Chapter 9 The Slave Trade of Northern Germany from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries

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Throughout the seventeenth century, the transatlantic slave trade of the northern European states was largely organized by national companies, but the history of slaving activities by these companies cannot properly be told in national terms alone. Early modern intercontinental trade involved participation in global markets, and the financial capital for such trade transcended national boundaries and institutions. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to discuss the slave trade purely in terms of national flags. German slave traders played at most a minor part in the history of the transatlantic slave trade. We know that subjects of the German states were employed in service to the great European naval powers, especially the Netherlands, and that some German sailors, surgeons, carpenters, and locksmiths served onboard slave ships owned by other nationals. Such activities are not, however, the focus of this chapter, which concentrates instead on German political and financial involvement in the slave trade from the seventeenth century onward.

The political fragmentation of the German states in the early modern era makes tracing German involvement in the slave trade difficult.

Most German duchies were small and had little impact on international politics. This was true, for example, of the maritime cities of the Hanse, which failed to develop a centralized state of international significance. It is not by chance, therefore, that despite efforts by various scholars to trace German involvement in slaving, only the duchy of Brandenburg, which later became Prussia, has left clearly traceable evidence of participation in the slave trade.[1] Some states failed to become involved either because of inadequate resources or because of international opposition. In other cases, the fact that slaving was carried on illegally by private traders means we lack the source materials to study it properly.

This chapter will describe the efforts of German states and private merchants to participate in the transatlantic slave trade. Its emphasis will be on the ventures of Brandenburgers, which have attracted the attention of several historians and for which source materials exist. I have drawn on studies by Schück, Kellenbenz, Jones, and Brübach, as well as on my own research in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA) in Berlin. Since 1993–94 the latter archive has been merged with documentary materials formerly deposited in a small East German town. Combining these materials with TSTD2 enables us to improve our understanding of the German role in the slave trade.

COURLAND INITIATIVES AND BRANDENBURG-PRUSSIA ENTERPRISE

Although there is evidence that a German slave trader purchased 150 slaves in Angola in 1841 with the intention of sailing to Brazil (the ship was captured by the Dutch), the initial German efforts to acquire colonies in West Africa and the West Indies date from the middle of the seventeenth century.[2] In 1651 Jacob (James) Kettler, Duke of Courland, established a factory at the mouth of the Gambia River and two years later claimed ownership of Tobago in the Caribbean. Some years later, Courland lost its territories in Gambia and Tobago to rival European states and, despite frequent international negotiations, was unable to enforce its claims to them until the eighteenth century.[3] It is unlikely that any slave voyages between Gambia and Tobago occurred, but in 1683 Captain Cornel Gildem and the *Sereine* left Amsterdam under the Courland flag and took on slaves in Gambia and Gorée with the declared intention of carrying them to Guadeloupe. We do not know the outcome of this voyage, but it is probable that Courlanders continued to take an interest in the

slave trade in the second half of the seventeenth century, though actual voyages, if any, would have been only occasional. Unfortunately, little evidence relating to the overseas commerce of Courland has survived. The fairly good documentary sources generated by the English in Gambia have so far turned up nothing on Courland activity.[4]

By contrast, the efforts of the Duke of Kurbrandenburg to gain his own factories and promote overseas trade have left much stronger traces in the historical record and therefore have received considerable attention from scholars. A primary motivation of Brandenburg enterprises was Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm's desire for international recognition. In pursuing his goals, the elector was influenced by his uncle, the Duke of Courland, who had grown up in England and based his own plans for trade on English ventures. In Friedrich Wilhelm's case, the model followed was that adopted by the Netherlands, where he had grown up. During the Thirty Years' War, he tried to establish trading companies in both the East and the West Indies, but these efforts failed for political or financial reasons. It was not until Middelburg merchant Benjamin Raule joined the services of Brandenburg and the duchy founded its navy that a trading company could be successfully established in the 1680s.

The initial bases for Brandenburg trading enterprise were Königsberg and Pillau, but neither proved particularly advantageous, and in 1682 the elector took advantage of a local dispute in East Frisia to transfer the headquarters of his commercial and naval enterprises to Emden, a port then considered one of the best in Europe. Even before this move, however, the first expedition to Africa under the Brandenburg flag had taken place in 1680 at the instigation of Raule and other Dutch merchants. For this venture the elector provided the crew for two ships and his flag; Raule and his partners provided the finance and carried the other costs.[5] The ventures were to trade for gold, ivory (or "teeth"), corn, and slaves on the coasts of Guinea and Angola and to sell the slaves at Cádiz, Lisbon, and the Canary Islands, or secretly at some islands of the West Indies. For the Brandenburg court, the elector requested "half a dozen young and handsome slaves of 14, 15, and 16 years of age."[6]

Despite some conflicts with ships of the Dutch West India Company, this first expedition succeeded in making trade agreements with three *caboceers* based between Axim and Cape Three Points.[7] It was in Raule's interest to reinforce this connection, and so in 1682 the Trading Company of the Coast of Guinea was created.[8] Later known as the Brandenburg African Company (BAC), the company was founded by two charters issued in March and

October 1682, with an intended capital of 50,000 thaler.[9] The company proved to be unprofitable. Building and supporting trading posts in Africa and America proved expensive, and those involved in ventures seem often to have traded on their own behalf rather than on that of the company. In Africa agents traded with pirates, and money disappeared. The company also suffered from the hostility of other nationals. Brandenburg ships were repeatedly seized and recovered, if at all, only after extended proceedings, with the result that the company had to submit requests for new ships. By 1692 the BAC was bankrupt.[10]

Four years before the BAC became insolvent, however, the elector had chartered another American company with a permit for trading in slaves.[11] Created at the instigation of some Scottish merchants, Spanish opposition and the outbreak of the Nine Years' War in 1689 precipitated an early end to this initiative. In 1692 Friedrich Wilhelm transferred the rights of the former BAC through a new charter to the newly created Brandenburg African American Company (BAAC). Most of the new stockholders were Dutch merchants. Because they were not allowed to contract with other powers for overseas trade, their investments in the BAAC were registered in the name of a member of the Brandenburg navy council. Later the assets were transferred into stocks with a declaration of assignment.[12] The charter of the new company was similar to its predecessor's, although its organization resembled that of the Dutch West India Company.

In common with other European states, Brandenburg tried to secure connections with the Gold Coast by creating forts and factories. In 1682 two ships were dispatched to Africa to renew treaties and build a fort. With local assistance, a fort named Großfriedrichsburg was built on the mountain Mamfort or Mumfort at Cape Three Points.[13] A year later a similar arrangement was concluded with the caboceers of Akwida, nearly two and a half miles farther east. There the Brandenburgers built the fort called Dorotheenschanze, also acquiring a factory with access to the region's granary and the only navigable port along the Gold Coast.[14] They gained another post five miles farther east in 1685 but lost it two years later. To offset this loss and to protect connections between Großfriedrichsburg and Dorotheenschanze, in 1694 the Brandenburgers built another small trading post east of the former.[15] Farther north, Cornelis Reers, sailing with the *Zeelander* under the Brandenburg flag, negotiated a treaty in 1687 with the king of Arguim, an island off modern-day Mauritania. The treaty conceded an exclusive trading right in exchange for rebuilding the European fort there. Raule held these trading rights until 1692,

when they passed to the BAAC. From 1694 onward the Brandenburgers also maintained a small base on the Slave Coast at Ouidah, which they used to purchase slaves.

From their earliest voyages to Africa, the Brandenburgers explored the possibility of slave trading. The Dutch West India Company impeded the trade of the two ships sent to Africa in 1682 by the Brandenburgers, but two years later Brandenburgers delivered 254 slaves to Berbice. In preparing for these arrivals, Raule concluded an agreement with the owner of the Dutch colony, Abraham van Pere. Even earlier, Raule had tried to obtain contracts to supply slaves. First, he negotiated with the Coymans brothers (Balthasar and Caspar) and with Josua and Pedro van Belle, who, together with the Dutch West India Company, were suppliers of slaves to the Spanish under the *asiento.* In 1683, while Spanish needs were temporarily being supplied under licenses issued by the Casa de Contratación, Raule negotiated directly with the Spanish Crown for consignments of 2,000 to 3,000 *piezas de Indias* per year. In doing so, Raule was motivated not only by profit but also by a desire to eliminate the hated Dutch company.[16] These various negotiations failed because Brandenburg did not possess a base in the Caribbean through which to conduct trade, and neither the Coymans brothers nor the Spanish were interested in allowing an unregulated trade in slaves in Brandenburg ships. In the early 1680s the BAC sought to negotiate the lease or purchase of a base from the French or the Danes, and in November 1685 Raule signed a treaty with Denmark to rent St. Thomas in the West Indies for thirty years. This agreement allowed the BAC to maintain a post on the island and to own as much land as it could farm with 200 slaves. The treaty also established the rules under which the Brandenburg slave trade might be conducted. Trade was allowed only to the Danes and to the BAC. Should foreign merchants seek to sell slaves at St. Thomas, it was agreed that the Danish governor of the island and the director of the BAC would be permitted to purchase them in equal shares.[17] The treaty also provided in vague terms for mutual support between the Danes and Brandenburgers in the purchase of the slaves at Guinea, in cases where their ships might come into contact.[18] Differences in interpretation of the treaty and constant smuggling by Brandenburgers soon caused problems with the Danes, however, and during the late 1680s the search began for another West Indian base. In 1689 Brandenburg seized the island of St. Peter, two miles south of Tortola, which, in addition to serving as a potential base for slaving, also became a base for privateering and for tax avoidance by traders.[19]

We possess only limited evidence of how the Brandenburgers conducted their slave trade in Africa. Dutch merchants conducted most of the trade, and in the seventeenth century the market organization for slaving was developed in partnership with African trading partners. In this respect, the Brandenburg slave trade in the African sphere worked like that of other European nations.

Although Brandenburgers expected to buy slaves at Arguim in North Africa, it is uncertain whether they achieved regular deliveries from that place to the Americas. In the fifteenth century, Portuguese traders had diverted the caravans designed for the trans-Saharan slave trade to Arguim and had taken these slaves to Portugal. When the French came to Arguim in 1638, the trans-Saharan routes that the Portuguese had drawn on had shifted further east. In 1691–92, however, it was reported that several hundred slaves were brought from Arguim to the West Indies, and in the 1699 minutes of the nine directors of the BAAC there are instructions that suggest attempts to introduce slave shipments from Arguim to the Canaries.[20] But evidence also exists of plans by Brandenburg to exchange the African base for a French island in the Caribbean, suggesting that from the Brandenburg perspective, Arguim had yielded little of significance in terms of developing the slave trade.[21] A Prussian merchant nevertheless estimated in 1709 that 100 slaves a year could be purchased at Arguim, though whether this was realized is unclear.[22]

Similarly, there is little clarity in the sources regarding the importance of the fort at Großfriedrichsburg for the Brandenburg slave trade. It is probable that the number of slaves held for sale at the fort was usually no more than twelve at one time, although the number of working slaves at the fort might exceed this.[23] Because of high maintenance costs, the BAAC decided in 1699 to reduce the number of working slaves at the fort from 216 to 60 and to send the rest to St. Thomas in the West Indies. Probably some of the 421 slaves brought to St. Thomas the following year came from Großfriedrichsburg.[24] During the 1692 voyage of the *Fredrik Wilhelm* (voyageid 21,950), the only Brandenburg voyage for which detailed accounts survive, slaves were purchased for the first time at Accra, about 110 miles to the northeast of Cape Three Points.[25] At that time Accra was reputed to be one of the best places to acquire slaves because local wars supplied captives constantly.[26] African points of trade are not as well depicted in the sources as their American counterparts, but, as with the Dutch and the English in the late seventeenth century, those flying the Brandenburg flag bartered for the majority of their slaves at the ports of the Slave Coast. At about the time the Brandenburgers started slave trading, the center of the trade at the Slave Coast was moving from the kingdom of Allada to the smaller

coastal state of Ouidah, formerly a province of Allada.[27] Whether the pattern of Brandenburg trade in the region reflected these trends is unclear, but it appears that Allada remained the major source of supply for the slaves carried by Brandenburg ships.[28] TSTD2 shows Allada dispatching 85,000 slaves before 1700, with the peak occurring in the 1680s, but how many of these left on Brandenburg ships is unclear. The Danish forts and Ouidah appear to have been the major embarkation points. Some of the Brandenburg slaves originated in the Bight of Biafra. Known as Calabari (likely Igbo) and probably taken from the Cross River, slaves from the Bight of Biafra were not well regarded by contemporary buyers in the Americas, who were concerned about their desire for freedom and resistance to slavery.[29] In 1699 the BAAC gave the order not to bring any more slaves from Calabar for fear of "spoiling" the rest of the slave cargo.[30]

In the 1690s the BAAC also tried to extend its trade farther south in Angola. Three passports were issued for trade to this region between 1692 and 1698.[31] The company's accounts for 1694, moreover, show Angola to have been the most important single destination for buying slaves. Why the BAAC sought to extend its slaving activities to Angola at this time is unclear, but it may have been linked to simultaneous negotiations with the Portuguese Companhia de Cachẽu over supplying slaves under the asiento.[32]

The procedures of the BAC and BAAC for embarkation and transport of slaves were similar to those followed by the Dutch West India Company. Physicians assisted Brandenburg traders in negotiating slave purchases with local dealers and in selecting slaves for purchase. Once bought, the slaves were branded, in the case of the BAAC, with the letters "CABC" prior to boarding ship.[33] After leaving their place of trade, most Brandenburg slave transports stopped at São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea to take in fresh water and provisions before crossing the Atlantic.[34] Records of shipboard mortality for only four voyages have survived, and these suggest an average mortality of 13.4 percent of those taken onboard on the African coast, but even with this small a sample the range of mortality was wide. Both the average and the range are not inconsistent with what has been observed in other branches of the trade during this period. The merchants of the BAAC actually allowed for a mortality loss of 8 percent.[35] This appears low by contemporary standards.

Brandenburgers adopted three main strategies for selling slaves once their ships reached the Americas. One method involved negotiating contracts and supplying slaves in lots. Another was to smuggle slaves to other parts of the Caribbean, while a third involved selling slaves to the planters of St. Thomas.[36]

The last probably constituted the smallest part of the Brandenburg trade, but its significance to the growth of the plantation sector in St. Thomas should not be understated. If the Brandenburg transatlantic system was an attempt at a miniature replica of those of the larger European powers, then St. Thomas was in some senses a tiny version of Barbados. It had a small plantation sector that grew explosively in the seventeenth century and produced sugar steadily into the nineteenth century, but it was also an entrepôt that supplied other plantation regions of the Americas. While St. Thomas was never a Brandenburg possession, Brandenburg traders established the base slave population in the 1690s, and as with Barbados, most of those first slaves came from the Gold Coast. Their arrival made possible the island's boom in the 1690s and early eighteenth century. The colony's first census in 1688 revealed a population of 317 whites and 422 blacks, but by 1697 an English report suggested there were about 1,500 "working negroes and seven sugar-works" at St. Thomas, attributing this expansion to Brandenburg slave suppliers. By 1715 there were said to be 547 whites and 3,042 blacks living on the island, close to its peak population before the nineteenth century.[37] Brandenburg traders were not responsible for all the post-1690 growth in St. Thomas's slave population, but in these early days they were the major suppliers. The entrepôt role of the island becomes clear when we recognize that 13,000 slaves arrived under the Brandenburg flag between 1686 and 1703, while the slave population did not reach 4,000 until 1720. Other traders, including Danes and interlopers, supplied slaves to the island thereafter. The terms of the 1685 treaty negotiated with Denmark brought gains both to the island's Danish governor and to the Brandenburg director of the BAAC. Permitted under the treaty to buy slaves equally and sell them at market prices, the governor and director appear to have earned profits of between 25 percent and 100 percent from such activities.[38]

For most of the time, however, Brandenburg activity in the Americas centered on supplying slaves to purchasers outside St. Thomas, whether on contract or through smuggling. A primary goal of the BAC and BAAC was to sell slaves in Spanish America. The Spanish authorities, however, treated Brandenburg's entry into the slave trade with suspicion. In February 1686, even before company employees arrived at St. Thomas, the Spanish king ordered the governor of Puerto Rico to be particularly vigilant about the activities of Brandenburgers and emphatically forbade the unloading of Brandenburg ships at Spanish ports in the Americas.[39] Efforts by the Spanish to prevent Brandenburg infiltration of the Spanish American slave market were only partially successful, however. A Dutch merchant working in the service

of the Germans traveled on one of the first company ships to St. Thomas and later traded along the shore of the Spanish West Indies.[40] Furthermore, the decline of Dutch control over the asiento following the death of Balthasar Coymans in 1686 and the ensuing prolonged struggle for the contract among the Dutch, English, and French created opportunities for smaller trading countries to engage in supplying slaves to the Spanish colonies. Within four years of Coymans's death, his plenipotentiary in the Americas, Pedro van Belle, had entered the service of Brandenburg.[41] Between 1690 and 1693, Brandenburgers were able to benefit from the confusion over the asiento by trying to meet some of the demand for slaves in the Spanish territories.[42] One arrangement allowed them to deliver 600 slaves four times a year to the Spanish.[43] It appears that only in 1693 were they able to meet this target, and we do not know how successful they were in subsequent years or if, in attempting to meet it, they resold slaves from interlopers and pirates. In 1694 the BAAC made an agreement with the holder of the asiento, under which the company was allowed to supply 2,000–3,000 slaves annually to the *asientistas.*[44] The Brandenburgers also bargained in vain for contracts with the French as well as with the Portuguese Companhia de Cachēu, which had temporarily taken over delivery of slaves from the West India Company, and when opportunities to work with the holders of the asiento were lacking, they tried to infiltrate Spanish American markets by dealing with the interlopers of Zeeland.[45]

Those trading under the Brandenburg flag also sought to supply slaves to non-Spanish markets in the Americas. One potential outlet was the English West Indies. In 1697 Governor Codrington of the English Leeward Islands noted the contribution of Brandenburg traders to the thriving slave trade at St. Thomas and warned that this might entice poor planters in the Leeward Islands and Barbados to move to Tortola, where they could access slaves from Brandenburg suppliers on highly favorable terms.[46] The reverse—that Brandenburg traders might supply slaves to the Leeward Islands—was also possible and seems to have been an option that Codrington himself chose to exercise.[47] Planters and traders sometimes journeyed to St. Thomas when a slave delivery from Guinea was expected. In other cases, middlemen redistributed slaves, particularly when war made the sea routes dangerous. There are references to trade connections as far north as Carolina.[48] The English also kept an eye on the smuggling of slaves from St. Thomas to the Spanish colonies, fearing competition for Jamaica, which was beginning to supersede Curaçao as a supply center for asientistas.[49] In 1693 the governor of Jamaica reported agents of

the asiento taking slaves from St. Thomas rather than Jamaica, noting that because there were at Jamaica "no negroes. . . . to supply the Assiento, Sir James Castile[50] sent four sloops to St. Thomas with about £300,000 in money in hopes of securing negroes there."[51]

Other Europeans received slaves from those flying the Brandenburg flag. Brandenburgers were said to have near exclusive control of the slave supply to the Danish island of St. Croix between 1690 and 1696.[52] This connection was likely to have built on links between St. Croix and St. Thomas dating from the 1670s, when Dutch merchants had sold slaves from Curaçao via St. Thomas.[53] There is evidence, too, of connections with the French Caribbean, notably through Martinique and Saint-Domingue, especially Petit-Goâve in southern Saint-Domingue.[54] The French were unable to meet the demand for slaves in their colonies at this time, and the problem was compounded by war in Europe. In 1692 the planters of Saint-Domingue were given permission to buy their slaves wherever they could.[55] Two years later, Ducasse, the governor of Saint-Domingue, rejoiced in the fact that "for two years this colony has shown a brilliant luster . . . 8 or 900 Blacks have come from St. Thomas; one no longer has to fear a shortage."[56] In the same year, Brandenburgers opened a branch at Saint-Domingue, accepting indigo as advance payment for slave deliveries, and were probably instrumental in supplying slaves from St. Thomas to French planters in Saint-Christophe.[57]

In seeking to trade with the colonies of other nations, Brandenburg slave traders became embroiled in international conflicts when they spread to the West Indies. The effects were mixed. In 1691 the English requested support from three Brandenburg ships in an expedition against the French.[58] Three years later, the Dutch seized two Brandenburg ships trading at Curaçao.[59] The damaging effects of war on the Brandenburg fleet were sometimes offset by benefits, as in 1691–92: after the French plundered the English islands of Antigua, Nevis, and Montserrat, the English sought to restock their colonies with slaves by acquiring eight shiploads at St. Thomas, some doubtless supplied by Brandenburg traders.[60] By the close of the century, however, the complaints by Brandenburg interests about the difficulties they had with trading in the French and English islands seem to have grown, as the French and English sought to exclude foreign vessels trading with their colonies. The measures taken to inhibit Brandenburg infiltration included restrictions on debt collection, with the result that by 1699 Van Belle, a BAAC employee, complained of difficulties in making return cargoes because his ships were prevented from calling at foreign ports.[61]

Van Belle's complaints were part of a wider catalogue of challenges facing Brandenburg traders that were to intensify and ultimately ruin them. Colonial ventures seem to have brought nothing but losses to the duchy in the main. This may have been more apparent than real, for the BAAC accounts were kept so poorly that Raule was suspected of fraud and eventually went to prison.[62] Profits made on voyages were, in any case, distributed to BAAC shareholders rather than reinvested. Some losses were nevertheless real. Between 1694 and 1697, a French pirate attack on St. Thomas proved costly when fire broke out in the company's storeroom and one of the company's captains took his ship and joined the pirates. Other nations regularly seized Brandenburg ships, and a dispute with the Danish authorities at St. Thomas prompted the island's governor to seize Brandenburg goods and ships. Poor business practices and disputes drained the confidence of potential investors, restricting the BAAC's abilities not only to reequip its own ships but also to obtain credit in the Netherlands for doing so.[63]

Between 1699 and 1709, only a few ships fitted out by the BAAC went to sea, and some of these were lost. Unable to supply its own trading posts in Africa adequately, the company came to depend on Dutch interlopers to do so. Private traders based in Emden or Zeeland encroached on the BAAC charter, using Prussian passports and the Prussian flag as well as BAAC forts but trading on their own account. This continued until 1715, with some of the profits being distributed to the BAAC and later to Prussian King Friedrich I, who in 1711 seized the company's assets without resistance from the shareholders. Friedrich's successor, Friedrich Wilhelm I, effectively liquidated what was left of the company. In 1717 he sold Großfriedrichsburg to the Dutch West India Company in exchange for 6,000 thaler and twelve young Africans—for some years the Prussians had tried to get Africans to serve in their army as musicians.[64] In 1725 the last effects of the company at Emden were auctioned, and six years later the Danes confiscated the company's factory and lodges at St. Thomas to cover outstanding debts.[65]

The ultimate failure of the BAAC and Brandenburg's intervention in the Atlantic slave trade should be considered within a broad context. The BAAC was not the only company involved in African trade to face severe problems and ultimately to collapse. The English Crown chartered several monopoly companies in the seventeenth century (the two largest in 1662 and 1672, respectively), before eventually opening the African trade to all its subjects in 1698.[66] The French experimented with various companies but in the seventeenth century were unable to meet the labor demands of their Caribbean

colonies.[67] The Danes sent ships to Africa for slaves to supply their West Indian colonies at same time as the Brandenburgers. The difficulties of the Dutch West India Company are widely known, and it lost its monopoly after 1730.

Brandenburg's limited involvement in slave trading and the trade's relatively early ending were only partly, therefore, institutional failures. The BAAC's collapse owed something to internal problems, but it was linked also with wider infrastructural and political problems. In Europe, the BAAC had access to merchant capital through the Dutch but lacked the means to market and process colonial products. The Great Elector had wanted to participate in colonial trade, but his system was never fully completed. To realize profits in the Americas required secure bases and colonies that could be kept dependent and under control. The Brandenburg authorities failed to match their support for the BAAC by engaging in colonial ventures in the Americas. Small as their slave trade was, it was much larger than what St. Thomas or indeed all the Danish islands together could absorb, given the Danes' parallel activity in the slave trade. Perhaps separate plantation colonies in the Americas were beyond the means of a sparsely populated duchy. Herein, perhaps, lies the underlying problem of Brandenburg's Atlantic slave-trading venture.

That said, we now know that at least fifty-six slaving voyages were dispatched to Africa under the flag of Brandenburg during its history of involvement in this traffic. These voyages carried an estimated 22,750 slaves from Africa, just 18,400 of whom arrived in the Americas alive. In view of the weaknesses in BAAC accounting, this should probably be considered a minimum figure. It does not include Brandenburg involvement in intra-Caribbean trafficking. Even with these caveats, Brandenburg's slave trade was small by the international standards of the age and tiny relative to the overall volume of the Atlantic slave trade. It need scarcely be said that the human misery this trade represents is clearly beyond the quantifiable.

In terms of its temporal distribution, the Brandenburg slave trade was not without significance. Figure 9.1 shows the arrivals of slaves in the Caribbean in the last fourteen years of the seventeenth century, distributed by the carriers' national flags. Most of this period was characterized by war at sea, which certainly reduced the traffic of the major powers. Nevertheless, while the English were already the dominant slave traders in the region at the beginning of the period, Brandenburgers were the second largest carriers in 1692 and 1696 and the third largest, ahead of the French and the Danes, in every year except 1686, 1689, 1695, and 1697. Their trade reached its peak in 1692–93, when an estimated

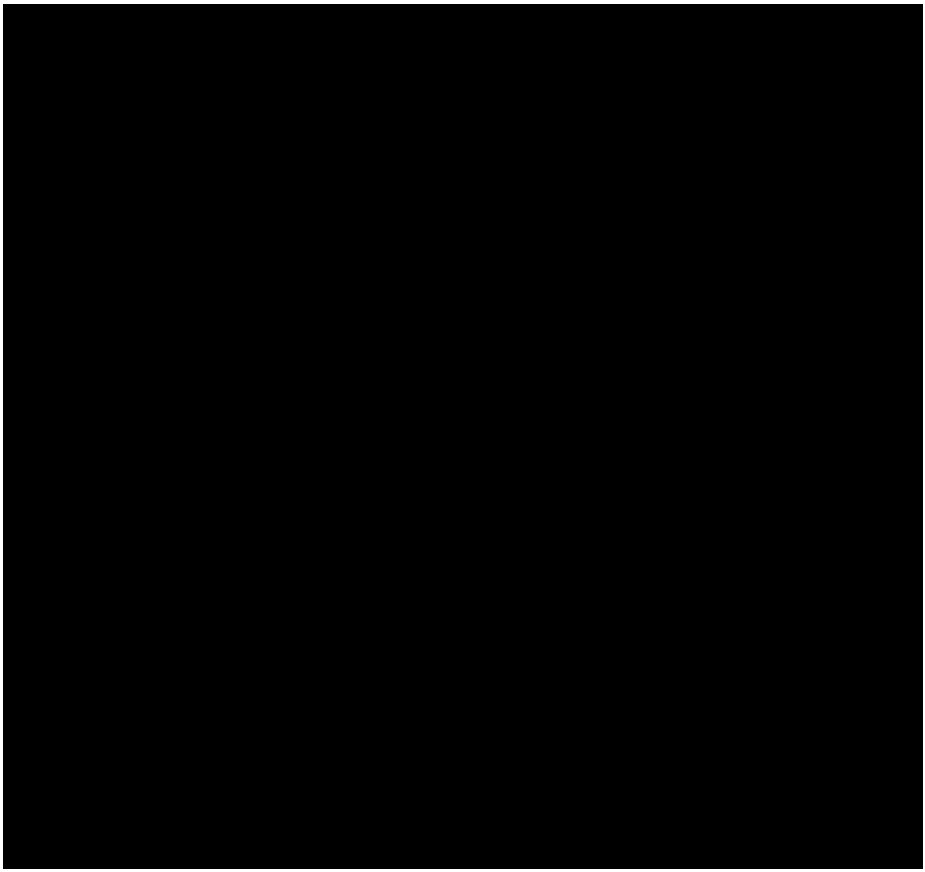

Figure 9.1 Annual Arrivals of Slaves in Caribbean Territories Distributed by National Flag of Carrier, 1686–99
Source: TSTD2.

3,717 Africans arrived in the Americas in Brandenburg ships, more than was carried by the Royal African Company in those years and far more than the 900 disembarked by Dutch West India Company ships. That single year actually accounts for more than one in five of all the slaves carried to the Americas in Brandenburg slave vessels. It was not by chance that other nations then began to view German involvement in the trade seriously and to take measures against it. Neither before nor afterward were Brandenburg carriers ever able to match the slave deliveries of 1693, but in the 1690s they shipped on average 1,200 slaves a year in what was the most "successful" period of the slave trade from the Brandenburg point of view. Well over half of Brandenburg's slave trade was concentrated in this one decade.

Brandenburg activity at this time sheds light on the shifting balance of power and interest among the different European nations in the Caribbean in the late seventeenth century. By this time the economic position of the Dutch in the Americas was clearly in decline although, given the Dutch financing of Brandenburg slaving activities, that decline may not have been so pronounced as is sometimes assumed.[68] The struggle for economic supremacy in the Caribbean by the 1690s, however, was clearly between the English and the French. Brandenburg participation in the slave trade occurred during the upheaval caused by the shift in the balance of power from the Dutch to others. Supported by Pedro van Belle, the Germans exploited Dutch connections with Spanish America and other parts of the Caribbean to gain entry into American slave markets. In retrospect, Van Belle's association with the BAAC provides an index of its fortunes. He used the BAAC for his own benefit when the influence of the Dutch West India Company began declining. Then he retreated about 1702 to his own plantation on the British island of St. Christopher (later known as St. Kitts), when the BAAC no longer offered him significant commercial opportunities.[69] More generally, the Brandenburg involvement in the slave trade was always conditional on broader political and economic contexts. Its peak years of involvement coincided with changes in international politics, war in the Caribbean, and the uncertainty this created in the 1690s.[70] The ending of the Brandenburg slave trade came quite abruptly after 1700, not only because of financial constraints but also because the English and French chose to stop buying slaves from the Germans.

THE SLAVE TRADE OF THE HANSE TOWNS

In the age of mercantilism, the Hanse towns along or near the Baltic and North Sea coasts could participate in the slave trade only under the protection of other nation-states. One early involvement centered on the Danish African Company of Glückstadt, a port northwest of Hamburg. The company was founded in 1659, predominantly with resources from Hamburg, but it ran into difficulties and in 1671 became associated with the newly founded Danish West Indian Company based in Copenhagen. The new company traded with varying degrees of success between Guinea and the West Indies, often in competition with Brandenburg traders along the same routes, starting in the 1680s. At that time, the Danish company recruited many of its staff from Hamburg and Holstein.

Further efforts by Hamburg merchants to enter the slave trade occurred after the War of the Spanish Succession, when they sought to establish a new

company on the Elbe River. One vessel, the *King of Prussia,* reached St. Thomas with 212 slaves in 1715, but this effort was generally unsuccessful largely for political reasons, and from then until late in the eighteenth century there is only one further Hamburg voyage on record—in 1768—although there were certainly other slaving ventures to Africa conducted under foreign passports or as contraband trade.[71] There are few sources about such activity, and we cannot easily distinguish between Danish and Hamburg trade. At the end of the eighteenth century, an interesting interlude of relatively free trading in slaves developed for the only time in the slave trade's history. The British, the Dutch, and the Danes all allowed free entry into many of their ports for vessels carrying slaves.[72] After 1789 the Spanish also gave free access to vessels carrying slaves to all their ports in the Americas. Thus, except for the French Caribbean—largely shut down during the 1790s by revolution and war—there was virtually no jurisdiction in the Caribbean that did not participate in a freer slave-trading environment. It did not last long, however. Beginning with the Danes in 1802, one nation after another instituted a different set of restrictions in the form of gradual abolition of the slave trade, until the last vessel crossed the Atlantic in 1867.

In the preceding short period of freer trade, from about 1789 to the British and U.S. abolition of the slave trade commencing in 1808, Hanse town merchants organized a minirevival of the North German slave trade, dispatching at least eight slave voyages between 1798 and 1805. These vessels obtained slaves at Accra and Christiansborg on the Gold Coast or, in two cases, in Upper Guinea. They then proceeded to a range of ports in the New World where slaves could be sold without restriction. These included Havana, Montevideo, Suriname, and St. Thomas. As noted, Danish, British, and U.S. abolition efforts brought this interlude to a close, and it is clear that Hanse merchants were never able to capitalize on the new international environment in the 1790s the way the Brandenburgers had a century earlier.

Thereafter, a different kind of Hanseatic involvement developed. After 1815 the British suspected Hamburg merchants of participating in what they now considered to be an illegal slave trade, with Hamburg merchants of Portuguese ancestry in particular being thought to use connections with Angola and Brazil to pursue it. In the 1830s Hanse merchants sent vessels carrying merchandise to be exchanged for slaves to the African coast, and in some cases they were suspected of transferring such vessels to Portuguese owners, with the result that the same vessels carried slaves to the Americas. The Hanse towns signed a treaty with Britain by which cruisers of the two powers had the

right to arrest suspected ships, conduct them to their respective domestic tribunals, and attempt to get convictions. The British navy detained several vessels under the Hanseatic flag and accompanied them back to Bremen, where the vessels were invariably released without being convicted.[73] These activities have not been researched exhaustively.[74]

Tables 9.1–9.3 summarize what is known about the size and geography of 160 years of slave trading from northern Germany. Table 9.1 shows that the minirevival of the traffic in the late eighteenth century, this time without the involvement of a monopoly company, meant that in total sixty-six ships carried an estimated 25,169 slaves from Africa and disembarked an estimated 21,209 in the Americas. (This excludes a voyage to Brazil in 1839, sailing under the flag of the Hanseatic League, which was owned by Portuguese slave traders who adopted that flag to escape the attentions of British antislave patrols.) Table 9.2 shows that the sample of voyages with information on African coastal origins of slaves is small. The preponderance of Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin origins—equivalent to 84 percent of all German-transported slaves for whom origins are known—that these data show is, however, likely to be representative of the traffic as a whole and is consistent with earlier discussions. Table 9.3 shows that in the Americas, where information on places of disembarkation is more complete, the Danish Virgin Islands played a similarly dominant role for the North German traders. It is also clear that the private traders during the minirevival sought a wider range of markets in the Americas than had their counterparts of a century earlier.

Table 9.1 Estimated Number of Slaves Carried by North German Slave Vessels in Ten-Year Intervals

Years	*Voyages*	*Slaves Departing*	*Slaves Arriving*
1641–50	1	150	130
1681–90	10	2,865	2,277
1691–1700	37	17,532	14,461
1701–10	7	1,894	1,515
1711–20	1	265	212
1761–70	1	330	269
1791–1800	6	1,605	1,450
1801–10	3	529	452
All years	66	25,170	20,766

Source: TSTD2.

Table 9.2 Estimated African Origins of Slaves Carried by North German Slave Vessels, 1641–1810

Senegambia	*Gold Coast*	*Bight of Benin*	*Bight of Biafra*	*Angola*
879	2,413	3,151	51	150

Source: TSTD2.

Table 9.3 Estimated Destinations in the Americas of Slaves Carried by North German Slave Vessels

Years	*Dutch Caribbean*	*Dutch Guianas*	*Río de la Plata*	*Virgin Islands*	*Barbados*	*Cuba*
1641–1720	1,404	254	0	13,912	200	0
1761–1810	0	266	232	618	0	220
All years	1,404	520	232	14,530	200	220

Source: TSTD2.

CONCLUSION

German involvement in the Atlantic slave trade was always dependent on broader political and economic conjunctures, as the German states were unable to provide sufficient resources to promote trading companies on their own. Their involvement was always constrained as well by the lack of German plantation colonies in the Americas. German traders, whether from Courland, Brandenburg, or the Hanse ports, thus depended on groups from other nations to buy the slaves they delivered to the Americas. In this respect, German participation in the slave trade depended on the power and goodwill of other European nations. In Africa, Brandenburg managed for some time to acquire factories and forts as bases for trade. The BAAC was also for a time able to exploit political conflicts and shifting balances of power among the major European nations to develop markets for slaves among otherwise inadequately supplied non-German planters and other buyers. The African ventures of Brandenburg-Prussia were also made possible by Dutch capital and the ambitions of Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm. They always lacked, however, a commercial infrastructure at home and thus remained dependent on external factors, including, in the age of mercantilism, the willingness and power of other nations to block trade. Although the Germans did not take a major role in the slave trade, the history of their

involvement, especially that of Brandenburg-Prussia, provides an interesting example of how smaller states tried to share this trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It also shows how merchants outside the German-speaking states of Europe used the ambitions of these states for their own commercial and financial gain.

An overview of nearly 200 years of intermittent slave trade–related activity by German polities allows us to discern a pattern of sorts. The Brandenburg slave trade was most active when one of two conditions held. The first was war between the major slave-trading powers, which could disrupt the normal flow of slaves and provide an opportunity for a smaller neutral flag to take up some of the resulting slack. This was the situation in the 1690s, when the Brandenburg traffic peaked. The second condition was when one or more powers with a presence in the plantation Americas opened their markets in times of peace to particular German states, as Denmark did in the seventeenth century and as several major colonial powers did in the late eighteenth. Neither condition held for most of the era of the slave trade, and the involvement of the North German ports remained a peripheral activity except for a few years in the 1690s.

NOTES

1. See Heinrich Volberg, *Deutsche Kolonialbestrebungen in Südamerika nach dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg* (Cologne, 1983).
2. The 1841 episode is included in TSTD2 as voyageid 11,653.
3. See "Vorgeschichte der deutschen Kolonien und Schutzgebiete," http://www.deutscheschutzgebiete.de/vorgeschichte_der_deutschen_kolonien_und_schutzgebiete.htm.
4. See Otto Heinz Mattiesen, *Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik de kurländischen Herzöge im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1940).
5. See Richard Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik unter dem Großen Kurfürsten und seinen Nachfolgern (1647–1721)* (Leipzig, 1889), 2 vols. Vol. 1 covers the history of the colonial politics of Brandenburg Prussia. Vol. 2 contains some important documents on the issue. This reference is to vol. 1, pp. 142–43.
6. "[E]in halb Dutzend junge Sklaven von 14, 15 und 16 Jahren, welche schön und wohlgestalt seien." Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, pp. 95–96.
7. *Caboceer* was derived from the Portuguese term *caboçeira.* Europeans used the word for noblemen or chieftains, especially of the Gold Coast. See Adam Jones, *Brandenburg Sources for West African History, 1680–1700* (Stuttgart, 1985), 313.
8. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 63.
9. The company was also called "Guineische Compagnie" or "Africanische Compagnie." See Eberhard Schmitt, "Die Brandenburgischen Überseehandelskompanien im XVII. Jahrhundert," *Schiff und Zeit* 11 (1984): 6–20, esp. 9.

10. See Peter Feddersen Stuhr, *Die Geschichte der See- und Kolonialmacht des Großen Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg in der Ostsee, auf der Küste von Guinea und auf den Inseln Arguim und St. Thomas, aus archivalischen Quellen dargestellt* (Berlin, 1839), 41.
11. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 123, par. 3.
12. See ibid., vol. 1, p. 236.
13. Construction lasted until 1708. Nearly all materials had to be brought from Europe so that the sum of 36,000 thaler spent by the Great Elector was insufficient to cover the costs. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 1, p. 320. See also ibid., vol. 2, no. 74, Requisita zur Festung in Africa vom 20./10. Juni 1683.
14. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 1, p. 322.
15. See Jones, *Brandenburg Sources,* 4. The post was called Tacrama or Taccerama and was located near what is today called Westpoint.
16. "Ein jeder weiß, dass der Sklavenhandel die Source des Reichthums ist, den die Spanier aus ihren Indien holen, und dass derselbe mit ihnen den Reichthum theilet, der die Sklaven anzuschaffen weiß. Wer weiß wieviel Millionen baar Geld die niederländische westindische Kompagnie aus dieser Sklavenlieferung an sich gebracht!" (Raule to Elector, Copenhagen, October 26, 1685, in Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 1, p. 192).
17. See the treaty between Elector Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg and King Christian V of Denmark concerning the island of St. Thomas, dated November 24, 1685, in Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 103, art. 20.
18. Ibid., art. 21.
19. See Nils Brübach, " 'Seefahrt und Handel sind die fürnembsten Säulen eines Estats': Brandenburg-Preußen und der transatlantische Sklavenhandel im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert," *Lateinamerika-Studien* 32 (1994): 30.
20. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24, Blatt 23. These plans were probably never realized.
21. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24a, Blatt 28f.
22. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 170.
23. See Jones, *Brandenburg Sources,* 6.
24. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24, Blatt 24, and No. 40c, Blatt 32.
25. See Paul Oettinger, ed., *Unter kurbrandenburgischer Flagge: Deutsche Kolonial-Erfahrungen vor 200 Jahren; nach dem Tagebuche des Chirurgen Johann Peter Oettinger* (Berlin, 1886), 51f.
26. See Hugh Thomas, *The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1870* (London, 1997), 349.
27. See Patrick Manning, "The Slave Trade in the Bight of Benin, 1640–1890," in Henry A. Gemery and Jan Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979), 114.
28. See Robin Law, "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey," *Journal of African History* 27 (1986): 240.
29. See Johannes Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge, 1990), 106–10.
30. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24, Blatt 25, where it is said that "is geresolveert . . . dat geen Slaven meer uijt de Calbarij sullen werden gehaalt om d'andre daar meede niet

instalug te maken." In 1698, when the *Charlotte Louize* was taken by English pirates, the ship was cruising off the coast of Calabar. See Jones, *Brandenburg Sources,* doc. 89.

31. Ibid., 165.
32. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 144.
33. See Oettinger, *Unter kurbrandenburgischer Flagge,* 61. This is the only description of a Brandenburg slave transport, but we can suppose that most of the transports took a similar course.
34. Despite high prices, most slave ships used the island as the last stop before the Middle Passage. See Thomas, *History of the Atlantic Slave Trade,* 362. It is known that in 1698 the *Kurprinzessin* also stopped at São Tomé. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 28a, Blatt 306.
35. Ibid., No. 18b, Blatt 122.
36. See Brübach, "Seefahrt und Handel," 34.
37. John J. McCusker, *Rum and the American Revolution: The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies, 1650–1775* (New York, 1989), 710.
38. See Waldemar Westergaard, *The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671–1754)* (New York, 1917), 148 and appendix J.
39. See Manuel Gutiérrez de Arce, *La colonización danesa en las Islas Vírgenes: Estudio histórico-jurídico* (Seville, 1945), 34–36.
40. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 113.
41. I. A. Wright, "The Coymans Asiento (1685–1689)," in *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde,* 6 (1924): 31.
42. See Brübach, "Seefahrt und Handel," 32. The situation got so confused that nobody knew whether the treaties between Spain and Coymans or his successor, Carcau, were in force or not. In 1688 there were about 5,000 slaves at Curaçao who could not be sold within the treaties, and so the following year the island was declared an open market. See Postma, *Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade,* 43–46.
43. See Brübach, "Seefahrt und Handel," 32.
44. A 1694 report from Danckelmann and Raule to the elector said that "in onderhandeling sijn getreden met een Coopman die van de Cooning van Hispanien geobtineert hebbende het assiento om negros Slaven in de spanshe Westindien tebrengen . . . bij succes van welck Accordt en Contract, om aen haer 2000–3000 Stucks jaerlijks televeren" (GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 18b, Blatt 13). On the asiento holders at this time, see Georges Scelle, *La traite négrière aux Indes de Castile: Contrats et traités d'assiento* (Paris, 1906), vol. 1, pp. 693–700.
45. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24, Blatt 15.
46. Governor Codrington to Council of Trade and Plantation, Antigua, September 27, 1697, in J. W. Fortescue, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies* (henceforth Cal. Col.) (London, 1904), vol. XIV, No. 1347.
47. See Cal. Col., vol. XIV, No. 997; vol. XVI, No. 431.
48. See Westergaard, *Danish West Indies,* 148, and Cal. Col., vol. XV, No. 864 III.
49. See Governor Sir Nathaniel Johnson to Lords of Trade and Plantations, June 2, 1688, Cal. Col., vol. XII, No. 1773. Johnson's report notes, "There is now a Danish African Company established to carry on a trade with the Spaniards in negroes, which will be

very detrimental to Jamaica and to the Royal African Company also, by sending slaves clandestinely into these islands which is constantly done." According to Westergaard, no slave vessels registered in Denmark reached St. Thomas between 1688 and 1700. See Westergaard, *Danish West Indies,* appendix J.

50. This was Santiago Castillo, who worked as a factor for several asientistas. At this time he worked for the asiento holder, Nicolas Porcio. See Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (New York, 1969), vol. 1, p. 327.
51. Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Beeston to the Earl of Nottingham, June 10, 1693, Jamaica, Cal. Col., vol. XIV, No. 392. At a price of about £24 per slave, with £300,000 they would have been able to buy 12,500 slaves. More probable is the sum of £30,000.
52. See Brübach, "Seefahrt und Handel," 33.
53. See Clarence J. Munford, *The Black Ordeal of Slavery and Slave Trading in the French West Indies, 1625–1715* (Lewiston, N.Y., 1991), vol. 2, p. 393.
54. See Hermann Kellenbenz, "Die Brandenburger auf St. Thomas," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 2 (1965): 196–217, esp. 204. In 1693, for example, 300 slaves were brought from St. Thomas to Léogâne. A year later a French merchant shipped 400 slaves from St. Thomas to Saint-Domingue. See Munford, *Black Ordeal,* vol. 2, pp. 393–96.
55. See Jean Baptiste Labat, *Pater Labats Sklavenbericht, 1690–1705* (Stuttgart, 1984), 181; Donnan, *Documents,* vol. 1, 96–99.
56. Cited in Munford, *Black Ordeal,* vol. 2, p. 394.
57. Ibid.
58. See Archibald Hutcheson to William Blathwayt, Antigua, April 3, 1691, Cal. Col., vol. XIII, No. 1302.
59. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24, Blatt 14, and No. 40c, Blatt 6ff. In the papers of St. Thomas published by Kellenbenz we can find only cotton as cargo for Curaçao. Probably the Brandenburgers bought slaves at Curaçao when no ships came from Africa. See Kellenbenz, "Brandenburger auf St. Thomas," 204–10.
60. See Brübach, "Seefahrt und Handel," 33.
61. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 24, Blatt 25.
62. See Stuhr, *Geschichte der See- und Kolonialmacht,* 110.
63. Ibid., 107.
64. See Schück, *Brandenburg Preußens Kolonialpolitik,* vol. 2, no. 165. The king noted regarding an offer of merchants of Rotterdam to send ships to the gulf of Guinea: "Die Pesse will ich unterschreiben wen die Com. will 150 Mohren mitbringen, die 10 à 12 Jahre alt." See also ibid., vol. 2, no. 186, Ramler's Bericht über Anschaffung von 150 Mohren.
65. See Brübach, "Seefahrt und Handel," 42.
66. See George L. Beer, *The Old Colonial System, 1660–1754* (Gloucester, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 43–44. See also "Losses Reported by the Royal African Company," in Donnan, *Documents,* no. 161.
67. See Munford, *Black Ordeal,* vol. 1, pp. 160–65. During the war of 1672–78 only eleven ships crossed the Atlantic on a slave journey. In 1679 only eight of twenty-two company ships traded in slaves. See also James Pritchard, David Eltis, and David Richardson,

"The Significance of the French Slave Trade to the Evolution of the French Atlantic World before 1716," this volume (chap. 7).

68. See Fernand Braudel, *Sozialgeschichte des 15.–18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1990), vol. 3, p. 288. For the Dutch position in the slave trade, see Jelmer Vos, David Eltis, and David Richardson, "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic," this volume (chap. 8); and António de Almeida Mendes, "The Foundations of the System: A Reassessment of the Slave Trade to the Spanish Americas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, this volume (chap. 2).
69. See GStA, I.HA, Rep. 65, No. 40c, Blatt 15.
70. See figure 9.1.
71. See Heinrich Sieveking, "Die Glückstädter Guineafahrt im 17. Jahrhundert: Ein Stück deutscher Kolonialgeschichte," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 30 (1937): 19–71. The data set includes only two voyages by the Hanse towns in the eighteenth century: one in 1768, the other in 1798 (TSTD2, voyageids 79,001 and 97,001).
72. See TSTD2, voyageids 97,002 and 96,051.
73. David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1987), 87, 200.
74. See Percy Ernst Schramm, *Deutschland und Übersee: Der deutsche Handel mit den anderen Kontinenten, insbesondere Afrika, von Karl V. bis zu Bismarck; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rivalität im Wirtschaftsleben* (Braunschweig, 1950).