

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
cordially invites you to the workshop

**Merchants' Manuscript Culture in the Premodern World.
Merchants and Their Agents in a Comparative Perspective**

Friday, 8 July, 2:00 pm – 7:00 pm CEST
Saturday, 9 July, 9:00 am – 12:45 pm CEST

Hybrid Event

Registration:

<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/register-workshop26.html>

Global trade in late medieval and early modern times depended on specific manuscripts. Since trade had reached a certain level of complexity, merchants could not act on their own, but depended on partners and agents to cooperate with them. Written records played a very important part in organizing this complex trade: The relationship between a merchant and his agent was negotiated in contracts, letters and accounts, for example. Trade in different regions of the globe thus depended on manuscripts that the merchants produced themselves or got them issued by public authorities such as city councils and notaries. At the conference, we will discuss in a comparative perspective how these manuscripts worked in enabling, organizing and facilitating trade. Special attention will be given to the question of authentication. The conference will shed light on different forms of creating an authorized document by bringing together scholars who work on merchants and their agents in different parts of the premodern world. Thus, we will discuss the interplay of specific writing traditions and common problems of trade and its influence on the specific lookout of the manuscripts.

Programme

Friday, 8 July 2022, 2:00 pm – 7:00 pm

2:00 Ulla Kypta (Hamburg): Welcome and Opening Remarks

Litigation: 2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Chair: Christian Ashauer (Hamburg)

2:30 - 3:15 Philipp Höhn (Halle)
*Materiality Matters? Manuscripts in Litigations of
Maritime Conflicts in the Atlantic (1300-1500)*

3:15 – 4:00 Daniel Strum (Sao Paulo)
*Proxies and Trans-imperial Litigation in the Early
Modern Atlantic*

4:00 - 4:30 Coffee Break

Merchants' culture in a nutshell: 4:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Chair: Ulla Kypta (Hamburg)

4:30 - 5:15 Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi (Bilbao)
*Public Notaries and Merchants' Manuscript Culture in
Early Modern Bilbao*

Harm von Seggern (Kiel)
*A Merchant's Manuscript Culture – the Debt Register
of Johan Hungerhove from Oldenburg (c.1520)*

6:00 – 6:15 Break

6:15 – 7:00 Matthias Berlandi (Utrecht)
*Cities as Centers of Innovation? A Reassessment of the
Commitment Problem in Commercial Transactions with
the Scottish Bonds of Manrent*

Saturday, 9 July 2022, 9:00 am - 12:45 pm

Global Connections: 9:00 am - 12:45 pm

Chair: Elsa Clavé (Hamburg)

9:00 - 9:45 Carlos Manuel Olano Paredes (Berlin)
*Amigos' Manuscript Culture: Compatriotism, Trust, and
the Exchange of Knowledge and Goods within the
Spanish Empire (1765-1794)*

9:45 – 10:30 Ulf Christian Ewert (Erfurt)
*Managing Informal Commercial Exchange: The
Mitigation of Agency Problems in Fifteenth-Century
Portuguese Trade with West Africa*

10:30 - 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 - 11:45 Alexandr Osipian (Berlin)
*Commercial Jurisdiction and the Church Agency:
Circulation of Letters, Bills and Warranties in Early Modern
Armenian Merchant Networks*

11:45 – 12:30 Susanne Friedrich (München)
*The Early Years of the VOC (1602- ca. 1630). Documents
and the Limits of Authority in Long-Distance Trade*

12:30 – 12:45 Concluding remarks

Abstracts and Contributors

Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi (Bilbao)

Public Notaries and Merchants'. Manuscripts Culture in Early Modern Bilbao

Friday, 8 July, 4:30 pm – 5:15 pm

Bilbao was founded in 1300, and it soon became an important harbor, since it attracted merchants from Biscay and Spain, but also from more far-flung regions, such as England, France, Flanders or Indias. In recognition of its importance, in 1511 Queen Joanna I (daughter of Catholic Monarchs Isabella I and Ferdinand II, and mother of the emperor Charles V) founded the Consulado, Casa de Contratación, Juzgado de Negocios de Mar y Tierra, y Universidad de Bilbao (House of Trade), which lasted until it was abolished in the 19th century. This House of Trade was essentially a government agency to control all Spanish exploration and colonization, in addition to trade.

Not only was Bilbao full of merchants, but also of public notaries. These officials controlled the written culture, since their signatures and seals granted to documents legal validity. They were the depositaries of the public faith, and played an essential role writing and authenticating contracts and documents. Many of these public notaries worked in their offices, but also in the Consulado, and the merchants went to them in order to get documents written, but also translated. So, they depended a lot on the public notaries.

This paper focuses on the public notaries from Bilbao, specifically on three issues: their training, their writing and translating skills, and the problems arose between the merchants and the public notaries.

Matthias Berlandi (Utrecht)

Cities as Centers of Innovation? A Reassessment of the Commitment Problem in Commercial Transactions with the Scottish Bonds of Manrent

Friday, 8 July, 6:15 pm – 7:00 pm

It is almost common place that cities and especially the merchants within these cities were innovative and the motor to transform the feudal economic system into a capitalistic one. This picture is widely accepted, since the two opposing dominant schools of thinking fostered this view. Marxists needed the early capitalists to be successful, to fit the evidence into their teleological model of the political and social

development: early capitalists had to be more successful and innovative than their feudal counterparts, because these were the key attributes of capitalism Marx identified for its success: “Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft”. The Liberal tradition even started from that premise, explaining by that the necessity for the further empowerment of the captains of industry on the expense of old aristocratic families in the 19th century.

Having a closer look at the social and economic realities in the cities, it becomes clear that not “Alles Ständische” was vaporized. Inequality and thus unfreedom persisted within the urban communities. It is even hard to spot major differences between successful merchant and noble families in regard to their economic decision-making. What is additionally opposing the narrative of economic success of the cities, is the fact that most German cities were bankrupt at the end of the Holy German Empire in 1806. Assessing this development, one might get the impression, that the transformation of feudalism to capitalism did not occur because of advances in the field of economy, but because of the political and social institutions accompanying scientific and technological advances. This view was more carefully formulated by Avner Greif, who regarded the development of institutions interfering with the market for more relevant in explaining the economic transformation in the early modern period, than the assumed rise of the free market economy, which anyways only exists in fiction. Some present prominent economists claim that we are even reentering a feudal form of economy, which they explain by the technological and institutional change of the past five decades.

The commitment problem covers of course only a tiny part of that discussion, but still it is worthwhile to point out, that merchants did not invent certain techniques to ensure the loyalty of their agents, they copied it from those people, who already knew how to conduct economic transactions safely – and this was the landed nobility. Interesting enough many researchers discovered a change in the culture of feudalism during the later middle ages, which only reflected administrative inventions to cope with certain practical problems in commercial transactions. I think it is worthwhile to have a look at these contracts between Lords and their agents during land transactions from a comparative perspective, asking whether it is true to observe here a cultural decline of feudalism or the institutional refinement of the basic idea of feudalism. I will discuss this question on the basis of the Scottish Bonds of Manrent, which developed during the 14th century and led to a heated discussion about the decline of Feudalism in Scotland.

Carlos Manuel Olano Paredes (Berlin)

Amigos' Manuscript Culture: Compatriotism, Trust, and the Exchange of Knowledge and Goods within the Spanish Empire (1765-1794)

Saturday, 9 July, 9:00 pm – 9:45 pm

In 1765, the Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País (RSBAP)¹ was founded in Vergara, Basque Country. Much of the academic historiography, especially in Spain and the Basque Country, has proceeded on the assumption of this society as a regional or national project (Astigarraga 2003). However, some investigations into the history of economy serve to situate the research in a broader perspective by presenting case studies on Mexico (Torales Pacheco), among others. On the contrary, the proposed paper examines how a group of merchants of the RSBAP faced the changes in the global economic system with the help of intellectual projects in the spirit of Enlightenment. From the 1770s onwards, the writings of the society (El Ensayo and Idea General) circulated overseas, in the Americas and the Philippines. Due to the French invasion, the RSBAP ceased its activities in 1794, only to resume them the following year and, at times, in the nineteenth century. The list of members published and distributed annually, together with the Extractos, which in 1793 counted more than 1,500 'friends', reflects the immense scope of the Basque project.

The presentation will take a closer look at this specific case and, in particular, at the manifestations that appeared in different parts of the Spanish Empire. Thus, the aim is to show how manuscripts were used by the Basque merchants located in different parts of the Americas and the Philippines to spread the information of their enlightened project. Among other things, a new kind of cooperation based on compatriotism [paisanaje] was needed to be able to bet on the future. This also influenced the ways in which knowledge was acquired and passed on. In this context, the ways by which RSBAP members recognized as compatriots [paisanos] in their manuscripts is understood here as a way of authentication. In two steps, the presentation wants to show how the RSBAP developed strategies of communication, not only to stay in contact worldwide, but also to win new members. It also explains (2) how trade networks were built on the basis of this communication network and how global markets for books, fabrics or spices were opened up.

Cultural aspects such as trust and intercontinental cooperation between members are of particular interest in this project. Thus, the question is pursued, how the exchange of

information, goods and money was possible with people in distant places with whom one was in contact only through correspondence.

In summary, the presentation aims to reassess the role of merchants going beyond that of economic agents, and to underline their role as mediators of knowledge and culture that linked distant realities. In this context, it is shown that, despite informality and instability, the merchants were largely responsible for the functioning of the Empire.

Ulf Christian Ewert (Erfurt)

Amigos' Manuscript Culture: Compatriotism, Trust, and the Exchange of Knowledge and Goods within the Spanish Empire (1765-1794)

Saturday, 9 July, 9:45 pm – 10:30 pm

From early fifteenth century on the Portuguese systematically explored the West African coast southward, and by mid-century they had established a profitable trade there of spices, ivory, gold and slaves with the indigenous population. The overseas trade served the proper economic interests of merchants, courtiers, knightly orders and the royal family, and, since it was taxed, trade contributed significantly to the revenues of the Portuguese crown. This, however, required considerable investment into exploration and market development at distant shores, which in turn created an agency problem, because it had to be ensured that the merchants who sailed to West Africa acted there in the interests of their investors. Moreover, since much of the commercial exchange with the indigenous population was operated as silent barter also in late fifteenth century – this being the only viable solution to bridge the cultural and juridical differences –, another agency problem arose, because the Portuguese crown who claimed a monopoly over all trade south of Cape Bojador, had for fiscal and political reasons a strong interest in the merchants in West Africa acting in the crown's favour.

To oversee the rather informal Portuguese trade in West Africa and to mitigate the agency problems coming along with it, a highly formalised institutional arrangement was set up by the Portuguese crown. The crown acted as a broker for capital that knightly orders as well as rich noblemen wanted to invest in overseas trade. To minimise their commercial risk merchants could use a public insurance for their overseas commercial endeavours. The crown granted licences for trade to merchants for a fee to generate income and to regulate the number of merchants going to West Africa. Trading outposts to control West African trade were founded on the island of Arguim (1445) and at São Jorge da Mina (1482). For taxation purposes imported commodities were registered at

the ports of Lisbon and Porto, and the whole trade with West Africa was managed and brought to account in a particular royal chamber, founded in 1443, the Casa da Guiné. The paper will focus on the manifold forms of written documents that were produced in this quasi state-run trade company, and especially on whether such documents were instrumental in mitigating agency problems, so that a rather simple and informal local trade like the West African trade could be incorporated into the more formalised European long-distance trade. This is of interest inasmuch as the Portuguese fifteenth-century trade with West Africa was a precursor of the European overseas expansion in the sixteenth century, and thus a sort of testbed for all later commercial endeavours of Portugal. Not only nautical knowledge was accumulated, also methods of fund-raising and trade administration were developed. More importantly, early contact and commercial exchange with indigenous populations allowed the Portuguese to develop their approach to monopolise and restructure local trade with only little colonising attempt. Knowledge and formal management routines evolving in this process could be used later on with greater experience in India, South-East Asia and Brazil.

Alexandr Osipian (Berlin)

Commercial Jurisdiction and the Church Agency: Circulation of Letters, Bills and Warranties in Early Modern Armenian Merchant Networks

Saturday, 9 July, 11:00 pm – 11:45 pm

In the early modern world, networks of Armenian merchant communities expanded as far as Madras, Calcutta, and the Philippines in the east, and Venice, Marseille, Livorno, and Amsterdam in the west. Trading networks of stateless Armenian merchants are particularly noteworthy because they elaborated their own system of commercial jurisdiction and authentication of commercial documents.

Fernand Braudel was fascinated with the successful spread of Armenian merchant network in Poland-Lithuania “with its own rules, printing-presses, and its many trading connections, dominated the huge carrying-trade towards the Ottoman Empire.” Of the several questions posed by Fernand Braudel on this topic, two are of particular importance: What was “the key to their fabulous success?” And “how were these long-distance connections set up and related to each other?” (Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, vol. 2: *The Wheels of Commerce*, p. 157).

Long-distance trade in the early modern period was risky, and its development often overlapped with the rise of merchant networks based on common ethnic or religious background. However, common background was not enough to mitigate risk, establish credit, or prevent fraud. To answer Braudel's questions, then, one has to look elsewhere. This paper is focused on the practices of issuing and authenticating of commercial letters. These letters facilitated the long-distance trade conducted by Armenian merchants of three networks – East European, Ottoman, and Julfan (Persian) – between the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Commercial correspondence as well as bills of exchange, promissory notes and letters of attorney had circulated in the wider Armenian network in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Of these documents many were originally composed in Turkic with Armenian script by the merchants themselves or by Armenian clerics. Then in Poland-Lithuania these documents were translated to Polish in order to be submitted to the court records and used in a litigation between merchants. In that way Armenian civil courts in Poland and Armenian consistory court in Lemberg (Lviv) legally authenticated the translated copies with the Armenian bishop's seal.

Armenian merchants were frequently employed as royal interpreters and envoys in Polish-Ottoman diplomatic relations. Therefore, the practices of translating commercial documents were used by the merchants-turned-diplomats when dealing with interstate treaties.

From Poland to the Ottoman domains the Armenian merchants travelled as organized into big convoys with extraterritorial status – caravans – led by caravanbashi who acted as a judge and notary in course of a trip.