

5.1 The Prize Papers

Uncurated Histories of Global Scope

Zusammenfassung:

Dieser Beitrag stellt einen erst kürzlich in seiner ganzen Dimension als europäisches und globalgeschichtliches Kulturgut bekannt gewordenen Quellenbestand aus Schiffskaperungen – die Prize Papers – vor. Schiffskaperungen während der europäischen und zunehmend global geführten Seekriege zwischen 1652 und 1815 waren ein Teil des Kriegsrechts und zeugen von einer zunehmenden Verrechtlichung internationaler Beziehungen. Beschlagnahmtes Schiffsgut aus aller Welt – Schiffspapiere, Postsäcke und persönliche Dinge der Schiffsbesatzungen und der Reisenden – wurde in den frühneuzeitlichen Admiralitäts- oder Prisengerichten herangezogen, um die Legitimität einer Kaperung im Konfliktfall belegen zu können. Der Londoner Admiralitätsgerichtshof hat dieses Kapergut aus 35 000 Schiffskaperungen über Jahrhunderte teilweise völlig unberührt aufgehoben. Jetzt befindet sich diese Überlieferung, eingelagert in ca. 4 000 Boxen, in den National Archives in London und bildet heute eines der faszinierendsten Archive zu Europäischer Expansion, Kolonialismus und historischer Meeresforschung aus einer alltagshistorischen und, was den Entstehungskontext der Dokumente betrifft, globalen Perspektive.

1. Letters that Went Missing During Transit at Sea

Like many men and women who migrated in the wake of European overseas expansion, Moravian missionaries like Lene Wied, who lived with her husband in the mission station in Paramaribo, Surinam, mused about letters that should have arrived as part of a ship's load crossing the oceans, but never did.¹

[...] this time I received two letters [...] but I have not received anything from my family for almost two years; letters from my family probably went missing twice, because together

¹ I would like to thank Amanda Bevan for her careful reading of this article and for her thoughtful comments.

with Brother² Lutzke's letter I received a short note from my brother that he had written to me recently, but I have not received his letter, now I learn from all the other letters I received that my sister Christel married and now lives in Berlin, but I have not received a single line from her herself, the two ships which have been taken by the French probably carried letters addressed to me [...].³

Similarly, the Moravian Catharina Borck wrote from her new home in Paramaribo, Surinam, to a friend in Christiansfeld that “only recently a ship that should have come here [to Paramaribo, Surinam], was captured by privateers, they took the ship cargo and everything else on board, and let the ship continue on its journey empty, it brought one postal bag full of letters, but a second remained there [...]”.⁴ From 1792 she lived with her husband in Paramaribo, Surinam, and she seems to have used any free minute to correspond with her family, friends, and brethren in Christiansfeld, her old home. She was very aware that letters might not arrive.⁵

It was not a secret that during warfare merchant ships were captured by the enemy, and that mail in transit went missing as a consequence. The Moravian Thomas Langballe, clockmaker and organist in Paramaribo and an assiduous correspondent, voiced his despair at the sight of so many ships “sent from here to Europe, and taken by the British privateers, by which occasion they threw the letters overboard or the letters fell into the wrong hands and were squandered; I almost lose confidence to write again.”⁶

But what really happened to these missing letters and other belongings on board ships, and why was their transport across the oceans interrupted?

2. The Capture of Merchant Ships as Part of European Warfare

Throughout the early modern period most of Europe was engaged in permanent warfare, wars named after conflicts, regions, or timespans, such as the Thirty

2 Brother or Sister here with a capital “B” or “S” refers to a religious brother or sister of the Moravian community, not a biological brother or sister.

3 The National Archives UK [=TNA], High Court of Admiralty [=HCA], HCA 30/374, Paramaribo 11 March 1795.

4 TNA, HCA 30/228, Paramaribo 27 February 1795.

5 For more information on Catharina Borck as a Moravian missionary in Surinam, see Dagmar Freist: Wo wurdest Du geboren, und wo überall hast Du gelebt? Mehrfachzugehörigkeiten und Selbstverortungen am Beispiel der Herrnhuter Weltgemeinde im 18. Jahrhundert. In: ead./Sabine Kyora/Melanie Unseld (eds.): *Transkulturelle Mehrfachzugehörigkeit als kulturhistorisches Phänomen. Räume – Materialitäten – Erinnerungen*. Bielefeld 2019, pp. 83–101.

6 Unitätsarchiv Herrnhut, R.15.L.b.33.d. Thomas Langballe an Samuel Liebisch, 16.05.1798. I would like to thank Jessica Cronshagen for pointing out this reference.

Years' War (1618–1648), the War of the Palatine Succession (1688–1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), the Anglo-Dutch wars between 1652 and 1795, the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the Wars of American Independence (1775–1783), and the Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815), to name but a few. These wars spilled over into the European overseas expansion, with numerous wars fought at sea and around the world to compete for new territories, resources, and trading posts outside Europe, while destroying and suppressing local cultures and enslaving people in the wake of empire building and economic exploitation.

In wartime, the seafaring powers of Europe intercepted each other's ships in order to weaken and demoralise the enemy by cutting off trade and supply routes all across the globe, confiscating ships and cargo, and sometimes also taking prisoners of war. The capture of enemy and neutral ships was a regular and highly regulated part of European warfare.⁷ Although its subsequent legal proof was overseen by national prize or admiralty courts, the capture as such was based on the law of nations.⁸ Numerous surviving eyewitness reports describe the capture of a ship – with variations – as the same routine procedure: a naval warship or a privateer would stop the suspected ship, board the vessel, demand to speak to the master of the ship, and inspect the ship's papers. If the ship was clearly an enemy, or if there was the slightest suspicion that the ship's papers were false and an allegedly neutral ship was an adversary after all, it was seized and sent into the nearest friendly port. Here the crew was subjected to a standard set of questions – the standing interrogatories – issued at the beginning of wars involving the British by the High Court of Admiralty to commissioners in each port around the country. They were intended to be administered to the captured ship's crew immediately after being brought into port, in order to generate the necessary evidence required for the court process to begin. If the ship or cargo were found to be neutral, the court restored the ship or cargo to its various owners. In other cases, a ship might be condemned and only the cargo restored to its owners. Especially if a neutral ship was captured, the owners of its cargo, or an agent working for them, put forward a claim to make a demand for their property.

While standardised documents, these standing interrogatories did change in content over time and between wars. Formal examinations were based on these questionnaires and conducted by local commissioners, and each individual would reply to the questions outlined in the standing interrogatories; their responses fitted into a more formal language for the court when written down. The examinations or

7 See Donald A. Petrie: *The Prize Game: Lawful Looting on the High Seas in the Days of Fighting Sail*. Annapolis 1999.

8 David J. Starkey: *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century*. Exeter 1990, p. 13.

depositions were concluded with a notarised proof, the commissioner's affidavit, that the commissioners had administered the questions in the standing interrogatories to the relevant people in a particular prize case. In most cases it was complemented with an allegation by the captor, the captain of the privateer or naval ship. It stated the fact of the seizure and requested that the ship be condemned.⁹

A formal court process started if a vessel was suspected to be owned by those in service of an enemy sovereign, to have originated from an enemy port, or if evidence suggested that they were intending to trade with the enemy. A ship also came under scrutiny if found to be carrying contraband. Neutral vessels were those that sailed under the flag of a sovereign not involved in the war, but privateers and naval vessels had the right under the law of nations to seize them if they suspected that they were carrying enemy cargo. To establish whether a captured ship did indeed belong to an adversary power, the examinations of crew members alone did not suffice. In case of suspicion, all papers, including the ship's papers, personal documents, and artefacts, were taken off board to be transferred to the relevant prize court.¹⁰ In the case of captures undertaken by English ships, everything aboard a ship was stored as potential evidence or "exhibits"¹¹ for the High Court of Admiralty in London.¹² An officer of the capturing ship attested in a sworn statement – the attestation as to papers – that the papers found aboard were of the same number and condition as those transferred to the court. In most cases, documents taken from captured vessels and transported to the court in London were not in English. Therefore, abstracts were produced for the court which provided a summary of the papers taken as well as translations of any documents seen to be relevant to the case. If the papers were in multiple languages, multiple abstracts and translations were produced by different translators.

A large variety of papers from about 35 000 captures between 1652–1815 has thus survived in the High Court of Admiralty at The National Archives UK in Kew, including the documents produced in the initial and subsequent court procedures and processes. As as yet unknown amount of evidence was dealt with by the colonial Vice-Admiralty Courts. The resulting English Prize Papers are a unique collection. No similar collection of papers used by other European or American prize courts is known.¹³

9 See Amanda Bevan/Randolph Cock: The High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers, 1652–1815: Challenges in Improving Access to Older Records. In: *Archives* 53/137 (2018), pp. 34–58, esp. p. 35.

10 For an example, see the article by Lucas Haasis in this section.

11 Bevan/Cock, The High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers (see note 9), p. 35.

12 Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise* (see note 8).

13 Bevan/Cock, The High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers (see note 9), p. 34.

3. The Prize Papers

The Prize Papers are all those documents that were found on captured ships crossing the oceans during warfare and suspected to be “enemies”, and which were transferred as potential evidence or exhibits to the High Court of Admiralty in London. Their core consists of personal and egodocuments in unparalleled extent, regional and global variety, socio-cultural diversity, and multiplicity of languages; they also include everyday objects. The collection holds approximately 160 000 personal and business letters, many of them still unopened, written in at least nineteen different languages, among them Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian, Spanish, English, Basque, Flemish, Yiddish, Ladino, Russian, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, and Latin. Furthermore, there are miscellanea such as sheet music and songs, poems, drawings, doodles, diaries, account books, notebooks including small slate tablets on which chalk-written memos have survived, vocabulary lists, grammar books and language learning manuals, writing exercises, ground plans, landscape descriptions, and scientific treatises. The artefacts include fashion accessories such as bows, pearls, bracelets, rings; organic remains such as shipped seeds and dried plants; medical substances or intoxicants; trade goods and samples; and objects of everyday use of European and non-European provenance. Among the Prize Papers are also personal archives of traders, shipmasters, and passengers. Moreover, administrative records of colonial powers are part of the collection. They include the financial administration of the slave trade and annual reports of plantation overseers compiled for the owners who often resided in Europe, including the appraisal of slaves, as well as handwritten spreadsheets which list the number of male and female slaves including children traded against other types of cargo such as brandy and rum or textiles during the voyage of a ship along the African West coast.¹⁴ Finally, surviving ship papers include ship passes, charter parties, passports, muster rolls, bills of lading, cargo manifests, bills of health, ship logbooks, letters of marque, as well as instructions on how to conduct privateering practices.

These written and material sources are complemented by the court records generated by the High Court of Admiralty in order to decide on the lawfulness of the captures. Apart from those legal records produced at the moment of capture, such as the examinations of the captain and selected sailors and occasionally some of the passengers, affidavits, allegations, and translations, these records include the appertaining correspondence with ship owners, attorneys, agents, merchants, and councils of free cities who sought to prove the unlawfulness of the capture to reclaim their ships and goods, as well as claims and appeals.

14 Dagmar Freist: European Overseas Expansion. In: Scott Dixon/Beat Kümin (eds.): *Interpreting Early Modern Europe*. London 2019, chapter 10.

Geographically, the collection includes Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and perhaps Australia. Its global scope is mirrored in the linguistic multiplicity of the surviving documents – preserved letters, administrative correspondence, and documents in numerous fonts, hands, languages, and dialects. Some are translated into English, if some relevance for the establishment of the ship's nationality was attributed to the captured document, or its content was suspected of being of political interest.

Politically and historically, the Prize Papers are the result of and an eyewitness to European overseas expansion, migration, and colonialism. In contrast to other surviving documents of this period, European expansion and nation building, colonialism, slavery, resistance and rebellion, subversion and agency, (forced) migration, missionising, naval wars and seafaring, forms of communication, the ups and downs of long-distance trade, and discoveries become observable in these multilingual written sources and artefacts from the perspective of ordinary people. Numerous letters written or dictated by children have been preserved, as well as letters of ordinary sailors, soldiers, servants, and craftsmen, and a wide range of letters from women, who either stayed at home and had to manage everyday life, or who went abroad as migrants, travel companions, independent tradeswomen, missionaries, translators, or plantation mistresses, to name but a few reasons for travelling abroad.

These incidentally surviving documents and artefacts provide glimpses of the voices of ordinary people in global contexts, their emotions, practices and agency. They show the complex ways in which individuals and groups created global connections, within and across boundaries of empires, pursuing a range of often conflicting aims. From a micro-historical perspective these sources will shed further light on formal and informal networks and empires across the early modern world, and its rootedness “in inter-personal relations and exchanges between people of different nationalities and diverse religious affiliations, belonging to various ethnic groups”.¹⁵ Entanglements and confrontations of regions as well as of people across time and space will come into sharper view. To what extent this archive will allow us to decentralise the still dominant European and North American academic perspective of early modern globalisation, migration, and diasporas,¹⁶ which is also inherent in many of the surviving documents, cannot be answered at this stage. The survival

15 Cátia Antunes/Amélia Polónia: Introduction. In: ead. (eds.): *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500–1800*. Leiden 2016, p. 8.

16 Natalie Z. Davis: *Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World*. In: *History and Theory* 50 (2011), pp. 188–202; Vinaya Chaturvedi (ed.): *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London 2012; Paul Gilroy: *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge (MA) 1993; for a revision of the African diaspora, see Paul T. Zeleza: *Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic*. In: *African Affairs* 104/414 (2005), pp. 35–68.

of documents in multiple non-European languages, the artefacts of non-European provenance, and the fact that these documents originated in multiple contexts around the world provide an important starting point for approaching this historical period anew in collaboration with researchers from academic contexts outside of Europe, and for approaching the collection as a shared cultural heritage.

4. Uncurated Histories

The Prize Papers were first stored within the Court as a working collection, and then moved to the Tower of London. From 1838 onwards, they were formally in the custody of the newly established Public Record Office (PRO) and were finally moved to the Office's premises in Chancery Lane in 1856. From there they were transferred to the new PRO in Kew in 1996. Since 2003, when the PRO and the Historical Manuscript Commission merged to form The National Archives (TNA) in Kew, the Prize Papers collection became part of The National Archives UK, where they are stored in more than 4 000 boxes, some papers still in their original postal bags. While some parts of the papers are still "seriously disarranged", the majority is organised by ship and capture, though there are still bundles of misplaced papers, and almost all of the papers lack further descriptive details at the document level due to the sheer volume.¹⁷ Thanks to the commitment and expertise of the archival personnel at TNA, with Dr. Amanda Bevan as head of legal records, an ambitious sorting process has begun as an integral part of the Prize Papers Project, which aims "to open this whole collection to free worldwide exploration".¹⁸

The Prize Papers are both product and testimony of early modern global interlacing, however, from a mainly European perspective: juridically, as prize records, they are the products of naval warfare and the juridification of international relations.¹⁹ Socio-culturally, as letters and things originating and sent from all over the world, they are a testimony of global intertwining processes which could run athwart state-drawn confrontation lines.²⁰ Classified as "legal records, with the court papers

17 For the history of the archive, first attempts of cataloguing, and the challenges it poses for contemporary cataloguing, see Bevan/Cock, *The High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers* (see note 9).

18 *Ibid.*, p. 36. For details on the Prize Papers Project, see URL: www.prizepapers.de [last accessed on 20.08.2019] and below.

19 David J. Starkey: *The Origins and Regulation of Eighteenth-Century British Privateering*. In: C. Richard Pennell (ed.): *Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader*. New York 2001, pp. 69–81.

20 Dagmar Freist: "Ich schicke Dir etwas Fremdes und nicht Vertrautes". Briefpraktiken als Vergewisserungsstrategie zwischen Raum und Zeit im Kolonialgefüge der Frühen Neuzeit. In: ead. (ed.): *Diskurse – Körper – Artefakte. Historische Praxeologie in der Frühneuzeitforschung*. Bielefeld 2015, pp. 373–404; Thomas Truxes: *Transnational Trade in the Wartime North Atlantic: The Voyage of the Snow Recovery*. In: *Business History Review* 79/4 (2005), pp. 751–780.

for each capture being the driver for the survival of the papers as exhibits”, the richness of the collection for numerous other research areas was overlooked for almost two hundred years.²¹ However, a number of projects have started to use the Prize Papers as a historical source for linguistic, trading, family, or maritime research, mainly focusing on papers “from specific countries or in specific languages”,²² while researchers have also begun to discover the global dimension of the collection.²³

The Prize Papers’ large potential for the above mentioned and numerous complementary research areas, such as medicine, missionising, slavery, climate research, communication studies, religious plurality, or the study of international and maritime law, is based on their unintentional preservation, the accidental conservation of the prize documents. The lack of contemporary selection by the historical writers themselves or their successors, as well as the absence of any major revision or sorting by archive personnel has left behind “unarchived histories”,²⁴ which means that research gains access, without obstruction or censorship, to early modern social practices and to relations to the self and the world in a directness rarely encountered in archival contexts. This becomes clear for instance in the case of surviving merchant archives, which can also be found in large numbers in other archives. But the known conserved examples usually trace voluntary bestowals from individuals or companies, which have often been bowdlerised beforehand for reasons of prestige: pending or bounced bills, threatening or disappointed letters,

21 Bevan/Cock, *The High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers* (see note 9), p. 36.

22 Ibid. See for instance Erik van der Doe et al. (eds.): *Sailing Letters Journaal*, vol. 1-5. Zutphen 2008–2013; Marijke van der Waal/Gisbert Rutten: *Letters as Loot: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2014; Jelle van Lottum/Lex Heerma van Voss/Jan Lucassen: *Sailors, National and International Labour Markets and National Identity, 1600–1850*. In: Richard Unger (ed.): *Shipping and Economic Growth 1350–1800*. Leiden/Boston 2011, pp. 309–352; Thomas Truxes/Louis M. Cullen/John Shovlin (eds.): *The Bordeaux-Dublin Letters, 1757: Correspondence of an Irish Community Abroad*. Oxford 2013; David Sebouh Aslanian: *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*. Berkeley 2014; Siem van Eeten: *De kaping van de Genoegens van de ongetrouwde Jongeman*. Zuidwolde 2017.

23 Xabier Lamikiz: *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks*. Woodbridge 2010; Thomas Truxes: *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York*. Yale 2010; Karwan Fatah-Black: *Paramaribo as Dutch and Atlantic Nodal Point, 1640–1795*. In: Gert Oostindie/Jessica V. Roitman (eds.): *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*. Leiden 2014, pp. 52–71; Dagmar Freist: *A Global Microhistory of the Early Modern Period: Social Sites and the Interconnectedness of Human Lives*. In: *Quaderni Storici* 52/2 (2017), pp. 537–555.

24 Sebouh D. Aslanian/Joyce Chaplin/Ann McGrath/Kristin Mann: *AHR Conversation: How Size Matters. The Question of Scale in History*. In: *American Historical Review* 118/5 (2013), pp. 1431–1472.

documents proving illegal practices or machinations in grey areas, as well as occasionally very personal missives about emotions, experiences, and interpretations of the world were not supposed to have any influence on posterity's perception of the respective writer. This is also evident in multiple documents relating to slavery, which survive uncensored and shed light on everyday practices of ordinary people in colonial contexts.

Conclusion

We cannot say at present on which ships the missing letters that Catharina Borck longed for had travelled. But we do know that the two letters quoted at the beginning of this chapter and written by Catharina Borck sadly did not reach their addressees in Europe either, but ended up in the High Court of Admiralty in London to be rediscovered only now.

The first letter was among the mail in transit on the American merchant ship "The Illustrious President" with largely Danish and Swedish crew bound from Paramaribo to Amsterdam.²⁵ Its cargo included sugar, coffee, cocoa, cotton, and Madeira wine. Lying off Dover, the ship was captured on 20 April 1795 by a boat from the British "Flora" privateer and taken into the Port of London. The cargo, postbags, textile samples, ships' papers, and diaries on board the ship were transferred to the High Court of Admiralty in London as potential "material witnesses", or exhibits, needed to double proof the "national" origin of the captured ship in case the capture was challenged as illegitimate.

A considerable number of these potential "material witnesses" once admitted as exhibits were never touched and constitute the "uncurated" part or histories of the Prize Papers. They slumbered in boxes and postal bags for more than two hundred years. Other captured documents and the ship papers were more actively used by the High Court of Admiralty. Many of them were numbered by the respective staff of the High Court of Admiralty for ease of reference and audit: the numbers were also used for cross-referring to the related translations.²⁶ They were thus integrated into the internal historical and judicial structure of the High Court of Admiralty and were linked, often with a string, with those papers that were generated by the court proceedings after a capture: standing interrogatories, examinations, affidavits, attestations to papers, claims, allegations, appeals, as well as correspondence between the High Court of Admiralty and different claimants, their lawyers, and even

25 For the naval wars during this period and privateering, see Richard Hill: *The Prizes of War: The Naval Prize System in the Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815*. Stroud 1998.

26 However, papers could also be returned. For many neutral ships we have a "ghost archive" in the form of translations or brief descriptions of letters and papers restored by the court.

diplomats of the countries at war. These bundles of legal records survive until today, and together with opened and unopened letters, folding techniques, letter bundles, artefacts, and natural remains contained in letters, they make up the unique documents as well as the materiality of the Prize Papers, which is in itself a fascinating source for the study of early modern materiality and social practices.

This part of the archive has never been sorted, which means no one in the past decided what to keep and what to weed.²⁷ Therefore, material has survived which we would never find in a state or national archive. In a nutshell, these are sources which became part of the legal records of the High Court of Admiralty after the capture of ships, but which originated in contexts of great geographical, linguistic, ethnic, social, religious, cultural, regional, and national diversity around the world between 1652 and 1815. This diversity of context and origin with all it entails makes up the unique global scope of the collection. Especially the surviving letters, drawings and doodles, diaries, and notes are of a very private nature, witnessing what it meant to ordinary men, women, and children to migrate and to come to terms with foreign places, climates, sounds, and tastes, and how to write about this. The Prize Papers thus lend a voice to people of whom we usually have no evidence, especially within colonial contexts. The archive is interdisciplinary, with documents and artefacts relating to colonial history, international law, history of medicine, climate research, ship building, cartography, slave trade, political history, to name but a few. The collection also provides new evidence of the slave trade and the everyday involvement of ordinary people in it, of resistance, subversion, and agency; of the hazards of making a living as a migrant and the emotional side of being separated from family and loved ones across the sea. In view of colonial history and empire building, this material contributes to new research perspectives which focus on connectivities and informal networks²⁸ going beyond the nation state and the learned middle classes which migrated in the wake of colonial administration.²⁹ The linguistic, social, ethnic, and geographical diversity of the surviving documents and artefacts allows insights into everyday practices in colonial contexts.

27 The sorting undertaken by TNA now on a larger scale aims at saving all documents and getting them back into their original place.

28 The field is vastly growing, see therefore the classic study Sanjay Subrahmanyam: *Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia*. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 31/3 (1997), pp. 735–762, and references in Maxine Berg (ed.): *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges of the 21st Century*. Oxford 2013.

29 For the impact of the middle classes on letter writing and communication across the Atlantic see Konrad Dierks: *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*. Philadelphia 2009; Sarah M. Pearsall: *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century*. Oxford 2008.

The close study of the diverse contexts of origin of these documents and artefacts in collaborative projects with researchers from these contexts of origin as well as participatory projects promise to contribute to a less European centred approach to migration and globalisation of this period.

In order to open the richness and diversity of the Prize Papers and its appertaining legal documents to a global audience as widely as possible, and to make it searchable for numerous research queries, a project was started in January 2018 that aims at the complete digitisation of the Prize Papers, including the preservation of the collection's material dimension, initial and in-depth cataloguing, the creation of research-oriented metadata, and finally the presentation of the digital copies and the metadata in an open access research database.³⁰ The first documents will go online by the end of 2019. The complete digitisation of the Prize Papers has been made possible through funding since January 2018 from the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. The project is situated at the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg and assigned to the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities. The project collaborates with The National Archives UK, and it has the German Historical Institute in London and the IT specialists of the German head office of the common library network in Göttingen (GBV/VZG) as co-partners.³¹

The chapters in this section engage with different themes of early modern maritime and oceanic histories.³² They are based on different document types and artefacts within the Prize Papers and cover different geographical, social, ethnic, linguistic, and thematic aspects of this collection.

Based on extant documents from three ships – the “Concord”, the “Prince of Wales”, and the “Margaret” – which were captured and transferred to the High Court of Admiralty during the Nine Years’ War (1688–1697), Oliver Finnegan asks how early modern people ordered commercial relations across maritime space, and how interpersonal and legal aspects of trade were balanced by Atlantic trading communities. The surviving documents, among them bills of lading, affidavits, muster rolls, examinations, and exhibited correspondence “allow for the detailed reconstruction of all three ships’ voyages, crews, and investors, as well as the economic practices they employed”, and bring to light four very different Atlantic trading communities: planters, a Quaker merchant company, as well as French-Irish and Afro-European networks.³³

30 For details, see the article by Christina Beckers at the end of this section.

31 Bevan/Cock, *The High Court of Admiralty Prize Papers* (see note 9), p. 36. For details on the Prize Papers Project, see URL: www.prizepapers.de [last accessed on 20.08.2019].

32 For a new series on oceanic histories, see David Armitage/Alison Bashford/Sujit Sivasundaram (eds.): *Oceanic Histories*. Cambridge 2018.

33 Oliver Finnegan: *Formal and Informal Economy in Atlantic Trading Communities, 1680–1700*, see below.

At the heart of the next chapter, by Lucas Haasis, are two significant practices of early modern alphabetisation of ordinary people: learning to write through exercises and the practice of dictating letters. Taking sailors as a case in point, Haasis argues that these early modern writing practices, while familiar from schools, were also performed in very unusual settings and by unexpected social groups: sailors on board ships. His example is the “Concordia”, a ship which was captured in 1758. The “Concordia” is an amazing example of the richness of documents, including a “multitude of personal belongings of several seamen” and the material traces of their use, that survived as Prize Papers, as well as the complexities of early modern privateering, prize taking, and the subsequent legal justification and proof.³⁴

In her chapter, Annika Raapke appraises the active, physical environment of oceans, the “conglomerate of water, winds, and currents”, and shows how the ocean as a co-actor influenced communication processes across its watery surface and popped up time and again in epistolary narratives.³⁵ Analysing a number of eighteenth-century letters sent between the Caribbean and Europe, all intercepted in prize taking activities and subsequently transferred to the High Court of Admiralty, she asks how “people conceived of this environment, of its power, possibilities, and vulnerabilities”.³⁶ One of the recurrent themes in epistolary narratives was the power of oceans to counteract plans by simply delaying ships. A second theme that Raapke picks out is the perception of the ocean as full of opportunities waiting to be embraced.

Crossing the ocean and starting a new life while staying closely connected and communicating with those left at home was a central experience for the Moravian missionaries. In her chapter, Jessica Cronshagen looks at the unique role of female Moravian missionaries in Surinam whose letters have survived among the Prize Papers. These letters convey the central role of generation, as well as the perception of the Moravian diaspora in Surinam as centre (Paramaribo) and periphery (the hinterland) in the formation of gender roles in colonial settings. From this perspective, Paramaribo was seen as the portal to Europe across the Atlantic, and was felt as closer to Herrnhut than to its own hinterland. The perceived remoteness of Moravian outposts allowed female Moravians considerable freedom.

Christina Beckers’ chapter rounds off this section by connecting with the introductory piece on the Prize Papers as an archive of uncurated histories of global scope.³⁷ Her chapter is a brief introduction to the undertaking of moving a het-

34 Lucas Haasis: *The Writing Seamen: Learning to Write and Dictating Letters on Board of the Bremen Ship “Concordia”*, see below.

35 Annika Raapke: *The Realm of Wind and Water: How the Atlantic Always Had the Last Word*, see below.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Christina Beckers: “Captured” Once Again – *The Prize Papers Going Digital*, see below.

erogeneous collection like the Prize Papers from paper to screen. The Prize Papers make up just one archival collection surviving from Europe's tumultuous, entangled, and far-reaching past; the digitisation of this and other collections aims to integrate this heritage into the building of a connected future. This chapter also considers interrelations between Web 2.0 environments and the historical research fields as well as the sector of cultural heritage accompanying the Prize Papers' digitisation project.

