side of the Atlantic. Together the two volumes provide a wealth of information about ports and who was shipping what to whom.

Weber and Vogt both present the merchant entrepreneurs they study as effective agents in the forging of economic links between central Europe and the Americas. Both downplay the role of states, and focus instead on the importance of entrepreneurial initiatives facilitated by family and personal relationships and sustained by carefully tended reputations for trustworthiness. Weber's approach to his cross-cultural study was to gather widely scattered and sometimes fragmentary information about hundreds of individuals. Vogt opted to work outward from documentation relating to a single family of merchants and shippers. Both authors are to be commended for energetically cutting across frontiers and, like their subjects, viewing the Atlantic less as a barrier than as an opportunity.

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