

# **Southern Netherlandish Prize Papers: French and British Colonial Commodities at Sea during the 18th Century**

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**March 2020**

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University of London, Senate House, Malet St., London WC1H 0XG



**Commodities of Empire  
Working Paper No.32**

**ISSN: 1756-0098**

## Southern Netherlandish Prize Papers: French and British Colonial Commodities at Sea during the 18th Century

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This working paper emanates from the Flanders Marine Institute's ongoing research into the Prize Papers Collection kept at the National Archives in Kew, and their significance for eighteenth-century Southern Netherlandish maritime history. This collection contains shipboard documents captured from enemy ships by the British Navy during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714), the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). In particular, the part of this collection relating to Southern Netherlandish ships and sailors has been left unexplored.<sup>1</sup> We take the Prize Papers collection as a starting point in order to investigate commodity flows of American and Caribbean commodities such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, indigo and rice towards Flemish merchant networks.<sup>2</sup> As elsewhere in Europe during the eighteenth century, consumption patterns in the Southern Netherlands were marked by an increasing demand for such colonial products.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fragmented nature of these Prize Papers as shipboard primary sources, the products of corsairing and maritime warfare, we may gain some insight on colonial commodity flows during Early Modern wartime. They show how both maritime and land-based warfare interrupted peacetime commerce in Europe and colonial territories, while simultaneously providing risky and lucrative trade opportunities. This paper focusses on the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714), the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). This chronological demarcation intentionally leaves out the period of the General Imperial India Company or 'Ostend Company' and its preceding private ventures (1719-1743), when the Austrian Netherlands directly engaged in Asian colonial trade via expeditions to Mughal India and Qing China from the port of Ostend. This period has been treated more extensively elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Instead, we wish to focus here on the indirect role of Southern Netherlandish commodity flows from French (and to a lesser extent British) colonial trade.

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<sup>1</sup> Although initiatives are now ongoing at the Huygens Institute (NI), and via the Prize Papers project (De – University of Oldenburg / Academy of Sciences and Humanities Göttingen)

<sup>2</sup> Although Flanders formed only one geographical part of the Southern Netherlands, we will use 'Flemish' throughout this text to designate people or commodities belonging to the Southern Netherlands as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> Anton Schuurman et al., *Aards geluk: de Nederlanders en hun spullen van 1550 tot 1850*, Amsterdam: Balans, 1997; Bruno Blondé, *Retailers and consumer changes in early modern Europe. England, France, Italy and the Low countries*, Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> See Jan Parmentier & Karel Degryse, 'Maritime Aspects of the Ostend Trade to Mocha, India and China (1715-1732)', in Jaap Bruijn & Femme Gaastra (eds), *Ships, Sailors and Spices. East India Companies and Their Shipping in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1993, pp.139-75. More recently, see also Wim De Winter & Jan Parmentier, 'Factorijen en forten: Zuid-Nederlanders in achttiende-eeuws India', in Idesbald Goddeeris (ed.), *Het Wiel van Ashoka: Belgisch-Indiase contacten in historisch perspectief*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013, pp.35-50; Wim De Winter, 'Perspectives for a Comparative Cultural History of the Ostend Company Interactions in Bengal and China', *Crossroads: Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World*, 11:1 (April 2015), pp.115-30.

In the first section, we investigate how the Southern Netherlands served as a secondary market for colonial commodity flows, situated ‘between empires’. In the second, using bills of lading as sources on merchant networks, we attempt to trace the flow of the above-mentioned commodities from their production to their final delivery point, before they made their way into consumer culture, while shedding light on the merchants and routes involved. In the final part, we use merchant correspondence from the Prize Paper collection to investigate the specific conditions and impact of maritime warfare on such commodity flows.

### **The Southern Netherlands as a market ‘between empires’ for colonial commodities**

As authors such as Saupin and Wallerstein have pointed out, European trade was characterised by explicit mercantilist policies from the seventeenth century onwards, which aimed at achieving a positive trade balance through exports. In this sense both France and Great Britain decreed that only their own subjects were allowed to trade with their colonies.<sup>5</sup> Yet for merchants belonging to countries without direct colonial links, which was the case for the Southern Netherlands during the major part of the Early Modern period, access points to colonial commodities would have been through French and British ports. For Great Britain this concerned its staple markets of London and Liverpool, which, through the role of slave trade, had evolved into transatlantic commercial centres.<sup>6</sup> In France, colonial goods from the Caribbean were shipped to its Atlantic ports of Bordeaux, La Rochelle and Nantes, which had equally grown in importance due to the slave trade.<sup>7</sup>

The ports of Ostend and Bruges, mainly due to their central location in Western Europe, served as intermediate ports and as markets for such colonial goods. In addition to Ostend’s convenient location, the town’s trade was enhanced in different ways throughout subsequent periods in the eighteenth century. For instance, Ostend carried out infrastructure works to its port in order to better accommodate this trade, or constructed roads to enhance the connection to its hinterland.<sup>8</sup> At other times, the impetus behind Ostend’s commercial success was due to political measures. Jacobus Bowens, in his 1792 chronicle of the town, portrays an upsurge of

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<sup>5</sup> Guy Saupin, ‘De Hollanders in Nantes in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw’, in Piet Emmer et al. (eds), *Atlantisch avontuur. De Lage Landen, Frankrijk en de expansie naar het westen, 1500-1800*, Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2010, p.232; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1650-1750*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. Wartime formed an exception to this rule: as Lydia Towns has demonstrated, British privateers during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) managed to disturb the French fleet to such an extent that neutral shipping, such as Danish and Dutch ships, took over the French colonial traffic (‘The Impact of British Privateers in the Seven Years’ War’, unpublished paper at [https://www.academia.edu/14696018/The\\_Impact\\_of\\_British\\_Privateers\\_in\\_the\\_Seven\\_Years\\_War](https://www.academia.edu/14696018/The_Impact_of_British_Privateers_in_the_Seven_Years_War), pp.11-12, accessed 9/9/2019).

<sup>6</sup> David Richardson et al. (eds), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> During the Seven Years’ War, British authorities prohibited the trade with France, which is the reason that the selected Prize Papers are found in the High Court of Admiralty fund at the National Archives in Kew. From 1757 onwards, when a French military presence entered the town, and officially from 1759 onwards, Ostend was considered as an enemy port, due to which one also finds records of Flemish ships accused of sailing to French ports.

<sup>8</sup> John Everaert, ‘Handel in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1650-1795’, Dirk Peter Blok (ed.), *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, dl. 8, 1979, pp.185-7; Jan Parmentier, *Tea Time in Flanders*, Aalst: Ludion, 1996; Jacobus Bowens, *Nauwkeurige beschryving der oude en beroemde zee-stad Oostende*, Bruges: s.n., 1792, p.135..

commercial activity in Ostend during and immediately after the period of the Seven Years' War due to a decree declaring Ostend as an 'entrepôt'. This allowed merchants to store merchandise for the duration of one year and plan their commercial imports differently, presumably speculating on a wider range of commodities.<sup>9</sup> Another upsurge was caused by the 'free port' status which Ostend gained in 1781. All ships navigating under imperial colours were henceforth to be considered neutral, and were effectively recognised as such by the belligerent nations involved in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784). Consequently, merchants of all nations flocked to the city, even forcing the government to build more houses.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1. A bill of lading found on *Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque*, captured 1704 by the British

For the purpose of this research paper, we composed a sample of seven ships from the Prize Papers collection that acted in this historical framework, both vessels trading towards Ostend or Bruges and towards French ports from where colonial commodities were destined towards the Southern Netherlands. For the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714), we included the *Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque* (captured 1704),<sup>11</sup> the *Liberté de Dunkerque* (1709)<sup>12</sup> and the *Jamaica Merchant* (1710).<sup>13</sup> For the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), we

<sup>9</sup> Bowens (1792), pp.131-5.

<sup>10</sup> Bowens (1792), p.163.

<sup>11</sup> The National Archives (TNA) HCA (High Court of Admiralty) 32/64/2 'Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque (master Nicholas Kiecken)'.  
<sup>12</sup> TNA HCA 32/68/86 'Liberty de Dunkirk (master Francis Sous)'.  
<sup>13</sup> TNA HCA 32/64/35 'Jamaica Merchant (master Andrew Gerineau).

included the *Anna Maria* (1758),<sup>14</sup> the *Lark* (1759)<sup>15</sup> and the *Twee Jonge Brouwers* (1759).<sup>16</sup> Finally, the *Jan & Samuel* (1778)<sup>17</sup> represents the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783).

These ships' papers contained so-called 'bills of lading', formal documents which functioned as identification of the different parts of the cargo. Bills of lading generally mention the contents of the cargo, the name of the captain and his ship, the ports of origin and destination, the merchants who shipped and received the cargo, and the date when goods were put on board. Once the cargo was delivered to its destination, the bills of lading, now rendered useless, were generally not preserved. However, because the ships mentioned in this paper were taken mid-journey, their bills of lading survived, revealing valuable information about different aspects of Early Modern commodity flows.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 map the trajectories of these vessels and their respective cargos. These show the same commodities flowing along different paths: for instance, Figure 4 shows that raw plantation sugar as well as refined sugar, produced in the British colonies, was imported via London (cf. *De Twee Jonge Brouwers*), but also via Nantes (cf. *Anna Maria*, *Jan & Samuel*). This sugar had been shipped there by vessels such as the *Jamaica Merchant* or the *Liberté de Dunkerque*, respectively bringing produce from Martinique and Saint-Domingue; or from Barbados, as the cargo of the *Vierge Immaculée* proves. Tobacco was imported from Liverpool (cf. *Lark*) as well as from France, supplied by ships such as the *Liberté de Dunkerque*, coming from Saint-Domingue but carrying a load of Martinique tobacco.

The diverse origin of these commodities in ports of the Southern Netherlands was not restricted to these specific cases. Looking at reports in the *Gazette van Gendt*, a newspaper recording the arrival of ships in the ports of Ostend and Bruges, we see that of the 222 cargos of sugar arriving between 1749 and 1765, 22 percent came from London and another 26 percent was equally divided between Nantes and Dunkirk. Molasses, however, were exclusively imported from France (33 cases). The statistics concerning tobacco paint a similar picture, although much more imbalanced: of the 281 cargos, 61 percent came from London, 22 percent from Dunkirk.<sup>18</sup> Despite the same or similar commodities being situated between different empires, we may notice that the identity and role of specific merchants crossed over imperial borders, conducting trade according to opportunity. We now turn towards these merchants in order to better understand their roles in these commodity flows.

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<sup>14</sup> TNA HCA 32/167/4 'Anna Maria (master Andries Nocks)'.  
<sup>15</sup> TNA HCA 32/214/7 'Lark (master Matthias Forsberg)'.  
<sup>16</sup> TNA HCA 32/247/3 'De Twee Jonge Brouwers (master Jan Hendrick Dancott)'.  
<sup>17</sup> TNA HCA 32/364/16 'Jan en Samuel (master Christian Meyer)'.  
<sup>18</sup> *Gazette van Gendt*, Ghent: Michiel de Goesin, 1749-1765. Due to incomplete volumes, the years 1750, 1751, 1752 and 1760 were not included in this analysis.

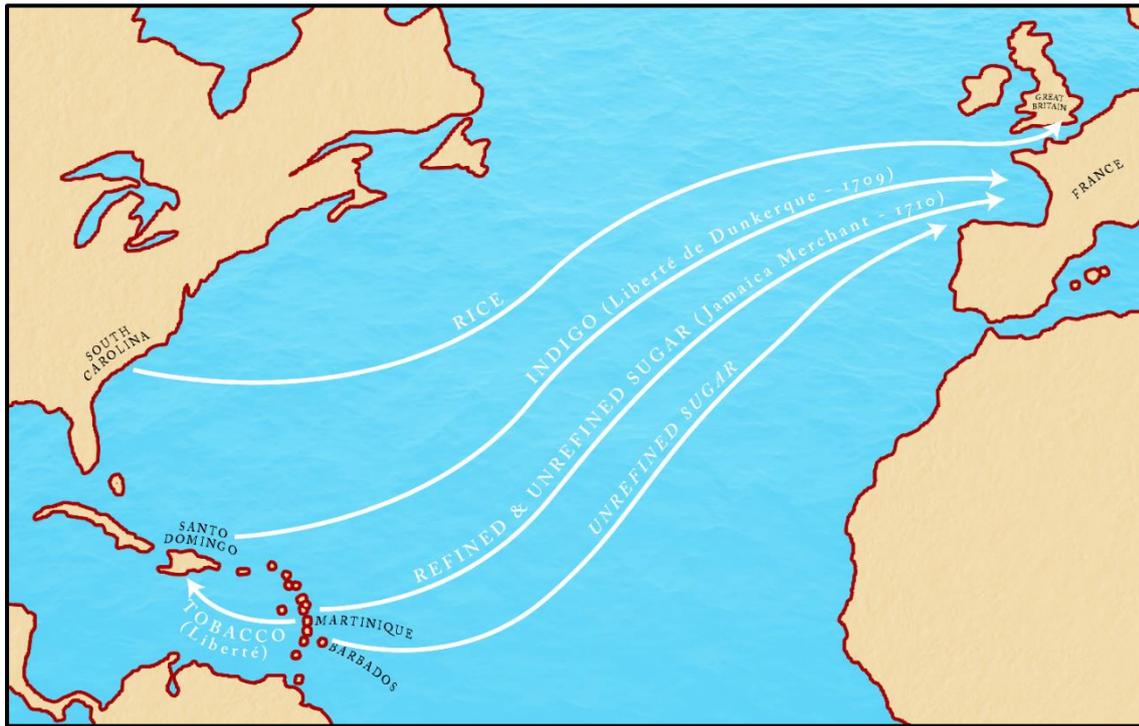


Figure 2. Transatlantic commodity flows as mentioned in the Prize Papers, 1702-1765



Figure 3. Intra-European commodity flows of rice & tobacco as mentioned in the Prize Papers, 1702-78



Figure 4. Intra-European flows of sugar & coffee as mentioned in the Prize Papers, 1702-78

### Bills of lading as a source for investigating cross-national merchant networks and commodity flows towards the Southern Netherlands

When treating the history of trade, historians traditionally tended to focus on imperial entities or chartered companies. Recently, however, scholars such as Antunes and Owens have pleaded to shift agency back to individual merchants, advocating an ‘actor-centred’ approach to the writing of economic history. They highlight the contribution of self-organised networks of individual merchants in the study of early modern European trade. As ‘informal empires’, these networks did not obey the frontiers of nations, empires and chartered companies; rather, merchants challenged the formal boundaries of monopolistic institutions in order to establish trans-imperial and trans-national cooperative ties.<sup>19</sup>

To chart these networks, historians have hitherto mainly used merchant’s correspondence.<sup>20</sup> However, the bills of lading present in the Prize Papers can also shed valuable light on these commercial webs. These sources reveal information on the identities of the merchants trading in the commodity flows of sugar, rice, coffee and tobacco, showing how these were organised and facilitated, both between colonial plantations and among European colonial ports, and from these ports onwards to the Southern Netherlands. The Prize Papers reveal that the trade of these commodities into the Southern Netherlands formed part of a secondary circuit of colonial commodity flows.

<sup>19</sup> John Owens, ‘Dynamic Complexity of cooperation-Based Self-Organizing Commercial Networks in the First Global Age (DynCoopNet): What’s in a name?’, *Journal of Knowledge Management, Economics and Information Technology*, special issue (2012), pp. 25-51; Cátia Antunes & Amélia Polónia, *Beyond empires: global, self-organizing, cross-imperial networks, 1500-1800*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Ana Sofia Ribeiro, *Early Modern Trading Networks in Europe. Cooperation and the case of Simon Ruiz*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

The comparison among merchants involved in these circuits reveals how a limited number of important merchants controlled and directed colonial commodity flows in a multinational network among European ports. It seems that their immigration coupled to their accumulation of capital allowed them to quickly establish themselves as figures of repute in their ports of activity, where their mercantile connections were ascertained through religious, national and family networks. However, Cátia Antunes critically points to the “long-standing scholarly tradition” portraying kinship groups and religious communities as “efficient institutions” for Early Modern ways of conducting business. She turns this viewpoint around by claiming that the raising of capital from such networks would have imposed limitations for merchants, and that its cross-cultural, cross-religious and cross-ethnic cooperation rather formed successful factors in business.<sup>21</sup> For the French Atlantic world, Silvia Marzagalli also argues against the tendency to pinpoint merchant networks according to singular characteristics such as religious denomination, instead pointing towards the necessity of trade relations outside of homogenous networks, as keys for entrepreneurial success. She argues for the primacy of kinship or family networks over co-religiosity, emphasising that networks were built and expanded upon through recommendations provided by relatives and correspondents.<sup>22</sup> The research on Southern Netherlandish Prize Papers seems to suggest that kinship and religion may have played a part in establishing trade networks, and providing the initial concentration of capital therein. However, the sustained nature of this trade would have also relied on the international and cross-cultural logic Antunes and Marzagalli advocate. In the case of merchant networks connected to Ostend, it is clear that family networks played an important role in this process, as is apparent from the following case-studies of merchants involved in colonial commodity flows.

As a visual support, the 1753 portraits of the French merchant Deurbroucq and his wife, based in the French colonial trade from Nantes, may illustrate the different aspects of merchants’ involvement in colonial commodity flows (Figure 5 and 6). Both portraits by Pierre-Bernard Morlot aptly symbolise different aspects of the colonial commodity trade this merchant (who stands here as a *pars pro toto* for other merchants) was involved in. Undoubtedly, these portraits were also designed to convey such an assemblage of aspects. This illustrates how colonial commodity flows formed the social and political identity of the merchant class itself, which would be the case for Dunkirk and Nantes just as well as for Ostend.<sup>23</sup> As the Prize Papers show us, Dominique Deurbroucq himself played an important role in the import of French colonial sugar and coffee into the Southern Netherlands during the Seven Years’ War, transported from Nantes to the port of Bruges and then onwards to vendors in towns such as Ghent, Courtrai, Ypres, Brussels and Liège.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cátia Antunes, ‘Cross-Cultural Business Cooperation in the Dutch Trading World, 1580-1776’, in Francesca Trivellato et al. (eds), *Religion and Trade. Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000-1900*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp.150-1.

<sup>22</sup> Silvia Marzagalli, ‘Trade across Religious and Confessional Boundaries in Early Modern France’, in Trivellato et al. (2014), pp.172-4.

<sup>23</sup> As there are notable symbolic similarities to the iconography of portraits shown in Jan Parmentier, *Het gezicht van de Oostendse handelaar*, Ostend: Oostendse Historische Publicaties, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> TNA HCA 32/167/4 ‘Anna Maria (master Andries Nocks)’.



**Figure 5 & 6. Portraits of Dominique and Marguerite-Urbane Deurbroucq by Pierre-Bernard Morlot, 1753**

Source: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication au bénéfice de la ville de Nantes.

These portraits contain multiple references to the colonial trade: both prominently feature the role of slaves as servants involved in the production of colonial commodities. On Dominique Deurbroucq's portrait, the servant is even relegated to sharing a similar facial expression as the household dog (itself a status symbol). This portrait also emphasises the role of correspondence (letters and an envelope with seal), and the environment of the study (a detail on the back cover of the book featured on the desk reads 'Histoire de la Mer', emphasising Deurbroucq's role in maritime commerce). The portrait of Marguerite Deurbroucq is perhaps even more significant in relation to colonial commodity flows: not only does her servant bring her sugar and cocoa or coffee, the tabletop itself seems to feature a map (as if asserting the Deurbroucq family's dominance in world trade, by placing the commodity on top of it), and even the textile of the clothes may refer to colonial origins. The parrot featured at her left shoulder has been identified as a *Psittacus Erithacus*, a parrot occurring on the coasts of Africa and the New World, these being the principal areas where Deurbroucq was commercially active in slave and commodity trade.

Among the Prize Papers, we find similar French and Flemish merchants such as Deurbroucq, who were involved in the trade of colonial commodities. For instance, during the War of the Spanish Succession, we know the names of the merchants who shipped their cargoes on the *Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque* (1704). For the Seven Years' War, we know the identities of the merchants involved with the ships *Anna Maria* (1758), carrying French

commodities from Nantes to Bruges, and the *Twee Jonge Brouwers* (1759), carrying British commodities from London to Ostend. Finally, we could also reconstruct a list of merchants for the *Jan and Samuel* (1778), navigating from Nantes to Ostend. The identities of some of the key merchants of these ships indicate the nature and organisation of the continued trajectory of the commodity flows, after the commodities' delivery at the first European port of call, as well as an indication to the merchants and/or shipwrights organising these trade flows. Comparing the role of these merchants during the three covered periods may indicate some general organisational tendencies of such colonial commodity flows.

The *Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque*, carrying colonial commodities from Barbados between Saint-Malo and Dunkirk, mentions several merchants dealing in raw and muscovado sugar. In order of importance on the supplier side these are Saint Nicolas de la Fosse, Jean Prouvost de la Roche, Jean Gaubert and François Noques. Among principal receivers we find Denis Pierre Faulconnier, Philippe de Surmont, Théodor Van Scherpenbergh and Guillaume Rouzier.<sup>25</sup> If we examine the supplier side in Saint-Malo, as European port of contact receiving colonial sugar from Barbados, it can be seen that these merchants formed part of an elite group of traders engaged in the 'Compagnie des Indes de Saint-Malo', whose members were involved in Asian colonial trade as well as Caribbean sugar trade. André Lespagnol mentions that these merchants usually cumulated their merchant activities with other activities, such as the freighting out and commanding of vessels, as well as juridical or medical professions. He also points to a strict socio-economical demarcation between traders mentioned as 'négociants' and those mentioned as the more elite category of 'marchand', where the above-mentioned merchants clearly fall in the latter and more prestigious category.<sup>26</sup> In *Corsairs and Navies*, John Bromley also mentions one of the *Vierge Immaculée's* receiving merchants, Guillaume Rozier, as engaged in commercial shipping towards Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, as well as functioning as a shipwright for 14 corsairing vessels during the War of the Spanish Succession.<sup>27</sup>

Along these lines, Alain Roman has sought to adjust the image of Saint-Malo as a corsairing port, while Nantes is often portrayed as the main French slave-trading port. As one example transcending this distinction, he mentions de la Fosse as a privateering commander simultaneously involved in the slave trade. From the same family, he mentions de la Fosse and others as taking 27 prize ships and ransoming 15 other vessels, thereby acquiring a fortune of 300 to 500 thousand livres, which allowed him to form part of one of the largest slave-trading societies in France during the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> This clearly shows that some important providers of the French colonial sugar flow were simultaneously involved in multiple commercial pursuits, forming their considerable capital through entangled flows of privateering, slave trade and colonial commodity exchange. Karel Degryse has shown how such colonial commodity flows towards Dunkirk also occurred towards the port of Ostend. The same merchants were involved as suppliers, among whom was Guillaume Rozier, who freighted out

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<sup>25</sup> TNA HCA 32/64/2 'Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque (Master Nicholas Kiecken)'.

<sup>26</sup> André Lespagnol, 'Messieurs de Saint-Malo: Une élite négociante au temps de Louis XIV', *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest*, 98:1 (1991), pp.75-6.

<sup>27</sup> John Selwyn Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies, 1660-1760*, London: Hambledon Press, 1987, p.290.

<sup>28</sup> Alain Roman, *Saint-Malo au temps des négriers*, Paris: Karthala, 2003, pp.276-7.

ships towards the Caribbean or via the Peruvian coasts from Canton to Ostend during the period 1714-1717.<sup>29</sup>

One of the key merchants mentioned on the receiving side of the *Vierge Immaculée*'s cargo, Denis Pierre Faulconnier, also played a crucial role in directing a commercial society for the land-based transportation of cargo between Flanders, Lille and Dunkirk during the years preceding the War of the Spanish Succession. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1688, French king Louis XIV issued a decree organising a mercantile transport company on the trajectory of Flanders, via Dunkirk, to Cadíz, to which the merchants de Surmont, Libert, Vanzeller and Faulconnier were appointed as directors.<sup>30</sup> This shows how several of the *Vierge Immaculée*'s receiving merchants formed part of the same network enabling transportation of commodities between ports, ensuring the flow of colonial and European commodities along different routes. From this limited case, we clearly notice the importance of several key merchants in the organisation and control of specific commodity flows – in this case primarily that of raw Barbados sugar. These merchants played an important role in commercial society, maintained intensive commercial links between several ports and cities, and were simultaneously engaged in multiple activities related to colonial and maritime trade. Through their engagement in slave trade, they also provided the means of production and labour power for producing these colonial commodities, as well as the capital to do so. Moreover, the fact that the *Vierge Immaculée* carried commodities stemming from the British island of Barbados between French ports clearly shows the porousness of imperial boundaries, as stressed by aforementioned scholars and authors such as Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra.<sup>31</sup>

A peculiar case of the commodity flow of plantation sugar and cocoa during the War of the Spanish Succession is that of the ship *Jamaica Merchant*, sailing from Martinique to Nantes in 1710. Its cargo of sugar and cocoa was mentioned as destined for “Reneow de Mounto Dwein”,<sup>32</sup> who may be identified as René II de Montaudoin (1673-1731), an aristocrat from Nantes who was mostly active in the slave trade. The *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* mentions him as the owner of the slave ship *Comte de Tessé* in 1708-1709, transporting slaves from Whydah to Martinique.<sup>33</sup> In the interrogations joined to the Prize Papers, we note that the *Comte de Tessé* engaged in privateering on its subsequent 1710 journey under captain Andrew Gironeau, hijacking the British ship the *Jamaica Merchant* near “the Latitude of the Maderas”. The crew was divided as both ships then continued sailing for Martinique together, and Captain André Guerineau took possession of the ship at Martinique by order of Paul Mitchell, who bought and loaded her, and was freighted out again to Nantes on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1710. The *Jamaica Merchant* was loaded by Mitchell with 380 barrels of white and brown sugar, and 180 sacks of

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<sup>29</sup> Karel Degryse, ‘De vrienden van ‘mijnheer Crozat’ of de Zuid-Nederlandse betrokkenheid bij de Franse handel op de Stille Zuidzee (1710-1719)’, in Jan Parmentier et al. (eds), *Orbis In Orbem: Liber Amicorum John Everaert*, Gent: Academia Press, 2001, pp.162-3.

<sup>30</sup> Albert Girard, *El comercio francés en Sevilla y Cádiz en tiempo de los Habsburgo: contribución al estudio del comercio extranjero en la España de los siglos XVI al XVIII*, Cádiz: Editorial Renacimiento, 2006, p.421.

<sup>31</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (ed.), *Entangled Empires. The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1830*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> TNA HCA 32/64/35 ‘Jamaica Merchant (master André Guerineau)’.

<sup>33</sup> David Eltis et al., *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: An Expanded and Online Database*, 2008: Voyage ID 33651 ‘Comte de Tessé’.

cocoa, consigned to René de Montaudoin, before the British captured it back and brought to Lisbon on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1710.<sup>34</sup>

From the above-mentioned cases, we may form a picture of the merchants engaged in both commerce and the slave trade, as kingpins of commerce within their main ports of activity. Pierre Boulle provides a citation from an eighteenth-century inhabitant of Nantes, which evocatively describes these merchants:

These [are] important personages, leaning on high, gold headed canes [...] [dressed] in full city regalia; their hair carefully arranged and powdered; with suits made of dark- or light-colored silks, according to the season; wearing long vests, waistcoats and breeches, also of silk, white stockings and shoes with large gold or silver buckles. They carry a sword [...] What must be admired most is their fine linen and the resplendence of their shirts which they send to be washed [...] in the mountain streams of Saint-Domingue, where water whitens clothes much better than in French rivers [...]<sup>35</sup>

For the Seven Years' War, we find the ship *Anna Maria* (1758) supplying syrup or molasses, as well as a limited quantity of coffee, which were transported from Nantes to Bruges. Twenty years later, during the American Revolutionary War, the *Jan & Samuel* (1778) would repeat the same trajectory (although to Ostend), again loaded with molasses, sugar and coffee, as well as cotton and rice. For the *Anna Maria*, the bills of lading also indicate a diverse list of Flemish merchants receiving this cargo at Bruges, and the onwards destinations to which these were supposed to be sent, in the towns of Ghent, Brussels, Courtrai, Ypres and Enghien (in decreasing order of importance, see Figure 4). In the case of the *Jan & Samuel*, a significant amount of coffee was destined to Brussels and Liège. The primary supplying merchants of the *Anna Maria* mentioned in Nantes are the aforementioned Dominique Deurbroucq, "the widow Charles Tollenaere", Frans de Tollenaere, and "D'haveloose & Wilfelsheim".<sup>36</sup> Twenty years later, Deurbroucq was still pursuing his commercial activities, as the primary merchant involved in the *Jan & Samuel*, next to Florent Tarvouillet and the trading company Bossat & Bellin. Although based in Nantes, several of these merchants held strong kinship and commercial links with the Southern Netherlands. Most notably, D'haveloose was known as 'davelos' in Spain or 'dhaveloose' in the Netherlands, and belonged to a family with branches in Spain as well as Brussels.<sup>37</sup> Concerning Nantes as a base of operations, Laure Pineau-Defois mentions that, from the seventeenth century onwards, the influx of a limited number of powerful Dutch-speaking families would come to dominate the socio-economical life of the port due to their flourishing maritime activities, among whom were merchants such as Deurbroucq and D'haveloose. This leads her to note that Early Modern trade had the capacity to integrate different nationalities and trade flows into the capitalist commercial market, leading to an economic osmosis within the

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<sup>34</sup> 'Declarations of In° Bruno Lieutenant and Maturine Davie Pylot of the Ship Jamaica Merchant', in TNA HCA 32/64/35 'Jamaica Merchant (master Andrew Guerineau) 1710'.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Boulle, 'Slave Trade, Commercial Organization and Industrial Growth in Eighteenth-Century Nantes', *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire*, 214:1 (1972), p.88.

<sup>36</sup> TNA HCA 32/167/4 'Anna Maria (master Andries Nocks)'.

<sup>37</sup> As shown in the genealogical work of Joël Rilat, *Ces messieurs de Nantes – compliment tome 4*, 2018, pp.247-50.

city, in which immigrant merchants could become power holders and were clearly identified as belonging to the commercial bourgeoisie, often while bringing along their already-established fortunes or acquired capital. Although Pineau-Defois claims that the Seven Years' War virtually stranded French maritime commerce, and in particular the colonial and slave trade of Nantes, we still notice the same prevalent merchants active in the traffic of ships such as the *Anna Maria*.<sup>38</sup>

While the merchants receiving goods from the *Jan & Samuel* remain unknown, the cargo of the *Anna Maria* was to be sent onward to merchants such as “the Graverand brothers”, Verheggen, D’Hooghe, Amelot, and de Scheemacker, located in several Flemish towns.<sup>39</sup> For Ypres, “Graverand and Compagnie” are mentioned as small-scale traders in commodities such as saffron,<sup>40</sup> while François D’Hooghe occurs as dean of the guild records of grocers in the 1747-1777 accounts of the city of Ghent.<sup>41</sup> This leads us to presume that the merchants buying the *Anna Maria*'s cargo in Bruges were grocers or spice dealers, either wholesale or as shopkeepers, and formed the endpoint of the ship's commodity flow in syrup or molasses, from where it would reach the consumers. Although different merchant families, notably some immigrants with a wide-ranging network towards the Southern Netherlands, operated during the Seven Years' War, we essentially see a similar dynamic as during the War of the Spanish Succession, where a limited number of kingpin merchants were involved in the colonial commodity trade towards the Southern Netherlands.

Having mapped the role of merchants in the French colonial commodity trade, we may now consider the role of merchants in the British colonial commodity trade, to see whether we notice a similar pattern.

For the ship *Twee Jonge Brouwers* (1759), captained by Jan Hendrick Dancott of Bruges, we find its main London suppliers listed as Desmarcks, Barbaud, “Rougemont & Lieutard” for refined sugar, “Fred & John Vandermeulen” for rice and lemons, John Macnamara for pimento and moscovado sugar, “Blisson & co.” for “British refined sugar”, and Thomas Robinson for “British plantation sugar”.<sup>42</sup> Some of these merchants were also immigrants, as had been the case for the merchants of the *Anna Maria* or the *Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque* in the French context, and presumably also enabled ties with their continental networks from London. For instance, Jacques Barbaud is mentioned as a merchant from La Rochelle, who left France in 1687 due to the religious persecution of Huguenot Protestants.<sup>43</sup> He apparently did well in his mercantile career while settling in London, as his family was engaged in the official British gunpowder trade to the Ottoman empire during the late-eighteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Frederick

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<sup>38</sup> Laure Pineau-Defois, ‘Une famille provençale à Nantes: les Chaurand. Une réussite dans l’armement et le commerce maritime à la fin du XVIIIe siècle’, in Guy Saupin & Jean-Luc Sarrazin (eds), *Economie et société dans la France de l’Ouest Atlantique*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016, pp.211-3.

<sup>39</sup> TNA HCA 32/167/4 ‘Anna Maria (master Andries Nocks)’.

<sup>40</sup> Maurice Leroy, *Histoire de Morlancourt*, Morlancourt: Impr. Yvert, 1904.

<sup>41</sup> Ghent City Archive (Stadsarchief Gent – SAG), Reeks 172 (Ambacht van de kruideniers), register 20 (rekening 1747-1777).

<sup>42</sup> TNA HCA 32/247/3 ‘De Twee Jonge Brouwers (master Jan Hendrick Dancott)’.

<sup>43</sup> David Van der Linden, *Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680-1700*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2015, p.221, fn.158.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman Relations, 1661-1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017, pp.176-8.

and John Vandermeulen are mentioned in the Journals of the House of Commons, in a case concerning a dispute over duties levied on British wool imports by merchants in the Low Countries. They are stated as being involved in the export of goods via commission to Flanders in May 1780, for instance to the towns of Courtrai and Ghent, where they exported lead, tin, sugar and “prize goods”.<sup>45</sup> This essentially seems to concern the same kind of trade and commodity flows they were engaged in via the *Twee Jonge Brouwers*, the commodities of which were also destined for the towns of Courtrai and Ghent. This leads us to presume the commodity flows of colonial commodities shipped by this constellation of merchants moved along firmly established commercial links and relations with the Southern Netherlands. Just as Barbaud migrated to London from France, Vandermeulen is mentioned as a “Dutch-born” merchant, who married in London while his nephew took care of business in Amsterdam.<sup>46</sup> Although the *Twee Jonge Brouwers*’ commodity flows of sugar, pimento and rice were not exclusively in the hands of such immigrant merchants, we do see the parallels with the role of immigrant merchants in providing and sustaining the connection with buyers in the Southern Netherlands.

On the receiving side for the ship’s colonial commodities in Bruges, only two key buyers of sugar and pimento are mentioned: Antoine Constantin, combining cargo from Desmarks, Barbaud, Rougemont & Lieutard, and Thomegay in refined sugar; and Jacob Flanderin in moscovado sugar and pimento supplied by John Macnamara; while a sizeable number of merchants remained unmentioned on these commodities’ bills of lading.<sup>47</sup> In *Het gezicht van de Oostendse handelaar*, Jan Parmentier mentions these merchants as key figures in the international maritime trade at the port of Ostend. Flanderin is mentioned as a supercargo or merchant for the General Imperial India Company on journeys to China and Bengal for 12 years, before establishing himself as a merchant in Ostend in 1746, where he inherited the mercantile network of his father-in-law. Through this network and his own experience, Flanderin specialised in the import of Asian goods and salt, and in the British export of West Indies tobacco. Via his cousin Francis Verbeke, he also held connections to Cadíz, from where he imported colonial wares from Mexico (mainly indigo). Parmentier mentions his main mercantile contacts in London as Fonblanque, John Twyman and John Macnamara for purchasing West Indies and American commodities such as sugar, pimento, cotton and rice. Flanderin also served as a liaison or commissary merchant for freighting ships with colonial goods, such as coffee, tobacco and tea, in the trade between Dunkirk, Lille, Spain, Nantes, Saint-Malo, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Liverpool and Copenhagen. The commodity flow via the *Twee Jonge Brouwers* thus falls perfectly within the scope of Flanderin’s mercantile activities, which combined multiple colonial commodity flows from British as well as Spanish origins. However, the main receiving merchant mentioned for this ship, Antoine Constantin, was an associate of Flanderin and an important Ostend merchant in his own right.<sup>48</sup> He was mentioned as an important member of the free shopkeepers guild at Ostend in 1760,<sup>49</sup> and was a French migrant who established himself there in 1748. Parmentier mentions Constantin as a trader in salt, wine,

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<sup>45</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 37, London: Henry Hughs, 1781, p.814.

<sup>46</sup> Kate Morris, *St Albans in 50 Buildings*, Chalford: Amberley Publishing, 2018: ‘24. Romeland House’.

<sup>47</sup> TNA HCA 32/247/3 ‘De Twee Jonge Brouwers (master Jan Hendrick Dancott).

<sup>48</sup> Jan Parmentier (2004), pp.173-5.

<sup>49</sup> Jan Parmentier (2004), p.418.



were to be found, settlers or merchants would mostly write letters which were “heavily laden with preoccupations. They reveal the goals merchants fixed, their alliances and interests, and the colonial way of life by which they aimed to gain their small fortune as quickly as possible”.<sup>54</sup>

To a limited extent, the Prize Papers also contain a number of letters sent from the colonies, which provide insight into the preoccupations of merchants and settlers, as well as information on the conditions in which they attempted to produce and ship their commodities. A particular example of the labour process for colonial commodities, and the merchants’ personal views thereon, is found in the correspondence and accounts related to the indigo trade in Saint-Domingue. At the time of research, these sources were included among the Prize Papers of the ship *Princesse Louisa* (1758),<sup>55</sup> but elsewhere it is indicated that they were mislabelled, and ought to belong to the archival category for the Bordeaux vessel *Le Philippe* (1757).<sup>56</sup> The accounts and correspondence found there, especially pertaining to the plantation *Cortade*, may serve as a snapshot of the plantation economy at Saint-Domingue during the year 1756-1757.

The cache of documents relating to the merchant Cortade’s plantation includes a description of the accounts and direction of the indigo plantation named *Cortade* for the period of December 1754 until the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1756. Its accounts indicate the incoming revenue from the indigo sale, shipped twice by Bordeaux ships in August and September 1755, and to local buyers – who were merchant colleagues looking to add the indigo from Cortade to their own supplies. The list of expenses contains barrels of indigo seeds, bought from several suppliers, supplies for the settlement, a fixed yearly price to the surgeon for taking care of the slaves’ health, some costs for the plantation’s river guards, and occasional expenses, such as those paid to “Naillou free Negroe for the healing of a Negroe of the Cortade plantation”.<sup>57</sup> In the overview of total possessions related to the settlement, it becomes clear that slaves were considered as property equivalent to infrastructure and furniture – all of which were expressed in their equivalence as capital.

In the letters pertaining to Cortade, the plantation’s overseer and accountant Naude writes to the plantation’s owner, Monsieur Cortade, designated as “*négociant*” or merchant in Bordeaux. In a letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 1757, he writes that:

we have learned of all the misfortunes that you have made since the war, the Losses of which are very considerable to you, I have told you that it has not been possible to load any cargo for you [...] we have also learned that our merchant vessels which left have almost all had the misfortune of being taken. I am also among the unfortunate as I wanted to send some funds into France, which by these wartimes I have until now been unable to do, running the risk of losing 1200 livres in Indigo

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<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Debien & Marcel Delafosse, ‘Marchands et colons des îles, quelques lettres du XVIIe siècle’, *Outre-Mers. Revue d’histoire*, vol. 170 (1961), p.96. Related to the colonial trade of de la Fosse, one of the merchants mentioned in the papers of the *Vierge Immaculée de Dunkerque* (1704), Debien and Delafosse reveal his family or kinship network included some relations settled in Saint-Domingue in 1690 (see p.122).

<sup>55</sup> TNA HCA 32/230/18 ‘Princesse Louvise of Copenhagen’ (master Tobias Dossche).

<sup>56</sup> At the present time these are still indicated according to the former category, but could in the meantime be found among the files of TNA HCA 32/230/19 ‘Le Philippe of Bordeaux’ (master François Letellier).

<sup>57</sup> ‘Compte de Gestion de l’habitation Cortade depuis le 27 decembre 1754 Jusques et compris le 10 Juin 1756’, TNA HCA 32/230/18 ‘Princesse Louvise of Copenhagen’ (master Tobias Dossche) [at the moment of consultation – see above].

[...] I will not freight anything anymore during the war, per the advice of Mr. de Carere with whom I have conferred together [...] unless I receive precise instructions from you, if you order me to freight on your account.

Cortade had nevertheless requested his accountant to ship 2,000 livres worth of indigo, spread over three or four different vessels in order to spread the risk, yet his accountant replies that:

I have not found the means to freight this quantity of indigo, as the risks are too great here. It is very rare that our merchant vessels escape among the ships leaving here, either being taken by the currents or the vessels of the English king which cruise here continuously [...] it would be throwing your Goods to the Wolf, freighting with such a great risk.<sup>58</sup>

This insight confirms the cases mentioned for the commodity flows towards the Southern Netherlands, as those ships also fell victim to these same risks, by which we may suspect that whichever colonial goods made it to the Southern Netherlands would have been more exceptional during the Seven Years' War than during peacetime.

Another cache of letters sent from Saint-Domingue, by a certain Giraud, show us how he dealt with the peculiar circumstances of trying to develop a plantation during the Seven Years' War, as well as how a merchant's commercial concerns could colour and accompany even his most intimate reflections. Writing to his wife from Saint-Domingue on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1756, Giraud hopes that his letter will arrive, as "the several letters I have written you before have passed into England, according to all appearance". He writes that he finds it a charming idea that his wife has retreated into a convent or monastery during the time he was trying to establish his plantation, and even indicates how the risks of wartime could end up being an advantageous commercial opportunity for him:

I will do as such that you should not take the trouble to come and find me because if the war continues longer than two years, I will employ the products of my accountancy in order to buy Indigo which is currently cheap here and will have it shipped to France during peacetime, maybe I might even risk to send a part of it during The war which would be a good return, it being valued here at only 4 francs per livre while it is written that in France it is at 18.

He further elaborates the commercial scheme by which he would seek to make a profit, allowing him to return to his wife:

I will make money off of all the rest, that is to say I would sell my four negroes with what little furniture I have in order to come and find you, which would yield me a total of 'une quarantaine de mille livres' in Saint-Domingue money which would produce 30 thousand livres in French money. I limit myself to making this small fortune so that you would not have to sacrifice yourself by coming here.

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<sup>58</sup> 'Cortade ce 20 mars 1757', TNA HCA 32/230/18 'Princesse Louise of Copenhagen' (master Tobias Dossche) [at the moment of consultation – see above].

He then concludes his letter by indicating that his wife should contact a number of business contacts in Rennes and Paris, in order to arrange the advantageous delivery of indigo.<sup>59</sup>

Not only does the above cache of letters show that Saint-Domingue suppliers ran the risk of losing their exports, we also find a letter written by Captain Raboteau from Port au Prince on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1757, stating the shortage of imported provisions due to the quantity of English privateering. Raboteau mentions not having been able to sell anything in Saint-Domingue, finding himself in:

the unfortunate perspective of having spent three months and a half on this coast, having so to say all my cargo consumed by the climate as well as by Daily Consommation, joined with the bad quality of wine that is almost wholly spoiled [...] I search to unload my cargo not being able to place it on the spot, as I lost a whole barge abundant with Indigo [...] where she arrived perfectly at L'Enceavaux the place where I had ordered it to place the provisions on board a barge, and to take whichever Indigos it could in return and take them here [...] but the misfortune has wanted that the Officer had just unloaded his first cargo and made ready to sail out of Enceavaux to go to Trou Jérémie or Bienfais, but he had the Misfortune to encounter a corsair which has taken the Barge and its contents.

Raboteau declares that he would still like to load some goods on board his ship, as:

one is never sure of what one can do via the inhabitants, all the Rest will be in Indigo and a bit of Coffee which I have to take [...] the largest part will be in beautiful and good Indigo with which one can always make money.

However, on top of losing two barges, Raboteau also had the misfortune to “have a lot of trouble in replacing my Crew, which has almost completely deserted”, which obliged him to “stay here for a long time in this unfortunate Land it is true that we have only very few Crewmembers to be paid in France”. Due to these unfortunate circumstances, Raboteau insists that “one has to make great profits in order to maintain”. He insists that the best colonial commodity to do this with is indigo, as “all the indigo I have until this day are of the first Quality, I have had them by waiting for the dead season of this commodity as the whole World speculates on this article”, and he concludes his letter by stating:

that our ports are Blocked by the Number of British Corsairs, we sometimes manage to take some prizes of little consequence [...] by this blockade we await the provisioning of wooden boards, flour, and Beef, as we daily desire the arrival of our warships, it is four months that we wait for them here, which Intrigues A Lot of People.<sup>60</sup>

The difficult situation caused by British privateering's impact on French colonial production in Saint-Domingue caused merchant Jean Micheau to write to his colleague and cousin Jacques Drouillard from La Rochelle in 1755-1756: “see to what we are reduced today,

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<sup>59</sup> ‘le 31 xbre 1756 no 718’, TNA HCA 32/230/18 ‘Princesse Louise of Copenhagen’ (master Tobias Dossche) [at the moment of consultation – see above].

<sup>60</sup> Raboteau ‘Port au Prince le 5 mars 1757 a Bordeaux’, TNA HCA 32/230/18 ‘Princesse Louise of Copenhagen’ (master Tobias Dossche) [at the moment of consultation – see above].

it being that this war would last, one nevertheless has to suffer what one cannot prevent”.<sup>61</sup> Presumably this situation also caused Micheau to consider getting rid of his plantation in Saint-Domingue, in an attempt to convince Drouillard of buying it:

being at the age of fifty years old, I would like to get rid of a good that is too far removed from me, thus my dear cousin the proposition that I will make you can only be advantageous to you, consider this my sentiment and last will on this topic, I would leave you my stake in it for the price and sum of 36 000 livres, and you will pay me that in cash [...] there are other persons who know this establishment and would offer me more than I ask from you, but it is more natural to conduct affairs with you.<sup>62</sup>

We have seen how the specificity of wartimes, and corsairing in particular, could have an impact on colonial commodity flows, including those towards the Southern Netherlands. The above-mentioned mercantile and shipboard correspondence provides both personal perspectives and contextual insight into these circumstances. Other merchants' correspondence, such as Phelipe Mendes d'Acosta's letters between London and Cadíz, confirm the extent to which European ports yearned for the influx of colonial traffic, and how the flow of colonial goods tied up with the trajectories of parallel maritime commercial affairs. When, in the case of d'Acosta in 1702, the Spanish ships from Buenos Aires failed to arrive, his other maritime commercial pursuits towards Constantinople and Moscow proved unable to be financed.<sup>63</sup>

The Prize Papers themselves, as well as the testimonials contained within its letters, form proof of the losses incurred by involved merchants, and of the way colonial commodity flows were interrupted. For instance, according to Pineau-Defois, the Deurbroucq family were incurring the main losses of such capital during the Seven Years' War, with a loss of no less than 1.23 million French livres.<sup>64</sup>

### **Conclusion: charting the flow of colonial commodities towards the Southern Netherlands**

Using the Prize Papers archive, as well as additional relevant source material concerning the Southern Netherlands as an indirect destination for colonial commodities in the eighteenth century, we have managed to sketch the commodity flows of colonial staple commodities such as tobacco, rice, sugar, molasses and indigo across the Atlantic and on the North Sea. As our analysis of a Flemish periodical has shown how sugar (in both its refined and unrefined form) and tobacco formed the two main staple commodities of colonial import into the Southern Netherlands in terms of frequency. In obtaining these commodities, Southern Netherlandish merchants employed both commodity flows from British and French colonial empires, for instance by importing raw sugar via Barbados as well as Martinique. These commodity flows

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<sup>61</sup> 'lettre de mr micheau ecrite a mr jacques drouillard de M 19 7bre 1756', TNA HCA 32/230/18 'Princesse Louvise of Copenhagen' (master Tobias Dossche) [at the moment of consultation – see above].

<sup>62</sup> 'lettre de monsr jean micheau ecrite a mr jacques druillard le 8 may 1755', TNA HCA 32/230/18 'Princesse Louvise of Copenhagen' (master Tobias Dossche) [at the moment of consultation – see above].

<sup>63</sup> TNA HCA 32/52/52 'Buenos Aires Ships' – 'Phelipe mendes d'acosta Cadiz fev 2<sup>de</sup> 1698', f. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Laure Pineau-Defois, 'Un modèle d'expansion économique à Nantes de 1763 à 1792: Louis Drouin, négociant et armateur', *Histoire, économie & société*, 23:3 (2004), p.370.

usually reached Flemish ports via French colonial ports such as Nantes and Dunkirk, and British ports such as London and Liverpool. Specific commodities were shipped in combinations, either from the above ports in their entrepôt function, or due to a shared colonial provenance (which was the case for rice and tobacco from South Carolina, or cocoa and sugar from the French Caribbean). When the bills of lading contain especially detailed information, they can show traces of exchanges between traditionally separated empires (e.g. *Vierge Immaculée*); or elucidate the trajectories of commodities towards the port's hinterland (e.g. *Anna Maria*).

We have also revealed how specific 'merchant kingpins' engaged in the organisation of these commodity flows, mostly via the entanglement of different trade networks, and due to their export and organisation of colonial plantation trade. An important role was attributed to those merchants engaged in slave trade as well as in commodity flows of colonial produce, effectively providing the labour force and capital as well as the produced commodities. They were not only involved in buying or purchasing colonial commodities, but directly helped shape the production process via the slave trade and the establishment of plantations. In their mutual organisation, merchants from France, London and Ostend seemed to rely on kinship and social networks in enabling these flows, while engaging in written correspondence concerning prices, contacts and opportunities. This correspondence also gave us an insight into the starting point of the colonial commodity flows at the Caribbean plantations, with the conditions surrounding indigo plantations as an example.

Lastly, the Prize Papers have enabled us to look at these conditions of commodity flows and production during wartime disruptions. Privateering, or corsairing in particular, has been shown to have disrupted colonial commodity flows, temporarily impeding the further expansion of merchant capital. Merchants' personal letters have given us an insight into eighteenth-century merchant capitalists' first-hand experience of this process, both from nearby and from afar.

Although the examples touched upon in this paper are limited, and only form a preliminary insight into eighteenth-century colonial commodity flows, they may suggest a line of inquiry that may be pursued further. By making wider and more ample use of the Prize Papers as an under-investigated source material for the Southern Netherlands, in combination with supplementary sources such as those portrayed in this paper, the Southern Netherlandish Prize Papers research could reveal the extent and impact of colonial trade during wartimes against the backdrop of the general (intra-) European commodity flows.

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**Commodities of Empire** is a joint research collaboration between the University of London's **Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS)** and **School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)**. These two institutions form the nucleus of a growing international network of researchers and research centres. Commodities of Empire is a British Academy Research Project

The mutually reinforcing relationship between 'commodities' and 'empires' has long been recognised. Over the last six centuries the quest for profits has driven imperial expansion, with the global trade in commodities fuelling the ongoing industrial revolution. These 'commodities of empire', which became transnationally mobilised in ever larger quantities, included foodstuffs (wheat, rice, bananas); industrial crops (cotton, rubber, linseed and palm oils); stimulants (sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and opium); and ores (tin, copper, gold, diamonds). Their expanded production and global movements brought vast spatial, social, economic and cultural changes to both metropolises and colonies.

In the Commodities of Empire project we explore the networks through which such commodities circulated within, and in the spaces between, empires. We are particularly attentive to local processes – originating in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America – which significantly influenced the outcome of the encounter between the world economy and regional societies, doing so through a comparative approach that explores the experiences of peoples subjected to different imperial hegemonies.

The following key research questions inform the work of project:

- 1) The networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires;
- 2) The interlinking 'systems' (political-military, agricultural labour, commercial, maritime, industrial production, social communication, technological knowledge) that were themselves evolving during the colonial period, and through which these commodity networks functioned;
- 3) The impact of agents in the periphery on the establishment and development of commodity networks: as instigators and promoters; through their social, cultural and technological resistance; or through the production of anti-commodities;
- 4) The impact of commodity circulation both on the periphery, and on the economic, social and cultural life of the metropolises;
- 5) The interrogation of the concept of 'globalisation' through the study of the historical movement and impact of commodities.

<http://commoditiesofempire.org.uk/>

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