

Acknowledgements

In August 2012, my friend Siem van Eeten secretly took a picture of me in the reading rooms of the National Archives London. He sent it to me right after my first research trip to London, which I spent together with Els van Eijck van Heslinga, the director of the Royal Library of the Netherlands at the time, and her team from the Sailing Letters project. I will be forever grateful to Els for inviting me to join the group in 2012 because this trip changed my life as a historian. I am also grateful to Siem for taking this photo because he captured the moment that would bring about this change, the moment when I first made contact with the Prize Papers collection. In the picture, I am sitting full of awe at one of tables in the reading room. I still have short hair, I am wearing white gloves, staring at a pile of old documents, full of amazement. I still feel that way today when I work with the documents at TNA. I actually feel that way already every time when we disembark the tube at Kew station and turn into the road leading to TNA, full of anticipation, especially now because of many long-standing colleagues working there whom I would count as close friends such as Amanda Bevan, Randolph Cock and Maria Cardamone. During the pandemic, I learned that I could even feel that way when opening digital images of the records or particularly when watching another brilliant video of original documents unfolded by Randolph and filmed by Maria. I even learned that I could feel that way when we worked together in the team at Oldenburg university, discussing for hours the characteristics of a new historical document type found in the collection. Today, I work at the Prize Papers Project that is digitizing the entire Prize Papers collection, a privilege I owe to Dagmar Freist, my supervisor and mentor, and to my dear colleagues and close friends Annika Raapke and Christina Beckers, who have walked this path with me right from the beginning.

The picture that Siem took of me is almost 10 years old now. It is 2021, and this is no typo. Finally, this book will be published in 2022. I cannot believe that I have finally made it. During the last decade, I moved three times, had five contracts, got married, became a father of two wonderful sons. Our younger boy was born during the pandemic. Even my little brother is a father now. I have taught over 1100 students and introduced them to the Early Modern Period. Many of them are teachers now. Time flies, many things have changed. The world has changed. In 2022, I guess as we all hope, finally for the better. I have also changed, and not only my hair style. I still have to comprehend that

this mammoth project is over and admittedly I also still have to process and find out whether it was all worth it in the end. My family and friends had to swallow many bitter pills during the last years.

What I can say today is that I am proud to have finished this project, not alone, but with the help of many and only through the constant support of my family and their understanding. And I still love to talk about Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, the merchant at the heart of the book, even after 10 years, which is a good sign. I never felt tired of doing the actual research, because it always led to surprises. These surprises are the reason why I became a historian in the first place and as I would learn from the Prize Papers, these surprises will never cease and will never stop to amaze me. Just when I was finishing the manuscript for this book, I found out that the cantata that Carl Friedrich Telemann composed for the consecration of Luetkens' brother Joachim in Hamburg will be performed for the first time at a concert in Bern in December 2021. The Luetkens story keeps on giving. I also still love to think back and remember the very first time that I sat in the archive opening the boxes containing the Luetkens archive and the wine that we drank in a wonderful small restaurant in London after this experience with Els, her husband Nico, Erik van der Doe, Perry Moree, Roelof Hol and Siem.

Ten years of work means that over the years I have met a lot of wonderful people. I cannot thank all of you in this dedication. But rest assured that your support always meant the world to me and that it was important.

I would like to express my special gratitude:

To Dagmar Freist and Gerd Steinwascher, for being my supervisors and the supporting pillars of my research and career, not only during the last ten years, but since 2006.

To the further members of my board of examiners, Karen Ellwanger, Ulrike Link-Wieczorek, and particularly I would like to thank Hans Medick, who supported me during my microhistorical endeavour during the last years and who was a role model for me for many years.

To Maren Barton, who proof-read 1000 pages of my PhD thesis and the 600 pages of this book. Her reliability and patience have been the wind in my sails during the last months.

To my dear friend Robert Mitchell, who proof-read every paper and article I wrote during the last 10 years, who was literally always only one call away, and whose own work had a great share in my decision to take an ethnographic approach in this book.

To Mirjam Galley at transcript publishing for your support, understanding and patience!

To my closest companions Annika Raapke, Constantin Rieske and Benedikt Sepp. Cheers guys.

To the Prize Papers Team in Oldenburg, Christina Beckers, Jessica Cronshagen, Frank Marquardt, Lisa Magnin, Daniel Fleisch, Suzi Foxley, Alberto Winterberg.

To the further colleagues of the Prize Papers team in the UK, my friend Oliver Finnegan, whom I have promised several pints of London Pride in the Tap on the Line as soon as the pandemic allows it, to Sarah Noble and Camilla Camus-Doughan, for believing in the value of materiality and for your cooperation over the years.

To Gary Thorpe, who left TNA years ago, but Gary was the first person, who welcomed

me with open arms in the basement of TNA, which I will never forget.

To the members of Faculty IV and the Institute of History at Oldenburg University, particularly to Rudolf Holbach, Dietmar von Reeken, Almut Höfert, Gunilla Budde, Thomas Etzemüller, Samuel Klar, Thomas Heidorn, Eva Glander-Bey, Sarah Neumann, Ingrid Heuser and Angelika Koops.

To the National Archives London, the GHI London, the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the DFG-Graduate School “Self-Making”, Thomas Alkemeyer, Niko Buschmann, Robert Mitschke in particular, to the Staatsarchiv Hamburg, the OLB-Stiftung, the Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv and the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Christine Kitzlinger in particular, for the help and hospitality.

To Aske Brock, who will remember one particularly long pub night, when we concocted the crazy plan to publish a book and be a parent at the same time. Well, here we are dude.

To Daniel Starza Smith and Jana Dambrogio, who taught me the importance of letter-locking and the power of initiative.

To Gudrun Anderson, Mikael Alm, Margaret Hunt, Henrik Ågren, who have supported me ever since my stay abroad at Uppsala University in 2010. I still feel the warmth of your hospitality back then.

To Anna Brinkman-Schwartz, Wolfgang Henninger, Meg Williams, David Mills, Gabrielle Robilliard, Helen Newsome.

To Marian Füssel, Thomas M. Truxes, Margaret Schotte, Daniel Bellingradt, Jelle van Lottum, for being an inspiration and for your interest in my work.

To my colleagues and friends of the DFG-Graduate School “Self-Making”, particularly to Marta Mazur, Milena Weber, Noah Munier, Jörn Eiben, Roman Eichler, Gerrit Vorjans and Andreas Brehme.

To Angela Huang, Anne von Stormbroek, Ulla Iljäs, Sherylynn Haggerty, Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek, Kathrin Enzel, Patrick Heike, and Pierrick Pourchasse, who kindly helped me during the home stretch for finishing this book.

Thanks to my wonderful students, who show me each semester why I may have chosen the right job.

Thank you all for believing in me. Helpfulness and kindness are key to academia. Cooperation is key to academia. You all gave me the feeling that academia can be a good place, because people make it a good place.

And now to the hardest part. I want to say thank you for your patience and for your understanding:

To my friends Antonia, Andi, André, Christoph, Christopher, Claas, Felix, Julia, Michi, Nico, and Robert.

To my mother and father.

To Martin and Vera.

To my family in the Swabian Alb and my extended family in Graben-Neudorf.

To my brother, his wife and their daughter.

To my sons.

To my wife.

“What is a letter? If not simply a piece of paper that one can tear into pieces or crumple together, but that one can also keep as a treasure and make it yellow and weather.”

Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty. Sämtlich hinterlaßne Gedichte, edited by Adam Friedrich Geisler. Halle: Hendel, 1782.

“But letter writing is now a mere tossing of omelettes to me.”

Letter from Virginia Woolf to Gerald Brenan, December 1, 1923. In Virginia Woolf: The Complete Collection. Eugene: Oregon Publishing, 2017.

“We see from your letter, dear friend, that love on the one hand and the pursuit of profit on the other fight a battle in your heart. [...] But we very much wished for E.E., and for our interests, that the dear child will grant E.E. a bit more time to fill the bag with ducats, for which E.E. has the best opportunity at the moment.”

Letter from Jobst Henning Hertzner & Christopher von Bobartt to Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, March 5, 1745, The Luetkens Archive, The National Archives, Kew, London, HCA 30/234.

All translations by the author.