

## 3 Shipping Business

---

### 3.1. Hamburg

#### Reasons for Settling down for Business in Hamburg

In the 18th century Hamburg was one of the most vibrant and thriving trading cities and commercial centres of Europe and ranked as one of the leading trade entrepots and transshipment ports of the era. As Mary Lindemann aptly put it, “Hamburg served as a commercial nerve centre for half the continent”.<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the German territory alone, as Klaus Weber emphasized, the city on the river Elbe can surely be regarded as “the most important German seaport” of the 18th century, which even “outstripped the previously leading port of Amsterdam in its relevance [...] as a major hub in the trade and further distribution of colonial goods”.<sup>2</sup> A contemporary traveller, whose name unfortunately remains unknown to us, but who visited Hamburg in the mid-18th century for the purpose of assessing the city’s economic situation for a foreign bank, noted that the “importance of business in Hamburg and the variety of things connected with it are so great that one could profitably spend an entire year here and learn something new each day. There are few European seaports which Hamburg’s ships do not enter, and there is no seafaring people in this part of the world which does not traffic with Hamburg. Its superb location makes the city the emporium of all Germany. [...] The Elbe and the canals [...] are almost blanketed over with ships. The assembly on the Stock Exchange is one of the largest [in Europe] and the place teems with negociants. In a word, one finds here a perpetual motion of all nations and peoples caught up in the business of money-making.”<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 3. See Lindemann, Mary. *The Merchant Republics: Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648–1790*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 27–30.

2 Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 15. See *ibid.*, 16. See also Jeannin, Pierre. “Die Hansestädte im europäischen Handel des 18. Jahrhunderts.” *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 89 (1971): 41–73. See Lindberg, Erik. “The Rise of Hamburg as a Global Marketplace in the Seventeenth Century: A Comparative Political Economy Perspective.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 3 (2008): 641–662.

3 “Bericht über eine im Auftrag der Mährischen Lehenbank durchgeführten Kommerzialreise – Eine zeitgenössische Bestandsaufnahme zur Wirtschaftslage mitteleuropäischer Städte um die Mit-

The reasons for this great commercial significance and the important role that Hamburg played on the world market were manifold. Surely also some fortunate strokes of luck during the long and eventful history of this city had had their share in this development, such as for instance that Hamburg had been largely spared during the Thirty Years War. Mary Lindemanns' work, but also and especially the standard work regarding Hamburg and its *Social History* by Franklin Kopitzsch, give an eloquent testimony of this.<sup>4</sup> Five reasons, however, can be highlighted as ultimately the main promoting and favouring factors that turned Hamburg into a commercial centre of the 18th century, all of which were hinted at in the words of the abovementioned contemporary traveller.

The first reason is the superb location. Situated in the centre of Europe, Hamburg served as a perfect hub and nodal point to connect the markets in the north, including the Scandinavian and Baltic areas, the south, including the Mediterranean region, the east, including Russia and Poland, and the west, with England, France, the Netherlands and Spain as the main trading countries. In contrast to the commercial cities in the south of Germany such as Augsburg or Nuremberg, which had been the most important cities during the 15th and 16th century, regarding the 18th century and its markets, Hamburg enjoyed the crucial advantage of having a direct connection to the sea, which was highly important for its interconnection with the Atlantic trading markets. At the same time, Hamburg was protected against naval attacks through its inland location. This inland location in turn provided the basis for intensive trading exchanges between Hamburg and the European domestic markets and close cooperation between the merchants and the manufacturing industry. Hamburg's own manufacturing sector in fact can be regarded as the second most important pillar of the commercial significance of the Elbe city. For instance, the agricultural sugar processing industry with over 350 sugar refineries in the Hamburg region enabled the merchants of the city to conduct the typical Hamburg trade of buying raw, unrefined sugar and then selling the more expensive processed product, which is important to know since the merchant Luetkens, too, traded in sugar.<sup>5</sup> All of this turned Hamburg into a very attractive place for merchants, which was a fact that would furthermore be fostered through the political situation prevailing in Hamburg during that time, which is the second main reason why Hamburg experienced a commercial peak in the 18th century.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the favourable location, Hamburg also provided favourable political conditions for merchants to settle down and to start their business. The second reason for Hamburg's blossoming in the 18th century was thus that as a free imperial city placed

---

te des 18. Jahrhunderts (Teil III) (edited by Gustav Otruba)." *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 16 (JFW), no. 4 (1976): 231-252, here 258.

4 See Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte*, vol.1, 135-246. See also Pantel, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, 1.

5 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 232. See also Weber, *German Merchants*. See also Prange, Carsten. "Handel und Schiffahrt im 18. Jahrhundert." In *Hamburg im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, edited by Inge Stephan and Hans Gerd Winter, 42-56. Berlin/Hamburg: Reimer 1998, i.a. 48. See Newman, "Hamburg in the European Economy," 57-93. Regarding the Hamburg sugar refineries see Petersson, *Zuckersiedergewerbe und Zuckerhandel*, 41-59.

6 See also already Schramm, "Hamburger Kaufleute." See Schramm, Percy Ernst. "Die deutschen Überseekaufleute im Rahmen der Sozialgeschichte." *Bremisches Jahrbuch* 49 (1964): 31-54.

within the Holy Roman Empire it was acting almost autonomously and independently from external political powers. That means that during the entire Early Modern Period Hamburg was self-governed, although it was nominally under the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor. The city's own local elite exercised political control and governed the political destiny of Hamburg. Since this elite recruited itself from its own leading parties and the most influential members of its society, and since these most influential members were for the most part merchants, the political agenda and political orientation of the city was mainly commercially shaped. The merchant class dominated Hamburg and as such they put great efforts into the commercial prosperity of their hometown, and only secondly, if at all, would they act also for the good of the Holy Roman Empire. The direct impact of this political power of the merchant elite and its consequences for the daily and especially the commercial life of Hamburg can be illustrated by means of the third and fourth reason for Hamburg's rise to economic power.<sup>7</sup>

The third main reason for Hamburg's commercial wealth and prosperity was the institutionalisation of the mercantile agenda of the city, which already started in the 16th and 17th century. In 1558, the Hamburg Exchange opened its doors. The Hamburg bank was established in 1619, the Hamburg Admiralty in 1623, and in 1663 the Commerz-Deputation (todays Chamber of Commerce) followed, of which, as we know, Luetkens later in his life became an important member.<sup>8</sup> In the 18th century, these institutions went on to enjoy worldwide fame, as even our unknown traveller reverently acknowledged.<sup>9</sup> In almost the same breath our traveller noticed and stressed the many nationalities and people from all over the world that he met in Hamburg, who lined the streets and teemed at the meeting places, merchant houses and coffeehouses of the city. This observation, too, ultimately refers back to the autonomy and power of the merchant elite of the free imperial city and represents at the same time the fourth reason for Hamburg's prosperity in the 18th century.

During almost all of the 18th century, Hamburg advocated a religious tolerance policy. This means that Hamburg generally was open to people from many other countries, or nations as the traveller called it, regardless of their religious backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> This tolerance policy subsequently attracted not only merchants from other countries in general, but particularly it provided a place of shelter and a place of refuge for all of those who were experiencing and fleeing from expulsion, persecution and displacement in other countries. In Hamburg for instance Huguenots, meaning French Protestants, as well as Calvinist refugees from the Spanish Netherlands and Jews from Portugal found a new home. The latter fact, however, did not mean that these groups did not also

<sup>7</sup> See Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 36. See Pantel, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, 30. See Reißmann, *Die hamburgische Kaufmannschaft*, 22. See also Kellenbenz, Hermann. *Unternehmerkräfte im Hamburger Portugal- und Spanienhandel. 1590-1625*. Hamburg: Verlag der Hamburgischen Bücherei, 1954.

<sup>8</sup> See Handelskammer, *Handelskammer*, 21-24, and 42-65. See Baasch, *Handelskammer*.

<sup>9</sup> See Lindemann, "Doing Business in 18th century Hamburg," 162.

<sup>10</sup> See Lindberg, "The Rise of Hamburg," 641-662. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 239-240. See Whaley, Joachim. *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg 1529-1819*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

face and suffer from prejudices and social exclusion in Hamburg.<sup>11</sup> The immigration further boosted Hamburg's economy since the new arrivals were, although they may have lost their homes, often still in possession of their capital, their networks and their knowledge, which they brought with them to Hamburg and from which Hamburg in turn benefitted. The tolerance policy regarding foreign merchants therefore was thus no purely altruistic gesture by the Hamburg authorities and it did not serve entirely selfless motivations, but quite on the contrary, even this measure served the purpose of expanding the role and economic power of the city on the international trading floor. At the same time, however, it was also the main reason for the cosmopolitan nature of Hamburg's inhabitants that the cited traveller encountered, and it provided highly favourable conditions for internationally trading merchants, for which the last main reason for Hamburg's rise ultimately provided the perfect complement to the said foreign policy, further stimulating economic growth.<sup>12</sup>

This fifth reason can be regarded as in essence forming the background for all other reasons for Hamburg's unique commercial status in 18th-century Germany, providing the key and general legal framework which Hamburg drew from for the purpose of developing and asserting its commercial authority and independence on the world market. The fifth reason was that during the entire Early Modern Period, the free and imperial city of Hamburg claimed and maintained a policy and status of neutrality with regard to the power struggles and wars led by the colonial superpowers of the period.<sup>13</sup> As a free imperial city, Hamburg was granted this right by the Holy Roman Emperor, since as a self-governed city it was also given the right to enter independently, but nonetheless lawfully, into peace treaties and bilateral trade treaties with other countries, detached from the political alliances of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1744 and 1745, the period covered by the Luetkens archive, Hamburg held such treaties with France, Spain and England, that is, with the main belligerent parties of the period. Furthermore, it had also set up trade alliances with the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, and therefore could successfully establish and maintain itself as a free port in the midst of a war-torn Europe.<sup>14</sup> To a certain extent, Hamburg, as well as the other Hanseatic cities and

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. See Kopitzsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte* and "Zwischen Hauptrezeß und Franzosenzeit."

<sup>12</sup> Prange, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, 28-29; Newman, "Hamburg in the European Economy," 77. See Liebel, Helen. "Laissez-faire vs. Mercantilism: The Rise of Hamburg & the Hamburg Bourgeoisie vs. Frederick the Great in the Crisis of 1763." *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 52, no. 2 (1965): 207-238.

<sup>13</sup> See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 162-166, 229. See Weber, "German Merchant." See in general Pantel, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, particularly 1-2, 29, 39. See Lindberg, Erik. "The Rise of Hamburg"; Newman, Karen. "Hamburg in the European Economy."

<sup>14</sup> See Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 6,7,13, 21-28. The peace and trade treaties between Hamburg and France can be found ibid. 87-88, stating that "Hambourg est le magasin du Nord et de presque tout l'Empire." Ibid. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 166, 229. See Alimento, Antonella, and Koen Stapelbroek, eds. *The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century: Balance of Power, Balance of Trade*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Regarding the trade with England 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. See also Schulte Beerbühl, *German Merchants*. Regarding the navigational acts see Morgan, "British Empire." Regarding Spain see Kellenbenz, *Unternehmerkräfte*. See also Poettering, *Handel, Nation und Religion*.

also some of the free ports in France, represented the exact opposite to the generally protectionist and mercantilist trade policies and trading systems of the superpowers and therefore provided a clear impetus for merchants even from these superpowers to trade with Hamburg, who hoped for profits and trading opportunities across national boundaries or even for actively undermining the national borders. The opportunity of free trade was consequently also the reason why our anonymous traveller encountered so many ships from different nations blanketing the Elbe and the Hamburg port and why he concluded that there seemed to be “no seafaring people in this part of the world which does not traffic with Hamburg”.<sup>15</sup> The Hamburg port was basically a port of call for every trading nation of the 18th century and therefore was also called upon by all the superpowers of the era, thus elevating Hamburg to the rank of a commercial heavyweight. The maritime neutrality, on the other hand, also led and contributed to the fact that Hamburg ships travelled relatively freely in the international waters of the time, manoeuvring their way through and in-between the different territories and seas controlled by the naval powers, in peace as well as during wartime. Their main role and remit in this regard was to become intermediaries, re-exporters, and therefore international distributors of all the goods of the superpowers that had swamped these countries’ own domestic markets. And with this latter condition, in turn, we have arrived at the main topic of this chapter.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter deals with the shipping business as an important mainstay for Hamburg merchants in the 18th century and as an important business field and proving ground for an aspiring wholesale merchant who tried to establish himself in 18th century trade. Ralph Davis even concluded that “on the whole [...] it was trade that gave its assistance to shipowning rather than vice versa; the merchant entered the potentially profitable business of shipowning because he had connections which were likely to enhance these potentialities, not because he needed a ship to carry his goods.”<sup>17</sup> The business field of the shipping business includes the buying of ships, the procurement of passports and flags and insurances and the necessary tackle, apparel and furniture for these ships, the hiring of ships’ captains, the maintenance of the ship, the procurement and subsequently the transshipments of goods and the setting of the routes for these ships.<sup>18</sup> In this chapter we will primarily learn about the first part of the tasks of an 18th century ship-owner. I will show how Luetkens bought ships and how he took care of the necessary formalities. In the chapter on high-risk trade and on the ships’ captains’ letters in the Luetkens archive, we will also learn in detail about the second part of the mentioned tasks. In the present chapter, Hamburg’s neutrality, and the economic advantages accompanying it, will be presented as the general prerequisite for all trading activity in

<sup>15</sup> Otruba, “Kommerzialreise,” 258.

<sup>16</sup> See furthermore Baasch, “Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt.” Regarding French-Hamburg trade see also Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*; “French Trade” and “Dynamism and Integration”. See Pourchasse, “L’immigration négociante.” On maritime neutrality and its benefits see also Müller, “Maritime Neutrality.” See Anderson, “Privateering.”

<sup>17</sup> Davis, Ralph. *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. London: Macmillan, 1962, 99.

<sup>18</sup> See Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 115–142; see Davis, *English Shipping Industry*, 81.

this business field and as a crucial characteristic and asset for Hamburg's wholesale merchants.<sup>19</sup> For us, in turn, it represents the key topic about which we need extensive background knowledge, apart from knowing about the shipping business, in order to explain and understand Luetkens' business practices and, subsequently, to understand the events within the letter conversations regarding this business field in the Luetkens archive. That is the reason why I have prepended this chapter with an introduction on the reasons for Hamburg's special role in international business relations because it provides us with the first part of the necessary intelligible framework and the historical backdrop against which the subtleties and specific characteristics of Luetkens' activities in this business field will become understandable for us. To a certain extent, as a matter of fact, all the mentioned reasons for Hamburg's commercial success had their concrete bearing on Luetkens' establishment phase since they all shaped and fostered his career and career advancement in the first place, and therefore they will resonate continually during all the analytical chapters of this book. As we know, furthermore, Luetkens did not spend only one year in Hamburg, as the traveller suggested it as advisable and favourable for merchants, but he spent his childhood, youth and apprenticeship in this city. He therefore learned from his own personal experience what it meant to live and trade in Hamburg. He knew about the commercial advantages and features that Hamburg offered its citizens and merchants, the reasons why Hamburg represented such a favourable place to establish oneself. That is, he knew of the significance of Hamburg's favourable geographic location, the benefits of the opportunities for contact with many different trading nations, and he got to know the authority and strong reputation of the mercantile institutions of Hamburg as well as the good reputation that Hamburg merchants enjoyed in the world. After his return, establishment and settlement in Hamburg, he consequently also became an active part of these institutions.<sup>20</sup> For the time of his establishment phase, however, the most important characteristic and feature of Hamburg trade from which he directly profited was Hamburg's maritime neutrality. This phenomenon enabled him to enter into and to act successfully within the field of shipping, which, in turn, made a perfect foothold for his establishment phase.

In the next part of this chapter, I will elaborate on the subtleties of both the shipping business and maritime neutrality in 18th century trade and seafaring, which further fleshes out our picture around Luetkens' first important mercantile field of activity. On the basis of this thick contextualisation we are well prepared to analyse in detail the episode of the letter conversation that stands at the centre of the chapter, which

<sup>19</sup> On the shipping business see Davis, *English Shipping Industry*. See also the comprehensive bibliography by Morgan, Kenneth. *Ships and Shipping. Oxford Bibliographies online research guides*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. See Veluwenkamp, Jan Willem, and Werner Scheltjens, eds. *Early Modern Shipping and Trade: Novel Approaches Using Sound Toll Registers Online*. Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2018. For the French-Hamburg shipping business see Treutlein, Gerhardt. *Schiffahrt*; Prange, "Handel und Schiffahrt"; Baasch, "Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt." See Baasch, Ernst. *Quellen zur Geschichte von Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. 5 vol. Hamburg: Gräfe & Sillem, 1908-1910. See Baasch, Ernst. "Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts." In *Hamburg um die Jahrhundertwende 1800*, edited by Neue Börsen-Halle, 155-173. Hamburg: Neue Börsen-Halle, 1900.

<sup>20</sup> See the chapter on the "Making of a Merchant."

will give us crucial insights into the concrete mercantile operations within the 18th-century shipping business as well as insights into how letters were effectively used to implement and keep this business running. As regards insights into the powers of persuasion applied in business and letter practices during the 18th century, we will learn in this chapter about the first and one of the most fundamental practical principles of persuasion governing letter practice. This was the principle of demanding loyalty from correspondents in order to be able to put plans into practice. Luetkens demanded loyalty from his two natural brothers, whom he successfully recruited for his plans in his shipping business. On the basis of the persuasive principle of demanding loyalty and by drawing on fraternal bonds, Luetkens was able in the year 1744 to restructure and reorganize his entire shipping business, adapting it optimally to the conditions prevailing in this business field and in French-Hamburg trade during the 18th century. By means of his letters, as the letter episode will show, he was able to transfer the ownership of all his ships *pro forma* to his youngest brother Anton. For this purpose, Anton became a Hamburg citizen, a Large Burgher of the city of Hamburg. This means he applied for and paid for a so-called large citizenship in Hamburg, in German "großes Bürgerrecht", which allowed Luetkens to declare his ships neutral ships and provide them with a neutral Hamburg flag and passport, which were necessary for free passage, while at the same time staying highly active in French trade.<sup>21</sup> Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, in turn, became the official hirer of these ships from his brother, which allowed the merchant still to dispose of these ships freely, even though his brother was the official ship-owner. In order to convince his brother, and in order to pull off that trick in his shipping business, Luetkens made use of three very formative letter practices of the period, which will be demonstrated in the chapter as part of the principle of persuasion. First, he bundled several letters to different people in one letter packet that he sent to Hamburg. The enclosed letters were inserted into one another, meaning that he folded letters into letters. This practice represented a very typical pattern and material arrangement of letters during the Early Modern Period.<sup>22</sup>

The second letter practice he used was to deliberately not seal the inserted letters, but to leave them open, or – as the contemporaries called this practice – to produce unfinished letters, in German "ohnbeschwerte Briefe".<sup>23</sup> This practice allowed the respective addressees of the outer letter to decide for themselves whether or not they would forward these letters and how they should proceed further in this undertaking. By means of this practice, Luetkens was in essence able to materially convene a family

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the different forms of citizenship, the "große und kleine Bürgerrecht" in Hamburg (how to become a Small or Large Burgher) see the following explanations as well as Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 60-63 as well as Pantel, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, 26. See also Kopitzsch, "Zwischen Hauptrezeß und Franzosenzeit," 367.

<sup>22</sup> We can find thousands upon thousands of such letter packets enclosing letters in letters in the Prize Papers. See Dagmar Freist, "Uncurated Histories." There exists, however, no article or book dealing with this material practice in detail so far. See in general Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 85-108. Regarding the tuck-and-seal method of letterlocking see *ibid.*, 53-54. See Wiggins, *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, 173-193. With a special focus on letter materiality see Daybell, James. *Women Letter-Writers*, here 10-11 and 32-60. See Haasis, "Materialität."

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Schulte, Jeronimus to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, April 6, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/236.

council using only this letter packet. The outer letter was sent to his middle brother, Joachim; the first inserted letter was addressed to his youngest brother, Anton; and the last inserted letter was addressed to his youngest brother's master Luer Luers. Using the practice of not sealing enclosed letters, Luetkens provided his brothers with certain decision-making powers. They were able to decide how they wanted to proceed in the respective undertaking and using this material gesture he ultimately managed to convince his brother and Luer Luers to help and support him in this matter. The last letter practice I will present in this chapter is the practice of rhetorically skilful argumentation in letters which was used to react to criticism and to steal an addressee's thunder.<sup>24</sup> All of these letter practices were part and results of the practical principle of persuasion of demanding loyalty.

The crucial question to answer before dedicating our attention to the letter practices is, however, why they were necessary at all. Why did Luetkens have to reorganize his shipping business in the first place? In order to answer this question, I will first continue my thick contextualisation and further specify the conditions that prevailed for merchants during that time in the shipping business and the conditions that particularly prevailed for young wholesale merchants travelling and trading in foreign lands, in France in particular, during their establishment phase. This second part of my contextualisation will provide us with the necessary plausible framework that helps us to understand the particular material events in the letter episode that will be presented. As a matter of fact, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens did not decide right away after his apprenticeship to settle down in Hamburg, but he stayed unbound and free (and did not apply for citizenship in Hamburg) for the time that he spent in France. For this decision he had very good reasons, which will be presented in the next part of this chapter.

### 3.2 A Hamburg Merchant in France

#### Reasons for not Settling down for Business in Hamburg

The shipping business of a Hamburg merchant is an insightful topic relating to international trade relations and maritime neutrality because it demonstrates, on a general level, the opportunities, practices and typical ways of the Hanseatic trade participation on the international trading floor in the 18th century and it shows the challenges that accompanied this process.<sup>25</sup> Luetkens' case furthermore represents a significant example in this regard because his efforts and activities clearly demonstrate the challenges and demands, the constraints and problems, not just the incentives that the merchants faced in this situation. A most telling fact in this regard is that the merchant Luetkens

<sup>24</sup> See Redford, *The Converse of the Pen*, 1-15. See Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter*, 35-54, 87-128. See Fitzmaurice, "Like talking on paper?"

<sup>25</sup> See Davis, *English Shipping Industry*. Regarding Hamburg shipping, see Treutlein, *Schiffahrt*; Prange, "Handel und Schiffahrt"; Baasch, "Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt." Regarding the importance of the Hamburg shipping business and Hamburg merchants for France, see Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*, 267-290.

did not decide right away to settle down in Hamburg despite the presumably unequivocally beneficial situation prevailing there. Instead, when he hit the road after his service in the house of David Speelmeyer, the merchant instead deliberately left open all options as to when or where to establish himself. We will learn more about this in the chapter on how he found a business partner, but it seems that he was not averse to or even desirous to settle down and open a merchant house in France. In the end, however, he decided to settle down in Hamburg, but it took him a whole six years to make this decision, which raises the legitimate question: What took him so long to decide this matter? Why did he not come to this decision earlier? Why would he even have considered not establishing himself in Hamburg even though he would find such favourable conditions there? This fact reveals to us that there must have also been clear and severe reservations and reasons against the decision to settle down in Hamburg because otherwise Luetkens presumably would have decided more automatically and naturally to establish himself in the Elbe city. He must therefore have found some clear incentives to delay his decisions, and these incentives must have even rendered it possible or advisable to decide against a neutral status as a merchant in 18th-century Europe.

These incentives, and the said reasons that generally spoke against the decision to settle in Hamburg, are the topic in this part of the chapter. However, we must avoid creating a false impression. The explanations are not going to render the first part of the chapter obsolete. Quite on the contrary, the additional information that will be given represents a necessary complement to the first part. It represents the necessary opposite side to the benefits. If you like, it represents the cons to becoming a part of Hamburg's trade, or rather the pros of not staying neutral in the maritime field of the 18th century. But these factors nevertheless also notably shaped Hamburg's trade. As it will become obvious, it must be assumed that the trading operations of Hamburg merchants most often must have run precisely at the conjuncture between the two sides, because this was the place where trade was ultimately the most profitable.

On the basis of a deeper look into the enterprises Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens undertook in the mercantile field of the shipping business and the challenges he faced and overcame business field, this exploration of a middle way, leeway, or in other words, of a legal and commercial grey area, can be vividly and appropriately illustrated. Within his shipping business, Luetkens successfully managed to combine and utilize for his purposes both the benefits of a neutral status while at the same time still remaining capable of acting and trading relatively freely within the French Atlantic markets regardless of the restrictions of neutrality, and this even without having obtained an official status and large citizenship as a Hamburger. How he succeeded in this regard and what ways and means he found to overcome, or rather circumvent, the hurdles that stood in his way will be subsequently shown and analysed on the basis of the letter episode at the centre of this chapter.

Through his example we will gain a better understanding of how we have to assess the actual situation and concrete practice of Hamburg merchants regarding their trade participation in the international markets of the 18th century. On the one hand, we will learn from his activities that, speaking in strictly practical terms, the shipping business provided the basic foundation for many of the other trading activities of a wholesale merchant, such as commission trade. On the other hand, his example is indicative of

the common strategy used by Hamburg merchants to react to international trade policies, in terms of how they reacted to trade restrictions and to privileges offered. The way Luetkens handled his shipping business is representative of the way he basically handled all his affairs. He searched for a middle course, found leeway and was therefore able to literally manoeuvre through or, put more colloquially, muddle his way through the field of 18th century international trade. In all of his businesses presented in this book, the merchant chose the strategy of the middle way. All of these strategies helped him fight his way through the turmoils of his lifetime and the stage of life he was at. The example of the shipping business in essence is representative of the general way that Hanseatic merchants of the 18th century found ways and loopholes within the international trading system. With this part of the chapter, I will therefore also provide essential preparatory information for all the following chapters.

As will be shown, not only in this chapter but the entire book, the ways and means of doing business for Hamburg wholesale merchants were almost never only a question of being neutral or not neutral. Instead, it far more often took the form of manoeuvring right between the two poles, just as the Hamburg ships manoeuvred their way through the sea areas of the colonial superpowers. Especially for a merchant during his establishment phase, it was essential to find an appropriate course and to learn the rules of the game, including developing a certain intuition and instinct for what was legitimate, where to push the boundaries, and what was possible and lucrative but still feasible. If he had failed early on in the business field of the shipping business, it would in fact have been immensely difficult still to develop a good footing in business in general.

The reason for the latter is that most often the shipping business represented the first step on the career ladder, the foundation that provided the basic capital and starting point for a successful career in mercantile business.<sup>26</sup> Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens found this middle course and masterfully used the grey areas at least until the year 1745 when the capture of the *Hope* and the *Post van Hamburg* brought to light his wheelings and dealings in this strand of mercantile business. However, in August 1745 this unmasking of his activities could actually no longer do him great harm, except for the loss of his business archive and the goods on the ships. After all, at this point in his career, he was already on the verge of establishing himself in Hamburg and did not necessarily need to draw on the grey areas and strategies he had successfully applied in the two years before because from then on he would officially take on the status of a Hamburg merchant and act as such also in his shipping business. He became a Hamburg citizen, a *burgher*, three days after his return from France, signing his oath, the “Bürger=Eyd”,

---

26 See Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 83, 132. Regarding the necessity of choosing a middle course as young merchants, see Grassby, *Business Community*, 293. As a good comparative example to Luetkens's shipping business, see Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, chapter “Shipping and Trading in an Empire of the Seas,” 115-142. As another comparative example with a focus on the 19th century see Vogt, Annette-Christine. *Ein Hamburger Beitrag zur Entwicklung des Welthandels im 19. Jahrhundert: Die Kaufmannsreederei Wappäus im inter-nationalen Handel Venezuelas und der dänischen sowie niederländischen Antillen*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003. See Henninger, Bethmann, 316-344. See Morgan, *The Bright-Meyler papers*, particularly “Introduction,” 80-84.

on the 22 of September.<sup>27</sup> For the time between 1744 and 1745, however, he did use existing grey areas and he found a working strategy of his own to circumvent the problems that he faced through his unclear status, which in the end performed well and did him good service. The letter episode analysed in this chapter will pay an eloquent testimony to this. First of all, however, we will have to describe in detail the exact requirements for trading as a neutral party and the restrictions and problems that came with it before we can show how Luetkens found a solution to circumvent and therefore solve the problems. Bound to these requirements, we will also discover the reasons that spoke against the decision, or at least too hasty a decision, to settle down in Hamburg.

### 3.3 Maritime Neutrality

#### Benefits for a Neutral Merchant

As a man and merchant born and raised in Hamburg and having enjoyed a mercantile education there, one was still not automatically and officially deemed a Hamburg citizen and therefore did also not automatically obtain a neutral status. In order to obtain this status, one had to officially apply for and purchase a Hamburg citizenship. This would grant the applicant the right to call himself a Hamburg citizen, and therefore being a Hamburg merchant meant that as a merchant one would enjoy a neutral status in international trade. This citizenship would also entail the right to participate in Hamburg politics. The official Hamburg regulations distinguished between a large and a small citizenship, *Small Burghers* and *Large Burghers*. Consequently, for the purpose of obtaining neutrality, wholesale merchants needed to purchase the large citizenship, whereas the small citizenship was intended for smaller, mainly locally active businessmen and craftsmen, who also had ambitions to participate in the political sphere of the city.<sup>28</sup> As we learn from a letter by Nicolaus Gottlieb's brother Joachim, the large citizenship subsequently cost the applicants around 12-14 Reichsthaler (but could also cost up to 50 Reichsthaler depending on the family status). As a further requirement, as Joachim highlighted with regard to the case of a friend whose family history he compared to their own family history, one needed to verify that one was descended from a respectable Hamburg family, in which, ideally, the father had already possessed a Hamburg citizenship. Since their father Nicolaus Luetkens (1675-1736) was a respectable priest and large burgher in Hamburg Billwärder, and their uncle Joachim Kaehler was a respectable merchant and large burgher in Hamburg, the Luetkens brothers would not have run into problems in applying for the same large citizenship. Yet, as we know, Nicolaus Gottlieb hesitated and waited until the end of the year 1745 before he applied for it.<sup>29</sup> The important information in this respect, and with regard to the nature of

<sup>27</sup> His printed burgher oath, Bürger=Eyd, signed the 22 September 1745, can be found among the court records in the case of the ship *Post van Hamburg*, HCA 32/143/17. Thanks to Oliver Finnegan.

<sup>28</sup> See Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 60-63. See Pantel, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, 26. See Kopitzsch, "Zwischen Hauptreiß und Franzosenzeit," 367.

<sup>29</sup> See letter from Luetkens, Joachim to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 25, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

Hamburg's commercial and maritime neutrality in general, is that becoming a Hamburg merchant and becoming neutral was definitely a deliberate decision. That fact, in turn, leads us by implication directly to the first and basically the main reason that spoke against becoming a settled merchant in Hamburg. The question arises why it was optional at all for Hamburg inhabitants to decide whether or not to become a Hamburg citizen, burgher, "Bürger" in German, in the first place. The answer to this question can be found in the peace and commercial treaties that Hamburg held with its European neighbours. Therein, for instance in the important commercial and peace treaty of 1716 with France and its ally Spain, it is stated that Hamburg merchants as approved neutral trading partners of France were "allowed freedom of trade and shipping [...] in France" and Spain ["derselben Freyheit in der Handlung und Schiffarth geniessen"].<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, however, this paragraph also stipulated that with regard to all trading with the French colonies, meaning all the trade happening "outside Europe" [not "in Europa belegen"] was prohibited to all Hanseatic merchants. This was the crux of a neutral trade association with the colonial superpowers.<sup>31</sup> Hamburg merchants were not allowed direct trade with the French colonies or in colonial goods.

The only accepted way to gain direct access to the lucrative Atlantic French market was by applying for naturalisation in France, thus becoming a permanent resident of France. It was not sufficient merely to hold a status of neutrality to directly access and partake in the Atlantic market. The latter, however, represented, the main business area and the real gold mine of French trade during that time.<sup>32</sup> By means of this regulation, France tried to ensure the best advantage, growth and efficiency for their own markets and merchants, which was representative of the general protectionist, mercantilist economic policy that the French state pursued during this time and ever since the reign of Louis Quatorze and his finance minister Jean Baptist Colbert. Yet the regulation nonetheless also created opportunities for the neutrals. It did not generally exclude neutral merchants from participating in French trade. Instead, it reserved for them special sectors, from which, in turn, the French Crown and economy would also profit, namely the commission trade and the provision of logistic services. The latter of these stands at the centre of this chapter, followed by a chapter on the former.<sup>33</sup> Re-

30 Kommerz- und Seetraktat zwischen Ludwig XV. und den Hansestädten Bremen, Hamburg und Lübeck, 1716. Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Senat Cl. VI Nr. 5 Vol. 1 Fascicul, Art. I und Art II, Art. XXII. See Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 87-88. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 56, 166. See Weber, "German Merchants."

31 See also *Kommerz- und Seetraktat*, III (on the regulations regarding and the exempt from Capitation/"Kopfsteuer" and the Dixième /Zehnte), IV (on the exemption from the so called Droit de tonneau/"Faßgeld"), V (regarding the elimination of customs duties and the reduction of duties on import to 3 % to be paid to the Fermier Du Domaine d'Occident) and in general on the specificities of the privileges but also the constraints for Hamburg commercial activity in France.

32 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 167, 193. See also Weber, "The Atlantic Coast of German Trade."

33 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 14-15, 56, regarding the French *Droit d'Exclusif* that forbid the foreigners the direct trade with the colonies, *ibid.* 277. See also Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France*, 83-112. See Thompson, Gillian and Pierre Boulle. "France overseas." In *Old Regime France 1648-1788*, edited by William Doyle, 105-138. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. See Butel, *L'Économie française*. For an introduction see Butel, Paul. "France, the Antilles, and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: renewals of foreign trade." In *The Rise of Merchant Empires. Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World*, edited by James D. Tracy, 102-152. Cambridge: Cambridge Universi-

turning to the Hamburg merchants and the question of the disadvantages of a neutral status, we now understand why it was not an easy decision to decide for a neutral status. The main reason against settling down and establishing oneself in Hamburg was ultimately that the decision for commercial and maritime neutrality at the same time amounted to a decision against active participation in direct trade with colonial goods, and this was why merchants carefully assessed their decision.

For a long time, historians have therefore also assumed that, since Hanseatic merchants were in a strictly legal sense excluded from the direct trade, they were also naturally destined to play only a minor role, or put figuratively, the second fiddle in the Atlantic markets. In current research though, this hypothesis is often rejected and with the present book I also want to contribute to this reappraisal. The criticism of the thesis relates, however, not to the aspect of the typical activities and business fields of Hanseatic merchant in foreign countries, which were in fact intermediary activities, but it relates to the ultimate relevance of these activities for both the host economies and the careers and fortunes of these men. As examples like Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, but also the case of the merchants Johann Jakob Bethmann or Friedrich Romberg show, the foreign economies still provided enough opportunities for building a successful career and business as a wholesale merchant abroad and for attaining wealth and a good reputation. These neutral merchants' success kept pace with the success of the local merchant houses. Research has also stressed the important role that the merchants' intermediary activities played for their host countries as logistic scaffolding for the success of the superpowers.<sup>34</sup> Neutral merchants were indispensable for the superpowers, especially the kingdom of France. Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens was one of these merchants who acted as lubricants for the French economy. His example will show that, although direct trade was forbidden to him, Luetkens found several ways and fields of business which helped his career to prosper in France and which were decidedly granted to him as a merchant from Hamburg by the French Crown.

These fields of business represented the re-export of colonial goods from the French ports. Hamburg merchants were allowed to purchase and trade in the goods that had already been shipped to the European mainland and were in stock and available in France. The merchants were also highly active in the export of domestic products from France, first and foremost French wine, to central Europe and the Baltic. Hamburg merchants served as providers of logistics and partners for the further commercial re-marketing of colonial and domestic goods and products. In other words, Hamburg merchants provided shipping infrastructure. They were also highly active in auctions of French and Spanish prize goods and bought prize ships. Last but not least, and presented in greater detail in the next chapter, Hamburg merchants often acted as commission agents in France. This means that they traded as intermediaries and middlemen by order and on the account of French-based but also Hamburg-based merchants and other foreign merchants in France. All these fields of business were approved sectors and loopholes of Hanseatic trade activity officially recognised and supported by the French Crown and

ty Press, 1990. See Pourchasse, Pierrick. "Dynamism and Integration". The same applies to England, see Schulte Beerbühl, *German Merchants*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> See Jeannin, "Distinction des compétences," 316-318.

legislation.<sup>35</sup> So, if a Hamburg-born merchant did not plan to become naturalised in France – which actually exceedingly few did because in the end it was not necessary for being successful in France – there were nonetheless several lucrative trading opportunities in France. Many Hamburg merchants did follow this path because, though they did not always reach the level of profits of their French hosts, partners or competitors, these indirect routes of participation in Atlantic trade still provided very good profits. Moreover, many of them, including Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, found and established even more loopholes in addition to the officially acknowledged fields of activity, which further increased their profits.

The chapter on founding a merchant house will deal in this regard with the phenomenon of mixed merchant houses, that is, partnership between local and foreign merchants that even allowed easier access to colonial goods. In the commission trade, too, there were strategies allowing for alternative access routes to the Atlantic honey pot, which will be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>36</sup> However, in the context of the 18th-century shipping business and the subtleties of neutral status as a merchant, it suffices to stick to the official, regular opportunities and legal stipulations regarding Hanseatic trade activity in France to further outline the advantages and disadvantages of becoming Hamburg merchants. These prerequisites point us again to a second major argument against settling in Hamburg.

As things stood – substantially encouraged and in a way even required by the legal framework – all the mentioned business fields from re-export to commission trade more or less made it necessary or advisable to locate yourself close to the direct sales markets and therefore locate yourself directly in the French ports and not in Hamburg. Only in the French ports did the merchants have the direct contact and opportunity to get hold of the different Atlantic goods and also to inspect and select the goods suitable for re-export.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, we find big foreign communities in the major trading cities of France such as Bordeaux or Nantes, as well as in Spain The “German colonies”, “Les Colonies Germaniques” as they were called by the contemporaries, often represented one of the largest groups, because these French cities, as main hubs for Atlantic goods, functioned as their approved entrance gate to the respective market.<sup>38</sup> As re-

35 See particularly Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 190, but also 14-15, 55-56, 154-165, 178. See Weber, “German Merchants,” 104-114. See Weber, “Atlantic Coast of German Trade,” 106. See Pourchasse, “French Trade,” 17-20. See Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*. A concise English book review of Pourchasse’s work in English offers Marzagalli, Silvia. “Book Review: *Le commerce du Nord: les échanges commerciaux entre la France et l’Europe septentrionale au XVIIIe siècle*.” *Economic History Review* (60), no. 4 (2007): 851-853. See Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 34-35. See also Butel, Paul “Le trafic européen de Bordeaux de la guerre d’Amérique à la Révolution.” *Annales du Midi* 78 (1966): 37-82, here 72.

36 Regarding these mixed merchant houses, “gemischt-nationale Gesellschaften”, see Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 190.

37 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 14.

38 Regarding these German colonies or *nations* in Bordeaux and Cádiz see in detail Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*. See Weber, “Atlantic Coast of German Trade.” See also Butel, Paul. “Les négociants allemands de Bordeaux.” See in great detail already 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-

search has shown, almost all shipping and trade between France and Hamburg, and also more generally the *Commerce du Nord* including the Baltic trade, was controlled, driven and executed by these communities of foreigners serving as the distribution centres for French goods to the rest of Europe.<sup>39</sup> And even if a Hamburg merchant still traded and acted from his merchant house in Hamburg, he would nevertheless be highly dependent on these communities. He would need to draw on his own factors or commission agents in the foreign ports because only these middlemen, “their agent compatriots”, held the right and could process, settle and close his deals in the foreign ports, serving therefore as an extension of himself and his trade activity.<sup>40</sup> The role as middlemen was often gladly accepted especially by aspiring merchants on the eve of establishment because in doing so these men gained experiences in foreign goods and markets. At the same time, they developed a firm standing and reputation in the field of trade for themselves and accumulated capital.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, if we search for another reason why Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens’ decision to establish himself and settle down in Hamburg took him so long, we find the answer in this unique business opportunity in France. As a travelling merchant, Luetkens took on this role of a local agent, a commission agent and ship-owner. He thus acted as an intermediary, and agent compatriot for several merchants established in Hamburg, but also and especially for merchants from France and Spain, settling their business in the French ports. For himself, in turn, this opportunity served as the perfect way to fill his coffers before returning to his hometown.

The next supportive factor, which Luetkens took full advantage of and exploited to the maximum, was a logical consequence of the French efforts in attracting Hamburg merchants to become involved in the said re-export and re-distribution of their goods and to establish communities in the French ports: French incentives. This factor also represents a third major reason why a settlement in Hamburg might have occurred as a secondary choice for a young wholesale merchant. France, as well as its political and military Bourbon ally Spain, not only allowed the neutrals to take on the role of redistributors of their goods. They also created clear incentives that actively stimulated the targeted settlement and influx of Hamburg merchants to France, which also served the purpose of binding the neutral partners to the French homeland. The main incentives were that the powers allowed the foreign merchants to rent premises and warehouses in the French ports easily and freely.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Hanseatic merchants had to pay neither the *Dixième* (the tithe) nor the general taxes which applied for French citizens,

149. Such nations could also be found in other countries see in this regard also Ressel. Magnus. *Ein privilegiertes Händlernetz an der Lagune: Die „Nazione Alemana“ in Venedig und der deutsch-italienische Handel von 1648-1806*. Frankfurt (unver. Habil), 2017.

39 See Pourchasse, “French Trade,” 19-23. See the articles in Augeron, Mickael, and Pascal Even, eds. *Les Étrangers dans les villes-ports atlantiques. Expériences françaises et allemandes XV<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010, particularly Pourchasse, “L’immigration négociante,” 317-332. See Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*. See also Marzagalli, “Book Review: Le commerce du Nord.” See Kikuchi, Yuta. *Hamburgs Ostsee- und Mitteleuropahandel 1600–1800: Warenaustausch und Hinterlandnetzwerke*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2018, 256-298.

40 Pourchasse, “French Trade,” 20.

41 See also Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 81.

42 “Niederlassungsfreiheit” in German: “Ein Hamburger Kaufmann, der in eigener Sache oder für eine Firma nach Frankreich reiste, konnte sich dort ohne besondere Formalitäten in einer Stadt nieder-

the *capitation*, up until one year of staying and trading in France. They also enjoyed privileges of low duties on imports, 3-3.5% instead of the usual 6.5 % which other foreigners, for instance English or Prussian merchants had to pay. They were also exempted from special taxes such as the so-called *droit de tonneau*, which was a tax on casks loaded onto or offloaded from their ships.<sup>43</sup> In the commercial and peace treaty of 1716, the *droit d'Aubaine*, too, was suspended in the 18th century, the right of the French crown to confiscate all property when a citizen died. The treaty stipulated that the goods and warehouses of a foreign merchant did not automatically get impounded in the case of a merchant's death, but would instead be dealt with in line with his last will.<sup>44</sup>

All these privileges were clear incentives for Hamburg merchants to start a business or to conduct business in France. For aspiring wholesale merchants, however, the first point was crucial and conducive since this legal provision provided the basic means to successfully start one's own business in France as a merchant. All Hamburg merchants could simply rent premises or a warehouse in the French ports. This explains why the deponents in the additional interrogatories regarding case of the *Hope* of the British High Court of Admiralty were asked in 1747: "Had not the said Nicholas Gotlieb Luetkens while he lived and resided in France a Compting House or Compting Houses and one or more Warehouse or Warehouses at Brest St. Malos or Nants or one or other."<sup>45</sup> In his particular case, however, the situation and his handling of the situation had been devised even more cleverly. Luetkens decided not even to rent a merchant house or warehouses in France directly. Instead, he simply drew on his German, French or Swiss contacts and used their warehouses and storage facilities while most of the time also living and working in their merchant houses during his business trip. By doing so, he was not only highly flexible with regard to his enterprises and travels and his ports of call as a touring commission agent, but he was also playing it safe. He was thus immune to protests or legal claims from the outside, as for instance from the English or the French authorities. As is worth stressing again, all of this happened even without him being in possession of the official legal status as a neutral Hamburg merchant at that time. In his case, the legal framework undeniably provided him with a highly favourable situation for his trading and shipping activities.

This relative openness of French trade to foreigners, whether seen as a lax or liberal approach, appears on a whole rather astonishing. The extent of Hanseatic trade participation and particularly the concrete privileges conveyed to the Hanseatic merchants in France are particularly surprising in view of the general, protectionist mercantilist policy and the political approach that the Bourbon powers pursued during that time.<sup>46</sup> However, upon closer consideration, this favourable situation and the incentives for the

---

lassen und ein Zimmer nehmen oder für längere Zeit ein Haus mieten." Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 34.

Regarding the "Zehnt", "Kopfsteuer", "Faß-Geld" see ibid. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 166.

43 See also Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 87-88. *Kommerz- und Seetraktat*, Art. III, Art. IV, Art. V. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 159-165. See already Wurm, *Von der Neutralität des deutschen Seehandels*, 11- 21.

44 Pourchasse, "Dynamism and Integration," 46.

45 "Interrogatories administered and to be administered on the part and behalfe of Nicholas Craven," TNA, HCA 32/115/14.

46 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 14-15, 304. See Butel, *L'Économie française*, 83-88 ("Le royaume et le commerce extérieur"), 89-97 ("Les marchés de l'Europe du nord et d'Allemagne"). See Huhn,

foreign merchants did not directly contradict the mercantilist strategy in general. They even represented, if you will, in essence a good idea. Since the lucrative direct trade with the colonial goods was limited to French merchants and therefore was safeguarded as a secure and stable source of revenue for the French economy but still produced a high surplus, the involvement and integration of neutral trading partners in the French economy was an uncomplicated way of utilising this surplus. In other words, France found a welcomed trading partner, and easily accessible re-distributor and customer in the Hamburg or Bremen merchants. The activities of these merchants, in turn, promised additional profits, and thus extra revenue for the French economy with little to no effort required from the French Crown or French merchants.<sup>47</sup> They just had to grant the foreign merchants access to their markets, allocate them a specific trading sector and cooperate with them. This process is vividly demonstrated in the Luetkens archive. In addition, the French economy in return naturally also profited from the imports of Hanseatic goods to their ports, which most of the time consisted of goods that were highly needed in the French economy, such as linen, for instance for accoutrement of the colonies, as well as timber or wood for the French ships.<sup>48</sup>

In sum, the legal foundation and provisions for Hanseatic merchants, and particularly Hamburg merchants in France, provided a win-win-situation.<sup>49</sup> This led to the result that the French merchants held the neutral merchants in high regard for their services and vice versa. From a contemporary point of view, among Bordeaux merchants, this esteem went so far that the locals even “preferred on the whole to leave trade management to the foreign colonies based in Bordeaux [already] since the XVIIth.”<sup>50</sup> Or, to quote the Nantes merchant Descazaux du Hallay, the majority of French merchants, although naturally not all of them, agreed on “how important it was to allow foreigners to bring their goods into France for their own benefit and in their own ships without us having to go to fetch such goods from their country in our ships. Idem for allowing them to pick up and transport our goods in their country for their benefit and in their ships rather than to send these to them in our vessels”.<sup>51</sup>

---

*Handelsverträge*, 6. See Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France*, 83-112. See in general Doyle, *Old Regime France*.

47 See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 158. See Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*, 285-290, and in general 195-201, 267-290. See Pourchasse, “French Trade,” See Butel, *L’Économie française*, 77-82. See Pourchasse, “L’immigration négociante,” 317-332.

48 Weber, “Atlantic Coast of German Trade,” 101. Regarding the role of linen in transatlantic slave trade see Steffen, Anka. “Schlesische Leinwand als Handelsgut im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der frühen Neuzeit. Das Beispiel der Hirschberger Kaufmanns-Societät.” Themenportal Europäische Geschichte 2017, [www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-1696](http://www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-1696), accessed September 20, 2020. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 229. See also Lindberg, “Rise of Hamburg,” 657. See Ressel, “Das Alte Reich und transatlantische Sklavenhandel.”

49 See also Augeron/Even, *Les Étrangers*. Particularly 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 XVIe-XIXe siècle*, edited by Mickael Augeron and Pascal Even, 45-62. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2010.

50 Butel, “Les négociants allemands de Bordeaux,” 593 (translation by Pourchasse, “French Trade,” 19).

51 Archives Départementales Loire Atlantique C 754, quoted after Pourchasse, “French Trade,” 16.

This situation accurately demonstrates the specific role, the importance and the general way of Hanseatic merchants' participation within the French trading system. The Hamburg merchants constituted the largest group of Hanseatic merchants active in France, followed by Bremen merchants. Through their presence in the major trading hubs and their taking on the important re-export and redistribution of French goods, the Hamburg merchants were successfully able to partake and be capable of trading and having their share in French Atlantic trade, even though they faced mercantilist trade barriers and were excluded from direct trade with the colonies.<sup>52</sup> Yet by integrating themselves in the market by means of occupying the approved niches that the French economy granted them, they were able to effectually overcome, or to put it more accurately, to essentially dismantle the French legal trading barriers from within and conduct a profitable business. On the other hand, the benefits on the side of the French trading partners were clear, too. France and its economy benefitted hugely from neutral partners because they fulfilled the tasks assigned to them diligently and with great success: The Hamburgers redistributed great amounts of French goods to central Europe, including the landlocked area stretching from Hamburg to Italy, and Northern Europe, including the Baltic, thus turning Hamburg into the major outlet for French colonial and domestic goods. In doing so, the Hamburg merchants significantly shaped and supported the net balance and overall positive balance of the French economy.<sup>53</sup> The plans seemed to pay off for both sides.<sup>54</sup>

In a long-term perspective, however, as the French historian Pierrick Pourchasse convincingly argued in his book *Le commerce du Nord*, it was precisely this openness and liberal handling of the question of integrating neutral trading partners into the French economy that unfortunately turned out to be detrimental to French economic power and the French role on the world market, especially in comparison with their British counterpart. By admitting and approving the neutral powers to handle large parts of the northbound and eastbound trade, France forewent having direct influence on these important markets in the North and East. This, in turn, allowed their biggest rival, Britain, to occupy large parts of this lucrative segment instead. As a matter of fact, as

52 Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 14-15, 277, 304. See the new project by Magnus Ressel. As an introduction see Ressel, Magnus. "Hamburg und die Niederelbe im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der Frühen Neuzeit." *WerkstattGeschichte* 66/67 (2014): 75-96.

53 See the ANR project TOFLIT: Transformations of the French Economy through the Lens of International Trade, 1716-1821. For more information see <https://toflit18.hypotheses.org>, accessed September 12, 2018. See Charles, Loïc, and Guillaume Daudin. "Cross-checking STRO with the French Balance du Commerce data." In *Early Modern Shipping and Trade: Novel Approaches Using Sound Toll Registers Online*, edited by Jan Willem Veluwenkamp and Werner Scheltjens, 133-150. Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2018. See Charles, Loïc, and Guillaume Daudin, 2015. "Eighteenth-Century International Trade Statistics. Sources and Methods." *Revue de l'OFCE, Presses de Sciences-Po* 4 (2015): 7-36.

54 Regarding the consequences for Hamburg imports from France see Pfister, Ulrich. "Great divergence, consumer revolution and the reorganization of textile markets: Evidence from Hamburg's import trade, eighteenth century." *Economic History Working Papers* 266 (2017): 1-73, regarding sugar particularly 40-44. See already Baasch, Ernst. "Zur Statistik des Ein- und Ausfuhrhandels Hamburgs Anfang des 18. Jahrhunderts." *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 54 (1929): 89-144.

a consequence of the French policy regarding neutral partners, almost all French exchanges with the North and the East, especially with the Baltic, rested in the hands of foreigners, particularly Hamburg merchants. Instead of being advantageous and only conducive for the French economy, therefore, this situation, in a macro-economic perspective, weakened French economic development, as Pourchasse was able to prove. This led to the effect that the British attained and maintained the leading position in this market segment, which became one of the major factors, apart from misfortunes in war events and battles, why France forfeited their supremacy in the world and on the world market during the 18th century.<sup>55</sup>

In general, the English case represents a counterexample of how to deal with foreigners and foreign merchants in terms of their commercial policy. In contrast to France and Spain, in England foreign merchants did not find such favourable conditions and access opportunities as they found on the continent. As laid down in the Navigation Acts, beginning with the Navigation Act of 1651, England pursued a stricter protectionist policy than their Bourbon neighbours. Hanseatic merchants were strictly excluded from direct access to the British colonial market, unless they decided for naturalisation.<sup>56</sup> Without naturalisation, however, they did not enjoy any privileges or opportunities to participate in British trade, particularly during war.<sup>57</sup> This was also the reason why many Hamburg merchants generally decided to move to France instead of Britain to try their luck in trade because there they would find better and more lucrative conditions. As one of these merchants, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, too, took this decision even though one of his first travel destinations had been London where he visited his uncle Anthony, who was established and naturalised in London. France, however, provided him with much more lucrative opportunities to develop a firm standing, a good

55 See Pourchasse, *Le commerce du Nord*, particularly "Quatrième partie. La stratégie du négoce étranger," 267-328. See also Pourchasse, "Dynamism and Integration"; "French Trade." English quote: Marzagalli, "Book Review: Le commerce du Nord," 852.

56 See in general Newman, *Anglo-Hamburg Trade*, here particularly 149-159, but also 7-11. Regarding the navigation acts see Morgan, Kenneth. "Mercantilism and the British Empire, 1688-1815." In *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688-1914*, edited by Donald Winch and Patrick K. O'Brien, 165-91. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. See Andrews, Charles M. "The Acts of Trade." In *The Cambridge History of the British Empire Vol 1. The Old Empire: From the Beginnings to 1783*, edited by John Holland Rose, Arthur P. Newton, and Ernest A. Benians, 268-99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929. See Pincus, Steve. "Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2012): 3-34. See already Harper, Lawrence A. *The English Navigation Laws. A Seventeenth-Century Experiment in Social Engineering*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939. See also Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 7.

57 See Schulte Beerbühl, *German Merchants*, 13-24. Yet still Hamburg merchants traded heavily with and in Britain in the 17th century and still in the 1740s, as Schulte Beerbühl and Newman are able to vividly demonstrate and show. However, the ties of Hamburg merchants with France were yet many times stronger. For British merchants, in turn, "Hamburg ranked in the forefront of destinations for England's export trade as a whole, for this free Imperial city on the Elbe was the point of entry to a vast north-European hinterland reached by a network of waterways extending deep into Silesia, Saxony, Bohemia, Austria and southern Germany." Roseveare, *Markets and Merchants*, 51. See for the 19th century Krawehl, Otto-Ernst. *Hamburgs Schiffs- und Warenverkehr mit England und den englischen Kolonien, 1814-1860*. Cologne: Böhlau, 1977.

reputation and gains in capital and to establish himself as a wholesale merchant. He ended up operating all of his shipping business mainly from France and on the shipping route between France, Spain and Hamburg.<sup>58</sup>

For the Hamburg merchants, the macroeconomic conditions did not discriminate against them in the end. Quite on the contrary, the conditions even decidedly strengthened the merchants' role and significance on the world market in the long run and helped them through the turmoils of war. The quarrels between the superpowers also did not generally perturb the main protagonist of this book, and the long-term developments had no influence on his success during his establishment phase. As a Hamburg merchant traveling France during the mid-18th century, still with close contacts in England, Holland, Spain, and in several other countries, as a cosmopolitan, he emerged from the contemporary situation as the beneficiary third party, as in the proverb that when two dogs fight for a bone, the third runs away with it.

Nonetheless, there is a further limitation with regard to the relative freedom of trade prevailing for Hanseatic merchants in France. This limitation largely correlates with the said English influence on the international maritime transport sector. It also represents the main factor why every status of neutrality was ultimately always fragile and negotiable.<sup>59</sup> The one thing that proved to have considerably corrosive effects on the status of neutrality in the 18th century was again the human factor. First, what corroded the status of neutrality was the general human propensity to refuse to allow others a place in the sun unless one got to enjoy the exact same privilege oneself. Secondly, what corroded the status of neutrality was also the human propensity to also always seize these opportunities which serve one's own best interests.<sup>60</sup>

The final problem that arose for Hamburg merchants trading between France and Hamburg was simply that their ships, during their passage from France to Hamburg, were still captured by British privateer ships. From the English standpoint, Hamburg merchants trading in France were allying themselves with the enemy.<sup>61</sup> The supposedly safe and free passage thus in practice did not run completely smoothly and was often inhibited. This problem generally applied to all neutral shipping. The situation was that, although Hamburg held peace treaties and had commercial treaties with the different belligerent parties of the time separately and therefore their shipping activities generally were classified and recognised as neutral, they nevertheless were not immune to captures by the respective conflicting parties.<sup>62</sup>

58 On Spanish-Hamburg trade, see Pohl, *Die Beziehungen Hamburgs zu Spanien*.

59 See Marzagalli/Müller, "Forum: Negotiating neutrality," 108-192.

60 See *ibid*. See Müller, "Maritime Neutrality," 53-58. See also Salvemini, Biagio. "The 'intervention practices of the late ancien régime: Notes on the institutional and mercantile spheres of eighteenth-century Europe." In *War, Trade and Neutrality. Europe and the Mediterranean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, edited by Antonella Alimento, 160-170. Milano: FrancoAngeli Storia, 2011.

61 Regarding British privateering see Starkey, *British Privateering*.

62 "Every power at war is naturally attentive to prevent its enemies from carrying on a free trade under the protection of neutral colors," asserted a *Mémoire Instructif* in the summer of 1756. *London Magazine*, May 1756, quoted in Truxes, "Commerce Raiding," 13. Consequently, neutrality could not protect Hamburg and its ships "from hostile pressure by land and by sea". Roseveare, *Markets and Merchants*, 171.

Although the status of neutrality applied to Hamburg ships and goods, it did not, in fact, apply to those goods carried on Hamburg ships that belonged to a respective enemy in the sea war. In purely practical terms, this means that during the War of the Austrian Succession and its sea wars, which were waged between *inter alia* England and the alliance of France and Spain during the time under investigation in this book, the British authorities of course did not approve of Hamburg's supposedly neutral trading activities with the French and Spanish enemy. This was because they did not regard this trading activity as neutral, and the exact same held true for the French and Spanish side as regards Hamburg's trade with England.<sup>63</sup> Whenever an English ship therefore found French or Spanish cargo on a Hamburg ship, it regarded these goods as enemy goods and the act of transporting these goods would be regarded as associating with the enemy. As a result, the ships were captured and the goods confiscated and resold by the English. The status and benefits of neutrality therefore ultimately amounted to a game of chance, depending on the circumstances and events during the voyages of the ships. With regard to the situation prevailing in the English Channel in 1744 and 1745, the result of this was basically that lots of Hamburg ships were captured by the English because the English suspected behind every ship coming from France, or having passed the coastline of France, a French ally. As the previous explanations have shown, these suspicions were in fact not completely unsubstantiated because, since France supported and approved of the particular ways of Hamburg's participation in their transshipment of goods, the Hamburg merchants would of course take on these opportunities and the English found French cargo on the ships. This again points us to the general crux of neutrality. The general situation prevailing during the sea wars of the time led to the fact that neutrality always meant quite literally that the neutrals were unavoidably caught between the fronts. This meant by implication that the neutral powers were in effect always forced to choose a side and allegiance. The temptation for profits often was simply too great to not only trade in indubitably neutral goods such as timber, wood or linen, but also to invest on a large scale in the trade and re-export of colonial goods owned by French merchants, and therefore accept and risk the consequences that these goods were in the end contestable by the respective rival powers. Neutrality therefore always took the form of running the gauntlet and was highly dependent on personal decisions and also on luck. With regard to the latter, however, there were some ways and means to at least tip the odds in one's favour.<sup>64</sup>

With this last point, we return to the specific case of Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, his shipping business in France and the ultimate reason why he did not decide right away to settle down in Hamburg. In the years 1744 and 1745, Luetkens already owned and maintained nine merchant ships in total, as a ship-owner or part-owner. He had

63 See in this regard, regarding France, also the *Kommerz- und Seetraktat* between France and Hamburg from 1716, which states that "allein die Seiner Königl. Majest. Feinden zuständige Güther und die Contrabande Wahren weggenommen werden." See Huhn, *Handelsverträge*, 87-88.

64 See Schnakenbourg, Éric, ed. *Neutres et neutralité dans l'espace atlantique durant le long XVIIIe siècle (1700-1820): une approche globale*. Bécherel: Les Perséides, 2015. See Schnakenbourg, *Entre la guerre et la paix*. See Pantel, *Hamburgische Neutralität*, 1. See Newman, "Hamburg in the European Economy," 57-93.

bought the ships not just in Hamburg but mainly in French and Spanish ports, often with the help of French merchants. Frequently, such ships were Prize ships captured by French privateers, offered at auctions which foreign merchants were allowed to attend with the right to bid in France.<sup>65</sup> Several of his ships had been originally English ships. For his ships, however, he often chose German names.<sup>66</sup> He used the ships for trading in Hamburg goods, but mainly he traded and shipped French goods on these ships for which he had taken commissions. Luetkens provided logistic services or infrastructure on a large scale, that is, transhipment services and storage space within his ships, for French merchants. He also offered this opportunity to Dutch merchants, who used his service for the transshipment of their goods to other French ports or to Hamburg. Although Luetkens also carried out business with English merchants, mainly through the connection with his London-based uncle, he had taken the decision, for the purpose of establishing himself in the world of trade, to trust and collaborate mainly with French merchants and he accepted and risked the consequences. The promise of profits outweighed the risks and presumably made the risks appear worth taking. The latter fact explains why it took him so long to return to Hamburg and to settle down there because of the many business opportunities in France which helped him “to increase his fortune” (“Glück zu pusiren”), as he himself explained it in a letter to his future brother-in-law.<sup>67</sup> However, eventually he returned to Hamburg at the end of the year 1745, as a reputable merchant, and later in life furthermore became the third largest Hamburg importer of one of the most important colonial commodities. It appears that history proved him and his decision right.<sup>68</sup> He must have therefore chosen the right path and the right ways and means to make his fortune in France and to develop a solid standing, not least through his shipping business, despite facing the obstacles.

Two of the strategies to overcome the difficulties were rather common. First of all, Luetkens made use of an institution that was just in the ascendant during the 18th century and became one of the most important institutions for all merchants doing business in Atlantic trade during the era, which was the insurance industry.<sup>69</sup> Particularly

65 See letter from Bethmann, Johann Jakob to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, November 12, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

66 The ship were called *Die Hamburger Börse*, *Die Freyheit*, *Commercium*, *Cutte Harmonie*, *Post von Hamburg*, *Die Hoffnung*, but he also owned the *Bretagne*, *Minerva*, *La Domenienne*. See letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, to Hertzer & von Bobart, July 15, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 220. See letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Anton, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 1.

67 Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Engelhardt, Erenfried, August 3, 1745, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 583.

68 See Introduction. See Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 250.

69 On maritime insurance business Barbour, Violet. “Marine Risk and Insurance in the Seventeenth Century.” *Journal of Economic and Business History* 1, no. 4 (1929): 561-596. See Koch, Peter. *Geschichte der Versicherungswirtschaft in Deutschland*. Karlsruhe: Verlag Versicherungswirtschaft GmbH, 2012, particularly 29-60 (regarding private insurances). See also Denzel, Markus A. “Hamburg-Swedish connections: exchange rates and maritime insurance from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century.” In *Preindustrial commercial history: flows and contacts between cities in Scandinavia and North-Western Europe*, edited by Markus A. Denzel and Christina Dalhede, 199-230. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014.

private insurances began to flourish during the 18th century. Such private insurances on ships and crews had only become possible for Hamburg merchants since the year 1731, when the Hamburg *Assecuranz- und Havareiordnung* was revised, legally allowing this opportunity for the first time. In the following decades the private insurance sector grew considerably and became an essential prerequisite for Hamburg trade.<sup>70</sup> By securing his business against external attacks, not only against capture but also against the dangers of bad weather or even shipwreck, through taking on insurances, mainly through an Amsterdam private insurance company, on both his ships and his goods, the merchant Luetkens was able to at least curtail possible losses or damages to his ships and his goods. Later in his life, the merchant and then Hamburg senator Luetkens became one of the initiators and founding fathers of the first Hamburg *Assecuranz-Compagnie für See-Risico und Feuers-Gefahr* in 1765, which was the first ever Hamburg insurance joint-stock company, "Versicherungs-Aktiengesellschaft" in German.<sup>71</sup>

The second strategy for financial and legal protection he used in his shipping business was the practice of splitting potential risks to his business enterprises through splitting the shares of his ships and goods. This strategy was very common among merchants already during the preceding centuries. Luetkens offered or awarded part shares in his ships and the goods loaded on his ship to other merchants or offered other, French, Hamburg, Spanish, Swiss, or Dutch merchants to load their cargo on his ships. He also split insurances on the cargo, "Partenreederei" in German. Most usually in Luetkens' enterprises, three or four merchant shareholders shared the risk and subsequently also potential profits of a shipping enterprise. Luetkens therefore was able to at least minimise the risk of total losses, as best as possible, because if one ship and its cargo went missing or was damaged or seized, he still owned several other shares in his other ships, which would, at best, compensate for the loss of a ship or its cargo, or the delay to profits that could arise through captures.<sup>72</sup>

The third and most crucial practical strategy, however, that Luetkens used and which his success in the shipping business was built on, was far less common. It was also far less self-evident than the first two strategies because it represented not an officially acknowledged and regular way of proceeding but a grey area practice. This strategy in essence was shrewd trickery, with which Luetkens was, however, able to solve or circumvent most of the existing obstacles and problems that prevailed in Atlantic shipping business for Hanseatic merchants with regard to neutral trading and shipping. By means of this strategy he was able to perform the feat and balancing act of actually gaining lucrative access to the French market and its goods with the discretionary power of representing a free trader without a Hamburg neutral status and passport

<sup>70</sup> See Ressel, *Sklavenkassen*, 657. See "Hamburger Assekuranz- und Havarie-Ordnung von 1731." In *Sammlung der hamburgischen Gesetze und Verfassungen*, edited by Johannes Klefeker. Hamburg: Piscator, 1769, Tit. X Von Assekuranz für Türkengefahr und auf der Menschen Leben, 97.

<sup>71</sup> See Koch, *Versicherungswirtschaft*, 45.

<sup>72</sup> See Davis, *English Shipping Industry*, 82-87. See Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, 132. See Witt, Jann Markus. *Master next God? Der nordeuropäische Handelsschiffskapitän vom 17. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*. Hamburg: Convent, 2001, 255. 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.

while at the same time still attaining and maintaining neutral status for all his ships and his goods. Once again, the secret of his success lay in his skill for finding a middle way and exploiting a grey area. For this purpose, he used every single opportunity in existence for Hamburg merchants that I have outlined above. The fundamentally important skill and practice that enabled him to perform this trick and that allowed him to walk the tightrope, was to write letters. Furthermore, his negotiation skills were highly important for his correspondence and last but not least, what did become immensely important to put his business to work, was his power of persuasion. His persuasive skills and competences allowed him to recruit and integrate other people into his plans, which represented the decisive key and determining factor for his strategy for finding solutions and his success.

In the following episodes of letter conversations among Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, his brother Anton in Hamburg, Anton's Hamburg merchant master Luer Luers, his brother Joachim in Hamburg, his uncle Anthony in London and his letter conversations with some of his main trading partners in Hamburg, France, and Spain, we will learn about the strategy and the shrewd trick behind Luetkens' shipping business and he concocted this plan and put the strategy into practice. With the help and on the basis of the previous explanations we are sufficiently well-equipped to analyse and directly understand the episode, its subtleties, its general background and the conditions for the material events happening before our eyes because the explanations have provided us with the necessary thick contextualisation.

In his book *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680-1830* (German Merchants in Atlantic Trade 1680-1830), Klaus Weber stated critically that the German participation and integration in Atlantic trade during this period is unfortunately still a highly under-researched topic. He observed that "hitherto it had hardly been sufficiently scientifically researched how closely the German economy worked together and was interconnected with the colonial economies of its western neighbours and to what great extent the German economy profited from [and participated in] the colonial empires of the time."<sup>73</sup>

Luetkens' case provides us with the opportunity to further expand our knowledge on this topic and to find a further remedy to this general research desideratum. In addition and as a complement to Weber's works, this book offers a concrete microhistorical study of the role and the practices of German merchants in Atlantic trade, with a particular focus on letter and business practices. Through this microhistory, we gain a striking and impressive insight into the characteristics of the Hanseatic trade participation in the 18th century and the tricks it employed. At the same time, we read the impressive story of a young man who later became one of the most important economic actors and players in 18th century Hamburg, but who apparently already knew how to manage his affairs during his establishment phase, which therefore set the right course for his future career.

---

73 "Es wurde bisher kaum untersucht, wie eng die Wirtschaft der deutschen Länder mit den Kolonialwirtschaft westlicher Nachbarn verflochten war und wie sehr sie von diesen Kolonialimperien profitierte." Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute*, 27. See also Weber, "German Merchants."

The practical principle of persuasion applied in 18th-century correspondence that will become apparent from the letter episode and that shows its characteristics and powers in the analysis as an important mainstay for putting plans into practice by means of letters is the practical principle of persuasion through demanding loyalty. Practising loyalty in this regard exceeded the level of mere trust between merchant partners as a basis for business, as was already extensively researched in the last decades. But apart from trusting in each other's capabilities and trustworthiness, loyalty as a concept included a person's willingness and readiness to act for the sake and on behalf of someone else, even if these actions were not mandatory.<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, practising loyalty included a certain altruistic attitude. Luetkens asked this loyalty in the following letter episode from his two brothers by drawing on and referring to their fraternal bond. Both eventually helped him in this undertaking.<sup>75</sup> In order to put his plans into practice, Luetkens used particular letter-writing practices, a combination of both material practices as well as textual practices in letter writing, which will be presented in detail in the following part of this chapter, woven into the episode. Through these practices and the practical principle of persuasion underpinning them, Luetkens was able to win his brothers over to his plans, which again facilitated his success in the shipping business. I will start the episode, however, with a prehistory to the actual story of how Luetkens managed to convince his brothers to help him with the reorganisation of his shipping business, because this first story prompted his decision to concoct his shrewd plan in the first place.

---

74 On the importance of trust in merchant communities, see Haggerty, *Merely for Money*, 66–96. See also Lamikiz, *Trade and Trust*, 141–181. See Muldrew, Craig. *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998. See Winter, Mabel. “The collapse of Thompson and Company: credit, reputation and risk in early modern England.” *Social History* 45, no. 2 (2020): 145–166, DOI: 10.1080/03071022.2020.1732125. See Aslanian, Sebouh. “Social Capital, ‘Trust’ and the Role of Networks in Julfan Trade: Informal and Semi-Formal Institutions at Work.” *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 3 (2006): 383–402. Regarding the process of building trust in letters, see Dossena, Marina. “Building trust through (self-)appraisal in nineteenth-century business correspondence.” In *Social Roles and Language Practices in Late Modern English*, edited by Päivi Pahta et al., 191–209. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2010. Regarding the concept of loyalty during the 18th century, see the important article McCormack, Matthew. “Rethinking ‘Loyalty’ in Eighteenth-Century Britain.” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 3 (2012): 407–421, stressing the importance of differentiating between the practice of loyalty and loyalism (focusing, however, on political actors.) The article “argues that ‘loyalism’ was not a current term in the eighteenth century, and that ‘loyalty’ had specific meanings for different political groups [in this book I am focussing on the mercantile group]. It could connote a religious, a legal or an emotional tie.” *Ibid.*, 407. In this chapter the focus is on the latter meaning. McCormack emphasizes and “suggest[s] that historians need to refocus on the language and concept of ‘loyalty’ on which much of it rests.” *Ibid.*

75 See Capp, Bernard. *The Ties That Bind: Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, chapter 3, “Fraternal bonds” on the concept of family solidarity and support. Regarding family relationships and letter-writing practice, see Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*.

### 3.4 The Episodes: How Luetkens Reorganized His Shipping Business

#### A Bitter Lesson

In the spring of 1744, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' business trip through France took him to Bordeaux, where he lived and traded in the French-German merchant house of Bethmann & Imbert.<sup>76</sup> During the months he spent there, he dealt in various goods, primarily in sugar. As one of the several business ventures he undertook during that time, in April 1744 he invested in the re-export of sixty casks, in the usual contemporary measure called sixty "hogsheads" or in German "Oxhoft", of French Martinique sugar from Bilbao to Hamburg. This sugar had been bought for him, that is, in his name and for his account, several months earlier, in December 1743, in the Spanish port of Bilbao by the French merchant Jean Baptiste Lacoste. In him, Luetkens had found the necessary French middleman, who allowed him direct access to the precious goods. The goods were subsequently stored in Lacoste's warehouse in Bilbao.<sup>77</sup> Almost half a year later, the goods were then to be shipped to Hamburg, where the demand for sugar at that time seemed favourable and promised high revenues. The fact, however, that Luetkens was living in Bordeaux at that time, while the sugars were stored in Bilbao, made it necessary to handle this entire enterprise by means and on the basis of letter correspondence. This fact allows us today to reconstruct the whole implementation, management and the processing of this business affair because all letters exchanged in this undertaking, both incoming and outgoing, can still be found amongst the papers of the Luetkens archive.

However, the actual main story of this chapter only starts at the point at which it became clear that the transshipment of these 60 casks of sugar turned into a nightmare for Luetkens, even though in the end it still resulted in a relatively positive outcome considering the initial situation. Yet, the initial situation induced Luetkens to take certain measures and steps to prevent similar problems in the future. These measures are the actual object of interest in this chapter because they were to become formative and characteristic for Luetkens' entire handling of his shipping business and were the key to his success in this field of business, thus providing us with important insights into the pitfalls and opportunities of Hanseatic shipping in this era. Furthermore, since these steps were primarily put into practice by writing, sending and receiving letters, they reveal the major role and significance that the practice of letter-writing played for the occupational advancement of merchants during their establishment phase. First, however, we will have to clarify what went wrong during the shipment of the sixty casks of

---

76 The following explanations are based on letters sent from and to Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens written in May and June 1744, TNA, PRO, HCA 32/232-234. Quotations from individual letters are further specified in the footnotes.

77 The sugar was offered at a public sale in Bilbao and therefore fell into the category of goods traded in France directly (and therefore these goods did not fall into the category of Spanish or French colonial goods coming from the colonies). The good therefore met with the conditions for neutral trade as defined in the peace and commercial treaty of 1716.

sugar in order to understand what triggered the subsequent measures and steps in the first place and why they became necessary at all.

After the purchase of the 60 hogsheads of French Martinique sugar, Luetkens offered and resold parts of the cargo to other merchants, in order to split the cargo and therefore minimise his own risk, which was usual practice during that time. He kept a 1/6 share in the goods himself; another 1/6 was assigned to the Hamburg merchant house Hertzner & von Bobartt, for whom he worked as a commission agent in several enterprises during that time. The two merchants in Hamburg, in turn, safeguarded his interests in Hamburg during his absence as his “true and undoubted agents and attorneys”.<sup>78</sup> The other parts were assigned to and divided between the French merchants Lichigaray Jeune from Bayonne, Aché & Aché and the French-German merchant house of Bethmann & Imbert, whose shares in this enterprise came as no surprise since Luetkens was living in their house during that time. Notwithstanding this allocation of shares, Luetkens took responsibility and was in charge of the loading and transshipment of the entire cargo of 60 casks of sugar while the other shareholders’ task was simply to note their interest in their accounts. Luetkens also looked for a suitable ship for the re-export and he applied for insurance for the cargo, which was effected by the Amsterdam merchant and insurance house of Cornelis de Meyere & Sons. This acceptance of an insurance on the cargo was very important for Luetkens because it was to be feared that the ship could encounter problems during its journey to Hamburg. This risk was further heightened by the fact that Luetkens decided to use a French ship, with a French flag, and a French ship’s captain, captain Plaisance, for the transport of his cargo to Hamburg, even though France was in a state of war with England at that time. The reasons why Luetkens decided to choose a French ship for the transshipment of the goods anyway are not entirely clear, especially because he himself, as he wrote in a letter to the French merchant Lichigaray in Dutch, had “always been of the opinion to prefer to spend 2 or 3 Florins more on a Dutch ship than to load on a French ship”. This was because Dutch ships, just like Hamburg ships, enjoyed neutral status in international waters during that time.<sup>79</sup>

Maybe, in this letter to his middleman Lacoste, we already find the answer to that question. As possible reasons for the choice of a French ship, it can be assumed that Lacoste himself had suggested this solution because he himself held shares in the French ship in question and the goods on the ship, or simply that the insurance premie (insurance rate) was better. Proof for this assumption can also be found in a later letter from the Hamburg merchants Hertzner & von Bobartt, in which they wrote that “they

78 Attestation of Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens as part of the as part of the *Additional Hearings and Attestations*, TNA, HCA 32/143/17.

79 “[...] weet dat ik jyder Tydts van opinie ben lyffers in een hollander 2 à 3 F. meer te gheeven alls in een frans Schip te laaden.” Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Lichigaray Jeune, Timothée, (presumably) March-May 1744 (date unreadable), TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book III, no. 1. Regarding the merchants’ fear that the Dutch also declare war, see letter from Hertzner & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 29, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

guess that Mr. Lacoste is interested in this enterprise and other Spaniards".<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the involvement of the other French merchants could have been a determining factor because through their participation in the ship, it would in any case be deemed a French ship. Or, as the simplest answer to the question, maybe during that time there simply was no other ship than a French or Spanish one at anchor in the port of Bilbao, which left Luetkens with no other option. In any case, it was very advisable to apply for insurance on his goods on this ship, even though Luetkens surely must have hoped not to be forced to need it.

Unfortunately though, his hopes would be dashed, and in turn, his fears came true, when a mere few weeks later the ship *La Domenienne* was captured by a British privateer in the English channel and taken to London. There, a Prize case was initiated and filed against the ship and its ship-owners, in the course of which also Luetkens' goods became the subject of judicial proceedings at the High Court of Admiralty. During these court proceedings, the insurance company of de Meyere became active by submitting an application to the English court for the reclamation of the 60 casks of sugar. Instead of simply reimbursing and compensating Luetkens and his partners for the damage, they therefore tried to protest the confiscation of the goods on the basis of the fact that these goods had been purchased on the account of a neutral Hamburg merchant, therefore must be deemed "Hamburger goods" ["Hamburger effecten"], which meant that the confiscation had happened without justification.<sup>81</sup> Anthony Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb's uncle was appointed as the legal representative on-site in London for Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, Hertzer & von Bobartt as well as De Meyere. He therefore appeared before the court there to try to enforce the reclamation of the goods. Right at the beginning, however, Anthony gave his nephew, his partners and the insurance company little hope that the reclamation would turn out successful. In a letter from April 16th 1744 he wrote to Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens "that one must not think such a thing can be reclaimed since it is a French ship & a French Cap[tain], which makes it a rightful prize" and he added that he was "sorry that E.E. would therefore loose the profit from the goods but that he is glad that he [his nephew] had insured them."<sup>82</sup> Nicolaus

80 "Uns ahndet aber daß Mr Lacoste wohl wird darbey intressiret sein gehöret ihm und denen andern Spaniern zu." Letter from Hertzer & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, April 24, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

81 See the letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, April 16, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/233, court bundles, bundle B, no. 1.

82 "daran ist auch nicht zu gedencken dan ein fransch Schiff & fransch Capt. macht es Preis und mir leidt das E.E. den proffiet daran verlieren, und guth das versichern lassen." Ibid. In the translation of the British Court noted on the original letter: "But as it is a french Ship & a french Capt. he must not think such a thing can be obtaind. He is sorry that you will lose the profit of them but is glad that you have insured them". Ibid.

The abbreviation E.E. or V.L. in the letters quoted in this book stands for "Euer Edlen", "Euer Ehren" viz. "Viver Liebden", which was typically used as an abbreviation in many German, Dutch, but also in many French letters of the 18th century as a form of address. In English letters, we often simply find the wording "Gentlemen" or "Dear Gentleman" or "Honored Sir", which, however, stands for the same. In my translations, I have nevertheless stuck to the original common form of abbreviation instead of changing it to Gentleman or to "you", since it better represents the original letter text. Furthermore, it is important to be able to distinguish between letters using E.E. or the

Gottlieb's main trading partners in Hamburg, Hertzer & von Bobartt, also shared this view, writing to him that whenever one of Luetkens' ships, for which he was acting as the ship-owner, was stopped by a British privateer, "the English are right in confiscating the ship, since you are staying and trading as a resident of France", which was an enemy of England.<sup>83</sup>

However, only days later, after Anthony had visited the Doctors' Common, which was the first central place to go to in such matters, where he had also consulted the respective advocate entrusted with these matters, of which he wrote in a letter two weeks later, Anthony Luetkens had gained "great hope" that there might, after all, still be a slight chance that the reclamation could turn out to be successful.<sup>84</sup> However, this chance was attached to a certain condition, regarding which he had to raise some further queries and needed some more precise information from Nicolaus Gottlieb and Hertzer & von Bobartt, which he explained in detail in this said letter from the 3rd of May. This letter apparently, although somewhat surprisingly, must have been overlooked by the court in the case of the ship *Hope*, even though it was revealing. Thus, it is not to be found in the court bundles; instead, I discovered it in Luetkens' other letter bundles in the pile of all letters written by Anthony Luetkens. This letter marked the beginning of Luetkens' future strategy, the starting point for his idea, and shows the trick that he later employed in his shipping business, which is the reason why I will cite large parts of it from the original. Anthony wrote that "I wished that everything [the whole 60 casks of sugar] had been bought on the account of E.E. & H[ertzer] & von Bobartt, and that E.E. by now has become a burgher of Hamburg [“Bürger von Hamburg”], of which, however, I am not completely sure [“nicht gewiß”] at the moment. [...] [In this case] then the Proctor and Advocate in the Doctors Commons gives me great hope [...] when E.E. could prove [“außmachen kan”] that all the goods were bought for his account under such conditions that they were bought to be send to Hamburg, as the connoisement [bill of lading] appears to show, since it shows that Nicolaus Gottlieb had taken care of and procured the insurance [“Assecuranz besorget”] for the entire cargo, that would help a lot. [...] The advocate requires from him is a sworn attestation [“beeydigtes Attestaten”] sent to him that proves that E.E. is a burgher of Hamburg or that E.E. is a Hamburg burgher and a Protestant, and that the whole sugar was bought for him by Jean Bapt. Lacoste on his account and risk, as the connoisement of the 60 casks shows [...] including [apart from the 20 casks of sugar concretely labelled as his and Hertzer & von Bobartt's goods] also the 40 other casks loaded on the ship [and he asked Nicolaus Gottlieb] if Lacoste could attest this."<sup>85</sup>

Apart from this letter to Nicolaus Gottlieb, which was followed by three other letters with the same urgent request, Anthony had also already sent a letter beforehand with

---

pronoun "you" as a form of address, because it allows conclusions regarding the relationship between the correspondents. Regarding this typical practice, see the contemporary merchant manual Marperger, *Getreuer und geschickter Handelsdiener*, 217.

83 "wen [...] E.E. als Rehder im Schiff seinde und in Frankreich sich befinden und Handlung treibende, recht zu haben solches aufzubringen." Letter from Hertzer & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 8, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

84 Letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 3, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

85 Ibid.

the same wording to Hertzner & von Bobartt. The answer from the latter, however, must have been rather disenchanting for Anthony Luetkens. As a letter from the Hamburg merchant house to Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens shows, they must have answered Anthony Luetkens that the goods, “Partey” in German, had indeed originally been bought in total on the account of Luetkens, however, he himself had “only kept a 1/6 share in it afterwards, while we have taken another 1/6 share in it, the rest of the goods belonged to French merchants from France.”<sup>86</sup> The reaction of Nicolaus Gottlieb to his uncle’s letter, however, turned out rather different, and, to a certain extent, must have been much more to the fancy of the old London merchant with German roots. Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens apparently must have got the rather obvious hint from his uncle.

As we learn from several letters from his Letter Book written during the months of April and May 1744, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens’ reaction and the result of receiving the letter from Anthony had been that he wrote letters to Lacoste and Lichigaray, asking the latter to contact Aché & Aché for him. Furthermore, he cleared things up with Bethmann & Imbert in person. By means of the letters, he subsequently initiated and implemented the necessary steps that would allow him to comply with the wish and request of his uncle. On the 30th of May 1744, he had sent a letter to Lichigaray, which enclosed the letter to Lacoste in the letter packet, asking Lichigaray to pass it on to Lacoste. By means of this material rhetoric, namely inserting the letter to Lacoste into the letter to Lichigaray, Nicolaus Gottlieb was able to first approach Lichigaray in the matter, on which basis of negotiation and common ground he then also approached Lacoste, referring to the already settled business with Lichigaray. The request he had for the latter was that Lichigaray would now “resell the interest that he shared with M. A[ché] & A [ché] in the goods in a certain way [“auf gewiße Arth”] to me so that I will be able to attest with a clear conscience [“mit gutten Gewiße”] that these goods officially belong to me. There is no other possible way than doing it that way”.<sup>87</sup> To Lacoste he subsequently wrote that “the Admiralty in London requested a sworn attestation that certifies that E.E. [Lacoste] had bought and loaded the sugar in my name and on my account. Since this is the truth [“solches nun die Wahrheit”], I see no problem, but that E.E. can obtain such a sworn attestation with a clear conscience from the Admiralty or Justice Department, a notarial certificate alone would not be sufficient. This attestation should show and verify that E.E. [Lacoste] on the 29th of November 1743 had been given order from Hamburg to purchase various goods in the name of *Nicolaes G. Lutkens neegotian von selbige staed* [original sentence written in Dutch instead of German] [...] inter alia to purchase sugar [...], which order had been confirmed by the said Lutkens on the 30th of December 1744. [He should furthermore verify that] He had taken note of the said order and had therefore bought 60 casks of sugar on the ... from Mr .... [three dots in the original letter] for the said N.G.L. *neegotiant de Ham*. On the same’s account [...] and that he had loaded this sugar in the name and on the account and on the risk of the same Nicolaes Gottlieb Lutkens, as it is also stated in the connoisement, onto the French ship *La domienne* captain Pierre Plaesance for which he had himself taken 2 per

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Hertzner & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, April 24, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Lichigaray Jeune, Timothée, May 30, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book III, no. 3.

cent commission. The same Mr. Lutkens had settled the purchase as well as had taken the necessary precautions regarding the unloading of the ship, and he was also the one who had signed the *factura* [“*Factura mit E.E. conforma notirt*”].<sup>88</sup>

Both, Lichigaray, who furthermore acted on behalf and in the name of Aché & Aché, and Lacoste subsequently agreed and complied with the requests, as did Bethmann & Imbert, which was not surprising since they would all in this way regain a prospect of profiting from goods that they must have largely written off already. As we can learn from later letters, the peculiar sentence and apposition to “sell the goods in a certain way” [“*auf gewisse Art*”] had been very crucial, because it must have meant nothing other, and needs to be understood as nothing other, than that the offer to transfer back the shares in these goods to their original respective accounts later on, if the protest turned out successful, and therefore it constituted a promise profit. The typical letter formulae in merchant letters to do something “in a certain way” or “on certain conditions” was not only a signifier that an enterprise was generally solvable under certain conditions, but it also stood for certain agreements and concrete practices known to those involved or even collectively known in mercantile circles as problem-solving strategies which those involved would now draw on. These strategies, in turn, did not necessarily always refer to legal practices, but just as frequently they involved grey area practices.

For this moment, however, most crucial for further progress in this endeavour was that all trading partners agreed on the deal, which they did. Hertzer & von Bobartt therefore, almost jubilantly, took note and congratulated Luetkens in a letter from the 26th of June on the fact “that E.E. had taken over the interest in the sugar loaded on the ship of Pierre Plaisance for Lichigaray Jeune, Aché & Aché Bethmann & Imbert on certain conditions [“*auf gewisse Conditiones*”] [...] and wish that the attestattion that E.E. had [then] sent to London shows the desired effect [“*von guthen Effect*”].<sup>89</sup>

As we learn from a letter sent to Luetkens from Hertzer & von Bobartt on the 17th of July 1744, only one month later, the “whole 60 casks of sugar were released by the English” court and subsequently shipped to Hamburg on another ship.<sup>90</sup> Anthony Luetkens therefore had been able to successfully reclaim the goods on the basis of the attestations. Notwithstanding this positive outcome, the old merchant did not refrain from sending his nephew some complaints and admonitory words in hindsight. In a letter from the 21st of June, he wrote or rather lamented that even though he hoped to reclaim “all 60 casks of sugar, the ship is nevertheless lost [“*verloren*”], [...] and we still have to pay for all legal expenses for both sides [...] [which is why] I give the advice [to his nephew] to cut down his activities a bit [“*piano zu gehen*”], because right now they [the English] capture each and every ship coming from or going to Hamburg from France or Spain and even though one would be able to reclaim the goods, it would

88 Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Lacoste, Jean Baptiste, May 30, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book III, no. 2.

89 Letter from Hertzer & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, June 26, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

90 Letter from Hertzer & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, July 17, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

nevertheless bring many expenses [“große Unkosten”] and it costs a lot of time.”<sup>91</sup> In another letter from the 5th of July, Anthony further specified these problems, writing that the English privateers would capture all ships coming from France because the assumed “a lot of Lurrendreyerey” behind these ships passing their coast, which means that they suspected the ships of sailing under wrong flags and with false passports. Even though the capture of goods or even ships from Hamburg could be protested, it would nevertheless remain a game of chance, “a mystery” [“ein Rätsel”] whether or not the protest would actually also turn out successfully, but in the end it would still always take “2 à 3 month and 50 à 60 Pound legal expenses.”<sup>92</sup> Anthony’s words did not remain without effect as, from then onwards, Luetkens in fact exercised more caution in his shipping business. Regarding the wish and request of his uncle’s to cut down his activities, he would, however, not be compliant but did quite the opposite. As a matter of fact, following this incident, he even intensified his activities in the shipping business. However, this does not mean that he had not learned his lessons from the troubles in the case of these sugars. Instead, it means that, as a direct consequence of the troubles, he simply set about finding his own peculiar way of handling his shipping business afterwards. He found a way of how to comply with the specific conditions and problems within this business fieldy, which represented a solution that did not necessarily completely comply with his uncle’s plans, but which still helped him to make his business successful. From then on, he would only rarely place cargo on a French ship but invested instead in buying and furnishing his own ships. For these ships, in turn, he found an appropriate solution of how to procure a Hamburg flag and neutral status for them even though he still refrained from obtaining a Hamburg citizenship himself. This plan was developed and its necessary precautions were taken already right after the first letter of Luetkens’ uncle had reached him, as a result of and happening simultaneously with the capture and the emergence of the initial difficulties regarding the 60 casks of sugar. This story represents the main story of this chapter.

### A Story of Fraternal Endorsement

#### Pulling Strings by Means of Paper: Bundling Letters and Leaving Letters Unsealed

It can be assumed that, in the letter from Anthony Luetkens of the 3rd of May, not only the old merchant’s indications regarding the 60 casks of sugar need to be understood as direct hints and suggestions to take action, but also that his words regarding the application for a Hamburg citizenship of his nephew can be read in the same way, as an instruction and the concrete request to finally create facts. Anthony certainly would have appreciated it if Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens had already taken the decision to become a Hamburg burgher beforehand because this would have made his job in London before the High Court of Admiralty a lot easier. A clear indication in this regard is the real

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, June 21, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/233, court bundles, bundle B, no. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, July 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/233, court bundles, bundle B, no. 8. Regarding *Lurrendreyerey* see the explanations in the last part of this chapter.

disappointment we notice in his letter after learning that Nicolaus Gottlieb had still not become a Hamburg large burgher, an official citizen at this moment in time, which, as he wrote in the letter from 31st of May, had "made me sad".<sup>93</sup> The whole case of the 60 casks of sugars therefore against this background reveals itself as a charade performed before the court, because Luetkens had not been an official Hamburger at that moment in time. But the risk connected with trying one's luck in this regard must have still been bearable and worth taking, as Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' actions demonstrate. The reason for this must have been that in exchange for that risk he would be able to keep all the freedom and benefits of a status as a non-neutral merchant travelling, living and trading in France. Access to trading Atlantic goods and to French networks was far easier and more open as a non-neutral merchant. Furthermore, by not yet deciding for a Hamburg citizenship, Luetkens even kept open for himself the opportunity to make the decision to settle down in France.

With regard to ensuring the necessary maritime neutrality in the field of trade or more concretely in order to be able to procure a Hamburg flag and neutral ship papers for his ships to turn them into neutral ships, as he learnt from the case of *La Domenienne*, Luetkens had to find an alternative solution to the tricky situation, since he had decided not to become a Hamburg burgher. As we learn from further letters of his written during the months of May and June 1744, however, an appropriate solution was not long in coming. Only hours after having received his uncle's letter, he must have "come up with an idea", "bin auf den Gedanken gekommen" in German, that would provide the necessary remedy to the tricky situation. We are able to confirm this assumption with a certain degree of certainty because already on the 5th of May, only two days after his uncle had written his letter, he presented this idea in detail in letters to his two brothers in Hamburg and to Luer Luers, a merchant residing in Hamburg, master of his youngest brother Anton in Hamburg. These three letters were sent as a letter packet, bundled together. The outer letter served as a letter wrapper for the other two letters, while each of these other letters was again inserted one into the other. With this letter packet we are therefore dealing in a way with a kind of a letter matryoshka. This bundling and folding technique, inserting letters into other letters, was very typical of the 18th century, as we can see in thousands upon thousands of cases and letters in the Prize Papers collection.<sup>94</sup> This practice shows the material possibilities that the people of the 18th century were provided with and that they used constantly when writing and sending letters during the time. As will be shown in the following explanations, this practice furthermore explicitly provided the people of the age with certain opportunities to settle matters with one another and to exert influence on each other in particular ways.<sup>95</sup>

93 "es that mir leydt E.E. die Bürgerschafft nicht angenommen." Letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 31, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

94 See the Materiality Homepage of the Prize Papers project; [prizepapers.net](http://prizepapers.net), accessed September 14, 2020.

95 Today, these letters can be found in Luetkens' main Letter Book and a smaller Letter Book. Interesting and revealing is that Luetkens deliberately separated the three letters from each other, copying them into two different Letter Books, even though they were all sent together in the same letter packet. His plan was obviously to cover up or at least conceal the plan he devised in these letters

The letters in their material arrangement and their content are highly revealing with regard to the powers of persuasion applied during correspondence by means of material rhetoric and text. In order to demonstrate this, I will, once again, cite large parts of these letters in the following, which I will combine with further elaborations in the form of a praxeological thick description on the material properties and the performative actions that were performed on the basis of these letters. Subsequently, I will talk about the effects that these letters produced, that is, I will discuss and present the further course of the letter conversation resulting from these three letters.

The main outer letter of this letter packet sent to Hamburg to solve his problems, representing the first addressee that Nicolaus Gottlieb wanted to approach in this matter, was a letter to his brother Joachim. In this letter Nicolaus Gottlieb explained his plans to his oldest brother, including the plea or rather request not only to hand over the enclosed letter to his youngest brother but to also to do everything in his power to encourage Anton to consent to the propositions given in this second letter. The interesting thing about both the other letters enclosed in the letter to Joachim is that these letters had deliberately not been sealed and closed by Nicolaus Gottlieb. Instead, he left them open, unsealed, so that Joachim could also read the content of the other letters. Luetkens produced an unfinished letter, "ohnbeschwerter Brief" in German, as the contemporaries called this practice.<sup>96</sup> In his letter to Joachim, Nicolaus Gottlieb wrote accordingly that Joachim could "see from the letter [to Anton] which proposition I am making to him with regard to the shares I hold in these ships. I do not doubt ['zweyfelle nicht'] that he will be willing and compliant in this regard in case his conscience will allow him to swear on the passport ['Passen beschwöhren'] [...]" [He also referred to] the nice profit ["schön Profitt"] that this brings him [Anton]. [...] [Furthermore, he wrote to his] dear brother [Joachim], if you are convinced that this could be done with good conscience, which I do not doubt, then I ask you gently as a brother to impel him [Anton] to promptly initiate the matter ["wie ein Bruder ihm zu presieren die Sache [...] ans Werk gericht wird"]. [...] [Last but not least, he emphasized that] the goods everywhere are very nice ["extra schön"] at the moment, but I cannot ship them due to the turmoils of war ["Kriegesstrubbeln"] because of the many privateers ["capers"] on sea. If an English ship would stop my ships and they would find out that I was staying in enemy land [...] they would under this pretext confiscate my ships due this situation and therefore bring great misfortune to my heirs ["Erbenleister"].<sup>97</sup>

Joachim would then be able to complete his knowledge about the plan by reading the letter addressed to Anton in detail afterwards, since it was enclosed unsealed. He was thus able to inform himself in detail about the said propositions and form his own opinion about the matter before handing over the letter to Anton and, consequently, discussing the matter with his younger brother. What we can learn from this, and what

---

for any outside viewer who might get a hold of these books in a court trial. Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, to Luetkens, Joachim, and Luetkens, Anton, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 1; Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luers, Luer, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book II, unnumbered.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Schulte, Jeronimus to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, April 6, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/236.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Joachim, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 1.

the letters therefore very vividly demonstrate, is how people of the 18th century used their paper and the material of their letters to shape and anticipate courses of action and negotiation conducted through letter writing. Approaching his oldest brother first was not coincidental, but a clever move, because in doing so, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens ensured that his propositions were presented to his youngest brother with more emphasis, that is, not only in the form of his own written words, but also in person by Joachim himself. It was Joachim who acted as the deliverer of the said letter and its message and whom Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens had assigned with the task of not only handing over the letter but also talking to his brother. Therefore, we see an active way of exerting influence on an addressee through letter-writing practice by means of putting together and bundling together letters in a letter packet in a particular way. The same practice was then also used for the third enclosed letter.

Before coming to that letter, however, we will first make use of the opportunity that was also open to Joachim, which is to read the letter to Anton. This letter is available to us, as are all the other letters from Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, through the Letter Books that have survived in the Luetkens archive in London. This particular letter to Anton, however, stands out as holding a very special position amongst the many letters that Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens wrote during his establishment phase. It was on the basis and by means of this pivotal letter the merchant ended up changing the whole course and strategy underlying his shipping business, thus laying the basis for his success in this field. The reasons for this become immediately obvious to us when we read the letter that he wrote to his younger brother. Anton at this time was still an apprentice in the house of the merchant Luer Luers in Hamburg and was thus at a very early stage of his career when he received the propositions of his brother. After the usual salutations at the beginning of the letter, Nicolaus Gottlieb wrote that

"Since I am not yet a burgher of Hamburg ["kein Bürger in Hamb."] and I am on travel and because of the turmoil of war [using the same words as in his letter to Joachim, "Kriegestrubelln"], which all leads to the consequence that people might have reservations ["Bedencken"] against loading in our ships, and under these circumstance might prefer other ships, I came up with an idea ["bin auf die Gedanken gekommen"]. How about, if you would become a burgher à costly [in Hamburg] ["Bürger möchte werden"] and I would then sell you all of the ships and the shares in the ships that I am holding at the moment in a certain way ["auf gewiße Arth"], so that you could, with good conscience, swear on the ships' passport and attest that they officially belong to you ["dier eigenthumlig zu gehört"] and your name appears in the passports. [This regulation would apply for the following ships] [...] The ship Die Freyheit captain Hoogtop 1/2 share, [...] the ship Die Hamb. Börse, captain Nagell 1/2 share, the ship Commercium captain Claes Nordtstern 3/8, the ship bought by the name La Minerva [...] 3/8 [and] the ship Die Post von Hamb, captain Paatz 1/2 share [...]."<sup>98</sup>

Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens then continued his letter by specifying that the merchants Hertzer & von Bobartt would procure and sell these shares to Anton in his name. As

98 Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Anton, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 1.

regards the necessary financial resources for this plan and the purchase, he asked his youngest brother to settle the respective obligation through drawing and advancing on his inheritance that was administered by his other uncle – the merchant Kaehler – and the two Hamburg citizens Jante and Brockes, who I have introduced in the previous chapter. He then went on to explain the subtleties of this transfer.

“This sale must be duly conducted [“ordentlich geschehen”], if necessary by drafting a notarial contract with Hertzer & von Bobartt, who have the order and the power of attorney [“Follmacht”] to sell these parts to you in my name, you pay them in the way as outlined above and they confirm and receive the payment and then you are the real holder [“würklig Eigner”] of these ships. [...] After the sale, Hertzer & von Bobartt have my order and the power of attorney to conclude in my name a contract of affreightment [“Contract vor Befrachtung”] with you for your ships for a period of two years. [...] And I in return am obligated to care for the maintenance of the ships, equipage, insurance etc. on my account. All profit or losses that these ships bring are for me. [...] Besides, I am also free to sell these ships. [...] After these two years we come to the agreement that you will sell the ships back to me. [...] In this way and manner, your capital stock would account to Bco. Mark 10923:2 S., which comes to a profit of Cour. [Mark] Bco. 2100:-, with 9 1/2 per cent profit each year, and there is not the slightest risk for yourself [“nicht den minsten Ricico”]. [...] The cost of applying for the Hamburg citizenship you have to bear yourself. [...] I do not doubt, my dear brother, that you will comply with my proposition [“hierin zustimmen”] and will become a Hamburg burgher at the first opportunity so that the matter can be settled [using once more the letter formulae “Sache ins Werk mach komme”]. In my opinion, when you have become a Hamburg burgher and purchased my shares in the ships, there is no reason why you should not with a good conscience be able to swear on the passports. Should there be, however, any scruples [“Scrupell”] on your side, I won’t force you to comply with my request. Apart from that, I hope and ask you as a brother [“alls sein Bruder”] that nothing prevents you from this plan because this matter is of consequence [“Sache von Consequence”]. Enclosed you will find another letter to your patron, which you can hand over to him after having read it yourself [“nach Übersehung”]. I hope that he will not object to you becoming a burgher. Should you agree with my proposition, you can hand this letter to Hertzer & von Bobartt so that they can settle the sale and contract of affreightment with you the way that I have outlined above. I will inform them due to the lack of time only very briefly about the idea. In the case, however, that you don’t want to accept my proposal /: which I do not hope /: it is not necessary to show them this letter.”<sup>99</sup>

The proposition that Nicolaus Gottlieb made to his brother was therefore that he would sign over all his ships and the part shares in his ships to Anton, while at the same time he himself hired these ships and part shares back from him in the form of a contract of affreightment. Thus, the two of them would enter into a hiring contract, but Anton would become the official ship owner. This is particularly highlighted by the fact that

---

99 Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Anton, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 1.

Nicolaus Gottlieb used a letter phrase in the letter that was very common in contemporary maritime law defining the role of a ship-owner, the “real holder” of the ship, as the person to whom “a ship properly belonged” [“derjenige, welchem ein Schiff eigenthumlich zu gehöret”].<sup>100</sup> Nicolaus Gottlieb had therefore used the German words *eigenthumlich* and *würklich Eigner* deliberately in his letter, to send a signal to his brother, to convince him that this plan was, in fact, a *matter of consequence*. The benefit of this agreement for Nicolaus Gottlieb was that he could officially declare his ships neutral Hamburg ships and his goods neutral goods without the need to apply for a Hamburg citizenship at that moment in time. For Anton, in turn, accepting this proposition would at a moment’s notice lead to the result that he would obtain an immense capital stock, which he could, however, not access directly. Nonetheless, this proposition came with a great gain in prestige for the young merchant and surely contributed to his reputation as a merchant. The actual financial incentive, however, was the 9 1/2 per cent interest rate that he obtained in these ships and would keep during the period of the two years, for which he had to do nothing other than basically to lend his name to his brother. This promised Anton a continual inflow of capital without taking any risks or being at all obliged to care for any businesses related to the ships, apart from being asked to procure and sign the passports and all other contracts. This financial incentive, the promise of easy money, however, was not the only means that his older brother used for winning his youngest brother over for his idea, and for convincing him of the expediency and attractiveness of this plan. Just as important was Luetkens’ strategy of calling upon the good conscience of his brother, which he combined and bound together with the call upon family loyalty, both represented in the content and text of the letter as well as in the material arrangement of the letter packet. Last but not least, this obvious will to create a greater closeness to his brother by means of this letter is even mirrored in the personal form of address, the pronoun that he used for approaching and writing to his brother, using “you” instead of the typical form of address “E.E.”, which corresponded to the typical “Honoured Sir” in English letters.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.5 Letters Exchanged between Brothers

As reflected in these letters’ text and material, Nicolaus Gottlieb expected his brother to trust him in the matter and he referred in this respect to the family commitment of helping each other out. At the same time, however, he still allowed, or at least pretended to allow Anton relatively free reign to decline the offer. Both becomes tangible in the letter content and the material arrangements of the letters. It is interesting to see how Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens’ words balanced and manoeuvred between these two sets of considerations, which is part of his chosen way of persuasion. Surely during the 18th century there still prevailed traditional family structures even or especially in

<sup>100</sup> “Kauffahrdey.” *Oekonomische Encyklopädie*, edited by Johann Georg Krünitz. 242 volumes. Berlin, 1773-1858, vol. 36, 470-478.

<sup>101</sup> Regarding the typical usage of E.E. “Euer Edlen” as a form of address in merchant letters, see Marperger, *Getreuer und geschickter Handelsdiener*, 217.

bourgeois families, which were shaped by the fundamental patriarchal system that underlay and shaped the whole social system during the era. With regard to relationships between brothers, this provided the first-born son in the family with a certain power of disposition over his younger brothers, especially if the father had already died as was the case in the Luetkens family.<sup>102</sup> These structures, however, as the letters show, were apparently not as rigid as one might assume. Accordingly, they did not automatically rule out the need to reach out to try to establish reciprocal understanding, mutual coordination, room for manoeuvre, and especially the need for negotiation and for consent.

All of this is reflected in the text and in the material arrangement of the letter packet under investigation. The letter from Nicolaus Gottlieb to Anton forms a very revealing and vivid example of a crucial medium and platform that allowed this family negotiation to take place. The letter shows that the oldest brother, Nicolaus Gottlieb, by no means simply ran the family business alone and therefore decided or determined the destiny and course of the family businesses single-handedly. Instead, he was to all intents and purposes still dependent on the goodwill or at least the consent of his brothers. Nicolaus Gottlieb's usage of the word "brother" and his usage of the phrase that he would approach Anton "as a brother" is telling. Of course, he referred to family obligations with this phrase, but the way in which he employed it and weaved it into his letter text was directly bound to the appeal to his brother's personal conscience. However, it much more took on the form of an attempt to meet and approach his brothers as equals. If we furthermore take into consideration the material form and the packing and bundling together of the letters, we can characterise this social encounter, which was performed in letter writing and particularly by means of corresponding with each other, as essentially calling together a family council rather than as an event that confronted the actors involved with a *fait accompli*. This fact, however, does not mean that Nicolaus Gottlieb did not try everything in his power to get his way. It only means that we need to acknowledge that it obviously needed more factors to negotiate with your brothers than only bringing in your natural authority as the firstborn son and to create financial incentives.<sup>103</sup> It also needed a certain power of persuasion to convince and win over your brothers for your plans. This power of persuasion, subsequently, did not only include finding the right and appropriate words when approaching your brothers, but it also included providing them with the possibility of some leeway for action and the freedom of choice. Certainly, Nicolaus Gottlieb still sent out clear messages in this regard, and

<sup>102</sup> Regarding the rights and responsibilities of an elder brother towards his younger brothers, see *Ties That Bind*, chapter "Introduction," 1-12, see also chapter "Fraternal Bonds," 32-50.

See Miller, Naomi J., and Naomi Yavneh. "Introduction: Thicker than Water. Evaluating Sibling Relations in the Early Modern Period." In *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, edited by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, 1-14. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2017.

As based on another Hamburg example, see Spalding, Almut. "Siblings, Publications, and the Transmission of Memory: Johann Albert Hinrich and Elise Reimarus." In *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, edited by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, 216-227. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2017. See also Finch, Janet. *Family Obligation and Social Change*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1989.

<sup>103</sup> See Capp, *Ties that Bind*, 32-50.

for precisely the purpose of showing his youngest brother how he expected him to act in this undertaking. Repeating his comment or argument that he did “not hope” that Anton would decline the proposition and his repeated reference to their mutual benefit can certainly be read as a clear means of trying to reinforce his power. Yet, in the end, Anton was at least in theory granted the opportunity to say no.

Apart from the respective reaffirmations of this opportunity in the letter, the most intriguing proof of this fact is provided by the existence of the third letter within this letter packet from the 5th of May 1744, the letter to Anton's master Luer Luers. This letter was not sent to this merchant directly but was inserted unsealed into the letter addressed to Anton. This practice, as a material rhetoric, provided Anton with the most concrete opportunity to decline his brother's offer.<sup>104</sup> Anton basically simply had to refrain from sealing this third letter himself and handing it over to his master. At the same time, the possibility of reading this letter must have also had a certain effect and impact on the young merchant apprentice Anton. This was a fact that Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens surely must have anticipated and intended when inclosing the said letter unsealed, because when reading this letter Anton must have realized the “severe consequences” that Nicolaus Gottlieb had already described to him.

In the end, Anton did hand over the letter to his master. As a merchant apprentice and later as a clerk, he was used to approaching his master in such matters. It was a typical situation that both merchant and apprentice together went through the correspondence of a merchant house and answered the letters. As such, we can imagine the situation in May 1744 as similar in character to a painting that can be found in the *Deutsche Historische Museum* in Berlin depicting “The Merchant” during his daily activities. On this painting we see a merchant clerk or merchant apprentice showing a letter to his master, just as Anton Luetkens might have shown the letter from his brother to his master Luer Luers. On the table we can see a letter wrapper, on the left-hand side, and many opened letters resembling the material arrangement of the letter packet Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens had sent from France. The seated merchant is ready to answer the incoming letter on the spot, holding a quill pen in his hand, which was also a typical practice of merchants trying to keep up and manage their correspondence during the 18th century. Luer Luers must have received the news from France with pleasure. Certainly, his response letter did not take long because Luetkens' offer was lucrative and the letter was furthermore oozing with obeisance and praising words.

The letter Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens wrote to Anton's master Luer Luers differed very much from those to his brothers: in its tone, style and voice, and especially with regard to the chosen form of address, sticking to the common form of “E.E.” instead of “you”. This letter to Luers explained in the most respectful and reverential words and tone the benefits and far-reaching implications of Nicolaus Gottlieb's plan and left very little doubt that this idea was advisable; implying vice versa, that the decision to not take the opportunity would be rather inadvisable or, in other words, stupid. The letter went as follows:

<sup>104</sup> See Spoerhase, *Das Format der Literatur*.

Figure 8: A typical situation in a merchant house. Detail of the painting "Mercator/Kaufmann" by Johann Jakob Haid, painted in 1760.



Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Inv. Nr. 1987/153 © bpk / Deutsches Historisches Museum, Arne Psille.

"In the hope that E.E. permits me [“ponderieren”] to take the freedom [“Freyheit so mir nehmen”] to write this letter to E.E., in which I wanted to humbly ask E.E. if E.E. would have the courtesy [“Gütigkeit gelieben zu haben”] to permit my brother Anthon, who is in your service to become a [Hamburg] burgher. This shall happen because I want to consign him several part shares in my ships [“Schiffsparten”] [and for this purpose he must attain the citizenship] because otherwise [...] he would not be able to swear on the ships' passports. My brother will inform E.E. comprehensively about all the details. It happens because since I am staying in enemy foreign land at the moment, which is currently at war, it could easily happen that some of my ships | in which I have shares | are stopped and seized. If they were to find only my name in the ship's papers and find out that I am a traveller in foreign lands at the moment, they might cause problems [“Chiquane machen”]. For that reason, I have come to the decision [“geresolvirt bin”] to sell my brother several of my shares in these ships in a certain manner [“auf gewise Arth”]. Therefore, I very much hope that E.E. will have the courtesy to do me the favour [“Gefälligkeit”] to permit my brother to become a burgher. I do not doubt and

am sure that this will not lead to any change in his behaviour [“Aufführung”]. Furthermore, there will not occur any disadvantages [“Molestie”] for E.E. Therefore, I would like to once more kindly repeat my request to grant me this favour. I am also of the opinion that Monsieur will not refuse this request [“abschlagen”], who, as is known, had always shown much love and affection [“Liebe und Gewogenheit”] for my brother and I do not doubt that he [my brother] will do all in his power to return this favour. If my humble self [“meiner Wenigkeit”] could be of any service for E.E. you could tell me freely at any time [“frey zu befehlen”].<sup>105</sup>

The difference in style and tone between this letter in comparison to the two other letters of the letter packet is striking. Particularly when reading the letters directly one after another, it becomes obvious that Luetkens used a completely different language register for this letter to Luer Luers than he had used for the letters to his brothers. The spirit of compromise or the openness to a frank discussion that characterised and shaped the tone in the letters to his brothers, which now becomes all the more tangible, changed here to a spirit and tone of a polite matter-of-factness that must have been a clear signal to Anton that as soon as he handed over this letter to his master, the matter would be no longer negotiable but the plan would then be unmistakably implemented, “put into practice” [“ins Werk gesetzt”] as Luetkens called it himself, clearly supposing that Luer Luers would of course agree to the propositions. The gesture that Luetkens performed in the first two letters, namely leaving the decision open to Anton whether or not he was going to hand over this letter, is therefore to be read as a gesture of confidence that he trusted his brother to make the right decision, which was, as this letter to Luers all the more reinforced, to agree to the proposition. Describing and interpreting the letter to Luers itself, we once more encounter certain visible strategies of exerting influence on an addressee by means of letters, this time directed at Luer Luers. The simple reason for this was that Luetkens was dependent on Luers’ goodwill in this case as he had to allow his apprentice and employee to become a Hamburg large burgher in order to put the whole plan into practice. This latter fact, in turn, explains the character, style and language register of the letter, all aspects of which were geared towards winning Luer Luers over for Luetkens’ plan, this time in a professional manner. Tellingly, the language register resembled the gallant language register of flattery, “Aufwartung” in German, which will be presented in detail in the chapter on Luetkens’ marriage initiation. In order to find proof for this form of flattery, we can consult the contemporary letter-writing manuals, in which we find letters similar in tone and style as letter examples under such categories as “letters to a patron” or “letters to higher ranked persons” or “letters of requests or of thanks”.<sup>106</sup> These example letters therefore provide the necessary basis for comparison and the context that help us to understand the intention and logic behind the letter to Luer Luers and also what formal criteria Luetkens had to meet in order to ensure that the letter was to be understood in the right way by Luer

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luers, Luer, May 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book II, unnumbered.

<sup>106</sup> See Hunold, *Die Allerneueste Art Höflich und Galant zu Schreiben*, particularly “Dancksa-gungs-Schreiben an einen Patron,” 236-237; “Anerbietungs-Schreiben an einen Patron,” 286-288, 25, regarding “pardonieren” see *ibid.* 114.

Luers. In other words, these reference letters provide us with the intertextual framework and context that show us how the contemporaries would have understood such a letter when receiving it. From letter examples provided in letter-writing manuals such as those by Christian Friedrich Hunold (Menantes), August Bohse (Talander) or Benjamin Neukirch, we learn that for instance the obviously strong and emphatic rhetoric of respect and humbleness that seems exuberant to us was simply an integral part of such letter types and belonged mandatorily to the language register and presentation of such letters.<sup>107</sup> We find it as essentially the basic pattern of all such letters in the letter-writing manuals. Conversely, it would have been a breach of convention and an affront against the receiver of such a letter if this style and tone were not chosen. The hyperbolic style was therefore not hyperbolic at all but quite on the contrary it represented a normal, appropriate social interaction with regard to making a request or expressing a wish to another person who did not belong to the immediate circle of acquaintances or family. Choosing such a letter style was therefore considered merely good form and courtesy. Furthermore, the contemporaries understood and directly inferred from such a form the intention that the writer pursued with the letter. This letter to Luer Luers therefore draws its significance not only from the mere expression of a request or plea, but it actually performs this request in all its characteristics, in its style, form, material and its expressions, as a performative action in order to have an impact on the addressee. As a further means of persuasion Luetkens also offered Luer Luers financial incentives. Again, this letter therefore not only presents words to an addressee, but it represents a material gesture that was performed by means of the practice of letter writing. When Luer Luers therefore received this letter, he received not only ink on paper, but he received a loyal address, a courtesy call from another merchant, who asked him for his support.

When we return at this point once more to the two letters Nicolaus Gottlieb sent to his brothers and compare their style and tone with the letter to Luers against the backdrop of our knowledge of the importance of choosing the right tone for letters, we now realise the relative soberness of the style and tone that Luetkens had chosen for the letters to his brothers. Of course, the interaction amongst brothers had its own rules and formularies, too, represented for instance in the references regarding brotherly obligations and the recurrent and similar formulae regarding appeals to and the trust in their brotherly conscience and loyalty. Nevertheless, compared to the letter to Luer Luers, the letters to Anton and Joachim strikingly waive exuberant, humble set phrases and stilted formulations and instead show a plain style and sober language. Knowing about the meaning of the other more formal language register, however, we now realise that this soberness by no means represents coldness or distance prevailing in the relationship between the brothers. Quite on the contrary, especially since these

<sup>107</sup> See *ibid.* See Bohse, *Der allzeitfertige Briefsteller*, "Anerbietungsschreiben," 425. See Bohse, August (pseud.: Talander). *Des kurieß bequemen Handbuchs allerhand auserlesener Sendschreiben und mündlicher Complimenten [...] Leipzig: Moritz Georg Weidmann, 1721* [first published 1696], regarding the typical letter formulae of "werden pardonieren," 29 or "Vermögen zu ihrem Glück beizutragen," 149. See Neukirch, Benjamin. *Anweisung zu teutschen Briefen*. Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1727, letter examples "Dancksagung" and "Insinuation," 381.

letters waive formalities, and therefore allow a somewhat freer tone, this soberness reveals to us the exact opposite of distance. This style and tone instead show us an at the time normal, typical and symptomatic way of dealing with each other "as brothers". Therefore, it represents the clearest sign of personal closeness between the brothers, which once more fits into the picture and supports the assumption that these letters represent a family council performed on the basis of letters that served the purpose to strike a business deal.

Seen as a whole, these letters therefore once more show us how Luetkens successfully found leeway and a certain middle course of how to approach things in a pragmatic and constructive manner. Not only with regard to the content of his letters but also in the way he used these letters' materiality and the way he chose the tone and style of his letters, these letters present us therefore with a prime example of how the power of persuasion was applied on the basis and with the help of letter practice. In all its elements, the letters display how Luetkens did everything in his power to pull the necessary strings to solve his problems with regard to his shipping business. Luetkens' negotiation strategy in this regard was to allow or rather purport freedom of choice, while at the same time applying every possible means and pressure to make the decision to agree to his proposition an easy one for Anton, or rather an inevitable one. For this, he used every possibility that the practice of letter writing provided him with in terms of content, style and letter material. The principle of persuasion governing this process is therefore not primarily that Luetkens simply brought his authority to bear, which would presumably not been a sufficient means in its own right because if it had been then his letter would have looked different. Instead he used a far more powerful means especially within family business: he demanded loyalty. In the end, Luetkens could not simply apply and assert authority since he was dependent on the goodwill and concessions from his brother Anton and Anton's master Luers, who both had to consent to this trickery and to become an active part in it. Choosing to demand loyalty is very auspicious because ultimately it transformed the alleged freedom of choice into a matter of conscience, which made it very hard for Anton to say no. This essentially represents the icing on the cake of the practical principle of persuasion becoming apparent in this letter conversation, which is the principle of demanding loyalty.<sup>108</sup>

As a matter of fact, this practical principle of persuasion was subsequently crowned with success. All three could be convinced of both the feasibility and the lucrativeness of the plan: Joachim, who responded that "as brothers we will of course comply with our duty before our brother" ("als Brüder dir als einem Bruder"), who only wants the best for us ("mit uns aufrichtig meint") this is a matter that can be done"; Anton, who agreed to the proposition and thanked his brother for showing "so much love to me" and for the generous offer; and Luer Luers, who allowed Anton to become a Hamburg large burgher.<sup>109</sup> As we furthermore learn from Anton's response letter to his brother, even the concrete course of further events following Nicolaus Gottlieb's letter went precisely the way it was devised, planned and anticipated by his eldest brother. Anton wrote on

<sup>108</sup> See Capp, *Ties that Bind*, 1-13 on family and fraternal loyalty. See also *ibid.*, 32-50.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Joachim to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 25, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235. Letter from Luetkens, Anton to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 24, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

the 24th of May to his “Dear Brother”, in an obviously still rather inexperienced spidery hand and furthermore using phonetic spelling, in the Hamburg dialect, that as requested he had “handed over the letter to my master [“Patron”], who has allowed me to become a burgher [“das ich man Bürger werden könnte”], so that I will become a burgher tomorrow. I have also presented [“gäbben”] your letter to Hertzner & von Bobartt, who will at the first opportunity sell to me [...].”<sup>110</sup> He would for this purpose also draw on the said reserves in the inheritance overseen by Kaehler, Jante and Brockes to be able to issue the obligation necessary for the purchase, just as Nicolaus Gottlieb suggested it. The respective obligation has also survived among the papers of the Luetkens archive; it was issued on the 26th of May.<sup>111</sup> In his letter, Anton then went on to affirm that he could “with good conscience [“mit gutten Gewissen”] swear on the passports [issued in his name] and I will sell the same ships back to you” in two years and for the same price. The money therefore worked as only as a loan.<sup>112</sup> A letter by Hertzner & von Bobartt to Luetkens, dating already from three days earlier, further confirms this course of events, reporting that Nicolaus Gottlieb’s “brother has visited us yesterday, showing us your letter [“Schreiben gecommuniziert”]. He will become a burgher next Monday. Shortly after, we will put into effect the sale of the shares in the ships and procure the contract of affreightment”, which all was to be furthermore officially authenticated through “a notarized certification” [“Notariel Acte”], which has also survived among the Luetkens papers.<sup>113</sup> They furthermore promised that it would then take only another week until the ships of the ships’ captains Nagel, Hoogtop and Noordstern obtain their respective Hamburg passports. Finally, they complimented Nicolaus Gottlieb on this idea and stated that “all difficulties should now be resolved [“alle Schwürigkeiten gehoben”].”<sup>114</sup>

This latter message, this breakthrough, then also served only several weeks later as the basis for several letters that Nicolaus Gottlieb himself sent to all of his main trading partners in his shipping business in France, Germany, and the United Provinces of the Netherlands. As a kind of circular, he wrote to his partners on the 29th of June 1744, in almost the same words but in different languages. To quote from a letter to his partners in Nantes, Luttmann & von Bobartt, he wrote that “for the sake of more security I have signed over in a certain manner [“auf gewisse Conditie”] his interests [...] [in the sugars on the ship of Nagel] to my brother Anth. Lutkens in Hamburg, who

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> “Ich Uhrkunder und bekenne hiemit vor mich und meine Erben, und Erbnehmer, auch sonstens Jedermänniglich, daß ich am heutigen dato von Herrn Joachim Lutkens empfangen habe drey Tausend neuhundert achtzehn Mark sechs S. Banco wovon sich die Intrese anfanget am negstkommenen Ostern à vier pCt. Mark Courant Interese per anno [signed by Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens] [...] Ich unterschrieben transportire diese Obligation an Herrn Anthon Lütkens von welchem deswenigen völlig bin befriediget worden Hamburg d[en] 26 May 1744, Joachim Lütkens.” Obligation formerly enclosed in a letter from Luetkens, Anton to Luetkens Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 16, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Anton to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 24, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

<sup>113</sup> Exhibit A. Copy and translation of the agreement by which Anthony Luetkens let out his share in several ships for two years to Nicholas Gottlieb Luetkens, TNA, HCA 32/115/14.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Anton to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 24, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

is burgher and inhabitant there [...], which happened in accordance with the friends in Hamburg [Hertzner & von Bobartt], so that all the difficulties are now resolved [“diese Schwirigkeit gehoben”].<sup>115</sup> Or, in other words, to quote from a Dutch letter to Cornelis de Meyere & Soonen in Amsterdam, using the very same sentences already familiar to us, he wrote that “since the English could expose me to problems [“chiquan”] in the reclamation of my goods since I am in France, so I have transported my interest in [...] [my ships] in a certain manner [“op gewisse Conditio”] to my brother Anton burgher and inhabitant [“Boorger en Inwooner”] of Hamburg, so that all my shares in the goods now run on the account of him and Hertzner & von Bobartt.”<sup>116</sup> Anton himself confirmed the successful implementation of all necessary steps actually already on the very same day, in his letter dated the 29th of June. This means, that Nicolaus Gottlieb would have received this letter some days later. However, it seems that he must have already received the goods news earlier from Hertzner & von Bobartt. This following letter by Anton is still worth quoting in length because in this letter the youngest Luetkens brother for the first time expressed at least a whiff of criticism. However, he did not criticise the plan in general, but only the said “conditions” and the ways and means of how the plan was implemented. This criticism, however, was subsequently met with a rebuffal by Nicolaus Gottlieb, using the principle of the sledgehammer method in his letter, which will be explained in further detail in the chapter on commission trade. For this purpose, the merchant pulled out all the rhetorical stops available to him, as the primarily tool of persuasion. He nevertheless remained true to his chosen path and used these rhetorical moves to once more remind his brother of the significance and meaning of loyalty.

### 3.6 Stealing Someone’s Thunder

Anton’s response letter to his brother reads as follows. First, he confirmed that with regard to the ships

“all the necessary precautions have been taken care of [“alles in Richtigkeit”] and you must have received by now the 4 passports for these ships, and they [Hertzner & von Bobartt] have also drafted the sales contract at a notary, and I have signed it. I believe, however, that this would not have been necessary [“nicht nochtich war”] since as soon as you are back [in Hamburg] I will also in any case of course sell these ships back to you for the same price that you have sold them to me. Because I cannot say with good conscience [“nicht mit gutten Gewißen”] that these ships actually belong to me, since I have hired [“verheyret”] them back to you. You will not take it amiss [“solges nicht übel nemmen”] that I am writing this to you.”<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luttmann & von Bobartt, June 27, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 201.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Cornelis de Meyere & Soonen, June 27, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 200.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Luetkens, Anton to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, June 29, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/235.

Anton's letter, at this point of the written conversation, is remarkable. Since already all the precautions regarding the whole undertaking had been taken care of at that stage, with his lines he surely did not have the intention to jeopardize the plan in general. Nevertheless, he still had the guts and it was obviously important for him to at least voice certain reservations regarding the "certain conditions" of the deal. Therefore, he must have presumably at least tried to preserve his own integrity and actually is emphatic about the right to have his say in this matter that his brother had granted him. For this purpose, he took up or even quoted precisely the lines of his brother's letter regarding the appeal to his conscience, using the same language register, and expressed subsequently his attitude towards them. His lines can be interpreted in two different ways, both of which, however, must be regarded as concrete performative actions in direct reaction to his brother's explanations, also still functioning within the realm of an appropriate way of conversation as it was allowable among brothers. Important to note in this regard is that despite his reservations, Anton nevertheless fulfilled and satisfied his brother's request and therefore confirmed the efficiency of the practical principle of persuasion applied in this episode: he pledged loyalty to his brother and did as he was told.

Interpreting his letter, we can nevertheless draw certain conclusions with regard to his attitude towards this deal. The first interpretation of his words would be, in a more positive connotation, that he wanted to intimate to his brother that, especially since they were brothers, such a cumbersome method of winning him over would not have been at all necessary, but rather that it went without saying that he as his brother would naturally and gladly help his brother. A second explanation and interpretation of his words would be that he was not completely satisfied with the conditions of the deal, in which he would in the end act only as a marionette, albeit still gaining profit from this deal. Maybe he even hoped for additional concessions from his brother. Or maybe this whole letter represents a mixture of both these interpretations. In any case, it becomes obvious that the realm of negotiation as prevailing within this letter conversation between the brothers allowed for such criticism, which once again confirms my general interpretation of this letter conversation as a family council. Unlike Anton's ambiguous lines, however, the response letter from his older brother was very unambiguous indeed. Apparently, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens did not like the late intervention and the relativization regarding the regularities of the arrangement. Notwithstanding this, he stuck to his letter style and language register, although the tone of his letter voice became more strict and severe. Therefore, he did not per se deprive his brother of the right to voice criticism, but he nonetheless disapproved of the attack against his own integrity, as which he obviously saw the letter written by Anton. Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' letter from the 15th of July 1744 in response to his brother's criticism reads as follows:

"I have well received your pleasant last from the 29th as well as the signed obligation and the contract of affreightment issued by Hertzer & von Bobartt for the first four ships. You write that it would not have been necessary that we have proceeded in that way and that since you have rented these ships [to me] you are of the opinion that these ships do not really belong to you ["nicht recht zugehören"]. Think about it for yourself,

if someone buys a house and then rents this house to another person, who is the real owner of the house [“jemand der ein Hauß kauft und hernachen verheuert”]? You own these ships for real and far more than I do [---] it is not a shame [“thutt kein Schande”] neither for me nor for you to have things sorted out and to keep order in things at any time. And I have written [asked] you about all that beforehand. Maybe someone has talked you into it who has no clue [“kein Verstantt”] about all that, which hurts me deep in my heart [“ins Hertz schmertzet”]. If you had not rented these ships to me, I would not be able to find any cargo [“nicht die Fracht empf.”] [...] You now own 5 ships worth 32/m [32 000] Mark Bco. And I for my part have only approximately 9900 Mark Bco und your two obligations worth 1/m Mark and 6800 Mark as an assurance; which I can, however, not even sell [“verneegotiren”] or turn into cash, which is why I cannot, even if I wished to do so, include you more or give you more shares in my businesses [“unmöglich dier beteiligen kann”]. If you had not mentioned it to anyone no one would know about it and even Hertz & von Bobartt and the notary public have promised to keep it a secret that you have rented these ships to me and it is not necessary that you tell anybody about it now. [...] I don't know who has given you the idea that, since you have sent me the obligations, you won't be able to access the money later when you need it. I can give you no more assurance than the fact that I have always kept my promises [“mein Paroll nachgekommen”] and you can believe me that I will always have your money ready whenever you need it and that you won't find my cash till empty [“kein Pech in meiner Cassa”].<sup>118</sup>

In this letter, in a most straightforward manner, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens pulled out all the stops to convince his brother of the rightfulness and necessity of this undertaking. Remarkable in this regard is that Nicolaus Gottlieb did not decide to simply block, rebuke or simply pass over the criticism of his brother, but obviously he had an interest in placating his brother. Demanding loyalty implied that the letter-writer himself would also be bound to stick to this loyalty. Luetkens did, however, use a rather drastic tone for this letter. In the end, since all precautions had already been taken care of, his letter probably could have also turned out shorter, because the dispute in the end bore no more direct effects to the implementation of the actual plan. Due to the family setting of the letter conversation, however, in order to prevent a family row, but certainly also primarily to once more insist on the orderliness of his business, which was an important part and valuable asset of a merchant's self-perception, he answered his brother's criticism at some length. As a reader there is no way one could deny or ignore the abundantly obvious resentfulness of his words. Nevertheless, we recognize Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' will to cope with the situation by means of arguments instead of only berating Anton. The merchant therefore must have had an interest in settling this matter for good. For his arguments he then drew on several rhetorical strategies to convince his brother, all of which were a clear reaction as they directly cited and referred back to the arguments that Anton had produced but rebutting or weakening

---

118 Letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Anton, July 15, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 219.

them. Reading the letters alternatingly, the reading impression one gains is of a conversational exchange of blows. One argument is therefore that Nicolaus Gottlieb pointed out that Anton himself had had the chance to say no, by means of which he criticized the point in time that Anton had chosen for his criticism which had essentially rendered the criticism not just obsolete but also superfluous. At this point, his persuasive strategy, the practical principle he had mobilised before, which was to demand loyalty while at the same time offering or pretending freedom of choice for his brother, paid off because Luetkens could now easily steal the thunder of his brother's criticism.

Using this argument again, he therefore passed the buck back to Anton. The same applies, on a more general level, to Nicolaus Gottlieb's recalling the fact that Anton would ultimately not lose anything through this arrangement but would only stand to profit from it. This sentence can be directly understood as a performative act signalling that at this point of the conversation Anton should stop whining. Highly conclusive in this regard is the fact that Nicolaus Gottlieb omitted to recapitulate in detail the conditions of the arrangement, which means that for him these conditions are now settled, fixed and justified and no modifications can now be made. Since these conditions, as we know, already included revenues for Anton from the hiring of the ships, Nicolaus Gottlieb must have, by implication, regarded these revenues as sufficient for his brother. As the only return service and agreed consideration that his brother had to render, Nicolaus Gottlieb and his partners Hertzner & von Bobartt requested the said obligation from Anton, which, however, could not be reutilised or as he wrote "turn[ed] into cash" by Nicolaus Gottlieb. The latter, in turn, used this in his letter as the argument why he could not offer further shares or a more extensive involvement of his brother in the ships' concrete businesses. In pure financial and objective terms, the reason for the conditions of Anton's role in this matter was therefore that Anton would not invest in the ships himself, and thus not bring in a real equity share himself in the ships, because he lacked the financial resources for it, but he would still make a profit from the ships' rent. In this way, Nicolaus Gottlieb was once more able to steal Anton's argumentative thunder because he was able to show that they still would both make a profit from the ships: in different ways, but nonetheless lucrative for both sides. He described this with the words that the deal "is not a shame neither for me nor for you". The latter, in turn, fairly well describes the means of persuasion that Nicolaus Gottlieb used in this letter. It is not only factual reasons which he put forward in his letter to persuade his brother, but it is again and even more vehemently than before also the reference to their relationship as brothers and their brotherly obligations, which he used to react to Anton's criticism. Instead of using this reference, however, in an admonishing manner, we again notice a rather placatory, conciliatory tone that at the same time strongly underpinned his own integrity, in mercantile as well as family business. In this regard, Nicolaus Gottlieb's offer and proposition to his brother that Anton did not have "to tell anyone about their deal", which would mean that Anton himself gained all the prestige of being in possession of the ships, reads almost as a resigned groan. In any case, it represented at least another concession of Nicolaus Gottlieb to his youngest brother for the sake of settling the matter amicably. In the same line we read Nicolaus Gottlieb's assurances regarding his own brotherly obligations and his part in the deal, which shows clearly in the words that he had so far kept all his promises in the past ["parol nachkommen"]. This sentence,

furthermore, also reflected a definite sense of disgruntlement of Nicolaus Gottlieb because it quite frankly also sent the message to Anton that he should have known better than to criticise his reliable brother. The last and strongest rhetorical strategy that we can find in the letter by Nicolaus Gottlieb is, however, the application of the rhetorical device of the analogy in order to disabuse his youngest brother. This rhetorical technique is one of the oldest traditional means of rhetoric, and we will also encounter this technique again in other letter episodes presented in the book. It represented a basic means of persuasion that yielded and promised, without beating about the bush, direct and rapid success and as such was naturally very conducive for a practice such as letter-writing, which was highly dependent on brevity and concreteness.<sup>119</sup> Also in this example of the letter by Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens it becomes apparent why this rhetorical technique was so efficient. In essence, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' analogy was very striking because it is ultimately very simple – and it once more referred to the common definition of a ship-owner in contemporary maritime law.<sup>120</sup> In response to Anton's complaint and objection that he would not feel like the real owner of the ships because he had hired them back to his brother, Nicolaus Gottlieb answered: "Think about it for yourself, if someone buys a house and then rents this house to another person, who is the real owner of the house?"<sup>121</sup>

This analogy nipped all of Anton's criticism in the bud. In essence, it cut Anton off and robbed him of all reason for further criticism. How could Anton respond to this explanation other than to agree and consent to it? At the same time, however, this analogy also illustrates to us once again the legal grey area that Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens occupied with his deal and strategy in his shipping business. Of course, the analogy makes sense regarding the general agreement between the brothers. However, there is still a notable, distinct difference between a rental agreement regarding accommodation and the rental agreement Nicolaus Gottlieb proposed for his shipping business. The difference is simply that when letting a house, the revenues and income only accrue from the rent and thus only benefit the landlord, whereas in the case of Nicolaus Gottlieb's ships, the main revenues and income accrued in particular from the loading and the transshipment of goods on his ships and thus constituted proceeds that Anton would be excluded from. Yet, as Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens himself wrote, in the end they would both profit from the agreement. Consequently, there was no further reason left for Anton to criticise the agreement.

It is not clear, or provable, which of the various means and which rhetorical strategy of persuasion outlined above actually worked and led to the intended effect, which

<sup>119</sup> Regarding the rhetorical device of the analogy see Hoenen, Maarten J.F.M. "Art. Analogie." *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* 1, edited by Gert Ueding, 498-514. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992.

See also Bartha, Paul. "Art. Analogy and Analogical Reasoning." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/reasoning-analogy>, accessed November 17, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> See "Kauffahrdey" *Oekonomische Encyklopädie*, edited by Johann Georg Krünitz. 242 volumes. Berlin, 1773-1858, vol. 36, 470-478.

<sup>121</sup> See once more the letter from Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb to Luetkens, Anton, July 15, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/232, Letter Book I, no. 219.

was to convince or pacify Anton regarding the feasibility and lucrativeness of the whole enterprise. We can, however, say that the principle of demanding loyalty underpinning this letter exchange worked in the end. There are no further letters to be found written by Anton in the archive than those discussed above. However, we do know that from this moment onwards each and every one of the ships that Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens bought or hired over the course of the following year – nine ships in total at the end of 1745 – was immediately signed over to his brother in Hamburg and, as if that was not enough, the merchant even started to sign over certain goods to his brother. So, obviously, the plan that Nicolaus Gottlieb developed in the months of May and June 1744, shaped by his bad experience with regard to the ship *La Domenienne*, worked out completely and turned out to be successful. Although some of his ships were still captured even afterwards, the prospects of getting these ships and the goods back were much better than before. Considering this, it is actually not important which argument or strategy exactly prompted Anton to agree with the proposition, as long as we know that the whole process turned out to be successful for Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, and as long as we realize and acknowledge that many different ways of persuasion had been applied, and had been necessary, in this episode in order to set the ball rolling. This shows that each and every one of the different arguments and strategies individually was not regarded as sufficient to have the desired effect. Rather, for the purpose of winning someone over for certain plans, the various strategies and resources of persuasion available were mobilised, in the hope that at least one of them, or all them taken together, would lead to success. And this forms the crucial insight on which we are able to base our investigation of the powers of persuasion in letters because by investigating, thickly describing and therefore acquiring knowledge and an understanding about these various resources, ways and practices of persuasion, we ultimately gain a comprehensive insight into the different opportunities that were available to the people of the age to exert influence on each other and therefore to successfully manage their affairs in the past by means of letters.

As we have learned from this letter episode, the power of persuasion of these letters was by no means a sure-fire success but rather took the form of constant negotiation, which only worked out with the help and by means of applying and mobilizing different forms and resources of exerting influence. This entailed employing material practices, rhetorical practices, providing and creating financial or honour-related incentives, creating hard facts, or mobilising and instrumentalising contemporary norms and values that were used as arguments and as justification of interpersonal or moral obligations, all as part and under the general framework of the practical principle of persuasion of demanding loyalty.

All of these practical resources, in turn, could only take effect because they found a medium and space that also allowed for their practical utilisation. This medium was the letter and the space was to be found in the practice of correspondence. Only through the practice of letter writing, its properties and effects, this episode of brotherly endorsement was at all feasible, realisable, imaginable and of course practicable. It was the basis for his business practice in the field of the shipping business. This is what we should have learned and what I wanted to show in this chapter. Only through the help of letter practices, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens found a solution to the complicated, tricky situ-

ation in his shipping business, which shows us in an exemplary manner the immense significance and weight that letters held for the people of the age. His letters made the merchant capable of acting even though he was spatially separated from his correspondents and negotiation partners, in this episode, from his two brothers. For us, these letters, in turn, allow us today to reconstruct these ways of acting through letters, and this fact holds true despite the fact that we are now spatially and temporally separated from the actual events in these letters.

After his return to Hamburg, Nicolaus Gotlieb Luetkens eventually did become a large burgher of the Free and Imperial City of Hamburg. Among the papers required by the High Court of Admiralty in the case of the ship *Post van Hamburg*, we find as a piece of evidence Luetkens' original printed burger oath, *Bürger-Eyd*. The document was signed in person on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1745, right after his return to the Elbe city.

### 3.7 Conclusion: On Lurrendreyerey

In the German language, there exists a word whose meaning is nowadays only known to a few and which is basically no longer in use today. During the 18th century, however, this word was on everyone's lips and very common in common parlance, especially in sea business and particularly in Northern Germany and Hamburg. This word was the so called "Lurrendreyerey" or "Lurrendreier". In its literal sense, it referred to the word "Lurrd" and thus to the twisting of old ropes around new ropes in order to better preserve the new ropes.<sup>122</sup> In the actual way people used it during the 18th century, however, it was "a word common in seaborne trade, which meant that someone sailed with false, counterfeit passports, under a false flag, with a false connoisement, false papers or with prohibited goods [contrabande]", as it is defined in the contemporary dictionary and glossary by Michael Richey "Idioticon Hamburgensis".<sup>123</sup> The famous merchant manual of Carl Günther Ludovici, *Eroeffnete Akademie der Kaufleute*, defined that a skipper is called a "lorrendreyer" when he conducted "illicit trade in an unlawful manner to the detriment of a country or its inhabitants".<sup>124</sup> Still in the 19th century, a lexicon of East Frisian dialect defined it in the same way as "illicit trade" ["Schleichhandel"], a fraud with ships' papers, conducted by ship-owners or "shippers, who forged

122 "Lurrendreier." *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexicon von Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander*. 5 volumes. Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1867-1880, vol 3., 1873. <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/Wander/lemma=lurrendreier>, accessed March 24, 2017.

123 Lurrendreyer: "als Wort beim Seehandel gebraeulich, und bedeutet, was einer mit falschen Paessen, falschen Flaggen, falschen Connoisementen, falscher Fustage verbotener Waare u.d.gl. fahret." "Lurrendreyerey." *Idioticon Hambvgense oder Woerter-Buch, zur Erklaerung der eigenen, in und uem Hamburg gebraueuchlichen, Nieder-Saechsischen Mund-Art [...]*, edited by Michael Richey, 157. Hamburg: Koenig, 1755.

124 Lorrendreyer: "diejenigen schiffer lorrendreyer genannt, welche unrechtmäeßiger weise [...] zu schaden eines landes und seiner einwohner, [...] heimliche handlung treiben [...]." In *Eroeffnete Akademie der Kaufleute: oder vollstaendiges Kaufmanns-Lexicon, woraus saemtliche Handlungen und Gewerbe, mit allen ihren Vortheilen, und der Art, sie zu treiben, erlernet werden koennen*, edited by Carl Günther Ludovici, vol. 3, 1569. Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1767.

ships' passports and other ships' papers", which papers were once called "Lurden".<sup>125</sup> If translated as a kind of twisting or distortion of facts, it becomes rather obvious how the more literal, more idiomatic and the actual meaning of the word as it was used by the people of the age fit together. The reason that this word is therefore no longer in use today and not very common nowadays is simply that this practice is for the most part no longer very common, or in other words, has been mostly successfully eradicated. In the 18th century, however, this "Lurrendreyerey" was apparently still a very common and widespread phenomenon, which can be understood in the end as one of the direct consequences and reactions of the maritime trading sector during that time to the conflict-laden and unstable situation of war. Furthermore, this found its clearest expression in the very fact that High Courts of Admiralty existed in all European countries, whose main task consisted *inter alia* in uncovering and fighting these frauds. Against this backdrop, it comes at little or no surprise that this peculiar word also resurfaces over and over again in the letter correspondences of Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens. Furthermore, it is hardly surprising that we can also find it in the letter conversation analysed in this chapter, in the most exemplary fashion, at least twice referring to exactly the practice of providing false ships' papers. Notwithstanding this, the word and the usage of this word in our letter conversation still holds ready a special twist in its appearance in the letters that maybe deviates from the first impression regarding the correlation of the term and the letter episode that might have occurred to the reader so far. The word can be found in the letters, but the particular usage or the situation in which it was used might surprise us and is therefore all the more revealing.

So, for instance, we can find the word in a letter from the 29th of May 1744, in the very same month that Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens' shrewd plan was concocted. The merchants Hertzer & von Bobartt used it in a letter to Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, reporting and discussing the capture of a ship bound to Dunkirk owned by an Englishman, which, however, sailed under Danish colours and with a Hamburg captain, which caused the merchants to note that "behind this enterprise there stands Lurrendreyerey".<sup>126</sup> Also the London merchant Anthony Luetkens wrote about the said practice in a later letter from the 5th of July, reporting to Nicolaus Gottlieb that "the warships of the King capture all ships that fall into their clutches, because they hope that they find a lot of Lurrendreyerey with regard to false signatures" behind these ships.<sup>127</sup> The merchants therefore were quite aware of this practice and they discussed it. However, the only thing they would refrain from, or rather the idea that would not cross their minds, was to associate their own practices and undertakings with this illegal practice.

Neither Hertzer & von Bobartt nor Anthony Luetkens attributed or saw their own actions and the plan to sign over Nicolaus Gottlieb's ships to Anton in any way as a form

<sup>125</sup> "Luur(an)dreien = anführen, täuschen, betrügen; eigentlich Schleichhandel treiben, vom Schiffer, der die Pässe fälscht, oder falsche Briefe, [...] früher Lurden genannt, ausstellt." "Luur(an)dreier." *Ostfriesisches Wörterbuch*, edited by Stürenburg, Cirk Heinrich, 142. Aurich: Seyde, 1857.

<sup>126</sup> "Es steckt aber Lurrendreyerey darunter." Letter from Hertzer & von Bobartt to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, May 29, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/234.

<sup>127</sup> "als die Kriegsschiff vom König weilen in Hoffnung das viel Lurrendreyery mit Unterschrifft, de-shalb alles auffbringen was für kommt." Letter from Luetkens, Anthony to Luetkens, Nicolaus Gottlieb, July 5, 1744, TNA, HCA 30/233, court bundles, Bundle B, no. 8.

of Lurrendreyerey and therefore as illegal behaviour. This, in turn, was in the end exactly the fact that struck me most when reading and reconstructing this letter conversation between Luetkens, his family and his trading partners conducted in the summer of 1744. It represented the special moment of surprise that prompted me to write this chapter because it reveals to us so much about the self-perception of these Hamburg merchants that consequently underlay and facilitated their activities in the trading sector during the 18th century. Thus, it also reveals a lot about how these merchants remained capable of acting in the hazardous and highly contested field of trade and the market of Early Modern wholesale trade because, by means of these ways of justification that they used, they also show us what role and position they attributed to themselves. They saw themselves in the role of the free riders, or in more positive words, the in-betweeners in these fields that allowed them to do whatever was needed to be able to conduct their trade.

As their letters reveal to us, Luetkens as well as his trading partners and family must have shared the conviction that with their actions, with developing and implementing the plan of basically using Anton to whitewash their business, with his consent, they did not do anything wrong or fraudulent but simply did what was necessary. Of course, the whole undertaking ultimately was trickery, which must have been clear right from the start to everyone involved. Also, all the actions taken with regard to the sixty casks of sugar in the case of La Domenienne, ultimately have to be regarded as just as artful and shrewdly planned. But from the merchants' point of view, this trick and all the actions accompanying it did not represent fraud or fraudulent, illegal practice in any way. At least they would not admit it. Thus, the presented cases were decidedly not regarded as Lurrendreyerey by the involved actors. Quite on the contrary, for them they only represented a legitimate utilisation or exploitation of a legal claim, right and status that was officially and by maritime law given and granted to them in France. The latter fact, in turn, is particularly and strikingly reflected in the constantly repeated, mantra-like letter formulae used in almost all of the letters analysed, namely that Luetkens transferred the ships to Anton "in a certain manner", "auf gewise Arth" in German, or "op gewisse Conditio" in Dutch. This insinuated and underlined that Luetkens knew what he was doing and that his trading partners and family members could rely on the fact that he would ensure that the legal safeguarding of this undertaking was waterproof, on paper and notarially certified. At the same time, we can assume that his correspondents, reading this line and letter formulae, at least might have been aware of the fact that they were acting in a grey area. Nonetheless, since the merchants could in the end relate all their actions to the legal framework of maritime neutrality, they must have regarded their actions as nothing other than a necessity and an appropriate usage of the prevailing legitimate opportunities, the existing loopholes and grey areas available to them, which they would then of course still be required to adapt to their particular situation. This was also the reason why Nicolaus Gottlieb insisted in his letters so strongly on ensuring the orderliness and the legal safeguarding of all the actions carried out. It was this legal safeguarding that represented the basic foundation and reinsurance of his plans and the justification that he could always draw on and refer to. Since all the actions happened in accordance with existing legal regulations, these actions, and thus his shipping business, could not be regarded in any way as improper means. As must

be clear to the reader and the contemporaries though, these actions of course always sailed rather close to the wind and were at the edges of legality or even beyond because, speaking in purely practical terms, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens only used the benefits of maritime neutrality to be able to advance and promote his trade and businesses in France. What we are dealing with in this episode is therefore ultimately a legal grey area that Luetkens and his trading partners and correspondents occupied with these actions and that Luetkens masterly devised and used to implement his plans. And with this depiction of a grey area, in turn, we are ultimately arriving at precisely the operational framework that we have to assume was applied for most of the Hamburg or Hanseatic trading activities during that time in general.

As a matter of fact, maritime neutrality was rather difficult to sustain during a time when all trade and all the transport routes were unavoidably linked or directly connected to the different colonial powers and when most of the trade goods were coming from or transported to the markets of the colonial powers. Therefore, merchants, even from neutral powers, always had to choose sides in one way or another and take risks in order to take part in the Atlantic trading markets. The only thing they could do was therefore to try everything in their power and within the realms of the possibilities to remain capable of acting and trading in this hazardous situation. This approach, in turn, represented precisely what Luetkens and his associates did in the analysed episode. Nicolaus Gottlieb unmistakably took the side of the French, though not without trying everything in his power and using every means available to him to try to ensure that this partisanship would not straightaway be to his detriment because after all he possessed certain opportunities and resources to cover up this partisanship. And this is how we have to understand the whole underlying situation and his actions concerning his way of running his shipping business.

There are, however, no moral scruples to be found on his side. These would also have been in a way inappropriate from his contemporary point of view because, first of all, he did in principle stick to the rules, at least on paper. Secondly, his actions in the end only served the purpose of trying to make a living and to keep up with the times even though, or precisely because the times were harsh and inconvenient. It is important to note in this regard, however, that all his actions in this episode did not serve the ultimate goal of getting rich or maximising profits, in a modern capitalistic sense. Instead, as has become obvious, the measures primarily served the purpose of staying capable to act at all, of making a living as a Hamburg wholesale merchant in France as best possible, and for this purpose all measures were in the end reasonable and not morally reprehensible to him and from his perspective.

In fact, the only moral element that we can find and notice in this letter episode points exactly in the opposite direction rather than showing us any scruple or doubt as to the righteousness of the whole enterprise. In the demand for loyalty that Nicolaus Gottlieb claimed from his brother Anton, we actually find the ultimate proof that Nicolaus Gottlieb was convinced of the legitimacy and appropriateness of his juridical trick. In this regard, the whole enterprise was not to be seen as morally reprehensible or corrupt, but quite on the contrary, it would have been a blunder and breach of morality if Anton had repelled the idea. The moral compass or cudgel effective in this episode therefore works exactly the other way round than having a hindering effect. It is Early

Modern family moral and values and the obligations of fraternal bonds that form the background to the persuasive strategies effective in this letter conversation and these make it unmistakably clear by implication that any other scruple at the same time was out of place.

Notwithstanding this, the interesting thing about this episode is that Nicolaus Gottlieb nevertheless left the ultimate power of decision regarding the question of whether or not his sibling would jump on the bandwagon, ultimately to his brother. Anton basically could still have said no and rejected the offer. In practice all he had to do was simply not to hand over the third enclosed letter to his master. By doing that, he would have surely refused a very lucrative offer and furthermore it must be assumed that this refusal would have also caused discontent on the part of his eldest brother. Yet, Anton did in fact have the opportunity to say no. That, in turn, shows us in the end the personal closeness and familiarity, the strong bond that prevailed among the brothers and, concomitant to that, it reveals to us the importance of the powers of persuasion in this fraternal relationship. After all, if it had been sufficient to convince Anton simply by means of exercising his natural brotherly authority, then the strategy of leaving his brother with the power to make his own decision would not have been at all necessary. Nicolaus Gottlieb simply could have also instructed or even commanded his brother to act in a certain way, but he did not.<sup>128</sup>

The letter conversation therefore shows us the subtleties and complexities of 18th century family relations and family communication in a commercial family in the pursuit of the maintenance of family cohesion. In addition, it also shows how this familial environment was actively used and mobilized to successfully pursue one's affairs in mercantile business. Nicolaus Gottlieb therefore surely accepted certain grounds for refusal of his offer. Against the background of my explanations, however, these grounds would not include general scruples against the legitimacy of the enterprise, as especially his harsh letter from the 15th of July 1744 shows. As these grounds, he would only have accepted more personal family reasons, as for instance when Anton feared that he would not be able to cope with the immense responsibility, or, of course, if the master had not agreed to the proposition. Unfortunately though, we will never know whether such an answer would have caused a different result or outcome to the whole enterprise, because in the end Anton accepted the offer. Therefore, I understand the gesture of inserting the letter to Anton's master unsealed in the letter packet as primarily a gesture of good will because Nicolaus Gottlieb expected the same good will from his correspondent.

At the same time, we are clearly presented with a very powerful way of how people were able to exert influence on others during the 18th century with the help of letters. Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens was able to convince his brother in this case to agree to his offer and to initiate the necessary steps to implement his idea by means of the practical principle of persuasion through demanding loyalty. He did so by creating a situation in which he seemingly provided his brother with discretionary powers while he at the same time anticipated or rather created a guilty conscience on the part of his brother in case Anton did not consent to the offer. All this, in turn, happened primarily on a

128 See Capp, *Ties that Bind*, 1-13.

performative level rather than finding concrete expression in the letter text itself, as for instance through words that would expressly force his brother to say yes. Instead, it is written between the lines. Luetkens used the full potential of the performative powers, practical means and resources offered by the communication medium of the letter in order to win his two brothers over for his plan. He used the material in the form of a material rhetoric by leaving the letters open; he used certain arguments, which appealed to his brother's conscience; he used rhetorical devices, such as the analogy, in order to convince his brother on a logical level; he created financial and honour-related incentives; and he used the assistance of his middle brother, whom he skilfully included into the conversation, and made his accomplice, by also inserting a letter to him in the letter packet. All these elements in the end made it rather difficult for Anton to refuse the offer.

As becomes obvious from this episode, the practice of letter writing was a highly effective and crucial tool for implementing plans and successfully managing a shipping business in the 18th century. Under the condition of spatial separation, it was basically the only tool that helped and allowed the people to accomplish their business enterprises. Letter practices held ready particular ways and means of being able to exert influence on the addressee. The practice therefore explicitly empowered people to implement their plans and aspirations. In the case of the analysed letter conversation regarding Luetkens' shipping business, the analysis has shown how the merchant, through his letter-writing and negotiation skills and business acumen, was able to react appropriately and to cope with the difficult circumstances prevailing for wholesale merchants coming from neutral countries during that time, which I outlined at the beginning of the chapter. In particular, the chapter has shown how the merchant solved the problems that occurred to him due to his special status as a travelling merchant during his establishment phase and his decision not to decide to trade as a neutral, but to trade with the French. Despite this, his ships sailed under neutral Hamburg colours, thanks to his shrewd strategy. In the end, even the ship *Hope*, captured in August 1745 by the English, was eventually decreed to be restored as neutral on the 15th of March 1746.<sup>129</sup> Even in this case, Luetkens' strategy paid off, at least with regard to his ship, though not his laden goods. Thus, although the Admiralty did find out about the trickery behind this ship *Hope* and its particular hiring arrangements, stored as exhibit A in the court records, they were nevertheless not able to legally refute the general lawfulness and veracity of the said arrangements.<sup>130</sup> The same held true for the court case regarding the ship *Post van Hamburg*. On the basis of this letter conversation, Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens was therefore able to restructure his whole shipping business during the time that he spent in France and this, in turn, helped him in great parts to press ahead and to set the course for his career and the success of his mercantile establishment phase because it kept him capable of acting. This was all that I wanted to show in this chapter.

<sup>129</sup> Decision: the ship and part of the cargo restored on 15 March 1746; the rest of the cargo condemned on 18 January 1748, TNA, HCA 30/232, HCA 32/115/14, HCA 13/90 and HCA 42/36.

<sup>130</sup> Exhibit A. Copy and translation of the agreement by which Anthony Luetkens let out his share in several ships for two years to Nicholas Gottlieb Luetkens, TNA, HCA 32/115/14.