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Habsburgs in the Indian Ocean. A Commercial History of the Austrian East India Company and its Colonies and Bases in East Africa, India, and China, 1775-1785

By

FLORIAN AMBACH

ABSTRACT

The study of the Habsburg monarchy's colonial past and global interconnections is a comparatively young field of research, traditionally understudied as it did not fit into the Austrian narrative of colonial disentanglement. The following paper offers new understandings of the history of the Habsburg monarchy within a global framework by focusing on the Habsburg East India Company of Trieste-Antwerp (1775-1785). In contrast to previous studies of their political dimensions, this article focuses mainly on the commercial actions of the company. Ship inventories, invoices, logbooks, letters, diaries, reports, and petitions from the archives of Vienna provide valuable insights into the everyday life of the Company. Raw materials and products can serve as probes of transcontinental linkages to bring into focus the economic and political contexts and the histories of people who produced, cultivated, processed, transported, and traded with them. But beyond that, the company trade of enslaved people constituted a key part of the company's commercial endeavors. Based on these theoretical and methodological considerations, the goods and people shipped by the Company sheds light on aspects of global trade and colonization projects of the Habsburg monarchy and can be used as a touchstone by which the national-historical perspective is challenged.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Florian Ambach is a PhD Candidate in History at the University of Innsbruck. His research interests are based in the Early Modern period and explore global entanglements of the Habsburg monarchy and Italy. He is working on his dissertation about the Capuchin mission in the Kingdom of Kongo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

INTRODUCTION

Although the Habsburg monarchy had established two East India Companies in the eighteenth century, the Company of Ostend (1722-1727) and the Company of Trieste-Antwerp (1775-1785), its colonial past and global interconnections were ignored in both public discourse and academic scholarship. This erasure was in part due to the Austrian narrative of colonial disentanglement. After 1945, Austrian historiography was committed to portraying the nation in a favorable light and to relativizing or even ignoring discreditable passages in its history. This includes not only the so-called *victim theory*, according to which Austria was not a perpetrator but a victim of Nazism and therefore not responsible for the crimes committed in its name, but also the downplaying of any participation in colonialism and imperialism.¹ Only in the last two decades has there been a significant increase in publications on this topic.²

In contrast to previous studies, this contribution focuses on the aspect of trade not only with raw materials and products, but also of enslaved people, in order to provide a supplement to the understanding of the Austrian East India Company. However, a clear distinction must be made between trade in goods and trade in humans. Mainly on the coasts of East Africa, company employees bought people who were dragged from the interior of the continent to hubs of the slave trade. These individuals were robbed of their homes, their families, and their identities in order to be commodified for the commercial gain of the company.³ In this context, the paper explores what role intercontinental trade of raw materials, products, and enslaved people played in justifying and maintaining the colonial bases established in East Africa and the East Indies. For this purpose, the short-lived colonial settlements in Delagoa Bay (1777-1781) in the south of present-day Mozambique, and on the Nicobar Islands (1778-1784) in the Bay of Bengal are placed at the center of the study. In order to situate the Habsburgs' colonial ambitions in a wider context, the study draws comparisons with the other East India Companies, primarily the *British East India Company* (EIC) and the Dutch *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC). International research has attempted to overcome national historiography in favor of global perspectives by employing different products such as sugar and cotton as the main analytical lens.⁴

Owing to the lack of serial sources on the activities of the Austrian East India Company, it is impossible to reconstruct a comprehensive history of the Company with reliable quantitative data. What the sources do provide, however, is an exemplary account of the economic pillars of the short-lived Habsburg colonial empire. This paper seeks to follow the chronology of events. Beginning with the debates surrounding the creation of the Company, the second section illustrates the close intertwining of its founding with the colonial ambitions of the Viennese Court and the economic and financial elite of the empire. The third and fourth sections revolve around the Delagoa Coast and the Nicobar Islands, which were established as permanent colonies - with large plantations, a multitude of settlers, and the implementation of slavery. The fifth section focuses on a specific commodity, tea, to show the impact of its importation into Europe on consumer habits and

how its profitability provoked a controversy about the company's core business. These different thematic approaches provide insights into multiple layers of the commercial life of the company in order to gain deeper insights into its role in colonialism.

THE FORMATION OF AN AUSTRIAN EAST INDIA COMPANY

The idea of establishing a company for the East Indies did not come about by chance. As early as the 1720s, the Habsburg monarchy had taken the first steps towards establishing overseas colonies with the Company of Ostend. The Belgian city of Ostend, which was conceded to the Habsburg monarchy in the course of the peace negotiations of Utrecht, Rastatt and Baden (1713/14), served as the main hub. The international merchant community organized several voyages to the Americas, Africa, and Asia and was successful in securing the support of Emperor Charles VI (r. 1711-1740), who issued an octroi in 1722.⁵ In the slipstream of the EIC and VOC, the Ostend Company was able to build up a small colonial empire based on outposts on the Coromandel coast and in Bengal.⁶ As they raced against the other European powers for colonies, the Ostend Company's agents became increasingly impatient in negotiations with the Nawab Murshid Quli Khan (r. 1717-1727) and the Faujdar of Hugli for the cession of Banquibazar, Hydsiapour and Bourompour. As a result, the Scottish-born Governor-General of the Ostend Company, Alexander Hume, and officer Macdonnel resorted to violent measures such as the blockade of the Hugli River, the capture of Indian ships, hostage-taking, and the menace of a massive retaliatory expedition. In return, the EIC and VOC persuaded the Nawab to launch a combined British-Dutch-Bengali attack on the Ostend Company. The Nawab actively supported the operation by committing an army of 1,500 soldiers to blockade the imperial settlement at Banquibazar. Imperial ships were eventually captured, isolating Banquibazar from supplies.⁷ Due to international pressure, Charles VI had to liquidate the Company as early as 1727 and finally dissolve it in 1731 in order to secure support for the Pragmatic Sanction and the succession for his daughter Maria Theresia.⁸ Despite the Company's dissolution, the Banquibazar base was still maintained, but Bengal was increasingly affected by the expansion of the Maratha Empire. Hume's successor François de Schonamille managed to gather a force of 350 European and Indian soldiers and went plundering through the surrounding areas. After leaving Banquibazar on 9 November 1744, they made their way to Syriam in Burma. But as Schonamille disregarded the ceremonial at an audience at the court of King Smim Htaw Buddhaketi (r. 1740-1747) in March 1745, he and most of his men were killed.⁹

These events show that colonial ambitions by no means ceased with the dissolution of the Company. Due to the involvement of the Habsburg monarchy in various wars on the European continent, however, plans to reestablish the East India Company had to be subordinated to coping with the consequences of these wars.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Trieste, the port city on the Adriatic Sea, became an increasingly important hub between Austria and overseas countries and markets, because it had been declared a free port by Charles VI in

1719, offering economic advantages for long-distance trade.¹¹ Moreover, it allowed merchants from the entire Mediterranean to settle in the city, bringing their know-how and networks with them. Soon communities of Protestant, Jewish, Armenian, Serbian and Greek Orthodox merchants emerged in Trieste, contributing significantly to the rise of the port.¹² Originally focused in particular on the eastern Mediterranean and the Levant, the merchants attempted to expand the trade route into the Indian Ocean. There are two main reasons the operational base was moved from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean (while the financial center remained in the Austrian Netherlands). Firstly, the political and economic elites hoped this would prevent jealous reactions from Great Britain and the Netherlands. Secondly, Trieste gained importance as a commercial hub due to the administrative restructuring and the designation of Karl von Zinzendorf (1739-1813) as governor.¹³

In 1775, Amsterdam-born former EIC employee Willem Bolts (1738-1808)¹⁴ was able to obtain from Maria Theresia (r. 1740-1780) the issuing of a new octroi for the founding of the new *Société impériale asiatique*.¹⁵ Unlike the octroi of the Ostend Company, whose 103 articles had strongly predetermined how the company was to operate, the founding patent consisted of only 18 articles and thus left Bolts with wide-ranging liberties for shaping the company. The right to seize land overseas (Article 14) and the permission to trade enslaved people (Article 11),¹⁶ “from the eastern and western coasts of Africa, or from the island of Madagascar, to the continent or to the islands of America”,¹⁷ were explicitly stated.

Following the negotiations with a group of Antwerp bankers, headed by Charles de Proli (1723-1786),¹⁸ Bolts acquired the EIC ship *Earl of Lincoln* in London and baptized it *Giuseppe e Teresa*. After almost being seized in Lisbon due to British suspicions that the ship was carrying contraband, it was able to continue its voyage to the Tuscan port of Livorno, where Pietro Leopoldo (1747-1792),¹⁹ the brother of Emperor Joseph II (r. 1765-1790), sat on the throne. The *Giuseppe e Teresa* was then loaded with soldiers provided by the Court War Council. In addition, the ship received a cargo of iron, copper, brass, steel, more than 13,000 rifles, several cannons, and ammunition contributed by the state budget. In September 1776, Bolts was ready to begin the voyage to the East Indies with the ship.²⁰

DELAGOA BAY: BETWEEN TRADING POST, PLANTATION ECONOMY, AND SETTLER COLONY

When the *Giuseppe e Teresa* ran aground on a sandbank off the southeast African coast at the end of March 1777, the East India project was in danger of failing early on.²¹ The aforementioned cargo could have capsized.²² However, the ship broke free with the next tide and reached the nearby coast at Delagoa Bay.²³ Bolts knew about the prospect of establishing a colony in Delagoa Bay.²⁴ Since the crossing to India could never be made in one go, a settlement on the East African coast had crucial strategic importance. This would mean that the Company ships would no longer have to rely on going to the Dutch Cape Colony for fresh food and drinking water.²⁵ Bolts himself had considered occupying the then

still uninhabited island of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic.²⁶ But when the *Giuseppe e Teresa* arrived in Delagoa Bay and laid the groundwork for a colony by treaties with three local princes, Mohaâr Capêll of Tembè, Chibanzaân Matôla, and Bilêne Masoûmo, this plan was obsolete.²⁷

Delagoa Bay not only offered an outpost with fresh water and food as well as timber for the maintenance of ships, but also seemed suitable for permanent colonization, because two key conditions were fulfilled: no immediate presence of major bases from other colonial powers and the successful negotiations with the East African princes. A central component of the treaties was the exclusive pre-emption right for ivory. As a result, the colony in Delagoa exported about 75,000 pounds of ivory annually.²⁸ In addition, Bolts planned the cultivation of sugar cane, for which he envisaged the use of forced labor by enslaved Africans.²⁹ The fertile soil was deemed suitable for the cultivation of tobacco, cotton, and rice, and possibly even coffee, pepper, and indigo.³⁰ How meticulously Bolts must have planned the establishment of the colony in advance is evident from the seeds brought from Livorno and Rio de Janeiro, which were to enable the colonists to grow lemons, oranges, pineapples, ginger, watermelons, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes. A gardener who had travelled with them was to ensure that the plants and fruits flourished.³¹ Before Bolts' departure in July 1777, he selected ten soldiers from the ship to remain in Delagoa and commissioned the German Daniel Pollet to continue the construction of the Fort St. Joseph. Meanwhile, a station was established on the island of Inhaca, which was ideal for pearl fishing and for collecting cowrie shells that could be used inland as barter currency for the acquisition of gold, ivory, tobacco, and enslaved people.³² This strategy of the Company parallels that of the other colonial powers, which adopted this ancient form of payment in order to establish a barter system that was asymmetrical in their favor.³³

A document from the archival legacy of the Trieste governor Karl von Zinzendorf lists the persons and objects to be sent to Delagoa and shows how the Company attempted to build up the newly acquired colony. It listed 24 cannons of 18 and 12 pounds, 2 field pieces, 300 shotguns, 300 pistols, 300 sabres, gunpowder, lead, 20 tents, 10 sea compasses, staves, fishing nets, fishing rods, 2 sloops, 2 ploughs, 20 plough knives, 6 bells, linen for flags, 50 doors, 200 windows, 100 wagons and wagon wheels, 300 hoes, 200 shovels, 200 sickles, 20 scythes, and 200 wooden hoes.³⁴ Precise specifications were also made for the composition of the settler community: 173 colonists, as many of them as possible married, among them 50 soldiers, 5 cannoners, 20 fishermen, 12 bricklayers, 12 carpenters, 20 of the like for building houses, 5 armourers, 5 blacksmiths, 5 brickmakers, 5 tailors, 5 cobblers, 2 millers, 3 coopers, and one Catholic and one Protestant clergyman.³⁵

This list clearly illustrates that the use of violence played a central role in the establishment of the colony.³⁶ As shown above, only half a century before, the rivalries of the Ostend Company with the indigenous powers in Bengal as well as with the European colonial forces had escalated to the point of violent excesses with many casualties.³⁷ This experience is likely to have still been present in the minds of the Company's central actors,

especially as the geopolitical situation continued to deteriorate. Portugal could have at any time viewed the colony as a threat of its sovereignty in East Africa.³⁸ In addition, the list makes it evident that skilled labor and the precise composition of working equipment were essential for anticipating the everyday work of the settlers and thus, in further consequence, for ensuring their supplies. In matters of faith, the illusion that the colonization project could have been linked to Catholic missionary purposes appears to have been abandoned right from the outset. They opted instead for the pragmatic solution of sending out both a Catholic and a Protestant priest - a necessary concession, because many Company employees did not come from Habsburg lands with a Catholic majority. Instead, due to the lack of personnel, the project had to be an international and multiconfessional undertaking right from the start.³⁹

THE NICOBAR ISLANDS: CASH CROPS ON A DESERTED ARCHIPELAGO?

The next step was to look for outposts on the coast of western India. Bolts steered the *Giuseppe e Teresa* into the Gulf of Cambay, where he targeted the port city of Ghogha for the establishment of a trading post.⁴⁰ Negotiations with the Marathi Peshwa, Madhavrao II (r. 1774-1795), were thwarted by the EIC.⁴¹ Instead, Bolts entered into a private deal with the Portuguese trader Manuel Simon dos Santos to establish a regular connection between the North West Indian ports and Delagoa Bay.⁴² East African ivory was highly demanded in India and yielded sizable returns in order to acquire cotton fabrics, which could be sold profitably in East Africa.⁴³ Enslaved Africans were to be acquired in Mozambique and sold to the island of Mauritius east of Madagascar.⁴⁴ To boost this triangular trade between Ghogha, Delagoa, and Mauritius, three new ships were acquired.⁴⁵

Taking into account the power dynamics on the Indian continent, Bolts had sent Captain Henry Bennett to the Bay of Bengal to take possession of the Nicobar Islands.⁴⁶ After initial explorations, the deed of submission was signed on 12 July 1778 by heads of families of the local population and by the Moravian Brethren, a group of the Protestant *Herrnhut Mission*, who had pushed ahead with an attempt at colonization by the Danish East India Company that had been aborted in 1772.⁴⁷ In order to gather supplies, the new settlers were led to Madras in August 1778, where they met Bolts. He had in the meantime received permission for the establishment of three factories in Mangaluru, Karwar, and Balliapatam on the Coromandel coast from Hyder Ali (r. 1761-1782), the Nawab of Mysore, who shared his hostility to the EIC. In return, Bolts supplied the Mysore leader with six cannons and the remaining rifles for the wars against the British.⁴⁸ More than a year passed in which they concentrated on building up these factories before Bolts acquired the ship *Le Borrekens* on 3 August 1779 and concluded an agreement about regular supply trips to the Nicobar Islands with the traders Rafael Pagose and Agavelli Satur.⁴⁹ Water and provisions were to be brought from Madras to the Nicobar Islands, where plantation produce was to be loaded onto the ship to be dropped off in Bago (Burma) to buy rice. For this purpose, the Company sought to establish a warehouse in Bago.⁵⁰ The first supply voyage in August 1779

brought the German Gottfried Stahl, whom Bolts entrusted with the establishment of the colony, to the Nicobar Islands with seeds, livestock, and twenty workers from the Malabar Coast, as well as four enslaved Africans.⁵¹

The harbour was located in a weather-protected bay and offered space for 80 to 100 ships. Due to the proximity to Sumatra, Cai Friedrich von Brocktorff, a former employee of the VOC from the German port of Kiel, who after his return to Europe offered his services to the Viennese court as an informant for Habsburg's East India plans, suspected auriferous ore on the Nicobar Islands.⁵² By listing the fruits and spices that one could find or at least cultivate in the future, the former member of the *Herrenhut Mission* Jakob Hegner, in order to convince the Viennese court of this venture, painted a picture of an idyllic overseas paradise where everything grew in abundance, including coconuts, areca, kapok, yams, cassava, ginger, capsicum, pineapple, mango, lemons, tamarind, jackfruit, bananas, turmeric, and saffron.⁵³ Stahl estimated sugar cane and cocoa to be the most profitable.⁵⁴ Cotton, coffee, indigo, maize, rice, and pepper could also be cultivated.⁵⁵ Due to its location, trade with Bengal, the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, Ceylon, Bago, Malacca, Sumatra, Java, and China was possible from the Nicobar Islands, and thus they had all the potential to become a pivotal hub for Austrian ambitions in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁶ Even Chinese traders frequently came to the area to acquire coveted swallow's nests.⁵⁷ Another highly demanded export product were coconuts. Brocktorff claimed that the VOC rented out coconut palms in Java for the annual price of one *Reichstaler* and 30 *Silbergroschen*.⁵⁸

But the question arose as to how these crops could be grown on a large scale. According to Stahl, the workers from the Malabar Coast were not suitable for plantation work, describing them as "lazy people".⁵⁹ He therefore sent a memo to Vienna in which he outlined his vision for the establishment of the colony: in Europe, 200 to 300 settlers were to be recruited and brought to the Cape of Good Hope in four ships. There were many similarities between the envisioned composition of the settler community in Delagoa Bay and on the Nicobar Islands. They were to be composed of farmers, carpenters, masons, bricklayers, lime burners, potters, joiners, tailors, locksmiths, tanners, cobblers, blacksmiths, doctors, and surgeons.⁶⁰ Two ships were to head for Mozambique, where they would acquire 200 slaves and bring them to the Nicobar Islands. The other two ships were to load butter, salt, meat, beans, and flour for the colony at the Cape and sail with the European colonists to Rangoon (Burma), where the craftsmen were to carve huts from the high-quality timber there. In order to transport these together with cattle and poultry to the Nicobar Islands, the purchase of one or two more ships would be necessary. Then the construction of settlements and the establishment of plantations could begin.⁶¹ Sugar cane would be particularly profitable, which could possibly be processed on site through a refinery and rum distillery, but cocoa, pepper, cinnamon, cotton, coffee, and indigo could also be experimented with.⁶² In practice, however, the settlers did not manage to grow more than small quantities of crops, and the dream of large-scale plantations did not materialize. Nevertheless, news of the islands' products soon circulated throughout German newspapers, as can be seen from an article of 20 September 1779 in the newspaper

Reichspostreuter, which was issued in Altona and widely distributed across the German-speaking countries:

The commanders of the Imperial and Royal ships Joseph and Theresia and Prince Kaunitz, have, with the consent of the inhabitants, taken possession of the islands of Nicobari, Souri, Tricatte and Carcioul, which are situated at the entrance of the Bay of Bengal, and have built a house and a fort there, leaving a few Europeans behind for the time being, until more can be sent there. These islands are inhabited by otherwise benign but ignorant Indians, and cinnamon, muscat and coconuts etc. grow there.⁶³

In the heyday of the companies, spices were among the most demanded goods, some even more valuable than precious metals, including pepper from Sumatra, Borneo, India, and Bengal, nutmeg from the Banda archipelago, and cloves from the Moluccas.⁶⁴ The VOC made every effort to monopolize this trade.⁶⁵ However, in 1769/70, the Frenchman Pierre Poivre had managed to steal clove and nutmeg plants from the Moluccas and to cultivate them on Mauritius and Réunion.⁶⁶ This transfer of plants beyond the Dutch monopolies can also be seen in the activities of the smaller companies. On the Nicobar Islands, according to Hegner's reports, the Moravian Brethren had secretly imported a cinnamon tree from Ceylon. He criticized, however, that the colonists did not know how to scrape it properly.⁶⁷ This shows that the smaller companies had difficulties in obtaining the plants and raw materials, whose access was strictly monitored and blocked by the hegemonic powers EIC and VOC. Even after the successful acquisition of the plant, they lacked sufficient know-how to extract the final product, in this case cinnamon, due to their limited personnel and their inexperience in the economic sphere of the Indian Ocean.

Brocktorff drafted detailed plans on how the colonization of the Nicobar Islands should ideally be carried out. He advised the Viennese court to recruit colonists primarily from Europe and the Coromandel Coast. In Tranquebar, he said, there were a number of children of European origin who had been taken into custody by the missionaries.⁶⁸ The Protestant missionaries in the Danish colonial empire in India were responsible for the custody and education of children. These included not only children of European settlers, but also children from relationships between Europeans and Tamils, as well as Tamil orphans adopted by colonists.⁶⁹ According to Stahl, these children were particularly suitable as colonists, as they were better accustomed to the climate and therefore more resistant to tropical diseases.⁷⁰ Stahl also considered the possibility of attracting colonists from China.⁷¹ For the permanent fixing of a Habsburg colony on the archipelago, a number of conditions, intended for both the colonial authorities and the settlers, seemed indispensable to him: religious tolerance, alliances with neighboring powers, adaptation to the climate, regular expeditions, and the establishment of plantations. Each colonist would have to be allocated a piece of land and cultivate it with the help of enslaved people.⁷² Stahl stressed, however, that "[...] every effort must be expended to attract many free blacks in order to have little need of slaves, which is otherwise a very necessary evil in India."⁷³ This statement indicates that he wanted to use slaves only with reservations. Moreover, it is not entirely clear whom Stahl was referring to as "free blacks". Given Stahl's use of this racialized concept, which was related not only to skin color but also to social

hierarchization, it seems plausible that he subsumed both people of African and Indian origin under this term.

This argument also seemed most powerful for Hegner, since as a member of the Herrenhut Mission he had witnessed firsthand how many Danish colonists had been carried off by diseases in the Nicobar Islands. Workers from the Malabar coast were paid seven to nine pagodas a month and some were paid six months in advance before the ships left from Madras - an indication of how unattractive the prospect of life on the Nicobar Islands was considered to be.⁷⁴ For these reasons, Stahl envisaged enslaved Africans for labor: "For 1,000 pagodas one could have bought at least 15 African slaves, who have a strong constitution to endure in the most unhealthy land, and one of whom works more than ten Malabars."⁷⁵ For logistical reasons, Stahl considered the purchase of slaves at Portuguese bases in East Africa, primarily Mozambique, to be the best option.⁷⁶ According to his calculations, 150 to 200 enslaved African men were to be brought to the Nicobar Islands at first - together with their wives.⁷⁷ His cynical argument was that "this will sweeten the discomfort of slavery, keep them from much debauchery, and at the same time provide the colony with an increase of young slaves, who are generally more capable of learning all kinds of crafts."⁷⁸ At the same time, however, a large number of Europeans would be required "to keep them in check."⁷⁹ As an option, Stahl mentioned that the slaves might be released after ten years' work, in order to continue building up the colony as free men.⁸⁰ Under no circumstances, however, should they be allowed to keep slaves themselves, because "this would put them too much on an equal footing with the Europeans and tempt them to give themselves up to idleness and to bring up their children wimpishly." Stahl described the native inhabitants of the Nicobar Islands as "ignorant savages" who were to be "civilized" by a series of measures and made useful to the colony.⁸² These included plans to build schools for Nicobarese children. At the age of 13 or 14, the boys were to enter a six- or seven-year apprenticeship with a European craftsman, in order to become carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, or something similar.⁸³ The training of young Nicobarese as seafarers occupied a special place in the plans.⁸⁴

With these arguments, Hegner and Stahl fit into a discursive context that, on the one hand, still followed a strict economic logic of maximizing profits through the exploitation of enslaved people, but nevertheless already showed sprinklings of Enlightenment ideas, especially considering the option of eventually setting them free and conceding them land ownership. Under no circumstances, however, is this to be regarded as particularly humane, let alone proto-abolitionist, since the slaves in the colonies continued to be politically, economically, culturally, and physically oppressed. Although the Nicobar Islands and Delagoa represented the only Habsburg plantation colonies during this period, there were a number of German merchants in the Austrian Netherlands who were also involved in the Atlantic triangular trade. The most prominent example is Friedrich von Romberg (1729-1813), whose company, based in Brussels, Ostend, Bordeaux, and Le Havre, brought slaves from Africa to the Caribbean to work on plantations of cotton, sugar cane, and indigo, and in turn sold the products in Europe.⁸⁵

Although slave labor was an important factor in the design of a colonial economy under Habsburg guidance, the Austrian East India Company lacked large-scale colonies with sufficient cash crops. Even if their sale was extremely profitable, the overall trade volume of the plantation products grown by settlers and slaves remained too small. Therefore, the Company had to consider other options to increase the returns from intercontinental trade.

TEA TIME IN AUSTRIA? TWO COMPETING MODELS OF HABSBURG COLONIALISM AND THE FLOW OF GOODS BACK TO EUROPE: COLONIAL COUNTRY TRADE VERSUS THE EUROPE-CHINA TRADE AXIS

The smaller companies, like the Danish and the Austrian East India Company, soon realized that the spice trade offered hardly any lucrative opportunities for latecomers, so they turned to trading tea from China. Both, moreover, tried to present themselves as neutral powers and offered shipping space on their ships to English and Dutch merchants in order to create loopholes within the hardened fronts between the VOC and the EIC.⁸⁶ Since no Company ship had yet returned to Europe and Bolts was therefore under pressure to present a visible return for the Antwerp business partners and the court elites, he acquired the 600-ton *Prince de Kaunitz* in Bombay, which headed for Canton in China with a cargo of pepper and cotton, to pick up tea and silk and take the fastest route back to Livorno, where the ship arrived in the spring of 1779.⁸⁷ A newspaper article indicates that after selling such large quantities of silk, the price of Italian silk dropped dramatically in order to remain competitive.⁸⁸

Besides the spice trade in India and Southeast Asia, Chinese tea represented a valuable commodity that could generate considerable profits. Since the last third of the seventeenth century, and with the gradual opening of Chinese ports, ever larger quantities of tea had arrived in Europe, where the beverage became much beloved. Increased demand caused the production of more tea in China, which lowered the price - not only in China, but also in Europe, allowing tea to spread to broader social classes. During the eighteenth century, the VOC as well as the East India Companies of other powers, such as Sweden, Denmark, and the Habsburg monarchy, also recognized the potential of the tea trade and wanted to enter the business.⁸⁹ The Ostend Company had already managed to become the largest importer of tea in Europe (excluding the Ottoman Empire) within a very short time: between 1725 and 1728, it had supplied about 60 percent of the tea consumed in Europe.⁹⁰ In the countries that maintained strong trade connections with Asia, tea slowly found its way into society - initially into elite circles of the court, the aristocracy, and the merchant class, but more and more into the urban middle-class as well. In the Habsburg monarchy, tea only slowly gained acceptance. For example, the consumption of Zinzendorf, the governor of Trieste, was limited to domestic herbal teas.⁹¹ This changed with the arrival of the first ship from Asia in Trieste, the *Prince de Kaunitz*, which carried a great variety of different teas.⁹² From the supercargo, a Frenchman named Hay, Zinzendorf received a gift

of the tea variety *Pou-eul-Tchâ* on 20 December 1780.⁹³ This is what the Assam variety *Pu'er* (普洱茶), grown in the upper reaches of the Mekong River, where China's Yunnan province borders Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar, was called. The next day, when the port captain Johann Peter Mayer visited the governor, he brought him boxes containing the varieties *Sunchée* and *Padre Saotchaou*.⁹⁴ Together with doctor Domenico Francesco Gobbi, he also tried *thé en boule*.⁹⁵ These are tea leaves pressed together into balls, mostly of different varieties, from Yunnan Province in southwestern China.

The majority of the shipload of the *Prince of Kaunitz* consisted of the black tea variety *Buoy/Bohea* (3,390 boxes/797,378 poids⁹⁶), as the area of origin of the Wuyi Mountains in Fujian was pronounced by European traders. This variety was the global bestseller because it was obtained from the lowest quality leaves directly on the stem, and thus the price was lower. Part of the reason for its success was that the fermentation of the leaves into black tea was developed in this area, which allowed it to be preserved for transport to ports, primarily Canton, and from there to transregional Asian or later even global markets.⁹⁷ Among the other black teas, rising in quality, were *Saotchaon/Lapsang Soachong* (立山小種) (341 boxes/14,672 poids), a variety from the same area which was smoked over pine wood, and the *Camphou/Congou* (工夫) (450 boxes/5,400 poids) variety, also grown in that region. The black tea *Pekao/Pekoe*, of which the ship carried 216 boxes (10,368 poids), was among the highest quality and thus most expensive teas from China because it was obtained from the smallest, silver-tipped leaves, and had floral notes.⁹⁸ Therefore, the further the leaf was from the stem, the higher its quality and price.⁹⁹ The cargo also included various types of green tea, such as 1,063 boxes of *Verd Sonlo*, which refers to the *Songluo* variety cultivated in a small area on the mountain of the same name in Anhui Province since the Ming Dynasty.¹⁰⁰ The 1,000 boxes of *Verd Tonkaye* refer to the *Twankay* (屯溪) variety of green tea, a refined variety of *Songluo* that originated in the Tunxi district of Anhui. Imported volumes of the green tea variety *Haissuen/Hyson* (熙春茶) (1,198 boxes/74,307 ½ poids) and the slightly lower quality variety *Haissuenskin/Hyson skin* (熙春皮) (236 boxes/14,285 ¾ poids) were also harvested in this area, whereas *Padre Saotchaou* (5 boxes/310 poids) originated from the Wuyi Mountains.¹⁰¹

In addition, cinnamon, rhubarb, silk, porcelain, and paper were also imported, but tea made up the majority of the cargo, approximately 560 tons - more than 80 percent of the total load.¹⁰² This shows that the companies responded to the demand of the time, focusing mainly on tea. Tea, which until then had been imported to Austria almost entirely from other nations and only in small quantities, had the status of a curiosity - even in Trieste, one of Austria's most important gateways to commodities from all around the world. This was about to change with the activities of the Company: from then on, tea became a more frequently imported commodity that enjoyed increasing popularity in the Habsburg monarchy and profoundly changed consumption patterns.

For 1780, governor Zinzendorf noted imports from Chinese ports that amounted 939,094 *Gulden*, whereas no goods from Europe could be sold in China.¹⁰³ He emphasized, however, that all imports from China could be sold to various merchants in Trieste - at a profit of 600,000 *Gulden*.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the merchants of the Southern Netherlands mainly turned their gaze to China, because they wanted to focus on the profitable tea trade.¹⁰⁵ Because Bolts only expedited one ship to Canton during his expedition, he was confronted with rumors that he sought to enrich himself in the country trade and take revenge on the EIC.¹⁰⁶ The Antwerpens had more and more ships equipped in Europe to send them directly to Canton and back again.¹⁰⁷ The stations of the country trade network set up by Bolts tended to be avoided in this process as to not further add fuel to the fire in the conflict between the two factions in the Company's leadership. In view of these divergent ideas about the goals of the East India Company, the colonies were increasingly left to their own devices, something that Bolts' further arrangements could not do much to change. After establishing trade links between saltpeter-rich Bengal and Madras, Bolts concluded agreements with merchants to annually bring 24,000 pounds of rice and four African slaves to the Nicobar Islands.¹⁰⁸ With three ships, he left India once and for all in April 1780 for Mauritius, where he bought the ship *Baron de Binder* and had it loaded with coffee from the plantations of Réunion. A four-year contract with the merchants Lorenzo Raffo, Geronimo Gaibisso, and Andreas Utter provided for two annual supply voyages to the Nicobar Islands worth 24,000 pounds of rice and four slaves.¹⁰⁹

After his return to Europe, negotiations between the Antwerp merchants and Joseph II intensified, and on 8 October 1781 an agreement was reached to transform the East India Company into a joint-stock company in which the financiers from the Southern Netherlands were given more decision-making power.¹¹⁰ As a result, ships were sent out to focus on intercontinental trade between Europe and China, and the colonies visibly withered away. This was quite different in the case of the direct trade axis between the Habsburg monarchy and Canton: in 1784 alone, five ships with imperial flags arrived in Europe with a total cargo of over two million pounds of tea and silk.¹¹¹ But trade between Austria and Asia seemed no longer profitable after the end of the American War of Independence in 1783 and the easing of relations between Britain and France. Europe was instantaneously flooded with goods from the Americas and Asia - and for the Austrian East India Company, this marked the beginning of the end.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

The commercial history of the Habsburg East India Companies underlines the twofold objective of the Habsburg presence in the Indian Ocean: the creation of a chain of trading posts and factories on the coasts on the one hand and the establishment of colonies with plantation economies and the use of slavery on the other. While the mercantilist-minded elites of the Habsburg monarchy and the Antwerp bankers were eager to enter the race for overseas factories to promote exports, the Company's main player in the East Indies,

Willem Bolts, pushed for the capital-, resource- and labor-intensive establishment of colonies and the cultivation of cash crops. For the plantation work and thus for the entire commercial activity of the Company, the forced use and exploitation of enslaved Africans was central - both on the coast of Delagoa Bay in Southeast Africa and on the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

The Viennese court laid the framework for the Company's endeavors, explicitly allowing Bolts and the Company to trade enslaved Africans. The expeditions were not only connected to commercial interests, but also included concrete colonization plans. The memos explicitly demanded that military capability be ensured by sending weapons and soldiers and by the construction of fortifications. In addition, all plans in Delagoa Bay and the Nicobar Islands were based on triangular trade in the Indian Ocean. European products and metals were used to buy cotton and silk on the Indian and Chinese markets, which were to be brought to the East African coast in order to purchase enslaved people, who were forced to grow sugar cane, cotton, pepper, cocoa, and tobacco in Delagoa Bay and the Nicobar Islands. These products in turn were destined to be sold in Europe at a profitable price. The economic system of the Habsburg colonial empire operated according to this pattern.

Due to the diverging objectives and the hostility of the other colonial powers, the Company was no longer able to ensure the cohesion of the overseas possessions. The connections established in the East Indies between the outposts and colonies also proved too weak to be maintained permanently. Nevertheless, even after the official expiry of the octroi in 1785, individual merchants proved willing to breathe new life into the Indian Ocean bases. Without the support of the court and because of the armed conflicts on the European continent, however, these efforts came to a standstill.

This paper has shown how the economic patterns of the Habsburg colonies in East Africa and Asia functioned and how the Austrian East India Company attempted to establish a network of bases and colonies in the Indian Ocean. The focus on specific colonies and commodities, as exemplified by the case study on tea, can serve as an impetus for future research on Austrian participation in global systems of colonial exploitation and colonialism. Beyond that, it remains a desideratum to study the period from the end of the Company to the renewed ambitions of Austria(-Hungary) in the nineteenth century. Especially for the second half of the nineteenth century, there are numerous publications devoted to Austrian colonial ambitions in Brazil, Mexico, Sudan, and Tianjin.¹¹³ This would allow researchers to trace the continuities and discontinuities of how the monarchy sought to secure its overseas presence under rapidly changing geopolitical, technological, and ideological auspices in order to remain competitive in the global race for colonies. There is still much work to be done to improve the understanding of the Habsburgs' involvement in colonialism and imperialism - and to disseminate the research findings beyond academia to deconstruct the myth of Austria's colonial ignorance.

NOTES

¹ Martin Scheutz and Arno Strohmeier, "Einleitung," in *Was heißt „österreichische“ Geschichte? Probleme, Perspektiven und Räume der Neuzeitforschung*, ed. Martin Scheutz and Arno Strohmeier (Innsbruck/Vienna/Bolzano: Studienverlag, 2008), 7-20, 9; Walter Sauer, "Auf dem Weg zu einer Kolonialgeschichte Österreichs," *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 55, no. 1 (2011): 2-6.

² John Everaert, "Willem Bolts. India Regained and Lost. Indiamen, Imperial Factories and Country Trade (1775-1785)," in *International Conference on Shipping, Factories and Colonization*, ed. John Everaert and Jan Parmentier (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen, 1996), 61-67; Michael Wanner, "Imperial Asiatic Company in Trieste and Antwerp. The Last Attempt of the Habsburg Monarchy to Penetrate East Indian Trade 1781-1785," *Miscellanea Historio-Archivistica* 19 (2012): 177-202; Stefan Meisterle, "Von Coblön bis Delagoa. Die kolonialen Aktivitäten der Habsburgermonarchie in Ostindien," (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2014); Boro Bronza, "Preparations of the Austrian Expedition towards India 1775-1776," *Istraživanja. Journal of Historical Researches* 29 (2018): 63-77; Gijs Dreijer, "The Afterlife of the Ostend Company, 1727-1745," *The Mariner's Mirror* 105, no. 3 (2019): 275-287.

³ The concept of "commodification" is suitable for the analysis of the slave trade, as it reflects the process of tearing people out of their environment for economic purposes, denying them their humanity in order to turn them and their labor into a commodity to be sold as profitably as possible. See Nicholas T. Rinehart, "The Man That Was a Thing. Reconsidering Human Commodification in Slavery," *Journal of Social History* 50, no. 1 (2016): 28-50.

⁴ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and power. The place of sugar in modern history* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

⁵ Michal Wanner, "The Establishment of the General Company in Ostend in the Context of the Habsburg Maritime Plans 1714-1723," *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations* (2007): 33-62, 50-62. An octroi is a kind of patent for trading companies in which different rights and obligations were stipulated. It was usually issued by the central political authorities of a country, e.g. monarchs, councils or parliaments.

⁶ Jan Parmentier, *De Holle Compagnie. Smokkel en legale handel onder Zuidnederlandse vlag in Bengalen, ca. 1720-1744* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1992).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-89; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 222-225, 244-249.

⁸ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 84-85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 289-290; Parmentier, *De Holle Compagnie*, 86-89.

¹⁰ The Habsburg monarchy was involved in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), First Silesian War (1740-1742), Second Silesian War (1744-1745), and Third Silesian War/Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

¹¹ Fulvio Babudieri, *Industria, commerci e navigazione a Trieste e nella regione Giulia dall'inizio del Settecento ai primi anni del Novecento. Dall'inizio del Settecento ai primi anni del Novecento* (Milan: Dott. A. Giuffrè, 1982), 43-83.

¹² Aleksej Kalc, "Immigration Policy in Eighteenth-Century Trieste," in *Gated Communities? Regulating Migration in Early Modern Cities*, ed. Bert Be Munck and Anne Winter (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2016), 117-134.

¹³ For Zinzendorf's period as governor of Trieste between 1776 and 1782 see Grete Klingenstein, *Europäische Aufklärung zwischen Wien und Triest. Die Tagebücher des Gouverneurs Karl Graf Zinzendorf (1776-1782)* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau, 2009); Florian Ambach, "Zirkulation von

Personen, Waren und Informationen. Triest als maritimer Knotenpunkt globaler Verflechtungen unter dem Gouverneur Karl von Zinzendorf (1776-1782)” (master’s thesis, University of Innsbruck, 2022), <https://resolver.obvsg.at/urn:nbn:at:at-ubi:1-110641>.

¹⁴ Bolts was born in Amsterdam in 1738 to German parents. The family moved to England in 1749, where Bolts took up a career as a merchant that took him to Lisbon for a few years. In 1759 he joined the EIC, which took him to Calcutta in 1760, where he proved himself as a factor and was able to accumulate a considerable fortune by circumventing monopolies in the trade of opium, saltpeter, cotton, and diamonds. This led to his dismissal from the EIC. After his involvement in the colonial ambitions of the Habsburg monarchy, Tuscany, Naples and Sweden, he stayed in London, Lisbon, and Paris. He died in 1808. See Norman Leslie Hallward, *William Bolts, a Dutch Adventurer under John Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920).

¹⁵ Babudieri, *Industrie*, 39-42; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 96-97; Bronza, “Preparations”, 70-73.

¹⁶ William Bolts, *Recueil de pieces authentiques, relatives aux affaires de la ci-devant Société impériale Asiatique de Trieste, gerées à Anvers* (Antwerp, 1787), 44-49.

¹⁷ Bolts, 47. Translated by the author.

¹⁸ Charles Melchior André de Proli was born in Antwerp in 1726. The family, originally from Como, had settled in Antwerp and became a central player in the East India ambitions of the Ostend Company, of which his father Pietro Proli was a director. The banking family also maintained contacts in the Austrian Litorale, where they participated in the Fiuman Sugar Purification Company, which was granted an imperial privilege in 1750. See Helma Houtman-De Smedt, *Charles Proli. Antwerps zakenman en bankier, 1723-1786. Een biografische en bedrijfshistorische studie* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1983).

¹⁹ Adam Wandruszka, *Pietro Leopoldo. Un grande riformatore* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1968); Pier Francesco Listri, *Pietro Leopoldo. Granduca di Toscana, un riformatore del Settecento* (Firenze: Firenze Leonardo Edizioni, 2016).

²⁰ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 100-102.

²¹ Ibid, 316.

²² Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Staatenabteilung (StAbt), Ostindienkompanie Triest-Antwerpen (OTA) 1, Konv. 1, Précis der ersten mit Bolts gepflogenen Unterredung, 13.5.1776, fol. 11r; Bolts, *Recueil*, 38-39, 42, 45-47; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 92-93, 310-313; Franz von Pollack-Parnau, *Eine österreichisch-ostindische Handelscompagnie 1775-1785. Ein Beitrag zur österreichischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte unter Maria Theresia und Joseph II* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1927), 31-34.

²³ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 316-318.

²⁴ Portuguese ships visited Delago Bay several times on their way to India in the sixteenth century. However, the Portuguese did not establish the colony there, but some 1,500 kilometers to the north on Ilha de Moçambique. See Wolfgang Reinhard, *Die Unterwerfung der Welt. Globalgeschichte der europäischen Expansion 1415-2015* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016), 114, 121, 168. The absence of European colonial powers in Delagoa attracted the VOC in 1720. However, the Dutch were unable to establish themselves there permanently and left the fort as early as 1730. Thus, Delagoa Bay remained an unoccupied territory until Austrian colonization in 1777, but was nevertheless frequently visited by European ships. See Rene Barendse, *Arabian Seas 1700-1763, vol. 1. The Western Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 129-154.

²⁵ In order to avoid the Cape Colony, the Company of Ostend in the 1720s had already considered

colonizing either Madagascar or the island of Fernando de Noronha, which was off the Brazilian coast and on course for the East Indies due to the wind currents. See John G. Everaert, "Commerce d'Afrique et traite négrière dans les Pays-Bas," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 62 (1975): 177-185, 180-181.

²⁶ Jonathan Singerton, *The American Revolution and the Habsburg Monarchy* (Charlottesville, VA/London: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 7; Walter W. Davis, *Joseph II. An Imperial Reformer for the Austrian Netherlands* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 143; Houtman-De Smedt, *Charles Proli*, 140.

²⁷ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 321-323, which also contains a facsimile of the contract between Bolts and Mohaâr Capêl.

²⁸ Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995) 159.

²⁹ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 5, Konv. C, Bolts' instructions for Pollet, 1.7.1777, fol. 48r-55v, fol. 49v; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 327-328. For the history of Portuguese ivory trade in East Africa, see Alexandra Celia Kelly, *Consuming Ivory: Mercantile Legacies of East Africa and New England* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2021), 30-47; Edward A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

³⁰ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 5, Konv. C, Bolts' instructions for Pollet, 1.7.1777, fol. 51r.

³¹ Nikolaus Fontana, *Tagebuch der Reise des kais. kön. Schiffes Joseph und Theresia nach den neuen österreichischen Pflanzorten in Asia und Afrika* (Dessau/Leipzig: 1782), 13; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 324-325.

³² HHStA, StAbt, OTA 5, Konv. C, Bolts' instructions for Pollet, 1.7.1777, fol. 49v, 51r; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 326.

³³ Jan Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); James Walvin, *Slavery in Small Things. Slavery and Modern Cultural Habits* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 37-53.

³⁴ HHStA, Nachlass Zinzendorf (NLZ), Karton 2, Boltsische Factoreien und Besiznemungen in Africa und Ostindien, 3.2.1780, fol. 1r-19r, 5r.

³⁵ *Ibid*, fol. 5r-5v.

³⁶ On the correlation between violence and the fortification of colonies, see inter alia Erik Odegard, *The Company Fortress. Military Engineering and the Dutch East India Company in South Asia, 1638-1795* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020); Christopher Kurt Waters, "Indefensible Landscapers. Power Dynamics, Social Relations, and Antigua's Eighteenth-Century Fortifications," in *Power, Political Economy, and Historical Landscapes of the Modern World. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Christopher R. DeCorse (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019), 153-176.

³⁷ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 222-225, 244-249, 286-290; Parmentier, *De Holle Compagnie*, 80-89.

³⁸ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 320, 330.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 313.

⁴⁰ Hallward, *William Bolts*, 143.

⁴¹ Ibid, 172.

⁴² HHStA, StAbt, OTA 4, Letter collection of Adam von Lebzelter, Copy of the contract between Bolts and dos Santos, fol. 20r-30v.

⁴³ Martha Chaiklin, "Surat and Bombay. Ivory and commercial networks in western India," in *The Dutch and English East India Companies. Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 101-124.

⁴⁴ Richard B. Allen, "The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of African History* 49 (2008): 43-72; Reinhard, *Die Unterwerfung der Welt*, 277.

⁴⁵ Bolts, *Recueil*, 78; Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 335-336.

⁴⁶ HHStA, NLZ, Handschrift (HS) 179, No. 64, Prolischer Vorschlag einer neuen Asiatischen Handlungs-Gesellschaft, 3.9.1780; Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 340-341.

⁴⁷ Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 342-343. For the Danish occupation of the Nicobars, see Stephan Diller, *Die Dänen in Indien, Südostasien und China (1620-1845)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 240-241; Michael Bregnsbo and Kurt Villads Jensen, *The Rise and Fall of the Danish Empire* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 160.

⁴⁸ HHStA, NLZ, HS 178, 269; Bolts, *Recueil*, 106-107; Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 339.

⁴⁹ Bolts, *Recueil*, 78; HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Jakob Hegner, Abhandlung betreffend der Einrichtung einer Kolonie und Haupt-Handlungs-Niederlage der Kayserl. Königl. Asiatische Compagnie auf der Nicobarischen Eilanden und in dasigen Hafen, 1782/83, fol. 302v; Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 345.

⁵⁰ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 6, Konv. G, Report of Bolts, 23.8.1782; HHStA, StAbt, OTA 5, Konv. D, Treaty with the King of Pegu, fol. 178r; Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 373-374.

⁵¹ Meisterle, *Von Coblon bis Delagoa*, 345.

⁵² HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. C., Brocktorff on the Nicobar Islands, 12.8.1782, fol. 202r-227v, fol. 210r.

⁵³ Ibid., fol. 209r; HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Hegner, Abhandlung, fol. 297r-298r, 331r-331v.

⁵⁴ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Hegner, Abhandlung, fol. 298r, 305r.

⁵⁵ Ibid., fol. 297v-298r, 331r-331v.

⁵⁶ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. C., Brocktorff on the Nicobar Islands, fol. 207v.

⁵⁷ On the spread of this luxury product, which was highly demanded among Chinese traders, see Amy S. M. Lau and David S. Melville, *International Trade in Swiftlet Nests with Special Reference to Hong Kong* (Cambridge: TRAFFIC International, 1994), 2-7; Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 309. Swallow's nest soup was also a highly praised delicacy in Europe, served as a feast at the Munich wedding celebrations between Emperor Joseph II and Maria Josepha of Bavaria. The price for this specialty was 6,000 *Gulden*. See Felix Joseph Lipowsky, *Leben und Thaten des Maximilian Joseph III* (Munich: Jakob Giel, 1833), 211-212.

⁵⁸ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. C., Brocktorff on the Nicobar Islands, fol. 209r-209v.

- ⁵⁹ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Hegner, Abhandlung, fol. 303r. Translated by the author.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., fol. 305r.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 308v-311r.
- ⁶² Ibid., fol. 331r-331v.
- ⁶³ *Beytrag zum Reichspostreuter*, Nr. 73, 20.9.1779, [1]. Translated by the author.
- ⁶⁴ Reinhard Wendt, *Vom Kolonialismus zur Globalisierung. Europa und die Welt seit 1500* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 58-59, 83-85; Jürgen G. Nagel, *Abenteuer Fernhandel. Die Ostindienkompanien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 17.
- ⁶⁵ Femme S. Gaastra, "Die Vereinigte Ostindische Compagnie der Niederlande. Ein Abriß ihrer Geschichte," in *Kaufleute als Kolonialherren. Die Handelswelt der Niederländer vom Kap der Guten Hoffnung bis Nagasaki 1600-1800*, ed. Eberhard Schmitt, Thomas Schleich, and Thomas Beck (Bamberg: C. C. Buchners Verlag, 1988), 1-90, 15-16, 21.
- ⁶⁶ Reinhard Wendt, "Globalisierung von Pflanzen und neue Nahrungsgewohnheiten. Zur Funktion botanischer Gärten bei der Erschließung natürlicher Ressourcen der überseeischen Welt," in *Überseegeschichte. Beiträge der jüngeren Forschung. Festschrift anlässlich der Gründung der Forschungstiftung für vergleichende europäische Überseegeschichte 1999 in Bamberg*, ed. Thomas Beck, Host Gründer, Horst Pietschmann and Roderich Ptak (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999), 206-222, 214-215.
- ⁶⁷ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Hegner, Abhandlung, fol. 298r.
- ⁶⁸ On the Danish missionaries and the colony of Tranquebar, see D. Dennis Hudson, "The First Protestant Mission to India. Its Social and Religious Developments," *Sociological Bulletin* 42 (1993): 37-63; Anne-Charlott Trepp, "Von der Missionierung der Seelen zur Erforschung der Natur. Die Dänisch-Hallesche Südindienmission im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 36 (2010): 231-256; Diller, *Die Dänen in Indien*, 147-189.
- ⁶⁹ Jana Tschurennev, *Empire, Civil Society, and the Beginnings of Colonial Education in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 150-152; Heike Liebau, *Cultural Encounters in India. The Local Co-Workers of Tranquebar Mission, 18th to 19th Centuries* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2018), 342-421.
- ⁷⁰ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. C., Brocktorff on the Nicobar Islands, fol. 223r-224v.
- ⁷¹ Ibid, fol. 221r.
- ⁷² Ibid, fol. 220v-222v.
- ⁷³ Ibid, fol. 222v. Translated by the author.
- ⁷⁴ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Hegner, Abhandlung, fol. 303r.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid, fol. 303v-304r. Translated from German by the author.
- ⁷⁶ On the slave trade from Mozambique to India, see José Capela, "Slave Trade Networks in Eighteenth-Century Mozambique," in *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange. Slave Trading in the South Atlantic, 1590-1867*, ed. David Richardson and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2015), 165-193; Pedro Machado, "A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean. Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave-Trade, c. 1730-1830," in *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, ed. Gwyn Campbell (London/Portland: Frank Cass, 2004), 16-33, 18-24.

For the broader context of slavery in the Indian Ocean and Asia, see Michael Zeuske, *Sklaverei. Eine Menschheitsgeschichte von der Steinzeit bis heute* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2018), 180-187.

⁷⁷ HHStA, StAbt, OTA 1, Fasz. F., Hegner, Abhandlung, fol. 305v.

⁷⁸ Ibid, fol. 320v-321r. Translated by the author.

⁷⁹ Ibid, fol. 308r. Translated by the author.

⁸⁰ Ibid, fol. 321v-322v. Translated by the author.

⁸¹ Ibid, fol. 323r. Translated by the author.

⁸² Ibid, fol. 324r. Translated by the author.

⁸³ Ibid, fol. 328r-328v.

⁸⁴ Ibid, fol. 326r-327v.

⁸⁵ Klaus Weber, *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel, 1680-1830* (München: C. H. Beck, 2004), 195-204, 284-285, 369.

⁸⁶ Nagel, *Abenteuer Fernhandel*, 135-137.

⁸⁷ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 103; HHStA, NLZ, HS 176, 299-300; HHStA, NLZ, Karton 2, Hafen- und Mauthgefälle zu Triest 1781.

⁸⁸ *Reichspostreuter*, 7.12.1779, Nr. 195, [3].

⁸⁹ Eberhard Schmitt, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der europäischen Expansion* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988), 302-304; Nagel, *Abenteuer Fernhandel*, 84-85.

⁹⁰ Peer Vries, *Zur politischen Ökonomie des Tees. Was und Tee über die englische und chinesische Wirtschaft der Frühen Neuzeit sagen kann* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2009), 39.

⁹¹ Karl von Zinzendorf, *Europäische Aufklärung zwischen Wien und Triest. Die Tagebücher des Gouverneurs Karl Graf Zinzendorf 1776-1782*, vol. 3, ed. Grete Klingenstein, Eva Faber, and Antonio Trampus (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau, 2009), 552 (12.12.1779), 618 (18.3.1780), 628 (7.4.1780), 630 (11.4.1780 and 12.4.1780), 631 (14.4.1780), 933 (4.10.1781), 934 (9.10.1781).

⁹² HHStA, NLZ, HS 179, Nr. 65, Chargement du Vaisseau Impérial le Prince de Kaunitz relaché à Malaga le 19 Aout 1780 & attendu incessamment à Trieste.

⁹³ See the contemporary description in Jean-Baptiste du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et phisique de l'empire de Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (Paris: P. G. Le Mercier, 1735), 22. For the history of this tea variety see George van Driem, *The Tale of Tea. A Comprehensive History of Tea from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 138-153.

⁹⁴ Zinzendorf, *Europäische Aufklärung*, vol. 3, 777 (20.12.1780 and 21.12.1780).

⁹⁵ Ibid, 781 (29.12.1780).

⁹⁶ The unit *poïd* is the equivalent to pound and amounted to half a kilogram, with minor regional differences.

⁹⁷ Peter Rohrsen, *Der Tee. Anbau, Sorten, Geschichte* (München: C. H. Beck, 2013), 19-21.

- ⁹⁸ Yong Liu, *The Dutch East India Company's Tea Trade with China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 68-69, 73.
- ⁹⁹ Alan H. Varnam and Jane P. Sutherland, *Beverages. Technology, chemistry and microbiology* (New York: Aspen, 1999), 146-147.
- ¹⁰⁰ James A. Benn, *Tea in China. A Religious and Cultural History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 175-176.
- ¹⁰¹ Liu, *The Dutch East India Company's Tea Trade with China*, 69-73. For the history of Padre Saotchaou, see Jason Goodwin, *A Time for Tea. Travels through India and China in search of Tea* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 50.
- ¹⁰² HHStA, NIZ, HS 179, Nr. 65, Chargement du Vaisseau Impérial le Prince de Kaunitz [...].
- ¹⁰³ HHStA, NIZ, HS 178, 331.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 332.
- ¹⁰⁵ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 104, 116-117; Reinhard, *Die Unterwerfung der Welt*, 232-233.
- ¹⁰⁶ HHStA, NIZ, HS 176, 301-302; Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 364.
- ¹⁰⁷ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 104, 117-119. The Antwerp group equipped eight ships for Canton between 1780 and 1785. Only three ships were destined for the Indian Ocean.
- ¹⁰⁸ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 355. For the saltpeter trade, see James W. Frey, "The Indian Saltpeter Trade, the Military Revolution, and the Rise of Britain as a Global Superpower," *The Historian* 71, no. 3 (2009): 507-554.
- ¹⁰⁹ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 355-357; Hallward, *William Bolts*, 187.
- ¹¹⁰ Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 110-115.
- ¹¹¹ Ernst van Bruyssel, *Histoire du commerce et de la marine en Belgique*, vol. 3 (Brussels/Leipzig/Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven, Jung-Treuttel, 1864), 299.
- ¹¹² Meisterle, *Von Coblön bis Delagoa*, 126. For a more detailed account of Habsburg trade after the end of the war, see Singerton, *The American Revolution and the Habsburg Monarchy*, 143-165.
- ¹¹³ Among the many publications on these topics, see the following, ranked by recency of publication: Michael Falser, *Habsburgs going global. The Austro-Hungarian Concession in Tientsin/Tianjin in China (1901-1917)* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2022); Edward Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico. A Disaster in the New World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022); Florian Ambach, „Baumwolle, Elfenbein und Glasperlen. Perspektiven österreichischer Reisender auf die Errichtung eines ‚informal empire‘ im Sudan des 19. Jahrhunderts,“ *historia.scribere* 13 (2021): 203-231; Mary Margaret McAllen, *Maximilian and Carlota. Europe's Last Empire in Mexico* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2014); Markus Kaiserseder, "Die österreichischen Missionsstationen im Sudan zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Wegbereiter eines Kolonialismus?" (diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 2013), <https://theses.univie.ac.at/detail/22281>; David Pruonto, "Did the Second Mexican Empire under Maximilian of Habsburg (1864-1867) have an 'Austrian Face'?" *Austrian Studies* 20 (2012): 96-111; Carlos H. Oberacker, *Leopoldine. Habsburgs Kaiserin von Brasilien* (Vienna: Amalthea Verlag, 1988); Walter Sauer, "Schwarz-Gelb in Afrika. Habsburgermonarchie und koloniale Frage," in *k. u. k. colonial. Habsburgermonarchie und europäische Herrschaft in Afrika*, ed. Walter Sauer (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau, 2002), 17-78; Michael Zach, *Österreicher im Sudan von 1820 bis 1914* (Vienna: Afro-Pub, 1985).