SLAVERY HINTERLAND explores a neglected aspect of transatlantic slavery: the implication of a continental European hinterland. It focuses on historical actors in territories that were not directly involved in the traffic in Africans but linked in various ways with the transatlantic slave business, the plantation economies that it fed and the consequences of its abolition. The volume unearths material entanglements of the Continental and Atlantic economies and also proposes a new agenda for the historical study of the relationship between business and morality. Contributors from the US, Britain and continental Europe examine the ways in which the slave economy touched on individual lives and economic developments in German-speaking Europe, Switzerland, Denmark and Italy. They reveal how these ‘hinterlands’ served as suppliers of investment, labour and trade goods for the slave trade and of materials for the plantation economies, and how involvement in trade networks contributed in turn to key economic developments in the ‘hinterlands’. The chapters range in time from the first, short-lived attempt at establishing a German slave-trading operation in the 1680s to the involvement of textile manufacturers in transatlantic trade in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A key theme of the volume is the question of conscience, or awareness of being morally implicated in an immoral enterprise. Evidence for subjective understandings of the moral challenge of slavery is found in individual actions and statements and also in post-abolition colonisation and missionary projects.

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**People, Markets, Goods: Economies and Societies in History**
Craig Koslofsky and Roberto Zaugg

Ship’s Surgeon Johann Peter Oettinger
A Hinterlander in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1682-1696

DRAFT

Final version to appear in


The life and travels of the barber-surgeon Johann Peter Oettinger (1666-1746) connect a central European hinterland, the region of Franconia in south-western Germany, with the Atlantic slave trade by way of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and the Brandenburg African Company. The small town of Künzelsau, where Oettinger died a respected barber-surgeon in 1746, lies only about ten miles from the tiny village of Orendensall where he was born in 1666, son of a Lutheran pastor. But as a young man Oettinger travelled across the Holy Roman Empire and the Dutch Republic, and then on to the West Indies and Africa in the course of making that ten-mile journey. Oettinger recorded his travels in a vivid manuscript journal, written from 1682 to 1696, but until now his account was known only through a partial and heavily manipulated retelling, published in 1885-1886 by Paul Oettinger (1848-1934), a Prussian officer and descendant of Johann Peter.\(^1\) Paul

\(^1\) In this literary undertaking, Paul Oettinger was supported by Vice Admiral Ludwig von Henk (1820-1894), a member of the German Colonial Society (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft) and a future MP of the German Conservative Party (Deutschkonservative Partei). Their text was first published in episodes in the popular magazine Schorers Familienblatt. Eine illustrierte Zeitschrift 6 (1885), pp. 134-137, 150-151, 180-183, 262-264, 398-399 and 412-415, and then and then as a separate book: Paul Oettinger, Unter kurbrandenburgischer Flagge. Deutsche-Kolonialerfahrungen vor zweihundert Jahren. Nach dem Tagebuch des Chirurgen Johann Peter Oettinger (Berlin, 1886). This ‘edition’ has been partially translated and annotated by Adam Jones, ed., Brandenburg sources for West African history 1680-1700 (Stuttgart, 1985), pp. 180-198. On Johann Peter
Oettinger based his shortened and heavily rewritten ‘edition’ on a clear and apparently accurate 1779 copy of the original manuscript. This copy, by Johann Peter’s grandson, Georg Anton Oettinger (1745-after 1831), was handed down within the Oettinger family until 1982, when it was donated, together with other family papers, to the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin. There it remained unnoticed by scholars until its discovery by the authors in 2010/2011. The discovery of this eighteenth-century manuscript copy of the original journal, titled ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf von Johann Peter Oettinger’ (‘Travel Account and Biography of Johann Peter Oettinger’) allows us, for the first time, to truly examine the barber-surgeon’s travels in Europe and in the Atlantic world.

Although Johann Peter Oettinger travelled much farther than most other journeymen-surgeons, his travel account belongs to a common genre, the journeyman’s diary, which served to document the itineraries of a craftsman’s travels and the masters with whom he had worked. Oettinger’s travels can be divided into seven segments: a journey through the Holy Roman Empire and the Dutch Republic (1682-1688), his first transatlantic voyage on a Dutch vessel to the Caribbean and Suriname (1688-1690), a second journey in the Dutch Republic and to East Frisia (1690-1692), a second Atlantic voyage with a Brandenburg vessel to West Africa and the Caribbean (1692-1693), an arduous journey from western France to East Frisia (1693-94), a third journey in the northern territories of the Holy Roman Empire (1696), and finally the return trip to his hometown Künzelsau (1696). Among its many themes, this rich account allows us to examine three significant axes that connected the hinterlands of central Europe with the Atlantic slave trade: migration, micro-investment, and the construction of race. Before we examine these themes, a brief introduction to the Brandenburg African Company is necessary, as Oettinger’s travels in the service of this enterprise generated the longest section of his account, which in turn emerges as one of the major narrative sources for the history of the company.

Oettinger see also Hartmut Nöldeke, Die Fregatte ‘Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde’ und ihr Schiff-Chirurg (Herford, 1990).

2 Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (GStA PK, Berlin), VI. HA, Familienarchiv Oettinger, 12, ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf von Johann Peter Oettinger’.

I. The Brandenburg African Company: A Hinterland State Enters the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Chartered in 1682 and officially dissolved in 1717, the Brandenburg African Company (BAC) – which in September 1692 was renamed ‘Brandenburg African-American Company’ (BAAC) – undertook the first sustained engagement with Africa and the Atlantic slave trade by a German state. The BAC holds a unique place in the history of connections between German-speaking hinterlands and the early modern slave trade, so it merits closer examination here.

The BAC was created by Elector Frederick William I (1640-1688) on the initiative of the Dutch émigré merchant, ship-owner, and privateer Benjamin Raule (1634-1707), first director of the company and first ‘Director-General’ of the nascent Brandenburg-Prussian navy. In 1682, the Elector of Brandenburg ruled a patchwork of overwhelmingly agrarian territories spread across central Europe, still depopulated by the effects of the Thirty Years’ War. Frederick William I

looked to mercantilist policies to enrich his hinterland territories through global trade. The model for prosperity through trade was the Dutch Republic, to which Frederick had close ties of religion and marriage. With the founding of the BAC in 1682, Frederick William I used Dutch capital and maritime expertise to carve out a place in the Atlantic slave trade.

With access only to the eastern Baltic, Brandenburg-Prussia was a typical hinterland country and possessed none of the geopolitical prerequisites for the triangle trade. But the pull of the Atlantic economy was powerful. To enter this world, the Brandenburgers patched together a new network of Atlantic harbours and trade sites. After a 1681 voyage from the Baltic port of Pillau to the Gold Coast, they signed an agreement (1683) with the port city of Emden, giving them access to the North Sea. Starting in 1683 they built trading posts on the Gold Coast, in the south-west of modern-day Ghana: the major fort of Grossfriedrichsburg in Pokesu (Princess Town), as well as the Dorotheenschanze in Akwida and the Sophie Louise-Schanze in Tacrama. In December 1685 Brandenburg-Prussia negotiated a thirty-year treaty with Denmark, allowing the BAC to sell enslaved Africans on the Danish island of St. Thomas in the Caribbean. In 1687 they became treaty partners with the Emirs of Trarza, who allowed them to use the existing island-fort of Arguin (just off the coast of modern-day Mauritania) as a trading post and supply station. Its attempts to acquire its own Caribbean islands and to establish territorial colonies failed, but Brandenburg-Prussia developed an essential network of Atlantic bases, each secured by agreements with local authorities.

From the start, the slave trade was conceived as an important aspect of the BAC, though trade for gold and ivory was also meant to play a significant role in the company’s commercial strategy. Alternative commodities continued to be sought on the African coasts for the whole period, especially in Mauritania, where gum arabic and ostrich feathers always constituted the core business. But by 1685 it was clear that the greatest profits could only be made with human cargo. As Frederick William I explained: ‘His Electoral Highness intends, because the African Company cannot develop without the trade of slaves to America, that one should establish the slave trade on

5 The BAC also tried to establish itself in Takoradi but after a few years it lost this base to the WIC.

6 An English translation of these agreements can be found in Jones, Brandenburg Sources.

7 Stamm, Das koloniale Experiment, pp. 237ff.
the island of St. Thomas. With a harbour in the Caribbean guaranteed by the treaty with Denmark, the BAC could now fully engage in trans-Atlantic trade. In 1687 Director Raule reported to Frederick William I that the first BAC slave ship had arrived at St. Thomas, and that ‘the slave trade... is becoming the foundation of our company.’

As Malte Stamm has shown, most of these slaves were re-exported from St. Thomas to French possessions (especially St. Croix) and to minor British islands. A significant (although not always traceable) share of the BAC’s slaves were, however, sold directly to English and French planters, whose demand over-rode the mercantile monopolies of the chartered companies, or to Dutch merchants on Curàçao and St. Eustachius, from whence the slaves were brought – illegally or through the asiento de negros system – to the Spanish mainland. In 1693 Robert Morrison, an English agent in Holland, described the BAC testily as ‘an Emden company trading under the Elector of Brandenburg’s patent to Guinea.’ He complained that

Though they [the BAC] pretend they send their ships to an island called St. Thomas in the West Indies, belonging to the Danes, which does not produce forty hogsheads of sugar a year, it is evident from their papers that the [return] cargoes were purchased at St. Croix, Martinique and other French islands.

In light of the incessant conflict in the Caribbean, he noted that ‘this company, under pretence of trading to St. Thomas, supply all the French islands with provisions and necessaries of war.’

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10 Stamm, Das koloniale Experiment, chap. 5.2, 5.6 and 5.7.

11 Extract of a letter from Robert Morrison, agent to the Transport Commissioners in Holland (10/20 April 1693), in W.J. Hardy and Edward Bateson, ed., Calendar of State Papers. Domestic series, of the reign of William and Mary... 1693 (London, 1903), p. 95.
English and French planters’ demand for slaves always exceeded the supply provided by their national chartered companies, and the BAC sought to profit from this gap. Between 1682 and 1715 ships sailing under the flag of Brandenburg-Prussia disembarked and sold at least 19,240 slaves.\textsuperscript{12} Overall Brandenburg-Prussia’s share of the slave trade remained well below that of the Dutch, whose ships delivered 87,391 slaves to the Americas during the same period.\textsuperscript{13} However, if we focus on the Caribbean between 1690 and 1700, when the Brandenburg slave trade was at its height, the BAC/BAAC share is much higher. In these years, the Company disembarked 15,293 slaves in the Caribbean on 36 voyages, whereas the vessels flying the Dutch flag delivered about 21,806 slaves to the same region on 52 voyages. For about a decade, then, the BAC/BAAC was a growing force in the triangular trade and real competition for the Dutch in the most important slave import market of the New World.

Inevitably, this success drew the attention of their European rivals. Pressure from the Dutch in Africa and the general growth of the British slave trade in the Caribbean were a constant challenge to the Company. The most important factor of the BAAC’s decline – though certainly not the only one – were the attacks on its fleet by the French\textsuperscript{14}. The BAC/BAAC fleet, which never had more than 16 ships at any one time, lost 15 vessels between 1693 and 1702.\textsuperscript{15} Oettinger’s return voyage to Europe in 1693, for example, ended when his ship, the \textit{Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde}, was seized and burned by the French in November of that year. After 1700 the fortunes of the BAC/BAAC declined rapidly. In 1717 the Company’s fortresses on the Gold Coast were sold to the Dutch, and the Brandenburg African-American Company was dismissed as a ‘chimera’ by King Frederick William I (1713-1740), who was much more interested in Prussia’s military position in continental Europe than by overseas trade.

\textsuperscript{12} An estimated 23,583 slaves were embarked on the African shores; 18.4\% of them died on board. The data concerning slave voyages by vessels flying the flag of Brandenburg-Prussia are taken from Stamm, \textit{Das koloniale Experiment}, pp. 398-401.

\textsuperscript{13} For slave voyages by Dutch ships see the \textit{Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database} at www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces (28 July 2012).

\textsuperscript{14} Eleven ships were captured or confiscated by the French, six by the English, five by the Dutch, one by the Danes and one by an English pirate. Most of them were never returned to the BAC/BAAC. Moreover, a dozen vessels suffered shipwreck and one was probably destroyed during a slave revolt. Stamm, \textit{Das koloniale Experiment}, pp. 398-400.

\textsuperscript{15} Nagel, ‘Die Brandenburgisch-Africanische Compagnie’, p. 90.
On the Gold Coast, however, the BAC was no chimera. In the 1690’s its main trading post, the ‘handsome and reasonably large’ fort of Grossfriedrichsburg, was comparable to the Dutch headquarters at Elmina in size and strength.\textsuperscript{16} From their first voyage to the Gold Coast in 1680-1681, the Brandenburghers signed treaties with local rulers, traded for gold, ivory, and slaves, and attacked and defended trading posts along the coast. In 1692 the BAC joined with the English Royal African Company (RAC) and the Dutch WIC to send a common embassy to Denkyira, an inland kingdom that had become a major source of gold and slaves.\textsuperscript{17} And further east, the Brandenburghers were in contact with the King of Hueda, in present-day Benin, to whose court in Savi Oettinger was admitted in early 1693.\textsuperscript{18}

The manifold activities of the BAC/BAAC generated entrepreneurs’ proposals, business records, travel accounts, and official reports – an interwoven set of texts in Dutch and German linking Berlin, its Baltic ports, and Emden with Arguin, the Gold Coast, and the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{19} The company tapped into an existing network of connections and opened new migratory channels between the hinterlands of central Europe and the Atlantic world.

\section*{II. Maritime Labour and its Migratory Hinterlands}

While there has been some recent work on merchants from continental regions investing their capital in slaving voyages,\textsuperscript{20} the participation of poor migrant workers from various hinterlands in

\textsuperscript{16} William Bosman \textit{A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea} (London, 1705), p. 7.


\textsuperscript{19} On the importance of written communication in the making of merchant companies see Miles Ogborn, \textit{Indian Ink. Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company} (Chicago, 2007), pp. 1-26, and the literature cited there.

\textsuperscript{20} For a general overview on investment by individual German merchants and the importance of cloth and manufactured goods from the Holy Roman Empire in the slave trade see Klaus Weber, ‘Deutschland, der atlantische Sklavenhandel und die Plantagenwirtschaft der Neuen Welt’, \textit{Journal of Modern European History} 7 (2009), pp. 37-67; for a special focus on Prussia and Saxony see Michael Zeuske and Jörg Ludwig.
the slave trade has been repeatedly noted but scarcely analysed. The nationally and racially mixed crews of Atlantic merchant ships are frequently described as a motley crew of desperados or, with more empathy, as a cosmopolitan proletariat. Thanks to works like that of Patricia Fumerton and Emma Christopher we now know more about the social life of sailors on English and British ships in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but still there is much work to do for slaving vessels from other countries and periods. It would be especially helpful to know more about the lives of ordinary crew members before they were recruited to serve on the slave ships. More background on their migratory paths would allow us to go beyond the cliché of a crew thrown together by chance and assess the depth of the connections between the Atlantic and more remote areas. The extensive presence of German-speaking sailors, craftsmen and surgeons in the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC) has been reconstructed in detail. German-speaking labourers were so numerous in the ranks of the VOC that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they had a specific role in settling the Cape Colony in South Africa. There is no systematic study on the place of migrants from the Holy Roman Empire in the Dutch WIC, but their involvement seems similar. And like the German hinterland merchants who migrated to Atlantic


ports in the eighteenth century, many of these maritime workers came not from coastal areas, but from regions farther inland. In the account of his BAC/BAAC voyage Oettinger mentions several fellow hinterlanders including soldiers from Eisfeldt, Dresden, and Strasbourg. As a 1688 muster-roll shows, only a minority of the employees of the Company serving on the Gold Coast were actually subjects of the Prince-Elector of Brandenburg-Prussia itself. Most came from other territories of the Holy Roman Empire and from the Dutch Republic. Men from Scotland, Courland, Hungary, and Poland-Lithuania also found work at the BAC trading posts in West Africa.

How can we explain this migratory phenomenon? We might be tempted to use a traditional push-and-pull model: no doubt the boom of Atlantic seafaring and the wage differentials between the rich Dutch Republic and the poorer German states played an important role in this. But to presume that these German-speaking labourers were automatically and directly attracted from their home towns to the labour-hungry ports of Rotterdam, Amsterdam, or Emden would be mistaken. As Oettinger’s journal shows, their stories are far more complex.

When Johann Peter Oettinger first left his home village of Künzelsau in 1681, he was 15 years old and he sought neither to work in the Dutch Republic nor to discover the wide world of the Atlantic. He simply moved to the neighbouring town of Schwäbisch Hall to do an apprenticeship as


a barber-surgeon. About eighteen months later he completed this educational migration and returned to Künzelsau. But he did not stay long: as with all craftsmen, after his apprenticeship he was obliged to travel as a journeyman. So he left Künzelsau again. During the first two years of his journey he stayed in Heidelberg, Pforzheim, Philippsburg, and Worms, working in each town for several months for an established barber-surgeon. This first segment of his craftsman migration, regional in scope, was likely based on social networks which he had already established before he left home.

In 1685 Oettinger decided to travel north-east from Worms to Kassel, then east to Jena to visit a brother studying theology there. However, in none of the cities along this route did he find steady work, so his stays were all brief. He then tried his luck in the south, in Nuremberg, but found no suitable employment there either. After months without work, Oettinger went back to the south western territories of the Holy Roman Empire where his connections were better; he then worked for more than a year in Mainz and in the small town of Bingen before heading down the Rhine to Düsseldorf. In Düsseldorf – or more likely in Aachen – he seems to have learned about opportunities in the Dutch Republic and decided to try his luck there. In Amsterdam he worked for a year in the practice of Nicolaus Ravenstein, a surgeon from Hamburg. Only when his employment contract with Ravenstein ended did he decide to take the surgeons’ examination of the Dutch WIC, accept an offer from this mercantile enterprise, and leave for his first transatlantic voyage to the Caribbean and Suriname.

This connection between craft migration and maritime work, seen in the lives of other barber-surgeons, is apparent in his second voyage as well. After returning from the West Indies,


32 See for example the travel accounts of Andreas Josua Ultzheimer (from Swabia, born 1578) and of Samuel Brun (from Basel, 1590-1668), who in the early seventeenth century visited Africa as a ship’s surgeons on Dutch vessels, or the autobiography of Oettinger’s contemporary Johann Dietz (1665-1738), who worked as a military surgeon in the armies of the Elector of Brandenburg and as a ship’s surgeon aboard a whaling vessel: Samuel
Oettinger could have continued in the service of the WIC. But he did not. Instead he moved to Harderwijk, where he worked for two years in the practice of an established barber-surgeon. We can presume that he grew better and better integrated in a regional network of social relations and information about job opportunities. When he left Harderwijk, he did not head back to south-west Germany, but instead travelled to Hallum and then to Emden in East Frisia, where in 1692 he was engaged by the BAC to sail to the West Africa and St. Thomas as a surgeon on board the Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde.

The third continental migration of Oettinger was hardly voluntary. It began in Brest, where the crew of the Brandenburg ship was disembarked after capture by the French fleet in November 1693. In the winter of 1693-94 Oettinger walked (!) from Brittany to Emden in order to collect his pay from the BAAC at their headquarters. Once arrived in Emden, however, he did not seek to return to his family (although he had not seen them for twelve years). Instead, he sought new opportunities. He first travelled south, but his new East Frisian connections drew him back to Aurich. There he worked in the practice of a barber’s widow with whom he seemed to settle down. It was only the steady pressure of his family which made him leave this woman and travel back to his home village, Künzelsau.33

As Oettinger’s travels show, the presence of hinterland workers in the Atlantic slave trade depended on multi-polar geographical mobility. Many hinterlanders worked in the Atlantic economy, but we suspect that very few left home with Atlantic ports in mind. The direction of their mobility was constantly reoriented by the networks and information they accessed during their travels. At each stage, migrants had to decide whether to stay or move on. And if they decided to leave, they needed information, resources and connections to choose another goal.

In the end, Oettinger’s migration led him back to his home village. But he had many opportunities to stay elsewhere along his route. In West Africa, he was offered an employment as

Brun, Schiffsarten, welche er in etliche neue Länder und Insulen zu fünf unterschiedlichen malen mit Gottes hülf gethan, (Basel, 1624); Andreas Josua Uiltzheimer, Warhaffte Beschreibung ettlcher Reisen in Europa, Africa und America 1596-1610. Die abenteurlichen Weltreisen eines schwäbischen Wundarztes, ed. S. Werg (Stuttgart, 1971); Johann Dietz, Mein Lebenslauf, ed. F. Kemp (Munich, 1966); the travelogues of Uiltzheimer and Brun have been partially translated and critically annotated by Adam Jones, ed., German Sources for West African history 1599-1699 (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 18-96.

chief surgeon in the Brandenburg fort of Grossfriedrichsburg, and in Aurich he found a barber-
surgeon’s practice and perhaps also a potential wife. The routes Oettinger travelled look quite
tangled and confused. But it is these connections that wove the fabric of the early modern Atlantic
world together with its migratory hinterlands.

III. Personal Trade as Micro-investment in the Slave Business

More research is needed to assess possible trade connections between Oettinger’s home region,
Franconia, and the Atlantic world. The Swabian region of neighbouring Württemberg was
producing linen for export by the mid-seventeenth century, and it is possible that WIC or BAC
ships carried linen from Swabia or Franconia in their holds.

Oettinger’s personal investment in the Atlantic trade is evident in his journal. When he returned
to Amsterdam in January 1690 after his first trip to the West Indies, he noted that upon arrival ‘the
noble West-Indian masters of the Company inspected our crates [Kisten] and released us from our
oath.’ These crates remind us of the breadth of small-scale participation in Atlantic trade by the
employees of the chartered companies.

After his second West Indian voyage, Oettinger was returning to Emden aboard the Friedrich
Wilhelm zu Pferde in November 1693 when the frigate was, as mentioned above, attacked by
several French naval vessels. The French plundered the cargo, took the crew prisoner, and then
burned the BAAC ship. Although Oettinger notes thankfully that ‘no one was allowed to take

34 ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, p. 59. He was also asked to stay at St. Thomas but declined the offer: ‘Ich
sollte an Land als Chirurgus bleiben, es wolte mir aber nicht stehen.’ Ibid., p. 109.

35 Hans Medick, Weben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650-1900. Lokalgeschichte als Allgemeine Geschichte

36 ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, p. 27.

37 See Van Gelder, Ostindische Abenteuer, pp. 180-83, on the opportunities for private trade by German and other
employees of the VOC.

38 The Friedrich Wilhelm zu Pferde had taken on a large cargo of cacao at St. Thomas. The decision to sell it to the
Spanish by stopping at Cadiz on the return voyage to Emden led to the ship’s disastrous encounter with the
French. Oettinger and the crew protested the detour to Cadiz (see ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, pp. 111-
anything from us once we were on their [the French] ship’, he had only the clothes on his back.39
He lamented that ‘my crates of sugar, tobacco, cotton, medicines, and everything else was gone’.40
Oettinger gives no specific account of the number or value of the crates, but he noted earlier in the
journal that ‘I was often on shore buying cotton and tobacco’ while in St. Thomas.41 Clearly, he had
hoped his investment in these commodities would bring a fine profit when he reached Emden.

This hinterlander’s micro-investment reveals an overlooked aspect of the Atlantic trade. Chartered companies allowed limited private trade by certain employees on board (the captain and a few others), but such trade is largely invisible in company records. The personal trade of lesser employees such as the young Oettinger appears only in cases of conflict. Evidence is limited, but this micro-investment alongside the Atlantic slave trade seems to have been common. In 1681, for example, ‘Doctor [Samuel] Stone’ (a surgeon employed by the RAC on the Gold Coast) made and then retracted an allegation against RAC official James Nightingale.42 Together Stone and Nightingale then accused another RAC official, Francis Frankland, of trading privately with the Portuguese and with English interlopers. Moreover, the two men claimed that RAC officer Arthur Wendover had purchased numerous textiles from a Dutch interloper (‘46 fine sletias43, 5 sayes44, and 7 perpetuanoes45’) for his own local trade. Similarly, the records of the BAC concerning the Zeeland interloper Creutz, seized by the BAC on the Gold Coast in 1686, show that when the Creutz was seized, the ship’s second mate (‘Unter Stürmann’) and surgeon ‘had made their own

39 And his gold, hidden in a bandage on his leg. ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, pp. 115-16.
43 Linen cloth, originally from Silesia but also made in England and the Netherlands.
44 Fine woollen cloth, made in England and the Netherlands.
45 Hard-wearing serge (wool) cloth made in England.
particular cargoes,'\textsuperscript{46} and the first mate had a private venture worth 70 Gulden on board.\textsuperscript{47} In 1699 the governor of the RAC fortress in Anomabu, Gerrard Gore, complained to the RAC headquarters at Cape Coast Castle that the ‘serjeant’ and soldiers of the fortress ‘have ever since they have been here had interloping goods, and sould at under prices in the towne... cheaper than the Companys prices in the Castle.’ One of the men, ‘Daniel Vanchesterfleet souldier’, had ‘two roles [=rolls] of tobacco and a cask of Barbadoes rumme’ to trade. Gore reported that the sergeant told him that that private trade ‘was none of my business, and that he and them might doe what they pleased, I was to mind the Company goods and nothing else.’\textsuperscript{48} Small and smallest-scale private commerce seems common to even the lowest-ranking employees. One suspects that company officials tolerated private ventures because the officials were usually trading privately themselves, and needed their subordinates to keep quiet about it. Further, the forthright resistance to Gore’s attempts to suppress private trade at Anomabu suggests that these employees felt they had a right to trade on their own.

Access to private trade was sought by officials and subordinates alike. In 1714 RAC official William Brainie complained that ‘the Compa[ny] think it very hard to allow even the first of their Servants to gain anything considerable on this Coast.’ Brainie then compared his plight with the freedom of the crew of the interloper \textit{Saint Thomas}, captained by Jacob Burgeson. Brainie noted that in contrast ‘Capt. Burgisson's Sailers (as I have it from their own mouths) have in this one voyage gaind some £60 others 70 and others 100 or more pounds.’\textsuperscript{49} In this case ‘even’ the lowest-ranking crew members took the opportunity to trade.

The implications of this micro-investment in the Guinea trade and in the products of slave labour deserve further consideration. If such personal trade were a widespread and lasting feature of

\textsuperscript{46} ‘particuliere cargaisoenen gemacht’. Interrogation of the former director and bookkeeper of Grossfriedrichsburg, Joost van Colster and Daniel Reindermann, (Emden, 9 March 1686), GStA PK, I. HA, Repositur 65, Marine und Afrikanische Kompanie-sachen, 42, 8r-22v. A partial translation of this document has been published by Jones, \textit{Brandenburg Sources}, doc. 61.

\textsuperscript{47} ‘seine particulier 70 [Gulden] flaams zugestanden, dehren cargaison er auch vor sein eigen geld aus Middelburg mit genommen’. Interrogation of the first mate of the Dutch interloper ship Dirck Blaues (Emden, 27 Febr. 1686), Stadtarchiv Emden, Protokoll XIV, 1, p. 46.


the Atlantic world, then common sailors, soldiers, and barber-surgeons were more personally invested (financially and emotionally) in the Atlantic system than has previously been assumed. This aspect of the slave business scarcely appears in the records of the chartered companies, but sources like Oettinger’s diary provide a glimpse of its extent.

IV. Race, Gender and Slavery

Johann Peter Oettinger saw much more of the world than his fellow hinterlanders. What did he learn on his travels from Künzelsau to Curaçao and from Emden to the Gold Coast and St. Thomas? He learned that he could seek his fortune in the Atlantic world, a world of slavery and trade. Like the majority of his contemporaries, Oettinger did not understand his participation in the slave trade as a moral issue. He witnessed the daily and manifold atrocities committed on a slave ship, and in his role as a surgeon he participated actively in the practices which enabled them, such as the careful inspection of slaves for purchase. We note that in his journal – which he certainly knew would be read by his family, if not more widely – he did not obscure the violence committed against enslaved persons, nor did he feel compelled to justify these acts and his personal participation in the trade. He describes the branding of new-purchased Africans (on the shoulder with letters ‘CABC’ for Churfürstliche Africanische Brandenburgische Compagnie), the Middle Passage, the torture of slaves, and slave labour without comment.

His abiding moral concern is not with the slave trade, but with property and theft. He notes carefully when something is stolen from him, or when the property of others is taken. Indeed, property and its possession are a key theme in his journal. His narrative tells the adventures of his property: the gold he hides from the French under a bandage on his leg, his lost crates of sugar and tobacco, the gold ring he receives from a grateful patient in Grossfriedrichsburg, and rings stolen and recovered just before he leaves Grossfriedrichsburg for the Slave Coast. He notes carefully that the possessions of those who died at sea were auctioned off, with the proceeds to be given to their heirs when the ship returned home.

50 See Marcus Rediker, The Slave Ship. A Human History (New York, 2007), and Fumerton, Unsettled, p. 102.

51 To extend the metaphor of the hinterlands and borderlands, one could argue that Europeans like Oettinger, lacking any moral perspective on the trade, occupied a no-man’s land rather than a hinterland.

52 ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, p. 83. These enslaved Africans were themselves often hinterlanders, marched long distances from sites of capture inland to the slave trading posts on the coast of West Africa.
How did Oettinger understand human beings as property? He first encountered gang slavery as he arrived in Curaçao on his voyage with the WIC in 1688:

Arrived on the 25th of September at 5 or 6 in the evening; at Curaçao our ship was pulled on land or on the dock with a rope by some hundred naked Moors, men and women.\(^{53}\)

Race and gender mark one another in Oettinger’s descriptions of African bodies, just as they do in seventeenth century images. The 23-year-old Oettinger tended to about 300 WIC slaves on a three-month journey from Curaçao to Suriname in 1688-89.\(^{54}\) During the voyage three African women gave birth. He described how ‘they bind the [new-born] child on their back with an old linen cloth, throw their breast to him over the shoulder, and let him suckle. They look like a pair of young apes.’\(^{55}\) In the early seventeenth century Theodor de Bry was one of the first to represent a recurring image in the depiction of African women: the claim that they could suckle their children over their shoulder (see figure 1).\(^{56}\) As Jennifer Morgan has shown, this image powerfully dehumanized African women, and it had a broad reach, echoing across the Atlantic world.\(^{57}\)

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53 ‘Den 25ten Septbr. abends um 5 a 6 Uhr angelangt, an Curacau wurde unser Schiff von etlichen hundert nacktten Mohren und Mohrinnen an Land oder an Wahl mit Stricken gezogen.’ ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, p. 17

54 Cornelis Ch. Goslinga (The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas 1680-1791 (Assen, 1985), p. 167) cites the WIC order to ship these slaves, classed as magrones (sick, weak, or injured slaves), to Suriname.

55 ‘das Kindt binden sie mit einem alten leinen Tuch auf den Rücken werfen ihm ihre Brüste über die Achsel und lassen Sie also saugen, kommen an als ein baar junge Affen.’ ‘Reisebeschreibung und Lebenslauf’, p. 21.


57 Jennifer L. Morgan, ‘“Some Could Suckle over their Shoulder”. Male Travellers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770’, The William and Mary Quarterly, 54/1 (1997), pp. 167-192. The Scottish traveller William Lithgow described the same practice by the women of northern Ireland after a visit
Oettinger’s perception of childbirth among the enslaved Africans also prompted comparison with an animal:

I was quite familiar with the three children born on the way because I was their midwife. The mother lies in no child-bed; instead she walks around and stretches out like a cat with its young.58

Oettinger’s European contemporaries understood the pain of childbirth as a curse that marked all women descended from Eve. Women who bore children differently, seemingly with less pain, might not possess the same humanity as Eve’s Christian descendants.59 This gendered and dehumanizing perspective on African bodies was also part of Oettinger’s education as he travelled from hinterland to metropole to colony.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when European colonialism in Africa was at its height and ideas of racial superiority had fully developed into a ‘scientific’ system, the question of slavery was, of course, considered in clearly different terms. In early modern times, one of the strongest factors in the consolidation of the idea of black inferiority was the emergence of slaveholder societies in the Americas based on the permanent reproduction of the ‘colour line’.60 By contrast, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when all European states had abolished both the slave trade and slavery,

there in 1620: ‘The other as goodly sight I saw, was women travayling the way, or toyling at home, carry their Infants about their neckes, and laying the dugges over their shoulders, would give sucke to the Babes behinde their backes, without taking them in their armes.’ William Lithgow, The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures & Painefull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Travayles from Scotland to the Most Famous Kingdomes in Europe, Asia and Afrfica (Glasgow, 1906), p. 378.


59 See Morgan, “‘Some could suckle over their shoulder’”.

anti-slavery ideas were integrated into ‘the catchall project known as the “civilising mission”’.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, after maintaining intricate relations with slave-exporting African states for centuries, and ultimately removing about 12 million enslaved Africans, slavery in Africa was now highlighted as one of the most evident signs of the Africans’ ‘barbarity’. Abolition became an ideological tool for the legitimation of the continent’s conquest by European powers.

The literary re-telling of Johann Peter Oettinger’s journal, published in 1885-1886 by his great-great-grandson Paul Oettinger, bears the signs of this contradiction. As noted above, the published text is far from being a faithful edition of the manuscript. Rather, the events and settings provided by the manuscript are transformed into a sort of historical novel. To enhance the pleasure of a popular readership, Paul Oettinger – who for decades worked as editor in chief of the \textit{Deutsche Militärzeitung}, one of the many newspapers published at that time for a military audience – transformed the rather dry and often elliptic style of the barber-surgeon’s annotations into exuberant prose, evoking – in a quite stereotypic way – exotic landscapes and the harsh but manly life of adventurous seafarers. To this end, various entirely invented passages were added to the story, infusing it with the rhetoric of African inferiority, enriched by common tropes taken from nineteenth-century racist, pseudo-ethnographic discourse. Again, gender was a central to the presentation of race.\textsuperscript{62} On one hand, African woman were depicted as exploited by their men (‘As in the case of most uncivilised people, women are considered only as beasts of burden’). On the other hand, the African women are imagined as thieving (‘They have little concept of "mine and thine" and my Negro women servant stole from me as well’) and sexually voracious (‘I found the young Negresses not at all shy… and I was more than a little astounded by the coquettish arts of seduction used by these savages.’)\textsuperscript{63} In other words, Africa was represented as a world where neither male


\textsuperscript{62} On the link between gender and race in modern colonial culture see at least Malek Alloula, \textit{The Colonial Harem} (Minneapolis, 1986); Anne McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context} (New York, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, \textit{Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule} (Berkeley, 2002).

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Der Begriff über mein und dein ist ihnen höchst unklar und auch ich wurde schliesslich von der mich bedienenden Negerin bestohlen…. Schüchtern fand ich die heranwachsenden Negerinnen nicht, […] ich staunte nicht wenig über die koketten Verführungskünste dieser Wilden.’ Oettinger, \textit{Unter kurbrandenburgischer Flagge}, p. 45. This passage about the ‘seductive negresses’ was further appropriated by Wilhelm Jensen, who
authority over women, nor the material and carnal desires of women were disciplined by the norms of civilisation. Again, it is important to note that these and similar passages have no reference point at all in the original diary. They were added entirely by Paul Oettinger.

Paul Oettinger’s agenda, however, was not only literary. He rewrote his ancestor’s diary with a clear political goal. The timing of his publication makes this clear. After remaining inside the family for generations, the story of Johann Peter Oettinger was for the first time presented to a broader public in 1885 – the year of the Berlin Congo Conference and just a year after the German Empire had entered the scramble for Africa. By publishing the barber-surgeon’s story under the title *Unter kurbrandenburgischer Flagge. Deutsche-Kolonialerfahrungen vor zweihundert Jahren* (*Under the Flag of the Electorate of Brandenburg. German Colonial Experiences Two Hundred Years Ago*), Paul Oettinger joined the rapidly growing trend celebrating the BAC as the precursor of modern German colonialism – a trend clearly aimed at providing a historical basis for contemporary imperial politics.  

The Prince-Elector Frederick William, Benjamin Raule and other initiators of the BAC were praised as heroes and integrated into German national history as the first German colonizers of Africa. The appropriation of the BAC ‘epos’ by Wilhelmine colonial culture had to face, however, one major problem: the basis of the company in the slave trade. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth century it had been the ‘foundation’ of the company, but by the end of the nineteenth century slavery was considered as an atrocity now practiced only by the ‘inferior races’ which European colonizers were called to ‘civilise’. In the case of Paul Oettinger’s literary manipulation of the barber-surgeon’s journal, the slave trade could not be obliterated, being the very reason of Johann Peter’s voyage on the Brandenburg frigate. Thus, to ‘save’ his ancestor and maintain him as a positive figure, Paul Oettinger added another completely invented passage, in which Johann Peter ‘writes’ as a compassionate man, instinctively opposed to the cruelties of the slave trade:

integrated it into his own historical novel on the BAC: *Brandenburg’scher Pavillon hoch! Eine Geschichte aus Kurbrandenburgs Kolonialzeit* (Berlin, 1902); on this issue see Wolfgang Struck, *Die Eroberung der Phantasie. Kolonialismus, Literatur und Film zwischen deutschem Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 2010), p. 83.

what a shudder came over me, as I entered the places [on board the ship] in which the unlucky victims were kept, inhaling the horrid atmosphere in which they were forced to live... and my heart convulsed when I was forced to watch as those who bore the shape of men were treated like animals.65

Paul Oettinger’s text integrated the sufferings of the middle passage, which had become (thanks to abolitionist literature) a central element in Western discourse on slavery, into a new German colonial vision. Thus the account of Johann Peter Oettinger offers us insights into the daily life in the Atlantic world in the seventeenth century, but also allows us to follow the shifting attitudes towards slavery in German culture, from the Old Regime to the Wilhelmine era.

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The travel journal of Johann Peter Oettinger reveals a wealth of seldom-seen connections between the Atlantic world and its seventeenth-century Germanic hinterlands. It is a valuable source for the history of the BAC/BAAC, the most significant attempt of a German state to participate in the slave trade. And it is a significant document for the reconstruction of migratory, economic, and cultural connections between this business and other German hinterland areas.66 These themes suggest that autobiographical texts and other sources of the history of everyday life are indispensable for our understanding of trans-continental contacts and exchanges. Study of the common people – individuals and families – who laboured to connect the early modern Atlantic to its various hinterlands can reveal far broader and more capillary connections than seen in the


66 Our research on Oettinger and his journal will produce two works. The first, a monograph by Roberto Zaugg, will contextualize and assess Oettinger’s migration, his slave ship voyages and his cross-cultural contacts at the court of Savi in the West African kingdom of Hueda. This study will also examine how Oettinger’s journal has been handed down by his descendants and manipulated during the late nineteenth century in the context of German colonialism. The second project will be an English textbook edition of Oettinger’s journal edited and introduced by Craig Koslofsky and Roberto Zaugg. This edition will make the journal more accessible for research and teaching.
existing scholarship. Travel from the hinterlands to the Atlantic world meant an extraordinary new set of experiences, opportunities, and social interactions. The Oettinger journal reveals these connections, and their perception and representation by a young man working his way through - and investing in - the Atlantic economy.