

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 The Luetkens Archive

In August 1745, in the French harbour of Brest, a merchant loaded his business archive, stored in a wooden travel chest, onto a ship.<sup>1</sup> This merchant was Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, this book's main protagonist. Little did he know that this moment in Brest would be the last time he would ever see his business archive. Luetkens, born and raised in Billwärder, apprenticed in the free and imperial city of Hamburg, was the son of a priest, however, his uncles were successful businessmen.<sup>2</sup> He had spent the previous two years in France as a "travelling merchant" as he called himself, visiting, living and trading in the booming cities of French Atlantic trade, making a name for himself as a wholesale merchant. The aims of his travels were "to prove himself in trade" and "to make friends and settle some correspondence in foreign lands."<sup>3</sup> The business trip to France would ultimately seal his transformation into a well-established settled merchant.

Brest was the final station on his business trip through France, which led him all the way along the French west coast, from Bayonne and Bordeaux in the south to Brest

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- 1 Today, the Luetkens archive is stored as part of the Prize Papers Collection, the archival records of the English High Court of Admiralty (HCA) of the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London, UK, HCA 30/232-236. In the following, I will use the abbreviated form of reference TNA, HCA 30/232-236. Corresponding court papers regarding the court case of the ship *Hope*, the ship on which the archive was once loaded before capture, can be found in HCA 32/115/14, HCA 13/90, HCA 30/775/4, and HCA 42/36. See our detailed catalogue reference here: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C4249188-C4249192>. A second ship captured by the English during the same time and owned by Luetkens was the *Post van Hamburg*. All corresponding court records regarding the court case of this ship can be found in TNA, HCA 32/143/17.
  - 2 See for a short introduction "Luetkens (Nicolaus Gottlieb), 601-602." In *Lexikon der Hamburgischen Schriftsteller bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 4, edited by Hans Schröder, 598-602. Hamburg: Perthes-Besser u. Mauke, 1866. Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens (also spelled Lütkens or Lutkens, but he preferred the spelling Luetkens) will be introduced in detail in the next chapter.
  - 3 Original translation by the court of "Summarische Deposition des erbaren Nicolaus Gottlieb Lutkens und der erbaren Hertzter & von Bobart", TNA, HCA 32/143/17: "Reisender Kaufmann", "sich in der Handlung habitiren", "sich Correspondenten und Freunde in auswärtigen Örtern zu erwerben".

and St. Malo in the north. This business trip, already his second after a first journey through England, Spain, the Netherlands and France in the years 1739-1742, filled his “bags with ducats”, as his business friends Jobst Henning Hertzner and Christopher van Bobartt put it, and furnished his pocketbook of correspondents with hundreds of names of reputable merchants and merchant houses.<sup>4</sup> Through his business trips he gained a sturdy foundation of experience in Atlantic trade, lucrative enterprises and a not unsubstantial fortune. At the end of the year of 1745, he was ready and well equipped to bring his establishment phase to an end.

It was time for him to return to his hometown and finally settle down. In Hamburg, his future wife, Ilsabe Engelhardt, daughter of a respectable Hamburg merchant family, already awaited him together with his future business partner, Ehrenfried Engelhardt, who was the brother of his bride, had been educated in the same house as Luetkens, and with whom Luetkens would open the merchant house *Luetkens & Engelhardt* in the Elbe city. Even before his return, the merchants Hertzner & von Bobartt, his longest trading partners, his “undoubted agents and attorneys” in Hamburg, had rented a stately merchant house in his name in the famous merchant quarter *Huxter Fleet* in the *Katharinenstraße* in Hamburg.<sup>5</sup> His return to his hometown, his wedding and the opening of his own merchant house in Hamburg in November 1745, after having spent years abroad, crowned Luetkens’ successful establishment phase. By that time, he was 29 years old, a typical age for merchants of the time to marry and to reach the next stage of their career as an established merchant.<sup>6</sup> As the last step before starting this new chapter in his life, however, the Hamburg merchant first had to transfer all his business records and personal belongings, including some clothing, from France to Hamburg, a crucial prerequisite for opening the merchant house, which is why we find him in the harbour of Brest in August 1745.

Luetkens chose one of his own ships for the transport. During that time, he already owned nine ships with three of them lying at anchor in Brest. He entrusted one of his most reliable ship’s captains, Rieweert Frerecks, with his valuable freight.<sup>7</sup> He himself had decided to travel back to Hamburg by horse and stagecoach with a last short

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- 4 “Beutel mit Ducaten”, Letter from Hertzner & van Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, March 5, 1745, TNA, HCA 30/234. The *pocketbook of correspondents* is stored in TNA, HCA 30/232. Regarding the importance of mercantile network building, see as an introduction Claisyer, Natasha. “Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire.” *Historical Journal* 47 (2004): 451-76. See Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, ed. *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World*. Aldershot: Variorum, 1996.
  - 5 Attestation issued by the ruling authorities of Hamburg with translation, letter of attorney with translation, brought into court 23 October 1745, HCA 32/143/17. Detailed information about the merchant house in the Katharinenstraße can be found in the chapter on Luetkens’ marriage preparations.
  - 6 See Grassby, Richard. *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 303, 331. See Earle, Peter. *The Making of the English Middle Class. Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1989, 177-184. See Holloway, Sally. *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 12.
  - 7 See examinations of Rieweert Frerecks, captain of the *Hope*, and Ties Christian Thiel, mate of the *Hope*, taken at Deal, 24 and 26 August 1745, TNA, HCA 32/115/14.

stopover in Paris. Later the seamen would report that they saw him eagerly patrolling the ship's deck and the docks controlling the loading procedure.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the merchant had good reason to be nervous. In 1745, France was at war with Great Britain during the *War of the Austrian Succession* (1740-1748).<sup>9</sup> This, in turn, entailed that ships passing through the English Channel, *La Manche* in French, coming from France were exposed to the danger of enemy attacks by British ships. In the case of commercial vessels, these attacks aimed less to damage or destroy the ships, but far more often to capture them in order to contribute to the economic weakening of the enemy. During the entire Early Modern Period it was common practice by all belligerent parties to capture enemy ships as a means of tactical warfare.<sup>10</sup> This task was often carried out by ships coming from the private sector supplementing the Royal Navies as auxiliary troops in times of war. The auxiliary ships were called privateers, *corsairs* in French.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the situation facing the merchant Luetkens in August 1745 was that his ships were at risk of running into British ships of war during the passage. To make matters even worse, the departure of Luetkens' ships coincided with a major British privateering campaign against French commercial shipping. With rumours swirling regarding the beginning of this campaign since the summer, Luetkens' ship departed from Brest at the exact time when Great Britain had decided to prey upon almost "all ships coming from France & Spain with destination Hamburg."<sup>12</sup>

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- 8 See examination of Samuel Tunis, boatswain of the *Hope*, taken at Deal, 24 and 26 August 1745, TNA, HCA 32/115/14.
- 9 See Anderson, Matthew S. *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748*. London/New York: Routledge, 1995. See Browning, Reed. *The War of the Austrian Succession*. New York: St. Martin's, 1993.
- 10 See for instance Anno Regni Annæ Reginae Magnæ Britanniae, Franciæ, & Hiberniæ, sexto. *Act for the better securing the Trade of this Kingdom by Cruisers and Convoys*. [...] London: Charles Bill, and the executrix of Thomas Newcomb decess'd, 1707.
- 11 See Starkey, David J. *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990. See Starkey, David J. "A Restless Spirit: British Privateering Enterprise 1739-1815." In *Pirates and Privateers. New Perspectives on the War on Trade in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by David J. Starkey, Els van Eijck van Heslinga and Jan de Moor, 126-140. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997. See Petrie, Donald. *The Prize Game. Lawful looting on the high seas in the days of fighting sail*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999, 161-162. See Anderson, Gary M., and Adam Gifford, Jr. "Privateering and the Private Production of Naval Power." *Cato Journal* 11, no. 1 (1991): 99-122, here 106-108. See Perl-Rosenthal, Nathan. "Reading Cargoes: Letters and the Problem of Nationality in the Age of Privateering." In *A World at Sea. Maritime Practices and Global History*, edited by Lauren Benton and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, 75-88. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. See Blakemore, Richard, and James Davey, eds. *The Maritime World of Early Modern Britain*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020.
- For the French perspective see Barazzutti, Roberto. "La guerre de course. Guerre au commerce et commerce de guerre." In *Economic Warfare. Storia dell'Arma Economica* (Quaderno Sism), edited by Virgilio Ilari et Giuseppe della Torre, 89-106. Milan: Acies Edizioni, 2017. See Aumont, Michel. "La guerre de course française en Atlantique sous Louis XV et Louis XVI (1744-1783)." In *Histoire des pirates et des corsaires de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, edited by Gilbert Buti and Philippe Hrodej, 285-298. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2016. See Villiers, Patrick. *Marine royale, corsaires et trafic dans l'Atlantique de Louis XIV à Louis XVI*. 2 vols. Lille: Atelier national de reproduction des thèses, 1991. See Bromley, John Selwyn. *Corsairs and Navies 1660-1760*. London: Hambledon Press, 1987.
- 12 See letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, June 21, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/233, court bundle B.

As a ship with a Hamburg flag and shipowner, with Hamburg being a neutral maritime power during almost the entire Early Modern Period, Luetkens' ship would, however, normally be spared this fate and instead "enjoy all the benefits and the privileges of a Hambro ship", meaning safe passage.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to piracy, privateering followed strict rules and was legalised by maritime law. One of these rules was that belligerent powers were forbidden to capture neutral ships. Neutral ships were ships flying the flag of all the ruling authorities uninvolved in the prevailing war, often maintaining peace and trade treaties with the warring parties.<sup>14</sup> The only condition appended to this rule was that the captains and ship owners of the neutral ships were not caught in the act of trading and collaborating with the enemy. For Luetkens, this meant that he had to ensure that no one could find out about his business archive filled with business records and hundreds of letters providing evidence about Luetkens' deep involvement and strong ties with the French economy. In order to play it safe, the merchant let the men hide his travel chest with the archive in the hold of the ship under some heavy casks of sugar and coffee that filled the rest of the cargo space.<sup>15</sup> He likely felt that this solved his problem. However, in the end, it was unfortunately precisely this hidden spot that was too conspicuous leading to his misfortune.

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All quotations from the original letters written in German, French and Dutch and all quotes from contemporary literature, including German or French letter-writing manuals and business manuals, French legal records or Dutch insurance records, are translated into English by the author. In all cases where I have used more loose translations of the letter text instead of literal word-for-word translations, for reasons of historical accuracy in terms of the contemporary meaning of the letter text in the original language, I provide the original letter text in square brackets or in the footnote according to the best of my knowledge and based on my knowledge of the respective letter context. The same rule applies to all letter text entailing formative letter formulae, typical contemporary set phrases used in letters in different languages, that are important for the analysis and that are also added in the original language. Complete transcriptions of the letters in their original language are available on request. For reasons of brevity, I have made the pragmatic choice of not quoting the entire original letter text in the footnotes.

- 13 Examination of Diderich Glasshoff, ship's broker, in Hamburg, HCA 32/143/17, CP 34.
- 14 See Müller, Leos. "The Forgotten History of Maritime Neutrality, 1500-1800." In *Notions of Neutralities*, edited by Pascal Lottaz, Herbert R. Reginbogin, 67-86. London: Lexington Books, 2019. See Müller, Leos. *Neutrality in World History*. London/New York: Routledge, 2018. See Schnakenbourg, Éric. *Entre la guerre et la paix: Neutralité et relations internationales, XVII-XVIIIe siècles*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013. See Brinkman-Schwartz, Anna. "The Antigallican Affair: Public and Ministerial Responses to Anglo-Spanish Maritime Conflict in the Seven Years War, 1756-1758." *The English Historical Review* 135, no. 576 (2020): 1132-1164. Regarding Hamburg's maritime neutrality, see Pantel, Isabell. *Die hamburgische Neutralität im Siebenjährigen Krieg*. Münster: LIT, 2011. See Newman, Karen. "Hamburg in the European Economy, 1660-1750." *Journal of European Economic History* 14, no. 1 (1985): 57-93. See for instance the Treaties of Peace and Commerce in Jenkinson, Charles, Earl of Liverpool. *A Collection of All the Treaties of Peace, Alliance, and Commerce, Between Great-Britain and Other Powers*. London: J. Debrett, 1785.
- 15 See attestation as to papers by Nicholas Craven, 24 and 26 August 1745, TNA, HCA 32/115/14. See examination of James Doran, September 10, 1745. *Instance and Prize Courts: Examinations and Answers, Examinations 1744-1747*, TNA, HCA 13/90.

The ship the merchant had entrusted his precious business archive with was called the *Hoffnung*, otherwise *L'Espérance* or the *Hope*.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, this turned out to be quite the misnomer. “Five Leagues to the Southward of Beachy Head”, a notorious capture spot at the south-easternmost tip of England, the *Hope* was captured by a British privateer called the *Charming Molly*. On the “23d. of August 1745”, the ship *Hope* was “stopt attacked and seized by an English private ship of war called the Charming Molly (Nicholas Craven commanding) and first brought into the Downs and afterwards brought to Deal under pretence that the said ship and goods did belong to and were the property of subjects of the French king or other enemies of the crown of Great Britain [...] without any resistance being made” as court papers reveal.<sup>17</sup> It was only later that Luetkens would discover that the *Hope* was unfortunately not even the only ship of his that was captured during this time. Two weeks earlier, the English had also captured the *Post van Hamburg*, a second ship that had left Brest in August 1745, which was seized off the coast of Dungeness.<sup>18</sup> Receiving this news must have been a shock to the merchant, when he finally arrived in Hamburg by land in September 1745. It was perhaps some consolation that nobody was physically hurt during the captures, but with this ship Luetkens’ mercantile archive was now lost to him forever.

Instead, the business archive, as part of British war loot, met with a fate that was completely different than its intended purpose. In fact, being deprived of its original purpose and of its owner led to it still being preserved today. After the capture of the *Hope*, the archive passed into the hands of the British authorities and military administration. This happened immediately after the hostile takeover and was part of the normal procedure that awaited every ship that was taken by an English privateer during that time.<sup>19</sup> In Deal, to where the ship was escorted post-capture, the ship was handed over to the crew of the *Charming Molly* and the local military authorities, and with it the cargo of the ship also changed hands, also including items such as numerous heavy casks of sugar and coffee which were later sold and the contents of the hidden archive.<sup>20</sup> Luetkens’ wooden chest was discovered by the two military men James Doran and Bartlet Bartholomew Coleman during the inspection of the ship which served

16 Court Papers in TNA, HCA 32/115/14. Captured ship: *Die Hoffnung* of Hamburg, otherwise *L'Espérance*, *De Hoop*, or *The Hope* (previously the English *L'Upton* or *Upton*, taken as prize and sold in France), Rieweert Frerecks master. History: a Hamburg merchant ship (English plantation built, 250 tons, 15 guns) bound from Brest to Hamburg, laden with sugar, coffee berries, vinegar, cork, butter, linen, beef and a chest; taken on 23 August 1745 by the privateer *Charming Molly* (Nicholas Craven commanding) and brought into Deal.

17 Allegation for the master, dated 5 August 1746, TNA, HCA 32/115/14.

18 Court Papers in TNA, HCA 32/143/17. Captured ship: *Post van Hamburg*, master Herman Andreas Paatz. History: a Hamburg ship (70 Hamburg lasts, 11 men), bound from Brest to Rotterdam, laden with sugar and paper; taken on 7 August 1745 off Dungeness by the privateer Swift, George Hudson commanding, and brought into Deal.

19 See Freist, Dagmar. “The Prize Papers. Uncurated Histories of Global Scope.” In *Das Meer. Maritime Welten in der Frühen Neuzeit / The Sea: Maritime Worlds in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Peter Burschel and Sünne Jütercerzenka, 267-279. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2021.

20 Commissions of appraisal and sale of the ships and the cargo, March 1746, as well as detailed appraisals of the ship and the cargo, together with auction arrangements for the cargo, details of sales by auction at Garraways Coffee House, Exchange Alley, Cornhill, London on 17 April 1746, ac-

the purpose of finding evidence of potential fraud. As the court records from 1745 state, “after the said Capt. Frerecks was sent on shore at Deal in order to be exam’d by the commissioners a large chest of papers was found hid under the cargo in the afterhold of the said ship and this deponent caused the said papers to be taken thereout because the said chest could not conveniently be [—] removed and all the s[aid] papers are contained in the bag hereto annex.”<sup>21</sup> The records were transferred to the High Court of Admiralty in London, the court that was administrating the British privateering endeavours, where a court process was opened challenging the neutrality of the ship. In the court proceedings, the business archive became the main piece of evidence against the shipowner who was accused of having visited “Brest and other parts in France [...] with the premeditated design to trade and traffick there in ships and goods [...] and he the said Nicholas Gotlieb Lutkens did accordingly continue to live and reside in France and carried on such Trade and Commerce there in the mutual Profit and advantage of himself and of the subjects of the French king and to the great encouragement of their privateers until in or about the month of September 1745.”<sup>22</sup>

After the court proceedings, which lasted until 1748, the archive as a piece of evidence was subsequently transferred to the archive of the court, which later moved into the Tower of London and, in the end, found its way into the UK National Archives, Kew, London, where I rediscovered it 268 years after Luetkens had loaded it onto his ship in Brest. The only item missing today is the wooden travel chest that the records were originally stored in, simply because the officers Doran and Coleman had not been able to remove the wooden chest stuck in the hold of the ship, and “some wearing apparroll” stored in the chest that must have been sold on spot.<sup>23</sup> Everything else has remained intact over three centuries in precisely the condition it was left in by the merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens in Brest in 1745 and the court personnel in London.

This story stands at the beginning of this book. With each retelling, I never tire of considering the coincidences and the odds leading to that fact that this archive has survived until today and I feel privileged that I was fortunate enough to discover it in 2012 among the English privateering records that the UK still preserves today in the *Prize Papers* collection in the National Archives in London. The story still beggars belief: Were it not for this incident in 1745, the Luetkens archive would most probably never have survived, as

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count of sale, and account of duty on sugar and coffee (part of the cargo was decreed on 15 March 1746 to be restored as neutral), TNA, HCA 32/115/14.

- 21 See attestation regarding papers by Nicholas Craven, 24 and 26 August 1745, TNA, HCA 32/115/14. The wrapper of this court document says “L’Esperance otherwise De Hoffnung Rieweert Frerecks Master. Attestation of Nicholas Craven with 63 ship papers & a large [bag]g of papers brought in by Ste[vens] [28]th August 1745.” See examinations of James Doran and Bartlet Bartholomew Coleman, September 10, 1745. *Instance and Prize Courts: Examinations and Answers*, Examinations 1744-1747, TNA, HCA 13/90.
- 22 Allegation, given by Stevens, brought into court 16 March 1748, HCA 32/143/17. Luetkens was accused of buying “ships and goods taken from the English by the French and brought into their ports and condemned there as Prize.” The *Hope* was originally an English ship called L’Upton but captured by a Spanish privateer and bought by Luetkens at an auction in Vannes, France.
- 23 Examination of James Doran, September 10, 1745. *Instance and Prize Courts: Examinations and Answers*, Examinations 1744-1747, TNA, HCA 13/90.

was the tragic fate of many private archives from the past that were destroyed or thrown away over the course of time. Regarding records from Hamburg and its merchants in particular, the situation is even worse because Hamburg's state archive, the *Staatsarchiv Hamburg*, and its library of commerce, the *Commerzbibliothek*, suffered severe losses of records through the Great Fire of Hamburg in 1842 and during the bombings of the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> But due to the capture of the ship *Hope* in 1745, the Luetkens archive has survived, which is a windfall for historical research. Into the bargain, the archive has survived in remarkable and unique condition. It was preserved as a time capsule from 1748, the time when the court proceedings ended. After the case was closed and all the evidence neatly and safely stowed away, the archive sank into oblivion and gathered dust in the archive's registry for centuries. This was not an isolated case, but happened on a large scale with thousands of British Prize records. As a remnant of a practice that was eventually abandoned during the 19th century, after the court case the Luetkens archive became a shelf warmer in the archive of the court, relegated to an existence in the dark alongside thousands of other records and pieces of evidence stemming from over 35,000 English privateering raids and captures between the years 1652 and 1815.<sup>25</sup> It seems unbelievable, but all these records were forgotten for centuries. It was not until the end of the 20th and particularly the beginning of the 21st century when Dutch Scholars together with the National Archives in London rediscovered this collection and began the reappraisal and in-depth research process regarding this collection, the Prize Papers collection.<sup>26</sup> In 2012, I enjoyed the privilege of joining the Dutch consortium during a research trip, which was when I found the Luetkens archive. In 2018, I started working in the Prize Papers Project, a research project digitizing the entire Prize Papers collection.<sup>27</sup>

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- 24 See Loose, Hans-Dieter. "Das Stadtarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg im Großen Brand von 1842." In *Aus erster Quelle. Beiträge zum 300-jährigen Jubiläum des Staatsarchivs der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg*, edited by Joachim W. Frank und Thomas Brakmann, 51-84. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2013. See Schubert, Dirk. "The Great Fire of Hamburg, 1842: From Catastrophe to Reform." In *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World*, edited by Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lübken and Jordan Sand, 212-234. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2012.
- 25 For a concise introduction to the collection see Bevan, Amanda, and Randolph Cock. "High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers, 1652–1815. Challenges in improving access to older Records." *Archives* 53, no. 137 (2018): 34-58.
- 26 See Van der Doe, Erik, Perry Moree and Dirk Tang, eds. *Sailing Letters Journaal I-V*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008-2013. See Kimbell, Caroline, and Laura Simpson. "Saving and Keeping. The Prize Papers at the National Archives." In *Buitgemaakt en teruggevonden. Nederlandse brieven en scheepspapieren in een Engels archief, Sailing Letters Journaal V*, edited by Erik van der Doe, Perry Moree and Dirk J. Tang, 25-30. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2013. Another intriguing time capsule is presented in Van Eeten, Siem van. *Andries van Pallandt van Eerde: belevenissen van een 19e-eeuwse klokkenluider*. Zutphen: WalburgPers, 2015. See also Van Eijck van Heslinga, Els. "'Wij beleven een bedroefden tijd'. Post voor Nederlandse krijgsgevangenen in Engeland, 1799." In *Buitgemaakt en teruggevonden. Nedelandse brieven en scheepspapieren in een Engels archief*, edited by Erik van der Doe et al., 272-280. Walburg Pers, 2013.
- 27 The *Prize Papers Project*, based at the University of Oldenburg, Germany, and the National Archives of the UK, is part of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Germany. The aim of the Prize Papers project is the complete digitization of the Prize Papers collection. This includes the preservation of the collection's materiality, initial and in-depth cataloguing, the creation of

As a result of its eventful history, the Luetkens records have survived untouched and in pristine condition. Even in view of the total sum of records in the Prize Papers collection, the Luetkens archive represents a rare find. Not a single document has left the corpus; dozens of original bundles of incoming letters were still intact and still bound together in bundles when I found them. There were originally folded letters, unredeemed bills of exchange, outstanding accounts. Luetkens large Letter Book concluded with the last letter copied in on Monday, the 14th of June 1745. The archive is preserved in such a way as if the merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens had just left it. I could only imagine, despite the joy and enthusiasm that I felt about this discovery, the great loss and pain and most probably anger that the merchant must have felt upon losing his precious material, particularly during this crucial time of his life and career. The latter fact, however, at the same time underlines the immense value of this archive for historical research today. Based on this source, we now get a glimpse into this stage in the life of this Hamburg merchant in the most direct way possible and we can derive from it the challenges of an 18th-century mercantile establishment phase. For me, finding the Luetkens archive was nothing less than a stroke of luck. This moment in 2012 became the reason and the historical background for my being able to write this book.

## 1.2 The Mercantile Establishment Phase

This book investigates one of the most crucial stages in the life of an Early Modern wholesale merchant. It covers the period between apprenticeship and the opening of one's own merchant house which again often went hand in hand with marriage. This book offers a comprehensive study into the mercantile establishment phase.<sup>28</sup> In 18th

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research-oriented metadata and finally the presentation of digital copies and metadata in an open access research portal. As of 2018, the Prize Papers Project is part of the Academies Programme of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. Thus, it is funded by the German state and the federal state of Lower Saxony. The prospective funding period is 2018 – 2037, see [prizepapers.de](http://prizepapers.de).

- 28 Literature on the topic of the mercantile establishment phase is still sparse. It is telling in this regard that one of the basic readings is still Wolfgang Ruppert's article "Der Bürger als Kaufmann: Erziehung und Lebensformen" from 1982, which was reprinted in an extended version as the book chapter "Lebenswelt des Bürgertums" in Ruppert, *Bürgerlicher Wandel*, as well as Peter Earle's book chapters on "Business Life", "Apprenticeship", and "Starting a Business". See Ruppert, Wolfgang. "Der Bürger als Kaufmann: Erziehung und Lebensformen, Weltbild und Kultur." In *Die Bildung des Bürgers. Die Formierung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und die Gebildeten im 18. Jahrhundert*, edited by Ulrich Herrmann, 287-305. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1982. See Ruppert, Wolfgang. *Bürgerlicher Wandel. Die Geburt der modernen deutschen Gesellschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1984, here 57-103. See Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 85-111. As basic reading, see also Jeannin, Pierre. "Distinction des compétences et niveaux de qualification: les savoirs négociants dans l'Europe moderne." In *Marchands d'Europe. Pratiques et savoirs à l'époque moderne*, edited by Jacques Bottin and Marie-Louise Pelus-Kaplan, 309-340. Paris: Editions Rue d'Ulm, 2002. See Deges, Frank. "Zusammenfassende Übersicht über den Inhalt des Buches *Der getreue und geschickte Handels-Diener* von Paul Jacob Marperger." In *Paul Jakob Marpergers Getreuer und Geschickter Handels-Diener*. Nachdruck der Ausgabe von 1715. Mit einer Einführung in das Werk, edited by Frank Deges, XV-LXV. Cologne: Bachem, 1999. In part, the establishment phase of an Early Modern mer-

century German, this career stage was called the period of “Etablissement”, the time when merchants or “merchant servants started their own business”.<sup>29</sup> Usually, merchants were between 25 and 30 years old when reaching this stage in their career. It could easily span several years.

Wholesale merchants were merchants active in long-distance trade of goods in large lots.<sup>30</sup> The careers of these men were often remarkably elaborate, long and complex processes due to the high requirements of the profession. Life as a wholesale merchant demanded experience, in-depth expertise in goods, business skills and acumen, language

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chant is discussed in the books and source editions by David Hancock, Thomas M. Doerflinger, Richard Grassby, Henry Roseveare, Kenneth Morgan, Iris Origo, and Paul Butel. However, the focus of their works mostly rests on the activities of already established merchants, their networks and enterprises. In previous research, there still exists no comprehensive book focusing primarily on the topic of the merchant's establishment phase as a crucial stage and phase of a merchant's life. See Hancock, David. *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community: 1735–1785*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. See Grassby, *The Business Community*. In his work, Grassby generally focuses on the entire commercial community of England including many different commercial professions. His book nevertheless also provides valuable information about wholesale merchants. See Doerflinger, Thomas M. *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia*. Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. See Roseveare, Henry. *Markets and Merchants of the Late Seventeenth Century: The Maresco-David Letters 1668–1680*. Oxford: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1987. See Morgan, Kenneth, ed. *The Bright-Meyler papers: A Bristol-West India connection, 1732–1837*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Morgan himself points to the potential research opportunities regarding a merchant's establishment phase in his introduction to the collection, particularly with regard to the case of Jeremiah Meyler. See Morgan, Kenneth. “Introduction.” In *The Bright-Meyler papers*, 80–99 (“Making a fortune”, “Manners, Marriage, Trust”, “The risk environment”). The edition of the Bright-Meyler papers provides fascinating material and insight into “how merchants made profitable careers for themselves and their connections.” Burnard, Trevor. “Book Review: The Bright-Meyler Papers: A Bristol-West India Connection, 1732–1837.” *International Journal of Maritime History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 433–35, here 435. See Origo, Iris. *Im Namen Gottes und des Geschäfts. Lebensbild eines toskanischen Kaufmanns der Frührenaissance, Francesco di Marco Datini (1335–1410)*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1985. See Butel, Paul. “La maison Schröder et Schyler de Bordeaux. Fondation et premier essor.” *Bulletin du centre d'histoire des espaces atlantique* 3 (1987): 3–20.

29 As defined by Marperger, Paul Jacob. *Getreuer und geschickter Handelsdiener [...]*. Nuremberg/Leipzig: Peter Conrad Monath, 1715, “Cap. XIV Von denen Kauffmanns-Diener / die ihren eigenen Handel / mit geringem Capital angefangen [...] [und] zu seinem künfftigen Etablissement führen können,” 481.

30 Wholesaling “is usually defined as ‘the sale of goods in large lots.’ The wholesale function denotes transactions by individuals in pursuit of a trade, ‘rather than simply to satisfy a personal or family need.’ Further clarification indicates that wholesaling involves ‘the sales of one entrepreneur to another, intended for resale by the second.’ [...] [The] ‘purpose rather than the scale is the determinant in these instances.” Glasmeier, Amy. “The Role of Merchant Wholesalers in Industrial Agglomeration Formation.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 394–417, here 396. On Early Modern wholesale trade in general, see Price, Jacob M. *Overseas Trade and Traders*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996. See Price, Jacob M. “What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660–1790.” *Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 2 (1989): 267–284. Regarding typical career paths of wholesale merchants, see Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*, 45–59. See Kansikas, Juha. “Career Paths in Institutional Business Elites: Finnish Family Firms from 1762–2010.” *Enterprise and Society* 17, no. 1 (2016): 1–38.

proficiency, routinised professionalism, a wide network and sufficient capital, and often also a generous serving of good luck.<sup>31</sup> Building a career as wholesale merchant required time, dedication and perseverance. But eventually, in the best-case scenario, one's arduous long path culminated in success, leading to wealth, a good reputation and social advancement. The book will take us directly to the crossroads of the careers of these men, the phase when their careers still hung in the balance and much was at stake, the phase preceding settling down.

These years of establishment were particularly crucial for the merchants and a juncture in their lives for two reasons. The first reason was that this stage of life was a phase of probation. During this time, the merchants had to prove their capability as a merchant. The second reason was that it was at the same time a phase of high mobility. In order to become a reputable merchant, the merchants often went on extensive business trips.<sup>32</sup> Both characteristics reveal this period as a defining moment in the lives of the merchants leaving a lasting effect on their professional advancement. Moreover, this underlines the pressures characterizing this time.

Finally, a third feature of a mercantile establishment phase has to be added as typical for this stage in life that ultimately results from the first two aspects. This typical feature, however, represents less another experience or a further challenge to be passed during the establishment phase, but rather it shows the means and the merchant's immediate response to the other two challenges. This third characteristic is that this phase was strongly shaped by letter-writing practice.<sup>33</sup> It was letters that helped the merchants to manage their business and reach their career goals during the time of establishment despite, indeed defying, the turbulence and obstacles put in their way. As I will argue, proficient and convincing skills in the practice of letter writing and shrewd business practice via this medium were key to the success of the mercantile establishment phase. The combination of all three characteristics ultimately turned this stage of life into a very formative experience for every merchant.

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- 31 See Haggerty, Sheryllyne. *Merely for Money? Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750-1815*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012. See Trivellato, Francesca. *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009. See Smith, Edmond. *Merchants. The Community That Shaped England's Trade and Empire*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2021.
- 32 Regarding the mercantile business trip as the merchants' alternative to the aristocratic and bourgeois Grand Tour and Cavalier's Tour still see Ruppert, *Bürgerlicher Wandel*, 86-90; extended remake of Ruppert, "Der Bürger als Kaufmann," 287-305. For a comparable example of a mercantile business trip see Henninger, Wolfgang. *Johann Jakob von Bethmann 1717-1792. Kaufmann, Reeder und kaiserlicher Konsul in Bordeaux*. 2 vol. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1993, 129-134. Johann Jakob von Bethmann was one of Luetkens's closest trading partners. He will play a crucial role in the book.
- 33 Regarding letters and correspondence as mainstays of a merchant's business see Trivellato, Francesca. "Merchant's letters across geographical and social boundaries." In *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400-1700*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond, 80-103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. See Ditz, Toby L. "Formative Ventures. Eighteenth-Century Commercial Letters and the Articulation of Experience." In *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-writers, 1600-1945*, edited by Rebecca Earle, 59-78. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. See Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*.

## The Pressure of Success

The first characteristic of the mercantile establishment phase of a wholesale merchant was that it was a time when the merchants had to prove themselves.<sup>34</sup> This phase was the ultimate litmus test during a merchant's career.<sup>35</sup> As a result, this stage of life was shaped by immense pressure to succeed. During the years of establishment, the merchants had to show what they were capable of and that they were ready to be welcomed into the ranks of the established mercantile circles. They no longer were apprentices, often having already worked for several years as merchant servants or clerks, but as merchants in establishment they would now for the first time in their lives also begin to take on complete responsibility for their own actions and business, starting to trade on their own or begin their career as commission agents entrusted by other merchants.<sup>36</sup> The merchants had to demonstrate their skills and their suitability as full and worthy members of the mercantile profession. Most often it was only because of the achievements, the networks and the experiences of these defining years that merchants were able to build up their career and become established wholesale merchants in the first place. During these times, the aspiring merchants established their trade and business portfolio, setting foot in major business fields of wholesale trade. They also aimed at finding long-term trading partners as well as business partners for their merchant houses. Finally, this time also served the purpose of finding a wife, finalising the establishment phase with marriage. Marriage in the 18th century still often entailed the merger of two mercantile families and led to the opening of a joint merchant house. Thus, even marriage was an intrinsic part of a merchant's business strategy during establishment. In the 18th century and still well into the 19th century, marriage in mercantile circles often remained a highly commercial business.<sup>37</sup>

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34 "Une réputation d'habileté ou de maîtrise supérieure reflétait en partie une position de fortune établie et certains avaient la chance de la trouver déjà inscrite ou préfigurée dans leur héritage." Jeannin, "Distinction des compétences," 309.

35 They needed to learn by experience "how to comport themselves in the business world." Harreld, Donald J. "An Education in Commerce: Transmitting Business Information in Early Modern Europe." Paper given at the *XIV International Economic History Congress*, Helsinki 2006, Session 1. Available at <http://www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers1/Harreld.pdf>, accessed October 14, 2020.

36 See Ruppert, *Bürgerlicher Wandel*, 57-103; Ruppert, "Der Bürger als Kaufmann," 287-305; Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 85-111; Deges, "Handelsdiener." On the role of commission agents and the difference between commission agents and merchant factors see an introduction Häberlein, Mark. "Trading Companies." *Europäische Geschichte Online* (EGO), edited by the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (IEG), Mayence 2018, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/haeberleinm-2016-en>, accessed February 20, 2020. See Veluwenkamp, Jan Willem. "International Business Communication Patterns in the Dutch Commercial System, 1500-1800." In *Your Humble Servant. Agents in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Hans Cools, Maria Keblusek and Badeloch Noldus, 121 - 134. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2006.

37 See Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 245. See Schulte Beerbühl, Margrit. *The Forgotten Majority: German Merchants in London, Naturalization, and Global Trade 1660-1815*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014, 116; Schulte Beerbühl, Margrit. *Deutsche Kaufleute in London: Welthandel und Einbürgerung (1660-1818)*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007.

As the five crucial steps and fields of activity of a mercantile establishment phase I present in this book commission trade, the shipping business as a shipowner, high-risk trade, finding a business partner and a merchant clerk for the founding of a merchant house and finally marriage as the ultimate stages towards establishment. These concrete steps paved the way into becoming a wholesale merchant in the 18th century. At the same time, the steps did not exclude the possibility of setbacks along the way. On the contrary, setbacks essentially came part and parcel with the steps of the establishment process. However, regarding such setbacks, the important point is that the merchants found solutions or alternative routes to deal with the occurring problems. Those who mastered the steps were ultimately forged in the crucible of establishment for a life in the hazardous field of trade, which still held ready a world full of enough imponderables, risks and uncertainties. But after the tough school of establishment, the merchants were at least equipped with experience, skills, competences and certain character traits in order to rise to the challenge. These features, together with good luck and perseverance, were the ingredients of a successful career. The establishment phase was a trial phase with little to no room for major failure. It was a time when careers started, and others ended abruptly. Therefore, this time was one of the most formative moments in the life cycle of Early Modern merchants.

## Mobility

The second characteristic feature and challenge of the mercantile establishment phase not only adds to this impression, but reinforces the notion that this phase was to a great extent a leap into the unknown. The second reason why this stage had a lasting effect on the career of these merchants was that it was often characterised by a high level of mobility.<sup>38</sup> During this time the merchants not only started their careers and began to stand on their own two feet, but they also learned the hard way while travelling in foreign lands. Many young merchants used this time for extensive travel abroad.<sup>39</sup> Such travel would serve as the springboard for a successful career in wholesale business. During the entire Early Modern Period, it was customary practice and held in high regard among merchants to encourage the mercantile offspring to take to the road and gain experience abroad, either already during their apprenticeship or during the transition period before settling down in business.<sup>40</sup> Many aspiring merchants followed this call, using the period for long business travels on their own account or on the account of other merchants, working as travelling merchants, commission agents,

38 See Ruppert, *Bürgerlicher Wandel*, 86–90. See also Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 187. See Henninger, *Bethmann*, 129–134. Regarding the importance of mobility for Hamburg merchants in general see Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 17–21.

39 For a comparable case see Johan Jakob Bethmann's business trip, "Kundenwerbepreise", during the years 1744–1745. See Henninger, *Bethmann*, 129–134.

40 See Häberlein, Mark, Hans-Jörg Künast and Irmgard Schwanke, eds. *Die Korrespondenz der Augsburger Patrizierfamilie Endorfer 1620–1627. Briefe aus Italien und Frankreich im Zeitalter des Dreißigjährigen Krieges*. Augsburg: Wißner, 2010. See Van der Wal, Marijke. *Koopmanszoon Michiel Heusch op Italiëreis: brieven van het thuisfront (1664–1665)*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2019.

merchant clerks or even as ship owners in business houses abroad in the booming trading cities of Europe or even overseas. The streets and cities of North-Atlantic trade were literally crowded with young merchants trying their luck in foreign lands. It is a remarkable contemporary phenomenon mirroring an Early Modern world in motion, shaped by growing internationalisation with a young generation of merchants who held a decisive stake in the process.<sup>41</sup> The merchant trips resembled similar tours that young noblemen, as well as men of letters, students or craftsmen, undertook during the same time, Grand Tours or Educational Tours, which were also a typical phenomenon of the Early Modern Period.<sup>42</sup> All forms of tour aimed at creating men of the world. The goal of the merchant trip, however, in contrast to the Grand Tour in particular, was often far more pragmatic. It aimed less at leisure than business, although sightseeing and amusement were surely a part of their trips, but most of all the business trips were born out of necessity rather than being a pastime. They served business purposes. The mercantile business trip as an obligatory part of a mercantile career served the goal of making a name for oneself, of getting to know foreign countries and people, foreign cultures, customs, behaviours, goods and local usances, of establishing important business contacts, of gaining experience and improving their skills in wholesale trade, in commission trade and the shipping business, and raising solid capital as a foundation for a future career.<sup>43</sup> The business travels were intended to pave the way for successful careers as respectable and established members of the merchant community. The “great journey was the most important means of mercantile education.”<sup>44</sup> The years abroad shaped and defined the merchants’ careers and self-perceptions, their self-esteem and their attitudes as international merchants.<sup>45</sup> As Luetkens himself put it, the

41 See Brock, Aske, and Guido van Meersbergen and Edmond Smith, eds. *Trading Companies and Travel Knowledge in the Early Modern World*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2021. See Steele, Ian K. *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

42 See Grosser, Thomas. “Reisen und soziale Eliten. Kavalierstour – Patrizierreise – bürgerliche Bildungsreise.” In *Neue Impulse der Reiseforschung*, edited by Michael Maurer, 135-176. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999. See as an introduction Leibetseder, Mathis. “Educational Journey, Grand Tour.” *Europäische Geschichte Online (EGO)*, edited by the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mayence 2013, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/leibetseder-2013-en>, accessed February 07, 2019. See Bertrand, Gilles. *Le Grand Tour revisité : Pour une archéologie du tourisme. Le voyage des français en Italie, milieu XVIIIe siècle-début XIXe siècle*. Rome : École Française, 2008. See Ansell, Richard. *Complete Gentlemen. Educational Travel and Family Strategy, 1650-1750*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2022. See the Grand Tour Project at Cesta Stanford University: Ceserani, Giovanna et al. “British Travelers in Eighteenth-Century Italy: The Grand Tour and the Profession of Architecture.” *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 2 (2017): 425-450.

43 Regarding the necessary condition of the creation of “an initial stake” see Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 241. See Grassby, *Business Community*, 82-84, 401; Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 100-111; Deges, “Handelsdiener,” LIV-LXII.

44 Ruppert, “Bürgerlicher Wandel,” 86.

45 See Jacob, Margaret C., and Catherine Secretan. “Introduction.” In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 1-16. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. See Trivellato, Francesca. “A Republic of Merchants?” In *Finding Europe. Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images*, edited by Anthony Molho, Diogo Ramada Curto and Niki Koniordos, 133-158. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. See Schulte Beerbühl, Margit and Jörg Vögele, eds. *Spin-*

time served the purpose to prove himself in trade, “sich in der Handlung habitieren” as he wrote in German.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, it once more becomes clear that never again in a merchant’s life would their career be under a greater threat of failure than during these years of establishment.

## The Significance of Letters

The third characteristic feature of the mercantile establishment phase ultimately answers the question of how the merchants were able to cope with the tough situation and how they dealt with the key challenges of this time, the mobility and the pressure to success. It shows how the merchants managed to lay the groundwork for establishing themselves in the field of trade while travelling and to rise to the challenge of constantly showing and providing proof of their capability as merchants at the same time. They used a typical means of how to face and cope with distances and separation in life and business to overcome the challenges of the Early Modern Period: they wrote letters.<sup>47</sup> The great need to write letters, in contrast to the other two characteristics, surely was not specific or limited only to the mercantile establishment phase and not even to the mercantile group. The importance of letters and correspondence was yet another hallmark of the period in general.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it is comprehensible that letter writing also represented one of the most crucial features and a typical important facet of the establishment phase of a merchant. Merchants put immense effort into the practice of letter writing and relied heavily upon the medium of the letter in business and life.<sup>49</sup>

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*ning the Commercial Web. International Trade, Merchants, and Commercial Cities, c. 1640-1939.* Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004.

- 46 Original translation by the High Court of Admiralty of “Summarische Deposition,” TNA, HCA 32/143/17.
- 47 Regarding merchant letters see Trivellato, “Merchant’s letters”; Ditz, “Formative Ventures.” For the 19th century see Dossena, Marina. “Handwritten Communication in Nineteenth-century Business Correspondence.” In *Communicating Early English Manuscripts*, edited by Andreas H. Jucker and Päivi Pahta, 133-146. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- 48 See Whyman, Susan. *The Pen and the People. English Letter Writers, 1660-1800.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. See Del Lungo Camiciotti, Gabriella. “Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern Culture: An Introduction.” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 3 (2014): 17-35. See Daybell, James, and Andrew Gordon, eds. *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. See Nevalainen, Terttu, and Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, eds. *Letter-Writing.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007. See Matthews-Schlinzig, Marie Isabel, and Jörg Schuster, Cesa Steinbrink, Jochen Strobel, eds. *Handbuch Brief: Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart.* Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. See Barton, David, and Nigel Hall, eds. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice.* Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1999. See Findlen, Paula, and Suzanne Sutherland, eds. *The Renaissance of Letters. Knowledge and Community in Italy, 1300.-1650.* London/New York: Routledge, 2020. See Gerber, David A. *Authors of Their Lives. The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century.* New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- 49 See Trivellato, “Merchants’ letters,” 81-84. See Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 153-176. Apart from Ditz, “Formative Ventures,” see also Ditz, Toby L. “Secret Selves, Credible Personas: The Problematics of Trust and Public Display in the Writing of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Merchants.” In *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, edited by Robert Blair St. George, 219-242. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2000. See Ditz, Toby L. “Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled:

During the time of establishment when they were highly mobile, the letter offered the merchants the opportunity to bridge distances and stay in contact with their trading partners, family and friends. The letter became one of the most important social sites of their life during establishment.<sup>50</sup> Almost no area of life and no branch of business remained untouched by the practice of letter writing.<sup>51</sup> The letter was relevant in business, in private, in friendships, in business partnerships. It was important during the search for business partners or one's future wife. For the merchant's business and career, the letter provided the means to not only continue but also to improve and refine their skills and business during their travelling activity. Letters allowed the travelling merchants during their establishment phase to conduct regular business, to remain in steady contact with trading partners and to maintain an overview of all enterprises despite being on the road and while simultaneously getting to know many different places, visiting, living and trading in many different merchant houses and learning about trade customs in foreign land. Letters were also used to learn language skills and to practice different languages when merchants wrote letters in their native language and in the language of their guest countries.<sup>52</sup> They always continued to write in their own mother tongue but supplemented their linguistic toolset with language proficiency and letter practice in two or three further languages. Wholesale merchants were often polyglot since this was a necessary requirement for entering the international stage of business and because they visited many different countries during their career.<sup>53</sup> A stay abroad was always a very important language learning experience. In the typical business fields in which wholesale merchants were active during this time, namely commission trade and the shipping business or high-risk trade, the merchants relied heavily on letter exchange. In almost all these fields, letters held the actual power to act in order to conduct business. In these fields, the letter served in a representative function for the merchants, representing or even embodying their actions, as it was widely accepted in mercantile culture.<sup>54</sup> As a contemporary merchant manual, a typical instruction book for mer-

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Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994): 51-80.

- 50 See Schatzki, Theodore R. *The Site of the Social. A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.
- 51 See Earle, Rebecca. "Introduction: letters, writers, and the historian." In *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-writers, 1600-1945*, edited by Rebecca Earle, 1-14. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. See Couchman, Jane, and Ann Crabb, eds. *Women's Letter across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
- 52 With a focus on mercantile education see Häberlein, Mark, and Christian Kuhn. *Fremde Sprachen in frühneuzeitlichen Städten. Lernende, Lehrende und Lehrwerke*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010. See Gallagher, John. *Learning Languages in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- 53 See Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*, 178-184; Trivellato, "Merchant's letters." See Trivellato, Francesca. "Discourse and Practice of Trust in Business Correspondence during the Early Modern Period," unpubl. paper, Yale University, 2004, 19.
- 54 See O'Neill, Lindsay. *The Opened Letter. Networking in the Early Modern British World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. See Fitzmaurice, Susan M. "Like talking on paper? The pragmatics of courtship and the eighteenth-century familiar letter." *Language Sciences* 22 (2000): 359-383. See Daybell, James. *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

chants, stated, letters held the power “to buy for us, to speak for us and to sell for us”.<sup>55</sup> A quote in the contemporary *Kruenitz encyclopaedia* confirms this statement by stating that in the business letter, the written word alone authorised business. The letter was a sufficient means to conduct business based on it, the letter was effective “paratam executionem”.<sup>56</sup> This is why merchant were so reliant on letters, particularly in commission trade, the trade in goods by order of other merchants. The same applies to the shipping business and being a ship owner or ship’s husband, a business field that included the buying, selling and outfitting of ships as well as the provision of logistic transports by ship including the shipment of one’s own goods. Both business fields would not have been practically implementable had they not been carried out by letters. These business fields were key businesses used as a foundation for burgeoning careers. Letters held the same significance in high-risk trade, which required comprehensive enquiries and negotiations in letter exchanges, and, last but not least, also in the insurance and banking business letters were pivotal.

Ultimately, in all fields of business analysed in this book, letters will be shown to have played a fundamental role as a control and nerve centre for the merchants. To keep their businesses running, merchants on travel wrote between 5-20 letters a day. This may not seem much compared to the letter production of larger merchant houses, but it was a considerable number of letters in view of the fact that these men were on travel, often alone, sometimes travelling with a travel companion but only rarely with a clerk, meaning that they wrote and copied all their letter themselves, even during the times they were staying in merchant houses in their guest country.<sup>57</sup> The number of letters per day once more underlines the important role that letter writing played during the daily life of these merchants and in their career development.

In sum, the letter offered the space, and at the same time a necessary extension of the self, to conduct business during a merchant’s establishment phase and to take it to the next level. This is why this medium was such an indispensable asset for a mercantile establishment phase. At the same time, it becomes clear that there was of course a lot of pressure resting on the shoulders of the writing merchants right from the start. There was always a strong connection and interrelation between the importance of the letter for a merchant during this time and the outlined second main challenge of a mercantile establishment phase, which was the requirement of a merchant to be convincing in his

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2006. See the project *Material Identities, Social Bodies: Embodiment in British Letters c.1680-1820*, a Leverhulme Trust funded project based in the School of History and Cultures at the University of Birmingham, <https://socialbodies.bham.ac.uk>, accessed October 20, 2020.

55 “für uns kaufen, reden und verkaufen”. May, Johann Carl. *Versuch in Handlungs-Briefen und grössern kaufmännischen Aufsätzen nach den Gellertschen Regeln. Nebst einer Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Handlungsbriefen*. Lübeck: Jversen und Comp., 1794, 1 (first edition 1756, fourth edition 1765, complete edition 1794). See Faulstich, Werner. *Die bürgerliche Mediengesellschaft (1700-1830)*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, 85.

56 “Die bloße Handschrift eines Kaufmannes zieht paratam executionem nach sich.” “Handels= Mann, Kaufmann, Negociant, L. Mercator, Fr. Marchand, Négociant.” *Oekonomische Encyclopädie*, edited by Johann Georg Krünitz. 242 volumes. Berlin, 1773-1858, vol. 21, 747-754, here 753.

57 For comparison, see Morgan, *Bright-Meyler papers*.

words and actions during establishment. In this regard, too, the letter offered a remedy and a necessary platform. During this time, when the pressure was high and proof of success indispensable, the letter also offered the merchants a stage to prove their capabilities and to provide hard evidence that they were worthy of being welcomed as wholesale merchants in the ranks of the mercantile elite. Letters were, therefore, not only used to conduct business and to communicate, but they were also decidedly used to demonstrate skills and strong self-assertion, reliability, negotiation savvy, trustworthiness and success as a merchant.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, letters were used to actively engage with each other, to negotiate, to bargain, to enquire, to conduct transactions or to send samples of goods. At the same time these letters were used to convince trading partners of certain trading opportunities, to exert influence on negotiations, to convince partners to buy or sell, to conduct insider trading, to convince merchants to join an enterprise or a network, to manipulate addressees in certain ways and ask for help and support. When trading partners were unreliable or did not keep their promises, letters were used for rebukes and for taking certain counteractions. When business enterprises threatened to fail, letters were used to change course. Letters were used to find compromises and agreements between correspondents, to overcome difficulties, solve problems and settle disputes. Letters were also used to terminate partnerships in cases where enterprises or partnerships failed or disputes were unsolvable, a situation that was, however, to be avoided. Letters were far more than only an important communication medium for merchants during their establishment phase due to their separation. They were a crucial field of action in their own right, an important and indispensable place for the negotiation, planning and implementation of mercantile life and business, a trading floor *sui generis* strongly intertwined with trade on spot and often shaping it decisively.

As I will argue in this book, in view of the situation the young merchants faced during this time, letters became the main proving ground for their careers during their establishment phase. Letters and the powers of persuasion and action that letters incorporated as tools of communication, negotiation and persuasion, were the decisive tool and lubricant that enabled the merchants to master their establishment phase, which required special measures and the courage to put everything on the line, for which letters provided the adequate means. If performed skilfully and convincingly, letters and the practice of letter writing were ultimately the key to a successful establishment phase as a wholesale merchant.

Letters continued to play an important role in the life of merchants during their entire career. As research has shown, letters had been the backbone of mercantile business since at least the Middle Ages, gaining in importance during the 18th century and be-

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58 Regarding persuasion in letters in general see Couchman, Jane, and Ann Crabb. "Chapter One. Form and Persuasion in Women's Letters, 1400-1700." in *Women's Letter across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion*, edited by Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, 3-18. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. See Van Houdt, Toon et al., ed. *Self-Presentation and Social Identification: The Rhetoric and Pragmatics of Letter Writing in Early Modern Times*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002.

coming particularly important in wholesale business.<sup>59</sup> The 18th century world of trade was strongly shaped by long distances, a great variety of products and services, moving markets and economic cycles, and a rapidly growing finance sector.<sup>60</sup> Letters and letter exchanges provided the means to keep pace with these developments, and vice versa the letter and the emerging postal services were major driving forces that enabled these developments in the first place. During the entire Early Modern Period, letters “served as sinews holding together the entire organic structure of [...] long distance trade” and stood at the centre of mercantile business and life.<sup>61</sup> In “the eighteenth century, business depended on the organized exchange of letters” as Max Weber already observed.<sup>62</sup>

The major point that I will make and add to this perspective in this book is that I assume that, although the letter remained important during the merchant’s entire life, due to the special characteristics and the special requirements of the establishment phase, a skilful and convincing practice of letter writing was particularly significant during establishment. During this time, the merchants learned the subtleties, the promising principles and practices, the tips and tricks of business practice and letter practice and they learned them in practice, and by trial and error. Merchants would draw on this experience for their entire lives. Furthermore, the requirements were high during this time because it was not only business enterprises, but ultimately entire careers that were at stake. It was letters that would facilitate the process of how these careers would turn out with regard to success. On the one hand, this means that letters offered a certain stability and relative calculability and the necessary room for manoeuvre during a time that was characterised by the exact opposite, that was delicate and unstable and to a great extent also adventurous. On the other hand, however, the merchants were also constantly being tested by every letter they wrote and by every enterprise they started. They did not only use letters to manage their business and maintain the trust of their partners conducting reliable businesses, but with every single letter they wrote they also always bore testimony to their capability as a merchant. They had to prove that they possessed the necessary qualities and skills of a wholesale merchant. Almost every letter they wrote could have sealed the end of their career because every enterprise counted during this time and the merchants did not yet have sufficient capital reserves to cope with too many setbacks. It is for this reason that the merchants were under immense pressure to be convincing in their words and actions, in their letters and in their business and it is for the same reason that they learned what was necessary for putting their plans into practice, come what may. In this time, they learned to use every means possible and necessary, even if this meant acting in legal grey areas for the sake of business. This special tension notably characterised the mercantile establishment phase.

For a successful career, merchants ultimately needed two skill sets. A merchant needed business skills and acumen and he needed a high proficiency in the practice

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59 See Trivellato, “Merchants’ letters,” 81–82 and 84. See Greif, Avner. *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

60 See Smith, *Merchants*, 1–13.

61 Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, 21.

62 Weber, Max. *General Economic History*. New Brunswick/London: Transaction Books, 1981, 295.

of letter writing. Both fields of practice, business practice and letter-writing practice, however, represent in many ways the two sides of the same coin because business relied and was mostly settled in letters and, vice versa, the letters and their form and characteristics and the letter negotiations were highly depended on business practices. In order to pass their test of establishment merchants needed to convince the mercantile community of their skills and capabilities in both areas of expertise and in their successful combination. What ultimately prepared a wholesale merchant for a life in trade was that the merchant possessed the necessary *powers of persuasion* in both business and letters. This is the titular historical fact of this book and the main argument I wish to make therein.

Writing about an Early Modern merchant establishment phase means writing about a merchant's letters and a merchant's skills to conduct his business by means of paper and quill pen. The concept of the book is to show how merchants actively made use of the medium of the letter in all its facets for the sake of their establishment phase.<sup>63</sup> We will learn how merchants utilised all the opportunities letters provided, their textual, material, linguistic, performative and rhetoric elements, as a highly complex and at the same time very flexible tool to put concrete plans into action, to achieve goals, conduct negotiations and start enterprises and, therefore, successfully complete a mercantile establishment phase. We will learn how letters tipped the scales of an Early Modern mercantile establishment phase and how merchants exploited all the possibilities that letters provided in order to impose their will on their mercantile fates.

## The Early Modern World of Trade

All three features, the pressure for success, the mobility and the significance of letters define the establishment phase of a merchant as one of the most remarkable periods in the life of wholesale merchants. Against this background, this stage in merchants' careers reveals itself to be a rewarding subject to study for both cultural and economic historians. It was a time when merchants were made and mercantile careers were forged. Investigating the establishment phase of a wholesale merchant takes us to the heart of the question of what it meant to be a merchant in the Early Modern Period and what it took to become one during this time – questions to which I will deliver answers in this book. These answers will provide insight into the life and business of European merchants, into mercantile culture and the mercantile world of Atlantic trade in the 18th century, the merchants' practices, discourse, the languages they spoke, the negotiation skills they had, their argument strategies, worldview and self-perception. At the same time, this phase in a merchant life will provide us with a mirror of a larger world, a world striving towards a "world economy in-the-making", as Mary Lindemann put it, the "Atlantic stage of European economic development", as François Crouzet summarized it, with global markets, global flows of goods, professionalisation, a consumer and communication revolution, the eve of a capitalistic society, yet shaped and driven by colonialism and colonial wars and massive human exploitation through slavery, which

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63 See Couchman/Crab, "Form and Persuasion," 5.

all characterised the Early Modern world of trade.<sup>64</sup> Luetkens was not directly involved in the slave trade, but he was a beneficiary of it, involved in the sugar trade and other colonial goods coming from the French colonies or from prize ships.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding his career, the large-scale developments bore out a very concrete result. It was during the Early Modern Period that the capitalistic idea of individual reliability and the individual pressure to succeed, the idea that every man is the architect of his own fortune, started to take root, which is ultimately also reflected in the requirements of the mercantile establishment phase.<sup>66</sup> Yet, at the same time the Early Modern world of trade was also still characterised by being built upon cooperation and networking, a shared business culture, shared enterprises, trust relationships, mutual support, exchange processes and also cultural contacts across countries, cultures, languages, sometimes even across religions – features that are also mirrored in the characteristics of

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- 64 Lindemann, Mary. "The Anxious Merchant, the Bold Spectator, and the Malicious Bankrupt: Doing Business in 18th century Hamburg." In *The Self-Perception of Early Modern Capitalists*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan, 161-182. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, here 163. Crouzet, François. "Wars, Blockade, and Economic Change in Europe, 1792–1815." In *Trade and the Industrial Revolution, 1700-1850*, vol. 2, edited by Stanley Engerman, 191-212. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1996, here 192. See Canny, Nicholas, and Philip Morgan, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World. 1450-1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011. See Beckert, Sven, and Seth Rockman. "Introduction. Slavery's Capitalism." In *Slavery's Capitalism. A New History of American Economic Development*, edited by Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, 1-28. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. See Freist, Dagmar. "Expansion, space and people." In *Interpreting Early Modern Europe*, edited by C. Scott Dixon and Beat Kümin, 268-297. London: Routledge, 2019. See Osterhammel, Jürgen, and Niels P. Petersson. *Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2019.
- 65 For France, see Stein, Robert Louis. *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988. See Villeret, Maud. *Legouët de l'or blanc. Le sucre en France au XVIIIe siècle*. Rennes : PUR, 2017. For Hamburg, see Ressel, Magnus. "Hamburg und die Niederelbe im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der Frühen Neuzeit." *WerkstattGeschichte* 66/67 (2014): 75-96. For Germany, see Mallinckrodt, Rebekka von, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz, eds. *Beyond Exceptionalism. Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021. See Morgan, Kenneth. "Sugar Refining in Bristol." In *From Family Firms to Corporate Capitalism. Essays in Business and Industrial History in Honour of Peter Mathias*, edited by Kristine Bruland and Patrick K. O'Brien, 138-169. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. See in general Mintz, Sidney Wilfred. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. London: Penguin, 1986, 35-73.
- 66 See Reinert, Sophus A., and Robert Fredona. "Merchants and the Origins of Capitalism." In *The Routledge Companion to the Makers of Global Business*, edited by Teresa da Silva Lopes, Christina Lubinski, and Heidi J.S. Tworek, 171-188. London/New York: Routledge, 2020. See Engel, Alexander. "Homo oeconomicus trifft ehrbaren Kaufmann. Theoretische Dimensionen und historische Spezifität kaufmännischen Handelns." In *Praktiken des Handels. Geschäfte und soziale Beziehungen europäischer Kaufleute in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, edited by Mark Häberlein and Christof Jeggli, 145-172. Konstanz: UVK, 2010. See Bruland, Kristine and Patrick K. O'Brien, eds. *From Family Firms to Corporate Capitalism. Essays in Business and Industrial History in Honour of Peter Mathias*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. In this book's conclusion, I strongly argue against the concept of the homo oeconomicus as a suitable blueprint to explain Luetkens' behaviour, business strategy and his establishment phase. See in general Braudel, Fernand. *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, vol 2. *The Wheels of Commerce*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992, 433-455.

the establishment phase.<sup>67</sup> This correlation also represents a reason why the mercantile establishment phase in the 18th century represents a rewarding field of study, because it shows how both developments overlapped during this century, providing us with a significant snapshot of this momentous period. On the one hand, during this century hundreds of men set out on the road on their own and in their own interest to turn themselves into successful merchants. On the other hand, they already knew or quickly learned that this process was impossible without the support and goodwill of other merchants and adjusted accordingly. The order of the day for the merchants of the 18th century was to win the support and trust of other merchants, to convince them of their own capabilities followed by the necessity to make sure that all partners followed orders and kept their promises. This latter fact underlines why at the end of the 18th century, we are still a long way off from the idea of ‘rags to riches’ propagating in capitalistic societies.

In this book, I will therefore not tell an individual success story, but instead I will portray the far more accurate story of the typical case of mercantile self-making during the 18th century.<sup>68</sup> I will show how merchants became string-pullers in business

67 See Jacob/Secretan. “Introduction,” 1-16. See Canny, Nicholas, and Philip Morgan. “Introduction: The Making and Unmaking of an Atlantic World.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450-1850*, PAGES. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011. See Coclanis, Peter A., ed. *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005. See Lesger, Clé. *The Rise of the Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange: Merchants, Commercial Expansion and Change in the Spatial Economy of the Low Countries: c. 1550-1630*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. See Gervais, Pierre, Yannick Lemarchand, Dominique Margairaz, eds. *Merchants and Profit in the Age of Commerce, 1680-1830*. London: Picking & Chatto, 2014. See Grassby, Richard. *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580-1740*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. See Lamikiz, Xabier. *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks*. Rochester: Boydell Press, 141-181. See Smith, *Merchants*, 1-13; Haggerty, *Merely for Money*, 66-96.

68 With the term “self-making” I am referring to the process of turning oneself into a merchant by means of performing practices as it was developed in the Oldenburg Graduate School 1608/1/2 “Self-Making. Practices of Subjectivation”, of which I was a member from 2011-2014. See for an introduction Freist, Dagmar. “Ich will Dir selbst ein Bild von mir entwerfen. Praktiken der Selbst-Bildung im Spannungsfeld ständischer Normen und gesellschaftliche Dynamik.” In *Selbst-Bildungen: Soziale und kulturelle Praktiken der Subjektivierung*, edited by Thomas Alkemeyer, Dagmar Freist, and Gunilla Budde, 151-174. Bielefeld: transcript, 2013. The concept of self-making is also, in part, already at the centre of the book by Wahrmann, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self – Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. Examples of books presenting individual success stories of firm or merchant biographies are Henninger, *Bethmann*; Hasenclever, Adolf. *Peter Hasenclever aus Remscheid-Ehringhausen, ein deutscher Kaufmann des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Gotha: Gotha FA Perthes, 1922; Brulez, Wilfrid. *De firma della Faille en de internationale handel van Vlaamse firma's in de 16e eeuw*. Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1959; Schramm, Percy Ernst. *Neun Generationen. Dreihundert Jahre deutscher „Kulturgeschichte“ im Lichte der Schicksale einer Hamburger Bürgerfamilie (1648-1948)*. 2 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963-1964; Price, Jacob M. *Perry of London: A Family and a Firm on the Seaborne Frontier: 1615-1753*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992; Ville, Simon P. *English Shipowning During the Industrial Revolution: Michael Henley and Son, London Shipowners, 1770-1830*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.; Buist, Marten G. *At spes non fracta. Hope & Co. 1770-1815*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff,

and life and how they used letter writing for this purpose. We will learn that only by gaining influence as string-pullers and by way of cooperation when concocting plans to overcome difficulties these men were able to manage and succeed in their establishment phase. Investigating the letters, we will learn about the great effort, the concrete practices and strategies merchants used to win over other merchants for their plans and how they were able to put their enterprises and private endeavours into practice. Their letters are impressive testimonies of the powers of persuasion attributed to letters by the contemporaries and they show us how people performed these powers of persuasion in letters.<sup>69</sup>

In the book, I will present how business and private life were conducted, negotiated and settled in letters. I will provide a catalogue of the practices used to influence and convince correspondents and trading partners in letters and business, and finally, the contemporary principles of persuasion mobilised to achieve one's goals in business and private life. It is my firm conviction that the moment we understand what practices, reasons, motives, arguments or material rhetoric letter writers used in the past to convince their correspondents of a certain enterprise, is the moment we come closer to understanding more of how people lived and socialised, conducted trade or negotiated life in the past.

This is a book about the mercantile establishment phase as the ultimate testing ground for aspiring wholesale merchants of the 18th century. It introduces the reader to the major business fields, business practices, skills and competences of a merchant during his establishment phase and it will show how letters in all their elements, in their form and content, their language and materiality, by means of the language used and the language registers mobilised, were actively used during this process and turned into effective tools of mercantile communication, negotiation, persuasion and implementation in both the social and commercial realm of Atlantic trade. This book is about the powers of persuasion during the establishment phase of an Early Modern merchant and about the historical practice that helped to pass this litmus test that was letter writing.

### The Merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens and His Letters

The study is based on the case of Hamburg merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens (1716–1788), who went forth from his hometown at the end of the year 1743 to travel through

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1974. For a convincing social history of a merchant firm, see Gorißen, Stefan. *Vom Handelshaus zum Unternehmen: Sozialgeschichte der Firma Harkort im Zeitalter der Protoindustrie (1720–1820)*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002. See also Ferguson, Niall. *The House of Rothschild*, 2 volumes. London: Penguin Books, 2000. For a convincing approach, see Rothschild, Emma. *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. Magnus Ressel is currently working on a biography of the merchant and slave trader Friedrich Romberg based on the archive of Romberg.

69 The analytical concept driving the analysis of powers of persuasion will be explained in detail in the part on the research approach.

France in order to become a successful wholesale merchant.<sup>70</sup> Two years later, he returned to the Elbe city as a respectable man of trade. How Luetkens succeeded in this regard, in these efforts to take the final steps towards completing his establishment phase, is the main storyline of the book. Based on his example and following his path, we will learn what it meant to become a successful merchant because he simply had no other option than to be successful. Everything else would have meant disaster for his career. But Luetkens passed the test with flying colours. His establishment phase laid the foundation for a highly successful career. The merchant house of *Luetkens & Engelhardt* became the third largest merchant house in the sugar trade in Hamburg with a handling volume in goods comparable in success only to the large Huguenot merchant houses.<sup>71</sup> Later Luetkens became a reputable senator and praetor of the city of Hamburg. Together with the merchant and senator Johann Schuback, Luetkens was responsible for one of the most important bank reforms in Hamburg in the 18th century.<sup>72</sup> His magnificent *Bel Etage* of his imposing merchant house in the merchant quarter around the *Huxter Fleet* in Hamburg, is displayed today in the *Hamburg Museum of Arts and Crafts*.<sup>73</sup> His portrait still hangs in the Hamburg city hall. Apparently, during his establishment phase Luetkens must have done something right. He had set the right course and was

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- 70 Regarding Hamburg merchants and their role as important contributors to the Atlantic business community of the 18th century see the important reference work by Weber, Klaus. *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680-1830. Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cadix und Bordeaux*. Munich: Beck, 2004. See Weber, Klaus. "German Merchants in the Atlantic Trade of Colonial Goods and European Manufactured Goods, Linking Hamburg, Cadiz, and Bordeaux (1700-1830)." *Jahrbuch für Europäische Überseegeschichte* 1 (2000): 169-174.
- 71 See *Admiralitaets Zoll und Convoy Einnahme*. Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Admiralitätskollegium, 371-2, F6, vol. 18 (De Anno 1753) and vol. 25 (De Anno 1769). I would like to thank Gabrielle Robilliard for her support with these records. See Denzel, Markus A. "Der seewärtige Einfuhrhandel Hamburgs nach den Admiralitäts- und Convoygeld-Einnahmebüchern (1733-1798)." *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 102, no. 2 (2015): 131-160. See Schulenburg, Frank. "Die Auswertung der hamburgischen Admiralitätszoll- und Convoygeld-Einnahmebücher: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der wirtschaftlichen Rückwirkungen der europäischen Expansion." *Jahrbuch für Europäische Überseegeschichte* 1 (2001): 175-180. The firm "Luetkens & Engelhardt" is also mentioned in Klaus Webers' tables of all sugar imports to Hamburg, also based on the Admiralty records of the Staatsarchiv Hamburg as the third-largest Hamburg sugar importer after the renowned Huguenot merchant firms of Pierre His and Pierre Boué. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 250. Weber, however, nonetheless concludes that Hamburg sugar trade was dominated and controlled by Huguenot merchants only, excluding the important Hamburg firm of Luetkens and his partner Engelhardt in his book. See *ibid.*, 248.
- 72 Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, and Johann Schuback. "An die sämtliche Herren Kaufleute, welche die gemäßigte Vorstellung und Bitte wegen Abänderung der bey der hiesigen Lehnbanco eingerissenen Missbräuche an die löbl. Deputation des Commercii unterschrieben haben." In *Drey Schriften über Geld und Banken, besonders über die Hamburgische Bank. Zweyte Auflage*; edited by Hamburgischen Commerzdeputation. Hamburg: Treder, 1791.
- 73 Luetkens' *Bel Etage* showing a decorative Louis Seize style boiserie once installed in his merchant house in the Katharinenstraße is displayed today as a *Period Room* ("Louis-Seize-Raum") in the *Hamburg Museum of Arts and Crafts* (Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, MK&G). Information found on <https://www.mkg-hamburg.de/en/collection/permanent-collection/period-rooms/louis-seize-room.html>, accessed March 8, 2019.

able to build the foundations upon which his later career could prosper. In this book, we will learn how he managed to achieve this goal.

Yet, the book will not tell another success story of a self-made man. Not only did Luetkens suffer severe setbacks along the way and in almost all fields of trade, which he, however, was often able to compensate, but what is even more important is that he never actually acted in isolation or only on his own behalf during his establishment phase. Instead, we will hear about a man who was highly dependent on the goodwill, the cooperation and the support of other merchants. He also learned from his trading partners. These other merchants, more than 40 merchant houses, banking firms or single merchants, ranging from close family members and friends, to trading partners, business friends, business partners, or even to complete strangers, were located in the Holy Roman Empire, the Hanseatic cities, France, the Netherlands, Spain, England, Poland, Switzerland, and Italy.<sup>74</sup> They were mainly Protestant merchants, but Catholic merchants were also among Luetkens' trading partners. Many of these merchants will have their say in the book and are part of the analyses because they were not only involved in Luetkens' businesses, but particularly because they exchanged letters with him that are still stored in the letter piles in the Luetkens archive.

As a result, and as an important aim of this book, I will not look at Luetkens' example only as an isolated case of a mercantile career, but I will present the Hamburg merchant, his business and letter practices, as a part of a larger community and network of European merchants active in Atlantic trade. Luetkens' task was to win the trust and respect of the other merchants with his enterprises and his letters, for which he was highly reliant on the approval of the other merchants. But the merchant managed to turn this situation into a positive outcome. In the end, he was able to prevail. Thus, we will meet a man, who was persistent enough to overcome the hurdles put in his way and who found ways to undermine boundaries set around him, sometimes through persistence, sometimes by chance, most often however by means of persuasive effort, shrewd strategies and tricks and by finding loopholes with his business and trading partners in business and legal matters as well as in private and interpersonal matters, circumventing or undermining any restrictions he faced in the best way possible. Luetkens knew whom to contact in what matters, whom to involve and how to persuade his correspondents, both business and private, to support his plans and undertakings for the sake of business, even if this would mean using grey areas and insider trade. This was key to his success. The latter, in turn, was quite symptomatic of Europe and Atlantic trade during the 18th century, where and during which economic and political interests were not necessarily always congruent.<sup>75</sup>

74 Find Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' entire network of correspondents and family members represented in the letters of the Luetkens archive in the detailed catalogue entry in TNA Discovery, which Amanda Bevan and I have compiled in 2017: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C4249188-C4249192>.

75 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*. See Marzagalli, Silvia. "Négoce et politique des étrangers en France à l'époque moderne: discours et pratiques de rejet et d'intégration." In *Les Étrangers dans les villes-ports atlantiques. Expériences françaises et allemandes XVe-XIXe siècle*, edited by Mickael Augeron and Pascal Even, 45-62. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010. See Truxes, Thomas M. "The Breakdown of Borders. Commerce Raiding during the Seven Years' War, 1756-1763." In *Commerce Raiding. Historical*

This book is therefore no biography, but a book about a man who became influential pulling strings in business and life, also offering a larger view on the 18th century world of Atlantic trade and its merchants. In Luetkens, we will meet a man who was in many ways typical, in any case indicative of his age and his profession as a wholesale merchant, a pragmatic man and a man who knew how to talk to people, who knew his business and how to use his skills in letter writing. All these elements proved to be decisive features for a striving man conducting wholesale trade in the 18th century, as was true for Luetkens and many other young merchants trying their luck in trade during the 18th century. What armed and qualified Luetkens for a life in trade as a wholesale merchant in the 18th century were his powers of persuasion and his mastery of putting this skill on paper. Luetkens' establishment phase was surely no sure-fire success but rather a contested, demanding and competitive pathway, which Luetkens, however, happened to navigate with success.

In order to tell his story and recreate Luetkens' path to become a settled merchant, I enjoyed the privilege of working with Luetkens' business and letter archive. The remarkable thing about this archive is that it was stolen from him at precisely the moment when he had entered the home stretch of this endeavour. The British privateers took it from him only shortly before his marriage and his return to his hometown of Hamburg. This is the reason why the Luetkens archive provides us today with first-hand account of a wholesale merchant's establishment phase. Due to the confiscation at this crucial point in time, this archive offers a unique and notably the most direct insight possible into the events and the process of a mercantile establishment phase. Nobody has altered the records since the time of the court proceedings. The stories have been concealed for centuries. Not even Luetkens had the chance to alter anything. Only thus, I was able to reconstruct the concrete process and present the major steps of a mercantile career and the most important practice during this time, letter writing, in such detail, because I had access to all of Luetkens' records and to all his letters that meticulously document this process.

The Luetkens archive still contains all the letters that Luetkens kept in his travel chest in 1745. In total, the Luetkens archive consists of 2,286 letters underlining the importance of the practice of letter writing for his business and career. Both incoming and outgoing letters have survived, in three languages, German, French, and Dutch, showing his multilingualism. Letters account for more than two thirds of the surviving records in the Luetkens archive. Two of the three archive boxes in which the archive is stored in London today are filled exclusively with letters, neatly stored in letter bundles. Half of the third box is filled with Luetkens own large Letter Book, smaller Letter Books and other books. These letters allow a detailed insight into Luetkens professional and

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*Case Studies, 1755-2009*, edited by Bruce A. Elleman and Sarah C.M. Paine, 9-26. Newport: Naval War College Press, 2013. See Truxes, Thomas M. *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. See Rupert, Linda M. *Creolization and Contraband: Curacao in the Early Modern Atlantic World*. Athens/London: University of Georgia Press, 2012. See Trivellato, Francesca, Leor Halevi and Catia Antunes, eds. *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

private achievements as well as into setbacks and failures. They represent the ups and downs of a mercantile establishment phase. Thus, I will not only tell Luetkens' story and analyse his establishment phase and show how he became part of Europe's large business community, but I will reconstruct this process based on the analysis of his letters. By showing how his letters practically worked in life and business, and how they were used by the letter writers for their concrete purposes, I will demonstrate how business worked, how personal arrangements were made, how lives and careers were shaped and how merchants closed rank in a world that expanded dramatically, and by doing this, I provide an accurate picture of what characterised life and business in 18th century Europe and Atlantic trade.<sup>76</sup>

### 1.3 New Impulses

Finding a merchant archive such as the Luetkens archive filled to the brim with letters, from an era that historians have long called the *Age of Letters*, was no surprise.<sup>77</sup> It was also nothing out of the ordinary that a person would write and receive, own and store that many letters during this time. The 18th century was strongly shaped by the practice of letter writing, particularly in the case of merchants and people of the middling sort.<sup>78</sup> Research on Early Modern letters therefore has a long tradition. During the last decade, however, it has been noticeably revitalised due to new questions and methodologies in research, the existence and expansion of large databases such as *Early Modern Letter Online*, large sociolinguistic projects, advances in automated text recognition software, large volunteer projects and, last but not least, due to advances in cataloguing that brought to light previously unexplored collections.<sup>79</sup> New discoveries of letter collections and personal letter archives have been made, from the contents of original

76 See Stewart, Alan. "Letters." In *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500–1640*, edited by Andrew Handfield, 417–433. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, here 417.

77 "Das 18. Jahrhundert war das Jahrhundert des Briefes und der Freundschaft." Steinhausen, Georg. *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes*. 2 vol. Berlin: Gaertners Verlagsbuchhandlung, vol. 2, 1891, 302. See Vellusig, Robert. *Schriftliche Gespräche. Briefkultur im 18. Jahrhundert*. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2000, 8.

78 See Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*; Whyman, *Pen and the People*; Matthews-Schlinzig et al., *Handbuch Brief*; Camiciotti, "Letter Writing." See Pearsall, Sarah. *Atlantic Families. Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. See Berg, Temma. *The Lives and Letters of an Eighteenth-Century Circle of Acquaintance*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. See Boran, Elisabeth et al. "Letters." In *Reassembling the Republic of Letters in the Digital Age*, edited by Howard Hotson and Thomas Wallnig, 63–67. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2019. See Hunt, Margaret R. *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996.

79 Early Modern Letters Online: <http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>; Dutch Prize Papers: <https://prizepapers.huygens.knaw.nl>; Transkribus: <https://readcoop.eu/de/transkribus>; Transcribe Bentham: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham>; Mapping the Republic of Letters: <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu>. See Edelstein, Dan, and Paula Findlen, Giovanna Ceserani, Caroline Winterer, Nicole Coleman. "Historical Research in a Digital Age: Reflections from the Mapping the Republic of Letters Project." *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 2 (2017): 400–424.

postbags in the Prize Papers collection found by Thomas M. Truxes to a remarkable surviving postmaster trunk filled with letters in the Netherlands found by the *Unlocking History* team.<sup>80</sup> For the first time, longer-known large collections of Early Modern letters in archives have become part of large-scale research and digitisation projects in the Georgian Papers Programme, Letters as Loot, Unlocking the Mary Hamilton Papers, Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence online, the Cultures of Knowledge project, the Feathers project or once again the UK-German Prize Papers Project.<sup>81</sup> This renaissance in research on letters will sustainably shape the field for years to come.

Among these newly discovered or newly explored letter collections, the collection of letters of the Luetkens archive represents a moderate find in terms of the number of letters. Yet, in terms of content-value and character, this archive provides important new insights, and it allows valuable new findings. For research on Atlantic merchants and mercantile letters, the Luetkens archive marks an exceptional find and it represents an invaluable source for advances in both the fields of economic and cultural history of the 18th century. The reasons for this are threefold, which all come back to the state of preservation of this collection and its three unique characteristics. Based on these characteristics, I was able to develop my research approach and delineate the aims and goals of this book, with which I hope to contribute to research and provide new stimuli for existing literature in the fields of research on Atlantic merchants and mercantile culture in the 18th century, both in France and in Hamburg, on letters, their role and importance in life and business as well on mercantile self-making in the 18th century.

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80 See Truxes, Thomas M., and Louis M. Cullen and John Shovlin, eds. *The Bordeaux-Dublin Letters, 1757: Correspondence of an Irish Community Abroad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2013. See *Signed, Sealed, & Undelivered*, Brienne.org: <http://brienne.org>. See Ahrendt, Rebekah, and David van der Linden. "The Postmasters' Piggy Bank: Experiencing the Accidental Archive." *French Historical Studies* 40, no. 2 (2017): 189-213. See Ahrendt, Rebekah, and Nadine Akkerman, Jana Dambrogio, Daniel Starza Smith, David van der Linden. "The Brienne Collection." *Early Modern Letters Online*. <http://emlo-portal.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/?catalogue=brienne-collection> (2017), accessed September 14, 2020. The Unlocking History team was recently able to virtually unfold a still sealed letter: Dambrogio, Jana, and Amanda Ghassaei, Daniel Starza Smith, Holly Jackson et al. "Unlocking history through automated virtual unfolding of sealed documents imaged by X-ray microtomography." *Nature Communications* 12:1184 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-21326-w>

81 Georgian Papers Programme: <https://georgianpapers.com>, February 19, 2021. Letters as Loot: <https://brievensbuit.inl.nl>, accessed July 7, 2021. See Van der Wal, Marijke, and Gijsbert Rutten. *Letters as Loot. A sociolinguistic approach to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014. Unlocking the Mary Hamilton Papers: <https://www.projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/maryhamiltonpapers>, February 6, 2021. EMCO: <http://emco.swansea.ac.uk>, accessed December 5, 2021. Cultures of Knowledge, Networking the Republic of Letters, 1550-1750: <http://www.culturesofknowledge.org>, accessed September 14, 2020. Feathers: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2019/12/major-european-subsidy-for-nadine-akkerman-and-detective-work-into-old-handwritten-documents>, accessed October 5, 2020. Prize Papers Project: <https://www.prizepapers.de>, accessed July 7, 2021.

## Filling the Gap

The first special characteristic of the Luetkens archive is that it offers a comprehensive and dense documentation of a time in a merchant's life that usually left sparse records in Early Modern business archives: the establishment phase of a wholesale merchant. The reason for this sparseness is that curated or donated mercantile archives, whether family-owned or bequeathed to archives, concentrate on the most memorable, successful years in a merchant's or a firm's history, which is naturally the time after the firm was founded.<sup>82</sup> The fact that the Luetkens archive has survived as a time capsule from the years preceding this crucial moment in time is therefore a stroke of luck. There is no comparable mercantile archive that has survived in such a complete form and in such an unspoiled state of preservation covering a merchant's establishment phase in the Early Modern Period.<sup>83</sup> Due to the destruction caused by the Great Fire of Hamburg in 1842 and the Second World War, there is not even a comparable collection in the Hamburg state archive, library of commerce or chamber of commerce or in the Hanseatic Business Archives.<sup>84</sup> Finding the Luetkens archive in London therefore also is a stroke of luck for the history of Hamburg and its merchants. Last but not least, the Luetkens archive represents one of the most extensive travel archives from a foreign merchant travelling in France. Many young merchants took to the road during the Early Modern Period, kept a travel archive or wrote letters during their stays abroad and during their apprenticeship. Most notably this is demonstrated in newly discovered rare collections of letters by young merchants from the Augsburg Endorfer family found by Mark Häberlein and his team and the letters by the Hamburg Heusch family sent home from Italy found by Marijke van der Wal.<sup>85</sup> The Luetkens archive is probably one of the most comprehensive personal archives of a young Hamburger travelling foreign lands, encompassing all his business records as well as his business and personal letters. It is one of the most complete documentations of a business journey of a Hamburg merchant in France in the 18th century.<sup>86</sup> Based on these features, I aim to contribute to two major research fields: the research on Early Modern merchant's careers and the research on the role of German merchants active in Early Modern Atlantic trade, particularly with regard to Hamburg merchants trading in France in the 18th century.

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82 See Butel, "La maison Schröder et Schyler"; Henninger, *Bethmann*, Morgan, *Bright-Meyler papers*.

83 For comparable mercantile source collections see the books and source collections by David Hancock, Thomas M. Doerflinger, Richard Grassby, Henry Roseveare and Kenneth Morgan, Wolfgang Henninger, Marijke van der Wal and Iris Origo.

84 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Commerzbibliothek Hamburg, Archiv der Handelskammer, Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv. No letters, but still highly rewarding source material from another Hamburg merchant family has been found by Spalding, Almut and Paul S. Spalding. *The Account Books of the Reimarus Family of Hamburg, 1728-1780. Turf and Tailors, Books and Beer*. 2 vols. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015. See Loose, "Das Stadtarchiv".

85 See Häberlein, *Endorfer*; Van der Wal, *Heusch Letters*.

86 As a recent letter edition see Green, Michaël. *Le Grand Tour 1701-1703. Lettres de Henry Bentinck et de son précepteur Paul Rapin-Thoyras, à Hans Willem Bentinck. Édition critique établie*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2021.

This book offers the first comprehensive study of a mercantile establishment phase in the 18th century. Previous research has hitherto mainly focussed on the years of apprenticeship or after settlement, it has examined large firm archives or family archives of merchant families, resulting in books on Economic History, company histories or works with a biographical focus on merchants, including works by Mark Häberlein, Wolfgang Henninger, Stefan Gorißen, Paul Butel, Kenneth Morgan, Emma Rothschild, Iris Origo, Leos Müller, Anne-Charlott Trepp, or Magnus Ressel.<sup>87</sup> These studies often concentrate on established, often well-known merchants or merchant families, including names such as Endorfer, Bethmann, Harkort, Schröder et Schyler, Bright-Meyler, Rothschild, Datini, Momma-Reenstierna, Grill, Benecke, or Romberg, not least because of the fact that for these merchants due to their later careers there are rich source collections available. Particularly the Romberg archives, which are currently undergoing a detailed examination by Magnus Ressel, promise new research findings.<sup>88</sup> The interest in Early Modern merchants continues unabated. Most prominent is a research focus that combines a historical cross-section through entire careers of merchants or firms, studies into cross-generational merchant families, a focus on business communities and merchant groups from certain regions, or transatlantic networks, linked with the questions of nationality, global networks, expansion or empire. The present book draws on extensive literature including the crucial works by David Hancock and Richard Grassby, Thomas M. Doerflinger, and more current books by Francesca Trivellato, Catia Antunes, Sheryllyne Haggerty, Edmond Smith, Xabier Lamikiz, Christopher Ebert and Tijn Vanneste.<sup>89</sup> The phase between apprenticeship and establishment plays a part in previous research, too, often presented as a transition period. Particularly the discovery and commented edition of the Heusch letters provides important findings for this present book.<sup>90</sup> However, a concrete comprehensive study and case study of

87 See Häberlein, *Endorfer*; Henninger, *Bethmann*; Gorißen, *Vom Handelshaus zum Unternehmen*, Butel, "La maison Schröder et Schyler"; Morgan, Bright-Meyler papers; Rothschild, *Inner Life of Empires*; Origo, *Datini*. See Müller, Leos. *The Merchant Houses of Stockholm, C. 1640-1800: A Comparative Study of Early-modern Entrepreneurial Behaviour*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis, 1998. See Trepp, Anne-Charlott. *Sanfte Männlichkeit und selbständige Weiblichkeit: Frauen und Männer im Hamburger Bürgertum zwischen 1770 und 1840*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996.

88 See the Romberg Project by Magnus Ressel: [https://www.geschichte.uni-frankfurt.de/102309703/Romberg\\_Projekt](https://www.geschichte.uni-frankfurt.de/102309703/Romberg_Projekt). See the video series: [https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/aufstieg\\_zum\\_geschaeftsmann?nav\\_id=9586](https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/aufstieg_zum_geschaeftsmann?nav_id=9586). See also Ressel, Magnus. "The global Presence of Merchants from the German Empire," 239-270. See Ressel, Magnus. "Die Stärke der schwachen Akteure. Die hanseatische Gemeinschaft im europäischen Handelssystem des 18. Jahrhunderts." *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 92 (2020): 95-136. See Huang, Angela. "Nun sag, wie hast du's mit der Hanse? Von den Wechselbeziehungen alter Hansebilder und neuer Hanseforschungen." *Geschichte für heute. Zeitschrift für historisch-politische Bildung* 13, no. 3 (2020): 5-16.

89 See Hancock, *Citizens of the World*; Grassby, *Business Community*, Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*; Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*; Antunes/Hallevi/Trivellato, *Religion and Trade*; Haggerty, *Merely for Money*; Smith, *Merchant*. Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust*; See Ebert, Christopher. *Between Empires. Brazilian Sugar in the Early Atlantic Economy, 1550-1630*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008. See Vanneste, Tijn. *Global Trade and Commercial Networks. Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011.

90 Van der Wal, *Heusch letters*.

the establishment phase in a merchant's life, including a focussed perspective on the important necessary steps leading to establishment, is still pending. The sparse existing and older literature on the topic, including articles and book chapters by Wolfgang Ruppert and Peter Earle, Frank Deges, Jan Willem Veluwenkamp or Pierre Jeannin – though highly important for this book –, often limit the focus and source background mainly to mercantile advice literature regarding the topic due to a lack of other sources.<sup>91</sup> With this study, I aim at filling the gap between apprenticeship and settlement and offer a case study of an Early Modern mercantile establishment phase and imbue this career stage at the same time with a particular significance. Today, the merchant Luetkens, his career, life and letters have fallen into complete obscurity. Yet during his time, he was successful and integrated into powerful merchant networks with manifold links to renowned and leading merchant houses in France, Hamburg and beyond, some of which still exist today. He represented a typical representative and example of an aspiring wholesale merchant on travel and interacted with the careers of other merchants during his establishment phase. He was also a typical representative of a foreign merchant active in French Atlantic trade. As such, his story represents a suitable starting point for a case study that goes beyond a biographic approach. In the end, his case reveals to us how the mercantile world worked in Atlantic trade of the 18th century and what opportunities it held for a Hamburger merchant to play a part in it.

## A Hamburg Merchant in France

The state of research regarding the role of German merchants in foreign trade is more extensive compared to the sparse literature on the establishment phase. The book can draw on pioneer works on the topic of German merchants and German 'nations', "Les Colonies Germaniques" as they were called in France, trading and residing in the ports and cities of Europe, as in France, but also in Spain, Portugal, Finland, the Netherlands or England.<sup>92</sup> These works, including the most fundamental book *Deutsche Kaufleute im*

91 See Ruppert, "Der Bürger als Kaufmann"; Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*; Deges, "Handelsdiener"; Veluwenkamp, "International Business"; Jeannin, "Distinction des compétences."

92 Regarding these German communities or 'nations' in Bordeaux and Cádiz see in detail Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*. See Weber, Klaus. "The Atlantic Coast of German Trade. German Rural Industry and Trade in the Atlantic, 1680-1840." *Itinerario, European Journal of Overseas History* 26, no. 2 (2002): 99-119. See Butel, Paul. "Les négociants allemands de Bordeaux dans la deuxième moitié du XVIIIe siècle." In *Wirtschaftskräfte in der europäischen Expansion*, edited by Hermann Kellenbenz and Jürgen Schneider, 589-613. Stuttgart: Klett-Contra, 1978. See Leroux, Alfred. *La Colonie Germanique de Bordeaux: Étude Historique, Juridique, Statistique, Économique, d'après les sources allemandes et françaises, Tome 1, De 1462 à 1870*. Bordeaux: E. Feret, 1918, chapter "Prépondérance des allemands (1697-1870)," 45-149. See Schulte Beerbühl, *German Merchants*. See Newman, Karen. *Anglo-Hamburg Trade in the Late Seventeenth and Early 18th Century*. Unpublished PhD-thesis. London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1979. Such nations could also be found in other countries, see Resel, Magnus. "Von reichsstädtischen Kommissionären zu europäischen Unternehmern. Die deutschen Händler in Venedig im 18. Jahrhundert." *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 107, no. 2 (2020): 163-193. See Poettering, Jorun. *Handel, Nation und Religion: Kaufleute zwischen Hamburg und Portugal im 17. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013. See Pohl, Hans. *Die Beziehungen Hamburgs zu Spanien und dem Spanischen Amerika in der Zeit von 1740 bis 1806*.

*Atlantikhandel* by Klaus Weber as well as his articles, the crucial works by Pierrick Pourchasse, Silvia Marzagalli, Paul Butel, the edited volume *Les Étrangers dans les villes-ports atlantiques* by Mickael Augeron and Pascal Even, complemented by works by Peter Höfer, Wolfgang Henninger, Margaret Schulte-Beerbühl, Jorun Poettering and Magnus Ressel, have shown and underlined the important role that German, particularly Hanseatic merchants played in the economies of the colonial superpowers.<sup>93</sup> In the case of Hamburg, as merchants from a neutral power, a maritime trading nation uninvolved in the prevailing war activities and spared from any fight or sanctions from warring parties, Hamburg merchants were welcome guests in many foreign countries of the time.<sup>94</sup>

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Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1963. For Finland, see Ijäs, Ulla. "German Families and Their Family Strategies: Marriage and Education in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Provincial Towns in the Northern Baltic." In *Families, Values, and the Transfer of Knowledge in Northern Societies, 1500-2000*, edited by Ulla Aatsinki, Johanna Annola, and Mervi Kaarninen, 79-101. London/New York: Routledge, 2019. See also Steffen, Anka, and Klaus Weber. "Spinning and Weaving for the Slave Trade: Proto-Industry in Eighteenth-Century Silesia." In *Slavery Hinterland. Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680-1850*, edited by Felix Brahm, and Eve Rosenhaft, 87-107. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016.

- 93 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*; Weber, "German Merchants." See Pourchasse, Pierrick. *Le commerce du Nord. La France et le commerce de l'Europe septentrionale au XVIIIe siècle*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006. See Pourchasse, Pierrick. "Dynamism and Integration of the North European Merchant Communities in French Ports in the 18th Century." in *Merchant Colonies in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Victor N. Zakharov, Gelina Harlaftis, and Olga Katsiardi-Hering. 45-60. London/New York: Routledge, 2016. See Pourchasse, Pierrick. "L'immigration négociante ou le développement d'un capitalisme sans frontières au XVIIIe siècle." In *Les Étrangers dans les villes-ports atlantiques. Expériences françaises et allemandes XVe-XIXe siècle*, edited by Mickael Augeron and Pascal Even, 317-332. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010. See Pourchasse, Pierrick. "Problems of French Trade with the North in the eighteenth century." Paper presented at the annual conference of the Economic History Society, April 1, 2006, [www.ehs.org.uk/conference2006/Assets/IIIDPourchasse.doc](http://www.ehs.org.uk/conference2006/Assets/IIIDPourchasse.doc). See Marzagalli, "Négoce et politique des étrangers en France." See Marzagalli, "Trade across religious boundaries in Early Modern France." In *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*, edited by Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi and Catia Antunes, 169-191. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. See Butel, Paul. "Le négoce international en France au XVIIIe siècle." In *Le négoce international: XIIIe-XXe siècle*, edited by François M. Crouzet, M., 140-152. Paris: Economica, 1989. See Butel, Paul. "Les négociants allemands de Bordeaux dans la deuxième moitié du XVIIIe siècle." In *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftswege, II: Wirtschaftskräfte in der europäischen Expansion. Festschrift für Hermann Kellenbenz*, edited by Jürgen Schneider, 589-611. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978. See Augeron/Even, *Les Étrangers dans les villes-ports atlantiques*; Butel, "Les négociants allemands"; Butel, "La maison Schröder et Schyler." See also Höfer, Peter. *Deutsch-französische Handelsbeziehungen im 18. Jahrhundert: die Firma Breton frères in Nantes (1763-1766)*. Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1977. See Henninger, Bethmann, Schulte-Beerbühl, *German Merchants*; Poettering, *Handel, Nation und Religion* and Ressel, "Romberg." See Ressel, Magnus. "The global Presence of Merchants from the German Empire: Linking the Continental Overland and Seaborne Trade." In *Migrationsforschung – interdisziplinär und diskursiv. Internationale Forschungserträge zu Migration in Wirtschaft, Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, edited by Margrit Schulte Beerbühl and Heike Knortz, 239-270. Göttingen: V&R, 2021. See Espagne, Michel, and Werner Greiling, eds. *Frankreichfreunde. Mittler des französisch-deutschen Kulturtransfers (1750-1850)*. Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 1996.
- 94 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 159-166. See Pourchasse, "Dynamism and Integration," 46. See Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*, particularly "Quatrième partie. La stratégie du négoce étranger," 267-328. See Huhn, Fred-Konrad. *Die Handelsbeziehungen zwischen Frankreich und Hamburg im 18. Jahrhundert: unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Handelsverträge von 1716 und 1769*. 2 vol. Unpu-

In France, they even enjoyed extensive legal privileges.<sup>95</sup> As the research by Pierrick Pourchasse on Franco-Hamburg relations has shown, Hamburg wholesale merchants were responsible for a large part of the re-distribution and re-export of colonial goods from France to Hamburg with Hamburg being one of the main hubs and transshipment ports of the time.<sup>96</sup> From Hamburg, the goods were shipped both into the Baltic and the German hinterland, cushioning the surplus of goods prevailing in France.<sup>97</sup> Many Hamburg merchants thus specialised particularly in the trade of raw materials such as raw cane sugar, which they transported to the Elbe city. In Hamburg and its hinterland, the sugar was refined, strengthening the local economy.<sup>98</sup> Foreign merchants were important economic actors in the French economy as commission agents and shipowners, as logistic service providers and freight forwarders. They were active as insurers or invested in French prize auctions. These merchants assumed tasks and took on the role of intermediaries in Atlantic trade, which was a profitable business and which turned them into enablers of the Atlantic market.

From the perspective of the foreign merchants themselves, in France or Spain, these ways of doing business provided the basis for actively participating in Atlantic trade despite the fact that, due to mercantilist policies and restrictions of the colonial superpowers, they were strictly not allowed to trade directly with the colonies.

Previous research has shown this important role of foreign merchants and presented the underlying structures of this sophisticated system from the perspective of Economic History, in a long-term perspective and based on extensive prosopographical studies.<sup>99</sup> In addition to these works, this book offers and undertakes a detailed case study into the concrete workings and events of Hamburg trade participation in France

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blished PhD-thesis. Hamburg: Hamburg University, 1952, 34. See Tarrade, Jean. *Le commerce colonial de la France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime. L'évolution du régime de «l'Exclusif» de 1763 à 1789*. 2 vol. Paris: P.U.F., 1972, 83-112. See Doyle, William, ed. *Old Regime France 1648-1788*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. See Butel, Paul. *L'Économie française au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Sedes, 1993. See already Wurm, Christian Friedrich. *Von der Neutralität des deutschen Seehandels in Kriegszeiten*. Hamburg: Joh. Auf. Meissner, 1841, 11-21.

95 France allowed the foreign merchants to rent premises and warehouses in the French ports. Hamburg merchants had to pay neither the "Dixième" (the tithe) nor the general taxes which applied for French citizens (the "capitation") up until one year of staying in France. They also enjoyed privileges of low duties on imports. They were exempted from special taxes such as the "droit de tonneau", which was a tax on casks loaded onto or offloaded from their ships. In the commercial and peace treaty of 1716 between France and Hamburg, the droit d'Aubaine, too, was suspended, the right of the French crown to confiscate all property when a citizen died.

96 See Pourchasse, *Le Commerce de Nord*, 291-327. See Pourchasse, "L'immigration négociante," 317-332. See Pourchasse, "French Trade," 19-23. See Marzagalli, "Négoce et politique des étrangers en France," 58-59. See Butel, *L'Économie française*, "Les marchés de l'Europe du nord et d'Allemagne," 89-97.

97 See Kikuchi, Yuta. *Hamburgs Ostsee- und Mitteleuropahandel 1600-1800: Warenaustausch und Hinterlandnetzwerke*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2018, 256-298.

98 See Petersson, Astrid. *Zuckersiedergewerbe und Zuckerhandel in Hamburg im Zeitraum von 1814 bis 1834. Entwicklung und Struktur zweier wichtiger Hamburger Wirtschaftszweige des vorindustriellen Zeitalters*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998.

99 Weber, Henninger, Pourchasse, Butel. For a prosopographical study of Hamburg and its merchants see also Reißmann, Martin. *Die hamburgische Kaufmannschaft des 17. Jahrhunderts in sozialgeschichtlicher Sicht*. Hamburg: Christians, 1975.

in the mid-18th century from the perspective of a travelling wholesale merchant. The book will offer vivid examples of various enterprises undertaken by groups of several merchants, both foreign and French merchants in cooperation, and show how these enterprises were negotiated and implemented in practice. Often the merchants in these networks shared the same religious background: a Protestant background. Lutherans, Calvinist merchants and French Huguenots merchants worked together. Today, this phenomenon is known under the term *Protestant International*, which had a crucial economic function for the integration of Hamburg merchants in France.<sup>100</sup>

In this book, I attempt to bring together the macro contexts of economic developments with the perspective of the individuals shaping them. This perspective will show the subtleties and complexities of Hamburg trade participation and the challenges of doing business as a Hamburg merchant in France. Hamburg merchants, though finding mostly favourable conditions in France, still were presented with many obstacles and had to fight their way to conducting a profitable business. They often had to find legal loopholes, find compromises and work closely together with local merchants to find and adapt solutions. These merchants often also relied on broad interpretations of law and customs and had to negotiate social and legal grey areas in order to advance in business, an aspect which is underrepresented in previous research. Key to success in mercantile business was negotiation and adaptation skills, persuasive efforts as well as in-depth knowledge of the trading customs, languages and legal opportunities of the time, social skills and the mastery of several forms of social etiquette together with the necessary business acumen, capital and networks.

## How a Merchant organised his Business Archive

The second special characteristic of the Luetkens archive is that it has survived in both great detail and in its original material condition of the mid-18th century, still encompassing all incoming and outgoing letters the merchant had received and sent during his stay in France. When I found the archive in 2012, large parts of the archive were still in the condition of 1745, as if Luetkens had just left it behind. The other parts were in the condition of 1748, when the court proceedings ended.<sup>101</sup> The only paper added in the following centuries was a small memo, a leaflet as we find them hundredfold in the Prize Papers collection today, drawn up by Paul Gaskoin, the archivist, who compiled

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100 The *Protestant International* will be discussed in detail in the chapter on commission trade. See Bosher, John F. "Huguenot Merchants and the Protestant International in the Seventeenth Century." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1995): 77-102. See Lüthy, Herbert. *La Banque protestante en France et la révocation de l'édit de Nantes à la Révolution*, 2 vol. Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1961. For a good introduction, see Marzagalli, Silvia. "Trade across religious boundaries in Early Modern France." In *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*, edited by Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi and Catia Antunes, 169-191. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

101 Today, all the papers of the Luetkens archive are neatly stored in dozens of standard archival blue folders, which for their part are filed into three standard archival boxes. The current situation is the result of cooperation that Amanda Bevan and I undertook in February 2017 when we created the detailed catalogue entry for TNA Discovery together, after the records had undergone conservation measures.

the first registry of captured ship represented in the collection in the 1750s.<sup>102</sup> Some records from the Luetkens archive served as pieces of evidence during the court proceedings and were piled up in separate court bundles and marked as evidence, the rest of the records were kept in the original condition for centuries.<sup>103</sup>

Figure 1: Left: Content of one of the three archive boxes in which the Luetkens archive was originally stored in 2012 with Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' original letter bundles. Right: Luetkens' large Letter Book.



Source: Left: The National Archives, ref. HCA 30/234. Right: The National Archives, ref. HCA 30/232. Pictures by the author.

Opening up the archive boxes during my research, I was presented with a completely intact business archive, with its order system also still intact and ready to be decoded and reinitiated for the purpose of my research.<sup>104</sup> This original order system of the letter archive served as the basis for my analyses because it allowed the reconstruction of letter exchanges from scratch and based on the immediacy of direct material evidence from the past. Right from the beginning, I reconstructed order practices and organising principles of an archive from the past and not archival practices. The most apparent organising principle structuring the Luetkens archive was that the incoming letters were all neatly sorted in letter bundles and letter piles, sorted by addressees. The letters in the piles were unfolded vertically and marked with a particular file mark at the top of the unfolded letter by Luetkens stating a name, date of receipt and date of response. In this way, the letter bundles represented an easily accessible letter filing system, with letter piles that could be flipped through whenever a letter response was due, comparable to computer backup programs today. As we learn from contemporary merchant manuals and portraits, this was a typical storing practice.

102 Regarding Gaskoin's role and work on the Prize Papers in general see Bevan/Cock, "Prize Papers." Except for Gaskoin, the last person, who went through the Luetkens archive was the honourable secretary of the High Court of Admiralty: Philipp Stevens.

103 Court bundles of letters used as exhibits, TNA, HCA 30/233. These are court selections of the business archive of Luetkens, removed by the court from his original arrangement, for use as exhibits.

104 Regarding historical archive practices and record-keeping, see Ketelaar, Eric. *Archiving People. A Social History of Dutch Archives*. 's-Gravenhage: Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 2020. On mercantile record-keeping, see Ketelaar, Eric. "The Dutch comptoir as information centre." *Archival Science* 18 (2018): 333-341.

Paul Jacob Marperger wrote in 1717 in his merchant manual *Getreuer und geschickter Handelsdiener* that it was advisable for merchants to “put together and pile up incoming letters in letter bundles” [“auf Stapel legen”] and to store them in “compartments” [“Brieffächer”].<sup>105</sup> We find the exact same system in the background of a portrait by Simon Moritz Bethmann, one of Luetkens’ correspondents.<sup>106</sup> In the portrait, Bethmann is sitting at his writing desk, behind him we see a cabinet containing hundreds and hundreds of letters, all stacked and bundled in letter bundles. Marperger furthermore advised merchants to once more “pile together these letter bundles in packages, each compartment separately, after each year of business and store them in postbags.”<sup>107</sup> This ordering principle is represented in the Luetkens archive and many other archives of the Early Modern Period.<sup>108</sup>

*Figure 2: Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens did not store his incoming letters in their original folded state in his archive, but he refolded them in such a way that he used the original creases of the letter while folding out the overlapping parts of the original letter fold, which once had been tucked into the folded letter. This practice allowed the merchant to easily file the letters and add notes on the upper side of the refolded letter. In the picture: refolded letters with Luetkens’ notes regarding the correspondents, the dates of receipt and the date of dispatch of his response letter; Figure 3: Oil portrait of Simon Moritz Bethmann (1721-1782), showing neatly stored letter bundles in the background. The portrait was painted between 1755-1775.*



Source: The National Archives, ref. HCA 30/234. Picture by the author (fig. 2); By courtesy of the Senckenberg Stiftung (fig. 3).

- 105 Marperger, *Getreuer und geschickter Handelsdiener*, 199. Regarding the practice of storing letters in bundles and stacks see also Ruppert, *Bürgerlicher Wandel*, 60.
- 106 Oil portrait of Simon Moritz Bethmann (1721-1782), showing neatly stored letter bundles in the background. The portrait was painted between 1755-1775. By courtesy of the Senckenberg Stiftung.
- 107 Marperger, *Getreuer und geschickter Handelsdiener*, 1058.
- 108 See Wolfe, Heather, and Peter Stallybrass. “The Material Culture of Record-Keeping in Early Modern England.” In *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World*, edited by Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alexandra Walsham, 179-208. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

In contrast to the letter piles and bundles, Luetkens' large Letter Book with all his outgoing letters, a large volume bound together from several paper books, was not kept sorted by correspondents, but instead in continuous order, sorted by date, but still giving the names of the addressees. This fact allowed me to match the outgoing letters in the Letter Book with the incoming letters in the letter bundles, reinitiate the order system of the Luetkens archive and recreate entire letter exchanges among several correspondents over time. An address book as well as a small book with a list of all outgoing letters, in which we also find letters not copied into the large Letter Book, completed the picture. Apart from still showing their original storage arrangement, many letters also still exhibited further original material features such as creases from the original folding techniques. Many letter packets, with letters enclosing other letters, were still intact and stored together. There were still enclosures in some of the letters such as linen fabric or cotton samples. In sum, the Luetkens archive has survived in an intriguingly dense and a genuine state providing valuable tangible insights into Early Modern letter practices and mercantile record-keeping.

Based on these unique features of the archive, in this book I am able to reconstruct complete letter conversations from the 18th century. By bringing together the letter bundles with the Letter Book and the list of outgoing letters, I am able to read letter correspondence alternately, and due to the original condition, in a materially genuine way. This served as the basis for being able to extrapolate and derive from these records all textual and material elements and resources shaping and structuring the letter exchanges and the business these letters facilitated. I learned how people adapted to different situations and how they communicated and dealt with each other in the historical real-time of the contemporary postal systems. In short, these reconstructions are ultimately as close as we can get to learning about the actual letter and business practices performed on the basis of letters during the 18th century.

### Mercantile Letter Conversations and a Catalogue of Letter Practices

The Luetkens archive allowed me to draw on two sides of 18th-century letter correspondence, to include several correspondents in the analysis and to document the letter exchanges without interruption. I capitalise on this fact in the book and present written letter conversations as “polyphonic conversations”, a term borrowed from Francesca Trivellato. Trivellato emphasises in her work the importance of such forms of conversations and communication platforms for mercantile sociability and business of the 18th century.<sup>109</sup> I also follow the argument by Alison Wiggins, who points out that reading “letters as part of the sequences of exchange within which they were sent and received, is vital to re-contextualising and historicising the letters.”<sup>110</sup> The term “written conversations”, also prominently used by Robert Vellusig, was already used by the contemporaries, who themselves regarded their letters as a distinct sphere of communication.<sup>111</sup>

109 Trivellato, “Merchants' Letters,” 89.

110 Wiggins, Alison. *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: Language, Materiality and Early Modern Epistolary Culture*. Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2016, 25.

111 See Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche*.

Figure 4: Reading, analysing and cataloguing the Luetkens archive together with Amanda Bevan in The National Archives, Kew, London.



Source: Letters on the table: The National Archives, ref. HCA 30/233. Picture by the author.

This contemporary discourse represents a crucial basis for the understanding of this present book.

As we can read in contemporary letter-writing manuals, letters served the purpose to “compensate for the lack of possibility of oral conversations by means of the written conversation.”<sup>112</sup> The Luetkens letters also broach the issue on a regular basis. Johann Jakob Bethmann, as one of Luetkens’ main correspondents, wrote in his letters that there “is still some time left to enter into a distant conversation with you”, his brother Simon Moritz Bethmann wrote that although they were “far away” from each other, he and Luetkens would continue their “long distance conversation”.<sup>113</sup> Letter utterances as such are often dismissed in research as mere letter formulae. However, as I argue in this book, following pioneer works in the field of Historical Sociolinguistics, it was meant literally.<sup>114</sup> Business and life were settled in letters and people of the past knew

112 “Mangel der mündlichen Unterredung durch schriftliche Correspondence ersetzen.” Hunold, Christian Friedrich (pseud.: Menantes): *Die Allerneueste Art Höflich und Galant zu Schreiben oder auslesene Briefe [...]*. Hamburg: Gottfried Liebernickel im Dohm, 1707, 53.

113 “Noch [...] bleibt mir ein Augenblick Zeit mich mit Euch zu unterhalten”, “Perßon mit welcher ich mich so zu sagen noch ein einem weit entfernten Gespräche befinde” in the original German letters. Letter from Bethmann, Johann Jakob to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, November 9, 1743, TNA, HCA 30/234. Letter from Bethmann, Simon Moritz to Luetkens Nicolaus Gottlieb, April 17, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

114 See Fitzmaurice, Susan M. *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English. A pragmatic approach*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2002. See Van der Wal, Marijke, and Rutten, Gijsbert. “The

exactly which ways and means to use and which resources to mobilise in their letters to make a decisive impact on their correspondents with their letters during the letter conversations. Marperger defined a correspondent in his letter manual *Der allzeitfertige Handels-Correspondent* as “someone who conducts written actions” [“schriftliche Handlung pflegt”] on the basis of letters. He added, that “we correspond together” [“wir correspondieren zusammen”].<sup>115</sup> The people of the 18th century acted on the basis of letters. This is the reason why the powers of persuasion in letters discussed in this book were not only decisive for the smooth running of correspondence, but with letter writing regarded as its own decisive sphere of action, the powers of persuasion in letters also had a direct impact on the merchant’s life, their success and career in general.

As part of the reconstruction of the letter conversations, the surviving letters allowed me to ask about the decisive elements that turned letters into powerful tools of practical persuasion. These elements included textual, material, linguistic, discursive, rhetorical, argumentative and performative elements that all shaped the process of writing, folding, sealing, sending and receiving letters. I analyse these elements as part of the reconstruction of letter practices that were used during correspondence. Letter practices are defined in the book as typical patterns of action that are used and performed on the basis of the letter material and text.<sup>116</sup> The outcome of my analyses is a catalogue of typical letter practices used by merchants of the 18th century. Furthermore, I will show which of these practices were most effective in the letter negotiations for the business purposes.

The Luetkens archive furthermore provided a cross-section across different groups of correspondents and status groups, from merchants, to bankers, to ships’ captains, to clerks, to family members. This in turn allowed me to ask the question of how people from different fields of business and from different social ranks approached each other in different situations in letters, wrote to each other for different purposes in different national languages, using different letter styles and mobilised different language registers to achieve a desired effect. A particular emphasis is put on language registers mobilised in the Luetkens correspondence. A language register is defined as a “conventional way of using language that is appropriate in a specific context.”<sup>117</sup> “People use different linguistic forms on different occasions.”<sup>118</sup> Presenting several letter styles and

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Practice of Letter Writing: Skills, Models, and Early Modern Dutch Manuals.” *Language and History* 56, no. 1 (2013): 18–32. See Nevalainen, Terttu, and Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen. “Letter Writing.” *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 5, no. 2 (2004): 181–336. See Nevalainen/Tanskanen, *Letter-Writing*.

115 Marperger, Paul Jacob. *Der allzeitfertige Handels-Correspondent* [...]. Hamburg: Schiller, 1717, 80.

116 On practices in detail, see the next part of this chapter on the research approach. See for an introduction Haasis, Lucas, and Constantin Rieske. “Historische Praxeologie. Zur Einführung.” In *Historische Praxeologie. Dimensionen vergangenen Handelns*, edited by Lucas Haasis and Constantin Rieske, 7–54. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015. See Spiegel, Gabrielle M., ed. *Practicing History. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn*. London/New York: Routledge, 2005.

117 Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 210.

118 Biber, Douglas, and Susan Conrad. *Register, Genre and Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 4. See Agha, Asif. “Art. Registers of language.” In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Alessandro Duranti, 23–45. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Regarding registers in praxeological approaches, see Welskopp, Thomas. “Sprache und Kommunikation in praxistheoretischen Geschichtsansätzen.” In *Unternehmen Praxisgeschichte. Historische Perspektiven auf*

language registers in this book, we gain a comprehensive insight into typical ways of communicating, negotiating and trading of a merchant in Atlantic trade, in different life situations, business fields and relationships. Taking both features, the unique material condition and the survival of a two-sided correspondence as a starting point for my research, I can once more contribute to current debates in three research fields. I aim to contribute to current culturalist approaches in Economic History, provide new insights in the research on Early Modern letters while at the same time putting a special emphasis on the materiality of letters.

The two main sources of inspiration for this book were the works of Francesca Trivellato and Toby L. Ditz. In her book *Familiarity of Strangers*, Trivellato puts special emphasis on the importance of letters and letter practice for mercantile business. As a representative of a more culturally oriented Economic History, Trivellato's research shows that besides the mastery of business practices, letter writing practices were crucial for the business and career advancement of Early Modern merchants. Trivellato highlights that letters were "the primary tool for weaving webs of commercial relations across space and social groups." Correspondence was the "cement that enabled distant agents to create solid webs across distant localities and wide cultural gulfs, [...] the backbone of European long-distance trade long past that time. [...] Business correspondence was a crucial instrument [...] in forging and maintaining [...] informal cross-cultural networks".<sup>119</sup> In my analyses, I confirm her assessments and supplement her work by providing a detailed catalogue of typical letter practices used by wholesale merchant in the 18th century.

The basic assumptions as to the role, importance and the main characteristics of merchant letters I share with Toby L. Ditz, whose articles also inspired this book. Ditz highlights that like "other written traces of the past, merchants' letters do not simply record or describe their surrounding economic and social reality [...]; they 'inscribe' and 'rework' it. [...] When merchants articulated intentions and defined situations, they did so within the matrix of possibilities and constraints posed by the genre and narrative conventions, symbolic repertoires, discourses, and vocabularies that they mobilized and reworked in their letters. The self-representations [in the letters] worked out with the help of existing cultural resources helped to define mercantile desire and interest. [...] [Therefore, the merchants made] use of culturally available genres, discourses, and vocabularies in order to make sense of recent actions and situations and to chart a future course."<sup>120</sup>

As part of my analyses, I provide all context necessary to understand the respective letter conversation. This includes information on the resources used, ranging from language registers to the letter styles, to fixed vocabularies and terminologies, to discourses shaping the conversations or specific material and social events framing it. The contextualisation serves the purpose of making the practices, both letter and business, and the content of the letters understandable. Ditz emphasises that business letters

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*Kapitalismus, Arbeit und Klassengesellschaft*, edited by Thomas Welskopp, 105-131. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.

119 Trivellato, "Merchants' letters," 81-82 and 84, as well as Trivellato, *Discourse and Practice*, 19.

120 Ditz, "Formative Ventures," 62.

were characterized as always “yoked to practical claims on others”.<sup>121</sup> Most mercantile “letters had immediate pragmatic goals; the writers’ figurative and narrative imagery, and their self-representations, were associated with appeals to others for practical assistance – for example, to transport and sell cargoes, to obtain loans or to extend the time for their repayment.”<sup>122</sup> The Luetkens letters will confirm this assumption in a vivid manner. In order to understand these various operations and to see how they were conducted on the basis of letters, context is needed. In addition to Ditz’ articles, in this book I provide information on the letter practices and business practices and the resources employed during the performance of these practices that were used to reach the respective goals. I concentrate on the processes and the manifold manifestations of persuasive efforts and persuasive powers applied in letters. How did the letter writers use their letters to reach their goals and what resources came into effect during the process? Which resources were most promising? This line of thinking was mainly influenced by research in the field of *Historical Sociolinguistics*, the research field that for the first time attributes actual powers and agency to the medium of the letter.

Susan Fitzmaurice, in her ground-breaking book on the *Familiar Letter in Modern English*, pioneered an approach to research on letters by defining “both fictional and real [letters] as a pragmatic act” at the centre of which stood the “writer and his or her intention in constructing a letter as an act designed to have some effect upon an addressee.”<sup>123</sup> We have to analyse the “variety of functions performed by epistolary discourse and the ways in which writers go about ensuring that their addressees get their message.”<sup>124</sup> Her work, and many that would follow by Terttu Nevalainen, Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, Marijke van der Wal, Gijsbert Rutten, Andreas H. Jucker or Helen Newsome, shape the idea behind the present book.<sup>125</sup> The assumption that letters had the ability to act is indeed highly applicable to merchant letters because in mercantile business letters were regularly used to conduct business. The letters had the intrinsic feature of bearing the power to act. In this book, I will demonstrate how this process worked. In my view, the ultimate purpose of writing a letter not only in business, but also in many other situations in the life of a merchant was to have an effect on the addressee, the challenge then being how to achieve this effect.<sup>126</sup>

Adding to Fitzmaurice’s perspective, who mainly emphasised the side of the letter writer, I concentrate in this book on the coordination processes between the correspondents, often including 3-5 correspondents in the analysis. I integrate the perspectives of both sender and receiver. Therefore, I can analyse how effects were achieved, how signals were received and, if this was not the case, how the correspondents adapted to the situation. Looking at courses of action in letter exchanges and observing the effects of

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121 Ibid., 53.

122 Ibid., 62.

123 Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter*, 1.

124 Ibid., 8.

125 Those not already quoted above are Jucker, Andreas H. and Päivi Pahta, eds. *Communicating Early English Manuscripts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. See Newsome, Helen. “The function, format, and performance of Margaret Tudor’s January 1522 diplomatic memorial.” *Renaissance Studies* 35, no. 3 (2020): 403-424.

126 See Stewart, “Letters.”

exerting influence in particular ways, I am ultimately able to extrapolate certain practical principles of persuasion underlying, and applied in, 18th century correspondence and business.<sup>127</sup> These principles created the basis for a powerful and successful letter negotiation practice. I define these principles as practical principles of persuasion, since they relate to letters, letter-writing practices and were often a result of material practices rather than of rhetorical thinking. The focus on the material side of persuasion and the materiality of letters links to the third research field to which this book contributes, namely materiality studies.

## The Materiality of Letters

The interest in letters as material items experienced a genuine renaissance in research in recent years. The research focusses on the multiple ways of how people of the past deliberately manipulated their letters in their form by means of folding, cutting, locking, arranging, packeting, tying up, and sealing their letters. This approach taking seriously the significance of the materiality of letters was pioneered by James Daybell in his book *Material Letters* and his articles, as well as in the works and workshops of the *Unlocking History* team and the letterlocking team led by Daniel Starza Smith and Jana Dambrogio, complemented by the books and articles inter alia by Alison Wiggins, Nadine Akkermann, Laura Findlen, Leonie Hannan, or Siobhan Talbott.<sup>128</sup> I have participated in this

127 The practical principles will be discussed in detail in the following part on the research approach.

128 See Daybell, James. *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012. See Daybell, James. *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 32-60. Daybell, James. "Material Meanings and the Social Signs of Manuscript Letters in Early Modern England." *Literature Compass* 6, no. 3 (2009): 647-667. See Daybell, James, and Peter Hinds, eds. *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture, 1580-1700*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010. See Dambrogio/Chassaei/Smith/Jackson, "Unlocking history." Dambrogio, Jana, and Daniel Starza Smith. "Letterlocking. Securing Correspondence before Envelopes." In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of the Renaissance World*, edited by Lauren Shohet. London: Routledge, forthcoming 2021. See Dambrogio, Jana, and Daniel Starza Smith et al. "The Spiral-Locked Letters of Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots." *eBLJ* 2021, Article 11 (2021): DOI: 10.23636/gyhc-b427. See Dambrogio, Jana, and Daniel Starza Smith, and Unlocking History Research Group. *The Dictionary of Letterlocking*, <http://letterlocking.org/dictionary> (DoLL, 2019), accessed March 23, 2019. See Wiggins, *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*. See Akkermann, Nadine. *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. See Findlen, Paula, and Suzanne Sutherland. "Introduction. With a letter in hand – writing, communication, and representation in Renaissance Italy." In *The Renaissance of Letters. Knowledge and Community in Italy, 1300.-1650*, edited by Paula Findlen and Suzanne Sutherland, 1-28. London/New York: Routledge, 2020. See Hannan, Leonie. *Women of Letters. Gender, Writing, and Life of the Mind in Early Modern England*. Manchester University Press, 2016. Siobhan Talbott's most current work is an edition of a Letter Book of a 17th-century merchant that shows striking similarities to Luetkens' Letter Book. See Talbott, Siobhan. *The Letter-Book of Thomas Baret of Norwich: Merchant and textile manufacturer, 1672-1677*. Norwich: Norfolk Record Society publications, 2021.

See also Decker, William Merrill. *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. See also Steen, Sara Jane. "Reading Beyond the Words: Material Letters and the Process of the Interpretation Process." *Quidditas* 22 (2001): 55-69. See Stewart, Alan. *Shakespeare's Letters*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. See Henzel, Katrin. "Materialität des Briefs." In *Handbuch Brief. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Maria

strand of research since the day I started working on the Luetkens archive and on the collection of the Prize Papers.<sup>129</sup> The Prize Papers collection is a vivid example of a largely uncurated material archive and one of the largest collections in the world holding thousands of records still in their original condition allowing unique research on the materiality of the past.<sup>130</sup>

Studying the Luetkens archive, I am able to show how material features were deliberately used by the letter writers as concrete means and an intrinsic part of letter persuasion processes in 18th century correspondence. The focus of previous research on letters often still rests on the text, but the analysis of letter materiality has gained immense ground. Even in materiality studies, however, research still concentrates on the task of identification and categorisation of the material features of letters. The most impressive current result is the *Dictionary of Letterlocking* presenting the Early Modern “technology of folding and securing an epistolary writing substrate to function as its own envelope”, created by Jana Dambrogio and Daniel Smith.<sup>131</sup> With my analysis I hope to add to the research on letter materiality by providing case studies as to how the material practices were concretely performed during letter conversations with the specific focus on the still pending question *why* they were performed and what effects ensued.

Therefore, apart from the textual analysis, I will show how material practices were used as a concrete means of persuasion during Early Modern letter conversations. I try to answer the questions of what different the purposes were for which letter writers, why they used certain folding techniques or different paper, or why they arranged letter packets in particular ways.<sup>132</sup> One of the main questions is what form of a “material rhetoric” was used as an intrinsic part of Early Modern letter exchanges, as Carlos Spørhase defines it.<sup>133</sup> As will become apparent, in most cases, material rhetoric served

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Matthews-Schlinzig et al., 222–231, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. See also Bittel, Carla, Elaine Leong and Christine von Oertzen, eds. *Working with Paper: Gendered Practices in the History of Knowledge*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. See Archer-Parré, Caroline, and Malcom Dick, eds. *Pen, Print and Communication in the Eighteenth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020.

129 Haasis, Lucas. “Papier, das nötigt und Zeit, die drängt übereilt. Zur Materialität und Zeitlichkeit von Briefpraxis im 18. Jahrhundert und ihrer Handhabe.” In *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Arndt Brendecke, 305–319. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2015.

130 In the Prize Papers Project, we put great emphasis on the preservation and presentation of the collection’s unique materiality. See the Materiality Homepage of the Prize Papers Project, [www.prizepapers.de](http://www.prizepapers.de), accessed 22 October 2021.

131 See Dambrogio/Ghassaei/Smith/Jackson, “Unlocking History.” The Categories and Formats chart in this article is the first complete method for systematizing letterlocking.

132 On the importance of paper during the Early Modern Period, the history of paper and paper trade and book history see Bellingradt, Daniel. *Vernetzte Papiermärkte. Einblicke in den Amsterdamer Handel mit Papier im 18. Jahrhundert*. Köln: Herbert von Halem, 2020. See Bellingradt, Daniel, and Anna Reynolds, eds. *The Paper Trade in Early Modern Europe. Practices, Materials, Networks*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021.

133 See Spørhase, Carlos. *Das Format der Literatur. Praktiken materieller Textualität zwischen 1740 und 1830*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018.

the purpose of putting pressure on the addressee, explicitly or implicitly, and reinforcing one's will. Material letter practices were deliberately used as a tool to reinforce the written word or to send messages between the lines. As such they mainly appear as manipulative practices. These, as I will argue, were highly important for the success of the plans and enterprises and the advancement of the merchant in 18th century trade, an assumption that I can further underline with the help of the third special characteristic of the Luetkens archive, which is that this archive still holds letters clearly exhibiting forms of wilful manipulation. In this archive, we can find many kinds of letters that would have rarely survived in other archival contexts.

### **On Becoming a String-Puller and on Dubious Practices**

The third and last special characteristic of the Luetkens archive is that, due to its conservation, this archive still comprises rare kinds of letters. These are letters that probably would have left the corpus or would have been removed from the archive if the archive had undergone the usual kind of archival preservation. Usually, such private or mercantile archives survive by being donated to a public archive by the merchant firm, the original owner of the archive or his family or descendants. This most often means that, in all likelihood, some letters will have been removed and extracted from the archive. The letters most likely to befall this fate are those not meant for the eyes of strangers such as personal letters, family letters and love letters. Furthermore, letters regarded as irrelevant or not memorable are removed, like letters documenting day to day business, letters exchanged with clerks and ship's captains. Last but not least, most probably all letters from a mercantile archive with unflattering, negative or problematic contents, letters that could shed a negative light on the original owners of the archive by presenting failures, losses, setbacks, warnings, open debts or insider trades, are whisked away from the eyes of prying historians. This usual kind of conservation, however, was not the case in the survival of the records of Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, which is the reason why letters of all these kinds are still present in the archive.

The business archive, stored in the National Archives, still contains all of the papers, both business and private, that Luetkens carried with him until the end of the year 1745 and we are presented with a collection that has not undergone any kind of revision of familial censorship. Due to the confiscation of his personal belongings, Luetkens had no chance of removing or destroying any of his documents. The archive offers us a time capsule and a snapshot of the two years of his stay abroad including many records that Luetkens himself most probably would not have wanted people to see, which is why working with his archive also comes with the responsibility of being as accurate as possible. Precisely because of this fact, having access to these letters today provides us with the unique opportunity to gain a comprehensive, unobstructed and undisguised view on Luetkens' activities during the years 1743-1745.

On the basis of these letters, we are able to learn about Luetkens' insider dealings, his behaviour in disputes, which the contemporaries called "quill pen fencing", "federfechten" in German, in which the merchant and his correspondents used rather drastic

means to restore order.<sup>134</sup> We learn about how merchants made use of juridical grey areas and often exploited situations of legal limbo in order to put their plans into practice, how they exercised certain discretionary powers by means of rhetorical means as well as by means of material rhetoric, conducted different information policies and used rather personal ways of exerting influence on their correspondents by issuing threats or offering instruction.<sup>135</sup> All of these elements represented important parts and decisive factors of Luetkens' business approach and it fostered his success as a merchant. These strategies helped him to pave the way for the success of establishment just as his other competences in mercantile and negotiation practice did, which is why the letters documenting these elements represent such a valuable resource to learn about an Early Modern mercantile establishment phase. One can even conclude that these elements represented intrinsic parts of his mercantile agenda and negotiation practices, helping Luetkens to implement his plans. In this regard, the book in some respect contributes to research fields and debates relating to illegal trade, smuggling, malpractice in mercantile business, as for instance represented in Mark Häberlein's book *Brüder, Freunde und Betrüger* or Thomas M. Truxes' *Defying Empire*, or to works on mercantile coping mechanisms with war.<sup>136</sup> It also might provide impulses for the field of research into conflict management, Early Modern diplomacy or risk management, which have become highly popular in recent years.<sup>137</sup> Last but not least, it contributes to literature on merchant strategy, risk and the use of maritime neutrality in the Early Modern Period.<sup>138</sup>

134 The term "fehder fechten" is for instance used by the merchants Hertzler & van Bobart in their letter to Luetkens on February 2, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234. See also "Federfechten." *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, 32 volumes. Leipzig, 1854-1961, vol. 3, 1399.

135 See Spoerhase, Carlos. *Das Format der Literatur*.

136 See Häberlein, Mark. *Brüder, Freunde und Betrüger. Soziale Beziehungen, Normen und Konflikte in der Augsburger Kaufmannschaft um die Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 1998. See Truxes, *Defying Empire*. See Talbott, Siobhan. "What Cannot Be Helped Must Be Indured: Coping with Obstacles to Business During the Anglo-Dutch Wars, 1652-1674." *Enterprise & Society* (2021): 1-35. See Ebert, *Brazilian Sugar*, 131-150.

137 See Goetze, Dorothée, and Lena Oetzel, eds. *Warum Friedensschließen so schwer ist. Frühneuzeitliche Friedensfindung am Beispiel des Westfälischen Friedenskongresses*. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2019. See Goetze, Dorothée, and Lena Oetzel, eds. *Early Modern European Diplomacy. A Handbook*. Munich/Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. See also the NWO Vide Project "Managing multi-level conflict in commercial cities in Northern Europe (c. 1350-1570)": <https://premodernconflictmanagement.org>. See Wubs-Mrozewicz, Justyna. "Conflicts about property: ships and inheritances in Danzig and in the Hanse area (15th-16th centuries)." In *Cultures of Law in Urban Northern Europe*, edited by Jackson W. Armstrong and Edda Frankot. 192-208. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2020.

138 See Gervais, *Merchants and Profit*. Gervais, Pierre. "Early Modern Merchant Strategies and the Historicization of Market Practices." *Economic Sociology* 15, no. 3 (2014), European Electronic Newsletter, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, [http://econsoc.mpifg.de/downloads/15\\_3/gervais\\_15\\_3.pdf](http://econsoc.mpifg.de/downloads/15_3/gervais_15_3.pdf), accessed March 14, 2019. Gervais, Pierre. "Why Profit and Loss Didn't Matter. The Historicized Rationality of Early Modern Merchant Accounting." In *Merchants and Profit in the Age of Commerce, 1680-1830*, edited by Pierre Gervais, Yannick Lemarchand, and Dominique Margairaz, 33-52. London: Picking & Chatto, 2014. See Mathias, Peter. "Risk, Credit and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise." In *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, edited by John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, 15-35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. See Zahedieh, Nuala. "Credit, Risk and Reputation in Late Seventeenth-Century Colonial Trade." In *Merchant Organization and Maritime Trade in the North Atlantic, 1660-1815*, edited by Olaf U. Janzen, 53-74. St Johns, Newfoundland: Interna-

Maritime neutrality was the one major asset that Hamburg-born merchants such as Luetkens exploited heavily to their advantage in business.<sup>139</sup> The crucial difference between a perspective on any form of malpractice and this book is, however, that from a contemporary legal standpoint as well as from Luetkens' own standpoint, dealing with his merchant strategies, we are not dealing with malpractice or any type of illegal behaviour.<sup>140</sup> Quite on the contrary, from a contemporary point of view, the merchants pushed boundaries or quite literally, were pushing the envelope of what was possible, by playing with grey areas. Thus, neither could Luetkens nor his partners be made culpable for illegal actions during the time, nor did they show any doubt or scruples as to the necessity and legitimacy of their actions. The latter, in turn, relates not only to legal matters, but also to questionable forms of social interaction such as tactics of concealment, preferential treatment or withholding information. As I will show in the following chapters, at the centre of the merchants' self-perception stood the strong conviction that as merchants they did nothing wrong and never acted illegitimately or illegally. Instead, the merchants took the view that they only used the opportunities and loopholes provided to them and that were necessary for their advancement as well as for making a living.<sup>141</sup> The practices and methods they used were often highly questionable from a modern-day perspective, but they always stayed within the realms of what was legally possible at the time. In fact, the merchants always made sure that all their actions were legally secured, which did not mean that they were any less questionable. On the other hand, Luetkens and his trading partners also appear in their letters and actions as very loyal businessmen amongst themselves. Luetkens himself did not harm or ruin any of his partners by his actions, but what he did in his business was mainly to circumvent political structures to reach his goals; he always paid his debts; and, last but not least, he himself never fell from grace but represented a reliable partner to his correspondents and trading partners. His network was very stable. All of this raises the question of what character traits a merchant had to have to become a successful merchant and how we should evaluate his behaviour from an ethical point of view. I will comment on this in detail in the conclusion of the book after the analyses and after I have demonstrated the many ways in which these merchants were able to conduct a successful business during the times of establishment.

The aim of the book is, however, not to judge Luetkens morally, neither to condemn nor to absolve him from his questionable actions. The aim is to demonstrate how mer-

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tional Maritime History Association, 1998. Relating to neutrality, apart from the works by Müller and Pantel see: Marzagalli, Silvia, and Leos Müller, eds. Forum: "In apparent disagreement with all law of nations in the world': negotiating neutrality for shipping and trade during the French Revolutionary Wars." *International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 108-192. See Pourchasse, Pierrick. "Speculations and Embargoes on the Grain Trade at the Time of the Revolutionay Wars (1792-1795)." In *Revisiting Napoleon's Continental System*, edited by Katherine B. Alestad and Johan Joor, 69-80. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

139 Based on the peace and trade treaty with France, 1716: *Kommerz- und Seetraktat zwischen Ludwig XV. und den Hansestädten Bremen, Hamburg und Lübeck*, 1716. Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Senat Cl. VI Nr. 5 Vol. 1 Fascia2.

140 See *ibid.*

141 See Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 17.

chants managed their establishment phase during the 18th century and, as I will argue in this book, a necessary part of this was to find loopholes. In order to react to and face the challenges of his age and lifetime and the obstacles that were put in his way during this time, Luetkens and his trading partners needed to find solutions that pushed the limits of what was permissible at the time and exhaust the personal limits of the trust relationship he maintained with his trading partners and family members. Otherwise, as the records show, Luetkens' establishment phase and his business travel in France would have presented a very difficult task and most probably would have failed – a fact that speaks volumes as to the historical specificity of Atlantic trade in the 18th century. As Konstantin Dierks puts it, the merchant did everything “in his power” to pass this stage of his life with success and reach his ultimate goal, which was to establish himself as a wholesale merchant in 18th century European trade, even though this would require dubious practices as special measures during special times.<sup>142</sup>

We will not meet a person with a clean slate. We meet a person with very rough edges, a string-puller, a manipulator, who at the same time was appreciated by many as a man of character and a respected merchant and trading partner, a person who dealt with the challenges of his lifetime. As such, he represents, in my point of view, the typical wholesale merchant of the 18th century. We will read the story of a man who learned early on how to pull the strings and take the reins in order to put his plans into practice. What makes the Luetkens archive such an extraordinary source for historical research is that it partially dents the image of what is widely known as the concept of the honourable tradesman, the “Ehrbare Kaufmann” in German. However, at the same time, the archive also vividly demonstrates that it was precisely Luetkens' shrewdness and inventiveness, flexibility and adaptiveness along with the dubious practices that allowed him, as a foreign merchant in France, room for manoeuvre. His strategies provided him with ample freedoms during a time and a place, the Atlantic market in the 18th century, that were otherwise characterised by strict isolation and restrictions and a mercantilist policy shaped by trade barriers and by the social exclusion or even expulsion of all people that were deemed foreign, including people of other religions.<sup>143</sup> The tension between these factors, the narrow path between legal and illegal, honourable and dubious, is key

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142 Dierks, Konstantin. *In My Power. Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, 1-8, here 5.

143 On the honourable merchant, see Lütge, Christoph, and Christoph Strosetzki, eds. *The Honorable Merchant – Between Modesty and Risk-Taking: Intercultural and Literary Aspects*. Cham: Springer, 2019. See Strosetzki, Christoph. “The Merchant from Patristics to the Honnete Homme in the Writings of Savary.” In *The Honorable Merchant – Between Modesty and Risk-Taking: Intercultural and Literary Aspects*, edited by Christoph Lütge and Christoph Strosetzki, 3-18. Cham: Springer, 2019. See Tietz, Manfred. “The Honest Merchant Before Adam Smith. The Genesis and Rise of a Literary Prototype in Britain.” In *The Honorable Merchant – Between Modesty and Risk-Taking: Intercultural and Literary Aspects*, edited by Christoph Lütge and Christoph Strosetzki, 77-94. Cham: Springer, 2019. See Klink, Daniel. “Der Ehrbare Kaufmann – Das ursprüngliche Leitbild der Betriebswirtschaftslehre und individuelle Grundlage für die CSR-Forschung.” In *Corporate Social Responsibility (Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft / Journal of Business Economics Special Issue 3)*, edited by Joachim Schwalbach, 57-79. Wiesbaden: Gabler, 2008.

to understanding the idea behind this present book. It stands at the core of what it meant to become a merchant in the 18th century.

In sum, all three features of the Luetkens archive allow us to ask new questions and provide impulses to existing research fields. From a methodological point of view, the archive furthermore allows both a close-up perspective and a wide-angle shot. The Luetkens records offer a detailed insight into the life and letters of Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens and his correspondents. At the same time, he is representative of many merchants who shared his career path, went on travel, had to establish themselves and wrote several hundreds of letters for this purpose. Luetkens was part of an international merchant community and business network of Protestant merchants. He participated in a shared Atlantic business culture, spoke and wrote in several languages and invested in typical fields of trade that shaped the Atlantic economy. In short, when writing this case study on the basis of the dense collection of the Luetkens archive, the aim was not only to write about the career of a merchant, but to also offer insight into the wider Atlantic world of the 18th century. In historiography, this particular approach is widely known today and associated with the approach of microhistory. In this book, I offer a microhistory of the establishment phase of an Early Modern merchant with the special focus that my analysis primarily rests on the investigation of 18th century letter practices.

## 1.4 Writing a Praxeological Microhistory

This book is a microhistory. Microhistory means investigating a historical topic on the basis and with the help of a limited field of observation using the method of extensive contextualisation of the respective research object and all sources available in order to arrive at detailed conclusions about the phenomenon and the larger context of which it was once a part and which it shaped at the same time.<sup>144</sup> It is a practice “essentially based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and an intensive study of the documentary material”, however, not aiming at the “investigation of small things, but it investigates in small scale” in order to arrive at general insights about the characteristics of a time period under investigation, as Giovanni Levi puts it.<sup>145</sup> The basic assumption behind the microhistorical approach is summarised

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144 See Medick, Hans. “Mikro-Historie.” In *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie – eine Diskussion*, edited by Winfried Schulze, 40–53. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994, 44. See Medick, Hans. “Mikrohistorie.” In *Lexikon der Geschichtswissenschaft. 100 Grundbegriffe*, edited by Stefan Jordan, 215–217. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002. See Ginzburg, Carlo, and Carlo Poni. “Was ist Mikrogeschichte?” *Geschichtswerkstatt* 6 (1985): 48–52. See Brewer, John. “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life.” *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 1 (2010): 87–109. See Ulbricht, Otto. *Mikrogeschichte. Menschen und Konflikte in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2009. See Magússon, Sigurður Gylfi, and István M. Szióártó. *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2013.

145 First quote, Levi, Giovanni. “On Microhistory.” In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, edited by Peter Burke, 93–113. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, here 95. Second quote, Giovanni Levi quoted after Medick, “Mikro-Historie,” 40.

by Roger Chartier, who admits that “it is on this reduced scale, and probably only on this scale, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of beliefs, of values and representations on the one hand, and social affiliations on the other.”<sup>146</sup> In a similar way, Lawrence Stone writes in his renowned article about the *Return of the Narrative* that a “whole social system and set of values can be brilliantly illuminated by the searchlight method of recording in elaborate detail a single event, provided that it is very carefully set in its total context and very carefully analysed for its cultural meaning.”<sup>147</sup> This searchlight method is also the general approach pursued in the present book.

Typical fields of observation of microhistorical studies in the past were villages, court processes, families or the story of often exceptional individuals who were spotlighted, represented in the crucial works by Hans Medick, Natalie Zemon Davis, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, or David Sabeau.<sup>148</sup> With this present book, I aim to continue in this tradition. The book represents a traditional microhistory in the sense that it tells the story of an individual while at the same time using his example as a starting point to exemplify larger contexts and correlations, namely the Atlantic business community and the Atlantic world of trade in motion. The book is a microhistory about the establishment phase of 18th century wholesale merchants based on the records of Hamburg merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens and his establishment phase in France and in the Atlantic Trade in the years 1743-1745.

At the same time, however, my microhistorical approach introduces a novel focus for microhistorical research. Based on the Luetkens archive, I am able to align the searchlight with a new type of research focus for a microhistory. The aim of the study is not only to tell the story of 18th-century merchant Luetkens, but rather to broaden the analytical focus to include mercantile letter practice and business correspondence at the very core of the mercantile establishment phase. At the centre of the book and the research approach is the microhistorical investigation of past practices, letter practices and business practices and their correlation during an Early Modern mercantile establishment phase. I elaborate how merchants used their letters as an instrument to put

146 Chartier, Roger. “Intellectual history or Sociocultural history? The French Trajectories.” In *Modern European Intellectual History. Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, edited by Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, 13-46. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, here 32. This quote about *The Cheese and the Worms* by Carlo Ginzburg notwithstanding, Chartier remains sceptical about the microhistorical approach till today. See Ginzburg, Carlo. “Microhistory, Two or Three Things That I Know about It.” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10-35.

147 Stone, Lawrence. “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History.” *Past and Present* 85, no. 11 (1979): 3-24, here 13-14. See Daniel, Ute. “Clio unter Kulturschock.” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 48, no. 4 (1997): 195-219.

148 See Medick, Hans. *Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650-1900. Lokalgeschichte als Allgemeine Geschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997. See Zemon Davis, Natalie. *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983. See Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. See Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. See Levi, Giovanni. *Das immaterielle Erbe. Eine bäuerliche Welt an der Schwelle zur Moderne*. Berlin: Wagenbach, 1986. See Sabeau, David. *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

their plans and enterprises into action. In order to do so, in my analyses, I set these practices and the letter episodes they created in broader contexts in order to be able to understand and explain the practices and to demonstrate how they worked in past times as a crucial feature and characteristic of the Atlantic business community as well as typical shared forms of communication of the 18th century. As letter episodes I define the letter exchanges and polyphonic letter conversations I reconstructed from the archive that were all conducted among the correspondents regarding a specific topic, often a particular business enterprise. These letter episodes often have a particular starting point, the letter phrase that a letter writer “came up the idea”, “bin auf den Gedancken gekommen”, were conducted over a certain time during which the enterprise was called “affaire en question”, until the enterprise was concluded.<sup>149</sup> Presenting over eight letter episodes relating to different fields of business typical for Atlantic long-distance wholesale trade, or relating to family matters of a merchant family, distributed over five analytical chapters offering comprehensive case studies, with this book I aim to arrive at a comprehensive view of the North-European world of trade in the 18th century.

The field of investigation of my microhistorical undertaking in the book is the actual material contents of the three archive boxes that hold the Luetkens archive today. The starting point of the study is the original, previously undocumented and forgotten letter and business archive of the merchant Luetkens. In my research I explored this archive and extracted all the information from the concrete records in this personal archive in an ethnographically inspired way.<sup>150</sup> Thus, I reconstructed the practices and the letter conversations the letters created from scratch and, as I found them in this archive, in both their textual form and material state. The reconstruction and the analyses were also always predetermined by the historical order system that has survived in this historical archive. The findings about the practices were subsequently put into historical context using various other types of sources in order to understand and explain the practices encountered in the Luetkens archive.

As further source material I used contemporary advice literature, merchant manuals, and letter-writing manuals in three languages. Such manuals were contemporary books that aimed at teaching and providing concrete instructions as to the appropriate

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149 Luetkens used this sentence and this exact formulation, inter alia, in the following letters: Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Bethmann, Simon Moritz, November 19, 1743, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book II, unnumbered; Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Joachim and Luetkens, Anton, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, No. 1. It was also used by his correspondents. The letter formulae can also be found in letter-writing manuals: See Hunold, *Die allerneueste Art Höflich und Galant zu schreiben*, 50-52. See Gottsched, Johann Christoph. *Ausführliche Redekunst* [...]. Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1736, 193. See Hunold, Christian Friedrich (pseud.: Menantes). *Einleitung zur Teutschen Oratorie und Brief-Verfassung* [...]. Halle: Johann Friderich Zeitler Wittwe, 1726, 2 (first published 1709, second edition 1715, third edition 1726). See Hunold, Christian Friedrich (pseud.: Menantes). *Auserlesene neue Briefe. Nebst einer Anleitung wie in den aller-meisten Begebenheiten die Feder nach dem Wohlstand und der Klugheit zu führen*. Halle: Wäysenhaus, 1735. See Weise, Christian. *Curiöse Gedancken Von Teutschen Briefen wie ein junger Mensch [...]. Die galante Welt wohl vergnügen soll*. Dresden: Johann Christoph Mieth, 1691. “auf Gedanken gebracht werden”. Frisch, Johann Leonhard. *Teutsch-Lateinisches Wörter-Buch* [...]. Berlin: Christoph Gottlieb Nicolai, 1741, 184.

150 See Medick, “Missionaries in the Row Boat.”

ways of doing business and the correct way of writing letters.<sup>151</sup> Letter-writing manuals were, as already noted by Georg Steinhausen, the pioneer in the research on letter writing, “almost encyclopaedia of everything knowledgeable. For every imaginable life situation they provided example letters” and a veritable “arsenal of formulaic expressions”.<sup>152</sup>

Furthermore, I used court records, including examinations of crew members, attestations by dozens of citizens of Hamburg as well as juridical statements and briefs of the authorities in London, Amsterdam and Hamburg, stemming from both the court case of the *Hope* and the case of the *Post van Hamburg*. I also used contemporary peace and trade treaties as well as other trade agreements, such as company or employment contracts. Last but not least, I made use of contemporary novels, short biographies and obituaries of the people involved, biographical dictionaries, supplemented by sources like commemorative medals, school registers, books of expenditures, portraits and other paintings, architectural drawings and prints, and material culture such as pieces of jewellery and furniture or wooden figurines of sailors that are displayed in museums today. Using various kinds of additional sources as intertextual and material resources I was able to put the letters and their contents in a “broader explanatory context”, to borrow the words of David Hancock.<sup>153</sup> This allowed me to broaden the horizon of the analysis of letter-writing and business practices and arrive at a “wall-sized culturescape”, as Clifford Geertz put it.<sup>154</sup> In other words, analysing practices and providing contexts we arrive at a comprehensive picture of this tense time and place that Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens was living in: France in the 18th century as the place of his establishment phase. The letter episodes allow me to present in detail and based on rich evidence the major steppingstones of a mercantile establishment phase of a wholesale merchant during the 18th century that not only Luetkens, but almost all of his fellow contemporary merchants had to undergo and pass when becoming a wholesale merchant in the 18th century.

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- 151 On merchant manuals, see Hoock, Jochen, Pierre Jeannin, and Wolfgang Kaiser, eds. *Ars Mercatoria: Handbücher und Traktate für den Gebrauch des Kaufmanns: 1470-1820: Eine analytische Bibliographie* (= *Manuels et traités à l'usage des marchands*), 6 volumes. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991-2001. On letter-writing manuals, see Furger, Carmen. *Briefsteller. Das Medium Brief im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert*. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2010. See Chartier, Roger, ed. *La correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Fayard, 1991. See Chartier, Roger. “Secrétaires for the People? Model letters of the ancien régime: between court literature and popular chapbook.” In *La correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*, edited by Roger Chartier, 59-111. Paris: Fayard, 1991. See Bannet, Eve Tavor. *Empire of Letters: Letter writing manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. See Gurkin Altman, Janet. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982. See Nickisch, Reinhard M. G. *Die Stilprinzipien in den deutschen Briefstellern des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Mit einer Bibliographie zur Briefschreiblehre (1474-1800)*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969. See Ruberg, Willemijn. *Conventional Correspondence: Epistolary Culture of the Dutch Elite, 1770-1850*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- 152 Steinhausen, *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes*, 302. Translation by the author. See also Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche*, 43, 53.
- 153 Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 9.
- 154 Geertz, Clifford. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, edited by Clifford Geertz, 3-30. New York: Basic Books, 1973, 21.

## Practices

In the last decade, the investigation of past practices has become a very fruitful addition and a new methodology in historiography. The research approach is known today under the term of *Historical Praxeology*.<sup>155</sup> Practices are defined in this research approach as common past patterns of action which are collectively shared and performed by several people or groups of people in the past that were shaping and constituting these peoples' life, their encounters and their dealings with each other.<sup>156</sup> Following *Practice Theory*, practices are seen as decisive carriers of social life and interaction.<sup>157</sup> The conditions and the basic elements involved and coming together during the formation and performances of practices are constant, their interplay, however, differs from situation to situation, allowing both routinised elements and creative elements to shape the practice.<sup>158</sup> Practices are constituted and composed of performed actions shaping

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- 155 See Freist, Dagmar, ed. *Diskurse-Körper-Artefakte. Historische Praxeologie in der Frühneuezeitforschung*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2015. See Reichardt, Sven. "Praxeologische Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Diskussionsanregung." *Sozial.Geschichte* 22, no. 3 (2007): 43-65. See Mergel, Thomas, and Sven Reichardt. "Praxeologie in der Geschichtswissenschaft: eine Zwischenbetrachtung." In *Entbehrung und Erfüllung. Praktiken von Arbeit, Körper und Konsum in der Geschichte moderner Gesellschaften. Für Thomas Welskopp 1961–2021*, edited by Gleb J. Albert, Daniel Siemens, and Frank Wolff, 79-102. Bonn: Dietz, 2021. See Füssel, Marian. "Die Rückkehr des ›Subjekts‹ in der Kulturgeschichte. Beobachtungen aus praxeologischer Perspektive." In *Historisierte Subjekte – Subjektivierte Historie. Zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte*, edited by Stefan Deines, Stephan Jaeger and Ansgar Nünning, 141-159. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2003. See Brendecke, Arndt, ed. *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit. Akteure – Handlungen – Artefakte*. Cologne/Weimar/ Vienna: Böhlau, 2015. See Spiegel, *Practicing History*. See the convincing edited volume Jung, Theo, ed. *Zwischen Handeln und Nichthandeln. Unterlassungspraktiken in der europäischen Moderne*. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2019. See Sepp, Benedikt. "Beyond the Buttocks as a Political-Geographical Model - A Praxeological Approach to West Germany's National Revolutionaries." *Moving the Social. Journal for Social History and the History of Social Movements* 56 (2016): 73-92. See Mariss, Anne. "A world of new things". *Praktiken der Naturgeschichte bei Johann Reinhold Forster*. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2015.
- 156 See Füssel, Marian. "Praxeologische Perspektiven in der Frühneuezeitforschung." In *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit. Akteure – Handlungen – Artefakte*, edited by Arndt Brendecke, 21-33. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2015. See Haasis, Lucas, and Constantin Rieske. "Historische Praxeologie. Zur Einführung." In *Historische Praxeologie. Dimensionen vergangenen Handelns*, edited by Lucas Haasis and Constantin Rieske, 7-54. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015.
- 157 See Reckwitz, Andreas. "Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing." *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (2002): 245-265, reprint in: Spiegel, Gabrielle M., ed. *Practicing History. New directions in historical writing after the linguistic turn*, 245-263. London/New York: Routledge, 2005. See Alkemeyer, Thomas, Dagmar Freist, and Gunilla Budde. "Einleitung." In *Selbst-Bildungen: Soziale und kulturelle Praktiken der Subjektivierung*, edited by Thomas Alkemeyer, Dagmar Freist, and Gunilla Budde, 9-32. Bielefeld: transcript, 2013. See Hörning, Karl H. and Julia Reuter, eds. *Doing Culture. Neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Kultur und sozialer Praxis*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2004. See Schatzki, Theodore R. *Social Practices. A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 89. See Hörning, Karl H. *Experten des Alltags. Die Wiederentdeckung des praktischen Wissens*. Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2001.
- 158 See for instance the works by Andersson, Gudrun, and Jon Stobart, eds. *Daily Lives and Daily Routines in the Long Eighteenth Century*. New York/Abingdon: Routledge, 2022. See Withington, Phil. "Where Was the Coffee in Early Modern England?" *The Journal of Modern History* 92, no. 1 (2020): 40-75. See Raapke, Annika. "Well, that escalated slowly. Prekäre Balancen, Konflikt und Eskalation in Brief-

and embedded in certain cultural contexts; they entail the use of certain artefacts and materials, like quill pen and paper, and the mobilisation of certain cultural resources, like language registers, that provide the respective actions with meaning. Following the definition of the sociologists Elisabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar and Matt Watson, practices represent the interplay of “materials, meanings und competence”.<sup>159</sup> They are composed as a “a nexus of doings and sayings” according to Theodore Schatzki’s definition.<sup>160</sup> Investigating practices, as Constantin Rieske and I defined it in our edited volume on *Historical Praxeology* from 2015, always includes the detailed analyses of the materiality, the processuality, the performativity and, last but not least, the historicity, the historic specificity and context of the respective practices as well as correlation and interplay of these elements.<sup>161</sup> The crucial assumption of the praxeological approach is that people now and in the past developed and adhered to certain patterns of practices that gave their actions order and stability and provided their actions with contemporary meaning and significance. The assumption is that we are still able to reconstruct past practices as patterns of actions today because the practices have left marks and traces in the sources. Past practices are identifiable because they have inscribed or imprinted themselves in the source materials or perpetuated themselves in the text of the sources, which is why in this book the analysis of practices rests on both the analysis of both text and materiality of the letters and why I regard the letter conversations ultimately as material, textual and social events that are reconstructable.<sup>162</sup>

Letter writing was one of the most popular and widespread practices during the 18th century.<sup>163</sup> This practice entailed several others, including material practices (folding, bundling paper or creating letter packets of several letters), linguistic practices (a particular language use and rhetoric), textual and performative practices (such as mobilising

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beziehungen zwischen Frankreich und den Karibikkolonien, 1778-1793.” *Historische Anthropologie* 29, no. 2 (2021): 189-208.

- 159 Shove, Pantzar, Watson conclude that “if practices are composed of materials, meanings and competence, histories of practice need to take note of the conjunction of all three elements at once.” Shove, Elisabeth, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson. *The Dynamics of Social Practice. Everyday Life and How it Changes*. London: Sage, 2012, 29.
- 160 Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 89. “Social life is plied by a range of such practices as negotiation practices, political practices, cooking practices, banking practices, religious practices, recreation practices, and educational practices.” As paraphrased by Schatzki, Theodore R. *The Site of the Social. A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010, 70.
- 161 See Haasis/Rieske, “Historische Praxeologie. Zur Einführung,” 26-49. See Shove/Pantzar/Watson, *Social Practice*, 29. Andreas Reckwitz defines practices (“Praktiken”) as “a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.” Reckwitz, “Toward a Theory of Social Practices,” 249.
- 162 Haasis/Rieske, “Historische Praxeologie. Zur Einführung”; Haasis, “Materialität.” Regarding these patterns as “material events”, see also Hillebrandt, Frank. *Soziologische Praxistheorien. Eine Einführung*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014, 55.
- 163 See inter alia Whyman, *Pen and the People*; Nevalainen/Tanskanen, *Letter-Writing*; Dierks, *In my Power*; O’Neill, *The Opened Letter*.

language registers from common parlance or represented in contemporary manuals) and discursive practices (adhering to certain rules of gallantry or politeness or codes of conduct prevailing in the mercantile community during the letter conversations). All these elements came together in letter practice and turned the letter into an effective tool of written communication and of exerting influence on correspondents. Based on these practices, merchants negotiated and conducted business and private life. Merchants would actively use letter practices and combine them with typical contemporary ways and strategies as to how to conduct business in the 18th century. The interest of this book lies in the combination in perspective of both letter practices and business practices, which ultimately allows me to paint a vivid picture of multiple events presenting themselves in an Early Modern mercantile establishment phase.

The stimulating aspect of adding a praxeological perspective to the approach of microhistory is that the research unit of practices already fulfils a prerequisite that microhistory understands as one of its key features. It combines both micro and macro perspectives while already representing a kind of a meso-level of investigation.<sup>164</sup> Practices are always shaped by both individual actions and structural conditions, however, their effectiveness stems from the sphere of shared performances in action. The focus of a praxeological perspective is on patterns of actions rather than on the individuals performing them or the structures shaping them. For microhistory this means that it is still possible as combined with a praxeological approach to follow the approach's main aim of answering large questions on a small scale.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, praxeological perspectives create new stimuli and new questions for microhistorical research. Thus, the research approach of this book is one of praxeological microhistory. From the perspective of Historical Praxeology, on the other hand, the combination with microhistory is promising because it allows the combination of detailed analysis of practices with the necessary step of dense historical contextualisation for which microhistory offers well-established proven methods. Significant with regard to the method chosen for this book is the fact that both approaches share a common source of inspiration. Both microhistory and praxeology are highly influenced by ethnography, a research approach and perspective that in many ways resembles working on untreated original sources found in an historical archive that has gathered dust for centuries.

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164 See Alkemeyer/Freist/Budde, "Einleitung." See Schlumbohm, Jürgen. *Mikrogeschichte – Makrogeschichte. Komplementär oder inkommensurabel?* Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2000. See Revel, Jacques. "Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social." In *Histories. French Constructions of the Past*, edited by Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, 492-502. New York: New Press, 1996. See Schegloff, Emanuel A. "Between Macro and Micro: Contexts and Other Connections." In *The Macro-Micro Link*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., 207-234. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1987.

165 See Hiebl, Ewald, and Ernst Langthaler, eds. *Im Kleinen das Große suchen: Mikrogeschichte in Theorie und Praxis*. Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2013. See Pomata, Gianna. "Close-Ups and Long Shots: Combining Particular and General in Writing the Histories of Women and Men?" In *Geschlechtergeschichte und Allgemeine Geschichte: Herausforderungen und Perspektiven*, edited by Hans Medick and Anne-Charlott Trepp, 101-124. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998.

## Praxeological Thick Descriptions

The method used in this book in order to analyse and explain both practices and their contexts stems from ethnography.<sup>166</sup> I use an extended variant of the method of thick description. Thick description is a method that combines participatory observation or, in historiography, close reading of sources relating to an inexplicable phenomenon with a thick contextualisation that aims at finding probable explanations for the phenomenon or source material.<sup>167</sup> The aim of this method is to “make the distant seem familiar and the familiar look foreign”, which means that the method argues that there are no anthropological constants or any matters of course with regard to phenomena from foreign cultures in the present or in the past.<sup>168</sup> The method used in this book is an extension of the original method because, instead of rituals or everyday life as typical research objects of thick descriptions, my work focuses on past letter and business practices, and instead of indigenous cultures I study the uncharted territory of an original 18th century letter and business archive.<sup>169</sup> The book offers praxeological thick descriptions, meaning descriptions that aim to make understandable past practices, the practices of letter writing and of conducting business. Thick descriptions in micro-history start from the assumption that the past is ultimately a foreign country.<sup>170</sup> The defamiliarization with the historical research object is crucial because it takes seriously the otherness of the past.<sup>171</sup> At the same time, it becomes indispensable and mandatory to explain, contextualise and historicise every aspect found in the source material instead of relying on any forms of presuppositions.<sup>172</sup> This is particularly important when investigating such a historical commonplace item as a letter archive from the 18th century or past letters, which invite readers today to familiarise, or even worse, romanticise

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- 166 See Schegloff, “Between Macro and Micro”. On mutual accountability within practices see also Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 77. See in general Garfinkel, Harold. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984. I owe a lot of my methodological thinking in terms of ethnography to the constant exchange and friendship with Robert Mitchell. See Mitchell, Robert. *Ballet and Taiji in Practice. A Comparative Autoethnography of Movement Systems*. Bielefeld: transcript 2022.
- 167 See Geertz, “Thick Description.” See Levi, “On Microhistory,” 100. Geertz, Clifford. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, edited by Clifford Geertz, 412-453. New York: Basic Books, 1973. One of the best history books ever written, applying the method of the thick description in historiography, is Darnton, Robert, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Basic Books, 1984, revised version 2009.
- 168 Darnton, Robert. “On Clifford Geertz: Field Notes from the Classroom.” *The New York Review of Books* 11 (2007), <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/01/11/on-clifford-geertz-field-notes-from-the-classroom>, accessed September 12, 2016, 32.
- 169 In contrast to Geertz, “Deep Play” on the Balinese Cockfight or Robert Darnton’s *Great Cat Massacre*.
- 170 Lowenthal, David. *The Past Is a Foreign Country – Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, the first version was published in 1985.
- 171 Darnton rightly observes and writes that “we constantly need to be shaken out of a false sense of familiarity with the past, to be administered doses of cultural shock.” Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 4. See Freist, Dagmar. “Historische Praxeologie als Mikro-Historie.” In *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit. Akteure – Handlungen – Artefakte*, edited by Arndt Brendecke, 62-77. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2015.
- 172 Medick, “Missionaries in the Row Boat.”

them. As this book will show, in the past the practice of letter writing was a very specific historical practice reacting to contemporary phenomena and fulfilling clear contemporary purposes and reasons. The letters of the past were different to letters today and followed their own historical rules and purposes. This book will show the historical role and significance that letters played in the life of merchants, introducing their specific language, their texts, their materiality and their contemporary function. Thick descriptions raise awareness of the fact that researchers should not fall into the trap of taking anything for granted when it comes to investigating past practices. On the contrary, it invites us to ask questions of the historical sources that might seem banal or trivial in the first place. For this book I have decided to ask a rather obvious and trivial question, just to learn that it is not trivial at all, and this, in turn, makes it a legitimate question. The question appears only trivial at first glance. The sources and my interpretations of them will prove the exact opposite, namely that the answers to this question are highly complex. The question that I will ask is how letters worked in letter negotiations and business enterprises conducted by merchants in the past. More precisely, I inquire how merchants used letters to approach and to influence other people in life and business for the sake of their establishment phase. The mission statement behind this question is that we should never underestimate the capacity of people to utilise their historical opportunities. The practice of letter writing is only a well-known terrain for us at first glance. In fact, this practice remains a largely undiscovered country especially when it comes to how and for what purposes people used the practice in different contexts.

The concrete research strategy of thick description is to create plausible frameworks, provide intelligible thick contexts around the research object in order to arrive at probable explanations about the research object.<sup>173</sup> The assumption is that the research object remains inexplicable for the researcher until embedded in a contemporary context that makes it understandable again. In this book the starting point of the approach is the investigation of the three archive boxes holding the Luetkens archive from which I recreated letter practices and business practices. The letters and letter conversations that I investigate, however, have lost the direct context in which they were directly understandable. These letters are still the same letters as they were in the 1740s; they are still in the same condition. But they have lost the historical context in which they were intelligible, comprehensible, “accountable” and recognisable for the reader.<sup>174</sup> Applying the method of thick description to the Luetkens archive following Geertz means putting the reconstructed letter practices and business practices in a “context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described” and therefore explained in their contemporary meaning, functionality and their specific historicity.<sup>175</sup> Still, thick descriptions always unavoidably remain “intrinsically incomplete”, as Geertz points out, because they always only focus on a particular part, a snippet of a respective foreign culture.<sup>176</sup> This part of a foreign culture is analysed and contextualised in the

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173 See Geertz, “Thick Description”, 14. See Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 5. See Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, viii.

174 Schegloff, “Between Macro and Micro,” 207.

175 Geertz, “Thick Description,” 14.

176 *Ibid.*, 29.

most detailed manner possible. The analyses of thick description are also always intrinsically subjective because it is always the interpreter who recreates the contexts and not the observed actors themselves.<sup>177</sup> As in ethnography, historians are faced with the challenge of “trying to read (in the sense of “constructing a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries” while having the task of making sense of this manuscript.<sup>178</sup> This means that all explanations given are to be seen as only suggestions as to how to understand the respective historical situation, not as a form of a claimed truth.

The result of this research attitude for concrete practice as a historian is that “the researcher’s point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account.”<sup>179</sup> Particularly the latter point has become highly influential and not only a standard but one of the hallmarks of both microhistory and the praxeological approaches. I am a strong advocate of the position that in historiographic narration even historians must reflect their role as narrator and this means historians have to allow for “hypotheses, the doubts, the uncertainties [...] [to become] part of the narration”, as Carlo Ginzburg puts it.<sup>180</sup> The same was already suggested by Pierre Nora.<sup>181</sup> We have to admit the fact that what we offer in our analyses are in the end only probable explanations about the past, “historical possibilities [with room for the] [...] ‘perhapses’, the ‘may-have-beens’,” as summarised by Natalie Zemon Davis.<sup>182</sup> Thick description is an interpretative hermeneutic.<sup>183</sup> It offers suggestions as to how we might be able to understand certain historical events and actions in the past.

Point of departure of thick descriptions are most often moments of surprise, perplexity, amazement or incomprehension with regard to the records or material events observed.<sup>184</sup> These moments are taken as a starting point of the analyses because they require the researcher to delve deeper into the historical logic of the respective research object, set it into context in order to obtain the knowledge necessary to explain the respective phenomenon and to solve the moment of surprise. As Robert Darnton’s defines the approach in his book the *Great Cat Massacre*, the line of thinking is that “when we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning. The thread might even lead into a strange and wonderful

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177 Ibid.

178 Ibid., 10.

179 Levi, “On Microhistory,” 106. See also Brewer, “Microhistory,” 12.

180 Ginzburg, “Microhistory,” 24.

181 See Nora, Pierre. “Is ‘Ego-Histoire’ Possible?” In *Ngapartji ngapartji, in turn, in turn: ego-histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia*, edited by Vanessa Castejon et al., 289-296. Canberra: ANU Press, 2014. In critical retrospective to all romanticizing tendencies of thick descriptions, see Geertz, Clifford. *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist. The Jerusalem-Harvard Lectures*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995. See Bachmann-Medick, Doris. *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016, 103-130.

182 Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, viii.

183 See Levi, “On Microhistory,” 96-100.

184 Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 5

worldview.”<sup>185</sup> Moments of surprise or amazement that I will tell of in this book were for instance finding out about peculiar ways of how the merchant Luetkens folded and arranged letters in letter packets, learning about the fact that Luetkens and his correspondents wrote in several national languages and chose particular language registers when conducting business or that their business letters are all marked by a very effective international epistolary formularity, which even as a standard included terms of drastic language when it came to rebukes. Furthermore, I became intrigued by the fact that people trusted in simple material forms of personal insurance in the sea business or even trusted in verbal promises even if this meant setting course for dangerous seas. Last but not least, moments of surprise were the discovery of Luetkens’ *Bel Etage* in the *Hamburg Museum for the Arts and Crafts* and the moment when I learned about the fact that Luetkens, though in France, once asked his brother in London to buy and send his wedding jewellery hidden in a letter packet to Hamburg. All these moments served as the starting points for my analytical chapters, because they all prompted me to research the backgrounds of the respective phenomena. In the chapters, I subsequently recreated the historical context that allowed me to understand these moments of surprise or amazement and simultaneously learned about the world in which these features were once understandable for the contemporaries. As typical for thick descriptions, all the chapters represent self-contained units, they all represent complete stories and episodes because each chapter aims to explain and solve one or two moments of surprise. At the same time, I dedicate each chapter to a particular field of business or activity in the life and business of the merchant Luetkens that was linked to the moment of surprise. These different business fields represent the general topics of the chapters mirrored in both the respective contexts and the practices analysed. These topics of the chapters are the 18th-century shipping business, commission trade, high-risk trade, the founding of a merchant house and marriage as the mercantile steps and stations towards establishment. The chapters can be read in any order, each chapter individually, since all chapters represent their own demarcated case studies. However, they can also be read consecutively since each chapter represents one of the building blocks of an Early Modern mercantile establishment phase. As Geertz stated as an assumption regarding thick descriptions, this book allows the reader to “start anywhere in a culture’s repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else.”<sup>186</sup>

The concrete procedure in the analytical chapters is that the thick description “starts from a set of signifying signs [as to how to understand the research object] and tries to fit them into an intelligible framework”, to quote Giovanni Levi once more.<sup>187</sup> In praxeological thick descriptions these signs relate to the practices or certain elements of practices identified in the reconstructed letter conversations. The practices are reconstructed on the basis of an approved method in Historical Praxeology. For the identification and reconstruction of practices the perspective focusses on characteristic elements of practices, which are their materiality, their processuality, performativity and

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185 Ibid.

186 Geertz, “Deep Play,” 453.

187 Levi, “On Microhistory,” 98.

historicity.<sup>188</sup> Analysing practices means investigating the material used, the processes taking place during practice, the performances conducted on the basis of the practice and the historical context providing meaning and lending significance to the practice. The latter point is the respective link to the method of thick description which provides this context and enables the researcher to draw conclusions about the effectiveness and functionality as well as the “historicity value”, as Achim Landwehr puts it, of the examined practice.<sup>189</sup> In this book, I analyse letter practices and business practices as intertwined processes. The question thus raised is how business was conducted as well as how private matters were settled by means of letters. When examining letters as practices, as Alison Wiggins expresses it, the Early Modern letter will present itself as an intriguing “multi-layered technology of communication, where the linguistic, material and social intersect”.<sup>190</sup> This intersection turns the letter into a performative medium and this medium, as I argue in this book, was equipped with immense powers of persuasion that provided the letter writers with extensive powers and opportunities to act on the basis of letters. It provided the means to influence or even manipulate the course of letter negotiations and to influence the ways business was conducted and life decisions were made by putting quill pen to paper.

The letter practices presented in this book are typical ones used by merchants of the 18th century. The catalogue of typical practices can be grouped under four headings. Regarding the material form, we will learn about the practices of bundling letters and of arranging letter packets, the practice of letter folding, the practice of deliberately sending unsealed letters, “unbeschwerte Briefe” as they were called by Hamburg merchants, the practice of deliberately inserting extra sheets of paper into folded letters, which allows the extra pages to be removed if necessary, copy practice in Letter Books as well as letter citation and letter copying as typical practices in letter conversations. Regarding forms of transport, we learn about hand-to-hand delivery and the usage of postal routes, which often took a deliberately zigzag course. Regarding language use, linguistics and rhetoric, the practices presented are the usage of letter formulae, the usage of fixed business terminologies and a common, shared vocabulary in business that was highly effective and internationally acknowledged, practices of choosing to write in different national languages and mobilising different language registers. With regard to performative practices, we will learn about the practice of using historical speech acts, of writing a postscript, the practice of reading letters aloud, the usage of indirect speech in letters and the usage of drastic language and swear words.

These practices provided the basis for manifold business practices taking place on the basis of letters, including the buying, hiring, loading and maintaining of ships in the shipping business, conducting commission enterprises, including bank and finance

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188 See Haasis/Rieske, “Historische Praxeologie,” chapter “Arbeitsweise der Historischen Praxeologie,” 26-49. See Shove/Pantzar/Watson, *Social Practice*, 29.

189 “Historizitätswert”, Haasis, Lucas, Constantin Rieske, together with Nikolaus Buschmann, Dagmar Freist, Marian Füssel, Achim Landwehr, Frank Hillebrandt. “Was ist und was kann die Historische Praxeologie? Ein runder Tisch.” In *Historische Praxeologie. Dimensionen vergangenen Handelns*, edited by Lucas Haasis and Constantin Rieske, 199-236. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015.

190 Wiggins, *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, 4.

business, conducting high-risk trade, including insurance business, and negotiation practices in mercantile marriage initiation or contract negotiations regarding trading partnerships and the founding of a merchant house.

As further historical contexts presented in the analytical chapter which are also necessary for understanding the respective practices, we will hear about Early Modern travel culture, cultural contacts in France as well as clashes with the Ottoman Empire, postal conditions, the rise of the private merchant firm and the joint partner company as a business model, martial law and commercial law, maritime neutrality, the powerful religious diaspora network of the Protestant International, as well as about contemporary definitions of love and gallantry, the material culture of marriage and Early Enlightenment in the 18th century, all topics linked to the analysis of the letter and business practices of the merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens and his correspondents.<sup>191</sup> In the end, the focus of the book is best described as a perspective on the effective functioning of past letter practices as a driving force and interlaced with business practices within the historical contexts of an Early Modern establishment phase taking place in the larger world of Atlantic business.

The crucial advantage of working with the Luetkens archive conserved in its special condition is that I was offered the unique opportunity to analyse these practices in my thick descriptions not as single events, but as part of ongoing letter conversations. All practices are analysed as they find their application within polyphonic letter conversations among several letter writers during which the various practices were used by the historical actors to shape and structure the conversation and manage their mercantile and private affairs. The letter exchanges mostly happened in a linear order. However, as in oral conversations, letters between several correspondents could also overlap, interrupt the conversation or a new correspondent joined in. Analysing letter conversations allows me to reconstruct in detail “which historical actors belonging to which group of people, standing in which particular relationship, in which situations, under which conditions and under which rules of language, with which intentions have negotiated certain matters and things in their letters” as Peter Bürgel summarises the most crucial questions of historical letter analysis.<sup>192</sup> On the basis of the two-sided letter conversations, I am able to outline all crucial “properties and effects” of letter practices and business practices, to take Dan Hicks’s fitting terms, all the contemporary material and cultural means and resources that turned the letter into an effective tool of persuasion, for communication and negotiation.<sup>193</sup> I am furthermore able to show how people approached each other, negotiated and convinced each other and worked together in the 18th century offering a cross-section across the group of people working in or linked to

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191 Detailed information and footnotes in the individual chapters.

192 Bürgel, Peter. “Der Privatbrief. Entwurf eines heuristischen Modells.” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 50 (1976): 281-297, here 291. Translation by the author. See also Wiggins, *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, 4.

193 Hicks, Dan. “The Material-Cultural Turn. Event and Effect.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, edited by Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry, 25-98. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, here 74.

the business sector: including people of different ages, genders, from different countries, in the same profession such as merchants, or in different professions including captains, clerks, senators, court personnel, people from different families or family backgrounds, brothers, uncles, mothers-in-law, brothers-in-law, business partners, in different situation and fields of activity.

A final major feature of my analyses is the reconstruction of the language registers used in mercantile correspondence and mobilised in mercantile business, which were used in a very well-considered manner by the letter writers. The crucial language registers of the 18th century presented in the book are the language registers of business and trade, patronage, gallantry, love and friendship. The letter types presented are the family letter, business letter, ship's captain letters, friendship letter and letters of warning and rebuke. The letter languages are the three languages German, French and Dutch. Analysing and contextualising these letters and the letter episodes, and integrating into the analysis hundreds of letters both from Luetkens and his correspondents, not only provides insight into particular letter practices or business enterprises, or events and occurrences in the life of a single merchant, but it also profoundly broadens historiographic knowledge about the Atlantic world of trade, its trading practices and business culture, its common forms of communication and social interaction in letters of the 18th century written by wholesale merchants in Hamburg-French trade during this time.

### Practical Principles of Persuasion

The Luetkens archive finally demonstrates its significance by providing reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of letter and business practices in the past. Having access to all letters sent and received we can follow the courses of action and the letter exchanges, and we also get to know about the ultimate results and consequences of the negotiations and the future of the respective enterprises. We learn how letter writers actually “conversed with the pen”, as Bruce Redford calls it, and what concrete impact their actions had within the practices on the other correspondents, but also on business and life.<sup>194</sup> It also becomes clear and tangible in the process which elements of letter practice and which strategies in business were crowned with success and why these were effective while others failed. By taking the bird's eye view on the letter episodes, it becomes clear how the correspondents reacted to each other and to every letter and argument of their correspondents. The major observation and outcome from analysing entire letter episodes represents the last and final area of knowledge for which this book offers results.

The result of the analyses of complete letter conversations and entire business enterprises in the case studies is that I learned that these conversations and enterprises were not only shaped randomly by manifold practices but that these practices were also connected with each other and followed clear motives during their implementation. The practices again formed intertwined practices, practice arrangements during the letter conversations which, when analysed in an integrated approach, reveal with great

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194 Redford, Bruce. *The Converse of the Pen. Acts of Intimacy in the. Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter.* Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 1-15.

clarity certain underlying practical principles, mechanisms apparently effective in letter correspondences of the 18th century. The principles show how correspondents tried to influence their addressees in the long run and how they were successful. The letter conversations were clearly shaped by certain contemporary practical principles of persuasion applied by correspondents in order to exert influence on the addressees. These principals were practical by nature, not only rhetorically shaped and predetermined, but always influenced by the opportunities and constraints provided by the medium of the letter. They appear as not always intended or strategically planned out, but as quite routinized ways of dealing with certain matters and of reacting to certain situations in practice and in different contemporary contexts. The practical principles of persuasion become transparent only in the bird's eye view and only to the researcher overlooking the entire letter episodes. For the contemporary actors, however, these ways of dealing with matters must have felt rather natural. As such, as I would argue, the principles ultimately mirror more general principles of persuasion prevailing in 18th century public life and society. The principles are highly informative about how people negotiated, argued and legitimised their actions in the Early Modern world.

The concept of principles of persuasion stems from Robert Cialdini, who in his renowned book *Influence. The Psychology of Persuasion* worked on modern day business culture identifying and examining the crucial factors that influence people today to say 'yes'.<sup>195</sup> In his book, which is based on research on today's compliance practitioners and marketing practices, Cialdini elaborates on these factors, simultaneously summarising his scientific findings that although "there are thousands of tactics that [...] [people] employ to produce yes, the majority fall within six basic categories. Each of these categories is governed by a fundamental psychological principle that directs human behaviour and, in doing so, give the tactics their power. [...] The principles – consistency, reciprocity, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity – are [subsequently] discussed [in his book] in terms of their function in the society and in terms of how their enormous force can be commissioned by the [...] professional who deftly incorporates them into [his daily workings, which are in Cialdini's example] [...] requests for purchases, donations, concessions, votes, assent."<sup>196</sup> Cialdini is able to identify certain principles of persuasions in modern day business as to how people influence each other and how they developed "automatic, stereotyped behaviour" or "shortcuts in order to react adequately and cope with this circumstance".<sup>197</sup> This way of thinking is transferable to my approach because it coincides with the idea of practices shaping people's lives.<sup>198</sup> At the same time, the focus of my research approach and book is not psychological because I concentrate on material and textual practices of the past. Still Cialdini's concept is applicable as a methodological tool when researching the Luetkens letters. It can also be combined with microhistorical approaches which explicitly argue that "all social action [must be] seen to be the result of an individual's constant negotiation, manipulation,

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195 Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence. The Psychology of Persuasion*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, "Weapons of Influence," 1-16.

196 Cialdini, *Influence*, xiii.

197 *Ibid.*, 6-7.

198 *Ibid.*

choices and decisions in the face of a normative reality which, though pervasive, nevertheless offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms”, to quote Giovanni Levi one final time, and these choices are particularly reflected in practices like letter writing and business practice.<sup>199</sup> In this book, I use Robert Cialdini’s concept as an inspiration to find a suitable way to accurately describe the events presented to me in the letter conversations analysed. The outcome of my research on practical principles of persuasion in letters is that I am able to identify nine principles of persuasion active and effective in the 18th century. These practical principles of persuasion in letter practices and the business culture of 18th century trade are the following: demands for loyalty, the sledgehammer method, persuasion by showing efficiency, making firm promises and providing material assurances, meeting as equals, keeping a low profile, insider dealings, which is connected to the principle of giving correspondents preferential treatment by creating the feeling of exclusivity, and, finally, the practical principle of mollification.

Performing practices, the historical actors did not act randomly, but their letters equalled manipulation attempts to positively manipulate the result of the negotiations to their liking and in line with their own aims and interests. The principles of persuasion becoming apparent from the analyses are in this regard still not the same as strategies or rhetoric because they do not follow written rules or are necessarily rational, and they are neither thematised or scrutinised by the contemporaries in their letters themselves or directly described in them. Analysing and presenting these principles means using a methodological concept to find a way to describe the practical mechanisms that clearly structured the letter episodes as they were performed. We learn from the identification of these practical principles, borrowing David Hancock’s words, that “each type of business was guided by its own specific, fundamental business imperative for [...] achieving success”.<sup>200</sup> Mastering these imperatives was key to success in mercantile business and as such it was key to passing the mercantile establishment phase, by which we arrive back at the general topic of my book. The premise behind the principles also represents a major premise of mercantile establishment in general. It is that all practices needed to be performed convincingly. Speaking of the practice of letter writing this ultimately takes us to the very core of this practice and its purpose, which in my opinion often remains largely underexposed in research on letters.

The 18th-century lawyer and writer of novels and letter-writing manuals August Bohse, also known as Talander, brilliantly summarised this ultimate purpose. With recourse to classical thinkers, Bohse stated that “the purpose and the ultimate goal of someone writing a letter is similar to the purpose and goal of a talented orator or speaker: he seeks to convince [“persuadiren”] his audience about what he tells them, and to move their emotions [“affecten”] in order to gain their approval [“Beyfall geben”] and to win them over to his side [“auf seine Seite treten”].”<sup>201</sup> Early Modern letters were

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199 Levi, “On Microhistory,” 94.

200 Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 83.

201 Bohse, August (pseud.: Talander). *Der allzeitfertige Briefsteller* [...]. Frankfurt a.M./Leipzig/Dresden: Johann Theodor Boerio, 1690, 4.

products of practice rather than of classical rhetoric, the motives, however, remain the same.

The merchant Luetkens was highly skilled in the practice of persuasion. He was a master of pulling strings and of influencing correspondents and letter conversations according to his will. Luetkens did so without being a rhetorically trained man. He was no man of theoretical thinking. But he was a man of practice, a practically skilled man, as it was also deemed appropriate at the time for a man of business. He was a “practical man of affairs”.<sup>202</sup> Luetkens was also a pragmatic man, who had learned and incorporated his skills from practice and experience rather than from theory. For this type of learning, the contemporaries also had a particular name. Luetkens was a man of what was known as practical eloquence during that time, “Beredtsamkeit” in German, rather than of theoretical sophistication.<sup>203</sup> He knew how to talk to people, what needed to be done and used the means necessary to get these things done. As I will show in my analyses, this eloquence in practical matters as a skill of persuasion was also what enabled him to advance his career as a wholesale merchant. In the end, Luetkens possessed the necessary powers of persuasion to become a merchant in the 18th century.

## Chapter Summaries

The book continues with a chapter on the life and letters of the Hamburg merchant Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens. This chapter on the *Making of a Merchant* gives an introduction of the study’s main protagonist and his travels through France. I will outline his early years, his educational path based on the sparse information still retrievable from historical sources and from the information given in the court records of the High Court of Admiralty. I also describe in detail the requirements and motives underlying a mercantile establishment phase. Moreover, this chapter provides information about contemporary postal conditions, travel conditions, mercantile education and about the concept of practical eloquence as the very essence of a merchant’s skills during the 18th century.

This introductory part is followed by the main part of the book presenting Luetkens’ establishment phase. The Early Modern mercantile establishment phase is presented in five case studies representing the five crucial steps and business fields of a merchant during this stage of his career: shipping business, commission trade, high-risk trade, the founding of a merchant house, marriage preparations. All the analyses in this part are based on one or two letter episodes reconstructed from the Luetkens archive.

In the chapter on the *Shipping Business*, the reader will learn how Luetkens navigated legal grey areas to restructure his entire shipping business. Together with his brother,

202 Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 32. See in this regard also, with a reference to Defoe’s *Complete Tradesman* emphasising the importance of practical training, Shinagel, Michael. *Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968, 201-245. See Defoe, Daniel. *The Complete English Tradesman*. London: Charles Rivington, 1726.

203 More on practical eloquence in the next chapter on the “Making of a Merchant”. As an introduction to “Beredtsamkeit”, eloquence, and rhetorics during the Enlightenment see Ueding/Steinbrink, *Grundriß der Rhetorik*, 102-135.

whom Luetkens persuaded into helping him in several letters, the merchant was able to procure a neutral flag for his ships allowing his business to flourish. The chapter provides detailed information on the complexities of the 18th-century shipping business. Furthermore, the reader will learn about family letters and the principle of demanding loyalty in mercantile business.

The chapter on *Commission Trade* presents the crucial second cornerstone of Luetkens' career besides shipping business, which was commission trade. Commission trade allowed Luetkens indirect access to the French colonial markets and represented a lucrative loophole for many foreign merchants of the time to participate in French trade during the 18th century. On the basis of writing business letters and by mobilising the language register of business and trade, the merchants were able to develop and show the principle of efficiency, which was crucial for all men of trade.

The chapter on *High-Risk Trade* provides insight into trade on the Mediterranean Sea. The main question of this chapter is how Luetkens, in the hope of quick returns through Mediterranean rich trades, was able to convince his captains and their crews to take on the risk of sailing these dangerous seas that were patrolled by Ottoman privateers. The merchant did so by mobilising the language register of patronage and by making promises as material speech acts and by material assurances in his letters.

With a chapter on *Finding a Business Partner and a Merchant Clerk to Open up a Merchant House*, I enter the home stretch of the book just like Luetkens entered the end of his establishment phase when accomplishing these tasks. This chapter informs about the new importance of the private merchant firm and partnership as a lucrative basis of business in the 18th century besides the family firm. Founding a merchant house was at the same time the first important step in order to finalise the mercantile establishment phase. After months of letter negotiations, Luetkens found a suitable business partner in the Hamburg merchant Ehrenfried Engelhard, who fulfilled the contemporary standards demanded of merchant partners. Ehrenfried showed a corresponding humour, which meant in the contemporary sense of the word that the two men's characters and business acumen were compatible, and he brought more necessary capital into the partnership. This man, as was still typical during this time, was also the brother of his future wife.

Marriage was the second important step to finalise the mercantile establishment phase, as we will learn in the chapter on *Marriage Preparations*. In order to achieve his goal of finding a wife, Luetkens wrote letters because he was not able to meet his future wife in person while he was travelling. By means of the principles of preferential treatment and mollification, not least by sending precious furniture and jewellery, the merchant was able to convince his wife of his qualities.

The book ends with a conclusion in which I will summarise my findings, reflect on my approach, and provide the reader with remarks and an outlook on the research stimuli I hope to provide regarding methodological discussions as well as regarding research on Early Modern merchants, Atlantic business culture, business practices, letter practices and the power of persuasion.