

Revisiting Napoleon's Continental System

Local, Regional and European
Experiences

Edited by

Katherine B. Aaslestad and

Johan Joor



War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850

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War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850

Series Standing Order ISBN 978-0-230-54532-8 (hardback)

978-0-230-54533-5 (paperback)

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Revisiting Napoleon's Continental System

Local, Regional and European Experiences

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-34556-1

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First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-46657-3 ISBN 978-1-137-34557-8 (eBook)
DOI. 10.1057/9781137345578

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Revisiting Napoleon's continental system : local, regional and European experiences / [edited by] Katherine B. Aaslestad, Johan Joor.
pages cm. — (War, culture and society, 1750-1850)

Summary: "Napoleonic warfare spread to the high seas, harbors and marketplaces across Europe and the Atlantic through the Continental System. This volume addresses the illicit commerce, new merchant networks, 'daily life', and tensions with neutral states generated by Anglo-French economic warfare. It also reveals the contradictions inherent in the Napoleonic Empire - at once rational and progressive, but also coercive and exploitative. Regional and urban case studies offer a more complete understanding of the significance of economic warfare during the Napoleonic era, and explore the experiences and consequences of the conflict through several key themes: a re-evaluation of the historiography of the Continental System, the uneven power triangle of the French, British and neutral powers, and the strategies of merchants and smugglers to adapt to or circumvent the system. Transnational case studies underscore the vulnerability and ingenuity of Europeans as they faced transformative social and economic challenges."—Provided by publisher.
ISBN 978-1-349-46657-3

1. Continental System (Economic blockade) 2. Napoleonic Wars, 1800–1815—Economic aspects. 3. France—History—Consulate and First Empire, 1799–1815. 4. Europe—Commerce—History. 5. Europe—Economic conditions—1789–1900. 6. Europe—Politics and government—1789–1815. I. Aaslestad, Katherine. II. Joor, Johan.
HF1543.R49 2014
337.44—dc23

2014025898

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Series Preface

The century from 1750 to 1850 was a seminal period of change, not just in Europe but across the globe. The political landscape was transformed by a series of revolutions fought in the name of liberty, most notably in the Americas and France, of course, but elsewhere too: in Holland and Geneva during the eighteenth century and across much of mainland Europe by 1848. Nor was change confined to the European world. New ideas of freedom, equality and human rights were carried to the furthest outposts of empire, to Egypt, India and the Caribbean, which saw the creation in 1801 of the first black republic in Haiti, the former French colony of Saint Domingue. And in the early part of the nineteenth century they continued to inspire anticolonial and liberation movements throughout Central and Latin America.

If political and social institutions were transformed by revolution in these years, so too was warfare. During the quarter-century of the French Revolutionary Wars, in particular, Europe was faced with the prospect of 'total' war, on a scale unprecedented before the twentieth century. Military hardware, it is true, evolved only gradually, and battles were not necessarily any bloodier than they had been during the Seven Years War. But in other ways these can legitimately be described as the first modern wars, fought by mass armies mobilized by national and patriotic propaganda, leading to the displacement of millions of people throughout Europe and beyond, as soldiers, prisoners of war, civilians and refugees. For those who lived through the period these wars would be a formative experience that shaped the ambitions and the identities of a generation.

The aims of the series are necessarily ambitious. In its various volumes, whether single-authored monographs or themed collections, it seeks to extend the scope of more traditional historiography. It will study warfare during this formative century, not just in Europe but in the Americas, in colonial societies and across the world. It will analyse the construction of identities and power relations by integrating the principal categories of difference, most notably class and religion, generation and gender, race and ethnicity. It will adopt a multifaceted approach to the period, and turn to methods of political, cultural, social, military and gender history in order to develop a challenging and multidisciplinary analysis. Finally, it will examine elements of comparison and transfer and so tease out the complexities of regional, national, European and global history.

Rafe Blaufarb, Alan Forrest and Karen Hagemann

Acknowledgements

Our cooperation on the Continental System dates back to 2006, when we met at a workshop on the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era hosted by the German Historical Institute in London. We soon discovered that we shared a common interest in port cities, urban political culture, popular protest and the Continental System. Despite its significance in Napoleonic expansion, the Continental System seemed overlooked in earlier workshops and conferences that marked moments in the Napoleonic bicentenary. During the next several years we organized an international conference on the Continental System, and in May 2011 welcomed more than 30 scholars from nine countries to The Netherlands for 'The Napoleonic Continental System: Local, European, and Global Experiences and Consequences'. The International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and the Teylers Museum in Haarlem hosted the three-day conference. The papers at the conference featured a number of historiographical, social, economic, financial, judicial, urban, regional and intercontinental case studies of the Blockade, as well as the role of neutral states and the ingenuity of merchants, bankers and shippers in evading both the Napoleonic and British blockades. For this volume we selected 13 papers to be revised for publication and welcomed two new papers. The Continental System proved to be a provocative topic that stimulated the contributors to revise old findings and to explore new fields of research. Needless to say that much more of the execution, scope, consequences and all other aspects of the Blockade requires further study, and in this respect we consider this volume not the end to a process that started in 2006 but the starting point for new research.

We owe our thanks to many helpful institutions, foundations and individuals. We are grateful for financial support from the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of History at West Virginia University, the International Institute of Social History, the Netherlands Economic History Archives in Amsterdam, Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW), the foundations Professor Van Winter, Daendels and J.E. Jurriaanse that generously facilitated and supported the 2011 conference and subsidized this volume. We also thank Lex Heerma van Voss for his help and essential support during the whole process and all the participants from the 2011 Amsterdam conference for their stimulating presentations, and in particular the authors of this volume for their willingness to expand and revise their original papers. We are indebted to the patient assistance from Holly Tyler and Jenny McCall from Palgrave.

We also thank John Lambertson, Marissa Sura and Eric Christianson for attentive copy-editing. Finally, we also thank our families in Morgantown, WV and in Amsterdam who good-naturedly supported our long collaboration and shared passions for the rich history of port cities and their inhabitants.

Morgantown and Amsterdam
Katherine Aaslestad and Johan Joor, May 2014

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Legacy and Image (2011). He is currently working on the decline of the French Atlantic in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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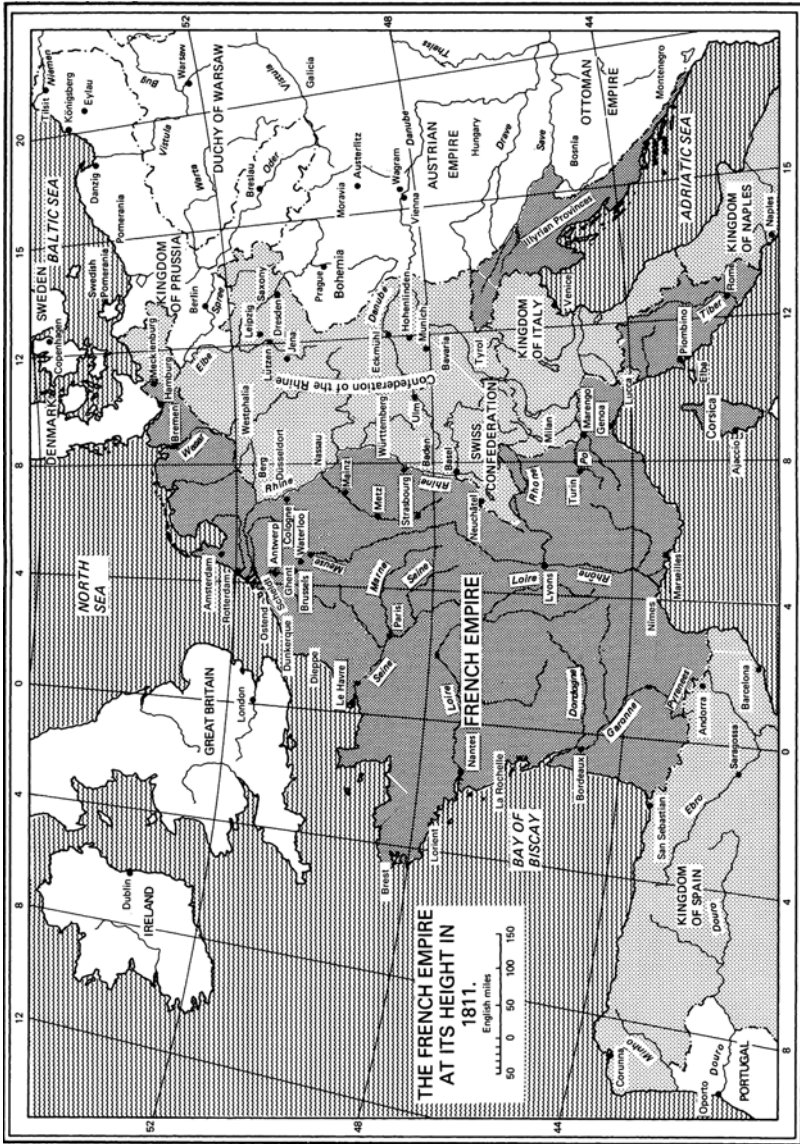
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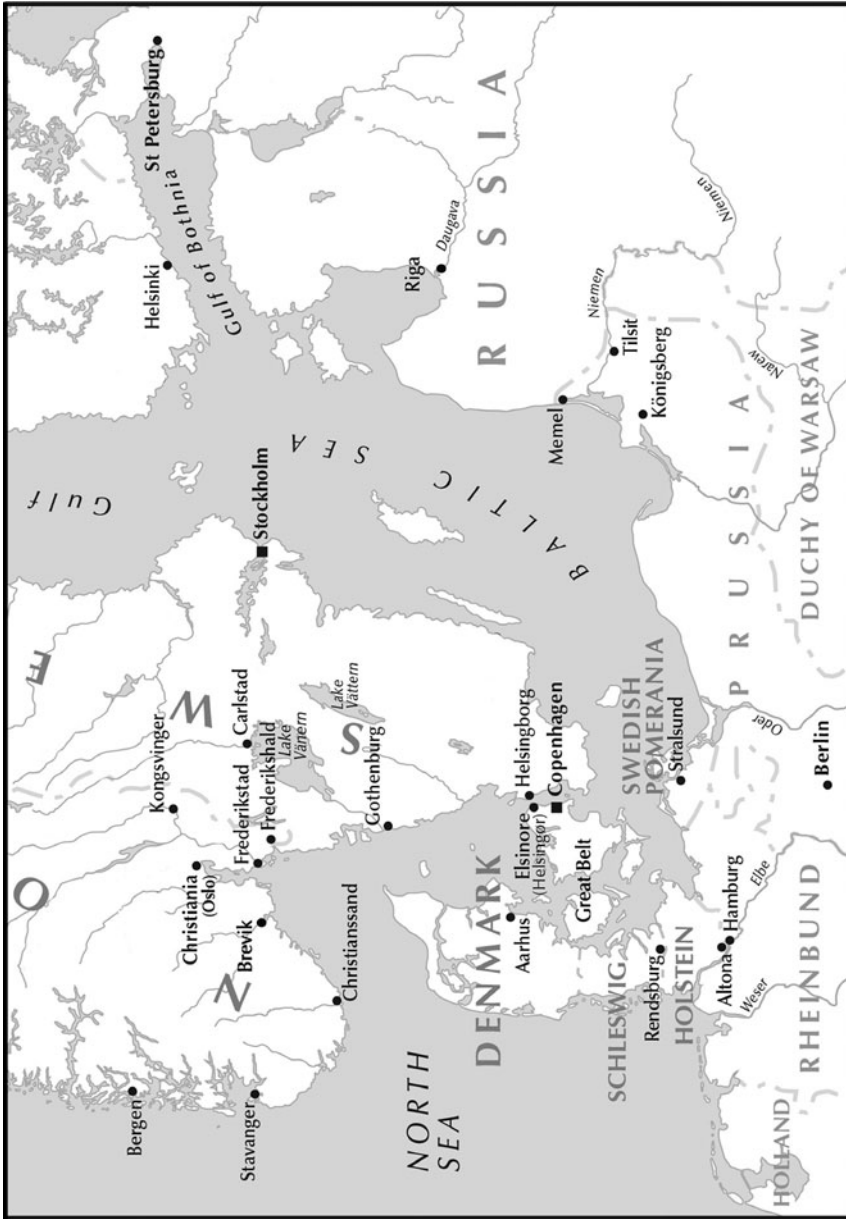
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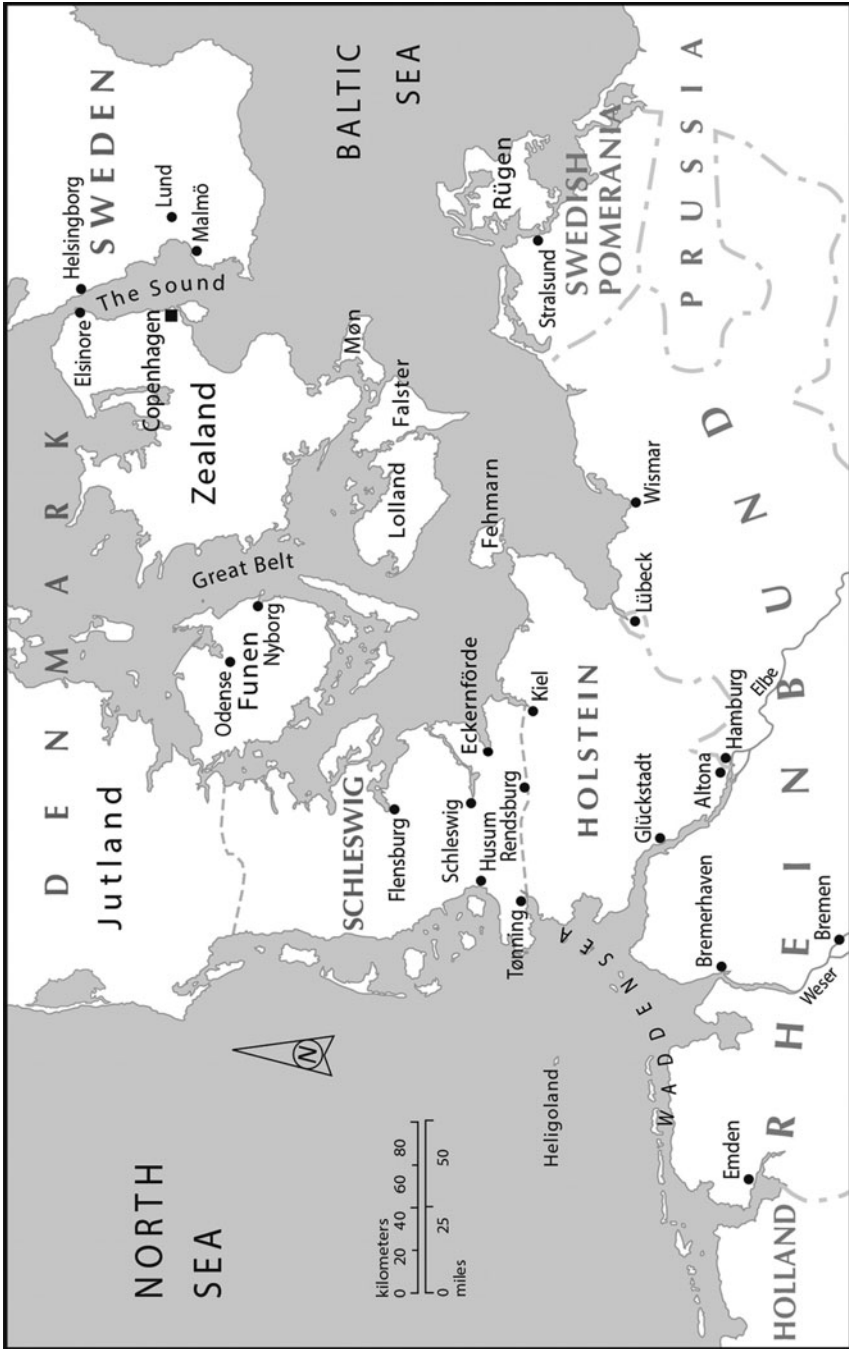
Map 1 Napoleonic Europe, 1811. From Geoffrey Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire* (Palgrave, 2003)



Map 2 Italy, 1812. From Alexander Grab, *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe* (Palgrave, 2003)



Map 3 Scandinavia and the Baltic area as of 1807. From Glenthøj and Ottosen, *Experiences of War and Nationality in Denmark and Norway, 1807–1815* (Palgrave, 2014)



Map 4 Historical map of Scandinavia. Denmark, the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein and Northern Germany as of 1807. From Glenthøj and Ottosen, *Experiences of War and Nationality in Denmark and Norway, 1807–1815* (Palgrave, 2014)

Introduction

Revisiting Napoleon's Continental System: Consequences of Economic Warfare

Katherine B. Aaslestad

John Webb, a Bristol merchant operating from the Tuscan port city of Livorno, wrote in April 1812 to New York merchants Thomas Masters and Francis Markoe on the prospects of American commerce in the Mediterranean market.¹ He identified such commodities as sugar, coffee, dried codfish, hides, cocoa and pimento as 'in great demand', but he recommended Civitavecchia as the port of call since Livorno remained under blockade.² The case of the Irish-born New York merchant James Watson underscores the opportunities for profit and challenges of great losses. Watson owned or held interest in 12 vessels that yielded profits carrying Barilla bark, cotton, rice, coffee, cocoa, indigo, wines, sugar, hides, corn, flaxseed, beeswax, turpentine and lumber to European, Asian, Caribbean and domestic ports; he, however, eventually lost three ships to French privateers and one to the British before he finally decided to sell the *Huntress* and the schooner *Betsy* in 1813 at a loss. Beaten by his debtors at home and abroad, he travelled to France in 1814 to regain his health and trade, but died there a year later.³ Finally, a letter from Hope and Company in Amsterdam in 1809 to Stephen Dutilh, a French-American merchant located in Philadelphia, discouraged further commerce and emphasized the scale of smuggling in 'articles of small and large volume, by which our wants are sufficiently fed to prevent absolute scarcity'.⁴ The experience of these merchants highlights the interconnected and global nature of commerce during the Napoleonic era, the importance of neutral trade, networks of commercial information, the combination of hardships and opportunities generated by the blockades, and privateering and smuggling as alternative forms of trade. These themes are essential to an understanding of the Continental System. This book revisits the economic warfare of the Napoleonic era to highlight the responses of merchants and smugglers alike in regional and urban case studies to reveal the often unexpected consequences of economic warfare.

The Continental System, central to the expansion and administration of the Napoleonic Empire, as well as a key military strategy in the conflict between France and Britain, led to imperial annexations and the invasions

of Portugal in 1807, Spain in 1808 and Russia in 1812. Yet scholars generally discuss the Continental System to stress its failure to destroy British commerce. This volume, in contrast, addresses how Anglo–French economic warfare generated new tensions with neutral states, redirected trade, developed expanding merchant networks, generated illicit commerce and shaped the ‘daily life’ of Europeans during the Napoleonic era. A variety of responses to the blockades characterized these wars, as merchants, shipowners, financiers and working people accommodated, subverted or protested imperial restrictions, which reveals the contradictions inherent in the Napoleonic Empire – at once rational and progressive, but also coercive and exploitative. This book demonstrates the vulnerability and ingenuity of Europeans as they faced economic warfare amid transformative social and economic challenges that made this an important ‘bridge era’ between the prosperous but bitterly competitive eighteenth-century mercantile economy and the instability of rapidly shifting markets, mechanization, consumer demand and calls for free trade in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Scholars have naturally focused on Napoleon in studies of the Continental System and explained the 1806 Blockade as his desperate attempt to defeat Britain via economic warfare, his mercantilist worldview, his ambitions to develop French industry and his awareness of French naval weakness. The French, however, did not alone determine the course, experiences and consequences of the Continental System. Britain’s role in the economic warfare, as well as the fate of neutral states who sought to survive and profit from the commercial rivalry of two feuding empires, are also central to the story. This volume moves beyond viewing the Continental System as primarily an Anglo–French conflict and explores the conduct of both belligerents, their allies and the crucial role of neutral states, including the United States, in the transformation of international commerce.

Regional and urban case studies offer a new and more complete understanding of the significance of economic warfare during the Napoleonic era, and explore the experiences and consequences of the conflict through several key themes: a re-evaluation of the historiography of the Continental System, the uneven power triangle of the French, British and neutral powers, and the strategies of merchants and smugglers to adapt to or circumvent the system. Together they reveal complex international networks that circulated goods, credit and especially commercial and political information to ensure illicit trade adapted to the shifting geography of war. With this approach, this book fills a void in current historiography and reminds scholars and students alike of the crucial role of the Continental System in warfare, modernization, state-building and socioeconomic transformations. It also invites new scholarship on this topic in other regions in continental Europe not covered in this volume, especially in southern and southeastern Europe, the Atlantic World, and the Americas.

An Account of the Continental Blockade, System and British and Neutral Responses

French and British hostilities during the Napoleonic Wars grew from a long period of commercial rivalry and warfare dating to the late 1600s. During periods of war and peace, Britain and France pursued mercantilist policies restricting trade via blockade and tariffs with other states to enhance their own economic development. Indeed, many historians now view the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars within a broader geopolitical framework that featured 61 years of open warfare between the two nations from 1689 to 1815.⁵ Patrick O'Brien, for example, presents the Continental System as an aggressive and ambitious French strategy, but as hardly a unique episode in the long era of Anglo–French conflict.⁶ His emphasis on continuity in Anglo–French tensions complicates the classical, if Anglo-centric, interpretation by Eli Heckscher that places Napoleon's System at the apex of irrational early modern mercantilism, destroyed by its own internal contradictions.⁷

Britain and Revolutionary France entered into military conflict in 1793, and both states embraced economic warfare, including restricting the trade of neutral states. As François Crouzet points out, mercantilist ideas, along with ideological differences, shaped Anglo–French hostility: 'world trade was seen as finite, static, as a zero-sum game; a country only could increase its trade at the expense of its competitors, trade was war, and war was one of the best ways to increase trade'.⁸ Britain implemented a blockade of the French port of Brest to limit the French fleet, and the French government extended their 1793 ban on British manufactured goods to prohibit 'all goods acquired by British trade' in 1796 and 1798.⁹ One year after the failure of the short-lived Peace of Amiens (1802–03), Britain seized French and Dutch vessels in British ports, proclaimed a blockade of the Elbe and Weser rivers, and extended it to French ports a year later, as France undertook a range of policies to restrict British commerce with the continent.

France and Britain alike targeted neutral shipping, which sought to continue trade with both belligerents. The early years of the war brought temporary prosperity to Scandinavian, Hanseatic and American trade, in particular American transports of French colonial goods. For Britain, the strongest naval power, neutral trade seemed to benefit its opponent and therefore needed to end. In an attempt to form a multilateral response to French and British belligerence against neutral commerce – specifically the British blockade of French ports – Russia, Denmark, Sweden and Prussia formed the League of Armed Neutrality in 1800 that included naval protection for their commerce. Within a year the British announced a blockade on the League (except for Prussia) and attacked the Danish fleet outside Copenhagen to compel the disunion of the League. Following a bitter three-hour battle led by Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, the Danes succumbed after losing 19 ships and suffering numerous casualties.

The 1801 Battle of Copenhagen demonstrated the crucial role of Britain's naval power; by 1800 Britain had twice as many war ships as France. Moreover, Britain's Royal Navy was far superior to the combined fleets of all its rivals, underscored by its size, functional variety, battleships' firepower and the number and quality of skilled seamen mobilized for warfare, all supported by a well-financed naval structure and an effective fiscal state.¹⁰ Nelson revealed the superiority of British naval power, gunnery and seamanship at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 when he attacked and defeated the larger French and Spanish fleets. Naval victories, as Jeremy Black points out, could protect Britain from invasion and enable amphibious operations but could not determine, in a sustained manner, the conflict on land.¹¹

Napoleon's own series of military victories over Austria and Russia in 1805 and Prussia in 1806 confirmed the dominance of the *Grande Armée* over their ill-coordinated opponents on the continent.¹² These French victories ended the War of the Third Coalition, enhanced Napoleon's dominance in Europe and underscored that Britain required land allies to defeat him. In fact, Napoleon's success generated a new level and intensity of trade disruption when he issued the Berlin Decree in November 1806; it prohibited all trade and traffic in British goods, criminalized British subjects in French-occupied areas, making their property 'fair prize', and barred vessels from Britain or British colonies from French ports as well as such French satellites, allies and occupied territories as Holland, Spain, Naples and the Hanseatic cities. In contrast, the ongoing conventional British blockade sought to restrict the imports and exports of France and its allies.

The Continental Blockade expanded as Napoleon gained more territory on the continent, and Britain exerted its muscle on the high seas. Following the defeat of Russia at Friedland and the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, Russia, Prussia, Norway-Denmark (following a British invasion and bombardment of Copenhagen) and Portugal (following a French invasion) joined the 'self-blockade' against British manufacturing and colonial goods. The British responded to the Berlin Decree with a series of Orders in Council in January and November 1807 that sought to tighten the blockade of France and its allies, deny French trade with neutrals and prevent Britain's enemies from trading with their colonies. Britain, like France, targeted neutrals. For example, the first Order required neutrals to call at a British port before proceeding to the continent, thereby imposing economic costs on neutral states. Napoleon's retaliation with the Milan Decrees of December 1807 strengthened the Berlin Decree as they expanded the blockade of continental ports to include neutral shipping that complied with the British directives. They authorized the capture of neutral vessels that called on British ports and declared neutral ships searched by the British on the high seas 'lawful prizes'. The economic disruption, hardships and declining standards of living caused by the dual blockade engendered widespread hatred of France and Britain. Merchants everywhere condemned their common practice of privateering

and disregard of neutrality, but found coerced collaboration with Britain through licensed trade, the lesser of two evils.¹³

The French navy was too weak to destroy Britain at sea, so the Berlin Decree targeted the British economy. Foreign trade financed Britain's power, and Napoleon sought to defeat Britain by attacking the vast capital and credit that made possible its sustained mobilization of financial assets for use in the war. Napoleon sought to damage British financial stability and balance of trade by reducing the British supply of gold and specie and weakening its credit, so that it could not subsidize continental warfare against the French. This continental 'self-blockade' was therefore not a conventional naval blockade that endeavoured to deprive its enemy of weapons, food and commodities; rather, it sought to deny Britain the financial ability to wage war.

The 'self-blockade', moreover, endeavoured to encourage the production of continental, especially French industries. Beyond subduing Britain, the restructuring of the continental trade with a new 'market design' attempted to establish French industrial and commercial hegemony on the continent.¹⁴ If some scholars view it as a constructive programme for European industrial development and trade under French guidance coupled with destructive intent for Britain, recent research reveals that the Berlin Decree represented an act of aggression against the continent beyond French economic imperialism. The Berlin Decree altered the character of the Napoleonic Wars, as Paul Schroeder asserts, since both France and Britain pursued victory at the expense of the continent, as economic warfare shifted from a 'covert, secondary, unsystematic, aspect of the war into a primary, central, highly organized one'.¹⁵ The Berlin and Milan Decrees, along with their British countermeasures, therefore, marked a turning point in the war, as the economic contest spread across northern and southern Europe with belligerents targeting neutral, conquered, satellite and allied states alike.

The Continental Blockade and System are often used interchangeably, but they are distinct if related in origin. The Blockade was Napoleon's 'economic war machine against Britain', whereas the Continental System encompassed the political organization necessary to enforce this Blockade on the continent.¹⁶ For example, Napoleon reorganized the political boundaries within the Italian peninsula to strengthen his control over the Continental Blockade, ultimately annexing Tuscany, Parma and Piacenza in 1808 and Rome, Umbria and Lazio in 1809 directly into the Empire, whereas the Kingdoms of Italy and Naples remained satellite states. Within a few years, commerce in Mediterranean ports was reduced to short-term coastal shipping.¹⁷ Napoleon also employed an army of green-jacketed *douaniers* (customs agents) to enforce his decrees on unwilling populations. In January 1807, 300 customs agents arrived in Hamburg, and throughout French-occupied Europe, *douaniers* became the hated symbols of Napoleonic economic oppression.

The regulation of neutral trade and British and French targeting of neutral vessels as fair prize generated increasing international conflict with neutrals and allies alike. By 1807 the United States, the largest neutral state, responded with an Embargo Act directed against trade with both belligerent powers and in 1809 replaced it with the Non-Intercourse Act that temporarily suspended trade with France and England. Neither Act could be effectively enforced, but Napoleon appeared to respond to US terms, leading the United States to focus on restricting trade with Britain. Friction over trade restrictions, the pressing into service of seamen on American vessels and an attempt to maintain access to European markets led the United States to declare war on Britain in June 1812 based on the cause of 'free trade and sailors rights'.¹⁸ Seeking to use his Spanish allies against the British, Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808 to strengthen the enforcement of the Continental System and 'carry on the war against Britain with more vigor'.¹⁹ Britain, on the other hand, managed to benefit from rebellion in Iberia and by providing *Junta* Spain with favourable trading conditions. By 1809 rebel Spain under the *Cortes* shifted its trade to Britain along with the trade of its colonies in Central and South America, which partially offset Britain's commercial losses on the continent.

Conventional smuggling and illicit trade thrived in the midst of the Anglo-French economic contest, and both belligerents resorted to licensed trade to control this shadow market. In 1797 Britain resumed the old practice of issuing licences to merchants to circumvent trade restrictions and prevent the import or export of specified goods. After 1806, the number of British licences rose sharply, especially as insurance companies insisted on licences, due to the protection those ships gained from the Royal Navy.²⁰ Much of the licensed trade took place on neutral vessels, turning the merchant marines of northern Europe into carriers sanctioned by the British government. After 1807 Heligoland, Gothenburg, Malta and Sicily emerged as thriving transit centres for Britain's licensed trade with the blockaded continent. Following Britain's seizure of Heligoland in 1807 to facilitate its illicit commerce, the former Danish island resembled a miniature London. British and continental mercantile houses established offices there, 300 to 400 ships visited the small island daily and the Royal Navy protected it.²¹ Likewise, Malta became the principal centre of illicit trade in British goods in the Mediterranean, where English exports to the region increased from less than 4 per cent in 1806 to 45 per cent in 1808, necessitating a fivefold increase in the island's fleet from 165 vessels in 1803 to 840 in 1811.²² Throughout continental Europe, smuggling developed into a quasi-legitimate business involving fixed business transactions, including commissions and insurance rates. Illicit trade and smuggling networks united a cross-section of society: unemployed labourers, fishermen, women, children, merchants and bankers.

Economic warfare reached a new level by 1810. In 1809 Napoleon annexed the Papal States and the Illyrian Provinces, and in 1810 Holland

and the north German coast into his Empire, forming a 'political, military, dynastic and economic federation of very unequal states'.²³ In addition, he finally compelled Sweden officially to join the French blockade and issued three new decrees. With the Saint Cloud and Trianon Decrees, Napoleon formalized special licences for colonial and agricultural exports and imports in order to turn smuggling to the advantage of the French Treasury and to strengthen the already privileged position of French industry and commerce by raising imperial tariffs. Both Dutch and north German merchants hoped that, as members of the Empire and part of the preferential market zone, they might benefit from Imperial reforms and trade with France on equal terms. To their bitter disappointment, tariff barriers remained, as the expansion of the Empire and licence system was designed to meet immediate and short-term logistical needs, primarily of metropolitan France and the inner Empire. For example, Napoleon encouraged grain exports from France in 1810 during the British grain crisis to drain British specie during a period of high grain prices to the benefit of French farmers. Napoleon's licence system, however, remained handicapped by insufficient naval support and growing hostility to the French from occupied and annexed territories. Finally, that same year he also issued the Fontainebleau Decree as a frontal attack against smuggling. In a punitive move, Napoleon increased the number of customs officials and imperial troops in French cities to enforce the Blockade, punish smugglers and confiscate British goods. Imperial officials burned seized goods with ceremonial pomp in hundreds of towns and cities in the last months of 1810 and first months of 1811.²⁴ These modifications to the Continental Blockade permitted imports of certain colonial goods and simultaneously fostered a 'customs terror' that characterized the last years of the Blockade.

In December 1810 Tsar Alexander I opened Russia's ports to neutral trade, an act that ultimately provoked Napoleon to invade Russia in June 1812. The Russian campaign and retreat galvanized a new and broad continental alliance when Napoleon rejected Austrian peace terms in 1813. Seriously outnumbered by Russian, Prussian, Austrian and Swedish forces, the French and their remaining allies faced defeat at Leipzig in October 1813. As Russian and Prussian troops invaded eastern France in early 1814, the French economy suffered from the combined loss of continental markets and the ongoing British blockade. Napoleon's Continental System, unravelling since early 1813, ceased to function long before Napoleon abdicated in April 1814, and Blockade legislation was formally repealed. On the Atlantic front, the British redeployed their navy to blockade the US coastline, leading to the formal end of the War of 1812 in December 1814. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 the Emperor sought to escape to the United States, but the British blockade of French ports prevented that voyage, and instead he spent his last days on the island of Saint Helena guarded by the Royal Navy, the force he could never defeat.

Assessments on Economic Warfare: Blockades, Belligerents and Business

War from 1793 to 1815 clearly interrupted and dislocated international commerce, and most studies on the Continental System focus on its economic consequences: the extent to which the Blockade fostered economic disruption or new trade opportunities within the Empire, its satellites and its allies. If historians concur that the Continental System foundered, they continue to debate the inevitability of the Blockade's failure and its long- and short-term economic consequences. For example, Eli Hecksher argues that Napoleon's effort to cripple Britain's military power through economic warfare was inherently doomed.²⁵ He points to the omnipresent role of smuggling, illicit trade and the dishonesty of French officials enforcing the Blockade. Recent research, like Silvia Marzagalli's comparative study of Hamburg, Bordeaux and Livorno, underscores the corrupt administration of the Blockade as well as merchants' success combining smuggling, fraud, bribery and diversion of trade routes to ensure the survival of commerce with Britain and its colonies.²⁶ François Crouzet, in contrast, posits that the System was not entirely ineffective and its failure was not inevitable. Indeed, Crouzet stresses that the adaptability of British merchants, the inability of the French to enforce the System consistently and Napoleon's military defeats in Spain and Russia contributed to its demise.²⁷ In his classic study, Crouzet recognizes that corrupt French officials undermined the Blockade, but that there were periods when the Blockade was effective, from mid-1807 to mid-1808 and from early 1810 until late 1812.²⁸ Finally, most scholars concur that Napoleon never had adequate force to patrol the European coastlines for illicit trade, nor could he keep frustrated European states and peoples bound to a market system that made their economies subservient to that of France.

Research on such regions considered the 'inner Empire' – contemporary Belgium, northern Italy and the Left Bank of the Rhine – present case studies that indicate that the blockade of English industrial goods fostered industrial growth and inland commerce, even if temporarily. Indeed, many continental manufacturers welcomed the removal of British competition and the introduction of a uniform currency and commercial code, unified weights and measures, improved infrastructure in roads and canals, abolishment of feudalism, guilds and internal tariffs. Following the annexation of the Left Bank of the Rhine, local merchants and manufacturers adapted quickly and well to the new economic conditions.²⁹ The abolition of internal tolls stimulated a thriving river traffic and an expansion of new markets. In Aachen and Crefeld, the production of wool and silk increased dramatically, as did the cotton industry in Cologne and metallurgical industries in Belgium.³⁰ The elimination of British textile competition and the shift in commerce from the Atlantic seaboard to the Rhine generated river traffic and industrial growth in

Cologne, Aachen and Crefeld as well as Ghent, Mulhouse and Strasbourg, as evidenced in Geoffrey Ellis's pioneering study of urban Alsace.³¹ Furthermore, the blockade of Dutch and north-German ports enhanced international distribution to inland commercial centres like Frankfurt and Leipzig. Absent British competition, industries in France as well as Belgium and the Rhenish left bank developed rapidly between 1807 and 1810.

Scholars agree that the combination of the Continental System, British blockade and the War of 1812 transformed international commerce.³² By the late eighteenth century trade-integrated commodity markets led to global commerce, and therefore the tensions that undermined and altered that trade demand study on a transnational level.³³ Scholarship emphasizing the international nature of economic warfare during the Napoleonic Era, rather than focusing on the Anglo-French contest, generates new insights on the scope of the simultaneously destructive and constructive transformation of transnational commerce. For example, revolution and war cost France its Caribbean colonies, especially Saint Domingue, and crucial exports and imports, which served as a vehicle for commercial globalization as such high-demand commodities as sugar and coffee shifted from Haiti to Cuba, Brazil and the United States.³⁴ The geopolitical tensions caused by economic warfare, including British restrictions on neutral trade and impressments of American seamen for British warships, drove the United States to declare war against Britain in 1812. The 'North American Theatre' of the Napoleonic Wars only concluded with Napoleon's defeat and the collapse of the Continental System and British blockades.³⁵ Global trade disruption created opportunities as well as hardships. As exports from Asia to Europe declined during the wars, Chinese and American ships bought spices, sugar and coffee directly from Southeast Asia.³⁶ Britain's European trade shifted south to the Mediterranean as merchants 'discovered' the regions' islands as alternative markets and sources of raw materials for English consumption.³⁷

Napoleon's Continental Blockade unintentionally left Britain in a far stronger global commercial position in 1815 than in 1793, despite the difficulty and cost of the wars. The wars against France cost Britain dearly and burdened the British population; defence of the realm and civilian administration increased fivefold by 1813 and sixfold by 1815. Britain paid more than 60 million pounds, or 10 per cent of the revenue collected for the war, as subsidies to Austrians, Prussians, Portuguese and others fighting against Bonaparte, who preferred their aid in hard currency.³⁸ The War of 1812 risked overextending naval resources and necessitated a significant westward redeployment of ships from the Baltic to a region with an underdeveloped naval infrastructure.³⁹ For the majority of working people in Britain, the combination of unusually poor harvests, lagging wages, rapid population growth and high taxes on such goods as beer, tea, salt, coal and sugar led to widespread hardship during the war, another measure of the war's cost on society.

In the long run, however, British economic warfare against the French and neutral states actually became an investment in a strong economic future. Britain seized many of its enemies' colonies and gained Malta, Ceylon, Guiana and the Cape of Good Hope. The wartime blockades, moreover, led to an increasing exclusion of French, Dutch, Spanish and Danish shipping that concomitantly increased British commerce and generated monopolies on services supplied by British ships, banks, mercantile houses and insurance companies for international trade.⁴⁰ Instability resulting from the Continental System also sent European funds to London (increasing Britain's investible capital), shifted some British export markets and accelerated the growth in commerce with South America. British exports of cotton textiles paradoxically increased during the wars and many of those exports went to continental Europe, demonstrating the ongoing European demand for British goods during the wars.⁴¹ As the conflict extended across the Atlantic, Britain benefited from the unintended consequences associated with economic warfare, as the Continental System presented Britain with new commercial prospects in South America, in particular Brazil in 1808.⁴² As Patrick O'Brien asserts, 'war can actually pay'.⁴³

Britain's success obviously derived from its sea power, and yet scholars have overlooked the importance of the Royal Navy in supporting British merchants, shippers and producers to respond to the Continental System.⁴⁴ Scholars have explained that the Revolution brought turmoil to the leadership and administration of the French Navy and that the US navy consisted primarily of coastal gunboats, but have taken for granted the fiscal and organizational strength of the Royal Navy in accounts of economic warfare. Blockade, a key tactic of the Navy, comprised many strategies: close blockade to contain an enemy fleet, open blockade to catch an enemy naval force and maritime blockade to halt commerce and disrupt the enemy's economy.⁴⁵ By disrupting the commerce of its opponents and hampering their economies by pushing up the cost of trade and damaging their ability to wage war, the Royal Navy played a key role in sustaining Britain as it faced the Continental System. Protecting the merchant fleet and resisting Napoleon's attempt to block its commerce from the continent remained key objectives of naval deployments.⁴⁶ Trade routes required constant protection from the threat of privateers. The convoy system helped protect Britain's merchant fleet and boost its share of shipping. Margrit Schulte Beerbühl points out that the Royal Navy backed the British licence system that generated international collaboration crucial to the expansion of British trade during the wars.⁴⁷ Moreover, protection of the convoys took precedence over supporting the Duke of Wellington's campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁸ The case of the Danish dependency, Iceland, underscores the union of sea and commercial power, as the island, situated within the sphere of the Royal Navy, had its commerce regulated by Britain's Board of Trade during the war.⁴⁹

If Britain expanded its commercial reach during the wars, elsewhere in Europe and across the globe, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars seriously impeded trade. The war raised the relative price of importable goods everywhere, but they were significantly pronounced during the years of the Blockade 'with increases of 100 per cent or 200 per cent'.⁵⁰ Dramatic price spikes involved goods traded between continents and caused severe disruptions in Latin American and African trade.⁵¹ Based on the evidence of relative prices, the Continental Blockade significantly contributed to raising the prices of sugar, wheat, pepper and coffee. In addition to price inflation, other hardships included lost cargo and ships, commodity shortages and high insurance rates that reduced trade.⁵²

An overview of continental Europe reveals that Britain's opponents and France's satellites suffered the most economic disruption. O'Rourke points out that the increase of relative prices in The Netherlands was far more dramatic than in France.⁵³ Relentless commercial warfare with virtually no recognition of neutral commercial rights meant that neutral states saw their peoples and economies become pawns in the great power conflict.⁵⁴ Blocked from trade with Britain and colonial markets, such entrepôts as Amsterdam and Hamburg faced commercial, industrial and financial decline. Forbidden the import of raw materials and traditional export markets, such industries as sugar refining failed – of Hamburg's 435 sugar refineries, only 40 existed following the city's annexation into the Empire.⁵⁵ By 1812 French officials reported that river traffic on the Elbe was limited to the transport of food, travellers and soldiers.⁵⁶ Even Danish Altona and Flensburg, port cities that prospered on black-market trade, faced severe economic crisis after 1810.⁵⁷ Unlike merchants who relocated eastward towards the Baltic, the residents of these port cities faced unemployment and declining standards of living. Destitute labourers from sugar refineries, artisans, sail-makers, ship carpenters, cigar-rollers, dock workers and petty merchants faced the loss of livelihoods and experienced daily military occupation, billeting and requisitions, heavy taxation and ruined state finances.⁵⁸ The full impact of the Continental System, therefore, included the costs of imperial occupation which ultimately discredited the French regime.⁵⁹ By 1813 impoverishment brought on by economic warfare and exploitation generated an ever-growing anti-French sentiment that erupted in a range of riots, desertions from the *Grand Armée* and even revolt in Hamburg, Harburg, Lübeck, Stade, Lüneburg and across destitute western Holland. Burning custom houses and targeting toll collectors illustrated the source of local grievances and popular hostility. The impoverishment attributed to the Continental System provided anti-Napoleonic propaganda with examples of Gallic oppression and exploitation that resonated throughout Europe.⁶⁰

Circumventing the blockades offered a new kind of livelihood, and the Continental System revived and expanded smuggling. Until 1810 goods continued to flow across borders, and smuggling and privateering emerged

as a key part of the international economic environment that encompassed a 'diverse world of professional smugglers, fishermen, labourers, ship-owners, merchants, manufacturers, bankers, and ultimately consumers'.⁶¹ Old women, children and maids successfully transported bags of coffee beans, sugar and pepper in their clothing through city gates in Hamburg. More elaborate smuggling schemes included transporting bulk goods in double-bottom wagons, disguising sugar as sand and funeral processions comprised of caskets of sugar, coffee, vanilla and indigo in place of corpses.⁶² Hard numbers on the value of illicit trade between 1806 and 1810 are difficult to determine since most of it remained unrecorded in official ledgers. Authorities in Hamburg estimated that some 6000 to 10,000 persons smuggled goods between Hamburg and its Danish neighbour Altona each day, and the distance between the two cities was so short that smugglers could make ten to twelve trips a day. No more than 5 per cent of this contraband was confiscated.⁶³ Likewise, Javier Cuenca-Esteban reassesses British exports to Spanish America by exploring 'ghost' exports in US ships not recorded in US custom-houses, asserting the involvement of US middlemen was far greater than officially recorded.⁶⁴ In fact, Peter Anders suggests that during the War of 1812 Americans were far more interested in illicit trade than in fighting.⁶⁵

The blockade on British goods along the North Sea and Mediterranean coasts remained porous until 1810, enabling merchants, who had prospered on neutral trade prior to 1806, to prevent complete commercial collapse. Klas Rönneck's work on the North Sea and Baltic demonstrates the region's crucial role in supplying Britain with necessary timber, grain and textile fibres.⁶⁶ Keeping the Baltic open to British trade became crucial to protect Britain's economy and national security; Britain's brutal campaigns against Denmark in 1801 and 1807 demonstrate the importance of this region.⁶⁷ Along the North Sea coastline, 'alternative trade routes' emerged that facilitated contraband cargos making their way to Amsterdam via the Ems from Emden or overland through Friesland and to Hamburg via Tönning and Heligoland. Merchants clearly learned to adapt their business to the French system, and new services proliferated to enable illicit trade, from forged ship certificates to country-of-origin papers as well as nocturnal pilotage through the coastal mud flats, reed beds and sand dunes. Tönning became a central conduit for US trade with Hamburg; in 1809 more than 100 American ships unloaded goods there, most of them bound for Hamburg.⁶⁸ Despite the intensity of Anglo-French conflict in one of the premier theatres of naval and economic warfare, the English Channel remained an important area of smuggling along the coast of Britain, northern France and the Low Countries. In fact, after 1810 illicit Anglo-French cooperation expanded as the Napoleonic state supported smugglers as a tool to support French industry and drain Britain of hard currency. Gavin Daly demonstrates Napoleon's desire for English gold which prompted him first to open the

port of Dunkirk to English trade and later to protect Gravelines as a 'city of smugglers', a locale for the illicit trade in traditional goods, guineas, letters and newspapers and French prisoners of war.⁶⁹

Like smuggling, privateering reached its zenith during the early nineteenth century as another alternative wartime form of trade to compete with Anglo-French restrictions on legitimate commerce. Viewed as a form of state-sanctioned piracy, private individuals and companies gained permission to arm vessels to seize hostile and neutral ships transporting contraband based on a letter of marque. Privately owned and armed vessels also supplemented the offensive efforts of each nation's navy, providing a new kind of weapon in the form of smaller and more manoeuvrable vessels appropriate for commerce raiding. During the War of 1812 the United States depended by default on privateers who were central to the US war effort. Privateering could combine economic and patriotic interests. For example, Danish privateers attacked British ships out of greed and hostility after the bombardment of Copenhagen, and Baltimore merchants acted similarly during the War of 1812.⁷⁰ Yet, it remained a desperate way to control trade amid war, as privateers targeted both belligerent and neutral shipping for profit. Historians have tried to assess the impact or success of privateering by calculating the number of captured ships and value of their cargos. Andrew Lambert points out, however, that of the 1613 British ships – 7.5 per cent of the British merchant fleet – captured by American privateers, the British recaptured 30 per cent of those ships, and concludes that US privateers did not form a significant threat to Britain.⁷¹ If privateering was a futile military exercise, it succeeded as a war against trade evidenced by increased prices and insurance rates that depressed commerce.⁷²

Merchants stand at the centre of trade, legitimate and illicit. Studies of their networks and strategies associated with smuggling, fraud, privateering and other forms of 'alternative trade' reveal Napoleon's misunderstanding of the strong commercial and kinship communities that structured international markets. In fact, the Napoleonic era demonstrates well that conflict shaped new trade patterns and practices; the Blockade provoked merchants to adapt.⁷³ In fact, Margrit Schulte Beerbühl argues that the necessity to find loopholes in the Continental System stimulated mercantile mobility and cooperation that ultimately fostered international continental integration only apparent at the end of the wars.⁷⁴ Expanded or new commercial networks helped merchants devise new structures and trade patterns, manage risk and ensure that trade could be profitable in the midst of conflict. These multilateral networks reveal the circulation of credit, bonds of trust and information necessary to reduce risk and maximize profit during the war. The example of Livorno demonstrates that neutral American and Greek merchants used the war as an opportunity to enter or expand their presence in the Mediterranean market when the British relocated to Malta, Messina and Palermo.⁷⁵ Likewise, American merchants in Livorno gained knowledge

about southern European markets and goods carrying neutral trade during the Napoleonic wars, and continued to meet European demand for tropical products by specializing in a limited number of commodities after 1815.⁷⁶ Merchants in Rouen survived and adapted by shifting their focus to interior trade, identifying alternative sources of cotton in Portugal, Italy and the Levant and relying on landed property for rental and farming revenues.⁷⁷ Other merchants replaced established commercial ties with new, more profitable ones. Uncovering their networks provides important insights on the practice of trade, the transfer of information in commercial communities and the interconnections of an expanding world economy.⁷⁸ The aim of this volume is to explore the world of merchants and smugglers, their regional and urban commercial networks, and the power triangle between France, Britain and neutral states to uncover the dynamics and experience of economic warfare. In doing so, it revisits the Continental System as a formative transitional period in modern European history.

Structure of the Book

Revisiting Napoleon's Continental System consists of 15 chapters within four thematic sections that approach the experience or consequences of economic warfare from a new perspective. The book commences with historiographical assessments of the Continental System in Anglo-American, French and Russian literature and a chapter on commercial dynamics between British, French and neutral states prior to the Continental Blockade. Geoffrey Ellis revisits his Oxford doctoral thesis, published in 1981 as *Napoleon's Continental Blockade: The Case of Alsace*. His description of the Blockade's objectives as an 'Uncommon Market' was formulated as the European Economic Community expanded, and his chapter addresses the place of the Continental System in the context of Stuart Woolf's 'integration thesis' on imperial expansion as a modernizing project. Annie Jourdan explores three French narratives on the Continental System: contemporary assessments, historical scholarship and legal studies. Taken together they reflect key interpretative paradigms on the nature of Napoleon's rule. Explanations of the Blockade as necessity, a poisoned legacy from the Revolution, or unbridled imperial ambitions failed to resonate with legal scholars who placed the conflict in the context of ineffective maritime legislation and the arbitrary rules of the high seas. Alexandre Tchoudinov highlights trends in Russian historiography, featuring their key contributions and their scholarly legacies through the politicization of the economic conflict during the Soviet era and in contemporary Russia. Struggling with incomplete sources, Russian scholars drew mixed results on the impact of the Continental System on Russia's economy, whereas popular journalists, 'revisionists' and 'patriots' cited older research to revisit and frame such iconic moments in Russian history as the French

invasion in 1812 for presentist purposes. Pierrick Pourchasse concludes this section by placing the Continental Blockade in a broader context. He identifies and sets up the key actors and dynamics of Napoleonic economic warfare through a study of conflicts over the grain trade in the mid-1790s. He evaluates the tensions between the Revolutionary government, the blockading British and the neutral states seeking profit to uncover policies and conflicts of interest that would resurface during the Continental System.

Recent studies emphasize that the economic impact of the Blockade and Napoleon's Continental System were far from uniform on the continent.⁷⁹ Regional variations, even within France, illustrate that not all port cities or inland hinterlands experienced the same fate. Regionalism as a conceptual framework is better suited to explore the complexity and nuances of economic life under Napoleon than traditional national narratives emphasizing either economic growth or decay. Transmitting goods, ideas and people, the Atlantic functioned as a space of transnational exchange and also provides a regional perspective, as Silvia Marzagalli reveals. She argues that the Continental System determined the direction and pace of French continental expansion. In order to ensure submission to his system, Napoleon occupied and annexed territories crucial for the success of his Blockade, but the Blockade only produced a reorganization of trade patterns and routes that diverted maritime commerce; it did not stop it. Likewise, Alex Grab's chapter on the Kingdom of Italy illustrates the efforts undertaken by the French in establishing and implementing the Blockade along the Adriatic and Mediterranean coasts as well as the Alps. Despite opposition to commercial restrictions, Grab demonstrates that the Kingdom's integration into the French market system stimulated agricultural growth which offset commercial and industrial losses generated by the Continental System. These unintended consequences served the lands of the Kingdom well in the following decades. Robert Mark Spaulding's study of traffic on the Rhine River and its key cities reveals a transformation in the location of the river's commercial activity, highlighting new patterns of trade and enduring shifts in downriver traffic. Intensification of the Blockade in 1810 triggered an economic recession that further reduced upstream imports in favour of downstream commerce and ultimately prompted new regional economies on the lower and upper Rhine. Chapters in this section demonstrate that during the war, rivers and coastlines, like the sea, remained a contested terrain where 'conflict and cooperation coexisted'.⁸⁰

Merchants, smugglers and privateers played a key role in forming the practices and networks necessary to circumvent the dual blockade. Margrit Schulte Beerbühl explores the networks and strategies cultivated by Nathan Mayer Rothschild as a young merchant engaged in continental commodity trade. Benefitting from kinship, family friends and commercial contacts, Rothschild's networks provided crucial information to help relocate

and reorient trade during the war. Jann Witt focuses on illicit trade and blockade-running in Denmark, illustrating both the ingenuity of individual merchants and the disastrous consequences Denmark faced during years of blockade and war. Bård Frydenlund further develops the political consequences of Denmark's inability to protect its trade and sovereignty through a case study of Norwegian merchants. By 1809, economic decline combined with insecurity associated with the licence system generated a lack of trust in the Danish state. As Norwegian merchants circumvented blockades, they developed new networks in Sweden and eventually emerged as internal opponents of Danish rule in Norway, favouring a new political order in 1814. Michael Rowe's study of illicit trade in the Rhineland illustrates a socially diverse population adapting to the ever-increasing economic restrictions with widespread and sophisticated smuggling operations. Rowe emphasizes that smuggling was a collaborative venture that included *douaniers* and local notables as well as people of different backgrounds: Norman merchants, Rhenish bankers, Dutch fishermen and British manufacturers. Taken together these chapters highlight merchants, networks of trade and information, and the emergence of new commercial communities on local, regional and international levels.

The final thematic section of the volume features merchants in their urban milieu. Commerce, the target of both the Napoleonic and British blockades, was the lifeblood of port cities. Yet, as these studies demonstrate, port cities remained sites of change and transition even as their trade deteriorated. Alan Forrest contextualizes the Continental System by emphasizing the decay and decline that French Atlantic cities experienced during the Revolution, including the loss of French colonies, especially Saint Domingue, and the war with Britain. Napoleon framed his intervention in commerce in 1806 as a form of commercial protection for merchants, yet Forrest points out that the Blockade offered few benefits to the economy of the French Atlantic, and merchants there, as elsewhere, had to experiment with new markets and risky forms of trade as they appealed to Bonaparte for a resumption of trade with neutral nations. Despite their innovations, Forrest emphasizes that merchant communities in France's Atlantic cities stubbornly retained a commercial conservatism that sought a return to the profitable triangular trade of the 1780s. Hilde Greefs studies two merchant communities in Antwerp, 'traditional elites and new internationals', to track how they reoriented and diversified their commerce. She traces the different commercial strategies these two groups pursued based on their experience, knowledge and commercial connections. Anita Čerpinska examines the export trade of the city of Riga between 1807 and 1812 to measure the impact of the Continental System and suggests merchants succeeded in circumventing trade restrictions. The city, however, did not escape the costs and hardships of the war due to

rising costs on basic goods and drained urban finances. Johan Joor presents the Continental System as the 'motor' of imperial policies in Holland and outlines the different phases of the Continental System to present the Blockade as the final blow in the process of steady decline within the city's crucial commercial and financial sectors. He traces the transformation of Amsterdam from a world market, hosting leading international houses of finance before the Revolutionary Wars, into one of only national and regional importance after Napoleon. In contrast to the traditional view of cities as sites of decline or quintessential modernization, cities during the Napoleonic Wars emerge as far more nuanced. They were agents of adaptation and forward-looking change as much as tradition and nostalgia for past prosperity.

The combination of hardships generated by the Continental System and the innovative means to circumvent it discredited the mercantilist approach to trade as a zero-sum game in which one party wins and another loses. Thus, it is no surprise that historians like Frank Trentman view the Napoleonic era as the first period in the history of free trade. During these decades, critiques of mercantilism combined with Adam Smith's moral vision of free trade to highlight a benign spirit of commerce and an interdependency between peace and prosperity that would calm the passions that stoke conflict.⁸¹ In fact, between 1776 and 1810, 26 translations of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* appeared.⁸² According to Peter Andreas, Adam Smith viewed smugglers as the 'real free trade pioneers' at the forefront of breaking down arbitrary barriers.⁸³ In the context of disrupted markets, privateering and smuggling, growing prices and insurance rates, Smith's vision of the economy as part of the natural world governed by the invisible hand of market forces gained a strong resonance that would only truly develop after the wars.

The difficult years of economic warfare and new commercial networks and practices outlined in this volume predisposed Europeans to openly associate peace with trade and prosperity and offered contemporary experience to support Smith's theory. Revellers carried a banner, 'For Peace and Trade', through the rebellious streets of Amsterdam in November 1813 underscoring the popular association of peace and prosperity.⁸⁴ The print, *The Sea Is Open. Trade Revives* (Figure 1), expresses the same sentiments and ironically depicts the greatest winner of the war, Britain, celebrating with one of the greatest losers, Holland. Both states, symbolized by well-fed toasting men, joyously unite over the burning of the Imperial Decrees and symbols of the 'customs terror'. This print, like the free market it celebrated, was deceptive. The course of the conflict transformed the international landscape in favour of Britain, which secured nearly half of the world's shipping by the end of the war, whereas the former neutral maritime power Holland, once central in international trade and finance, foundered.



Figure 1 *The Sea Is Open. Trade Revives*, cartoon about the end of the Napoleonic Continental System and the renewed friendship between Holland and Great Britain, artist unknown, publisher Rudolph Ackerman, hand-coloured etching, made in London, December 1813. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Notes

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Part I

Looking Forward and Backward: The Historiography and Origins of the Continental System

1

The Continental System Revisited

Geoffrey Ellis

The year 2011 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of my doctoral thesis, *Napoleon's Continental Blockade: The Case of Alsace*, by Oxford University Press. When I first embarked on my doctoral research at Oxford in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was struck by a marked lopsidedness in Blockade studies published up to that time. It seemed to me then that most, particularly those in English and French, had dealt in some way with what I called the 'sea aspects' of the subject, in which the Blockade is seen as essentially a 'coast system'. Such a view tended to accentuate its harmful commercial and industrial effects in the maritime ports of continental Europe and their hinterlands, to the neglect of its 'land aspects', which often reflected more positive economic results. My aim was to redress the balance by concentrating more on the inland regions of the Napoleonic Empire. That was why I chose Alsace, the two departments of the Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin, as an area for detailed focus, using the extensive archival material in Strasbourg, Colmar and Mulhouse. In due course, my wider research revealed that some of the economic fortunes of Alsace during the Continental Blockade from 1806 to 1813 were matched in other inland parts of the Empire, notably the annexed departments of the German left bank of the Rhine and mainland Belgium. Although industrial and commercial expansion varied considerably across those regions under Napoleonic rule, they were spared the prolonged decline, which overtook the major European seaports during the maritime wars of that time.

This conflicting evidence suggested that those very different economic experiences largely depended on whether the manufacturers and merchants concerned had access to, or lacked access to, markets and sources of supply. A familiar pattern of economic activity became clear to me: as the maritime ports entered their time of troubles from the mid- to later 1790s, and especially later during the Blockade, there was a reorientation of trade and industry in France and its earliest annexed departments towards the mainland markets. In a seminal article published some 50 years ago, the much-lamented François Crouzet, for long the recognized doyen of

Blockade studies, argued that a major long-term effect of the maritime wars of 1793 to 1815 was a 'shift of industry from the seaboard to the heartland of western Europe'. This 'shift' was so marked by the end of the period that, as he forcefully put it, 'the axis of the Continental economy had now moved from the Atlantic toward the Rhine'.¹

Following those leads, I was soon convinced that markets were a crucial element of Napoleon's Blockade project. This belief was sharpened by major differences of economic policy current among the states of western Europe during that formative period of my doctoral research, which prompted some tempting historical analogies. At the time my original thesis was conceived and completed, Great Britain had not yet joined the European Economic Community. For a young and no doubt rather impressionable researcher then projecting himself from an English university into the archives and libraries of Gaullist France, the analogy, however broad, between French opposition to British membership of the EEC and Napoleon's Continental Blockade against British trade more than a century and a half earlier seemed intriguing. But whereas de Gaulle was pursuing French interests within a genuine European Common Market of six initial member states subject to the same rules, Napoleon had no such restraints. He was not bound by the terms of any multilateral Treaty of Rome or of any other subsequent treaties that have redefined the identity of what is now the much enlarged European Union. He was in a position to impose his economic policies on conquered Europe in a much more unilateral and partisan way, if necessary by military force.

That, indeed, was the sense of my central theme that Napoleon's Blockade objectives included a continental market design, a project to create what I called an 'Uncommon Market' on the continental mainland – or what Louis Bergeron once likened to 'a kind of "one-way common market" (*une sorte de "marché commun à sens unique"*)', in which imposed commercial treaties and unilateral decisions produced an exchange system in the interests of France alone'.² To achieve this, Napoleon had to find within his essentially land-based empire the economic resources, *both* markets for French exports and re-exports *and* sources of supply of vital primary materials, which the French had lost in their overseas colonies during the maritime wars since 1793. It was thus on the continental mainland, within his expanding sphere of power, that he sought preferential or even exclusive rights favourable to French industry and trade. Such rights were not reciprocal, however, as soon became painfully clear to many manufacturers and merchants in countries that lay beyond the official imperial customs frontiers for all or much of the period of the Blockade.

How well my analogy of Napoleon's 'Uncommon Market' has weathered the last 33 years others may judge for themselves. Inevitably, something of its earlier topicality disappeared as the EEC was steadily enlarged, with Britain becoming a member in 1973. It would seem that just as historical

circumstances change, so historiographical trends change with them. If in retrospect I engage in some critical self-appraisal, I would have to make certain concessions in the light of more recent research. I can see now that, constrained as I then was by the strict word limit for doctoral theses at Oxford, I may have focused too narrowly on urban industrial and commercial markets. Although these were significant in themselves, and of growing future importance, they did not of course match the aggregative scale and overall primacy of local agricultural markets and the small-scale industries serving them within the European economies of Napoleon's time. I must equally admit that in my original research I only skimmed the surface of the large but neglected issue of military markets, that is to say markets for the supply of vital food and equipment to Napoleon's armies, which we now know were a major spur to local production and trade in many areas, including some in the subject states. These, too, reduced the relative importance of private industrial and commercial markets within the imperial economy.

'Continental Blockade' and 'Continental System'

Those were necessary self-limitations in my original work, and I should now also revisit another initial problem: was there any important distinction to be made between the 'Continental Blockade' (*Blocus continental*) and the 'Continental System' (*Système continental*)? Both terms were in common use from 1806, and it would be fair to say that contemporaries often thought of them as synonymous and interchangeable. Later nineteenth-century writers also tended to do so, and that same loose usage persisted even in some modern scholarly works in this field of research. Of these, one of the most influential was by Eli Heckscher, the political economist and economic historian. It appeared in English translation in 1922, three years after his original Swedish edition.³ Entitled *The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation*, it was primarily a study of the questionable theory behind and the erratic implementation of the Blockade as a failed venture in commercial and industrial warfare, to which the author as a celebrated free trader was opposed in principle. Heckscher's volume was to remain the standard text on the subject in Anglophone countries for almost the next half-century. His treatment of its British dimension was rather sketchy, however, and readers conversant with French had to wait until the publication of François Crouzet's magisterial account in 1958 provided the definitive statement.⁴ He preferred to use the term *blocus continental*, and I readily followed suit in my own published thesis.

Yet, even by then it was becoming clear that the term 'Continental Blockade' did not adequately cover the gamut of Napoleon's economic policies in conquered Europe, let alone his much wider imperial ambitions, and one could ask whether it had ever done so. The first use of the phrase *blocus continental* is usually attributed to the comte de Montgaillard (1761–1841),

formerly a shady counter-revolutionary polemicist who had ingratiated himself into Napoleon's circle of publicists through a series of reports. The thinking behind the Berlin Decree of 21 November 1806 had been anticipated in Montgaillard's *mémoire* of 25 July 1805, three months *before* the French naval defeat at Trafalgar, and its supplement of 24 March 1806.⁵ He saw British trade as a vast organized system of piracy, but at the same time as phantom wealth which he likened to 'dropsy' (*hydropisie*). Other polemicists around that time were also propagating an image of British commercial power as 'a colossus with feet of clay'.

Formulated in such terms, the rationale behind the Continental Blockade was crude and lacking in any real intellectual pedigree, except perhaps for a superficial foothold in outmoded mercantilist theories, which Napoleon himself shared. In short, his Blockade was not a carefully reasoned and well-organized economic 'system' in any meaningful sense, but rather an ad hoc extension of his military power to the commercial conflict with his most elusive enemy, and its enforcement was wholly dependent on that power. Its official proclamation in the immediate aftermath of Prussia's twin defeats at Jena and Auerstädt on 14 October 1806 was not coincidental. Conversely, it also testified to the increasing naval weakness of France after the battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. It was not a blockade properly so called but in effect a *self*-blockade, or boycott, as Heckscher pointed out long ago. Military conquests on land, Napoleon presumed, would lead to French conquests of continental markets as well.

In those broad terms, 33 years ago, I argued that the French continental market design was the obverse and more constructive side of the Blockade's destructive function as an economic war machine set in motion against British trade. Since then, as we know, Napoleonic studies have moved on to new areas and new debates, and the whole subject of the Blockade now needs to be approached in a somewhat different context.

New Directions in Napoleonic Studies: The Question of European 'Integration'

One of the more recent historiographical interpretations is the notion that Napoleon's overarching ambition was the 'integration of Europe' under French tutelage. Within this genre of writings, the Continental Blockade is seen as only one element of his wider imperial project to assimilate the annexed departments to French models and also to extend that process as far as possible to the subject states beyond the official frontiers of the French Empire, in other words, to all parts of his so-called 'Grand Empire'. Indeed, the proponents of this idea seem much less concerned with the economic history of the Blockade than with all the other policies (military, political, administrative, judicial and social), which together made up Napoleon's 'System' in the 'Grand Empire'. That is why I have preferred the

term 'System' for the title of this essay, and I should like now to discuss the cases for and against the 'integration' thesis before deciding how far the Continental Blockade itself fits the picture.

The notion that Napoleon was an early exponent of European 'integration', or even a sort of progenitor of the modern European Union, has gained some currency during the last 20 years or so. Admittedly, much of such talk has come from popular commentators, notably in France itself, with their own tendentious motives for propagating the analogy and with an eye for sensational publicity. It had a good airing at the bicentenary of Brumaire in 1999, for instance, perhaps because those writers and commentators wanted to play down Napoleon's image as an all-consuming military conqueror and extol his credentials as a civil ruler instead. But even if its more extravagant variants are excluded, the idea has also been advanced in serious scholarly work, and it now has quite a fashionable niche among the more recent genres in Napoleonic research. Pieter Geyl – thou shouldst be living at this hour! Napoleonic studies hath need of thee – again!

My apostrophe here is more than rhetorical. Pieter Geyl's celebrated *Napoleon: For and Against*, first published in Dutch in 1946, in English translation in 1949, and with many paperback editions since then, remains the best scholarly review of the 'classic' writings on Napoleon in French historiography up to the Second World War.⁶ If the 'integration' thesis had any long-established roots at all, one would expect to find traces of them somewhere there. Yet even if the rich vein of nineteenth-century French writings is followed through the heroic legend of Napoleon, and his 'black legend' is disregarded completely, there is little evidence of them. Those early writers certainly dealt with the great issues of Napoleon's imperial ambition, but their frame of reference was usually of a celebrated past rather than an unimaginable future. Some of them thus portrayed his 'grand idea' in classical analogies, such as the Roman imperial ideal – Napoleon as a new Caesar or Constantine or Theodosius or Justinian the lawgiver. However, though their invocation of a Roman civilization (*Pax Romana*) that lasted for centuries was comprehensible enough, they failed to establish any concept of 'Napoleonic civilization' (*Pax Napoleonica*) to match it. Other writers preferred the analogy with Charlemagne, which Napoleon himself used to good effect at different times of his imperial career, and which had the merit of identifying the essentially Latin and Germanic bases of his 'Grand Empire'. And other writers, again, put greater stress on Napoleon's rise to fame as a soldier of the Revolution, and saw him as the vital instrument of radical change through French aggrandizement, as the strong arm of the exemplary nation – *la grande nation* – destined to give its reformed political system and laws to the rest of Europe. This argument has at least the suggestion of European 'integration' seen as an imposed one-way process, but for writers who disseminated the 'black legend' of Napoleon, any such notion was excluded almost by definition.

If we turn next to the 'integration' thesis in more recent scholarly works, pride of place surely belongs to Stuart Woolf's important study, actually entitled *Napoleon's Integration of Europe*, published 23 years ago.⁷ I should say at once that his account is not based on any modish but anachronistic analogy. It has no proleptic undertones and is firmly set in the historical context of Napoleonic Europe, which of course was also in large part *conquered* Europe, the product of prolonged wars. It acknowledges and fully discusses all the forces then working against European 'integration', including hostile reactions to the Continental Blockade. On the other hand, Woolf posits the idea of a Napoleonic model of administrative 'centralism', 'uniformity' and 'modernity' which incorporated the legal model of the French Civil Code promulgated in March 1804 and renamed the *Code Napoléon* in 1807. He aims to show how far that model, premised on the belief of French imperialists that their administrative science was superior to all others, was implemented in the directly annexed departments of the formal French Empire and then also in its widely diverse subject or satellite states.

In my more recent writings I have disputed this notion that Napoleon 'integrated' Europe.⁸ My purpose was empirical: to find out how far the established historical facts, not least the basic facts of time and space, fitted that thesis. Two questions arose at once. First, given the relative brevity (just 15 years) of the whole Napoleonic episode, was it reasonable to think that European 'integration' could take enduring form in such a short historical time? Second, did the different time-lags through which the various annexed departments and subject states of the Empire were exposed to French rule, as well as their varying distances from the metropole, make them more or less receptive to its 'modern' administrative and legal models?

The answers to those questions seemed clear to me. The foreign lands in which assimilation to such models had been most pronounced by 1814, and proved more lasting thereafter, were those directly annexed comparatively early (some before Brumaire indeed) and so brought under French rule longest. As it happened, these lands for the most part also lay closest to France: namely, Savoy and Nice (two new departments formed in 1792 and 1793), Belgium and Luxembourg (nine new departments annexed in 1795), the German left bank of the Rhine (four new departments created in November 1797 and definitively annexed at the Peace of Lunéville in 1801), Geneva and its environs (one new department formed in 1798), Piedmont (six new departments, later reduced to five, annexed in 1802) and the Ligurian Republic (three new departments incorporated in 1805). To them one might add the satellite Kingdom of Italy, created in March 1805, which at its height had 24 administrative departments in Lombardy, Venetia and some neighbouring provinces. Other scholars, perhaps most notably Michael Broers, have rightly pointed out, as I at first had not, that those were precisely the conquered territories in which earlier social and economic change had most closely matched similar developments in France, and that this too was a

crucial factor in their receptivity to the reformed French models of government and civil law.⁹ They were also the conquered lands in which the French were most successful in gaining the active collaboration of the local *notables* and professional elites, whose public service under Napoleon left an important legacy after his fall.

Conversely, assimilation was much less pronounced in areas that came under French rule later or which lay further afield. These covered a wide arc from Parma, Tuscany, the Papal States and Rome itself (annexed at different times between 1808 and 1810) to Holland, the Hanse ports (Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck), northern Hanover and Oldenburg, all incorporated later still in 1810. Subject states had already been formed in Switzerland (1803), southern Italy (1806), Holland (1806, until its direct annexation in 1810), Germany east of the Rhine (1806–07), Poland (1807), Spain (1808) and the so-called ‘Illyrian Provinces’ of the Adriatic hinterland (1809). Furthermore, as a general rule, ‘integration’ was weakest of all in those countries where feudal practices were traditional, deep-rooted and difficult to abolish by legal writ alone.

What Might ‘Integration’ Have Meant in Napoleon’s Time?

That, briefly put, was and remains my empirical position. Yet perhaps it would also be useful to address some of the more theoretical possibilities raised by the ‘integration’ thesis. One question here is hypothetical: what *might* ‘integration’ have signified to the leading Napoleonic players in the heyday of the Empire, say in 1810, and what would it not have signified? It is not what *we* today mean when we speak of European ‘integration’ or rail against it, but rather what the term might have meant to Napoleon and his collaborators 200 years ago. For a start, it could not have meant a multilateral movement towards closer economic and political union among European nations as a collaborative way forward from unprecedented wartime conflict to peacetime reconciliation. Before Napoleon seized power in the Brumaire coup of November 1799, there had already been more than seven years of major wars in Europe, both on land and at sea, which dragged on for another year under the Consulate. The rupture of the Peace of Amiens in May 1803 and the land campaigns of 1805 set off a further decade of military conflict. Whatever else the ‘integration’ thesis might imply, it certainly cannot denote conditions of collaborative peacetime reconstruction; somehow, it would have to be reconciled with the plain fact of persistent warfare – and that is not a promising starting point.

On the other hand, and apart from its obvious military purpose of reinforcing a Grand Army of more than half a million men, Napoleon’s ‘Grand Empire’ was also an attempted construct in civil government. We might then ask how much ‘integration’ he sought, and how much he actually achieved, in its *civil* apparatus. At its territorial height in 1812 the official

French Empire had 130 departments with a combined population of around 44 million subjects, of whom only about 30 million lived in the area of 'old France'. The wider 'Grand Empire' added another 40 million Latin, Germanic and Slavic people to Napoleon's nominal domain. It would be a revealing test of the 'integration' thesis to ask how far Napoleon and his imperial collaborators saw themselves as the founding fathers of what might be called a 'United States of Europe'. And here, admittedly, Napoleon at times seemed to allude to just such a grandiose ambition, although much of this grandiloquent rhetoric came after the event, in the rambling reminiscences of his final exile, most famously recorded by Emmanuel de Las Cases in the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* of 1823. Some of this epic stuff was to live on in the Napoleonic 'legend' of the nineteenth century, but as historical evidence it cannot be trusted.

By contrast, the supporting evidence in Stuart Woolf's cited account is carefully garnered from the writings of many Napoleonic administrators and military commanders across the expanding Empire. If he is right about the French administrative model of 'uniformity' and 'modernity', then his 'integration' thesis might well hold for Napoleon's aim, if not for its achievement. The administrative system of state centralism, vested at departmental level in the functions of the prefects and sub-prefects in the *arrondissements*, and at local level in those of the mayors – all of whom were appointed from Paris, let us remember – was increasingly extended beyond French frontiers. Its methods of raising direct taxes and large conscript armies as well as harnessing ecclesiastical resources were conspicuously more effective than those in force in any of the other continental states. The Imperial Gendarmerie, which by 1810 had more than 18,000 officers and men, became a model police force for other states to emulate on a smaller scale, a process which continued well after 1815.¹⁰ The *Code Napoléon* was in theory a monumental model of modern civil law, which formally confirmed the abolition of feudalism in all its forms in France during the Revolution, paid lip service to the principle of legal equality (among males at any rate) and recognized existing individual property rights following sales of the national lands (*biens nationaux*) in the 1790s. The *franc de germinal*, based on the bimetallic standard adopted in April 1803, one of Napoleon's most important and enduring financial reforms, had the potential to become a common currency across the whole Empire. Conceivably, then, the Napoleonic system had some of the basic technical apparatus required to 'integrate' an expanded western European state.

The Empirical Case against 'Integration'

That façade of enlightened reform masked a different reality, however, as three fundamental contradictions undermined 'integration'. First, the 'Grand Empire' was forged by French military might and entirely on French terms.

The dynamic of conquest was centrifugal – from France outwards, and then further outwards. Napoleon had inherited from the Revolutionary Wars the so-called ‘natural frontiers’ of France (the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Rhine), and he then extended them so far that, in strictly national terms, they eventually seemed distinctly ‘unnatural’. As a power bloc, his ‘Grand Empire’ never naturalized any concept of multinational reciprocity, that is of a genuinely ‘European’ identity distinct from an enlarged ‘French’ identity, and its survival always depended on the continuing superiority of French arms. It took eight years or more to build, yet it fell apart in rather less than one, as Napoleon’s forces drained away in the campaigns of 1813–14. The Peninsular War had been one running sore since 1808, but his disastrous Russian campaign of 1812 marked the critical turning point. One wonders what vital interests or what ‘natural frontiers’ of France really *had* to be defended in Moscow. As the frontiers of the ‘Grand Empire’ receded, and then as Napoleon’s final power base was driven back by the – for once united – Allied Coalition into the boundaries of ‘old France’ early in 1814, any semblance of European ‘integration’ collapsed in the wake of his retreating armies. It fell to the ultimately victorious Allies at the Vienna Congress of 1814–15 to devise a new international order in Europe, not of ‘integration’ but of ‘concert’ among the great powers. That, however, is another story beyond the scope of this chapter.

The second basic factor which vitiated any project of European ‘integration’ Napoleon may have had was his increasing resort to a spoils system in the subject states from 1806 to 1807. This diverted him from the reforming and ‘modernizing’ vision of European reconstruction he had so confidently trumpeted in the early years of the Empire. It was to become an important function of what is sometimes called his ‘politics of grandeur’, a growing desire to embellish his imperial pretensions with dynastic and social lustre. The very finality of the Revolutionary sales of the national lands, as confirmed by the Civil Code, meant that Napoleon had no ready stock of disposable state lands in France itself with which to endow his new imperial nobility. The titles of prince and duke were the first to appear, from 1806/07, and the system of honours was then launched on a much grander scale by the March decrees of 1808 which inaugurated the titles of count, baron and chevalier of the Empire. The total number of these imperial nobles may eventually have reached 3600, and, crucially, the resources for their material endowment from 1806/07 were found in the conquered territories of the ‘Grand Empire’, most notably Italy, Germany and Poland.

In theory, the endowments took the form of land-rents, in effect cash, or what in earlier works I have called a kind of ‘*Napoleongeld*’, drawn from confiscated domain lands of the feudal lords and, in Poland, from the nationalized royal domain lands.¹¹ These land-gifts were called *dotations* and in due course were extended widely beyond the members of the imperial family

and imperial nobility to include many other lesser beneficiaries, among whom faithful military officers were the most numerous. As a group, the recipients of these imperial land-gifts were known officially as *donataires*, and by 1814, there were nearly 6000 of them, who together enjoyed *dotations* with a notional total value of some 30 million francs a year. But by then, as the French military grip on the lands of the *Napoleongeld* weakened during the campaigns of 1813–14, the whole system of endowments was rapidly disintegrating, and many of these confiscated estates were to be restored to their former owners at the final peace settlement of 1815.

Prima facie, there is not much evidence of European ‘integration’ at work here, and the way Napoleon’s system of land-gifts operated further undermined such presumptive aims. Legal ploys were used to convert revenues originally raised from feudal dues in the subject states into legitimate ‘defeudalized’ income in France itself, since the *donataires* themselves did not reside on the foreign lands from which their *dotations* derived. Another much blunter instrument for cash exactions in the subject states was the *Domaine extraordinaire*, created in January 1810. This was a special chest into which the accumulated spoils of war – sales of booty, confiscated land revenues, irregular levies from dependent treasuries and punitive war indemnities imposed on defeated enemies – were siphoned off for Napoleon’s own use. It enforced a form of despoliation far removed from any model of French ‘modernity’. Indeed, the late Michel Bruguière once commented on ‘the profoundly archaic character of this institution [*Domaine extraordinaire*], which in its nature and its profits reflected only the right of conquest of the Emperor, “exercising the right of peace and of war”’.¹²

It appears, furthermore, that the imperial *dotations* and exactions for the *Domaine extraordinaire* seriously hampered the implementation of the *Code Napoléon* in many of the subject states of the ‘Grand Empire’. The classic example of this was the satellite Kingdom of Westphalia, created in July 1807, and nominally ruled by Napoleon’s youngest brother Jérôme. As Helmut Berding showed in his definitive account 40 years ago, the new ‘model’ Constitution adopted in November 1807 was meant to abolish all feudal revenues in the kingdom.¹³ In practice, however, the extraction of *dotations* worked against that much vaunted aim. Westphalia was to become the most lucrative of all the lands of the ‘*Napoleongeld*’, and the enforcement of the *Code Napoléon* was largely ineffectual there. In fact, its application was also patchy in most of the other states of the Confederation of the Rhine, which Napoleon had formed in July 1806. In her pioneering research, Elisabeth Fehrenbach firmly concluded that on the whole the states of the Confederation were not naturally receptive to the Code.¹⁴ This was in stark contrast to the directly annexed departments of the Rhenish left bank, where the Code was effectively implemented, along with the reformed procedures for jury service, and then actually retained under Prussian rule after 1815 in preference to the *Allgemeines Landrecht* of 1794.¹⁵ In the subject and

allied states of the Rhenish Confederation, even where it was enacted *de jure*, its terms were widely evaded and feudal practices continued *de facto*.

The overall result was that, east of the Rhine, shortness of time compounded with local resistance to weaken the 'modernizing' thrust of the *Code Napoléon* so that 'uniformity' and 'integration' with French law foundered in their turn. *Mutatis mutandis*, there were similar effects in the satellite Kingdom of Naples, as John Davis has shown in several works, thus confirming some of the earlier findings of Pasquale Villani in the lands of the *Mezzogiorno*.¹⁶ There the social conservatism of both the old and the new agrarian elites long survived the French *decennio*.¹⁷ In these and other subject states of the 'Grand Empire' in Germany and Italy, it thus appears that the early reforming zeal of the French administrators and jurists was frustrated and the process of 'modernization' and 'defeudalization' retarded.¹⁸

Effects of the Continental Blockade on European 'Integration'

I have left till last perhaps the strongest of all arguments against the 'integration' thesis and so shall finish where I began – with Napoleon's economic record in Europe. This is a much bigger issue than his Blockade against British trade alone, as the term 'Continental System' now usually covers a much wider range of related economic policies. These include Napoleon's cash exactions of various kinds, his requisitioning and billeting for military purposes, and all the other costs of maintaining his Grand Army in the 'Grand Empire'. The cumulative effects of such policies hardly encouraged economic 'integration' in the subject territories or with former enemy states; again, one thinks rather of exploitation and despoliation.

Yet even if the economic focus is confined to the Continental Blockade itself, one struggles to see how its aims and effects could seriously be thought conducive to European 'integration'. Hypothetically, at least, there were alternatives to that policy as actually applied. Napoleon *might* have encouraged the formation of a multinational common market, a genuine *Zollverein*, across all the lands of his 'Grand Empire'. He *might* have offered all his Italian, German, Iberian, Swiss, Dutch, Polish and other foreign subjects real incentives to cut their commercial ties with Britain by allowing them to trade unhindered in the large imperial home market. In fact, he did none of those things, but quite the opposite. His crude mercantilist beliefs convinced him that national interests could be served only through strict protectionist policies. As he once asserted bluntly in a letter of 23 August 1810 to Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy, his 'principle' to be followed in dealing with conflicting national interests was simple: 'France first' (*la France avant tout*).¹⁹ Now it must be acknowledged here that as the official French Empire expanded, so some of its annexed foreign subjects gained economic benefits from membership of its growing home market. Those economic advantages were most conspicuous in Belgium (chiefly in

the production of cottons, iron and coal) and on the German left bank of the Rhine (in textiles and metallurgy) – both relatively advanced industrial regions at that time.

Such gains, however, were offset by the losses suffered by many manufacturers and merchants in the subject states beyond the imperial customs frontiers. The Kingdom of Italy, for instance, was declared a sort of ‘reserved market’ (*marché réservé*) for whole categories of imperial textile goods by Napoleon’s decrees of 10 June 1806 and 10 October 1810, and by the imposed preferential trade treaty of 20 June 1808. Such one-sided interventions cut across established trade routes within the Italian peninsula itself and also disrupted those between northern Italy and Switzerland (hitherto a vigorous industrial rival) and between Switzerland and the Rhine, along with its vast hinterland into central Germany and Poland. Merchants on the North Sea and Baltic were trapped between the pressure from France on land to enforce the Blockade and the demand of the British at sea to maintain their traditional commercial exchanges.

In the face of such obstacles to legitimate trade, smuggling and other fraudulent practices were rife across Napoleonic Europe, not least in the French Empire itself, aided by the corruption of many *douaniers* and some military officers. Merchants, shippers and bankers in Europe and across the Atlantic showed great ingenuity and guile in devising new strategies to evade the Continental Blockade and the counteroffensive of the British naval blockades, as important recent works by Silvia Marzagalli (among others) have amply demonstrated.²⁰ They changed the destinations, agents and methods of their illicit trade as circumstances demanded, across maritime and land borders alike. Even the customs crackdown or *terreur douanière* between 1810 and 1812 in the North Sea ports, following the harsh Fontainebleau Decree of 18 October 1810, ended with Napoleon’s later military reverses. By then, moreover, he had already moderated the Blockade elsewhere in the Empire by the Trianon Tariff of 5 August 1810, which permitted the import of many formerly prohibited goods but subjected them to exorbitant duties. The blatant fiscal motives behind the tariff had also been anticipated in his Saint-Cloud Decree of 3 July 1810, under which special licences for trade with the enemy were increasingly extended to ports in ‘old France’, notwithstanding the official Blockade.

Taken as a whole, Napoleon’s economic record was decidedly mixed and fell well short of European ‘integration’. The imperial cotton and silk industries generally did well under his rule in spite of major setbacks during the economic crisis of 1810–11. Cottons were more prone to sharp fluctuations, but overall production nevertheless increased significantly, partly due to important technological advances. The manufacturers of silkstuffs, for their part, enjoyed preferential export markets and valuable commissions from the imperial court. So, too, the woollen and iron industries both benefited from fairly buoyant markets, thanks not least to military orders. Among the

new industries, chemicals (especially dyestuffs and artificial soda) made the most headway, and foundations were laid for the later prosperity of sugar beet. But other economic sectors such as linens, ship-building and all its feeder industries and the once lucrative trade in colonial goods (including re-exports) generally declined. Inland entrepôt towns like Strasbourg took advantage of the reorientation of trade routes during the Continental Blockade; yet for the maritime ports and their dependent industries, that episode, and more particularly the period from 1808, marked the climacteric of a longer time of troubles dating from the French declaration of war on Britain in February 1793. It was in those later years that the crucial earlier lifeline of the carrying trade by neutral (especially American) ships became much more precarious, caught as it was between the conflicting requirements imposed by the British orders in council of January and November 1807 and by Napoleon's Milan Decrees of 23 November and 17 December that same year.

Beyond the imperial frontiers, the final economic balance sheet was on the whole negative. By ruthlessly pursuing the interests of imperial agriculture, industry and trade, Napoleon actually induced disintegration in many competing economies. If the cotton industries of Saxony, which flourished during the Blockade, were one notable exception here, then the results in most other subject states were rather different. In the grand duchy of Berg just across the Rhine, for instance, the once highly successful cotton and iron industries went into decline, most sharply from 1810 onwards. The effects of French agricultural protectionism were eventually even more damaging and more widespread. In the closing years of the Empire there was a creeping depression in agricultural prices in several subject states along the Baltic and the Mediterranean due to the official ban on trade with Britain at a time when France could not absorb their surpluses. This weakened their purchasing power and, in turn, paradoxically reduced their demand for imperial exports.

Conclusion

The ultimate failure of Napoleon's Blockade, both as a war machine and as a continental market design, seems clear. The aim of shutting out and replacing British goods in markets under French control was, at best, only partly achieved. The Blockade at times troubled but never sank the pound sterling, and it manifestly did not reduce Britain's capacity to finance foreign coalitions against Napoleon or force it to sue for peace out of economic exhaustion. The volume of French foreign trade in the years between 1812 and 1814 was no more than half the annual average recorded for trade for the years 1784 to 1788.²¹ Moreover its official values in the years immediately preceding the Revolution of 1789 were not again attained until the mid-1820s.²² By 1815 Britain's primacy over France as a naval power, as an

industrial and commercial competitor in world markets, as a technological innovator and as a global financial centre was greater than it had been at the start of those maritime wars.²³

Finally, as for the notion of Napoleon's 'integration of Europe', I would conclude that it is anachronistic and simplistic. Napoleon certainly brought the official apparatus of a uniform administrative and legal system to a much wider area of continental Europe than had been achieved for many centuries, perhaps even since the Roman Empire. It left an important institutional legacy of 'modernization' and state-building in those parts of conquered Europe that proved most receptive to French rule. But elsewhere, it was an alien plant rather than a natural outgrowth among the subject peoples, and often it was too short-lived to put down lasting roots. In short, the hard empirical case for 'integration' remains to be proved.

Notes

1. François Crouzet, 'Wars, Blockade, and Economic Change in Europe, 1792–1815', *The Journal of Economic History* 24 (1964): 586–7.
2. Louis Bergeron, *France under Napoleon*, trans. R.R. Palmer (Princeton, 1981), 173.
3. Eli F. Heckscher, *The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation*, trans. C.S. Fearenside (Oxford, 1922).
4. François Crouzet, *L'Économie britannique et le blocus continental (1806–1813)*, 2 vols (Paris, 1958; 2nd edn, Paris, 1987).
5. Both are published in the *Mémoires diplomatiques de Montgaillard (1805–1819)*, ed. C. de Lacroix (Paris, 1896).
6. Pieter Geyl, *Napoleon: Voor en tegen in de Franse geschiedschrijving* (Utrecht, 1946); *Napoleon: For and Against*, trans. O. Renier (1st Eng. edn, London, 1949).
7. Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London, 1991).
8. See especially Geoffrey Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire* (2nd revised edn, Basingstoke, 2003); and idem, 'The Nature of Napoleonic Imperialism', in *Napoleon and Europe*, ed. Philip G. Dwyer (Harlow, 2001), 97–117.
9. See for example Michael Broers, *Europe under Napoleon 1799–1815* (London, 1996), especially ch. 3; and idem, 'Napoleon, Charlemagne, and Lotharingia: Acculturation and the Boundaries of Napoleonic Europe', *The Historical Journal* 44 (2001): 137, 140–1.
10. Clive Emsley, *Gendarmes and the State in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1999).
11. Ellis, 'Napoleonic Imperialism', 112; and *Napoleonic Empire* (2nd edn), 105.
12. Michel Bruguère, 'Domaine Extraordinaire', in *Dictionnaire Napoléon*, under the direction of Jean Tulard (new revised and enlarged edn, Paris, 1989), 608.
13. Helmut Berding, *Napoleonische Herrschafts- und Gesellschaftspolitik im Königreich Westfalen 1807–1813* (Göttingen, 1973). He gives a good digest of his main findings in 'Le Royaume de Westphalie, Etat-modèle', *Francia: Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 10 (1982): 345–58.
14. Notably Elisabeth Fehrenbach, *Der Kampf um die Einführung des Code Napoléon in den Rheinbundstaaten* (Wiesbaden, 1973); and her more detailed study, *Traditionale Gesellschaft und revolutionäres Recht: Die Einführung des Code Napoléon in den Rheinbundstaaten* (Göttingen, 1974).

15. Michael Rowe, 'Between Empire and Home Town: Napoleonic Rule on the Rhine, 1799–1814', *The Historical Journal* 42 (1999): 643–74; and idem, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780–1830* (Cambridge, 2003), especially ch. 9.
16. For example, John A. Davis, 'The Napoleonic Era in Southern Italy: An Ambiguous Legacy?', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1993): 133–48.
17. Pasquale Villani, *Mezzogiorno tra riforme e rivoluzione* (Bari, 1962); and idem, *La vendita dei beni dello Stato nel regno di Napoli (1806–1815)* (Milan, 1964).
18. See especially Christof Dipper et al. (eds), *Napoleonische Herrschaft in Deutschland und Italien – Verwaltung und Justiz* (Berlin, 1995), an important collection of conference papers on different areas of Napoleonic Germany and Italy.
19. Napoleon I, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier publiée par ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III*, 32 vols (Paris, 1858–69), vol. 21, 70.
20. More particularly Silvia Marzagalli, *'Les boulevards de la fraude': le négoce maritime et le Blocus continental, 1806–1813: Bordeaux, Hambourg, Livourne* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1999).
21. Jean-Charles Asselain, *Histoire économique de la France du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, 2 vols (Paris, 1984), vol. 1, 122.
22. See for instance the table of trade figures reproduced in Geoffrey Ellis, *Napoleon's Continental Blockade: The Case of Alsace* (Oxford, 1981), appendix g, 285–6.
23. This central theme is emphasized in several of the articles in François Crouzet's collected volume, *De la supériorité de l'Angleterre sur la France: L'Économique et l'Imaginaire XVIIIe–XXe siècles* (Paris, 1985).

2

French Representations of the Continental Blockade: Three Kinds of Narratives for and against

Annie Jourdan

‘Let us destroy England, Europe will be at our feet!’
– Napoleon to Talleyrand, October 1808¹

To better understand how the Continental Blockade has been interpreted in France, it is useful to study at least three kinds of historical narratives.² First, there are the memoirs of contemporary witnesses and Napoleon’s remarks on the topic. Second, there are the writings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians, and third, the studies of legal scholars, who are more interested in the law of nations, the rights of the so-called neutrals and maritime law. These sources have different perceptions and goals. The first want to testify in person about the times they lived through and their own part within them. This does not mean, of course, that they do not take sides or seek to justify their actions. In contrast, historians seek to depict and understand the history of the past, drawing conclusions on the consequences of events and individual decisions. Here it bears noting that French historiography from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is tinged with a kind of nationalism, or at least a patriotism, which leads the authors to attribute the responsibility for war to others – to Britain mostly – and not solely to Napoleon.³ This tendency is less perceptible with the legal scholars, eager to employ comparative analysis in the legal history of Europe. These diverse explanations are indispensable if we are to place the Napoleonic Continental Blockade in the context of changing times.

In this chapter, some of these texts will be treated chronologically, and each kind of text will be approached separately so that developments and variations in interpretation can be better understood. We also have to be aware that these authors would have read their predecessors on the subject and that their own interpretations tend to take sides for or against those predecessors. All, however, ask similar questions about means and ends, causes and consequences, successes and failures, the morality or immorality of the Blockade and its consequences, and the errors committed by one side or the other. What is perhaps most significant is that very few Frenchmen

asked themselves whether the Blockade was the only or the best solution for France between 1806 and 1813.

Contemporary Memoirs

During his reign and when in exile in Saint Helena, Napoleon spent his time justifying the Blockade and his decisions about it. He was prone to accuse the British government of having been responsible for it and for its dramatic consequences in Europe. In contrast with the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter from a letter he wrote to Talleyrand, Napoleon wrote in 1808 to his brother Louis, king of Holland at the time, that the Continental System was in no sense living proof of his ambition – as his enemies were saying – but rather, that it was intended to force Britain to surrender. He further added that he wanted to reduce British power and halt the economic monopoly it imposed on other nations. His sole ambition, he claimed, was to destroy British power and give back to the continent what it had lost. In 1811 Napoleon wrote to Bernadotte, by this time king of Sweden, telling him that he must join the coalition against England since Sweden had far more to lose from a British blockade than from France. Bernadotte was not convinced. Finally, on Saint Helena, the ex-emperor told his companions that he was not his own master and that he did not follow a rigid system; rather, he ‘tried to bend his system to the unforeseen structure of events’. Or so he said.⁴ As on other occasions, it must be clear that Napoleon adapted his language to his audience and he alternated between explaining his foreign policy as an act of his own will and ambition, and as a necessity, imposed on him from outside. Both explanations would become a source of inspiration for later historians.

The Blockade was such a dominant issue at the time that, even years later, those who sided with Napoleon felt obliged to address it. The Finance Minister, Nicolas François Mollien, devoted several pages of his memoirs to analysing the harsh war between Napoleon and Britain. To succeed and exclude England from trade with the continent, he wrote, Napoleon had to exert a huge influence across Europe, from ‘Bayonne to St-Petersburg; from the harbour of Cette to the mouth of the Cataro’.⁵ From the moment the decree was issued, Napoleon’s policy was exclusively focused on this plan. Any ruler who did not cooperate with the Blockade could lose his kingdom or states, like the Pope, who was ordered to leave Rome because ‘some English ships had landed in Civitavecchia’. The same fate was reserved for Louis Bonaparte, whose kingdom Napoleon abolished because he protected his Dutch subjects and tolerated contraband. According to Mollien, Napoleon’s political dictatorship became progressively commercial with, as its sole objective, the destruction of the only people who dared to resist him.⁶ But this dictatorship also had a global impact. Mollien is careful not to put all the blame for this on Napoleon. He is aware of the responsibility

of England which, he writes, sought to make the whole of Europe dependent on it for American goods and for colonial spices from the West and East Indies. Mollien is also one of the first to notice that the Blockade enjoyed some early success and that in its first months the exchange rate for the pound fell by around 30 per cent.⁷ But thereafter, great dissatisfaction arose among European and international merchants because of the disruption to international trade.

In the beginning, it is true the French were seduced by the advantages that the Blockade seemed to offer. It seemed that French trade and industry would benefit, since it provided stimulation for innovation and invention. France would be compelled to produce what it could no longer import. It is widely accepted that some new products were indeed made in France, such as beet sugar, pastel and cotton wool. But Napoleon lost this advantage after 1810 when he decided to issue import and export licences and introduce new taxes on national and international goods. According to Mollien, by doing so Napoleon created two monopolies instead of one and increased the French commercial deficit – as well as disturbed the balance of European exchange. European cotton was so highly taxed that it could no longer compete with English cotton, although that had been the initial intention. With the licences, only some privileged merchants were able to trade, whereas the majority were not. And these privileged men were French and not their European allies.

A minority of French merchants grew rich. Mollien criticizes the injustice of the implementation of the Blockade, for it was not only merchants and manufacturers who suffered from the situation. Above all it was the population at large. All prices increased: sugar and coffee by 400 per cent and cotton clothes and colours by 100 per cent.⁸ But Napoleon had no intention of withdrawing or altering his policy since he believed that England suffered more, and he had to continue it if he wanted to force it to surrender. What he knew of the British situation – the decreasing exchange value, the scarcity of key supplies and popular uprisings between 1811 and 1812 – seemed to confirm his perceptions. Napoleon also had reason to be satisfied with his new taxation and licence systems which yielded the state new sources of income.⁹ Conversely, merchants and manufacturers lamented the increasing cost of raw materials and complained of the difficulty of selling at excessive prices.¹⁰ They asked for help and Napoleon agreed to help at least some of them.¹¹ As a consequence, part of the money from licences and taxation went to merchants and manufacturers rather than reinvesting it in the economy generally or on military supplies.

This was one of a number of paradoxes that Mollien rightly pointed out. Napoleon helped French merchants with significant amounts of money and, in the long run, this could affect the liquidity of the state itself. After his fall, for instance, around nine of the 18 million francs he borrowed remained unpaid. With the licences and increased taxation, prices became

so expensive that workshops and factories had to close their doors. The spiral was evident. Mollien drew the conclusion that Napoleon led an old regime war against England which in turn waged a modern one against the Empire, and he noted that 'sometimes and in some cases, anachronism is fatal'.¹² However much Napoleon's customs officers tracked down European smugglers, England remained master of the seas and had still the opportunity to buy cheap raw materials. British merchants started to open new markets, in America for instance, and they still had access to some parts of Europe, where goods could be smuggled onto the continent.¹³ The licence system itself was hardly beneficial, since it introduced arbitrary and contradictory measures. Above all, it allowed England to get her breath back. Moreover, it was not intended to benefit Napoleon's allies and vassal states; rather it benefitted France exclusively.¹⁴ This huge plan was doomed to failure, believed Mollien, precisely because it was too large and cumbersome.

Another Napoleonic public servant, Etienne-Denis Pasquier, agreed with Mollien. Pasquier, however, analysed the reciprocal responsibilities of France and Britain and emphasized the fact that England had been the first to introduce a blockade. Consequently, he insisted that the Continental System was not worse than the English initiative. But Pasquier admitted that England possessed far more assets. With its navy, Britain could initiate and pursue a blockade by itself, whereas Napoleon needed all the powers of continental Europe to support him.¹⁵ If a single nation refused to support his system, it was bound to fail. The best examples include Holland and Russia, though the Hanseatic cities also refused to faithfully follow Napoleonic rules. Like Mollien, Pasquier was not enthusiastic about the licence system. He disapproved of it because in his eyes it was nothing more than 'organized contraband'. But more than his colleague, he emphasized the great achievements resulting from the innovations stimulated by the Blockade, such as beet sugar.¹⁶ He also maintained that the extension of the war to the Spanish Peninsula represented a further unintended consequence of the Blockade. Thus, Pasquier and Mollien try to explain the subsequent history of the Napoleonic Empire in the light of mistakes that had begun with the Berlin Decree of 1806. Their vision of the Empire, based on hindsight, was largely determined by the vagaries of the Continental Blockade.

The former Minister of Police, Anne-Jean-Marie-René Savary, Duke of Rovigo, more or less shared their opinion. Moreover, he contested contemporary interpretations, speaking of an 'incredible ambition to extend and to enlarge an empire which was already too far-flung'.¹⁷ According to him, such measures as the Blockade were 'temporary' and intended to restrain British power and convince the enemies of France to side with Napoleon. Indeed, Savary cited the banker Jacques Laffitte in his memoirs who had made a strong impression on him. During the Empire, Laffitte told him that a blockade was a grand idea, but he was sceptical about its execution. And yet if such a policy could not be executed, then 'a great idea is nothing more

than an idealistic fancy'. He wished to tell Napoleon that the Blockade as it was conceived throttled not England, but the continent, since 'it is the continent which cannot put a vessel to sea'. If British ships sailed across the world and exerted a worldwide monopoly, the European continent experienced blockade and exclusion from global commerce. Laffitte went on to ask, 'is the continent worth the other parts of the world?' He worried about this new monopoly and its consequences for French merchants and consumers, but also about the dissatisfaction of the allied powers, for which 'everything is sacrificed without a chance to gain any advantage'. Russia, for instance, was greatly dependent on English factories. Since the Blockade, its exchange rate had fallen dangerously. Prior to 1806, the rouble had been worth three francs, and during the Blockade it was only 20 sols.

There was more. The licence system, Laffitte thought, harmed the effectiveness of the Blockade in two ways at least: it reintroduced a kind of privilege and 'it damaged the respectability of trade with the spread of the fraud and corruption that is inseparable from this system'.¹⁸ Furthermore, it so annoyed the allied powers that they would have to be allowed to introduce a licence system of their own. But if that happened, said Lafitte, the Napoleonic Blockade would become an illusion. Another reason for failure lie in the state of English credit which was far stronger than the French. As he explained, 'to get credit, England only had to work with the government, whereas France would lose its own, if she did'.¹⁹ According to the French banker, 'England was a great warehouse of which the ministers were the managers, and the laws were the contract that the government itself would have no right to break'. Conversely in imperial France, the council of state 'violates the power of the courts and nothing useful is done, because nothing is really secure'. This analysis was bold. Though it did not seem to enrage Napoleon, he did not follow the banker's advice. He simply continued with his system which, in turn, caused him to annex more and more new territories.

This is why Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord interpreted the Continental System as absolute evidence of Napoleon's desire for universal domination. In his memoirs, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs insists on revisiting treaties in which he had himself played an important role to underscore the kind of policy he wanted to avoid. Napoleon, he said, had unscrambled governments just to create new ones, which were in their turn overthrown. Talleyrand emphasized the arbitrary nature of Napoleon's policy in order to highlight his own talents. For him, everything had to be explained by the insatiable ambition of the French emperor. The Continental Blockade was not considered interesting or important enough to play a role in his memoirs. So Talleyrand did not take the trouble to justify the Continental System. Napoleon himself would tell his companions at Saint Helena that few people understood what he was doing.²⁰ That was true. Nobody on the continent had a proper understanding of what he was

striving for. The only thing that they understood was that they were getting poorer and poorer, and they could not get the supplies they needed.²¹

Gérard de Rayneval, a diplomat and former servant of Vergennes, was more qualified to comment, and in 1811 he published a book on British policy that demonstrated, drawing on plenty of quotations and references, how nations hid their true motives and interests under the veil of the law. Quoting some English legal scholars from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Rayneval argued that the English actually nurtured the law of the strongest and denied other countries freedom of the seas.²² He also hoped that there would be a revolution to change this policy so that every people would be free to navigate when and where they wished. He thought at the time that Napoleon would be able to attain this objective and the emperor, thanks to his wisdom and authority, could resolve the fate of the continent. This task entailed supporting a maritime code based on just and stable rules that would establish the freedom of the seas and facilitate commercial exchange between all the nations of the world.²³ What Rayneval overlooked, however, is that even though Napoleon had enforced such a policy, England had never agreed to it. His analysis demonstrated that England was exerting an intolerable dictatorship on the seas or, in other terms, that 'the seas belong to anyone who is powerful enough to exclude the others'.²⁴ The only power in a position to do so was Britain.

Historians' Narratives

The first to write a history of the Napoleonic era were his companions on Saint Helena, the 'evangelists'.²⁵ They were followed by the memorialists we have just considered. Then it became the turn of the historians who claimed to be objective and to ground their analyses on archival sources. One of the most important was Adolph Thiers, who admired the genius of Bonaparte, the General of the Republic, yet he had more problems with Napoleon, the emperor. For him, the general was genial, but the emperor was too ambitious.²⁶ Certainly, Thiers was aware of the problems created by the Blockade, but he would have preferred that Napoleon not invoke a blockade in order to annex more and more new territories. Like several historians and philosophers of the nineteenth century, Thiers attached importance to providence and fate in Napoleon's destiny. He interpreted the difficult victories of Ella, Bayle and Esslingen as a warning sign – more or less as Balzac symbolized in the 'red man' from *Le Médecin de campagne*, whose sudden appearance presaged the disaster to come. Napoleon, he believed, should have limited his ambition to the Alps, the Rhine and the Pyrenees – and thus to the natural limits of France. Within these limits, the French Empire would have been 'admirable' enough.²⁷

In his analysis, Thiers is inclined to confuse the political consequences of the Blockade with the hegemonic ambitions of Napoleon. He also

understands, however, that Napoleon responded to the fictive English blockade with a general blockade of the British Isles, and he condemned the British for having claimed 'extraordinary sovereignty over the seas'. Napoleon had to retaliate and to attack his enemy to force Britain to sue for peace: 'One cannot but excuse what he did to reach his ends. One can even be convinced that his fundamental mistake was not to persevere enough in his views'.²⁸ He is referring here to the licence system, which openly contradicted Napoleon's anti-British policy. Tsar Alexander was indeed right, thought Thiers, when he observed that Napoleon ruined his subjects as he himself grew richer and richer. Moreover, this system encouraged corruption on an immense scale.

It was true that Napoleon achieved great results as his customs officers harassed smugglers and compelled England to suffer trade dislocation. But it was not only England that suffered. The other European powers, among them friends and vassal states, faced great distress, and that was not the original purpose of the Blockade. As a consequence, Spain was bankrupt, Austria had great problems and Russia was displeased and impoverished. Despite the huge resources mobilized by Napoleon, he failed to resolve 'the great European question'.²⁹ According to Thiers, this was not due to any failure of military genius, but to Napoleon's politics. For 'it was not the soldier who succumbed ... it was the politician who had undertaken something impossible since he wanted to win from the invincible nature of things'. In other words, 'this wise legislator, this expert administrator, this great captain, was ... a very bad politician, because victorious, he lost his reason, and following a series of triumphs he went on to lose everything'.³⁰ This interpretation constitutes the basis of nineteenth-century French historiography and emphasizes the personal ambition of the Emperor as inseparable from the ultimate fate of the Empire. In this interpretation, the implementation of the Blockade is less important than the Emperor's ambition. The final *failure is due to Napoleon's mistakes*, as he was incapable of moderating his thirst for power.

Albert Sorel provides another important contribution to the history of the First Empire and Europe. Though less positive in his approach than Thiers, he is more Franco-centric.³¹ He wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century, not long after the French defeat against Prussia in 1870. This defeat coincided with an increasing wave of nationalism. Sorel's peculiarity is that he sees Napoleon as the heir of the French Convention – and thus of the Revolution – which on foreign matters would have implemented the traditional policy of Richelieu and Louis XIV, the pursuit of the natural frontiers. That means the borders of ancient Gaul as it had been described by Cæsar. The Directory, he believed, would have carried out a similar kind of policy 'but in an exaggerated and a distorted way', whereas Napoleon did it with 'order, method, and harmony'. According to Sorel, France required such a policy from Napoleon: 'this was the price of his rule'.³² Had he not expanded

French influence in this way, he would have lost his supporters, and thus his empire. This argument is well adapted to the context of the times in which he wrote, but it would also be employed by later Bonapartist historians to explain imperial conquests. Be that as it may, Sorel had some difficulty in linking the Continental Blockade to Napoleonic hegemony. Significantly, in volume six, he does not link them as early historians, whereas in the following volume he reverses this position.³³

According to Sorel, Napoleon conceived of a Continental Blockade from 1802 with 'French supremacy on the continent' as its objective. But he implemented this policy only in 1803 with the resumption of the war and with 'the return to the ambitious policy of the Committee of Public Safety', as he pursued a kind of total war 'that was already the blockade'.³⁴ However, the term 'blockade' would only be defined in 1805, when Napoleon was crowned king in Italy, annexed Genoa and reorganized the Kingdom of Etruria. That was the very beginning of the 'Great Empire'.³⁵ But what was the nature of the link between the Great Empire and the Continental Blockade? The answer comes in volume seven: 'the blockade would have been a warlike initiative, transformed into a political system' and wedded to French hegemony. This blockade was a response to English policies directed against France and sought to create 'the coalition of the continent against Great-Britain'.³⁶ Sorel described a Great Empire that had taken shape based on the necessity to constrain England and make peace on French terms. Only then did Napoleon decide to 'conquer the sea *via* the power of the land'.³⁷ But to be able to do so, he had to carry on fighting at a time when France's independence was no longer threatened.

This hyperbolic enterprise – the term is taken from Sorel – was doomed to failure, as it was far too ambitious. In Sorel's narrative, moreover, Napoleon was not a free agent. He was the instrument of a causality which transcended him: the necessity of reaching the natural limits of France and of destroying England's expanding hegemony. Thiers had a better feeling for historical interactions. In his view, the consequences of the Blockade were certainly important, but Napoleon's ambition played no less a role.

So should the Blockade be explained as necessity due to circumstances – owing to a poisoned legacy – or as the thirst for power of an ambitious individual? These two explanations remain the most frequent in Napoleonic historiography and consequently in that of the Continental Blockade. Later and recent historians have not introduced any significantly different interpretations, but they have tried to qualify them. Georges Lefebvre, for instance, wrote that the success of the Blockade depended on the solidity of the Continental System before he concluded that England was saved not 'by the natural laws of liberal economy', but by the Russian campaign. Against Bonapartist historians who underlined the poisoned legacy of the French Revolution and the necessity of enforcing a belligerent policy, Lefebvre contested any kind of historical determinism and attributed Napoleon's

final defeat to his ambition.³⁸ A more recent historian, Jean Tulard, adopts the reverse point of view, inspired by Marcel Dunan – himself a contemporary and rival of Lefebvre. He insisted that the shift from the federative system, created by the French Revolution, to the dynastic one, created by Napoleon, generated a progressive evolution starting with the revolutionary search for natural boundaries, then led to the Blockade, and, finally, to the Great Empire. By emphasizing the revolutionary legacy, Tulard in some way reflects Sorel. He does so, too, when he sees the Blockade as inevitable.³⁹

More recently, Thierry Lentz has taken the same line when he depicts the changing course of Napoleon, who after 1806 exchanged his Carolingian dream for that of Caesar. More than earlier historians, however, Lentz noted the ineffectiveness of the measures taken between 1809 and 1810 to strengthen the Blockade since these measures in practice implied a slackening of the Blockade in favour of French trade. Indeed, as Napoleon annexed neighbouring countries to close all continental coasts and havens to England, he gave licences to a few privileged merchants, stimulated gold smuggling from England and introduced colonial spices – with a taxation rate of 50 per cent.⁴⁰ But he also favoured some imports – at a very high price – to the same England. Like earlier historians and, above all Bertrand de Jouvenel, who is regularly quoted on this issue, Lentz admits that the Blockade could only succeed if it was strict and lasting.⁴¹ Nor does he forget to emphasize that England was open to the world and could freely trade with the East and the West. No naval fleet could hinder it, except perhaps the American one. And yet Napoleon made the mistake of alienating the United States with ill-judged measures. Lentz is also one of the few historians to recognize that a very different policy was still conceivable in 1806, for example a peace treaty with England.⁴² These two last points are fundamental to a better understanding of Napoleon's politics. They echo in some way Thiers's opinions on his political mistakes.

Another contradiction about the Blockade is that, even as it tried to unify the continent, it replaced an English trade monopoly with a French one. Moreover, French prices were higher and her goods less aligned to the needs of the rest of Europe.⁴³ As these new interpretations implicitly suggest, recent historians have benefitted greatly from François Crouzet's study on the British economy and the Continental Blockade. They introduce an economic dimension to their studies and focus on the political consequences of economic warfare or, conversely, examine the economic (and financial) consequences of French *and* English expansionist politics.⁴⁴ Thus, the Blockade intertwined politics and the economy as well as two confrontational powers, equally greedy for domination. The one ruled the seas and the other the European continent. Both wished to have a piece of the other's pie. These studies highlighted the reciprocal responsibilities for economic warfare, those of Britain as well as France. Since Crouzet's work, these are not simply explained as a result of counterrevolutionary ideology, but as a

fuller understanding of fundamental economic warfare.⁴⁵ Contemporary witnesses were well aware of these challenges, and until around 1810 they resented Britain, perhaps even more than France, on account of British maritime and commercial supremacy.⁴⁶

Thanks to new approaches grounded in fields of inquiry neglected by traditional nationalist historians, scholars have formulated innovative interpretations and views – such as Crouzet’s – that shed light on the actual consequences of the Blockade on England, but conclude that its success in France depended on its long-term application.⁴⁷ Pierre Branda recently added a financial dimension to former studies on the Empire and was able to conclude that ‘before he was vanquished on the battlefield, Napoleon had been defeated by money’ – that is, by the fantastic ability of England to financially defy France.⁴⁸ Other publications by Sylvia Marzagalli and recently by Alan Forrest have illuminated the harsh realities of life in French and European trading ports and have shown how talented consumers and merchants succeeded to survive in a time of crisis.⁴⁹ Legal studies proposed other perspectives for consideration, just as interesting because they highlight the problem of the law of nations and international maritime legislation.

Legal Studies

During the Napoleonic Empire, there were also scholars who examined the Blockade as a legal problem. One of them – Rayneval already quoted – seems to have been the most important, since his work became a reference for many later scholars, possibly because it supported France’s case against England. Rayneval explored and revealed how the various actors justified their maritime and commercial policies. He referred to John Selden and his *Mare Clausum* (1635) before denouncing the underlying premise of the British lawyer, who would have denied the freedom of the seas in defence of his own country’s rights. Rayneval discovered the same arbitrary tendency in Jenkinson (1757). His maxims might be correct, thought Rayneval, but the inferences he drew from them were contradictory: did he not attempt to demonstrate that a nation at war had the right to enforce its own maritime laws on neutrals? He also exposed that, at certain times, not only Britain but also Holland and Spain had enforced their own self-interested policies in defiance of the law of nations: ‘this variation indicates that the clearest principles of the law of nations are almost always subordinated to those of politics’.⁵⁰ Jenkinson may have recognized this, but he also appeared to conclude that the seas ‘belonged to whichever nation was powerful enough to exclude other peoples from them’.⁵¹ With this reasoning, Rayneval justified Napoleon’s policy, despite his various abuses.

Legal scholars under the Restoration would be less tolerant. Gilibert de Merlhiac, for instance, incriminated Napoleon for his ‘infamous combinations’ and denied the viability of his plan to ruin England.⁵² He emphasized

the impossibility of that goal since, 'the prosperity and the labour of twenty nations had been sacrificed to serve the exclusive interest of France'. With his licences, understood as a 'contemptible trickery', Napoleon became richer and richer, but at the expense of French trade. According to Merliac, Napoleon was both 'too capricious and too greedy'. These faults would themselves have caused the Blockade to fail. England, however, was neither innocent nor a victim. If we can believe an author who spent much of the period in the Arab world, the entire Arab maritime fleet was captured by the British to the ruin of the Arab nations. Merliac believed that all nations, including China, Japan and India, would have suffered from the Blockade whenever their ships were put to sea.⁵³ They were alternately attacked by the French or by the British. No one was secure.

What these two legal scholars do not explicitly say, although they suggest it, is that arbitrary rules governed the seas, and that, unlike the war on land, maritime war did not reflect the progress of civilization. On land, they noted that armies respected the rights of civilians and their goods or properties. On land, 'war is launched against the state, and not against individuals'. And yet, at sea all these rules are turned upside down. Private goods are seized, individual sailors are ensnared and mistreated, and ships are captured and burnt. War at sea strove to destroy the naval forces of the enemy as well as its trade. As a consequence, it harmed such non-belligerents as consumers and producers. This would be contrary to international maritime law, which pronounced that the sea is free and open to all nations. It would contradict the rights of man – that is, the right to life and the freedom of property. Once these rights were violated, concluded the legal scholar Chevalley, one would return to the state of nature and to natural rights, where law was based on reciprocity. Based on this premise, Chevalley affirmed that Napoleon had the right to retaliate and to take reprisals against England. With his Berlin Decree, he simply transposed the laws that applied at sea to the European continent. Or to put it in Napoleon's own words, he answered 'the sea blockade with a continental blockade', which would be legitimate in positive law even though it was not entirely legal or legalized.⁵⁴ Napoleon himself was quite aware that 'these laws were unjust, illegal and prejudicial to the sovereignty of nations'. He would have preferred to 'have the liberal ideas of continental wars transferred to maritime war'.⁵⁵

The immediate context of war made this transfer impossible. War had in fact, become more intense and progressively extended to include the whole world, neutrals in particular. In fact, Britain would claim in 1807 that 'all the vessels of all nations would be denationalized', whereas in international law 'the flag covered goods and cargoes'.⁵⁶ With the publication of this Order in Council, the flag no longer covered goods. That meant that neutral vessels would be visited by British customs officers and would have to pay taxes before navigating further. 'All nations were becoming dependent on the British admiralty', complained a French writer.⁵⁷

The Milan Decree of 17 December 1807 responded to this Order. It proclaimed that the British Isles were in a state of blockade at sea and on land and announced that all neutrals who obeyed the British would be captured and declared lawful prizes. These rules would be abolished if England cancelled her 'barbaric system' and abided by the law of nations. It was not the first time that France had underlined the right to take reprisals. Thiers had already noticed that the situation was intolerable for those neutrals who navigated between two 'tyrannies'.⁵⁸ They had 'to go to London to get a licence, and then they were menaced with being caught by the French' for having taken one. The situation became inextricable and menaced neutrals – that is, non-belligerent peoples. In part, the Anglo–American war of 1812 resulted from the irritation provoked by these constraints – and, also in part, from the increased imprisonment of sailors in American vessels. In fact, the United States was the only state to take measures against both the French and British blockades. Their reaction provoked a new Napoleonic decree closing French ports to the Americans, even if it was revoked some months later. The contradictory Napoleonic measures did not encourage the United States to open hostilities against England. By a strange irony of fate, when they finally did so, Napoleon had fixed his attentions on Russia.

Later, when he was in Saint Helena, the French Emperor told his audience that he had had a lot of bad luck towards the end of his reign: 'At the end of my career, I was repetitively pursued by fate!'⁵⁹ In this precise case, one could agree; it was bad luck, indeed. But as several historians demonstrated, it was an ill fate brought about by the Continental Blockade, which could not succeed unless it was lasting and imposed inflexibly all around the continent. And that was the rub. As the former Minister of the Interior, Jean-Baptiste Nompère de Champagny, the duke of Cadore, wrote to the diplomat Armand de Caulaincourt, the duke of Vicence, 'the maritime war constrains the emperor to dominate the continent'.⁶⁰ This would explain the brutal war in Spain and the dramatic Russian campaign.

Obviously, it is difficult to know how Napoleon would have acted without the Blockade. After all, the first annexations took place in Piedmont from 1802 to 1803 during the Peace of Amiens. Napoleon was crowned king of Italy in 1805, and the first satellite kingdoms were created during the spring of 1806, that is, before the Blockade was enforced. Furthermore, no great economist, the French Emperor could not foresee the consequences of the Blockade for England. He was, above all, a pragmatic man, a 'handyman', who drew profit from circumstance, as he himself admitted. Be that as it may, historians and legal scholars will still disagree on this issue. Some will continue to affirm that the Napoleonic hegemony on the continent was an inherent part of the Emperor's character, whereas others will insist that the Great Empire was a logical consequence of the Blockade. They agree only on one point: they admit that Napoleon became the victim of his own system and that he committed incredible mistakes in pursuing it. One could also

add that the Continental System alienated a lot of European nations from France and from the ideals of the French Revolution, and it facilitated the formation of the fatal coalition that defeated Napoleon in 1814 and 1815.

Conclusion

French historians and legal scholars distinguish the Continental Blockade from the System of the same name. The first was an economic war and the other was its consequence; it was a continental coalition against Britain. Scholars elsewhere, however, depict the Blockade as a maritime war directed solely towards Britain, whereas the Continental System concerned all European nations and, hence, should be seen as independent of the Blockade. More interesting is what the legal studies reveal, namely that Britain's violations of the law of nations on the high seas inaugurated the Blockade.⁶¹ Indeed, the Blockade showed that the law of the sea was still in the process of being formulated, and the right of the strongest still dominated. Legal scholars also contend that maritime supremacy remained a global and long-lasting problem exemplified by serious shortcomings in maritime legislation. Since the Navigation Acts from 1651, 1660, 1662 and 1663, England had restricted maritime liberty and dominated the seas – at the expense of all other countries. The reprisals enforced by Napoleon introduced a similar despotic policy on the continent and across the world. He did so by imitating England and not by liberalizing the law of nations. Some scholars even spoke of this as *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye) which many judged to be intolerable, the more so since Napoleon's system of licence was seen as corrupt and arbitrary.

The licences were also at odds with the Blockade and destroyed some of its results. For the Continental Blockade to function well perseverance was needed, but also a degree of reciprocity or equality between the European nations concerned. Prussia, Austria, Russia, Spain and Rome should have been permitted to give licences too and to fix their own taxation on supplies. Yet they were not. And when they protested against the Napoleonic measures, the Emperor reacted with annexations or with war against the few who had the power to resist him.

Annexations and wars were Napoleon's answer to friends and allies who disobeyed him: so it was in 1808 in Spain; in 1809 in Rome; in 1810 in Holland, the Hanseatic cities and the Swiss Valais. In other words, Napoleon did not allow his allies to ignore his orders and to favour their own interests, although they were twice losers. They could no longer get raw materials or sell their goods, and they were obliged to buy French goods at very high prices. All these problems help explain the failure of the Continental Blockade and of Napoleonic policies. To be sure, most French historians had, and still have, some difficulty in accepting the ability of England to resist and the superiority of the British financial system. Under the Empire,

Laffitte was one of the few to stress this superiority. Afterwards, it is not until Crouzet and Branda that we get an economic analysis of this complicated issue. It was so complex that, at the time, few understood what Napoleon undertook. On Saint Helena, we find him still complaining about the reception his Blockade had received: 'My continental system! ... You laughed about it, I presume? I was the only one on the continent to believe in it; that is why I had to commit acts of violence everywhere'.⁶² Even in exile, Napoleon still did not call his policies into question. Was another 'system' inconceivable after all? That may be the case, as we suggested. But even in Saint Helena, Napoleon refused to contemplate any alternative.

Notes

1. A. Dansette, ed., *Napoléon Bonaparte: Vues politiques* (Paris, 1939), 313.
2. I do not include fictional literature here but restrict the discussion to memoirs and biographies.
3. The same is true, however, for all European historians of the nineteenth century.
4. E.A.D.M.J. de Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, ed. M. Dunan, 2 vols (Paris 1951), vol. 2, 543, 837–40 (to Louis, although the letter is perhaps not authentic), 829–30 (to Bernadotte).
5. F.N. Mollien, *Mémoires d'un ancien ministre du Trésor public*, 4 vols (Paris, 1837), vol. 3, 114–15.
6. *Ibid.*, 116.
7. *Ibid.*, 115.
8. *Ibid.*, 134–5.
9. Pierre Branda evaluates the customs benefits from 1811 to 1813 at 100 million francs. P. Branda, *1812: L'année de tous les défis* http://napoleon.org/fr/salle_lecture/article (July–September 2012).
10. Mollien, *Mémoires*, vol. 3, 275.
11. Mollien writes that Napoleon spent from 12 to 13 million francs on people in need in Amiens, Saint-Quentin, Rouen and Ghent, in *ibid.*, 306–12. But Chaptal, ex-Minister of the Interior, speaks of a total amount of 62 million. J.A. Chaptal, *Mes souvenirs sur Napoléon* (Paris, 2009), 123.
12. Mollien, *Mémoires*, vol. 3, 290.
13. Access to South America resulted from Napoleonic policies in Portugal and in Spain. Never before had this continent been open to English trade. The departure of the Portuguese monarchy to Brazil and the Spanish war stimulated this shift.
14. On Saint Helena, Napoleon admitted that this system was wrong, but he invoked the argument that Britain was the first to introduce licences, and that it was a temporary solution. The Continental System itself would have been a temporary measure. De Las Cases, *Mémorial*, vol. 1, 778. On Napoleon's mistakes see also B. de Jouvenel, *Napoléon et l'économie dirigée: Le blocus continental* (Paris, 1942), 416–17.
15. E.D. Pasquier, *Mémoires du chancelier Pasquier: Histoire de mon temps*, 6 vols (Paris, 1893–95), vol. 1, 290–7.
16. *Ibid.* 295–296. Chaptal, who otherwise is very negative on Napoleon, acknowledges that he did a lot for French industry. Chaptal, *Mes souvenirs*, 123.
17. A.J.M.R. Savary, *Mémoires du duc de Rovigo pour servir à l'histoire de l'empereur Napoléon*, 7 vols (Paris, 1828), vol. 5, 99–112.

18. *Ibid.*, 113–16.
19. *Ibid.*, 113–16. Laffitte valued English credit at 18 to 19 thousand million francs and the French one at 1200 to 1300 million. Furthermore, England was able to borrow money at far cheaper rates than France.
20. *Mémoires du prince de Talleyrand: publiés avec une préface et des notes par le duc de Broglie*, 5 vols (Paris, 1891–92), vol. 1, 290, 302 and vol. 2, 6. Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché made a similar interpretation in L. Madelin, ed., *Les Mémoires de Fouché* (Paris, 1945).
21. (A.F. d'Allonville), *Mémoires tirés des papiers d'un homme d'Etat: sur les causes secrètes qui ont déterminé la politique des cabinets dans la guerre de la Révolution, depuis 1792 jusqu'en 1815*, 13 vols (Paris, 1831–38), vol. 10, 8.
22. G. de Rayneval, *De la liberté des mers*, 2 vols (Paris, 1811), vol. 1, xxiv, 264. Since the beginning of his career, Rayneval was Anglophobe. See J. Félix, *Louis XVI et Marie-Antoinette: Un couple en politique* (Paris, 2006).
23. As a diplomat, Rayneval is very cautious in his analysis of Napoleon's politics. It may be that the book was ordered by the Emperor or his ministers; De Rayneval, *La liberté des mers* vol. 1, 135. On books and police during the Empire, see Archives nationales, Paris, AF IV, 1049. On Napoleonic censorship, see my *Napoléon. Héros, Imperator, mécène* (Paris, 1998) 247–53.
24. De Rayneval, *La liberté des mers*, vol. 1, 275–6.
25. J. Tulard, ed., *Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène* (Paris, 1981).
26. A. Thiers, *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*, 20 vols (Paris, 1845–62), vol. 12, 6–20.
27. *Ibid.*, 20–6.
28. *Ibid.*, 43–4.
29. *Ibid.*, 699.
30. A. Thiers, *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*, 4 vols (new edn, Paris, 1868), vol. 4, 707. A similar interpretation can be found in Stendhal's study on Napoleon. See A. Jourdan, *L'empire de Napoléon* (Paris, 2000), 79–80.
31. A. Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 8 vols (Paris, 1885–1904), vol. 6, 19–20.
32. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
33. For a renewal in this kind of questioning, see the chapter by Geoffrey Ellis in this book.
34. Sorel, *L'Europe*, vol. 6, 258–9.
35. *Ibid.*, 435–6.
36. Sorel, *L'Europe*, vol. 7, 178.
37. *Ibid.*, 54, 114–18.
38. G. Lefebvre, *Napoléon* (Paris, 1947), 368–9, 462–8, 565–7.
39. J. Tulard, *Le Grand Empire* (Paris, 1982), 139–43, 319.
40. Gavin Daly, 'Napoleon and the "City of Smugglers"', *The Historical Journal* 50 (2007): 333–52; and idem, 'English Smugglers, the Channel and the Napoleonic Wars, 1800–1814', *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007): 30–46.
41. De Jouvenel, *Napoléon et l'économie dirigée*, 416.
42. T. Lentz, *Nouvelle histoire du Premier Empire*, 3 vols (Paris, 2002–07), vol. 1 (*Napoléon et la conquête de l'Europe: 1804–1810*), 256–76; vol. 2 (*L'effondrement du système napoléonien: 1810–1814*), 100–5, 604–19; and vol. 3 (*La France et l'Europe de Napoléon: 1804–1814*), 768–70.
43. R. Dufraisse and M. Kérautret, *La France napoléonienne: Aspects extérieurs, 1799–1815* (Paris, 1999), 147–8, 217–18.
44. F. Crouzet, *L'économie britannique et le blocus continental*, 2 vols (Paris, 1958), vol. 2, 856–60. Crouzet thinks that the blockade might have succeeded if it had lasted

- longer and had been consistently applied. Yet, it was effective for only three and half years. During the other two and half years, it was inefficient. Its ultimate failure owed much to Napoleon and his policies elsewhere himself: the Spanish war, the Russian campaign, Napoleonic policy with America and the corruption of customs officers, as well as to the financial strength of Britain.
45. Napoleon used these arguments to justify his politics. Dansette, *Napoléon Bonaparte*, 32–40, 315–16.
 46. On this topic, see J.P. Bertaud, A.Forrest and A. Jourdan, *Napoléon, le monde et les Anglais* (Paris, 2004), 196–200.
 47. Crouzet, *L'économie britannique*, vol. 2, 863.
 48. P. Branda, *Le prix de la gloire: Napoléon et l'argent* (Paris, 2007), 485.
 49. See their contributions in this volume; also Silvia Marzagalli, '*Les boulevards de la fraude: Le négoce maritime et le Blocus continental, 1806–1813. Bordeaux, Hambourg, Livourne* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1999).
 50. John Selden was contesting Grotius's *Mare Liberum* from 1609. In this book, Grotius was claiming that the sea was free for all nations – against the Portuguese domination. Selden challenged this interpretation by contending that the sea was as capable of appropriation as terrestrial territory. The next step was to be Cromwell's Navigation Act (1651). See also D. Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), 52–6.
 51. De Rayneval, *La liberté des mers*, vol. 1, 252–7, 275; vol. 2, 129–30.
 52. G. de Merlhac, *De la liberté des mers et du commerce* (Paris, 1818), 336–342.
 53. *Ibid.*, 336–8.
 54. E. Chevalley, *Essai sur le droit des gens napoléonien* (Paris, s.a.), 169–70.
 55. *Ibid.*, 156–66.
 56. Capitaine Godchot, *Les neutres: Etude juridique et historique du droit maritime international* (Alger, 1891), 250–2.
 57. *Ibid.*, 250. Both Chevalley and Godchot took sides with France and Napoleon against arch-rival England.
 58. *Ibid.*, 252.
 59. Quoted by Godchot, *Les neutres*, 286–90.
 60. *Ibid.*, 290–1.
 61. Another bone of contention between historians is about who imposed the Blockade first. English historians have invoked the Directory's decree of 1798; French historians emphasize the Order in Council of 1806.
 62. De Las Cases, *Mémorial*, vol. 1, 520.

3

Russia and the Continental System: Trends in Russian Historiography

Alexandre Tchoudinov

Under normal circumstances, studies of any historical subject advance from simple to complex, from superficial to profound.¹ First, a problem is discussed on the level of historical journalism, then some studies on particular aspects of the topic may appear, and finally, some generalizing works emerge as a natural result and synthesis of the previous debates. This is the usual trajectory for historical research, but the Russian studies on the influence of the Napoleonic Continental Blockade on Russia developed in the opposite way, from the fundamental historical research to superficial journalistic essays and then to particular case studies. This chapter addresses the origins and key works in Russian on this important episode of Russia's socio-economic relationship with Europe, how they were stopped for several decades by ideological pressure and, finally, how they reappeared recently in new formats.

Evgenii Tarlé and the Beginning of Continental Blockade Studies

Though the Russian historiography of the Anti-Napoleonic wars was abundant enough in the nineteenth century, the economic background of the 1812 Campaign, known in Russia as 'the Patriotic War', did not attract much attention from researchers. Considered in Russia as one of the principal milestones on the way towards the formation of Russian national identity, in particular the unity of monarchy and nation and the extraordinary success of the Russian army, historians paid enormous attention to the political and military aspects of this war. In contrast, the economic consequences of the conflict remained overlooked and marginalized.

The real starting point of Russian studies on the economic background of the Russian–French conflict appeared 100 years later in the fundamental monograph by Evgenii Tarlé, *The Continental Blockade*, published in 1913. Analysing a wide range of documents preserved in the archives of several major European countries, Tarlé created a scrupulous work on the Continental System in general. He dedicated one chapter to the influence

of this System on Russia. At that time, any access to Russian state archives was practically forbidden for historians and Tarlé premised his research primarily on foreign sources, both published and unpublished, particularly on documents conserved in the British Record Office and French National Archives. So he looked at this problem – so to speak – from the Western point of view. On one hand, it was an important advantage of his work because hereafter no Russian historians had an opportunity to study so many foreign documents concerning this subject. On the other hand, the impossibility of researching and revealing the internal mechanism of the Russian economy and related political consequences during the Continental Blockade remained missing in Tarlé's research.

According to all documents used by Tarlé, the commercial relations between France and Russia were never interrupted until 1806, even though both states were at war in 1798, 1799 and 1805. During this period of enmity French–Russian trade was driven through the German Hanseatic ports.² What's more, it flourished throughout the interwar period. In 1802 France and Russia reconfirmed the trade convention concluded back in 1787.³ Nevertheless, even in the most advantageous times, French trade was far less important for Russian society than British commerce. British merchants exported English textiles and colonial goods to Russia, and imported from the Empire such articles as grain, wood, hemp, linen and other crude materials that provided Russian nobles an important addition to their income. British commerce was indispensable for Russia because it brought such necessities as textiles, sugar, coffee, cotton and other goods to the Empire. Furthermore, the nobility spent a part of this income by buying articles of luxuries – some of which were imported into Russia from France – such as wine, brandy, silk and other pleasant superfluities. Therefore, commercial relations with Britain were essential for Russia, whereas similar relations with France were useful enough, but not indispensable.

Tarlé cited official French commercial data, shown in Table 3.1, which permitted him to compare the French and British maritime trade in Russia. In 1802, the only year of the general peace in Europe, 986 trade ships came to the main Russian trade ports of Petersburg and Kronshtadt. Note that 477 of them were British vessels and only five were French. Such enormous

Table 3.1 Trade via Petersburg port in 1802 (in rubles)

Merchants	Exported	Imported
<i>British</i>	17,741,211	8,365,854
<i>Russian</i>	11,787,546	14,408,892
<i>French</i>	567,486	60,781
Total	30,695,561	23,247,834

Source: Evgeniï Tarlé, *Sochinenia (Works)*, 12 vols (Moscow, 1958), vol. 3, 342.

disproportion took place in the best year of French–Russian commercial relations. When Anglo–French hostility resumed in 1803, the domination of the British Navy overwhelmed and diminished Russian–French trade. Finally, in 1805 Russia entered into war against France, but only the French occupation of German ports in 1806 interrupted trade between Russia and France. It was especially painful for some branches of the French industry. Tarlé analyses in detail a petition of the Lyon Chamber of Commerce presented to the French government in December 1806, which affirmed that the Lyon silk industry was on the brink of destruction because of the breakdown in trade with Russia and the German states.⁴

The Treaty of Tilsit infused the French commercial class with new hopes for trade with Russia in 1807. The peace convention not only re-established the good relations between France and Russia, but also eliminated the strongest commercial competitor. As a consequence of this convention, Russia had to join the Continental System and break trade links with Britain. Nevertheless, very soon these hopes turned out to be a chimera. Studying petitions of the French merchants, Tarlé designated three major obstacles for Russian–French trade in the post-Tilsit period: a lack of credit, an insufficient and outdated Trade Convention from 1787 and the low exchange rate of the ruble. If the first two obstacles were more or less expugnable, then the third became a real stumbling block for French attempts to play the same role as the British in the enormous Russian market.

The termination of British–Russian commerce had a dreadful impact on the rate of the ruble. Russian exported goods lost their markets as their prices decreased. According to data provided by the French Ministry of Internal Affairs (Tarlé used primarily the French sources), the rate of the ruble at the end of 1807 was only 40 to 50 per cent of nominal value. At the beginning of 1808 this Ministry asked the French merchants trading with Russia to provide a reason for the radical decrease of the ruble and received a decisive answer – it was the loss of the market for main Russian goods.⁵

Tarlé shows that the French government actively sought to overcome this problem. At the beginning of 1808 Napoleon addressed a special document to his ministers of home affairs and finances in which he suggested developing a direct exchange of commodities with Russia.⁶ But this idea, Tarlé affirms, had no real consequence. France could not substitute Britain within the Russian market. The neglect of the French navy did not require the necessary articles as did the British. Thus, primary Russian export goods did not find buyers. Moreover, even if such goods had found markets within France, they could not be transported there by sea because of Britain's naval domination. Transport by land of such cumbersome articles would be too difficult and too expensive.

Thus, all hopes of the French merchants to establish positions as British substitutes in Russia remained in vain even during the first post-Tilsit year when the Tsar strictly obeyed the Continental System. By July 1808 French Ambassador Armand Caulaincourt reported on suspicious ships carrying

English goods to Russian ports. He affirmed that he succeeded more or less in preventing Russian exports to Britain, but had no possible means to prevent the contraband of English products from entering Russia.⁷ At the end of 1809 the French merchants trading in Petersburg, the brothers Raimbert, informed their government that the British still dominated the Russian market and the French had no chance to force them out.⁸

In autumn 1810 Caulaincourt addressed Alexander I by pointing out that British goods were not only imported into Russia, but also were transited from there to the Leipzig markets. The tsar answered that all these articles were American, not British, and that it was purely the Russian government's business how to distinguish one from the other.⁹ Likewise, between 1810 and 1811 Napoleon often personally addressed persistent demands to Alexander I to suppress British contraband into Russia; Alexander consistently responded that Russia strictly obeyed the Continental System. As Tarlé noted, the notion that all colonial goods were really British repeatedly appeared in Napoleon's correspondence of this period as a true *idée fixe*.¹⁰

Moreover, Caulaincourt remained under pressure from the Russian government who was annoyed by the practice of the French government selling licences to ensure commerce with Britain. This practice put the Russian nobility into a rage in the summer of 1811. That year the harvest was poor in Britain, whereas it was excellent on the continent. Napoleon permitted the export of grain from the German ports of Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck controlled by the French, and taxed it to profit the French government. Because of this measure, shown in Table 3.2, the prices of grain in Western and Central Europe far surpassed the Russian ones. Russian landlords met with great losses and were of course malcontent with their own government, which prevented a grain export to Britain.

In response, French merchants became outraged when the Tsar enacted a law on 19 December 1810 on new customs which cancelled all the French advantages of Napoleon's Trianon Tariff. The Russian protectionist tariffs were aimed primarily against the main articles of French export. So it was forbidden to import woollen cloth, silk and luxury articles. French wines had to be imported only by sea, forming an embargo in practice because of the British sea blockade.

Table 3.2 Average prices of grain in May–June 1811 (in French francs)

	Petersburg	Paris	Dresden	Danzig
<i>Wheat</i>	10.12	21.39	16.39	15.41
<i>Barley</i>	8.63	12.60	12.19	6.74
<i>Rye</i>	9.65	14	14.51	11.02
<i>Oats</i>	7.65	15.59	12.53	11.79

Source: Tarlé, *Sochinenia*, vol. 3, 342.

Table 3.3 Import of cotton to Russia (in English pounds)

1809	1810	1811
557,924	3,769,137	9,255,404

Source: Tarlé, *Sochinenia*, vol. 3, 364.

Simultaneously, the former Russian measures against British contraband eased and in 1811 a huge torrent of British goods flowed into Russia and then through Russian borders into Europe. In support of his findings, Tarlé cited data, shown in Table 3.3, from the American economist Pitkin. In 1811, the Russian import of cotton was the largest in Europe. Certainly, such a radical increase could not be attributed only to the needs of the Russian industry. So the Trianon tariffs enriched Russian merchants making their transit trade beyond Russian borders highly profitable.

Thus, according to the French sources used by Tarlé, the influence of the Continental System on Russian trade was, in general, quite negative. This system undermined Russian exports. Only Russian merchants engaged with transit trade profited from this situation a year prior to Napoleon's campaign of 1812.

There remains the question of the influence of the Continental System on Russian industry. Did isolation from British manufacturing foster native industries in Russia as in Saxony and France? Tarlé ignored this important question and aspect of the Russian economy. He noted that according to reports from Caulaincourt, the production sector in Russia had developed and flourished because of the System, but underlined that this Franco-centric source was too tendentious to be a sure base for any decisive conclusion. Tarlé concluded that only a special study based on Russian sources could determine the status of Russian industrial production between 1806 and 1812.

Stagnation of Russian Historical Studies after 1917

After the revolution of October 1917 research on the history of the Continental Blockade begun by Tarlé was interrupted like most other pre-revolutionary historical studies in Russia. The Bolshevik regime, based on Marxist ideology, placed a lot of importance on the 'proper' interpretation of history and restricted the activity of non-Marxist historians of the pre-revolutionary era. The new state censored and decreased their publications and prohibited their research and travels abroad.

As the Soviet generation of historians appeared in the 1920s, they derived their interpretations far more from the ideological dogma of Marxism than from the study of concrete sources and analysis of archival materials. In this way, the leading Communist historian Mikhail Pokrovsky proposed his own

interpretation of the Continental System along with explanations of other phenomena of world history. He treated the influence of the Continental Blockade in continuum with the development of Russian industrial capitalism.¹¹ Pokrovsky never worked with the necessary primary sources; thus, absent concrete evidence, his conclusions were purely speculative. He derived them from an abstract idea that any protectionism was favourable for national industry, so according to this logic the forced closing of the Russian market for British industrial production had to be useful for Russian manufactures.

The temporary co-existence of the Russian pre-revolutionary historians and of the Soviet 'soldiers on the history front' (as they were called in official Communist party documents) ceased in the late 1920s. The official historians of the Soviet regime declared their non-Marxist colleagues of the pre-revolutionary generation to be ideological and political enemies, and announced their works to be erroneous. In 1930 many non-Marxist scholars were arrested and persecuted. Tarlé was one of them; he spent more than a year in prison and several years in exile. The Marxist historians established a monopoly on the interpretation of history.

In 1934 the pendulum of ideology swung back. The Communist Party leaders abandoned the ideas of the Marxist world revolution within historical research and tried to anchor the Soviet state to the traditions of Russian nationhood.¹² The state condemned the ideas of 'the Pokrovsky school', as it was named in negative context by official documents. Though Pokrovsky himself had already died, some of his disciples were persecuted, whereas the remaining historians of the pre-revolutionary generation, including Tarlé, were liberated and permitted to renew their research and studies.

The Fundamental Work of Mikhail Zlotnikov

In the late 1930s Mikhail Zlotnikov, one of Tarlé's pupils, produced an immense two-volume work called *The Continental Blockade and Russia* based on numerous documents from Russian archives. Due to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, his manuscript remained unpublished at the time. Indeed, this new destructive war more than postponed the publication of Zlotnikov's research; it killed him. In 1942 Zlotnikov starved to death in Leningrad during the siege.

Tarlé survived the war and after 1945 made efforts to publish the work of his former student. In 1951 he even wrote an introduction for the upcoming edition. Unfortunately, Tarlé did not survive to see this important work published, for he died in 1955. The first volume of Zlotnikov's monograph appeared only in 1966.¹³ It explored Russian commerce in the heyday of the Continental System.

Using numerous statistics from the Russian government, Zlotnikov presented a picture of Russian commerce at the end of the eighteenth century

Table 3.4 The content of Russian trade in 1799

Merchants	Exported (rubles)	Per cent	Imported (rubles)	Per cent
<i>Russian</i>	28,165,673	40.8	30,965,691	66.5
<i>British</i>	36,602,424	53.0	8,334,981	17.8
<i>Others</i>	4,232,713	6.2	7,334,967	15.7
Total	69,000,810	100	46,636,639	100

Source: Russian State Archives of Ancient Acts (RGADA), Moscow, Bulletin of Kommerz-Collegium 1799, fond 276, dossier 133, fol. 12. Cited in Mikhail Zlotnikov, *Kontinentalnaia blokada I Rossia* (*The Continental Blockade and Russia*) (Moscow and Leningrad, 1966), 24.

through the beginning of the nineteenth century in far more detail than Tarlé's earlier work. According to this data, the dependence of the Russian economy on trade relations with Britain was not only important, but vital to the Russian economy. The statistics of *Kommerz-Kollegium* (a government institution that anteceded the Ministry of Commerce created in 1802) documented the content of Russian trade in 1799, as shown in Table 3.4. The same approximate proportion of trade persisted throughout the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Moreover, by the turn of the nineteenth century Russia experienced the consequences of broken commercial relations with Britain, a precursor to the future Continental System. By breaking political relations with Britain in 1800, Tsar Paul I tried to revoke Russian–British trade. Though this episode lasted only several months, from November 1800 till March 1801, it caused severe economic troubles and great discontent among the Russian nobility who lost their main sources of export income. The result is well known: a plot and assassination of the emperor.¹⁵

Alexander I, who gained the crown and throne thanks to these events, did not want a repetition of his father's fate and pursued free-trade politics. He and his close circles knew well the ideas of Adam Smith and had an eager desire to revise the protectionist custom tariff of 1797. Zlotnikov studied in detail a government work on the new tariff which was elaborated and even partially tested in 1805. He noted that it was really a free-trade law, but this measure was not fully enacted because of the drastic changes in European conventional and economic warfare in 1806.¹⁶ So by joining the Continental System, Alexander I broke not only with the vital long-standing commercial partner of his empire, but with his own free-trade politics too.

It is not surprising that the Russian confrontation with Britain after 1806 was quite moderate. An official order of 28 October 1807, which prescribed confiscation of all British trade ships and goods, was preceded by a secret instruction proclaiming that local administrations had to permit the British to leave Russian ports freely.¹⁷ Nevertheless, at that period, the Russian

government strictly obeyed the Continental System. As a matter of fact, Zlotnikov corrected Tarlé's affirmation based on French sources that Russia really supported the Continental System one year after the 1807 Treaty of Tilsit. Studying the documents of governmental commissions, which investigated contraband articles, Zlotnikov concluded that the struggle against British trade was only really active in Russia until the middle of 1810.¹⁸

Zlotnikov considered the ordinance of 20 July 1810 as the crisis point in the Russian approach towards the Continental System. This ordinance alleviated restrictions for neutral, or so-called 'neutral', merchants dealing with colonial articles and became practically the first breach in the French-imposed trade blockade.¹⁹ It was the Russian response to the French politics of trade licensing. In 1811 the Russian government facilitated the import of colonial goods by enacting new rules for neutral trade. This document annulled many formal claims for neutral ships, in particular the control of nationality of crews and examination of log records. Additionally, it created several special port commissions to acknowledge the neutral origination of goods. The time of such procedures was considerably shortened. These measures had to hasten commodity circulation.²⁰

Nevertheless, participation in the Continental System brought the Russian economy into a deep crisis. According to the data provided by Zlotnikov, shown in Table 3.5, the volume of Russian external trade drastically decreased. The total volume of trade was reduced by 43 per cent, as shown in Table 3.6, because of Russian participation in the struggle against Britain. It remains highly demonstrative that after the withdrawal of Russia from the Continental System, such volume was restored within nearly four years.

Table 3.5 Annual average of Russian trade (in millions of silver rubles)

Years	Export	Import	Total volume
1802–06	54.1	40.8	94.9
1808–12	34.1	20.6	54.7

Source: Zlotnikov, *Continental Blockade*, 290.

Table 3.6 Annual Russian trade (in millions of silver rubles)

Years	Export	Import	Total volume
1813	33.4	29.5	62.9
1814	50.4	35.6	86.0
1815	54.6	30.3	84.9
1816	51.8	41.1	92.9

Source: Zlotnikov, *Continental Blockade*, 291.

Table 3.7 Custom revenues 1802–12 (in millions of silver rubles)

Years	Custom revenues
1802	8.5
1805	9.1
1806	7.4
1807	5.1
1808	2.9
1809	3.7
1810	3.7
1811	3.9
1812	4.8

Source: Zlotnikov, *Continental Blockade*, 338.

The trade crisis, as Zlotnikov noted, aggravated the financial confusion caused by wars against France, the Ottoman Empire and Persia. The problems of the budget deficit were aggravated by the reduction of custom revenues as well, as shown in Table 3.7.²¹ Thus, Zlotnikov estimated the influence of the Continental System on Russian commerce and finances as very negative. As for Russian industry, the author's conclusion remained unknown as the second volume of his monograph, dedicated to Russian industry, remains unpublished. Nevertheless, Zlotnikov's research established the second stage of development in Russian historiography on the Continental System: from general approach to a particular national study.

Since Zlotnikov's work appeared a quarter-century later than it had been written, it was out of date in some aspects from the moment of its appearance. Moreover, the author had used only Russian sources absent the inclusion of corresponding Western European archival sources. This scrupulous study, however, has become a classic and has influenced interpretations of the Continental System in Russian historical literature for several decades.²² Academic references to Tarlé's and Zlotnikov's studies remain common practice for almost every historian mentioning the Continental System.²³

Contemporary Interpretations of the Continental Blockade

The next stage of development in Russian historiography on this subject shifts from a national study to popular journalism. This new approach, as in the past, has been influenced by changes in Russian society and politics. The collapse of the Communist regime in Russia gave birth to a strong trend of historical revisionism. In some fields of historical studies it has led to serious academic reinterpretations of the past by professional researchers now liberated from the ideological censure of Soviet times; one

clear example is the 'new Russian school' regarding the historiography of the French Revolution.²⁴ But far more often, revisionism manifests itself in popular journalism as journalists pounce on this or that historical cliché. It's especially popular among 'liberal' (as they called themselves) publicists to attack commonplace interpretations of events that have been significant for Russian national identity or mark the collective memory of Russia's past, described by Pierre Nora as the *lieux de mémoire*. Naturally, such attempts often incur a sharp reaction from patriotic press and historiographers. The 'Patriotic War' of 1812 remains one of the most important *lieux de mémoire* for Russian national identity as a demonstration of the strength of Russian patriotism and has become a subject of especially heated public discussion between 'revisionists' and 'patriots'. Trying to diminish the glory of this pre-eminent historical event, 'revisionists' declare that this war was not a national heroic defence against Napoleon's aggression, but a consequence of the silly and provocative politics of Alexander I, who compelled Napoleon to invade Russia.²⁵

This trend of 'revisionism' also touched the interpretation of the Continental Blockade. In 2002 the young journalist Eugenii Ponasenkov published an article in which he tried to prove that the Continental System had no negative impact on the Russian economy and that the fiscal crisis between 1807 and 1810 (which the author did not deny) had been the result of bad government and military expenses. So the Continental Blockade might not be considered a legitimate reason for the rupture between Alexander I and Napoleon.²⁶ In 2004 Ponasenkov developed these ideas further in a monograph.²⁷ The author did not use any new documents and only presented a new interpretation based on well-known sources. His publication, however, stimulated hot discussion in Internet forums. One of the most detailed responses to Ponasenkov's interpretation came from an amateur 'patriotic' historian and active participant in the military reenactment movement, Alexander Podmazo. He refuted Ponasenkov's main ideas one after the other using Zlotnikov's data, the same data his opponent had drawn on, but Podmazo applied it far more accurately.²⁸

At last, this discussion attracted the attention of professional historians. In 2005 Svetlana Vasilieva defended a doctoral thesis, 'English–Russian Commercial Relations and the Continental Blockade', in which she cited some comparatively new Russian and English published sources, in particular *Commercial Statistics* by John Macgregor (1850), not drawn on by Zlotnikov. Nevertheless, this work has not drawn significant attention from either amateur or professional historians. The author accurately rectified some particular assertions of the former classical works, but made no drastic revisions or contributions to our understanding of the Continental System.

The recent bicentenary of the 1812 war, solemnly celebrated in Russia, has not essentially changed the historiography in this field. In spite of a real

glut of publications on this event, most were, as usual, dedicated to political and military aspects. Generally the economic questions and consequences of the Continental System remained in the shadow and on the margins. Nevertheless, there was one exception: articles by Nikolai Troshin, who wrote about the influence of the Continental Blockade on the Russian economy.²⁹ By scrupulously rereading already-known and published sources, he placed in doubt the widespread assertion that the influence of the Continental Blockade on the Russian economy had been extremely negative. According to this author, the decrease of Russian trade (he doesn't deny it) was determined far more by the activity of the British Navy, which blocked Russian ports, than by the disruption of Russian–British commercial relations. As for Russian industry, Troshin cited some opinions of contemporaries to speculate that the forced protectionism of the Continental Blockade had stimulated industrial development. Unfortunately, all of these subjective conclusions were not confirmed by precise statistical data, which has not yet been well studied, as Troshin noted himself.

To be fair to these recent attempts to critique some long-held views in Russian historiography, while they represent important new initiatives in Russian scholarship, I think it is too early yet to recognize them as full-scale revisions. Troshin, for example, still needs a study of all the complex economic statistical data for the era of the Continental Blockade. This would require wide-ranging research in Russian and foreign archives, because the existing published data is utterly insufficient for far-reaching conclusions. It is indicative that although he contests numerous general works on the Russian economy, Troshin has not challenged the main conclusions of Zlotnikov and has confined himself to rectification of some of Zlotnikov's calculations. As for the monograph of Tarlé, it has not been mentioned at all in the cited articles of Troshin.

Thus, we can continue to assume that, even now the old monographs by Tarlé and Zlotnikov still remain the best in this field of Russian historiography. But the appearance of some new studies, like those of Vasilieva and Troshin, offer hope that the corresponding research may be further developed and deepened in the near future. Within the last century dramatic changes in Russia have prevented and sometimes distorted an accurate assessment of Russia's experience with the Continental Blockade and System during the Napoleonic era. Now is the time to reverse that trend through research and scholarship.

Notes

1. This work carried out with the financial support of *Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme* (Paris) and the Russian Humanitarian Research Foundation (RGNF), grant no. 14-21-17001.
2. Evgenii Tarlé, *Sochinenia (Works)*, 12 vols (Moscow, 1958), vol. 3, 342–3.

3. The result of long negotiations over several years, the convention of 1787 regulated the conditions of mutual trade designed to drastically stimulate immediate Russian–French commercial relations, which had previously depended solely on intermediaries. Due to the revolution in France, it was not realized in practice.
4. *Ibid.*, 343.
5. *Ibid.*, 350.
6. *Ibid.*, 353.
7. *Ibid.*, 350–1.
8. *Ibid.*, 355.
9. *Ibid.*, 356.
10. *Ibid.*, 359.
11. See Mikhail Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoria s drevneishikh vremen (Russian History from Ancient Times)*, 5 vols (Moscow and Leningrad, 1929), vol. 3, 334.
12. For example, in English see David Brandenberger, *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Wisconsin, 2006).
13. Mikhail Zlotnikov, *Kontinentalnaia blokada I Rossia (The Continental Blockade and Russia)* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1966).
14. Zlotnikov, *The Continental Blockade*, 28.
15. *Ibid.*, 60–1.
16. *Ibid.*, 127–8.
17. *Ibid.*, 137.
18. *Ibid.*, 174–88, 354–5.
19. *Ibid.*, 188.
20. *Ibid.*, 246–53.
21. *Ibid.*, 338.
22. See Alexandre Narochnitskii, ‘Ob istoricheskom znachenii kontinentalnoi blokady’ (‘On the Historical Significance of the Continental Blockade’), *Novaya i noveishaya istoria* 6 (1965); Vladlen Sirotkin, ‘Kontinentalnaia blokada i russkaya ekonomika (frantsuzskaya i sovetskaya istoriografiia)’ (‘The Continental Blockade and Russian Economy (French and Soviet Historiography)’), *Voprosy voennoi istorii Rossii XVIII – pervaiia polovina XIX v. (Aspects of Russian Military History of the 18th and First Half of the 19th Centuries)* (Moscow, 1969).
23. See for example, *Otechestvennaia voina 1812 goda: Entsiklopedia (The Patriotic War of 1812: Encyclopedia)* (Moscow, 2004), 268.
24. See more details in Alexander Tchoudinov, ‘La Révolution française: de l’historiographie soviétique à l’historiographie russe, “changement de jalons”’, *Cahiers du monde russe* 2/3 (2002): 449–62.
25. See for example Oleg Sokolov, *Le combat de deux empires: la Russie d’Alexandre I^{er} contre la France de Napoléon, 1805–1812* (Paris, 2012).
26. Eugenii Ponasenkov, ‘Ekonomicheskie predposylki krizisa tilzitskoï sistemy v Rossii (1807–1812 gg.) i prichiny voiny 1812 g.’ (‘The Economical Background of the Tilzit System Crisis in Russia (1807–1812) and Causes of the War of 1812’), *Ekonomicheskaya istoria. Obozrenie (Economic History Review)* 8 (2002): 132–40.
27. Eugenii Ponasenkov, *Pravda o voïne 1812 goda (The Truth on the War 1812)* (Moscow, 2004).
28. Alexandre Podmazo, ‘Kontinentalnaya blokada kak ekonomicheskaya prichina voiny 1812 goda’ (‘The Continental Blockade as an Economic Cause of the War of 1812’), *Epokha 1812 goda: Issledovania. Istochniki. Istoriografiia (The Epoch of 1812: Studies. Sources. Historiography)* 2 (2003): 249–66.

29. Nikolai Troshin, 'Kontinentalnaya blokada i Rossia (k voprosu ob ekonomicheskikh prichinakh Otechestvennoï voiny 1812 goda)' ('The Continental Blockade and Russia (on the economic causes of the Patriotic war of 1812), *Otechestvennaia voina 1812 goda: Istochniki. Pamiatniki. Problemy* (*The Patriotic War of 1812: Sources. Monuments. Problems*) (2011), 278–97; idem, 'Ekonomicheskie posledstvia uchastia Rossii v kontinental'noï sisteme (postanovka problemy)' ('The Economic Consequences of Russian Participation in the Continental System (Problem Statement)'), *The Patriotic War of 1812: Sources. Monuments. Problems* (2012), 192–208.

4

Speculations and Embargoes on the Grain Trade at the Time of the Revolutionary Wars (1792–1795)

Pierrick Pourchasse

In 1793, a grain crisis touched France as major European powers joined forces to combat the new Republic. In addition to the military conflict, a real ‘war on hunger’ took place involving four actors. First, the revolutionary government; it understood that the grain supply was essential to the survival of the regime. For the working classes, bread had become a right and the authorities had the duty to ensure the right to obtain subsistence. Any failure led naturally to riots that the revolutionary government desperately wanted to avoid. Second, England, which asserted that the French Republic was not legitimate, decided ‘to starve the rebels’ and, contrary to all the rules of neutral trade, put an embargo on all foodstuffs to France. In the North Sea, the English Channel and the Mediterranean, British ships led a veritable hunt against vessels loaded with grain, but also stockfish, rice and so on. Third, grain-producing countries who naturally wanted to sell their surplus to France; their interest increased as the French demand led to rising prices that offered great opportunities for speculators. These countries were in Northern Europe, bordering the Baltic and North Seas, but also in the Mediterranean (North Africa, Morea, Sicily, the Levant). Fourth, the neutral northern powers who understood that they could make a lot of profit from the needs of France by organizing trade and providing transport between producer countries and France; the merchants of Hamburg and Copenhagen belonged to the only neutral maritime powers (with the USA) that had the fleets and the capital to meet French demand.

These neutral states, therefore, set up intense speculation by organizing a network to supply France. This essay presents this period of tension between the French, who were fighting for the survival of the Revolution, the British who set up an extremely well-organized blockade and the neutral powers from the north seeking to speculate on the grain and gain high profits. A few years later, during the Continental Blockade, the four actors remained, and if the positions were different between France and England, the same game was being played with similar problems and similar results.

The Survival of the French Revolution

From the year 1792, the economic situation deteriorated in France. In early 1793 the grain ceased to move between the different provinces and prices were extremely variable from one region to another. The Revolution faced a cereal crisis caused by rising prices. Though stocks existed, speculation created a food shortage. This crisis was exacerbated with the depreciation of *assignats*, the new French paper money.¹ To solve these problems, the National Convention voted on the Law of the Maximum on 4 May 1793, imposing fixed prices on grain and flour, and supplemented by a second law on 29 September 1793.

These decisions completely blocked the grain trade and accentuated speculation. The situation worsened, as in Marseilles, where, 'since food is taxed, we cannot find any. All the shops are empty and people from the country stop supplying. The city is hungry.'² In August 1793, 'we, in Bordeaux are in a very critical situation, famine threatens us and if we do not receive corn in a few days, we will succumb under the most dreadful scourge'.³ The conditions were already difficult; although the harvest of 1793 had been quite good, this was not the case in 1794, a disastrous year which led to semi-starvation in spring 1795.

On 22 October 1793 the Subsistence Committee was established to responsibly administer and develop agricultural production and organize the import and distribution of foodstuffs throughout the territory. Previously, foreign markets freely supplied coastal cities, but by 1793 the Subsistence Committee centralized and theoretically organized all operations for purchasing grain. For this purpose, it sent missions particularly into Northern Europe and North America to conclude contracts for food supplies.⁴ In December 1793 citizens Delamarre, Castera and Duveyrier arrived in Copenhagen to buy grain. They were received by the upper class of the Danish capital who were very curious to meet these dangerous revolutionaries.⁵ During their journey, that first led them to Hamburg, they signed contracts with major traders in these different places to supply the Republic. In the Mediterranean, the *Comité de Salut Public* secretly took in hand the old Africa Company, which enabled it to retain the privileges it enjoyed in Barbary. Its agents were retained in service and were now acting under the control of the Subsistence Committee to provide grain to the Republic.

In April 1794 the Subsistence Committee was replaced by a Commission of Trade and Supplies. The highly centralized administration was abandoned in favour of a more liberal policy. The number of overseas agents was reduced and purchasing was given to commercial firms chosen by the authorities. In Northern Europe, the main supply centres were Gothenburg, Copenhagen, Hamburg and Altona. The largest house involved in these purchases, however, was that of the American James Swan, one of the biggest speculators during the Revolutionary Wars.⁶

The payments for goods were particularly onerous to France because of inflation and the difference in currency exchange, which was particularly unfavourable. In August 1793, to limit this inflation, the authorities decided to ban the export of all commodities and raw materials by organizing a general embargo. This satisfied public opinion, which concluded that the enemy benefitted from exported goods. Absent exports, commercial interest from neutral ships declined; they had little interest in trade with France without freight to ship from French harbours. Eventually, as imports were needed, exports were permitted to ensure the entry of essential commodities.

As the neutrals did not want to be paid in paper money that depreciated daily, several solutions were implemented. Payments were made partly in cash. According to Albert Mathiez, sacred objects taken from the churches during the de-Christianization process were melted into mint and provided largely for these payments. Neutrals were also paid with high-value goods like wines, silks, luxury goods, art objects, silverware and books. At last, in December 1793 the *Comité de Salut Public* confiscated the funds that French bankers had abroad.

As its trade risked becoming completely paralysed by British naval power, the French government counted on the neutral fleets to ensure supplies of grain and food. The definition of neutrality, however, differed among different states. At the beginning of the eighteenth century it was generally accepted that neutral ships had the right to enter ports not under siege by the countries at war. The definition of contraband products depended on each state's interpretation. France understood contraband narrowly as arms and munitions. Britain, in contrast, had a wider conception of contraband, which included all naval munitions and even the resupplying of warships (ships loaded with Danish salt beef were declared good capture during the Seven Years War).⁷ The right to carry products belonging to the enemy emerged as a second point of discord. For the neutrals, the flag covered the merchandise ('free ships, free goods, unfree ships, unfree goods'). For London, the treaties authorized the confiscation of enemy property and the flag in no way protected the cargo. The final point of contention between the neutrals and the warring powers concerned the checking of the merchandise. If isolated ships had to accept undergoing a check, the neutrals maintained that ships in convoy were not liable to the right of access. The British held the opposite position and insisted that right of access had no special limit. Finally, coastal trade between two French ports or France's colonial trade carried out by a neutral vessel must follow 'the rule of 1756', which was that the ship and the goods could be seized because this trade had not been authorized by the French authorities in peace time.⁸ As a consequence, neutral ships and cargoes had, in that case, to be treated as being French.

For Eli Heckscher, these rules allowed the power of the British fleet to grow by multiplying the number of privateers who were sure to make a profit by seizing neutral ships.⁹ The possibility of such prizes encouraged all

shipowners who hesitated from engaging directly in the conflict. According to the jurist William Manning, this system increased a state's naval power 'by causing vessels to be equipped from private cupidity, which a minister might not be able to obtain by general taxation without much difficulty'.¹⁰ Thus, since the Seven Years War, implementing of rules for the blockades became harder and the Revolutionary Wars were the outcome of the process that led to the total suppression of the enemy's trade.

'To starve the rebels'

The war between revolutionary France and Great Britain was declared on 1 February 1793. From February 14 orders were given to capture all French ships and goods. On 8 June new measures known as the 'instructions of 1793' authorized privateers and British warships to 'stop and take all vessels loaded wholly or partly with grain, flour or any food product intended for a port in France or any other port occupied by the French armies'.¹¹ As England did not want any conflict with the powers of the North, which supplied them with strategic materials for their navy, and sought to avoid interminable procedures with the neutrals, the British government released funds to buy all doubtful shipments of grain and to pay the freight of the ships.

France, of course, reacted to the decisions made by the British government. On 1 March, the Convention took the first measures to ban British products. The Eden-Rayneval Treaty of 1786 was abolished and the import of a great number of products strictly forbidden. These measures were detailed in the law dated 18 Vendémiaire, Year II, entitled 'law prohibiting all goods produced or made in countries under British rule on Revolutionary soil'. Customs officers and cheats risked a term of 20 years in prison if they evaded these laws. These measures, however, did not appear to be sufficient as anyone caught carrying or using English products would be considered suspect and punished according to the rules defined in the 'law of suspects', meaning that the law-breakers could be imprisoned in a completely arbitrary manner. All documents referring to British products or brands and all advertisements regarding the sale of goods in Britain were prohibited, and cheats were also liable to 20 years in prison.¹²

More than a blockade, however, the British decision to cut off the supply of foodstuffs was new and could be considered an organized plan to starve France. The London authorities justified these instructions in various ways. First, war was declared in a manner contrary to international laws by a government not recognized by the British authorities. Since the grain trade was supported by the French government itself, this meant that these purchases were acts of an illegitimate government, so it was normal to prevent them. Finally, the only solution was to force the enemy to make peace. Pitt's justifications did not mention the need for cereal products in the United Kingdom. In 1794 and 1795 this need was great because of poor harvests affecting the country.¹³ According to a communiqué from Lars von Engeström, the Swedish envoy in London, a speech made in the House of

Lords on 3 November 1795 communicated that the seizure of cereal ships meant for France was a useful means of obtaining supplies from abroad.¹⁴

To control French traffic, most available frigates of the Channel Fleet were organized in independent squadrons. According to Nicholas Rodger, the two most famous were based in Falmouth under the command of Sir Edward Pellew and Sir John Borlase Warren.¹⁵ Commanded by young officers, these frigates had great freedom to conduct raids which paralysed French commerce. The sea routes of Northern Europe were closely watched, preventing deliveries by neutral ships to France.

To withstand such raids, neutral vessels had false papers indicating false destinations. It was, moreover, very easy for the shipowners to take over the cargoes, that is, to declare under oath that these belonged to a neutral country. This was a purely commercial move, paid for by a commission of one to two per cent to the company in charge of the operation. The port of Emden, in East Friesland, belonging to Prussia, was an important centre of neutralization for vessels en route to France.¹⁶ If the Prussian monarch, Frederick William, was theoretically at war with revolutionary France since 1792, Danzig, one of the biggest exporters of cereals in the Baltic, became a Prussian town after the second partition of Poland in 1793 and needed to continue its exporting activities towards Western Europe. The chartering contracts for neutral vessels loading on the Barbary Coast for the Africa Agency clearly indicated 'that the destination when returning to Barbary had only been laid down in the part of the charter for Genoa as simulation and to give better authenticity to the expedition, whereas the true and only destination was Marseille'.¹⁷

To know the truth about the cargoes and the destinations, the British put the seized ship's crew through a very thorough examination. The questions, posed separately to the captain and several crew members, were listed on a preprinted document to confuse smugglers. The examination was divided into 34 points representing around 150 questions. For vessels from Northern Europe, a second supplementary examination of 20 points and about 50 questions was added. Questioning was extremely accurate. Thus, for example, the additional interrogatory, numbers 14 and 15:

14: Do you know, have you heard, or do you not believe, that Mssrs. De la Marre, Duveyrier, and Castera, French Commissioners or Agents at Copenhagen, have, in the Course of the last Year, and up to the Present Time, Freightd a very great Number of Danish, Swedish, Hamburgh, and other Ships; and have Dispatched them from the Ports of Denmark and Sweden, and Northern Ports, with Cargoes of Provisions, and Naval and Military Stores, on Account, and for the Supply of France, under Fictitious Papers, in respect to the Property of such Cargoes, and Fictitious also as to the Destination? How many of such Ships have been Freightd to them, and what were their Names, and the Names of the Masters of such Ships, or any of them, to the best of your Knowledge, Information or Belief?

15: Do you know, or have you any Connections in Trade with Mr. Elick Backman, or Messrs. Tournier, Merchants at Gotenburgh, Mr. Sieveking, Messrs. Dennas et Lubbert, Mr. Ernst, Mr. Parish, Mr. Amberg, Mr. Chapeaurouge, Mr. Olivier, Messrs. Pierre Boué et fils, Mr. Jacob Burmester, the senator Rucker, the senator Klevicker, the senator Poppe, the senator Westphal, the senator Adami, Henry Westphal, Mr. Gabe, Mr. Mackelers, Pierre, Springhorn, Mr. Glasshoff the younger, Jan David Bredermann, Mr. Wippe, Mr. Wiper, Mr. Wilcke, Jacob Hahn, Pierre Jansen, Henry Hansen, Henry Doltz, all Merchants at Hamburgh; Mr. Otto Matthies, Matthias Matthies, Jan Ernst Matthiesen, Henry Kuper, Bohne Hansen, Mr. Theden, Mr. Tandau and Mr. Beekers all Merchants at Altona; the French Agents Albite, Honnore, Delamaire et Ceteraij residing at or near Altona; Messrs. Hansen, Merchants at Randers; or Mr. J Gummer, Merchant at Stockholm, or any, or either, and which of them? Do you know, have you not heard, or do you not believe, that some one or more of the Persons abovementioned, or some other Person or Persons, and who in particular, not mentioned by Name in the Ship Papers, had some and what Interest in, or control over, or connection with, the Cargo of the Ship in question, either directly or indirectly? Can you take upon Yourself to Swear positively, that no one of such above named Persons, or any other Person or Persons not mentioned in the Ship Papers, had any such Interest in, Control over, or Connection with the Cargo in question?¹⁸

The interrogation process looked like a police investigation. All the names quoted in the interrogatory were neutral traders and the purpose was to obtain responses that could lead to legal proceedings. The questions were repeated and overlapping in various forms to confuse the traffickers. The reports were analysed, the answers compared and a decision regarding the legitimacy of the ship's cargo and destination quickly taken. In doubtful cases, but also to supply Britain in cereals, the British frigates seized numerous vessels. In August 1794, after the end of the instructions of June 1793, the capture of grain vessels continued. The British services appeared fully aware of the smuggling and knew when the merchandise belonged to the French.

As the interrogation process indicates, the British were extremely knowledgeable about the smuggling and neutral traffic and the merchants who participated in such trades. To obtain information concerning French trade, the British authorities set up an intelligence service in all northern ports which exported grain and also in France. The great orator Fabre d'Eglantine compared these agents to 'vampires' ordered by the 'infernal genius' of Downing Street, that is to say William Pitt, whose mission was to destabilize the Republic by any means.¹⁹ For example, the former policeman Claude Antoine Rey, Lieutenant General of the Lyons police up to 1789, immigrated to London in October 1792 and organized with the help of two assistants an intelligence service paid for by the British government. In May 1793 it had

four main agents and eight junior agents in Paris; in the provinces, it had agents in Brest, Toulon, Granville and Lyons, its home town.²⁰ In Northern Europe, the diplomatic services wrote reports exceedingly well informed on ships and trades. The hunt seemed to be a success. In the archives, it is possible to identify approximately 392 Danish ships, excluding those from Sweden and the Hanseatic towns, taken by the British during the years 1793, 1794 and 1795, and this list is not exhaustive.

A Blessed Time for Neutrals

The system set up by the British Navy was extremely well organized, and the merchants' imagination seemed to be stimulated by the rigour imposed on them. For neutral countries, it was a complete violation of the principles of trade with the belligerent powers that anticipated restrictions on strategic goods but accepted free movements of foodstuffs.

The Scandinavian shipowners decided to ignore the embargo and got round the obstacle. In order to do this they used the usual means: change of flags, false papers with false destinations and so on. Even today it is difficult to understand this trade because of the use of nominees and other subterfuges to conceal the cargo owners.

Pierre Peschier of Copenhagen was one of the largest Danish merchants to participate in such trade. A Huguenot born in Switzerland, he specialized in the grain trade from the Baltic ports of Denmark and Hamburg. Between 1793 and 1795, when a ship loaded with grain was stopped in the North Sea by the British fleet, they always asked the captain if he knew a Mr Peschier of Copenhagen. In fact, he was a businessman working for Ernst Schimmelmann, the Scandinavian Minister of Finance. Schimmelmann regularly speculated on the benefits of Danish neutrality in European conflicts. Thus, during the American War of Independence, he organized an expedition to the Spanish colony of Caracas with a group of investors, whose names were kept secret but which included Prime Minister Guldberg, two members of the Council of State and the most important ministers and government officials.²¹ There is no doubt that during the Revolutionary Wars these men had also invested their money in neutral trade.

Finally, many ships escaped the British blockade so that France continued to receive foodstuffs. The risks were limited for the neutrals because the British were buying goods and paying the freight in the case of doubt as to the destination. When the ships arrived in France the profits were large, especially as payments were made with a very favourable exchange rate in luxury goods and confiscated objects (for example furniture mirrors and so on). For historians, it is difficult to know exactly the number of ships and the quantities of cereals that came to France. Amid the tumultuous revolutionary year, the French administration remained disorganized, and port records were very sketchy or non-existent, as indicated in the example from Bordeaux in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Ships arriving in the port of Le Havre (June–September 1793)*

Date	Name	Captain	Port of origin	Wheat		Rye		Flour	
				Qx	Livres	Qx	Livres	Qx	Livres
04/06/1793	<i>La Barque Robert</i>	Clark	Baltimore					4243	75
07/06/1793	<i>Le Hope</i>	George Toward	Baltimore					3500	
15/06/1793	<i>Le Sussex</i>	Atkins	Philadelphie					4408	25
21/06/1793	<i>L'Eliza</i>	Cadwell	Philadelphie					2541	
24/06/1793	<i>L'Harmony</i>	Osmon	Philadelphie					5824	87
26/06/1793	<i>Haabet</i>	Jensen Lind	Copenhague	1324	96				
03/07/1793	<i>Le Torsken</i>	Hans Jensen	Copenhague			2035	26		
05/07/1793	<i>Le Mercure</i>	Isak Wale	Copenhague	2667	50				
07/07/1793	<i>L'Anger</i>	Thomson Worp	Copenhague			1916	46		
10/07/1793	<i>L'Américain</i>	James Ewing	Philadelphie					5672	62
20/07/1793	<i>Le Christianhavn</i>	Urbanus O-Flor	Copenhague	4603	76				
22/07/1793	<i>Le Gustave</i>	Niels Bagge	Gothembourg			1366	34		
28/07/1793	<i>Le Hoppet</i>	A Wyk	Gothembourg	789	60	847	80		

13/08/1793	<i>La Margaritha</i>	Tonnes Lindrood	Copenhagen		2772	36
13/08/1793	<i>Les Deux Seurs</i>	Nissen	Copenhagen	2128		
20/08/1793	<i>Le Carolus</i>	Land Besg	Gothembourg		2200	56
22/08/1793	<i>L'Anna Maria</i>	Ob. Glorsen	Copenhagen		2006	58
24/08/1793	<i>La Speculation</i>	J.G. Waak	Gothembourg		1883	44
30/08/1793	<i>La Charlotte Christine</i>	Lorentzen	Copenhagen		2436	94
31/08/1793	<i>La Fortuna</i>	Ch. Hansen	Copenhagen	1198	40	
02/09/1793	<i>Les Deux Frères</i>	W. Boning	Gothembourg	1187	63	8
02/09/1793	<i>Anna Dorothea</i>	Rüber	Copenhagen		1212	64
08/09/1793	<i>L'Espérance</i>	Roelof Leicke	Copenhagen	1624	32	
11/09/1793	<i>Fredericka-Dorothea</i>	Hendricksen	Copenhagen	2638	72	
14/09/1793	<i>Die Walbe</i>	Smith	Copenhagen		2146	
Total				18,158	489	546
					21,679	26,188
						249

* This list is certainly incomplete and only concerns ships loaded with cereals. As part of this, on the 6 August 1793, two American ships, the *Hannah* (Captain Peter Cushing from Boston) and the *Johm* (Captain Pollard from New York) delivered rice to Le Havre. On the 8 August, the *Sarah Christine* from Uddevalla, Captain Soren Aflig Knap, arrived in the Norman port with a load of salted herring.

Source: Archives municipales du Havre F4, liasse 8.

It appears that the implementation of the embargo was not enforced consistently. In June 1793 the Danish consul in Bordeaux noted, 'It seems that the British let pass currently neutral vessels loaded with corn for France because two Danish vessels and one from Hamburg have just arrived in our harbor after having been visited carefully at sea.'²² On 6 August 1793 Captain Peter Cushing, commanding the 'Anglo-American' schooner *Hannah* coming from Boston to le Havre (then Hamburg) with rice, sugar, coffee and groceries, declared that he 'had been stopped by an English privateer who had taken all the letters he had for France & only handed back those for Le Havre after having read them'.²³ It is true that between the beginning of May and the end of the month of July 1793 English harbours received 184 grain ships coming from the Baltic and that demand had no doubt lessened. This could partly explain the success of Danish neutral shipping in supplying France.²⁴

Conclusion

The British blockade became less strict in August 1794 for several reasons. First, the British were disillusioned regarding the war. In early 1793 the London authorities believed the war would be short. According to Pitt, 'surely, everything will be finished in one or two campaigns'.²⁵ Things turned out quite differently. The campaign of 1794 turned into a disaster after the victory of Jourdan at Fleurus. The doors opened for the French to enter Belgium, threatening the Dutch Republic. At sea level, even if Villaret Joyeuse's fleet was defeated on the 'glorious First of June', it was only a partial victory because the convoy of grain it protected arrived in Brest. Second, the blockade had failed in its objectives. The cost of a total blockade was too high, and England could not control the entire French coast. The French population did not starve and even showed a new vigour in the fight against its enemies. Faced with the threat of France, Britain had to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the neutral powers. This was especially true when crops failed and grain riots broke out in various parts of Britain. It was therefore necessary to buy grain abroad, including from the United States and Northern Europe. Finally, the English may have noticed that, due to inflation and unfavourable exchange rates, it was detrimental to French economy to trade abroad. Buying high-priced products on foreign markets fed inflation and accentuated the economic crisis affecting revolutionary France.

The British decision to starve France was contrary to traditional blockade measures. In practice, however, the cereal trade war hardly changed at all. Lloyds' registers clearly show that the Royal Navy and British privateers were more interested in French ships loaded with rich colonial products or in liberating British ships taken by the French. As we have seen, ships from the north loaded with cereals were seized in great numbers when Great Britain

needed food, and these prizes were thus economically justified, but under normal circumstances the percentage of ships taken with cereal cargoes is relatively low.

We find the same elements to explain the failure of the Continental Blockade. The French authorities did not have the means to carry out a general blockade, and the neutrals, in agreement with the international trade world, knew how to get round all the bans in place. Here also there was a conflict of interest between trade and the regime.²⁶ For the merchants, the war, seen from a trade angle, had the advantage of being able to weaken the adversary's trade, even as commerce continued to function through alternative routes. Trade between enemies could carry on in a roundabout way because it was indispensable to the interests of commerce. Thus, in 1812 parliament in London learned, without turning a hair, that part of the uniform of the French army had been made in Yorkshire and that 'not only the accoutrements, but the ornaments of Marshal Soult and his army' came from Birmingham.²⁷

Notes

1. Michel Vovelle, *La chute de la monarchie 1787–1792* (Paris, 1972), 244.
2. Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Department of Foreign Affairs, letter of Hornbostel, 1793.
3. Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Kommerkollegiet, 1817, letter from Von Hemert, 17 August 1793.
4. Archives nationales, Paris, F11 240.
5. Sophie Dorothea Thalbitzer, *Grandmamas bekiendelser. Memoirer og Breve*, ed. Julius Clausen and P.Fr. Rist, 51 vols (Copenhagen 1905–27), vol. 4, 46–7, 72–82. 'De gjorde meget betydelige affairer med etatsraad Brun, Bügel, Selby, Erichsen og Cramer' ('they did much important business with senior members of the Council of State, Brun, Bügel, Selby, Erichsen and Cramer').
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7. Ole Tuxen, 'Principles and Priorities: The Danish View of Neutrality during the Colonial War of 1755–63', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 13 (1978): 217.
8. *Ibid.*, 223.
9. Eli F. Heckscher, *The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation*, <http://oll.libertyfund.org>, n.p.
10. William Manning, *Commentaries on the Law of Nations* (London, 1839), 117 (quoted by Heckscher, *The Continental System*).
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15. Nicholas M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London, 2004), 433.

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17. Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille, Marseille, L. IV, 104.
18. The National Archive, Kew, High Court of Admiralty, 32/543.
19. Edmond Dziembowski, *Les Pitt: L'Angleterre face à la France, 1708–1806* (Paris, 2006), 423.
20. Elisabeth Sparrow, *Secret Service: British Agents in France 1792–1815* (Woodbridge, 1999), 25.
21. Ole Feldbæk, 'Caracas-spekulationen 1782–1783: Dansk neutralitetsudnyttelse under den Amerikanske frihedskrig', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 6 (1973): 159–76.
22. Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, *Kommercekollegium, Journalsager*, 1158.
23. Archives Municipales, Le Havre, Feuille Maritime Havre de Grâce, 7 August 1793.
24. Soundtollregistersonline <http://www.soundtoll.nl>.
25. Dziembowski, *Les Pitt*, 407.
26. Silvia Marzagalli, *'Les boulevards de la fraude': Le négoce maritime et le Blocus continental, 1806–1813 Bordeaux, Hambourg, Livourne* (Villeneuve d'Asq, 1999).
27. Heckscher, *The Continental System*, 12.

Part II

Regional Approaches to the Practice and Consequences of the Continental System

5

The Continental System: A View from the Sea

Silvia Marzagalli

The evolution of Napoleon's views on Europe and the shift from the goal of peace in 1801 and 1802 to a continuous state of warfare after 1803 has been the object of extensive historical interpretations and debate.¹ In a recent book, Luigi Mascilli Migliorini offered a splendid analysis of the intrinsic reasons which prevented a régime born out of a *coup d'état* organized by a general to evolve into an element of stability within Europe.² He insists, in particular, on the importance of war for Napoleon in constantly asserting the legitimacy of his command, both within the Empire and on the continent.

This chapter provides a fresh and complementary look to this major historical question by looking at Napoleon's integration of large parts of Europe into an alliance system, or into the Empire itself, from a maritime perspective. Certainly, as Michael Broers put it, 'the Napoleonic empire was a contiguous land empire. It expanded directly from a heartland, across a continent ... inspired by imperialist expansion.'³ His observation, however, does not prevent an interpretation that one of the most powerful motives for this imperialism derived from the Empire's maritime weakness. I argue that the Continental System and the annexation of increasing parts of Europe into the French Empire can be largely explained within the context of the difficulties in implementing economic warfare against Great Britain. The fact that the composition of the Empire and its alliance system responded to economic necessity provides a better understanding of the heterogeneity of French authorities' views of imperial expansion. In particular it contextualizes the distance, arrogance, perceptions of otherness, incompatibility and hostility that so many French rulers reflect in their writings, when they sought to apply what they considered an advanced state model to what they regarded as backward, less civilized areas.⁴ The selection of European regions integrated into the Empire and the Continental System did not derive from a pre-existing perception of affinities which might have fostered more consensual and multifaceted amalgamation; rather, it was determined by sheer considerations of necessity – the necessity of forcing Great Britain to peace.

Economic war was the main means left to Napoleon in order to pressure Great Britain after the French navy and its allies were defeated at Trafalgar in 1805. François Crouzet already addressed whether this plan was realistic by looking at the strengths and the vulnerability of the British economy.⁵ This chapter, instead, explores mercantile activity among the merchants of continental Europe to illustrate how they circumvented the Continental Blockade and organized effective illicit trade networks, even when their cities were occupied by French troops or part of a state within the Continental System. This is not to say that the Continental Blockade was without consequences for those cities; on the contrary, their populations were heavily burdened as international trade routes underwent major shifts. Besides local economic and social consequences and global commercial readjustment, the inefficiency of the Blockade's implementation outside imperial boundaries had serious geo-political costs. This chapter suggests that the incapacity of the French state to effectively implement anti-British economic measures determined the typology, geography and chronology of Napoleonic imperialist ambitions and in particular necessitated annexing European port cities and maritime coasts to France.

The chapter retraces the context in which the Continental Blockade emerged and became imposed upon Europe before turning to its difficult implementation. The Continental Blockade and British trade legislation provoked a massive reorganization of trade patterns. During the Napoleonic Wars, merchants circumvented trade interdictions through traditional means, but they also invented new expedients to ensure trade. The difficult implementation of the Continental Blockade compelled Napoleon to a series of annexations and simultaneously contributed to the deterioration of interstate relations within the Continental System.

The Continental Blockade: An Ersatz for Maritime Weakness Affecting the Continental System

Throughout his long career, Marcel Dunan insisted on the necessity of differentiating the Continental Blockade from the Continental System.⁶ In 1966 and again in 1995, Roger Dufraisse stressed once more the differences between these two concepts.⁷ If the Continental System consisted in 'Napoleon's conception of the political, institutional, social and economic organization, not of Europe, but of the different states composing it', and aimed at securing the economic pre-eminence and international protection of French interests, the Continental Blockade consisted in the 'totality of political, military, diplomatic measures taken unilaterally by Napoleon to force Europe to apply against British goods those measures which were already taken in France.'⁸

The Berlin Decree extended to a large part of Europe the prohibition of British manufactures and colonial goods already enforced in France since

the 1790s, and again from 1803 onwards.⁹ In its content, the Decree represented not only a manifestation of industrial protectionism – although this aspect was the most likely to induce governments in Europe to accept it – but also a change in imperial strategy, as it aimed to reinforce economic warfare against Great Britain by banning its trade to (and less convincingly from) the whole continent. Colonial goods were considered British, and were thus prohibited, unless they were accompanied with a certificate of origin signed by the French consul in the ship's port of clearance, stating that the ships' contents had not been produced in a British colony.

By pointing to the fact that 'It was an extension to the whole continent ... of a toll legislation which was previously applied within a state only', Dufraisse stressed that the novelty of the 1806 Berlin Decree consisted precisely in Napoleon's determination to extend it to the greatest possible number of European countries.¹⁰ The Continental Blockade, thus, reflects the Continental System as much as it shapes it. The two, however, overlap neither conceptually nor geographically. If the Continental System was essentially related to power relations in the continent, the Continental Blockade was an economic policy which remained strongly determined by maritime factors and should in fact be understood as an ersatz for naval weakness.

This desire to extend existing interdiction against British trade to the entire continent should be understood in the context of the French defeat at Trafalgar in October 1805 and the victory of the French army at Austerlitz in December 1805 and at Jena in October 1806. The decree tacitly recognized British superiority at sea and the impossibility for France to blockade British ports through a classical naval blockade or to seriously hamper British shipping and maritime trade at sea. The French victory over Austria and Prussia, on the other hand, made it possible to conceive of a forced extension of the anti-British economic measures to a contiguous part of Europe and its coasts.

Napoleon thought it possible to stop British trade to Europe by controlling the land and the ports of the continent. By the time the Berlin Decree was issued, he already controlled, directly or indirectly, such major European ports as Genoa, Livorno, Amsterdam, Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg. In the case of the north German cities, French troops occupied these once neutral states, guaranteed by Prussia since 1795, a few days before Napoleon issued the Berlin Decree declaring Great Britain under blockade.¹¹ The Continental Blockade – a term which does not appear as such in the Berlin Decree itself – was thus maritime in its nature but continental in its implementation. In contrast with a traditional maritime blockade carried out by the navy, Napoleon's Blockade was *continental* because it was to be applied on land and aimed to encompass the whole continent.

Indeed, within a year, Napoleon had imposed the Continental Blockade to almost the entire continent.¹² The measures against British trade were reinforced by the Milan Decrees of 23 November and 17 December 1807,

severely restricting neutral shipping: neutral ships complying with British legislation and controls were considered as ‘denationalized’ and, therefore, a good prize. By the beginning of 1808, the Berlin and Milan Decrees were not only adopted within the boundaries of the Continental System, but also by Napoleonic allies Russia, Prussia and Austria.

The conjunction of British, United States and French policies asphyxiated trade in all major ports under French control and dislocated numerous economic activities on the continent linked to maritime trade, both exports and imports. In order to counter such disastrous effects, Napoleon provided navigation licences from July 1810 onwards, which sanctioned trade in colonial goods.¹³ This measure, however, radically favoured ports in ‘old France’, whereas imperial territories and allies were denied the opportunity to adopt similar policies.¹⁴

The evolution of the Continental Blockade over time emerged as a major factor in the increasing discontent within the system of forced imperial alliances in Europe. Specifically, the reintroduction of maritime trade relations between France and Great Britain in 1812, from which Napoleon excluded his allies, accelerated the decline of the Blockade. Many former allies ceased to implement effectively the Continental Blockade even before they abandoned Napoleon officially after the defeat of Russia. Consequently, the difficult implementation of the Continental Blockade, especially by reluctant allies, induced Napoleon to annex extensive portions of European coastal regions. In order to demonstrate this assertion, it is necessary to look more closely at the way the Blockade influenced trade and the means merchants deployed in order to circumvent trade restrictions.

Circumventing the Continental Blockade: The Recourse to Old Wartime Recipes

Legislation from France and Britain made wartime maritime trade consistently more complicated than in times of peace. Merchants in continental Europe, however, continued to carry on some international commerce. Maritime trade came to a standstill for specific lapses of time, such as in 1808 and again in 1811, related to British, French and American actions, but the Continental Blockade as such diverted maritime trade routes more than it stopped trade entirely.

Warfare and restrictive legislation obliged merchants to modify trade routes and to find ways to introduce prohibited goods to consumers within the continent. Some of the methods adopted in order to sustain trade were older than the Continental Blockade, others were specific to this era. This section deals with the old techniques that consisted mainly in recourse to neutral carriers.

From the point of view of the merchants in major European cities, business was shaped by the Blockade, but also – and above all – by the conditions imposed by the British on maritime trade. The addition of these two

constraints substantially shaped the way trade persisted, both spatially and in terms of organization.

Great Britain seized, as it had done since 1756, enemy ships and cargoes belonging to the subjects of an enemy state, whatever the flag of the ship. They also condemned apprehended ships and cargoes trading directly between two enemy ports, neutral ships transporting war munitions shipped to enemy ports even when they originated from a neutral port and cargoes bound to a blockaded port when the captain intentionally tried to break the blockade.¹⁵

The French Empire, on the other hand, seized ships belonging to enemy countries (a measure extended from 1808 to 1810 to American vessels), prohibited all imports coming directly from Great Britain and its allies (although from 1812 onwards French licences authorized such trade), as well as the import of British manufactures and goods, regardless of the flag or the itinerary of the ship and of the citizenship of the cargo-owner. Non-prohibited colonial goods could pass only when provided with a certificate of origin, but they were heavily taxed, especially after the Trianon Decree of August 1810 – a factor that considerably increased smuggling.

The easiest way to circumvent most British and French trade restrictions was to call in to a neutral port in order to avoid the direct leg between two enemy ports. This was a standard practice used by shipowners and captains in times of war, notably in order to carry on colonial trade. In March 1797, for instance, the US merchant ship *Eliza*, belonging to Elias Hasket Derby of Salem, arrived from Salem to the French colony île de France (today's Mauritius Island) where it bought a cargo consisting in sugar, coffee, indigo and cotton, which was imported to Salem in August 1797. A month later, the ship sailed to Bordeaux, where it sold the cargo.¹⁶ By 1805, the practice of the 'broken voyage' was so wide spread that British prize courts started condemning cargoes which could be proven to have been imported in a neutral intermediary port just to be re-exported to the final destination.¹⁷ By mixing up cargoes in a neutral port, changing ships, captains and crew, and by being very circumspect in correspondences that might be intercepted, trade was still possible. The US brig *Three Brothers*, for instance, on 20 April 1805 exported from Newburyport to Copenhagen brandy which had been imported two months before from Bordeaux to Newburyport on the *Alert*.¹⁸ Similarly, it was possible to export French goods to the British market by sending such goods to a neutral port before re-exporting them to Great Britain.

Imports of British products and British colonial goods bound to continental Europe could follow the same path. For instance, in the spring of 1806, before the French occupied Hamburg, British manufactured goods bound to Livorno, where the prohibitions of British goods were already enforced, were sent first to Hamburg and then reshipped to the Mediterranean on a neutral ship.¹⁹ Merchants had to provide them with a false certificate of origin or false trademarks.²⁰ Such documents could be forged, and the zeal of authorities could be hampered by pecuniary incentives. In the 1790s, the

British forged false ship papers as well. In March 1801, US consular agent in Bordeaux, Isaac Cox Barnet, remarked that 'They are well executed in Jersey & Guernsey & sold there for sixteen Dollars for set of Papers.'²¹ As one of the most pre-eminent forgers in London failed, 32 boxes of false shipping papers and seals of different countries were sold at auction.²² Forgery was particularly necessary as far as the certificates of origin for colonial goods were concerned, whenever it proved impossible to bribe the local consul.

The recourse to neutral ports enormously increased the activities of such ports, but also contributed to alterations in trade patterns as well, especially colonial trade. As this had been the case in previous conflicts, neutral merchants got deeply involved in colonial trade and largely disrupted traditional mercantile practices and trade routes customary in times of peace, which reserved colonial trade to mother countries. Hamburg merchants, for instance, imported in 1795 twice as much coffee as in 1790, and they also radically changed their suppliers. If in 1790 Hamburg imported colonial goods almost exclusively from France, by 1795 a consistent part of sugar and coffee was imported from Great Britain, and even more came from the other suppliers, notably the United States, as shown in Figure 5.1.

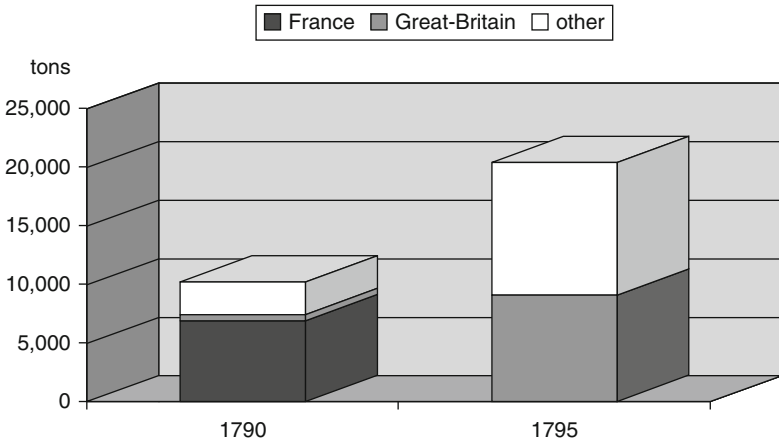


Figure 5.1 Origin of coffee imports in Hamburg

Sources: Ernst Baasch, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte der Handelsbeziehungen zwischen Hamburg und Amerika', in *Hamburgische Festschrift zur Erinnerung an die Entdeckung Amerikas* (2 vols., Hamburg, 1892), vol. 1, 74. I have converted into metric tons the data expressed in *Faß* (hogshead): 500 *Pfunds* for a *Faß* of coffee (1 *Pfund* = 485 g.), according to Heinrich Ernst Köppen, 'Die Handelsbeziehungen Hamburgs zu den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts', Phil. Diss. (Universität Köln, Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät, 1973), 414. The total of coffee imports for 1790 being unknown, the 'other imports' for 1790 is an estimation based on the mean imports of the two pre-war years 1791 and 1792.

Sugar trade underwent major changes not only in trade patterns, but also in areas of production. The West Indies experienced major upheavals since the 1791 slave revolt in Saint Domingue. The success of the slave revolt severely disturbed the island's sugar production, which in 1789 produced half of the world's sugar. As Haiti's sugar production collapsed, however, new sugar plantations were settled in the British West Indies, Brazil, Louisiana and Cuba. Merchants in London also absorbed the sugar produced in those colonies occupied by the British.²³

As a result of this reorganization, and despite temporary slave abolition in the French colonies from 1794 to 1802, total sugar imports to Europe in 1807 were higher than in 1789. Great Britain imported 165,000 tons of sugar in 1807, and although great quantities of it were traditionally consumed in Britain itself, a significant portion of imports was re-exported to Europe. By 1807, the United States re-exported 65,000 metric tons of sugar, mainly to continental Europe.²⁴ Some of this sugar had been produced in the British colonies, which had been opened to neutral traders in 1793. Despite the restriction imposed on such imports (certificate of origins), substantial portions of the sugar imported into the continent were either produced or traded with the concurrence of British subjects.

There is no doubt that neutral merchant fleets greatly benefitted from warfare, notwithstanding an unpredictable likelihood of being seized by one of the belligerents, delayed or condemned. Despite individual losses, the overall increase in neutral merchant fleets clearly proved the positive experiences of shipowners. Hamburg fleet increased from 159 units in 1788 to 280 in 1799.²⁵ Both the Danish and the Swedish sent twice as many ships to Southern Europe between 1793 and 1807 than during the period of peace from 1784 to 1792.²⁶ The overall tonnage of United States ships entering a port of the United States increased threefold between 1790 and 1807.²⁷ The Greek merchant fleet which sailed mainly under the neutral Ottoman flag had 'more than doubled' by the end of the Napoleonic wars.²⁸ Belligerents' hostility toward neutrals was a constant cause of international tensions and of diplomatic and consular frenetic activities, but it did not prevent neutral merchant fleets from prospering.

Recourse to neutral trade and carriers and to diverted trade routes lasted until the end of 1807 when, under the conjunction of the November Orders in Council, the Milan Decrees and Jefferson's Embargo Act, transatlantic maritime trade to and from continental Europe was heavily reduced. If until then trade had been carried out mainly through neutral carriers, as in previous wars, new ways had to be found now to dispatch products to their final consumers. These new approaches implied a radical reorganization of trade routes which went far beyond the circuitous voyages through a neutral port. This evolution ultimately provoked the reconfiguration of the Continental System and pushed Napoleon to expansionism.

Circumventing Trade Restriction: New Solutions

The Continental Blockade forced merchants to organize a structured smuggling of prohibited or heavily taxed goods and to adapt to the changing capacity of the French Empire and its allies to control the coasts of Europe. In order to conduct circuitous trade, merchants modified trade routes with existing ports, as well as created new trading places and exploited broader portions of continental coasts.

The case of Hamburg provides a good example. Since 1807, Hamburg experienced a situation which became the standard for most of Europe after 1810. The free Hanseatic city of Hamburg had been occupied by French troops two days before the promulgation of the Berlin Decree. The local Senate, the highest authority of the city, was forced to adopt the Continental Blockade a week later.²⁹ Great Britain consequently blockaded the mouth of the Elbe in March 1807, but authorized the navigation of coastal vessels on the river Elbe. As this had already been the case between 1803 and 1805 during the French occupation of Hanover and the British blockade of the Elbe, the Danish port of Tönning became the centre of intense smuggling activity with Hamburg. During the first quarter of 1807, coastal vessels with a total burden approximating 30,000 tons entered Hamburg from Tönning, charged mainly with goods previously imported from Great Britain. The commander of the French occupation army, General Guillaume Brune, and the French consul le Chevardière, did their best to help inhabitants to circumvent French prohibitions. As the consul of the United States in Hamburg put it, 'The secret of this, as of most of their [French] measures, is that the austerity of the agents must be softened by pecuniary motives'.³⁰ By the end of the summer of 1807, the deterioration of the British–Danish relations and the removal of the most corrupted French authorities from Hamburg put a temporary end to the prosperity of the small fishing port of Tönning, which would revive in 1809 and 1810, mainly through American shipping. Meanwhile, merchants found other ways to introduce British and colonial goods into the North Sea region.³¹

At the beginning of September 1807 following the British bombardment on Copenhagen, the British occupied the Danish small island of Heligoland, where 2000 inhabitants made a living from fishing. Within a year, the island became one of the major bases of British trade to the continent, and dozens of British and European merchants settled there. The total value of imports in Heligoland from March 1809 to September 1811 amounted to the very consistent sum of 5.7 million British pounds, mainly consisting of colonial goods and British manufactured products. Goods were discharged at night on the continent of the North Sea by small fishing and coastal vessels until Napoleon finally decided to annex the whole North Sea coast in 1810. If the Heligoland trade bypassed the city of Hamburg, the city's merchants took an active part in the smuggling networks that helped goods reach the continent.³²

Hamburg's population, on the other hand, became extremely active between 1807 and 1810 in daily smuggling from Danish Altona into Hamburg. Although Denmark had adopted the Berlin Decree after the British attack on Copenhagen in September 1807, the Danish king refused to adopt the Milan Decrees against neutral trade. Neutral shipping – notably American – was consequently very intensive in most Danish ports, especially in 1809 and early 1810, after the repeal of Jefferson's embargo. Huge quantities of colonial goods, therefore, entered legally into Denmark. The Danish port of Altona was a 15-minute walk from Hamburg, and thousands of Hamburgers carried daily small quantities of colonial goods into the Hanseatic city. A contemporary report states,

This smuggling was carried by a crowd of women, children, young girls, old people and the lowest class of the population, who go into the hidden warehouses of the city's outskirts, each of them carrying half a pound of sugar and coffee which they hide into their boots, shoes, and clothing.³³

Although seizures were considerable – 9.3 tons of goods in August 1810, 6.5 tons in September – the quantities smuggled into the city were far greater.³⁴

Once in Hamburg, goods were re-exported to the rest of the continent or into the French Empire. As most countries had adopted the Continental Blockade, all goods had to be accompanied and protected against seizure by a certificate of origin stating their non-British character. The French occupied Hamburg from November 1806 to December 1810, yet the number of French authorities in the city itself remained small, and they clearly felt far enough from Paris to accept incentives facilitating this trade. French plenipotentiary Minister in Hamburg, Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, agreed to countersign merchants' oaths delivered by the local Senate stating that the goods were not of British origin, although, strictly speaking, he had no idea of the actual origin of such goods. The inquiry ordered by Napoleon at the end of 1810 revealed that Bourrienne received an *ad-valorem* duty on the documents which accompanied the goods. The duty was actually very modest compared to the sum other French consuls required elsewhere for similar services: between 0.25 and 0.5 per cent in Hamburg, compared to 3 to 5 per cent in Rotterdam. From the investigation on Bourrienne, I calculated that between August 1807 and December 1810, he had delivered passports covering a yearly trade which was 60 to 120 million francs' worth in average – a sum which should be compared with the approximately 50 million francs' worth of colonial goods which Hamburg imported before the French Revolution, which consisted of half of its total imports.³⁵

The decision to annex Hamburg and the other Hanseatic cities into the French Empire in December 1810 is a direct consequence of the impossibility of preventing such illegal commerce. But the case of Hamburg is far from unique. I have demonstrated elsewhere that Livorno, for instance, presents strong similarities; the indirect control at the time of the Kingdom of Etruria between 1801 and 1807 allowed for an extensive introduction of British goods into the Tuscan port, so that Napoleon determined to annex the kingdom in 1808 to close this major Mediterranean port to British trade. Granted free-port status between 1808 and 1810, Livorno stored all goods (British manufactured goods excepted) duty-free for re-export and became a hub for the fraudulent introduction of colonial wares into the Empire. Thousands of inhabitants transported daily out of the city's walls small quantities of colonial goods which had not paid duties, just as their peers in Hamburg did in the opposite direction. Once the free-port status of Livorno was suppressed, organized smuggling emerged on the coasts of Tuscany, where malaria prevented authorities from effective patrols.³⁶

Whenever Napoleon managed to stop consistent flows of smuggling and fraud into a port city, merchants found alternative routes to introduce prohibited goods on less-controlled portions of the coast, or in regions where Napoleon could not exert control. Shipping in Swedish Gothenburg, for instance, increased considerably in the last years of the Empire, as is evident from Table 5.1.

Generally speaking, trade in Northern Europe shifted progressively eastwards; after the French occupied Amsterdam in 1795, trade shifted to Hamburg, and when the Hanseatic city was annexed to the French Empire in 1810, the Baltic became the centre of trade in Northern Europe.³⁷ A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Mediterranean, where trade routes shifted to the Levant and to the Balkans, as Italian ports were closed to British trade. In a different geographical area, Malta proved to be as useful

Table 5.1 Ships clearing Gothenburg, 1807–14

Year	Number of ships
1807	588
1808	434
1809	1006
1810	1239
1811	1500
1812	1617
1813	1021
1814	1209

Source: Archives du ministère des Affaires Etrangères, La Courneuve, France, Correspondance Consulaire, Gothembourg, t. 3, no. 222, 12 October 1816.

Table 5.2 Official value of British exports (a) and re-exports (b) to Gibraltar and Malta, 1802–12 (in thousands of British pounds)

Year	Gibraltar		Malta	
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
1802	530	67	21	12
1803	487	70	134	11
1804	560	55	114	13
1805	184	41	127	9
1806	512	85	261	30
1807	844	193	750	120
1808	1372	336	2914	682
1809	3605	626	2152	635
1810	?	633	?	265
1811	?	865	?	1091
1812	3450	1030	5272	2166

Source: François Crouzet, *L'économie britannique et le blocus continental, 1806–1813* (1958; repr. with new introduction, Paris, 1987), 883, 887.

as Heligoland. The Iberian Peninsula was another possible route of penetration for forbidden and heavily taxed products via British-occupied Portugal and via Gibraltar, once the Spanish insurrection gained ground (Table 5.2). Such circuitous trade routes and subterfuges made it possible to continue at least some of the peacetime trade both between the colonies and the mother country, and between belligerents.

The relative inefficacy of the Continental Blockade can be measured, among other means, by the differential in prices between the territories which were opened to British and neutral trade, those who had theoretically adopted the Blockade, and those which were tightly under Napoleon's control. In November 1812, one pound of coffee cost 1.65 francs in Tunis, 2.65 in Salonika, 7.57 in Trieste, 12.69 in Ancona and 15.30 in Milan.³⁸ By looking systematically at prices in different parts of Europe over time, it would be possible to have a precise understanding of the effective implementation of the Blockade in different parts of the continent and of the evolution of the allies' zeal in implementing it.

Conclusion

The use of neutral flags, notably the American, and the massive recourse to smuggling and corruption enabled a sustained international trade between Great Britain and extra-European ports on the one hand and European continental ports on the other. What was at stake in those years was the capacity to organize the circulation of goods across the Atlantic – which was under British control – and to connect colonial markets to European consumers

and producers in continental Europe, despite belligerents' restrictions at sea and Napoleon's restrictions on land. The Continental Blockade is an aspect of a much more comprehensive story linked to international circulation and Napoleon's limited means to control it. The Continental Blockade itself can only be understood by looking at it from a maritime perspective.

In producing major shifts in trade routes and price changes and by complicating or making virtually impossible some kinds of trade and economic transactions, the Continental Blockade influenced the economy in many different ways and affected the living conditions and, incidentally, state revenues of many countries, regions and cities in Europe. It also shaped relations between the Empire and its satellites and allies. Ultimately, it determined the directions of French expansionism.

Since the cessation of the Peace of Amiens, the directions of Napoleon's expansionism cannot be understood without considering his will to exert direct control on larger parts of European maritime regions. After the republic of Genoa, annexed in June 1805, Tuscany and central Italy were annexed in 1808, the Republic of Ragusa ceased to exist in 1808 and the Eastern Adriatic coast was put under direct French control with the creation of the Illyrian Provinces. In 1810, the Kingdoms of Holland and Bremen, Hamburg and Lübeck were incorporated into the French Empire. Finally, Catalonia was annexed in 1812. Annexation was conceived by Napoleon as the most adequate response to the incapacity or unwillingness of continental allies to impose respect for the Continental Blockade among the merchants in the ports and population living along the coasts. In those parts of Europe which were not annexed, the Continental Blockade markedly contributed to increased tensions with the French Empire as it became clear that French interests came before that of the allies. The evolution of the Continental System and imperial expansion and politics, therefore, can also be better understood by looking at it from a maritime perspective.

Notes

1. George Lefebvre denied that the Blockade was the 'essential purpose' (*raison d'être*) of the Empire: George Lefebvre, *Napoleon* (4th edn, Paris, 1965), 238–9; but Marcel Dunan considered the Blockade as the main factor of Napoleon's expansionism in Europe: Marcel Dunan, 'Napoléon et l'Allemagne', in *Napoléon et l'Europe* (Paris, 1961), 63–78 (75). See also Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London, 1991), 26–9.
2. Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, *Napoléon* (Paris, 2004).
3. Michael Broers, 'A Turner Thesis of Europe? The Frontier in Napoleonic Europe', *Napoleonica. La revue* 5 (2009): 2–12 (7).
4. These aspects have been best developed by Michael Broers, *Europe under Napoleon, 1799–1815* (London, 1996); see also his 'Cultural Imperialism in a European Context? Political Culture and Cultural Frontiers in Napoleonic Italy', *Past & Present* 170 (2001): 152–80.

5. François Crouzet, *L'économie britannique et le blocus continental, 1806–1813* (1958; repr. with new introduction, Paris, 1987).
6. Marcel Dunan, 'Le système continental', *Revue des Etudes Napoléoniennes* 3 (1913): 115–46; Marcel Dunan, 'L'Italie et le système continental', *Revue de l'Institut Napoléon* 96 (1965): 176–92.
7. Roger Dufraisse, 'Régime douanier, blocus, système continental: essai de mise au point', *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* 44 (1966): 518–34. Thirty years later, he still regretted the tendency of most historians to use both terms without defining them: Roger Dufraisse, 'Napoléon pour ou contre l'Europe', *Revue du Souvenir Napoléonien* 402 (1995): 4–25, http://www.napoleon.org/fr/salle_lecture/articles/files/Napoleon_pour_contre_Europe.asp#top (2 December 2012).
8. Dufraisse, 'Napoléon', and Dufraisse, 'Régime douanier', 535.
9. The French army had already imposed similar restrictions to trade with Great Britain in Hanover from 1803 to 1805, thus hindering shipping and trade on the Elbe and Oder rivers. The rapidity with which Hanseatic merchants had been able to divert trade routes and shift trade to areas which were not under French control induced Napoleon to plan a much wider extension of the blockade to Europe.
10. Dufraisse, 'Napoléon'.
11. The preamble of the decree does not mention any of these factors which were thought so fundamental in its origins. The Decree was rather justified as a response to the British Order in Council of 16 May 1806, declaring the coast between Brest and the Elbe River under blockade. Napoleon believed this Order in Council to be contrary to the principles of international law. He pointed to the economic consequences for the continent of a maritime blockade which hit commercial ports and not only arsenals, and contested the legitimacy of a 'paper blockade'.
12. The extension of the application area of the Blockade was foreseen in the text of the decree itself: Article 9 of the Berlin Decree ordered the French Minister of Foreign Affairs to send a copy of the decree to Spain, Holland, Tuscany and Naples, while instructions sent to Talleyrand ordered him to have the decree adopted in the Hanseatic towns as well. *Correspondance de Napoléon 1er: publiée par l'ordre de l'Empereur Napoléon III*, 32 vols, (Paris, 1859–69), vol. 13, no. 11,282, 554, Berlin, 21 November 1806. See also *ibid.*, vol. 14, no. 11,378, 27–8, to Louis Bonaparte: 'I recommend you the strict execution of my decree on the Blockade of England, without which we will never finish.'
13. Parallel to that, he also tried to reduce smuggling – and incidentally raise state revenues, as custom revenues in France dropped from 51 million francs in 1806 to 11.5 in 1809 – by establishing high import duties which were still, however, supposed to be lower than the cost of smuggling. The Trianon Decree (5 August 1810) increased import duties on colonial goods consistently: duty on sugar, for instance, increased from one franc pro kg to four francs pro kg.
14. See Silvia Marzagalli, *Les boulevards de la fraude: Le négoce maritime et le Blocus continental, 1806–1813. Bordeaux, Hambourg, Livourne* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1999), 105–43 for a discussion and details of the licences in different parts of the Empire; see also Frank Edgar Melvin, *Napoleon's Navigation System: A Study of Trade Control during the Continental Blockade* (1919; repr. New York, 1970).
15. In November 1807, Great Britain imposed on neutral ships to buy British licences if they wanted to sail a port where British ships were not admitted (that is ports where the Continental Blockade was in force). An account of the different typologies of British licences is in Crouzet, *L'économie britannique*. The interruption of

the delivery of British licences could temporarily stop trade to a given port or region.

16. Silvia Marzagalli, *Bordeaux et les États-Unis, 1776–1815: politique et stratégies négociantes dans la genèse d'un réseau commercial* (Geneva, 2014), chapter 5.
17. Bradford Perkins, 'Sir William Scott and the Essex', *William and Mary Quarterly* 13 (1956): 169–83.
18. Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass., Newburyport Custom House 282, #497 Abstract of drawbacks of duties payable in the district of Newburyport on goods, wares, and merchandise exported from the United States, 1804–1805.
19. Marzagalli, *Les boulevards*, 154.
20. On examples in Livorno, see Paul Marmottan, *Le royaume d'Étrurie (1801–1807)* (Paris, 1896), 148–54, 185–6.
21. National Archives and Record Administration of the United States (hereafter NARA), Washington DC, RG 59, Dispatches from US Consul in Bordeaux, T 164, r. 1, letter of Cox Barnet to the State Secretary of the United States, Bordeaux 20 March 1801.
22. See Alfred W. Crosby, *America, Russia, Hemp, and Napoleon: American Trade with Russia and the Baltic, 1783–1812* (Columbus, 1965), 114–15.
23. Silvia Marzagalli, 'Limites et opportunités dans l'Atlantique français au XVIII^e siècle: Le cas de la maison Gradis de Bordeaux', *Outre-Mers. Revue d'Histoire* 362–3 (2009): 87–110.
24. Although some sugar was imported from the United States to Great Britain, Great Britain absorbed 3.4 per cent only of United States re-exports. The bulk of United States sugar re-exports went to the European continent. Elisabeth Boody Schumpeter, *English Overseas Trade Statistics, 1697–1808* (Oxford, 1960), table 18; Timothy Pitkin, *A Statistical View of the Commerce of the United States* (1816, 2nd edn 1835; repr. New York, 1967), chapter 3, table 4.
25. Otto Mathies, *Hamburgs Rederei, 1814–1914* (Hamburg, 1924).
26. Dan H. Andersen and Pierrick Pourchasse, 'La navigation des flottes de l'Europe du Nord vers la Méditerranée (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle)', in *La Méditerranée dans les circulations atlantiques au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Arnaud Bartolomei and Silvia Marzagalli, *Revue d'histoire maritime* 13 (2011): 21–44.
27. Adam Seybert, *Statistical Annals* (1818, repr. New York, 1970); *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington DC, 1975), Q 507–8.
28. Gelina Harlaftis, 'The Eastern Invasion: Greeks in Mediterranean Trade and Shipping, in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Braudel's Maritime Legacy*, ed. Maria Fusaro et al. (London, 2010), 223–52 (232).
29. On Hamburg in the Napoleonic era, see Georges Servières, *L'Allemagne française sous Napoléon Ier d'après des documents inédits tirés des Archives Nationales et des Archives des Affaires Étrangères* (Paris, 1904); Adolf Wohlwill, *Neuere Geschichte der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, 1789–1815* (Gotha, 1914); Burghart Schmidt, *Hamburg im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution und Napoleons 1789–1813*, 2 vols (Hamburg, 1998); Katherine Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Culture, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era* (Leiden, 2005). Marzagalli, *Les boulevards*.
30. NARA, Washington DC, RG 59, Dispatches from US Consul, T 211, r. 1, US consul at Hamburg, Forbes, to the State Secretary of the United States, 30 January 1807.
31. Marzagalli, *Les boulevards*, 155–64.

32. Werhner Mohrhenn, 'Helgoland zur Zeit der Kontinentalsperre', Phil. diss. (University of Cologne, 1928); Frank Lynder, *Spione in Hamburg und auf Helgoland: Neuentdeckte Geheimdokumente aus der napoleonischen Zeit* (Hamburg, 1964); Crouzet, *L'économie britannique*, 294–6, 441–2, 594; see also Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards', 176–80.
33. Archives nationales de France (hereafter ANF), Paris, AF^{IV} 1653, plaquette 9, report of general Morand to the Minister of War, 10 September 1810.
34. ANF, Paris, F¹² 1948, reports of the War Minister to the Inner Minister, 19 October and 7 November 1810.
35. Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards', 203–7.
36. Silvia Marzagalli, 'Problemi di applicazione del blocco continentale nelle città portuali: Il contrabbando a Livorno in età napoleonica', *Società e Storia* 55 (1992): 83–108.
37. On the continuous adaptation of trade routes and smuggling, see Roger Dufraisse, 'Französische Zollpolitik: Kontinentalsperre und Kontinentalsystem in Deutschland der napoleonischen Zeit', in *Deutschland zwischen Revolution und Restauration*, ed. Helmut Berding and Hans-Peter Ullmann (Düsseldorf, 1981), 337; Crouzet, *L'économie britannique*, 383, 433, 461, 635–7, 694, 864. Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration*, 144–55.
38. ANF, Paris, F¹² 1859, price currents, 1812.

6

The Kingdom of Italy and the Continental Blockade

Alexander Grab

On 21 November 1806 Napoleon proclaimed the Berlin Decree, declaring 'The British Islands are in a state of blockade' and 'all trade or communication with the isles are prohibited', thereby launching the Continental Blockade. It would last until 1813.¹ This Decree played a central role in Napoleonic governance in the Kingdom of Italy. Dominating the Italian Peninsula was indispensable for Napoleon to assure the success of the blockade for two reasons. First, the peninsula's long Adriatic and Mediterranean coastlines were vulnerable to British smuggling. Second, the peninsula possessed important ports that served British ships, including Ancona, Civitavecchia (near Rome), Genoa, Livorno, Naples and Venice. Napoleon was aware of the close commercial relations between Britain and the peninsula throughout the eighteenth century.² England purchased raw silk, cereal, wine and olive oil from Italy and shipped textiles and colonial goods to the peninsula. Between 1793 and 1796 Britain sent to Italian markets eight per cent of its European exports.³ Moreover, dominating the peninsula was crucial for French presence in the Mediterranean Sea generally and for maintaining communications with the Near East and the Balkans.

By the time the Emperor proclaimed the Berlin Decree, the French occupied most of the peninsula. Napoleon established the northern Kingdom of Italy and the southern Kingdom of Naples in 1805 and 1806, respectively, and annexed Piedmont (1802) and Liguria (1805) to his empire. Between 1807 and 1810, Napoleon completed the occupation of Italy. In March 1808, he annexed Tuscany and two months later joined Parma and Piacenza. In November 1807, to strengthen French control over the Adriatic littoral, the Emperor seized the Papal Marche.⁴ Since Pope Pius VII rejected Napoleon's demands to close the port of Civitavecchia to British trade, the Emperor occupied Rome and the rest of the papal state and in May 1809, annexed the rump papacy to his empire and exiled Pius VII to France. Only the islands of Sicily and Sardinia remained outside French domination. They were under the rule of the Bourbon and the Savoyard dynasties, respectively, yet they owed their semi-sovereign status to Britain.

This chapter discusses the implementation of the Continental Blockade in the Kingdom of Italy. Aside from examining various imperial decrees and policies, the chapter responds to two main questions: How successful was the enforcement of the Blockade? and What was its impact on the Italian kingdom's economy? The chapter also references the experiences of the Blockade in other parts of the Italian Peninsula to provide a regional context.

The Formation of the Kingdom of Italy

To understand the implementation of the Blockade in the Kingdom of Italy, some background about its formation is necessary.⁵ Following his victory at Marengo (June 1800), Napoleon set up the Second Cisalpine republic in northern Italy. On 26 January 1802, he replaced it with the Republic of Italy, becoming its president. In March 1805, after becoming French Emperor, Napoleon transformed the republic into the Kingdom of Italy (*Regno d'Italia*) and declared himself king and his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, his viceroy in Milan. The kingdom, which lasted until Napoleon's fall in April 1814, consisted of the northern Italian regions of Lombardy, Novara, Emilia-Romagna, Modena, the Veneto, the Marche and South Tyrol. At its peak, the kingdom consisted of 24 departments, extending over an area of 84,000 sq. km with 6.7 million inhabitants.

Its geographical location made the kingdom a prominent player in securing the Blockade. It bordered Piedmont, Tuscany, the Kingdom of Naples, Switzerland and the Illyrian provinces, thereby constituting a major transit territory of commerce and smuggling from southern Italy and the Mediterranean to Northern Europe and from the Balkans to France. Its importance rose when it gained the northern Adriatic coastline. Indeed, Napoleon extended the kingdom's territory three times between the years 1806 and 1810, aiming to strengthen the Blockade's enforcement. Following their defeat in Austerlitz, Austria ceded the Veneto with the important port of Venice, which Napoleon added to the kingdom. In May 1808, the Emperor joined the Adriatic Marche provinces of Urbino, Ancona, Macerata and Camerino to his Italian state. Those changes gave the kingdom control over the northern coastline of the Adriatic Sea, which positioned its authorities to stop the smuggling of English goods from Malta and the Mediterranean. In 1810, Napoleon annexed South Tyrol to the kingdom, thereby strengthening the kingdom's strategic location vis-à-vis central Europe, and in particular, its control over the Alpine passes.

The Continental Blockade in the Republic of Italy (1802–05)

In northern Italy the blockade had its roots during the Revolutionary Three Years, 1796 to 1799. A treaty of commerce with the Cisalpine republic in February 1798 subjected that 'Sister Republic' to France, and along with

the later law of 13 July 1798, prohibited the import of British goods to Italian markets. Napoleon continued the Directory's policy. Britain never recognized the Republic of Italy and Napoleon's presidency there, and the First Consul was convinced that economic pressure would force Britain to change its practice. In June 1802, he wrote to Vice President Francesco Melzi, 'Thwarting [English] merchants will force it to recognize the Italian Republic.'⁶ Melzi responded that the authorities had difficulties identifying the origin of imported products since 'We receive [the merchandise] second hand, which renders it difficult to assure its origin.'⁷

The collapse of the Treaty of Amiens in May 1803 marked the resumption of hostilities between Britain and France and affected the Napoleonic satellites' relations with Britain as well. On 29 May 1803, Napoleon ordered the arrest of British subjects in the Italian republic.⁸ On 4 June 1803, he banned British goods from the republic and ordered the confiscation of British products.⁹ Merchants requested to be exempt from that ban.¹⁰ For example, Enrico Mijlius and the Pensa brothers asked to be allowed to import English goods they had paid for prior to the resumption of hostilities. Another request came from a certain Buttarelli who had paid 480 pounds for goods before 1803. The merchandise had arrived in Venice and he asked to be allowed to import them into the Italian republic. Giuseppe Prina, the Finance Minister, recommended allowing those imports, thereby indicating his reluctance to antagonize the merchant class. The Napoleonic prohibitions succeeded in reducing British imports to the Republic of Italy between 1803 and 1805.¹¹ British goods, however, continued to arrive via Venice and Trieste, which were under Austrian rule.

The Implementation of the Continental Blockade in the Kingdom of Italy

Within the kingdom, authorities intensified the restrictions on trade with Britain. On 27 July 1805, a bilingual decree in Italian and French repeated the ban on English merchandise, threatening violators with their confiscation. On 10 June 1806, Napoleon extended the prohibition to colonial goods whose owners were unable to prove that they did not originate from Britain.¹² The authorities also stiffened penalties, imposing a three-month incarceration and a fine on smugglers as well as the confiscation of means of transportation. To encourage the population's cooperation, they promised substantial rewards for informers who reported law violators. On 21 November 1806, the kingdom's authorities published the Berlin Decree in Italian and French. Then on 10 December they issued another decree designed 'to assure the full execution' of the Berlin Decree.¹³ It ordered citizens who possessed British goods to report them within 48 hours to department officials who, in turn, had to provide a list of those products to the Finance Minister. Inn owners had to supply names of English guests within 24 hours, and prefects and vice-prefects had to arrest them and to supply their names to the chief

of police. All British subjects were ordered to reside in the city of Cremona in Lombardy so that they could be better supervised.¹⁴ The government also established a special commission to deal with seized British merchandise.

Enforcing the blockade met with difficulties in the kingdom. As in other countries, merchants opposed the Blockade's restrictions and tried to evade them. The chief of police Diego Guicciardi reported that the December decree 'spread great fear among the class of merchants in this city [Milan]'.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the authorities failed to receive an accurate picture of the quantities of British goods in the kingdom. Guicciardi wrote to Viceroy Eugène that most merchants in Milan had failed to inform the government about their English goods, although 'secret reports cause me to assume that various merchants and especially owners of fancy shops had such goods'.¹⁶ He reminded Eugène that ever since 1803, when the ban was first proclaimed, only a few merchants had notified the authorities of English imports. A week later Guicciardi reported the growing discontent and opposition among merchants to that policy. Merchants in Treviso requested exemption from notification since they had imported British goods prior to the Berlin Decree. Entrepreneurs also resorted to falsification of documents that marked the British origins of the products to indicate their arrival from other countries.

Clearly, merchants feared that the authorities would confiscate their goods. Exporters were owed money from England and feared not being paid. Venetian merchants possessed an abundance of English merchandise, which they had purchased during the eight-year Austrian rule (1797 to 1805). Prina pointed out that 'before the annexation of the Venetian states ... [Italian merchants] were furnished with a lot of English goods but now were slow to notify to the authorities'.¹⁷ Luigi Lambertenghi, the head of the customs department, lamented that notifications from Venice and the departments of Piave and Brenta included no value of the goods.¹⁸ By January 1807, the authorities had received only 312 declarations of English goods from Venice. Rather than reporting their wares to the authorities, merchants shipped those products to Tuscany where the policy was enforced less rigorously. Indeed, much English merchandise was stocked in Livorno and from there was sent to Mediterranean ports.¹⁹

The kingdom's administration exerted much effort to end fraud and obtain an accurate picture of British merchandise. Among Napoleon's relatives who ruled over satellite states, Viceroy Eugène was the most loyal to Napoleon and, far more than Louis in Holland and Murat in Naples, he exerted efforts to fulfil the Blockade's orders. On 7 January 1807, the government issued a new decree ordering prefects, police and customs officials to complete the lists of merchants' names and their British and colonial goods within two days and submit them to the authorities.²⁰ A week later, on 15 January, a decree warned that unreported goods would immediately be confiscated and law violators punished. Not surprisingly, those decrees did not eradicate the problem and on 7 October 1807 the Viceroy issued a new comprehensive decree designed to provide the government with

complete information about English merchandise in the kingdom.²¹ Local police were ordered to periodically inspect customs' houses, warehouses, merchants' shops and houses to seize prohibited products. Officials were authorized to examine merchants' accounting books and correspondence. The decree repeated the penalties for violators of these policies and collaborating administrators were threatened with losing their job and with arrest.

The prefects of the departments of Bacchiglione, Tagliamento and Agogna reported on inspecting stores and confiscating banned products.²² The authorities sold seized English merchandise and in March 1808 sent 1.5 million francs to Paris.²³ Meanwhile, in Tuscany, not trusting that Queen Marie Louisa would enforce the Blockade, Napoleon deposed her. In southern Italy, the Kingdom of Naples had a 'critical role to play in enforcing the blockade against Britain'.²⁴ In March 1806, Joseph Bonaparte, Naples' ruler, prohibited British imports. Napoleon pressed his successor, Joachim Murat, to ban English goods and facilitate imports of French goods into his kingdom. Murat, however, was reluctant to cut ties with Britain and support the subordination of his kingdom to French products. He refused to recognize France's commercial privileges and interests; he never enforced the Continental Blockade as Napoleon ordered.²⁵

Smuggling in the Kingdom of Italy

Smuggling British and colonial goods constituted by far the greatest challenge to the enforcement of the Blockade throughout Europe.²⁶ The attempts of the French government to encourage production of colonial staples, like sugar and cotton, had limited success; their quality was inferior and the quantities were insufficient for Europe's needs. France's economy was not strong enough to replace Britain as the supplier of goods to the Continent. In sum, demand for British and colonial products remained high throughout the Blockade. Napoleon was unable to hermetically seal the European coastline despite his many geo-political changes and military campaigns. In the words of Eli Hecksher, smuggling 'flourished throughout Europe to an extent of which the world since then, and perhaps even before, has rarely seen the like'.²⁷ It is impossible to quantify precisely the volume of smuggled goods since smugglers left no records, but clearly contraband was a profitable occupation of enormous scope that employed tens of thousands of people, many of them from the lower classes. Scarcity of customs personnel and an insufficient number of guards and widespread corruption among officials and police, who took bribes and often participated in illicit commerce, seriously undermined the blockade's effectiveness.

British goods clandestinely entered northern Europe through the Netherlands, German states and the Baltic Sea. Thousands of citizens dealt in profitable contraband in Hamburg and the Rhineland.²⁸ The island of Heligoland, seized by the British in 1807, served as a warehouse for

English goods shipped to northern Germany.²⁹ Louis Bonaparte, the King of Holland, failed to contain Dutch smuggling, which led Napoleon to force his abdication in July 1810 and annex the Netherlands to his Empire.³⁰

In southern Europe, British and colonial goods entered the continent through Iberia and Gibraltar, the Italian Peninsula and the Adriatic coastline. Malta, 'the centre of all the smuggling in southern Europe' and counterpart to Heligoland, became the 'capital of English commerce' in the Mediterranean Sea.³¹ The British occupied Malta in September 1800 and refused to evacuate it as the Treaty of Amiens required. After the proclamation of the Continental Blockade, British exports to Malta increased rapidly from an annual average of 95,000 pounds from 1801 to 1805 to three million and five million pounds in 1808 and 1812, respectively. The number of English merchants in Malta rose from 5 in 1802 to 20 in 1807 and 60 in 1812. In 1812, 25 per cent of British goods shipped to Europe went to Malta. Much merchandise made its way from Malta to nearby Sicily, where many English merchants settled.³² From there, goods were smuggled across the Straits of Messina into the Kingdom of Naples, Tuscany and the Kingdom of Italy and from there to Switzerland and German Central Europe.³³

Livorno remained another 'centre of flourishing smuggling' in Italy.³⁴ In April 1806, the Kingdom of Etruria prohibited the import of English goods, but barely implemented this order. Thousands participated in smuggling in that port, including merchants, storekeepers and *porteurs*, who carried merchandise across customs lines. Customs officials failed to enforce the Blockade adequately, but were rarely brought to justice. From Livorno, merchandise was shipped to other parts of the peninsula, the Adriatic coast and the Near East. British goods arrived from Malta in the Adriatic ports of Trieste and Fiume. To enhance their commerce, Britain captured the island of Lussin, southeast of Istria (May 1809) and the tiny island of Lissa in the south Adriatic (April 1812). This stimulated Napoleon to create the Illyrian Provinces, which failed, however, to deter British activity in the Adriatic region.³⁵ Napoleon's concern with Britain in the Adriatic was obvious when he ordered Eugène to ship more soldiers and food to the island of Corfu, under French occupation since Tilsit (July 1807), adding, 'If the English become one day masters of Corfu, the Adriatic will be lost forever.'³⁶

Despite the efforts of the kingdom's authorities, widespread smuggling both by land and by sea remained a major challenge.³⁷ Illegal traffic was not new in northern Italy; grain and salt constituted major contraband commodities in earlier centuries. However, during the Blockade years, smuggling became more systematic and included more products. The kingdom's location, bordering many states, explains the extensive smuggling, which was hard to prevent along the long Adriatic coastline and in the mountainous areas. As in other places, thousands of working people, who suffered the adverse effects of the Blockade, participated in the smuggling. The Lombard economist Giuseppe Pecchio stated that smuggling was 'so profitable that

it seduced even honest merchants'.³⁸ The principal smuggled products included textiles, silk, colonial foodstuffs, dye and wheat.

Initially, much merchandise crossed illegally back and forth between Tuscany, Lombardy and the Veneto.³⁹ In September 1807, Napoleon complained to Eugène,

English merchandise cross the Kingdom of Italy; some English goods, which were found in Livorno, come from Milan. It is time that this ends. War without respite against English goods is the way to arrive at peace. English merchandise crosses the kingdom with false seals. It seems that customs in Italy is poorly managed.⁴⁰

On 4 October 1807, Prina reported that many English goods in Livorno had the kingdom's customs stamp.⁴¹ He explained that under Austrian rule many English goods were shipped to the Veneto, whose merchants shipped them to Tuscany 'where the prohibition of English merchandise was very late to appear and was not observed with rigor'. Prina also maintained that many English products were smuggled into the Kingdom of Italy from France and from there to Livorno. Moreover, merchants falsely marked many contraband goods as English to obtain a higher price. The Viceroy immediately wrote Napoleon that the Italian authorities would use every means to eradicate the problem.⁴²

Antonio Aldini, the kingdom's representative in Paris, was quick to promise the same to the Emperor.⁴³ Yet, as long as nearby Trieste was under Austrian rule, English inventory found its way from there to Venice and Ancona. Along the Adriatic littoral small boats carried out illegal traffic.⁴⁴ A certain Batellante Spellari carried English cotton in such a boat, intending to unload it illegally in Ancona.⁴⁵ He was arrested and the boat and cargo were confiscated. In 1811 Prina reported on a boat transporting salt that had anchored in Ancona due to a storm and which the authorities suspected had illegal merchandise on board.⁴⁶

Smugglers were also busy along the border with Parma and Piacenza, which, in part, consisted of the Po river where Napoleon declared free navigation in April 1806.⁴⁷ Prior to the Napoleonic period, commercial traffic in the area was free and their separation by Napoleon (Parma and Piacenza were annexed to France in 1808) hurt local trade. Customs officials in Parma and Reggio Emilia complained about 'the enormous smuggling' in their departments.⁴⁸ The river and a winding frontier line created 'ideal conditions for smugglers'. Likewise, much clandestine trade was carried out on the border with Piedmont.⁴⁹ That border was resented especially by the Novarese inhabitants who had belonged to the Kingdom of Piedmont before Napoleon and considered the new border artificial and disruptive.

Considerable illicit trade took place along the Swiss-Italian border. Colonial foodstuffs and other prohibited goods were stored in canton Ticino, the only Italian canton in the Helvetic Confederation. The border town of Bellinzona

served as a centre for smugglers.⁵⁰ After the proclamation of the Blockade, Ticino became 'a storehouse of colonial foodstuff and Swiss goods'. The mountainous Swiss-Italian border, difficult to police, enabled smugglers to evade customs officials easily. Illicit trade was also hard to prevent since numerous people took part in it by smuggling small quantities.⁵¹ Certain goods could be imported if their owners possessed a certificate demonstrating that the goods were made in France. Those certificates were often falsified. Smugglers also benefited from the fact that border officials, *guardie di finanza*, neglected their duties and let them cross the border freely.⁵² Eugène suggested that Napoleon join Ticino to the kingdom.⁵³ In October 1810 Napoleon ordered the Viceroy to occupy that canton with 5000 to 6000 Italian troops and 'a good detachment of customs and *gendarmerie*'.⁵⁴ Stressing that this was necessary due to smuggling, Napoleon instructed Eugène to confiscate colonial merchandise and any goods ready to be imported illegally into Italy, which he estimated to be worth several million francs. He further ordered the arrest of local outlaws and English merchants. The occupation, Napoleon stressed, would last until peace with England was achieved. Ticino remained occupied until 1813 when the Allied invasion into Switzerland forced the kingdom's troops to withdraw. But profits were so high that the occupation did not deter smugglers, causing Prina to blame customs officials' negligence.⁵⁵ The government sold whatever they seized in an auction in Milan. In sum, the authorities had some successes in fighting against smuggling, but English and colonial goods continued to enter the kingdom illegally by land and by sea.

In 1810, Napoleon proclaimed new policies throughout his Empire establishing what became known as *nouveau Blocus continentale*.⁵⁶ The Fontainebleau Decree on 18 October 1810 tightened customs surveillance, formed new customs courts, stiffened punishments – including long prison terms and even the death penalty – increased rewards to informers, and most spectacularly, ordered the public burning of seized English goods. In the Confederation of the Rhine, 56 bonfires were lit between 16 November and 3 December 1810.⁵⁷ Earlier, in the Trianon Tariffs (5 August and 17 September 1810), Napoleon expanded the list of colonial goods allowed into the Empire, but at the same time imposed exorbitant duties on them, a move meant to deter their import and increase public revenues. The authorities also encouraged the production of substitutes for colonial staples: chicory for coffee, beet sugar for cane sugar and woad for indigo. In 1809, Napoleon began selling licences that allowed trade with Britain, and on 25 July 1810, he institutionalized that system through the Saint Cloud Decree. The licences endeavoured to help landowners sell agricultural products, provide industrialists with raw material and augment customs revenues. Yet at the same time, this policy undermined the Emperor's goal of isolating Britain and tightening the Blockade.

Naturally, the Kingdom of Italy was integrated into the *nouveau Blocus continentale* and Napoleon ordered English goods to be burned there as in the north.⁵⁸ On 29 January 1811, the kingdom's authorities issued an 18-article

decree, modelled on Fontainebleau, announcing stiff penalties for smugglers: owners of smuggled goods and heads of gangs received jail terms of ten years with forced labour, whereas small carriers were subject to police surveillance for five years.⁵⁹ Article Eleven stipulated the public burning of 'prohibited goods'. In early 1811, Prina reported that the kingdom's authorities burnt goods worth 230,109 francs.⁶⁰ The Milanese diarist Luigi Mantovani reported on several such *auto-da-fes* between November 1810 and July 1813 in Milan and Venice.⁶¹ In Milan they took place in the *piazza dei Tribunali*, where in May 1811, for example, English goods belonging to certain merchants Perlasca and Millius were burnt. Mantovani spoke for many outraged citizens who resented this ruthless policy, calling it a 'great bestiality'.⁶² In the canton of Ticino, French officials destroyed suspected merchandise including 3325 pieces of Nanking cloth that belonged to two brothers Bianchi.⁶³ The brothers tried to save their property by presenting a document from the French consul in Frankfurt, confirming that the cloth had been purchased from a Dutch company, but to no avail, and the authorities seized the goods. In December 1810, the authorities burnt English goods in Ticino, but allowed the import of colonial products valued at 38,000 lire, for which the Trianon Tariffs had been paid and sold at an auction.⁶⁴ Confiscated colonial products that entered the kingdom from Ticino included cotton from the Near East, sugar, coffee, indigo, cacao, black pepper and fish oil.

Though Napoleon gave priority to French merchants when granting licences, he also extended them to merchants in satellite states. In the Italian peninsula, Napoleon created the *licences italiennes* through a decree on 23 July 1810.⁶⁵ In August and September 1810 he sent Eugène instructions regarding the entry of colonial goods, stressing the need to follow the French system and obey his orders.⁶⁶ Entrepreneurs in Venice and Ancona were to receive licences, allowing them to export wheat, cheese and other products to Malta, England, Switzerland and the Ottoman Empire, and import dye and foodstuffs. When sailing to England, Italian ships needed to stop in Nantes, and when returning from Malta, they had to stop in Genoa, Toulone or Marseilles. On 26 October 1810, 30 licences were divided among merchants in Venice, Chioggia, Senigallia and Ancona.⁶⁷ In January 1812, the authorities gave four licences to export silk to England. Silk exporters, however, faced delays and difficulties that caused 'the most serious damage'.⁶⁸ In 1813, to increase his revenues, Napoleon augmented the number of licences throughout his empire and the kingdom's merchants benefitted from this as well. Napoleon also tried to encourage Italian growers to produce colonial products or their substitutes. Two decrees on 12 September 1810 announced a subsidy of 150,000 lire to promote growing cotton, and a grant of 50,000 lire to produce sugar out of grapes.⁶⁹ Results remained limited, however, as the northern Italian climate was not conducive to growing cotton. In December 1811, Napoleon further integrated the kingdom into his empire by ordering the application of French navigation rules in Italian ports and regulations pertaining to entrepôts in Venice, Ancona, Sinigaglia, Milan and Bologna.⁷⁰

Napoleon's imposition of the Blockade on the Kingdom of Italy needs to be seen within the context of his efforts to consolidate France's economic supremacy. French industrialists were relentless in demanding easy access to Italian markets and gained the Emperor's full support. The Blockade intended to eliminate British competition for French industry in the kingdom.⁷¹ Moreover, in 1808 and 1810, Napoleon proclaimed customs modifications, assuring the import of Italian raw material and foodstuffs into France and guaranteeing a monopoly of French industrial products in the kingdom's markets.⁷² On 20 June 1808, France and the kingdom signed a commercial treaty that cut by half customs between them.⁷³ Officially, the treaty was intended to facilitate trade between the two, but in reality it favoured the more developed and competitive French industry, particularly textiles that dominated Italian markets to the detriment of Italian manufacturers.⁷⁴ During negotiations, Eugène tried to introduce some changes, arguing that such a treaty would be 'entirely ruinous to Italian industry and commerce', but Napoleon refused to make concessions.⁷⁵ Moreover, reducing customs payments by half diminished the kingdom's revenues. The Italian economist Giuseppe Pecchio summed up the Napoleonic treatment of Italian industry rather bitterly: 'After the losses of the American colonies, [the French] wanted to convert the conquered populations and turn Italian whites into the blacks of Saint Domingue and Martinique.'⁷⁶

In September 1810, to assure the import of Italian raw silk to France to benefit Lyon's silk industry, Napoleon abolished customs on exports of Italian raw silk to France and imposed a heavy duty of eight francs per kilogram on silk exports to other states.⁷⁷ Then, on 10 October 1810, to eliminate competition to French products in Italian markets, a royal decree forbade the import of cotton, wool and silk cloth to the kingdom from all countries except France.⁷⁸ The Emperor emphatically rejected any protest against French policies and ordered Eugène to give priority to French interests:

Italy should not make calculations separate from the prosperity of France ... it must merge its interests with those of France ... above all, it must guard against giving France an interest to annex it; because if France has such an interest who could prevent it? Hence, adopt as your motto: France before all.⁷⁹

Napoleon also took steps to encourage the import of Italian grain into France to bring prices down during scarce periods. In 1810, when France experienced a grain shortage, he ordered Eugène to exempt grain exports to France from any fees and to disallow any large export except to France and Piedmont. During the years 1810 through 1812, grain imports to France increased substantially. In sum, citing Giorgio Candeloro, Napoleon clearly intended 'to make the Italian kingdom a subordinate country to France economically and to reduce it to an agrarian appendage of the French empire'.⁸⁰

The Economic Impact of the Continental Blockade on the Kingdom of Italy

What was the impact of the Continental Blockade on the economy of the Kingdom of Italy? The Russian historian Evgenii Tarlé, in his book *La vita economica dell'Italia nell'età napoleonica (Economic Life of Italy in the Napoleonic Period)*, insisted that the kingdom suffered serious economic damages from the Blockade and the Napoleonic efforts to assure French monopoly over Italian markets. Indeed, he even maintained that Napoleon treated the kingdom as a colony after 1810 and 1811.⁸¹ More recent historians challenged Tarlé, arguing that he placed too much emphasis on commerce and industry, although the kingdom's economy was predominantly agricultural.

The Blockade certainly inflicted heavy damage on Italian commerce.⁸² Tarlé stressed that Italian maritime trade 'suffered mercilessly owing to the implacable and continuous struggle against England'.⁸³ The annexation of Trieste and Venice to the Empire inflicted a decisive blow to their commerce.⁸⁴ Between 1811 and 1812, Trieste ceased to be a major port. After 1806, Venetian trade was reduced to cabotage with Trieste. In January 1807, Ravende, the president of Venice's Chamber of Commerce, lamented, 'Venetian commerce is annihilated and industry discouraged' and added that he could not see an improvement as long as war and blockade continued.⁸⁵ In February 1807, French agents reported to the emperor that Venice's commerce was ruined. Aside from the Blockade, a threefold increase in taxes, confiscation of merchandise, detrimental customs and the detachment of the former republic from Istria aggravated Venice's crisis. Maritime activity in other Adriatic ports, including Ancona, decreased commerce to 'minimal proportions'. Of course, many other European ports underwent similarly severe losses.⁸⁶ In sum, the Napoleonic regime and commercial prosperity remained incompatible in the Italian kingdom, Tarlé justifiably concluded.⁸⁷

Italian industries also experienced difficulties. The main victim of the Blockade was the silk industry, the most important industry in northern Italy.⁸⁸ The kingdom lost the English and other foreign markets as it faced stiff internal competition from French products. In August 1812, the Milanese Chamber of Commerce complained that the silk industry declined due to 'general diminution of consumption, lack of foreign orders' and 'above all due to the dismemberment of cities and countries where most of the exports had been shipped', including Pavia, Parma and Piacenza, and part of Romagna that were annexed to the Empire.⁸⁹ Tsar Alexander I proclaimed a *ukaz* forbidding silk import to Russia, whereas high customs were imposed on imports into the Hansa cities and Bavaria. Napoleon, however, never helped the Italian silk industry find foreign markets or protect it against French competition. Consequently, the number of silk manufacturers fell from 489 in 1806 to 401 in 1811, the number of weavers declined

from 25,152 to 14,274 and the number of workers employed in processing silk cocoons dropped from 70,349 to 56,079 during the same period.⁹⁰

Other industries, including wool, cotton and metallurgy, were scarcely affected by the Blockade since they produced primarily for internal consumption.⁹¹ Some industries, however, were damaged by French competition. The wool industry benefitted from the elimination of imports of British textiles and from the military demand for cloth.⁹² French products were imported to the kingdom, but the wool industry was able to successfully resist that competition. On the other hand, cotton cloth production remained rudimentary as it lacked sufficient raw material due to the Blockade. Moreover, Napoleon assured the domination of French cotton products in the Italian market.⁹³ Production of hemp and flax yarn, which was quite developed in northern Italy, suffered from French imports as well and declined in the last years of the kingdom. Metallurgy, including mining and the arms industry in the city of Brescia, had the best experience under the French, although scarcity of fuel and skilled labour hindered its development.⁹⁴ It supplied local needs and arms to the Italian army.

As stated above, recent historians have criticized Tarlé's interpretation. Bernardino Farolfi argued that any economic decline during the Napoleonic era could not be blamed strictly on the Continental Blockade, but needs to take into consideration the contemporary structural fluctuations and problems of the capitalist economy.⁹⁵ Tarlé, he insisted, supported free-market policies and hence tended to blame, rather narrowly, the crisis on the Blockade. Likewise, Carlo Zaghi played down the negative effects of the Blockade, maintaining that the pre-Blockade years witnessed progress and that industries that produced for domestic consumption continued to develop. In other words, the economic crisis was not as profound as Tarlé suggested, and certainly was not irreversible.⁹⁶

Most important, historians, along with Mario Romani, a major expert on Lombard agriculture, criticized Tarlé's excessive emphasis to the crisis in commerce and industry in a country that was predominantly agricultural and suggested that Tarlé underestimated the fact that opportunities for industrial developments were limited from the start.⁹⁷ Romani criticizes Tarlé for 'excessively simplifying' the results of Napoleonic policy and for viewing 'in a totally negative manner the effects of the blockade and the [Napoleonic] commercial policy ... and underestimating the profoundly rural nature [of northern Italy]'. The possibilities of industrial silk development, Romani insists, 'were non-existent or limited and have been in conflict with the prevailing agricultural interests for centuries'.⁹⁸ He cites a French document from August 1806 that stressed that 'The Kingdom of Italy is properly speaking an agricultural country; by nature of its land, the abundance and the diversity of its productions and the character of its inhabitants, it cannot become a country where industry flourishes.'⁹⁹ Significantly, the crisis in commerce and industry caused entrepreneurs to shift their investments to land. Indeed,

agriculture experienced solid growth during the French period. Cereal exports to the French Empire increased, rice cultivation rose and mulberry planting – the basis of raw silk – expanded. Even cotton cultivation was attempted, though without much success.¹⁰⁰ The growing investments in agricultural products resulted in an expansion of irrigation and improvement in raising silk worms. Advances in agriculture increased revenues and land value. The benefits to cultivators can be seen from the high revenues from exports of raw silk between 1809 and 1813. In 1810, exports of raw silk rose to 76 million lire from 56 million in 1809, and if they later declined, at least they remained at a high level at 61.5 and 60.5 million in 1812 and 1813, respectively.¹⁰¹

The agricultural nature of the Italian economy, therefore, assuaged the losses in commerce and in some industries. Most importantly, agricultural expansion more than offset the industrial and commercial losses, stimulating an overall economic improvement during the Napoleonic period. And so, though Tarlé's book is useful for an understanding of the Blockade's impact on the kingdom's economy, his conclusions are inadequate. The Blockade, along with other Napoleonic economic policies, caused major setbacks to ports and maritime trade, as well as to the silk industry. Agriculture, however, the dominant branch of the kingdom's economy, underwent expansion during the Napoleonic period, leaving an important positive legacy for future economic development.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of Italy, along with the rest of the Italian peninsula, played a major role in the Napoleonic efforts to establish a successful blockade. Through geo-political changes that expanded the kingdom and aimed at shoring up the northern Adriatic coast against the smuggling of English goods, and numerous decrees designed to consolidate the Blockade's apparatus, imperial authorities exerted great efforts to assure the effective enforcement of the Blockade in the kingdom and its surrounding regions. As in other parts of the Napoleonic Empire, however, implementing the Blockade met with opposition and obstacles, most notably rife smuggling that the government was unable to eliminate. The Blockade also needs to be viewed within the context of the Napoleonic goal of subjecting the kingdom to French economic interests by favouring the export of French industrial products into Italian markets and by establishing the kingdom as a source of agricultural products for the benefit of French industry and consumers. The Blockade caused serious disruption within Italian ports and commerce. It also dislocated some industries, primarily silk, which lost its European market and remained unable to compete with the more developed French industry. In contrast, agriculture, by far the main branch of the kingdom's economy, experienced growth which offset commercial and industrial losses and provided a momentum to future economic development in northern Italy throughout the nineteenth century. Particularly in Lombardy, agricultural developments along capitalist lines,

including large farms, production for market demand and wage labour, would all provide a solid foundation for regional industrial development after the middle of the century.

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10. ASM, Milan, Finance Minister, Prina to Melzi, 12 September 1803.
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13. *Bdl* (1806), 1057–60.
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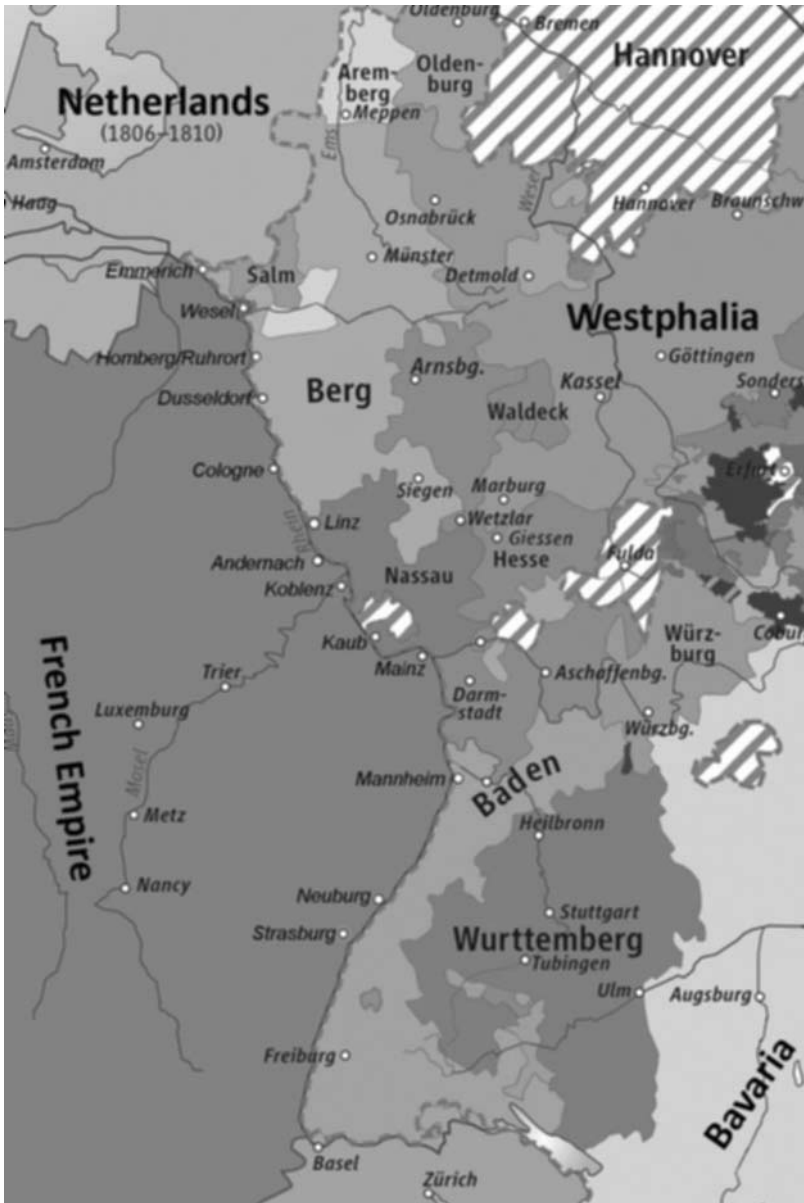
7

Rhine River Commerce and the Continental System

Robert Mark Spaulding

Eighty years ago Eli Heckscher pointed out that Napoleon's Continental System shifted European economic activity away from the Atlantic coast towards the interior of the continent.¹ Thirty years later, François Crouzet confirmed 'the axis of the Continental economy had now [1814] moved from the Atlantic toward the Rhine'.² The entire Rhine basin, as well as the commerce of the river itself, is widely presumed to have been profoundly affected by French economic policies in the years from 1806 through 1813. Recently, Ute Planert mentioned a 'shift of prosperity to areas on the Rhine' as a result of the Continental System, indicating that the inland shift to the Rhine has endured as one of the few accepted points in a literature often divided over the impact of Napoleonic economic policy.³ But the consensus ends there.

Regarding the river traffic in particular, respected scholarly opinions diverge sharply for both the early and later years of the Continental System. Jeffrey Diefendorf's pioneering study of Cologne and its environs identified 'commercial gains on the Rhine' in the years 1805 to 1807.⁴ Michael Rowe refuted that view in his comprehensive study of the Rhineland, which claimed the river's trade 'was greatly undermined by war in 1805–07' and that 'already in 1806/07, trade between the Rhenish cities and Holland experienced a complete breakdown.'⁵ Katherine Aaslestad's recent review of the literature reinforced Diefendorf's earlier, positive assessment by noting 'a thriving river traffic' on the Rhine and 'additional river traffic' after 1806.⁶ Although fewer judgments have been offered about river commerce in the later years of Napoleonic rule, opinions here are also flatly contradictory. Klaus Müller declared 'a crisis of Rhine shipping' at the end of the Napoleonic Empire, brought on by the Continental Blockade and general economic decline, a view that maintains Charles Schmidt's older but still influential claim that Rhine and Ruhr shipping 'had come to a nearly complete standstill by the end of 1810'.⁷ Those evaluations are contradicted by the account of the Director General of Rhine shipping showing over 125,000 metric tons of freight moved through the Rhine/Ruhr junction in 1809.⁸



Map 7.1 The Rhine valley in 1808. The Octroi Convention of 1804–05 regulated Rhine commerce and established 12 toll stations between Strasbourg and the Dutch border: Neuburg, Mannheim, Mainz, Kaub, Koblenz, Andernach, Linz, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Homberg/Ruhrort, Wesel and Emmerich
Source: Robert Mark Spaulding, from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rheinbund_1808,_political_map.png.

Most of these claims are assertions that rely on qualitative impressions rather than quantitative measures. Other judgments derive from very narrow bases comparing a few years before and after 1806, still others rely on material from one particular town or city, and many exhibit both temporal and spatial limitations. In the absence of larger, longer and more systematic sets of data, scholars have necessarily extrapolated from smaller source bases to offer conclusions regarding the impact of the Continental System on Rhine commerce. Thus far, their efforts have produced contradictory declarations of the type noted above. Twenty-five years ago, Roger Dufraisse bemoaned the inadequate sources at hand, particularly the 'low level of statistical information' and the 'bad record of quantifiable material' that virtually precluded efforts to get beyond local and regional histories of trade in German Central Europe during the Napoleonic era.⁹ The fundamental dilemma of the topic was captured in Karl Aretin's statements that 'the imposition of the continental Blockade by Napoleon in 1806 profoundly modified the economic structure of Germany', but that 'we lack the sources to give exact details of the development of the German economy during the wars of the Revolution'.¹⁰

Only one clear point of agreement has emerged: the volume of overseas imports heading upriver from the Netherlands into the German states declined because of the Continental Blockade. Yet this widely reported trend is rarely quantified and even the better efforts at capturing these changes depend on spot data from one or two years at one or two locales. Nor has the decline in ultramarine imports been adequately portrayed over longer stretches of the river by differentiating between merchandise declines on the lower, middle and upper Rhine. Other important subjects, such as the growth of downstream traffic in these years, have barely been touched. There is no overview of how the Continental System and other overlapping French policies combined to alter the patterns of commerce on the river in the years from 1806 to 1813.¹¹

This chapter brings important new evidence to bear on these issues in the hope that an expanded source base can help address the significant gaps that remain in answering basic questions regarding the flow of merchandise on the Rhine during the period of the Continental System. The most important piece in this new body of evidence is the Rhine toll data for the years from 1806 to 1815. In August 1804, after a decade of ad hoc French reforms along the Rhine, the French Empire and the Arch-Chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, acting as agent for the German princes on the right bank, signed the *Convention sur l'octroi de navigation du Rhin*, which placed the river under joint control of the two parties.¹² In 1805, regulation of the river's commerce passed into the hands of the new bi-partite administration, the *Octroi*. The new bureaucracy consolidated the ongoing transformation of river practices that had already boosted Rhine commerce dramatically during the previous five years. Further steps

by the *Octroi* reduced monopoly privileges and navigational restrictions that controlled trade, converted myriad local weights and measures to the metric system, introduced a standardized bill of lading, established a uniform commercial code, opened the boatmen's guilds and reorganized harbour practices at Cologne and Mainz. Most importantly, the *Octroi* reduced the number of river tolls by two-thirds, simplified and published the toll rates, and standardized collection procedures at the remaining 12 toll stations along the Rhine between Strasbourg and the Dutch border. The figures for upstream and downstream toll incomes at each station have been preserved for the years 1806 to 1811, and total figures for the 12 stations combined exist for 1806 through 1815.¹³ These records do not include figures for merchandise volumes or individual commodities. That material is not likely to be discovered for the toll stations in this period because such information was almost certainly never recorded. Thus, the toll revenues are an incomparable indicator of trends and direction in the Rhine trade, unlikely to be surpassed in the future. The toll revenues reflect upstream and downstream traffic at 12 points along the length of the river from Neuburg, then 70 km below Strasbourg, to Emmerich on the right bank just a dozen kilometres from the Dutch border, and stretch over six years from 1806 to 1811 with composite figures for toll revenues available to 1815.

It appears the toll revenue data, which cover the years of the Continental Blockade, have never been used to help clarify the changes underway in the river's commerce. By exploiting this new data set and using it in conjunction with smaller fragments of quantitative data that have been available for some time, this essay offers a more thorough and more grounded assessment of the changing nature and volume of the river's trade during the years from 1806 to 1814.

Chief among these other sources is the account of Johann Joseph Eichhoff who served as Director General of the *Octroi* administration from 1806 to 1812. His *Topographisch-statistische Darstellung des Rheines*, which appeared in 1814, contains a wealth of information about the Rhine trade during Napoleon's reign, including hard figures for merchandise trade volumes at dozens of cities and towns along the river. For some locations, Eichhoff also included figures on the volumes of the most important commodities traded there. Although Eichhoff's data are generally limited to only the three years 1807, 1808 and 1809, his numbers for merchandise volumes are an irreplaceable source of information. Eichhoff's data on trade volumes can be used together with the Rhine tolls revenues to gain a very good picture of trade flows in the years from 1807 through 1809. By extrapolating from these middle years, when data for volumes and tolls overlap, some reliable estimates can be made for trade volumes in other years, when only the toll data is available, 1806 and 1810 through 1813.

By combining the Rhine toll revenues with Eichhoff's memoir and other published and archival materials, this essay offers some robust conclusions about changes in the Rhine trade under the Continental System.¹⁴ The judgments emerging from this expanded and improved source base reinforce and elaborate some older views, such as the decline in colonial imports headed upriver, but also suggest significant nuances to that general observation. The toll revenues also allow a better understanding of how the economic crisis of 1811 unfolded along the Rhine. Current hypotheses about the changing ratio of upstream to downstream traffic can be significantly revised and extended. Finally, some heretofore unrecognized changes in the patterns and location of the river's trade are suggested.

This contribution also reminds readers that the Continental System was only one strand in a wider web of revolutionary and Napoleonic economic policies. It would be misleading to attribute the evolution of Rhine commerce in the years 1806 to 1813 solely to the impact of the Continental System without reference to other French programmes that also moulded the patterns of river trade at that time. Beyond the wholesale legal and administrative reforms of the *Octroi*, the French administration also upgraded the river's physical infrastructure, especially the tow paths that were vital for upstream traffic, and began to measure and mark the river with greater accuracy. Rhine commerce was shaped by the composite of French actions along the river in the years after 1806; the Continental Blockade was only the most visible of these policies.

Nor would it be fair to judge the entire two decades of French occupation along the Rhine on the basis of the half-dozen years of the Continental Blockade. After the Treaty of Lunéville brought peace to the Rhine valley in 1801, the beneficial effects of French commercial policies stimulated a dramatic increase in river trade. By the time the Rhine trade passed into the jurisdiction of the *Octroi* administration in November 1805, trade volumes along the river were triple their pre-revolutionary levels. Evaluating the Rhine trade of 1806 to 1813 in comparison to the low levels of river commerce in the final years of the Old Regime allows a more sophisticated appreciation of the beneficial and harmful effects of French policies.

A better understanding of how the Continental System and other French policies reshaped Rhine commerce resonates well beyond the fields of economic and business history. Along the densely populated banks of the Rhine, running nearly 700 km from Strasbourg to the Dutch border, the health of the river's economy was the chief determinant in popular attitudes and responses to the French administration. The ambivalence of most of the Rhenish population towards the French regime is an understandable response to the mixed set of French policies that generally stimulated, but sometimes depressed, commercial life along the Rhine with significant variations depending on location, commodity and direction of trade.

Elaborating the Decline of Imports from 1808 to 1813 and the Crisis of 1811

The data assembled here demonstrate a very steep and enduring decline in upstream traffic on the Rhine for the years 1809 to 1813 in comparison to the final pre-blockade year of 1806. That decrease reinforces the long-established consensus that the Continental Blockade caused a sharp reduction in the overseas imports that had comprised the bulk of the upstream trade for many years prior to 1806. The picture offered here includes a temporal refinement to that general conclusion by establishing the collapse of upstream traffic as beginning only in 1808 and not before. Spatial distinctions are revealed by declines in trade that manifested themselves unevenly over the long stretch of the river, with larger falloffs on the lower Rhine and less dramatic decreases on the upper river – a conclusion not surprising in itself, but one that has not been quantitatively substantiated in a comparative context comprising the entire river.

In 1808 the intensifying Continental Blockade hit the Rhine valley with devastating results for the upriver trade. Napoleon's programme caused dramatic declines in imports of overseas goods that had been the centre of the upstream trade for the previous 100 years: coffee, tea, sugar, tobacco, cotton and whale oil.¹⁵ These developments were noted by contemporaries in many localities and have been recounted often enough to make a full description here unnecessary. The composite toll revenues from traffic heading upstream show the extent of decline along the whole length of the river as well as the stagnation of upstream trade at these reduced levels through 1813 (see Table 7.1).

Toll revenues show that the upstream traffic collapsed in the two years 1808 and 1809, fluctuated at low levels through 1811 and moved down to a new low point with the return of warfare to the Rhine valley in late 1813. The 1811 figure is just one-quarter of the 1807 amount; the 1813 number just one-fifth. These data confirm contemporary and historical opinion, but also provide the first quantification of this trend that encompasses the whole length of the river from the Dutch border to Strasbourg. Within this larger development, a couple of spatial and temporal refinements can be offered. First, some locations on the Rhine displayed a surge in the upriver trade in 1807 before beginning a precipitous decline in 1808 and reaching low levels beginning in 1809. Second, the decline in upstream traffic varied inversely in

Table 7.1 Upstream toll revenues (in francs)*

1806	1807	1808	1809	1810	1811	1812	1813
1,273,645	1,386,585	715,498	380,773	405,127	365,997	330,415**	294,833

* The years 1806–11 in BHSA, Munich, MA/63447; 1813 in Shirges, *Rheinstrom*, 80; 1812 is estimated as the mid-point between the 1811 and 1813 figures. Estimated figures are designated with '**' here and in subsequent Tables in this chapter.

proportion to the distance from the Dutch border; the upper Rhine ultimately retained its upstream volumes far better than did the cities and towns of the lower river.

Ironically, 1807, the first full year after the Berlin Decree of November 1806, was the peak of the upstream trade as substantial increases in the upstream traffic on the lower Rhine delayed the downturn until 1808.¹⁶ The two toll stations closest to the Dutch border, Emmerich and Wesel, saw large increases in upstream revenues of 35 and 62 per cent. At Cologne, which marks the upper end of the lower Rhine, 5 per cent more freight came upriver in 1807 than in 1806. Although the toll data unambiguously record the swelling traffic of the lower Rhine in 1807, there is no clear explanation for this development, which contradicts an initial presumption that lower-Rhine commerce would demonstrate the effects of a blockade against overseas trade before the upper river and the interior. Strasbourg, at the other end of the river, also saw a substantial increase of 18 per cent in freight arriving on upriver traffic.¹⁷ The situation is confused by small declines, rather than any increases, in the upstream tolls at all five middle Rhine stations: Linz (3 per cent), Andernach (2 per cent), Koblenz (2 per cent), Kaub (3 per cent) and Mainz, the dominant commercial hub on the middle Rhine (6 per cent). These apparently contradictory developments of 1807 would bear further investigation with the goal of assessing initial business responses to the Berlin Decree.

More in line with expectations was the relative durability of upstream commerce on the upper portion of the river. After the Blockade bit into upstream trade in 1808 and 1809, upstream freight volumes declined on all portions of the river and remained at depressed levels through 1813 with a full recovery to pre-blockade levels not apparent until 1815. But the declines were far greater on the lower river and the impact lessened in proportion to the distance one moved upriver. Table 7.2 shows very clearly the Blockade's

Table 7.2 Upstream toll revenues: 1810 and 1811 as per cent of 1807

Location	1810	1811
Neuburg	78	78
Mannheim	44	43
Mainz	49	51
Kaub	31	34
Koblenz	30	33
Andernach	33	33
Linz	36	35
Cologne	23	23
Dusseldorf	25	23
Homburg/Ruhrort	30	25
Wesel	24	18
Emmerich	23	15

disparate impacts on the river's upstream trade as reflected in the toll data for 1810 and 1811. The data speaks for itself, but can be summarized briefly as follows: on the lower Rhine, upstream traffic collapsed by three-quarters; on the middle Rhine, by two-thirds; and on the upper river, by somewhat less than half. This last point is reinforced by developments at Strasbourg, where the upriver freight of 1811 was still 53 per cent of 1807 arrivals. The 1810 and 1811 upstream toll data are thoroughly compatible with the trends signalled by Eichhoff's numbers for upstream freight volumes at Cologne and Mainz in 1809, which strengthens the credibility of the toll data at other locations as well.¹⁸

Developments in the Rhine trade also allow some useful elaboration of another generally recognized occurrence of the period, the economic 'crisis' of 1811.¹⁹ The newly available data shed some light on the timing and location of the slump in Rhine commerce. A broader discussion about how this enhanced portrait of Rhine commerce might contribute to a better understanding of root causes of the recession in Europe awaits another venue.

A sharp economic downturn certainly did manifest itself in the Rhine trade and, as clearly as can be determined from annualized data, was confined to 1811. Table 7.3 shows 1810 had been a year of modest recovery from the devastating initial impact of the Blockade, as displayed in the revenue declines of 1808 and 1809. The year 1812 saw substantial commercial growth in absolute terms with revenues nearly matching those of 1808. But the growth of 1810 and 1812 was interrupted by the downturn of 1811, which spread very unevenly along the river, as the data from Table 7.4 shows unmistakably.

The clear pattern of the data shows the crisis as most severe on the lower river with diminishing impact as one moved away from the Dutch border. At the far end of the upper river, Neuburg and Strasbourg saw slow but measurable growth rather than a crisis. The highly differentiated impact of the 1811 slump along the Rhine might confirm the view that the crisis began in Northern Europe as a commercial event brought on by the sudden intensification of the Blockade in 1810 (and magnified

Table 7.3 Toll revenues (in francs) and per cent change (Δ) from previous year, 1808–12

Year	Revenues	Δ
1808	2,009,809	- 21.6
1809	1,820,730	- 9.4
1810	1,839,775	+ 1.0
1811	1,662,032	- 9.7
1812	1,980,000	+ 19.1

Table 7.4 Toll revenues: per cent change (Δ) from 1810 to 1811

Location	Δ
Neuburg	+ 3.6
Mannheim	- 2.5
Mainz	- 2.6
Kaub	- 2.9
Koblenz	- 1.4
Andernach	- 4.8
Linz	- 4.4
Cologne	- 8.6
Dusseldorf	- 11.6
Homburg/Ruhrort	- 14.9
Wesel	- 19.6
Emmerich	- 33.5

in some areas by poor harvests) that spilled over into the credit markets and reverberated back to Paris and other centres of trade and finance. Whatever the ultimate causes of the recession, the upper-Rhine economy evidently developed largely independently of the afflicted institutions and areas.

Refining the Picture of Downstream Trade

The data on the evolution of downstream traffic in these years allow direct engagement with the idea advanced by Dufraisse that during the Napoleonic period the Rhine trade experienced an important 'shift' in its direction from a north-south upstream pattern to a south-north downstream configuration.²⁰ In the narrow sense, Dufraisse was undoubtedly correct: all known data confirm the predominance of upriver trade in the pre-revolutionary decades (although this pattern may not be as ancient as is generally assumed), and the downstream trade certainly did 'outweigh' the upstream trade in every year from 1807 through 1813, so the traditional trade was reversed during the period of Napoleonic rule. But the story is larger and more complex than Dufraisse implied, as can be seen from the following observations.

First, the predominance of a downstream or south-north trade was not confined to the years of the Continental System or to those of Napoleonic rule as Dufraisse implied with the limiting phrase 'in the Napoleonic period' (*in der napoleonischen Zeit*).²¹ Plenty of data show that the predominance of downstream freight began before 1806 and continued after 1813. Therefore, the implication that the reversal of the pre-war pattern was a result of the

Blockade is not tenable. A second, related point is that the downstream trade did not come to predominate merely because the upstream trade was reduced by blockade. Of course, sharp declines in upstream shipping boosted the downstream freight as a percentage of the river's total commerce, but the downriver trade gained not only relatively as a portion of the overall business, but also increased in absolute volume along all three sections of the river. Third, the data also shows that the biggest gains in downstream trade were made on the upper portions of the Rhine with real, but much smaller, gains on the middle and lower river. Each of these three points merits some explication.

First, downstream freight surpassed upstream transport both before and after Napoleonic regulation of overseas trade. Already in 1806, toll revenues for upstream and downstream traffic at the 11 stations from Wesel to Neuburg were evenly balanced, at approximately one million francs in each direction.²² Because the downstream trade paid one-third less in tolls than did the upstream freight over the entire distance of the river from Strasbourg through Emmerich (1.33 francs/50 kg versus 2.00/50 kg), the volume of downstream freight must have been significantly larger than the upstream cargoes.²³ Trade volumes on the upper Rhine at Strasbourg show the downstream trade as much larger than the upstream traffic for every year from 1800 to 1806; in that final year before the Blockade, the downstream trade already was twice the size of the upstream business. In 1807, before the Blockade disrupted import trade, downstream shipments were 61 per cent of the arrivals in Cologne and 71 per cent of departing cargoes; the preponderance of the downstream loads, perhaps at a lower ratio, must have been in place for some years before 1807.²⁴ This trend continued after the withdrawal of French forces from the Rhine. In 1814, Cologne's trade on the lower Rhine showed downstream shipments of 871,843 *Zentner* (50 kg), which exceeded upstream arrivals of 840,520.²⁵ The pattern of larger downstream trade volumes continued at Cologne for every year from 1819 through 1826 with the exception of 1823.²⁶

An enlarged downstream trade that both preceded and succeeded the Continental System must be examined in a broader context of French reforms that also began before 1806 and survived after 1814. The most likely cause of increased downriver freights was the extensive commercial overhaul of the river codified in the *Octroi Convention* of 1804, the essential elements of which were preserved after 1815 in the new Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine.²⁷

Under the impact of blockade and war, the upstream trade continued to shrink, so that by 1813 the downstream trade provided 79 per cent of the river's toll revenues, despite the lower toll rates on downriver shipments. But the relative increase of the downstream trade should not obscure its growth in absolute terms as well. Downstream toll revenues grew by

Table 7.5 Downstream toll revenues (in francs)*

1806	1807	1808	1809	1810	1811	1812	1813
1,094,932	1,176,645	1,294,311	1,439,957	1,434,648	1,296,035	1,649,585**	1,093,167

* The years 1806–11 in BHSA, Munich, MA/63447; 1813 calculated from Shirges, *Rheinstrom*, 80; 1812 derived from the upstream estimate in Table 7.1; see asterisk note in Table 7.1.

Table 7.6 Downstream toll revenues: 1810 and 1811 as per cent of 1806

Location	1810	1811
Neuburg	160	160
Mannheim	157	154
Mainz	171	161
Kaub	172	161
Koblenz	135	126
Andernach	128	119
Linz	125	119
Cologne	113	102
Dusseldorf	116	101
Homburg/Ruhrort	112	96
Wesel	136	112
Emmerich	na	na

50 per cent from 1806 to 1812, as Table 7.5 shows. Even in the economic crisis year of 1811, downstream revenues remained 18 per cent above the 1806 level; only when typhus and war arrived on the middle Rhine in 1813 did the downstream trade temporarily fall back to 1806 levels.

The expansion of downstream trade was a differentiated phenomenon; merchandise volumes increased most dramatically on the upper river, as reflected in the toll data of Table 7.6. Above Kaub, which meant all of the upper Rhine and the upper portion of the middle Rhine, the downstream trade grew by well over half. That trend was confirmed at Strasburg where 210,636 metric quintals were sent downriver in 1810, or 260 per cent of the volume of 1806. On the lower section of the middle Rhine, downriver freights grew by one-third and on the lower river below Cologne by only one-eighth. Without reliable downstream toll data from Emmerich, it remains difficult to interpret or explain the incongruous data at Wesel.

The rise of a downstream trade greater than or equal to the previously dominant upstream trade was a dramatic reversal of long-term historical patterns. This was not a short-term turnabout, but rather the beginning of a longer-term pattern of balanced trade that characterized the Rhine in the modern period and was brought on, in part, by relatively high rates of growth on the upper river.

Suggesting a Shift from Commercial Metropoles to Regional Economies

The data on the Rhine trade may be sufficiently dense and coherent to suggest that the years of the Continental Blockade were a key phase in the reorganization of Rhine commerce with dramatic changes in the centres of commercial activity. The pre-revolutionary economy was dominated by the forwarding trade or reshipping business (*Spedition*) centred at the great commercial Cologne metropole and to a lesser degree at Mainz. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, a more diversified and less concentrated pattern of trade was taking shape characterized by a reduced role for Cologne and the growth of exchange in regional economies on the lower and upper river.

Cologne's relative position in the Rhine trade undoubtedly declined from its pre-revolutionary dominance, although even in difficult years such as 1811, 1813 and 1814 the port handled substantially more freight than it had under the old regime. Over the past two centuries, all accounts have agreed that beginning around 1800 many goods were offloaded at lower-Rhine ports such as Dusseldorf and at the Zündorf–Deutz–Mühlheim complex across from Cologne in order to avoid the toll and the remaining transfer rules still in effect on the left bank.²⁸ Reasonably reliable data allow an attempt to quantify this oft-mentioned development. In 1809, Cologne forwarded just under half the total merchandise that moved on the river, 2.6 million *Zentner* of a total volume of 5.5 million.²⁹ This was far less than the estimated 63 per cent the city controlled in 1789, 1.5 million *Zentner* out of 2.4 million.³⁰ Despite their frustrations with some of the trends underway during the Blockade, *Kölner* could remain satisfied with the river's overall commercial development, which brought sizable increases over the pre-revolutionary trade volumes; in 1809, the city port handled 75 per cent more freight than in 1789, in 1811 just over 50 per cent more.³¹ In 1814, Cologne's trade with the lower Rhine alone, not counting shipments to or arrivals from the middle or upper Rhine, was still 15 per cent larger than the total volume of 1789.³² These numbers go a long way towards explaining the city's accommodating response to the French administration and why no large-scale popular anti-French actions emerged even in the final days of the regime.

The decline of Cologne's dominating position in the lower-Rhine trade allowed other large and small locations to emerge as commercial centres as Eichhoff noted at the time. Among the larger entities, Mühlheim/Rhine handled 361,969 *Zentner* in freight on its own in 1809, whereas the turnover at Dusseldorf approached half a million *Zentner* that year.³³ Smaller towns such as Hitdorf grew into significant regional points of river commerce and redistribution.

Equally significant was the geographic distribution of the trade of these fast-growing lower-Rhine ports, which indicated the development of a

significant regional economy in the space between Cologne and the Dutch border. In 1809, Mülheim sent one-third of its shipments to 'places on the lower Rhine' and another one-quarter of shipments into the Ruhr valley which can be considered part of the emerging lower-Rhine economy. At Dusseldorf three-quarters of the total turnover was exchanged with the lower-Rhine and Ruhr areas. Arrivals outweighed departing shipments by more than 350,000 *Zentner*, indicating Dusseldorf distributed vast quantities of merchandise inland into the lower-Rhine economy. Hitdorf provided the same function on a smaller, more local scale, receiving some 50,000 *Zentner* of goods from upriver, two-thirds of which was dispersed into the interior of Grand Duchy of Berg with only the wine being forwarded on to the Netherlands in significant volumes.³⁴

The movement of Ruhr coal, which made up 90 per cent of all Ruhr exports, also fed into the regional economy of the lower Rhine. Spotty data for the entire period indicates overall production and export to Holland may have declined under the revolutionary regime.³⁵ On the other hand, the consumption of hard coal from the Ruhr increased dramatically in the lower-Rhine area, including Cologne during the French occupation and especially during the years of the Continental Blockade. Reliable data for Cologne show coal imports accelerating from very low levels in the 1790s, reaching roughly 500,000 *Zentner* in 1807 and nearly 800,000 *Zentner* in 1812, two-thirds of which was consumed in and around Cologne, and only one-third of which was forwarded.³⁶ If Cologne's 60 per cent increase in coal consumption in those years was typical of the lower-Rhine valley, then the 1.4 million *Zentner* of Ruhr coal used in the lower-Rhine economy in 1809 would have grown to 2.25 million by 1812. If shipments to Cologne are included the figures move to almost 3 million *Zentner*.

The small set of powerful examples presented here indicates the emergence of a lower-Rhine economy that received and absorbed immense quantities of goods shipped along the Rhine with impressive powers of consumption. There seems little doubt that large, and in many cases growing, volumes of materials arrived by river into the lower-Rhenish economy precisely during the years of the Continental Blockade. Those commercial trends lead naturally to questions regarding the nature and scale of productive activities in these territories. What was the lower-Rhenish economy doing with these vast volumes of incoming materials, in particular with 150,000 tons of coal arriving annually? How can these phenomena be reconciled with the generally dark picture of economic developments unfolding in the interior of the Grand Duchy of Berg and perhaps in other locations as well? Answers to these questions will require commerce and industry to be integrated into a single object of study far more thoroughly than has been done in the past. More comprehensive economic histories of trade and production in the lower-Rhine basin could serve as important

new starting points for assessing the highly differentiated local responses of the Rhinelanders to the French authorities.

A second large area of mercantile growth can be found along the upper Rhine. Beginning at very low levels, a vibrant commercial economy developed on the exchanges between Frankfurt/Main, Mannheim, Strasbourg and the smaller cities in-between. Unsystematic but indicative data reveal the presence of upper-Rhine products moving downriver in unprecedented volumes. In many instances, the dramatic increases in commerce on the upper Rhine are so formidable as to appear unbelievable. Anchoring the upper end of this economy was Strasbourg, which saw an impressive increase of 175 per cent in the port's turnover from 1806 to 1812, part of a longer 'quadrupling in volume by comparison with the annual average before 1806', as Ellis pointed out years ago. Freight heading downriver from Strasbourg to Frankfurt surged 350 per cent from 42,067 metric quintals in 1806 to 192,220 in 1812. Ellis linked Strasbourg's increased Rhine trade to a larger and deeper 'Alsatian prosperity'.³⁷

At the convergence of the Rhine and Neckar rivers, and at the centre of the budding upper-Rhine economy, sat Mannheim, which during these years finally acquired the commercial and economic position the Electors Palatine had sought for the city during the eighteenth century. Before the revolution, long-distance shipping linking the lower Neckar and the Rhine was almost non-existent; probably not more than 5000 *Zentner* of goods per year moved the 30 km between the Rhine–Neckar confluence and Heidelberg.³⁸ But during the years of the French occupation of the Left Bank of the Rhine and particularly during the phase of the Continental Blockade, the Rhine–Neckar trade exploded, particularly with goods coming out from the Neckar valley. For the two years 1807 and 1808, nearly 200,000 *Zentner* of goods moved upriver from Mainz to Mannheim and into the Neckar as fruit, tobacco, millet, sorghum, clover and rapeseed oil arrived in Mainz from the Neckar valley and Baden.³⁹ Neckar exports reached 637,223 *Zentner* in 1809; shipments to Strasbourg reached 728,920 *Zentner* for the two years 1808 and 1809. Eichhoff mentioned the new role of Mannheim as 'an important point for the shipping and commerce' of the Rhine and Neckar, and in 1808 the increased commerce inspired the founding of Ludwigshafen across the Rhine from Mannheim.⁴⁰ Export growth at smaller cities on the upper Rhine contributed as well. Worms and Speyer, for example, showed lively rebounds from their depressed states at the end of the eighteenth century, as Eichhoff's data shows.⁴¹

At the lower end of this upper-Rhine commercial circuit sat Mainz and Frankfurt/Main. Mainz benefitted tremendously from the persistent growth of the downstream traffic originating in the upper Rhine, which more than offset the losses in the upstream import trade caused by the Blockade. As

late as 1811, the throughput at the port in Mainz must have been about three times as large as the pre-revolutionary figure. Frankfurt contributed to the lively upper-Rhine river commerce by supplying goods banned by the Blockade, as Heckscher noted many years ago.⁴² Eichhoff's data shows a nearly 400 per cent increase from 1808 to 1809 in goods moving from Frankfurt to Mannheim and up the Neckar River.⁴³

There is no doubt that the years of the Continental System saw the rise of a commercial economy along the banks of the upper Rhine that moved volumes and values of traded goods far in excess of any previous period in the river's long history. What did this increased river trade mean to the general economic development of the riparian German territories? Ellis's study of Alsace, which linked Strasbourg's dramatically increased river trade to a larger swathe of spreading prosperity, can serve as a model for how these questions might be answered. A better understanding of economic conditions on the upper Rhine could provide a new basis for reassessing the *Rheinbund*, the political strategies of Baden, Hessen-Darmstadt and Nassau in the period of Napoleonic rule, and the legacy of the revolutionary era in the upper-Rhenish territories.

Conclusion

The study of Rhine commerce during the entire period of the French occupation is still engaged with that most fundamental historical question, What happened? Using the Rhine toll data for the first time, Ellis's comprehensive figures for Strasbourg, Eichhoff's numbers for many Rhine locations in the years 1807 to 1809 and other sources, this chapter presents an improved assessment of the changing patterns and trends in Rhine commerce. A depiction that is both more comprehensive and more detailed than earlier accounts should serve as the starting point for a better understanding of what happened to the volume, direction and location of Rhine commerce during the period of the Continental System. It offers important quantitative confirmation and substantial nuancing of some existing impressions about Rhine commerce, particularly the dramatic declines in upstream imports and the existence of an economic slump in the year 1811. The data here have also allowed substantial expansion and modification of earlier observations on the changing ratio of upstream to downstream freight. Finally, the materials gathered here support the suggestion that the era of the French occupation, and the period of the Continental System in particular, saw an epochal transformation in the organization and location of the river's commercial activity as the great gateway city of Cologne declined in relative significance and new regional economies emerged on the lower and upper Rhine constructed around dramatically increased exchange at medium-sized cities such as Dusseldorf and Mannheim.

A better understanding of 'what happened' should then help answer the question, Why did this happen? Not all of the developments in the Rhine trade concurrent with the Continental Blockade were in fact caused by the Blockade. Some occurrences are directly attributable to the causal impact of the Blockade, whereas explaining other commercial trends necessitates untangling the results of the blockade from the consequences of other factors, particularly other aspects of French economic policies. These analytic efforts will require a lot of additional work, but some preliminary evaluations can be made here in brief summary form.

The sharp decline in upriver traffic beginning in 1808 can safely be attached directly to the increasing strictures of the Continental Blockade. The crisis of 1811, with its clear differences in degree of economic downturn along the lower, middle and upper Rhine might indicate that the Blockade and its great intensification in 1810 precipitated the economic recession, which was more severe in the coastally connected lower-Rhine ports. Because the Blockade decisively reduced upstream imports, it helped reverse the historic pattern of Rhine trade to one in favour of the downstream commerce. Yet the downstream trade showed significant absolute growth and had already surpassed the upstream freight well before the Blockade took effect, so the significance of Napoleon's commercial boycott in this development as it continued after 1807 remains unclear. The commercial reform of the Rhine, consolidated under the new Convention of 1804, and affecting portions of the lower Main and the Neckar as well, certainly played a role in opening up the river for downstream trade. Similarly, it was the combined impact of commercial reform and then blockade which undermined the ancient dominant role of Cologne in distributing trade on the lower and middle Rhine. During the period of French hegemony the privileged metropolises of the old regime were superseded by intensified regional networks of commerce on the lower and upper river. Despite the retardant effects of the Blockade on some parts of the Rhine trade, commerce on the entire length of the Rhine from Strasbourg to the Dutch border moved in larger volumes, over greater distances and more freely in the Napoleonic period than it had since Roman times. The expanded, extended and liberated commerce of the Rhine proved an enduring outcome of the revolutionary era and played a vital role in the breathtaking transformation of the Rhenish economy in the nineteenth century. For these reasons, the imposition of revolutionary French hegemony, with its efforts at continental economic restructuring, produced ambivalent reactions among much of the local population, and its historical legacy remains contested.

Notes

1. Eli Heckscher, *The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation*, trans. C.S. Fearenside (1922; repr. Gloucester, MA, 1964), 295–323.

2. François Crouzet, 'Wars, Blockade, and Economic Change in Europe, 1792–1815', *The Journal of Economic History* 24 (1964): 567–88 (586–7).
3. Ute Planert, 'International Conflict, War, and the Making of Modern Germany, 1740–1815', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Smith (Oxford, 2011), 91–118 (107).
4. Jeffrey Diefendorf, *Businessmen and Politics in the Rhineland: 1789–1834* (Princeton, 1980), 179.
5. Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780–1830* (Cambridge, 2003), 199.
6. Katherine Aaslestad, 'Revisiting the Continental System: Exploitation to Self-Destruction in the Napoleonic Empire', in *Napoleon and His Empire: Europe 1804–1814*, ed. Philip Dwyer and Alan Forrest (New York, 2007), 114–32 (116).
7. Klaus Müller, *Köln von der französischen zur preußischen Herrschaft 1794–1815* (Cologne, 2005), 225; Charles Schmidt, *Das Großherzogtum Berg, 1806–1813: eine Studie zur französischen Vorherrschaft in Deutschland unter Napoleon I*, trans. Lothar Kellermann (1st French edn, 1905; Neustadt/Aisch, 1999), 298.
8. Johann J. Eichhoff, *Topographisch-Statistische Darstellung des Rheines* (Cologne, 1814), 74.
9. Roger Dufraisse, 'Das napoleonische Deutschland: Stand und Probleme der Forschung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der linksrheinischen Gebiete', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 6 (1980): 467–83 (480).
10. Karl Aretin, 'Les Consequences Economiques des Guerres de la Révolution en Allemegene', in *Economic Effects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Session B-1: Proceedings, Tenth International Economic History Congress, Leuven, August 1990*, ed. Erik Aerts and François Crouzet (Leuven, 1990), 48–56, 49, 50.
11. For a preliminary assessment, see Robert Mark Spaulding, 'Changing Patterns of Rhine Commerce in the Era of French Hegemony, 1793–1813', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 100 (2013): 413–31.
12. Robert Mark Spaulding, 'Revolutionary France and the Transformation of the Rhine', *Central European History* 44 (2011): 203–26.
13. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Bestand MA (Schiffahrt) file 63447 (Octroi-Renten) (hereafter BHSA, Munich, MA/63447). All references to Rhine toll incomes rely on this file.
14. Additional data in Georg Schirges, *Der Rheinstrom: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntniss der Geschichte, Handelstatistik und Gesetzgebung des Rheins* (Mainz, 1857); Christian Eckert, *Rheinschiffahrt im XIX. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1900); Eberhard Gothein, *Geschichtliche Entwicklung der Rheinschiffahrt im XIX. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1903); Geoffrey Ellis, *Napoleon's Continental Blockade: The Case of Alsace* (Oxford, 1981).
15. For example, in 1789 sugar, coffee and tobacco comprised 37 per cent of Cologne's river trade by mass and much more by value; Schirges, *Rheinstrom*, 13 with Gothein's correction, *Geschichtliche Entwicklung*, 25 n. 2.
16. The toll data for 1806 also include the final two months of 1805, so the increase of 1807 over 1806 is larger than it appears.
17. All references to shipping volumes at Strasbourg rely on 'Appendix B: Volume of the Carrying Trade to and From Strasbourg 1797–1813', Ellis, *Continental Blockade*, 277.
18. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 29, 60, including adjustment for 450,000 *Zentner* of Ruhr coal arriving in Cologne, which paid only 5 per cent of the standard upstream toll rate.

19. Because the economic downturn of those years was a global phenomenon affecting at least Britain, North America and parts of the continent, the term and its variants (crisis of 1810–11, crisis of 1811–12) are ubiquitous.
20. Roger Dufraisse, 'napoleonische Deutschland', 480; idem, 'Französische Zollpolitik, Kontinental Sperre und Kontinentalsystem im Deutschland der napoleonischen Zeit', in idem, *L'Allemagne à L'Époque Napoléonienne: Questions d'histoire politique, économique et sociale* (Bonn, 1992), 245–69 (260).
21. Dufraisse, 'Französische Zollpolitik', 260.
22. No toll data for downstream shipping is available from Emmerich for 1806 or 1807 and the data for 1808 to 1811 is obviously very incomplete. Data from Emmerich on freight moving in both directions is omitted from this portion of the discussion.
23. But not necessarily one-third larger because most bulk goods paid reduced tolls of 50, 25 or 5 per cent according to articles 100, 104 and 105 of the *Octroi Convention* of 1804. I have assumed that the reduced rates offered to the two largest commodities in these categories, downstream timber and upstream Ruhr coal, were roughly offsetting. That hypothesis could be refined by further investigation, but only a very great imbalance would undermine the larger point on ratios of downstream and upstream traffic made above.
24. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 60.
25. Jürgen Heinz Schawacht, *Schiffahrt und Güterverkehr zwischen den Häfen des deutschen Niederrheins (insbesondere Köln) und Rotterdam vom Ende des 18. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts (1794–1850/51)* (Cologne, 1973), 194.
26. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, Bestand 400 (post-1815), file 5195 (trade 1819–26) (hereafter HASK, Cologne, 400/1595). The file has no data for 1824.
27. Extended treatment in Spaulding, 'Changing Patterns of Rhine Commerce'.
28. For reasons of space, speculations on the role of smuggling in the rise of right-bank ports are not included here. The trends suggested in this essay are based on the official statistics of the legal trade.
29. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 60; Cologne Chamber of Commerce, 'Coup d'oeil sur le commerce et la navigation 1809', HASK, Cologne, 350/5269.
30. Gothein, *Entwicklung*, 25 for Cologne; my estimate for the total volume of 1789 was derived by applying to the entire river the known rate of growth for trade on the middle Rhine between 1789 and 1809: 230 per cent.
31. Gothein, *Entwicklung*, 25; Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 60; toll revenues.
32. Schawacht, *Güterverkehr*, 194.
33. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 62, 68.
34. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 62, 67, 63.
35. Walter Kliche, 'Die Schiffahrt auf der Ruhr und Lippe im achtzehnten Jahrhundert', Phil. diss. (University of Gottingen, 1904), 172; Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 73.
36. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 73; Johann Andreas Demian, *Statistisch-politische Ansichten und Bemerkungen auf einer Reise durch einen Theil der neuen preussischen Provinzen am Nieder- und Mittelrheine* (Cologne, 1815), 297.
37. Geoffrey Ellis, *Napoleonic Empire* (Highlands, NJ, 1991), 102; Ellis, *Continental Blockade*, 277, 198–200.
38. Only eight to ten ships made that trip per year, each with a load of perhaps 500 *Zentner*. Arthur Blaustein, *Die Handelskammer Mannheim und ihre Vorläufer: 1728–1928* (Mannheim, 1928), 33; Joseph Franz Ockhardt, *Der Rhein nach der Länge seines Laufs und der Beschaffenheit seines Strombettes* (Mainz, 1816), 105.

39. Albrecht Eckhardt, 'Die Industrie Statistik des Departements Donnersberg (Hauptstadt Mainz) von 1811', *Geschichtliche Landeskunde* 7 (1972): 140–207 (155); Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 26.
40. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 25–7.
41. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 27, 22–3.
42. Heckscher, *The Continental System*, 184.
43. Eichhoff, *Darstellung*, 26.

Part III

Adapting to Economic Warfare: New Networks and Illicit Trade

8

Trading Networks across the Blockades: Nathan Mayer Rothschild and His Commodity Trade during the Early Years of the Blockades (1803–1808)

Margrit Schulte Beerbühl

Napoleon's Continental Blockade tried to strangle Britain's trade with continental Europe after 1806. As things turned out, Napoleon did not reach his aim. On the contrary, Britain emerged as the leading commercial power at the end of the wars. For generations British historians have explained Britain's victory by referring to its naval power. Indeed, the two-hundredth anniversary of Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 2005 gave that line of research a new stimulus and directed scholarly interests to new aspects of research such as the role of the fiscal military state in financing the wars or the contractors who supplied and organized the supply of food for the navy in the remotest parts of the world.¹ So far, little has been said about the covert trade to continental Europe during the Napoleonic wars. There is some popular literature on smuggling, but there are few academic contributions.²

Concurrently, Atlantic commerce is at the centre of debate on Britain's economic ascent. Although in statistical figures the European continent does not figure highly compared with the westwards trade, Sidney Pollard pointed out that the role of goods of a strategic and dynamic quality which were re-exported to the continent should not be undervalued.³ The European states, especially those without colonies, were, on the one hand, a promising and rapidly growing outlet for British and colonial goods. On the other hand, they had become a most important supplier for linen textiles, grain, timber, masts, bar iron and a variety of other products which Britain needed for its navy, industrialization and colonies.⁴

The Baltic region was of vital strategic importance for Britain's national security and international standing. The New World could not adequately replace necessary Baltic naval stores, and since the 1790s, Prussia, Russia and German states became the main supplier of British grain as 72 per cent of

wheat came from these states.⁵ British merchants had settled in important port cities at the North Sea and the Baltic, and continental merchants had flocked to Britain, predominantly to London, to organize a more or less global trade. Embargoes and reciprocal blockades during the wars, therefore, threatened Britain's supply of the above-mentioned necessities and disrupted well-established trade routes and links. Scholars have pointed out that Britain's struggle against Napoleon combined a commercial war with a 'fight for political power'.⁶

Central questions discussed in this chapter address the role of covert trade among networks of British and continental merchants. What happened to these networks during the protracted wars of the Napoleonic period? How did merchants react to the challenges of the blockades when the main European ports were closed for British goods? What role did kin, religious or national affiliations play in developing and sustaining commercial networks? A case study on Nathan Mayer Rothschild's early years in Manchester will explore these questions in the context of commercial warfare during the Napoleonic era.

Nathan Mayer Rothschild came to Britain from Frankfurt in about 1798 or 1799 during an extremely difficult time. Britain and France had been at war since 1793 and trade with the continent was severely interrupted, first by the British blockades and, since 1806, by the Napoleonic Blockade. During his early years in Manchester until 1808, he had not yet turned to banking, but was a young, hardly known immigrant merchant exclusively trading in commodities. Myths abound about his motives for moving to Britain as well as about his early days in Manchester. Nathan himself much contributed to these myths.⁷ Whatever his motives, his early letters clearly reveal that he started his profession as an agent of his father's firm in Frankfurt. During the first years, his commercial activities relied predominantly on his father's reputation, credit and business partners. Nathan's main customers were his father, Mayer Amschel Rothschild, and a few other related Jewish families in Frankfurt.

Although there is rich literature on the Rothschilds and their banking activities, remarkably little has dealt with Nathan's early years. Besides S.D. Chapman's article on Nathan Mayer Rothschild's regional textile trade around Manchester, the only detailed study on this era is Niall Ferguson's introductory chapters in his voluminous study on the Rothschilds.⁸ Many of his biographers either bypass these early years or touch on them only very briefly. Herbert Kaplan, one of the most recent biographers, starts Nathan's history in England in 1806, a year when a few events changed his career decisively: his marriage to Hannah Cohen, the Continental Blockade, and two years later his move to London.⁹ Kaplan focused on Nathan's early banking activities and the period when he was asked by the British government to supply Wellington with large amounts of bullion and species. Referring

to Nathan's early days in Manchester and his commodity trade, Kaplan regards Nathan as a 'failing commodities merchant in Manchester' who had turned to banking just in time.¹⁰ In contrast, Ferguson reasons that Nathan was a rather successful commodity merchant based on the development of Nathan's sales figures and the fact that he had a house at 25 Mosley Street, on one of the most elegant streets in Manchester.¹¹ It should be pointed out that sales figures alone do not say much about gains unless the transaction costs and net gains are known. Nathan always insisted that he sold with a very small profit.¹² If his profit margins were indeed lower than the average, his business would have been very vulnerable to wartime crises and the failures of his partners, for transaction costs were surging during the blockades. During the 22 years of war the numbers of bankruptcies jumped to unforeseen peaks in England and even old and well-established businesses stopped payment.¹³

Trade during the war years and blockades became extremely difficult and risky, as legal commerce for most during that period was impossible. Nevertheless, as the trade with the continent had been very profitable in the past, and remained so if the goods could be sold or bought on the mainland, few merchants on either side of the sea voluntarily gave up that business. Thus, undercover and contraband trade as well as smuggling became widespread and took on new dimensions. Besides the petty smuggler, more or less all classes up to the highest ranks in society were involved in seeking loopholes to circumvent the blockade. However, an influential and trustworthy network of business partners was needed to keep from Napoleon's clutches.

The organization of secret transnational business activities afforded the collaboration of various classes and occupations in Britain as well as a network of trustworthy and reliable business partners on the other side of the Blockade. Given Nathan's later rise, it was ultimately his continental network which drew the attention of the British government to commission him and his family with transferring large amounts of specie and bullion to Wellington. Irrespective of the question of Nathan's success as a commodity merchant, the early years in Manchester were crucial in establishing his commercial networks. This chapter, therefore, uncovers information on the social structure of his network, explores how it developed, reveals the pillars of the network and speculates on how he tried to circumvent trade restrictions.

The following elaborations are based on Nathan's early letter books. I will start with some remarks on the development of his trade network between the Peace of Amiens in 1802 and the renewal of war a year later and then turn to his trade until the Continental Blockade in 1806 and shortly after until about 1809. The focus will be on Nathan's German and continental partners.

Expansion of Trade during the Short Peace of Amiens between 1802 and 1803

During his first two years in Manchester Nathan was mainly occupied in establishing business contacts with English and Scottish textile firms. In 1801 he spent some time in Glasgow, Paisley and other places in Scotland to establish business contacts with local textile manufacturers. He was temporarily assisted by his brother, Salomon, who had come to England for that purpose.¹⁴ During the short period of peace Nathan expanded his trade considerably. Peace allowed him to travel to the continent, including France. There he visited Paris, Metz and other places to confirm the business relations his father had initiated. Likewise, continental merchants crossed the channel. Merchants from Lyons, Russia and other places came to Manchester.¹⁵ One of the first who visited Nathan in November 1801 was G. Haenel of the Leipzig firm of Schoeffel & Haenel, who became one of his first and most regular customers outside Frankfurt. Nathan traded with the Leipzig firm on a regular basis until the proclamation of the Continental Blockade in 1806.

Nathan's travel on the continent and his visit to France may be seen as an important step in the building up of his own clientele, although his father continued to supply him with new commissions and remained the backbone of his emerging trade.¹⁶ His father, Mayer Amschel Rothschild, used the opportunities of the Frankfurt fairs to make contact with potential customers for Nathan. Soon after the end of the fairs Nathan was busy writing to merchants whose addresses his father had sent him and who might be willing to buy English and colonial goods. The transport of the goods for firms in France, Basel or Salzburg usually went via Hamburg to Frankfurt, and from there his father and other German-Jewish houses organized the onward transport to the final destination.¹⁷

The rapid expansion of his trade during the short peacetime had a snowball effect on Nathan's circle of business partners. Until 1802 his agents had been his father's partners, the shipping agent and the merchant house of Roerup & Reinicke at Harburg (now part of Hamburg) and the merchant-banker Mayer Michael David at Hamburg. For the transfer of goods and bills, Nathan's new customers advised him to use their agents and bankers, not his partners. Some French houses, for example, recommended him to take the Hamburg house of de Chapeaurouge as agent. Within the next few years de Chapeaurouge became an important partner for Nathan – at least until the Continental Blockade.¹⁸

The de Chapeaurouge family were of Swiss origin; Jacques de Chapeaurouge (1755–1805) had settled in Hamburg in 1764. This house dealt extensively with France and the Swiss states. De Chapeaurouge brought Nathan into business with the Bourcards, one of the principal firms at Basel. Both firms were heavily involved in smuggling English and contraband goods via Basel into France and other places.

In one of his letters home, Nathan mentioned as his business aim to get commissions from the very best houses, but added that he could only afford to handle small commissions.¹⁹ Indeed, during the short peacetime he got into contact with some of the leading bankers in Amsterdam like the De Smeths, Jacob Marcus and some internationally leading merchant houses in Switzerland, such as the Bourcards cited above and the Iselins of Basel. Geographically, he extended his trade to France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Russia. He also crossed over the close circle of the international Jewish community and started to trade with merchants of various denominations.

His French business, however, ended with losses, as his new customers complained about the quality of the goods and also could not agree on exchange rates. By the end of October 1802 he faced losses of about £2000 in Paris alone besides further losses in Metz.²⁰ They evidently drove him into a liquidity bottleneck. In several letters, he asked his costumers to remit his bills before they were due.²¹ Ferguson's table of Nathan's sales at the beginning of 1803 reveal a sharp downturn. They almost dropped to nil.²² It was not the only time that he faced financial problems. Repeatedly, he overdrew his account at his father's bankers. In one case, for example, he had overdrawn his account with the house of Parish in Hamburg by more than £2000, and Parish complained to his father that he was not prepared to give him any further credit in advance.²³ The sharp fluctuations of his turnover as well as his liquidity constraints reveal some of the problems young merchants faced in the early modern maritime trade. If he had not been backed by his father's financial means and reputation among the international merchant community, his fate may have been a different one during his Manchester years.

Trade Preceding the Continental Blockade, 1803–06

After the renewal of war in 1803 the British government proclaimed the blockade of the Elbe and Weser. Richard Southern & Pearson and Edw. and Geo. Coulson, both of Hull, had become Nathan's main shipping agents since 1802. They had shipped most of Nathan's goods to Hamburg. Even after the proclamation of the British blockade in 1803, Coulson continued to send neutral ships to the Hanseatic city for a while, but it became increasingly difficult to ship goods to Hamburg and Bremen, and by July Coulson complained to Nathan that 'suitable German ports were running short'.²⁴

The British blockade, however, did not stop trade with the north German port cities, but caused a shift to the smaller, neutral towns of Emden, Varel and the Danish ports of Altona and Tönning. They became the centres of English trade. The closeness of Emden, Varel, Norden and the neutral Duchies of Oldenburg and Papenburg to Bremen as well as to Holland made the ports a suitable entry for forbidden goods. John Brown of Yarmouth remarked in 1806 that Emden was 'considered the headquarters of neutralization on this side of the Elbe'. In the port town, about 50 establishments had been

'formed for the sole purpose of covering, by fraudulent documents, the vessels and merchandize, belonging to the subjects of the belligerent powers'.²⁵ The tideland between the mainland and the East Frisian Islands particularly favoured a clandestine trade during the nights, as the coast-dwellers knew the routes through the Wadden Sea (*Wattenmeer*) and the dangers of the tides as well as those of the tidal rivers, whereas the French occupiers, who controlled the coast, either did not know or feared them.

Before 1803 Emden had been an insignificant port from which predominantly agricultural goods like oats had been shipped to Bremen.²⁶ The American consul William Clarke, who settled in Emden after 1803, remarked in his consular despatches to the US government that in peacetime the traffic to Emden was inconsiderable. Since the other rivers and ports were blockaded, 'about a dozen American vessels have entered this River' within two months.²⁷ In 1804 the number of ships arriving at Emden had increased to 1283 and to 1595 in 1805. Many merchants from Bremen and Hamburg opened branches in that port town as well as in Tönning.²⁸ Those merchants of Bremen, who had imported colonial goods directly from London or Liverpool, redirected them via Emden or Varel after the renewal of war.

Legal trade to the Dutch ports also continued for some time after the return to war, but in November 1804 the Hull shipping agency of Clingham & Gell wrote to Nathan that 'every avenue by which goods were introduced into Holland, is now strictly guarded by the French'.²⁹ However, small barges continued to sail from Varel to Delfsiel using the tidal waters which escaped the vigilance of the enemy. From Delfsiel, goods were entered into Holland and Brabant.³⁰

Since the British blockade of the Elbe and Weser, the firms of Abegg & Co. and Altmann & Winkelmann at Emden had become important agents for Nathan. To facilitate the trade they had also established a branch in Varel on the river Jade that belonged to the neutral Duchy of Oldenburg.³¹ They cooperated closely with Nathan's father and supplied Nathan with information how to circumvent the blockade and how to transport British goods safely to Frankfurt as well as into Holland and Brabant.

Part of the trade shifted toward the Baltic, and Coulson started to ship some of Nathan's goods to the Baltic ports of Lübeck, Kiel, Wismar, Stettin and other places. However, until 1806 Nathan and his shipping agents preferred the ports of Emden and Tönning. They were not only much closer to Britain, but also nearer to Frankfurt, and the neutrality of the surrounding duchies made it easier to circumvent the Blockade.

Despite the renewal of war in 1803, Nathan continued to expand his business network. At least since 1804 he traded directly with the firm of Messrs Ausset Dutoit & Co. of Vevey Switzerland. It seems that he sent above all British cotton textiles to Switzerland. Involved in Nathan's Swiss transactions was the Swiss-German firm of Rougement & Behrens in London. On the continent, the firms in Emden and John Parish at Hamburg organized the onward transport.

After the British had imposed the naval blockade of the Elbe and Weser, the number of bankruptcies rose and reached a temporary peak in 1805 with altogether 104 failures. The majority of failures were among the smaller- and middle-sized houses.³² Among the unfortunate was also Mayer Michael David, the banker and agent of Nathan and his family at Hamburg. After his failure, the Rothschilds transferred their banking and commercial activities to the house of John Parish in Hamburg. About that time Mayer Amschel Rothschild opened a bank account at that house.

Originally from Scotland, John Parish's father had settled in the Hanseatic port city about the middle of the eighteenth century. At least since the early 1790s John Parish had turned to banking (see Fig. 8.1). He cooperated closely with the biggest European banking house of the eighteenth century, among them Hope & Company in Amsterdam and in London among



Figure 8.1 John Parish, Baron of Senftenberg (1774–1858), private collection, John M. Parish

others with Harman & Co., an old partner of Mayer Amschel Rothschild in Frankfurt. In 1794 the house of Parish had transferred English subsidies to Prussia and in 1809 also to the Austrian Government. Parish also dealt with the Board of Transport in London. He supplied the English troops on the continent with money and goods and provided the Royal Navy with ships for the transport of British soldiers to the West Indies.³³ Between 1793 and 1796 he was also consul for the United States in Hamburg.

At the time Nathan began to trade with the house of Parish. John Parish's sons, John, Charles and David had been installed in the business. The sons became key figures in breaching the Continental Blockade from 1806 onwards. The Hamburg house turned into an exchange centre of communication between Nathan and his father. Parish organized the transport of Nathan's goods to Frankfurt and transferred bills of lading, money and goods to correspondents in Rotterdam and Amsterdam.³⁴

In view of the alarming news that the French troops were approaching Hamburg, Mayer Amschel Rothschild travelled from Frankfurt to Hamburg several times to safeguard his and his sons' property. He stayed at the home of John Parish and discussed with him measures to 'colour' English goods – that is to declare them as of German origin – and also the possibilities of safe transport routes to Frankfurt.³⁵ For security reasons, they arranged that goods sent by Nathan to Parish should be entered in the name of Mayer Amschel Rothschild. After his return to Frankfurt, Mayer Amschel stationed his son Carl in Hamburg to safeguard the trade and also supply Nathan with new commissions of some Hamburg houses.³⁶

As already mentioned, two events changed the structure of Nathan's trade considerably in 1805 and 1806: his betrothal and marriage to Hannah Cohen and the Continental Blockade. Hanna Cohen was the daughter of Levy Barent Cohen, a well-known and wealthy merchant and diamond trader in London. Of Dutch origin, Levy Barent Cohen had come to London in the 1770s. Remarkably little is known about Cohen's mercantile activities. According to Herbert Kaplan, he was London's leading international diamond trader between 1781 and 1794.³⁷ In his early years Nathan had financially relied on his father's credit and reputation. After his marriage he became financially very dependent on his in-laws, for, according to Kaplan, L.B. Cohen's bills of exchange were generally accepted throughout the international mercantile community, whereas Nathan's bills were not.³⁸

Until about 1805 Nathan predominantly traded in textiles, and from that point he then began to broaden the range of products he dealt with. He increasingly traded with colours, especially indigo, coffee, sugar and other colonial produce.³⁹ By 1807 he had extended his business relations to the West Indian sugar islands in cooperation with his in-laws.⁴⁰ Other new destinations were Lima and Montevideo.⁴¹ In the latter business, he was involved with the house of Fermin de Tastet of London. He had been dealing with that house since about 1804.

In 1806 Fermin de Tastet was active in the big undercover bullion transactions between Mexico and France. This operation was routed via the United States. It was organized by an international consortium of French, German, English, Dutch, American and Spanish merchants and bankers, among them the big banking houses of Hope & Company in Amsterdam and Baring in London as well as one of John Parish's sons who had settled in Philadelphia for the purpose of overseeing and routing the bullion transactions via the neutral United States.⁴² These undercover operations were known to the British government and had even received the consent of William Pitt. Facing diminishing trade with Europe, he had agreed to these transactions with the prospect of opening new markets for British merchants in the Spanish colonies. According to Vincent Nolte, who was also involved in the bullion transactions, the far greater part of the whole transaction was not transmitted in bullion but in the commodity trade.⁴³ De Tastet had received licences to purchase bills on Buenos Aires worth £45,000.⁴⁴ The letters between Nathan and his father do not provide any hints as to his participation in the financial business, but they at least took part in the accompanying commodity trade, for Mayer Amschel had given an order to De Tastet via Nathan to buy Buenos Aires hides. They also received indigo and Jesuit bark via this channel.⁴⁵

Trade during the Continental Blockade from 1806 to 1808

The Berlin Decree of November 1806 and the occupation of Hamburg by the French troops transformed Nathan's business considerably. A glutted market and the confiscation and prohibition of all English goods in Switzerland in 1806 forced the Swiss firm Ausset Dutoit to cease all business with England. Similarly, trade with the Leipzig firm of Haenel ended in October when the French troops entered Leipzig.⁴⁶ In Hamburg relations with the house of Parish ceased temporarily. After the French had entered Hamburg John Parish Jr was among the first taken into custody. His father fled to Denmark and later on to Bath as his brother Charles fled to London. On 20 December Charles wrote to Nathan from London, 'It is out of question, as to sending manufactured goods there.'⁴⁷ Commercial relations with the Hamburg firm of de Chapeaurouge were also discontinued.⁴⁸

The Continental Blockade forced British merchants to shift their trade again to places out of Napoleon's reach, for any trade with the blockaded continent, including Nathan's trade with his father and kin in Frankfurt, became dangerous and the goods liable to confiscation. Until the Blockade, Nathan's goods had been predominantly shipped from Hull and since 1805 also from London. An occasional ship had also left from Glasgow, for he had bought a substantial amount of cotton in Scotland. From 1806 onwards the number of ships leaving Glasgow increased and Nathan also started to send goods from Liverpool.

Trading routes became circuitous. Within the next few years a ring of smuggling nests were established around the European continent that organized and coordinated illicit trade. Gothenburg, Christiansand, Heligoland, the Azores and Malta, as well as later on Gravelines near Dünkirchen, became major loopholes for the entry of British wares on the continent. Within the scope of this essay, only a few glimpses can be presented of Nathan's commodity trade after the proclamation of the Blockade. In Liverpool the shipping firm of Ewart & Rutson, for example, supplied forged papers for ships that went under American and other flags to Gothenburg.⁴⁹ They also organized a smuggling trade with colonial goods which were entered via the Azores into Spain, Portugal and even France.⁵⁰

Early in 1807 Nathan installed his clerk John Fox at Gothenburg to organize the trade with the blockaded continent. His father-in-law, L.B. Cohen, and Nathan had originally planned to send Fox to Amsterdam. They decided against that plan, however, because Fox was well known there and might be detected as a British subject. Thus, they thought it too dangerous to install him there to oversee the safe arrival and transfer of cargoes.⁵¹ As he was not known in Gothenburg, he would easily pass as an American. Ewart & Rutson of Liverpool provided Fox with a certificate which documented his birthplace as Nantucket, Massachusetts. The notary who had issued the birth certificate was dead, so that there were no witnesses who could disprove the authenticity of the paper.⁵² Thus furnished with an American pass and birth certificate, he was to go with the ship *Laura* to Gothenburg. Ewart & Rutson provided the ship with American ship papers, as if it departed from New York or Boston. The final destination of the ship was not Gothenburg, but actually Amsterdam. In a letter to Nathan, L.B. Cohen was concerned about the ship papers. An American ship coming from Gothenburg might arouse suspicion in Amsterdam, and he suggested that Fox should change the papers in Christiansand, if the latter thought it necessary. Cohen also suggested the possibility of sending the ship to Russia, though he feared that the Baltic might be too dangerous.⁵³

As Gothenburg became one of the big loopholes in the Continental Blockade many merchants had relocated to that Swedish coastal city. Among those who settled there temporarily was John Parish Jr. He acted there as an undercover intermediary between the Swedish government and the English Admiral Saumarez, who was sent into the Baltic in 1808 to protect English merchant ships.⁵⁴ In 1806 at last the Hamburg bank of Warburg & Co. had established a branch in Stockholm, and since 1807 part of the correspondence with Fox and also financial transactions with Frankfurt, Amsterdam and other places went via that bank. After the fall of king Gustav IV of Sweden, his successor Count Bernadotte officially joined the Continental System, but unofficially he kept the maritime trade fairly open for British ships. In 1809 British trade with the Baltic states more than doubled.⁵⁵

The clandestine trade with Holland increased under the reign of King Louis, Napoleon's brother. Napoleon had installed him as king of Holland in 1806 to enforce the Blockade and raise money for the French troops.⁵⁶ Louis did not enforce the Continental Blockade as rigorously as his brother expected him to do; to some extent he turned a blind eye to the entry of forbidden goods, so that the Blockade became very porous along the Dutch coast. Nathan and his family increasingly transferred money and goods via one of the Dutch ports. In August 1807 Carl, who was at Hamburg, wrote to Nathan that all English ships destined for Tönning were returning to England without having unloaded their cargoes. Thereupon, Mayer Amschel in Frankfurt advised Nathan to send his goods to Holland. As letters were opened in Hamburg by the French, he also suggested that Paris bills be henceforth sent to Amsterdam.⁵⁷ Thus, part of Nathan's continental trade shifted to Holland during 1808. Financial transactions were increasingly organized by some Dutch-Jewish houses like Braunsberg & Co. in Amsterdam.

The business letters with Nathan reveal the high mobility of his brothers on the continent during these years (see Fig. 8.2 and Map 8.1). Carl Rothschild moved between Hamburg, Itzehoe and other nearby places to oversee the secret entry of English and other forbidden goods, and Nathan's older brother, Amschel, went to Amsterdam after the conflict with Denmark in autumn of 1807. While his father stayed at Frankfurt, the sons Carl, Salomon and Jacob (James) moved between Schleswig and Holstein, Holland and France, and Jacob even went to England. Though the journey was dangerous, Mayer Amschel reasoned 'that you'll stipulate many things by mouth which would be unsuccessfully transacted by the long way of correspondence.'⁵⁸

Since the occupation of Heligoland by the British in 1807, the island became a thriving smuggling nest. Within a few years the number of warehouses increased from four to more than 140. Among those who opened a warehouse on the island was Nathan. As early as October 1807, shortly after the British occupation of Heligoland, Nathan saw an opportunity to send British and colonial goods via that island to the blockaded continent. Although his father-in-law thought Heligoland an 'infamous place' where no goods could be properly stored, Nathan decided to station one of his employees there. Within the next few years the island became a prominent smuggling hub from which goods were not only sent to the nearby German and Danish coast but were reloaded for more distant places like Holland or the Baltic. Between 9 August and 20 November 1808 altogether 120 English ships arrived at the island.⁵⁹ As Napoleon was distracted by his struggle against Spain and Austria in 1808 and 1809, the illegal trade from Heligoland to the German coast took place almost openly. In 1809 Nathan's shipping agent was sending three to four vessels every day from Hull to Heligoland. S.F. Cantor, Nathan's agent on Heligoland, as well as S. Bogen



Figure 8.2 Portrait of the Rothschild brothers. Clockwise from top: Amschel (1773–1855), Salomon (1774–1855), Carl (1788–1855), James (1792–1868), Nathan (1777–1836)

Source: Rothschild Archive, London.



Map 8.1 The Rothschilds' places of residence 1806–09

regarded the trade in sugar and other colonial goods as well as textiles with Bremen, Hamburg and Amsterdam very brisk. 'The smuggle of merchandise is here growing daily', wrote Cantor in May 1809. To facilitate the safe entry of British goods on the German coast, he suggested to Nathan to pack English textiles in small bales, which would not have to be unpacked on the island and could be directly reloaded on small vessels.⁶⁰

The intensive and ongoing correspondence as well as the financial and commodity transactions between Nathan and his correspondents on the blockaded continent is remarkable. Not all his enterprises were successful; some of the ships were taken and goods confiscated by the French or Danish privateers. The surviving correspondence of the Rothschilds and their partners does not allow any evaluation as to the extent of losses; however, in all it may be estimated that thanks to their family business network they were extremely successful in circumventing the Blockade.

Besides Heligoland and Gothenburg, Malta and Messina in the Mediterranean became smuggling centres for the entry of British goods into Italy. Since 1808 the number of British and Anglo-German merchant houses had increased considerably. Importations of British goods on Malta jumped from £35,000 in 1806 to £311,619 in 1808 and peaked in 1809 with £779,541.⁶¹ From there goods were sent to Trieste, Fiume, Napoli and many other Italian port cities. Among those who began to trade with Malta were well-known British merchants like James Cazenove, J.W. Mellish and John Lubbock. In 1809 there were between 30 and 40 English houses on Malta.⁶²

Nathan and his in-laws also began to send goods to Malta and Messina. Nathan organized his Mediterranean trade in cooperation with the textile firm of Isaac Aldebert & Co. of Manchester. The house of Aldebert & Co. operated internationally with branches and agents in several European towns and places. Isaac Aldebert was born in Erlangen near Nürnberg. He had a textile house at Frankfurt in partnership with Johann Christoph Mylius in 1787. If Isaac Aldebert went to Manchester, Johan Christoph Mylius's son Enrico opened a branch at Milan in the early 1790s.⁶³ At Frankfurt the parent houses were competitors on the market with English textiles.⁶⁴ Isaac Aldebert had come to Manchester about the same time as Nathan and entered a partnership with Charles Christian Becher from Hanau near Frankfurt. Nathan certainly had some knowledge of the Aldeberts, but he does not seem to have started business with them before the Continental Blockade. Aldebert's agent on Malta was John Christopher Ritter, and he also cooperated closely there with the firms of Joseph Barker on Malta and Melchior Dunner at Messina.⁶⁵ Nathan cooperated with Aldebert not only to enter goods into Italy, but also to Holland and via Sweden and Heligoland to Frankfurt. Like Nathan, Aldebert, also had an agent on Heligoland.⁶⁶ Relations between both merchants were strained from the very beginning, and in 1809 a conflict about the goods on the ship *Wellbedacht* arose which ended their commercial cooperation. The ship was to go to Memel, and if it succeeded would arrive safely at the port town, and Nathan's goods were to be forwarded to Frankfurt. The goods, however, were seized at Riga.⁶⁷

Early in 1808 Nathan's father-in-law died and Nathan decided to move to London. Not later than September 1808, Nathan had settled with his family in London. With his arrival in London a new period of his career began. It is after his move to the capital that he started to trade in species and bullion. During his first London years, however, Nathan remained financially heavily dependent on his in-laws. Moreover, together with Peter Fawcett of the Manchester firm of Moulson & Fawcett, he even traded with fictitious bills, called wind bills – that is, they generated bills of exchange that were not backed by credit. In the financial crisis of 1810 that highly speculative business caused Fawcett to bankrupt. Nathan, embedded in the influential

network of his in-laws and family, remained solvent. Furthermore, after his move to the City he started to smuggle not only commodities but species and bullion – often via Amsterdam – to the continent. His trade in species, which his father initiated and controlled on the continental side of the Blockade with the help of his other sons and related Jewish traders, found the attention of the British government when it sought international undercover merchant networks who could deliver specie to Wellington in Spain.

Conclusion

Nathan Mayer Rothschild's career as a commodity merchant was certainly not a linearly rising success story. Years of rapid expansion alternated with years of severe setbacks. He had to cope with the war and blockades. Losses, despite surprising gains, were inevitable, for ships were lost, goods confiscated by the French and many of his business partners went bankrupt. He, like many others, showed a remarkable flexibility and adaptability to quickly changing circumstances. Nathan's trade with the blockaded continent rested on three pillars: his father, his brothers and the agents and bankers employed by this father and father-in-law. His family, therefore, above all his father and his father's reputation within the international Jewish community and the mobility of his brothers on the continent and their positioning at strategically important places, allowed him to organize the secret import of British goods. Another key pillar rested on his father's bankers and agents in London and Hamburg as well as later on those employed by his in-laws. It may be concluded that above all, his embeddedness in the influential and widespread network of his family and, later, of his in-laws, were of crucial importance for his commercial survival. Instead of interrupting the well-established transnational trade, the Continental Blockade encouraged a closer collaboration within the international Jewish community as well as within transnational operating merchants of other denominations.

Although no definite answer can be given about his financial success as a commodity merchant, it was his marriage and probably his turn to finance, initiated by his father about 1809, which was of crucial importance for his professional survival during the hard years of the Napoleonic Blockade. It certainly was the Wellington commission which finally served as 'catalyst in the creation of the Rothschild financial dynasty'.⁶⁸ In all, Nathan was neither a diligent nor a considerate merchant. He only survived the difficult years during the Napoleonic wars and the blockades because he was embedded in the powerful and influential networks of his family and his in-laws. Backed by this support system, he developed a geographically extended continental network which lowered his risks of failure as he engaged in speculative and hazardous trading activities amid international economic warfare.

Notes

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2. For the Baltic see James Davey, 'Securing the Sinews of Sea Power: British Intervention in the Baltic 1780–1815', *The International History Review* 33 (2011): 161–84, and the older but still valuable study by A.N. Ryan, 'Trade with the Enemy in the Scandinavian and Baltic Ports during the Napoleonic War: for and against', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (1962): 123–40.
3. Sidney Pollard, 'British Trade and European Economic Development (1750–1850)', in *International Trade and British Economic Growth from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. Peter Mathias and John A. Davis (Oxford, 1997), 42.
4. Herbert H. Kaplan, *Russian Overseas Commerce with Great Britain during the Reign of Catherine II* (Philadelphia, 1995), 218; Arcadius Kahan, *The Plow, The Hammer and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago, 1985).
5. Davey, 'Securing', 163.
6. Ryan 'Trade', 124–5; Davey, 'Securing', 161.
7. See for example Herbert H. Kaplan, *Nathan Mayer Rothschild and the Creation of a Dynasty: The Critical Years 1806–1816* (Stanford, 2007), 14 n. 6; Derek Wilson, *Die Rothschild Dynastie. Eine Geschichte von Ruhm und Macht bis in die unmittelbare Gegenwart* (München, 1994), 36; Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, 'Crossing the Channel: Nathan Mayer Rothschild and His Trade with the Continent during the Early Years of the Blockades (1803–1808)', *The Rothschild Archive Review* (London, 2007–08): 41.
8. Stanley D. Chapman, 'The Foundation of the English Rothschilds: N.M. Rothschild as a Textile Merchant 1799–1811', *Textile History* 8 (1977): 99–115.
9. Niall Ferguson, *Die Geschichte der Rothschilds. Propheten des Geldes*, 2 vols (München, 2002), vol. 1 (1798–1848).
10. Kaplan, *Nathan Mayer Rothschild*, 175.
11. Ferguson, *Die Geschichte*, vol. 1, 77.
12. Chapman estimates that his profit margin was between 5% to 10%, while the average margin was between 15% and 20%; Chapman, 'The Foundation', 109.
13. Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *Deutsche Kaufleute in London: Welthandel und Einbürgerung (1660–1818)*, Publications of the German Historical Institute London, 61 (München, 2007), 347–79; Julian Hoppit, *Risk and Failure in English Business 1700–1800* (Cambridge, 1987); Ian P.H. Duffy, *Bankruptcy and Insolvency in London during the Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1985).
14. The Rothschild Archive London (RAL), London, I/218/35, 33, 38, 42r, 43r.
15. RAL, London, I/218/35, 14 November 1801; I/218/36, 10 November 1802, 8 January 1803.
16. See for example RAL, London, I/218/36, Nathan Mayer Rothschild (hereafter NMR) to Mayer Amschel Rothschild (MAR), 20 October 1802.
17. See for example RAL, London, I/218/35, NMR to Brothers Mayer, 11 July 1802.
18. Nathan's letterbooks have not survived after 1805.
19. RAL, London, I/218/35, NMR to MAR Frankfurt, 5 May 1802.
20. RAL, London, I/218/35, Nathan to B.L. Fould, 31 October 1802; 7 November 1802; 10 November 1802; 8 December 1802; to Mons. C. Aerts le Jeune Metz, 13 November 1802; to S. Geisenheim, Paris 18 December 1802; 22 December 1802.

21. RAL, London, I/218/35, to Schroeder, 3 November 1802; to Joseph Gugler Bozen, 5 January 1803.
22. Ferguson, *Die Geschichte*, vol. 1, 79.
23. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Parish, Hamburg to MAR Frankfurt, 23 April 1806.
24. RAL, London, XI/112/0 Coulson, Hull to NMR, 7, 15 and 16 July 1803.
25. John Brown, *The Mysteries of Neutralization: or, the British Navy Vindicated from the Charges of Injustice and Oppression towards Neutral Flags* (London, 1806), 5 (see footnote).
26. Staatsarchiv Bremen, Bremen, 2-SS.2.a.f., Schlachteangabebücher (port books) for 1790–1805.
27. National Archives Washington DC, Consular Correspondence RG 59 T566 vol. 1: Wm. Clark, Emden to James Madison Secretary of State Washington, 28 June 1804.
28. Louis Hahn, *175 Jahre Emden Kaufmannschaft* (Emden, 1938), 31, 33; see also Burkhart Schmidt, *Hamburg im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution und Napoleons (1789–1813)*, 2 vols (Hamburg 1998), vol. 1 (*Darstellung*), 241–8.
29. RAL, London, XI/112/01, Clingham & Gell, Hull to NMR, 24 November 1804. Gell of the shipping agency Clingham & Gell was stationed in Rotterdam.
30. Since 1804 the British government had permitted shipping through the tidal waters in small barges.
31. RAL, London, XI/112/01, Rob. Hudson Hull to NMR, 8 October 1803.
32. Schmidt, *Hamburg*, vol. 1, 243, 767.
33. Richard Ehrenberg, *Große Vermögen: Ihre Entstehung und ihre Bedeutung*, 2 vols (Jena, 1902, 1925), vol. 2 (*Das Haus Parish in Hamburg*), 38, 68, 117.
34. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Parish Hamburg to NMR, 15 July, 8 and 15 August, 14 November 1806.
35. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Parish Hamburg to NMR, 25 January 1806.
36. RAL, London, XI/86/0A, Carl Rothschild Itzehoe to NMR, 22 May 1807.
37. Kaplan, *Nathan Mayer Rothschild*, 7.
38. *Ibid.*, 25.
39. In a joint expedition with Fermin de Tastet, a Spanish house in London, he had bought hides in Buenos Aires for the account of his father in Frankfurt in 1806; RAL, London, XI/112/4, Fermin de Tastet to NMR, 30 September 1806; Parish & Co. Hamburg to NMR, 11 November 1806.
40. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Harman & Co. London to NMR, 19 June 1806; RAL, London, XI/112/5, L.B. Cohen London to NMR in Manchester, 1 July 1807.
41. RAL, London, XI/112/06, Fermin de Tastet to NMR, 29 February, 22 April 1806; XI/112/05, Edw. & Geo. Coulson to Nathan, 18 July 1807; 20 February 1808.
42. Adrian J. Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America, 1763–1808* (Liverpool, 2007), 202–20; *idem*, 'The Hope-Baring Contract: Finance and Trade between Europe and the Americas, 1805–1808', *English Historical Review* 124 (2009): 1324–52.
43. Vincent Nolte, *The Memoirs of Vincent Nolte* (1854; repr. New York, 1934), 78.
44. Pearce, *British Trade*, 218.
45. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Fermin de Tastet to Nathan, 30 September 1806; XI/86/0A, MAR Frankfurt to NMR, 17 October 1806.
46. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Baur, Altona to NMR, 21 October 1806.
47. RAL, London, XI/112/4, Charles Parish London to NMR, 20 December 1806.
48. In his case the British government had become suspicious of the firm. Shortly after the proclamation of the Continental Blockade, Whitehall issued an order to the immigration office at Harwich that should M. De Chapeaurouge arrive at

- the port, he should not be permitted to land; the National Archives, Kew, Home Office Papers HO 5/34, White Hall 16 February 1807, 95.
49. RAL, London, XI/112/5, L.B. Cohen to NMR, 19 October 1807.
 50. RAL, London, XI/112/5, Ewart & Rutson, 29 February, 7 March 1808.
 51. RAL, London, XI/112/5, A. Hertz to Cohen, 24 November 1807.
 52. RAL, London, XI/112/5, A. Hertz to Fox, 22 February, 31 October, 5 November 1807.
 53. RAL, London, XI/112/5, Cohen to NMR, 17 and 20 October 1807; Cohen to John Fox, 26 October 1807.
 54. Tim Voelcker, *Admiral Saumarez versus Napoleon: The Baltic 1807–1812* (Woodbridge, 2008), 146; A.N. Ryan, ed., *The Saumarez Papers. Selections from the Baltic Correspondence of Vice-Admiral Sir James Saumarez 1808–1812* (London, 1968), 162.
 55. Schmidt, *Hamburg*, vol. 1, 299; François Crouzet, *L'Economie Britannique et le Blocus Continental* (Paris, 1987), 425.
 56. See Katherine B. Aaslestad, 'Lost Neutrality and Economic Warfare: Napoleonic Warfare in Northern Europe, 1795–1815', in *War in an Age of Revolution 1775–1815*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge, 2010), 281.
 57. RAL, London, XI/86/0A, Carl R. Hamburg to NMR, 7 August 1807; MAR Frankfurt to NMR, 3 December 1808.
 58. RAL, London, XI/86/0A, MAR Frankfurt to Jacob (James) Rothschild, 13 November 1809.
 59. Schmidt, *Hamburg*, vol. 1, 297; RAL, London, XI/112/7, Geo. Coulson Hull to NMR, 27 July 1809.
 60. RAL, London, XI/112/05, Geo. Coulson to NMR, 22 October, 16 November 1807; XI/112/07, S. Bogen Heligoland to NMR, 17 March 1809, S.F. Cantor Heligoland, May 1809.
 61. Michela D'Angelo, *Mercanti Inglesi a Malta 1800–1825* (Malta, 1990), 243.
 62. D'Angelo, *Mercanti Inglesi*, 63.
 63. He had visited England several times before he settled in Italy. In 1796 he had already been arrested by the French for trading with English goods. For the Italian branch of Aldebert/Mylius, see Monika Poettinger, *La tradizione rinnovata: Da Enrico Mylius alla Sesto San Giovanni del futuro* (Villa Vigoni, 2006).
 64. RAL, London, XI/86/0A, MAR Frankfurt to NMR, 16 July 1805.
 65. D'Angelo, *Mercanti Inglesi*, 69; RAL, London, XI/112/06, Aldebert & Co. Manchester to NMR, 7 June 1808.
 66. RAL, London, XI/112/06, Aldebert & Co. Manchester to NMR, 7 and 8 June 1808.
 67. RAL, London, XI/112/07, Aldebert & Co. Manchester to NMR 7 and 21 January 4, 10 February, 1 March 1809.
 68. Kaplan, *Nathan Mayer Rothschild*, 177.

9

Smuggling and Blockade-Running during the Anglo–Danish War from 1807 to 1814

Jann M. Witt

Between 1792 and 1815 Great Britain and France fought for political and economic dominance in Europe. Though both nations disrupted their respective sea trade, neutral shipping prospered. Thus, for many years, the Kingdom of Denmark maintained its neutrality and benefitted economically from this bitterly fought war.¹ This chapter, however, examines the difficult years Denmark experienced at war with Britain, allied with France and, most importantly, faced with the destructive policies of the Continental System.

Since the end of the Great Northern War from 1700 to 1721 in which Russia, Denmark-Norway and Saxony-Poland had successfully challenged Swedish supremacy in the Baltic area, the Danish state had remained neutral. Composed of the Jutland peninsula, the archipelago of Danish islands in the Baltic, the Kingdom of Norway, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe, the Orkney and Shetland islands as well as the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, both connected to Denmark by a personal union, Denmark's geographical location, buffering the North and Baltic Seas, and its access to the Atlantic helped the kingdom establish itself as an important maritime nation.²

Economic reforms also led to the success of Denmark's maritime economy. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Danish economy was dominated by the same mercantilist principles predominant in other European absolutist monarchies. For instance, the Danish capital, Copenhagen, and its merchants and shipowners enjoyed economic privileges to the disadvantage of the rest of the Danish state. Only after 1751, when the German-born statesman Johann Hartwig Ernst Bernstorff became Danish foreign minister and actually head of the Danish government, Danish economic policy underwent a fundamental change. He abolished the old mercantilist centralism focused on Copenhagen, and sought economic advances beyond the capital in other regions of the Danish state, especially Schleswig and Holstein. Due to this new approach to industry, trade and seafaring in the two duchies started to grow again after a long period of stagnation. More reforms followed to the extent that by the

middle of the eighteenth century, in addition to the Danish capital, a number of ports in Schleswig and Holstein had become home to large merchant fleets operating in European and international sea trade as a result of this process of economic modernization. The most important of these ports were Flensburg, Eckernförde and Altona. Altona was then the second-largest city of the Danish state after Copenhagen and situated approximately 40 nautical miles inside the Elbe River near the city-state of Hamburg. If eighteenth-century Hamburg served as the main trade partner and financial centre for the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, the city-state's merchant fleet was smaller than that of neighbouring Danish Altona, whose ships frequently sailed on behalf of Hamburg merchants, specializing particularly in Mediterranean trade.

Maintaining Danish neutrality after 1720 allowed Danish fleets and commerce to prosper at the expense of those powers distracted by the frequent eighteenth-century wars, and represented the key factor in the growing success of Danish merchant shipping. Under the *Danebrog*, the neutral Danish flag, merchant vessels from Denmark and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein could trade more or less unimpeded by the warships and privateers of warring nations. These decades, characterized by a thriving economy, became known in Danish historiography as the 'long peace' and 'flourishing period'.³

Armed Neutrality

During the war of American Independence and the wars of the French Revolution, the Danish merchant fleet took advantage of the protection offered by its neutral flag. As the British policies against neutral trade after 1793 became more and more repressive, however, international tensions grew. For instance, in July 1800 the Danish frigate *Freya*, escorting six Danish merchantmen, refused control and was forced to strike flag by a British squadron after a short but fierce battle. Finally, friction between the North European neutral powers and Britain culminated in the forming of the second 'armed neutrality'. Initiated by Russia's Tsar Paul I and based on the model of a similar alliance of neutral powers during the American War of Independence, members included other European neutral nations in 1800, including Denmark, Prussia, Sweden and Russia.⁴

When 'armed neutrality' threatened to block British access to the Baltic sea, the British counter-strike was swift and hard, since a large amount of the vital Baltic naval stores, such as wood, hemp and tar, were necessary for the maintenance of the Royal Navy. On 2 April 1801 a British squadron under command of Admirals Sir Hyde Parker and Lord Horatio Nelson destroyed the Danish fleet in the bloody First Battle of Copenhagen. Despite this act of hostility, Denmark maintained its neutrality for a number of years.⁵

The Second Battle of Copenhagen, 1807

By 1806 Denmark faced new challenges in light of Napoleon's continental expansion. Following his victory over Prussia and the conclusion of peace with Russia, Napoleon had but one enemy left: Great Britain. The French Emperor had become the undisputed overlord of the continent, but his fortune began to turn following a sea battle off Spain's Atlantic coast. The Royal Navy's decisive victory in the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805 ensured that Great Britain quite literally 'rule[d] the waves'.⁶

Napoleon had but one chance to force Great Britain into defeat: through economic, not military measures. In the Berlin Decree on 21 November 1806 Napoleon officially established the so-called Continental Blockade, banning all British trade goods and products from the continent, intending to crush his enemy's export-orientated economy. Napoleon's Empire, satellite states and allies, however, also were expected to adopt the Continental System. Seeking political reconciliation with France, Russia also affiliated herself with Napoleon's economic warfare against Britain. Together both great powers agreed to persuade the minor powers in the Baltic area to join the embargo against Great Britain – if necessary, by force. This would have locked Great Britain from the Baltic Sea and cut one of its most important lifelines to its supply of indispensable Baltic naval stores.⁷

When intelligence about the Franco-Russian plot reached the British government, the reaction was as forthright as it had been six years previously. The British sent a fleet to Copenhagen, this time commanded by Admiral Lord James Gambier, to exert pressure on the Danish government and retain access to the Baltic for British ships. After their arrival off Copenhagen, the British delivered an ultimatum that demanded the Danes consent to an alliance against France and hand over their fleet to the British. The Danish state was given one week to reach a decision to pledge their future compliance to this British demand. Caught between the Scylla of British sea power and the Charybdis of the far superior French army advancing toward the Danish border, a neutral state such as Denmark could only lose. Were they to succumb to British demands, Napoleon would attack the kingdom, yet to remain defiant would mean the British forces would besiege their capital city.⁸

In the end, the Danish government, with courage born of despair, refused the British ultimatum. On 2 September 1807, the British commenced the bombardment of Copenhagen. For five long days the Danish bravely defended their burning capital in the Second Battle of Copenhagen, but capitulation was inevitable. This attack and the subsequent seizure of the Danish fleet caused a deep and enduring hatred of the British among the Danish population. As a result of the British assault, Denmark became a loyal ally of Napoleon. One immediate casualty of the outbreak of the war

between Denmark and Great Britain was the collapse of Danish–British trade; this proved disastrous for the Danish economy.⁹

Gunboats and Privateers

Although the British seized much of the Danish fleet to prevent them from falling into French use, the remaining Danish naval forces recovered amazingly quickly following the bombardment. With its limited resources, the Danish navy tried to launch an embargo on British goods. With their few remaining warships and a large fleet of quickly constructed gunboats, they began to wage a kind of seaborne guerrilla warfare against British shipping. The focus of the Danish seaborne operations was the closing of the passages in and out of the Baltic Sea – the *Øresund* – the narrow passage between the Danish island of Sjælland and Sweden, as well as the *Storebelt*, or the ‘Great Belt’, the route between the Danish islands of Fyn and Sjælland.

Gunboats proved to be a most effective weapon as the Danes fought against blockade-runners and enemy merchant ships. Open, flat-bottomed and of a shallow build, these vessels were ideally suited for the *guerre de course* or merchant warfare in coastal waters. Armed with a cannon astern or, in larger vessels, with a heavy gun each in the bow and in the stern, these gunboats could be sailed as well as rowed. Swift and highly manoeuvrable, they specialized in the element of surprise, conducting sorties from their fortified bases. They preyed on enemy merchant ships, which were easy prizes for them, especially when unescorted. Indeed, in a dead calm a squadron of these frail vessels could even menace a ship of war. A more traditional navy would have been wiped out in short time by the mighty British fleet, but in the narrow and shallow waters of the Baltic Sea and the Wadden Sea off the Schleswig-Holstein North Sea coast these handy vessels proved to be a match for the heavily armed but much more ponderous sailing warships of the Royal Navy.¹⁰

Not only Danish gunboats fought against the British. The use of privateers remained the classical weapon of minor maritime nations, mainly aimed at enemy sea trade. Once issued an official document called the ‘letter of marque’, privately owned ships transformed into ‘private ships of war’ (thus the term ‘privateer’) against the enemy nations specified in the document.¹¹

As early as 14 September 1807 the Danish Regent announced ‘Instructions to Privateers’, describing under what circumstances privately owned ships could be empowered by the Danish government to act as privateers at their own risk and for their own profits in the naval war against Great Britain. The Danish privateering regulations reflected the principles of the maritime law of nations as followed by most other European maritime countries. A suspect vessel had to be stopped first and its documents examined. If the inspection yielded sufficient evidence that the vessel or its cargo were of enemy origin, the ship could be seized and brought in to the next port by

a prize crew. To be condemned as a good prize, the vessel had to be tried before a prize court. Only if this court considered the seizure to be lawful could the ship be sold for the benefit of the privateer's crew and owners. Otherwise, the ship would be declared to be free and its owners would be entitled to receive compensation from the captor for the illegal seizure.¹²

Due to the devastation of Danish commercial trade, many shipowners and merchants invested in privateers in hope of rich profits. Between 1807 and 1813 a total of 556 Danish ships were commissioned as privateers to prey on British merchant vessels in the North and Baltic seas. In the beginning the Danish privateers were relatively successful, bringing in a number of captured British merchantmen.¹³ For example, the yacht *Johanne* of Copenhagen was quite typical of Danish privateers. Commanded by Christen Holm and commissioned in 1813, the small one-masted vessel was armed with two three-pounder guns and had a crew of 25. Danish authorities also commissioned privateers in the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. For instance, the Flensburg merchant Andreas Andresen equipped the vessel *Ellen Sophia* as a private ship of war. Likewise, the Flensburg privateers *Arestides* and *Hans Hansen* preyed on enemy shipping, but were captured by the Royal Navy.¹⁴

In many cases, presumably greed or desire for adventure were the main motives for seamen as well as 'landlubbers' (as men from the non-seafaring population were called by sailors) to join the crew of a privateer. Instead of regular wages, the crew would enjoy a share of the profits – should they be lucky enough to take a prize. On the other hand, there were seamen who simply preferred privateering to the compulsory military service in the Danish navy, especially the arduous duty aboard the rowed gunboats. One of these seamen was Niels Martin Nielsen, born in Copenhagen in 1785. When the ship he sailed in was captured by the British in 1807, he was lucky enough to escape from a prisoner-of-war camp. In the following years he sailed in British and American vessels until he found a ship destined to Norway. After his arrival in Norway in 1809 he joined the crew of a privateering schooner as boatswain in hope of rich prize money and to escape compulsory service in the Danish Navy. On their second voyage they seized a merchant vessel, but were captured themselves by a British man-of-war. This time Nielsen did not escape captivity – one of the many occupational risks for privateers. After spending a couple of months aboard one of the infamous British prison hulks – rotting hulls of old warships moored in ports and river mouths for the confinement of prisoners of war – he was officially exchanged for the survivors of a wrecked British ship of the line in 1813. Again Nielsen joined a privateering outfit, but later transferred into the merchant service. As for many other seamen, Nielsen's motivation for joining the crew of a privateer was a mixture of Danish patriotism, hope for riches and lack of alternatives, since Danish merchant shipping had collapsed after 1807.¹⁵

The British Licence System

Although Britain remained in an official state of war with Denmark, Sweden, Prussia and Russia between 1810 and 1812, the British were able to maintain their access as well as their economic contacts to the Baltic Sea region. A strong naval squadron commanded by Vice Admiral Sir James Saumarez kept the approaches to the Baltic sea open and protected the merchant vessels sailing to and from the Baltic.¹⁶ British merchant ships were not alone in the Baltic; most of the vessels belonged either to American owners or, in even more cases, to owners from Scandinavian countries. Thus, in many cases the ships were owned by subjects of states formally at war with Great Britain. States around the North and Baltic Seas that were more or less reluctantly allied with France did not consider blockade-running and smuggling a criminal act, but almost a form of resistance, if not a patriotic duty. So the Continental System was increasingly undermined, not only economically, but also politically. An elaborate scheme of so called 'licences' offered these neutral and even enemy ships free access to British ports and protection by the Royal Navy from enemy warships and privateers.¹⁷

The British licence system allowed all foreign ships in possession of such permission to call in British ports and to export British goods unhindered by British warships and privateers. To prevent misuse and an uncontrolled breach of the British blockade by France, British officials strictly controlled the entire licence system. For instance all ships in possession of a license were obliged only to sail in large convoys, escorted by British ships of war. This escort was not only intended to protect the merchant vessels from enemy attacks, but also to monitor them.¹⁸

The British convoys met at fixed points of rendezvous and sailed during the shipping season from 15 April to 15 October every fortnight according to a strict schedule. But the British system of licences and convoys only regulated the passages between Great Britain and the Baltic region. Once inside the Baltic, the convoys dissolved and the ships then sailed individually to their individual destination. No longer protected by the Royal Navy, they had to rely on disguise and deception alone. One popular form of disguise was so-called 'neutralization'. To achieve this, a vessel was pro forma in pretence sold to a new owner of neutral nationality, thus changing the vessels nationality and flag. This procedure made it possible to 'to operate the enemy trade under the mask of neutrality', as the German expert on prize-law, Kaltenborn, called it. Furthermore, most ships were equipped with counterfeited documents. As a consequence of this, the imitation of foreign documents proclaiming the neutrality of the ship and its cargo almost became an art form in itself.¹⁹ For instance, Peter Hansen, a seaman born in 1787 in Ekenis in the duchy of Schleswig who sailed on a neutral American vessel captured by a Norwegian privateer in 1808 and released by the prize court in Trondheim, reported in his memoirs about this dubious

business: 'In those times of war the production of false documents for ships and cargoes formed a special trade in London, and these counterfeited documents in general were so deceptively forged, that in almost every case the authorities in foreign ports were misled by them.'²⁰

Smuggling

For its loyalty to Napoleon and the participation in the Continental System, the Danish state paid an enormous price, as the economic consequences from war, blockade and embargo proved to be disastrous. Besides the export of rural and forest goods to Great Britain, shipping had been the backbone of Denmark's prosperity before the war. The ruin of merchant shipping after 1807 had considerable effects on the entire economy; seamen, shipwrights and sail-makers became unemployed, shipyards closed down and many merchants went bankrupt. In this dire economic situation, smuggling seemed to be the only way out for many Danish merchants and seamen.²¹

By seizing the Danish island of Heligoland in August 1807 the British had secured themselves a first-class base for running the Danish blockade. They transformed the little island, situated in the North Sea about 45 nautical miles west of the Schleswig-Holstein coast and predominantly inhabited by fishermen and their families, into a fortified warehouse containing all the goods desired on the continent, especially such colonial commodities as sugar, tea and coffee. In a short period of time, Heligoland became a smuggler's nest, accommodating a large number of merchants of various grades of respectability. From Heligoland these merchants ran the blockade, and landed their contraband – more or less secretly – not only in ports like Husum or Tönning, but also in numerous other small harbours. Soon the port of Tönning became the most important location of trans-shipment for smuggled goods on the west coast of the Danish state. The small town became a prospering seaport until the collapse of the smuggling trade in 1812.²²

Although Denmark was one of the most loyal allies to Napoleon and France supporting the Continental System, the embargo was not entirely maintained even by the Danish authorities. In theory, any trade with Great Britain was strictly forbidden, but there were some exceptions from the embargo, especially regarding trade with Norway. As Norwegians depended heavily on the import of grain and other vital supplies, both the British and Danes continued trade with Norway. An order by King Frederik VI from 10 November 1808, in which he instructed his officials to confiscate all ships available to ship grain to Norway, demonstrates the critical nature of supplying Norway with cereals.²³

British naval supremacy dictated these terms. Regardless of his political dependency on France, the Danish king had no choice but to reluctantly allow his subjects to use British licences and to accept the British system

of convoys and licensed trade to secure grain supplies for Norway. For humanitarian purposes, the British allowed the continuity of Danish trade with Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Norway, when King Frederik temporarily withdrew all letters of marque and stopped privateering warfare in Norwegian waters. Thus, many ships sailing under the Danish flag used British licences. To make things even more complicated, there is even evidence of cases in which Norwegian merchant vessels were defended by British ships of war against attacks by Danish privateers. Nevertheless, the question of whether the Danes themselves also issued licences for trade with Great Britain is yet to be answered.²⁴

The Danish Struggle against Smuggling

Regardless of the complicated question of licensing, the Danish state intensified its struggle against smuggling and blockade-running. In 1810 Napoleon issued an edict that all ships, including vessels sailing under neutral flags which transported a cargo of British origin, should be confiscated and considered as good prizes regardless of the ship's cargo documents and statement of origin. On 8 September 1810 Denmark's King Frederick VI issued a similar edict.²⁵

That this was no empty threat is evidenced from an incident that occurred in the little seaport of Eckernförde, situated about 30 km north of the city of Kiel in the duchy of Schleswig.²⁶ On 1 November 1810 two American merchant ships, the *Charlotte* and *Admittance*, and the Dutch merchant vessel *De Vrouw Hendrica*, entered the harbour of Eckernförde to unload their cargo. On his arrival, David Elliott, master of the *Charlotte*, declared that he had loaded his cargo of colonial products in Boston. Although the merchandise apparently was of neutral origin, the authorities in Eckernförde – in accordance with the aforementioned edict – refused to give Elliott the permission to unload his cargo. Left with no choice, Elliott planned to leave Eckernförde on the morning of 5 November 1810. But during the night, one of his seamen, Davis Gillmann, deserted the ship. Declaring he had been mistreated by his captain for the entire voyage, Gillmann, likely motivated by revenge, informed the authorities in Eckernförde of Elliott's offences against the regulations of embargo. Gillmann eagerly produced evidence against his master, declaring that 'the ship had false papers on board and went under English convoy'.²⁷

This information was sufficient for Lieutenant Holsten, a Danish naval officer who acted as the local Danish commander in Eckernförde, to seize the ship and to start a formal investigation. The crew of the ship were interrogated and subsequently admitted that the ship had indeed 'used English convoy'. This evidence allowed Lieutenant Holsten to confiscate the *Charlotte* in accordance with the 'Instructions to Privateers' of 28 March 1810. These instructions also declared that 'ships, whose flags are to be seen

as neutral ... but nevertheless have used an English convoy in the North and Baltic seas' should be liable to condemnation by a prize court.²⁸

Lieutenant Holsten also became suspicious of the second American ship, the *Admittance*, commanded by F. Myrion. Again, the Danish naval officer seized the ship, inspected the ship's documents and interrogated the crew. During these interviews one of the seamen, an Italian named Giovanni Varra, admitted

that a cargo of Campeche wood, that the ship took from New York, had been unloaded in London, that the cargo now on board, consisting of sugar, had been taken on board there, that the ship, after it had arrived near a small Swedish port, had joined a British convoy, and went through the Great Belt under its protection.

Thus, the *Admittance* was likewise confiscated by Holsten. Both ships were later condemned as good prizes by the competent Prize Court in Flensburg.²⁹

Only the Dutch vessel *De Vrouw Hendrica* remained so far uncontrolled. The ship had allegedly come from the port of Varel, near the city of Bremen on the German North Sea coast, with a cargo of raisins. On presenting the ship's documents her master, Dierck Hendrick Metting, had asked permission to discharge his cargo. The authorities responsible had no reason to refuse the request and so Metting received permission to unload his cargo on 3 November 1810.³⁰

Two days later, the ever-suspicious Lieutenant Holsten reported to his superiors that he had judged it necessary to also confiscate the *De Vrouw Hendrica*, the last ship in the harbour, on suspicion of smuggling and blockade-running. If the attentive and alert Holsten certainly was not too popular among the Eckernförde merchants, his merits were well received by the government. The Danish government officially commended him and recommended him for a reward.³¹

A local Eckernförde merchant known as Dreyer, who represented the trading house of Stoppel und von Dadelsen from Hamburg, challenged this last seizure, formally submitting a protest to the Holstein authorities on the grounds that the lieutenant's action were allegedly injudicious.³² The merchant, Dreyer, repeatedly addressed the *Königliche Statthalterschaft*, the office of the royal Danish Representative in the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, who eventually stopped the examination of the case. Nevertheless, the ship *De Vrouw Hendrica* was finally condemned by the competent Prize Court in Flensburg. In its sentence the court stated, 'The seizure was indeed well motivated, since the condemnation effected mostly is based on the fact, that the ship's neutrality wasn't sufficiently documented by the papers found aboard.'³³

Dreyer, in fact, seems to have been a character of rather doubtful respectability himself. Apparently, not only were the *De Vrouw Hendrica* and her

master deeply involved in the smuggling business, but also Dreyer himself. Only a few days before the three ships had put into Eckernförde harbour, Dreyer had been caught red-handed by the local authorities smuggling coffee. As the *Zollkammer*, the 'customs office', reported, one squire Schallburg, owner of Hemmelmark, an estate in close proximity to the town of Eckernförde, had confiscated about 15,000 lb of undeclared coffee on 27 October 1810. This coffee was 'bought by the merchant Dreyer from Eckernförde' to be transported to Hamburg, the customs office continued in its report.³⁴

As this example shows, the fight against smuggling was not entirely futile. By 1811 although Napoleon and his allies were able to curtail illicit trading and to increase economic pressure on Great Britain to a certain extent, they did not succeed in making the Continental System impenetrable. Despite all restrictions, smugglers and blockade-runners repeatedly found ways to elude the strict embargo controls.³⁵

In 1810 on the North Frisian island of Amrum, a so-called *Kaffeekrieg*, a coffee war, emerged when the British tried to recover a cargo of coffee that had been confiscated by Danish officials. Furthermore, in 1811 Danish authorities uncovered a widespread smuggling network. Three merchants from Flensburg, two from Sonderburg and one from Kiel were accused of illegal commercial connections with Britain. The verdicts against the three Flensburg merchants were severe: Christian Stuhr was fined 500 *Reichsbanktaler*, Lorenz Göttig was sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 5000 *Reichsbanktaler* and Hans Thomsen Fries (a future Mayor of Flensburg) was even sentenced to death, though later pardoned and sentenced to six months imprisonment. Needless to say, all smuggled goods were confiscated. Despite these relatively stern punishments, smugglers were not discouraged.³⁶

The Case of the *Vigilantia*

In 1811 a daring case of blockade-running took place in the port of Tönning, on Schleswig's North Sea coast. The leading player in this affair was one Hendrik van Nievervaart, a Dutch merchant from Dordrecht, apparently somewhat reduced in his circumstances as a result of the economic crisis brought about by the Continental System. Eager to regain his commercial standing, Nievervaart concocted a scheme to run the Blockade in the guise of a fake privateer. He planned to bring in a cargo of smuggled British goods by pretending to have captured an allegedly enemy merchant vessel.³⁷

Nievervaart employed Georg Christian Hasse, a local merchant from Tönning, as legal frontman. In the name of Hasse, he had fitted out a privateer called *Vigilantia* under the command of Captain Jan Jansen, from the north Frisian island of Föhr off the Schleswig west coast, an area renowned for its highly qualified seamen during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nievervaart himself was listed as secretary on the *Vigilantia's*

muster roll. Under the pretence of a privateering cruise, the *Vigilantia* sailed from Tönning, but instead of preying on the enemy merchant shipping the vessel sailed directly to the English port of Hull where Nievervaart had pre-arranged a rendezvous with a Dutch brig named *Fortuna*, commanded by Hemme Hendrick de Groot.

After the *Vigilantia's* crew had assisted in rigging the brig, the *Fortuna*, with a cargo of coal and accompanied by the *Vigilantia*, set sail from Hull. Both ships fell in with a British man of war, but after an examination they were allowed to proceed to the island of Heligoland where the *Fortuna* completed its load with a cargo of coffee. They then sailed back to Tönning where Nievervaart claimed the *Fortuna* to be a prize taken off the coast of Norway. By making a false declaration, he tried to get the brig and its cargo officially condemned as lawful prize which, if successful, would have allowed him to sell the ship and its cargo legally.³⁸

In other words, using the privateering business as disguise, Nievervaart had tried to game the Continental System by declaring his merchant goods as lawful prize. But the cleverly contrived *Vigilantia* scheme failed because of the vigilance of the ever-distrustful Danish authorities.³⁹ Both ships, the *Vigilantia* and *Fortuna*, were seized by the local authorities and their crews interrogated. During the investigation, the authorities discovered sufficient evidence that the *Vigilantia* had sailed to Hull under pretence of cruising against British merchant shipping to meet the brig *Fortuna* and to run the blockade.⁴⁰

This affair was too important to be handled by the local authorities alone. Thus a special examination board, called a Combined Commission – *combinirte Commission* – was established on direct order of the Danish king. This committee also had judicial powers.⁴¹ Nievervaart proved as creative in his excuses as he had been in the design of his elaborate blockade-running scheme. At first, he tried to wriggle himself out by claiming that it was not smuggling but industrial espionage that had been the true objective of his enterprise and that he had been attempting to figure out the construction of British spinning machines to earn a reward of one million francs offered by Napoleon for this technical information. But very soon the commission discovered Nievervaart's complete lack of technological knowledge. The commission determined that this was only an excuse to escape punishment.⁴²

Even less credible in the eyes of the commission was Nievervaart's claim that he was entirely ignorant of the rules relating to the Danish instructions for privateers. Not only was Nievervaart officially listed as the *Vigilantia's* secretary, and thus responsible for any misuse of the ship's letter of marque, but as a merchant he should also have had a certain knowledge of the regulations concerning the Continental System.⁴³ The commission also discovered that a Dutch translation of the Danish 'Instructions to Privateers' had been found aboard the *Vigilantia*, apparently written by Nievervaart

himself. Thus, the commission declared that Nievervaart was obviously well acquainted with Danish privateering regulations, and that he had wilfully violated them.⁴⁴

After a careful examination of the case of the *Vigilantia* and interrogations of all individuals involved, the Combined Commission pronounced its judgment on Nievervaart, Captain Jansen and two merchants from Tønning on 25 November 1811. Captain Jansen was declared to forfeit his right to command a ship under the Danish flag and sentenced to serve four years of hard labour in the fortress of Rendsburg.⁴⁵ Nievervaart was sentenced to two years of penal servitude, thus losing his respectability. This was a harsh sentence for someone living in a social order which considered respectability as one of its foundations, not only for being a reputable member of society but also for the practice of his profession as a merchant. By losing his respectability, Nievervaart also lost the trust of his fellow citizens, an essential component in business transactions.⁴⁶ The two accused merchants from Tønning, Albrecht Keller and Georg Christian Hasse, only received prison sentences of two and four weeks, respectively. Concerning the two ships *Vigilantia* and *Fortuna*, the commission declared both be condemned and be lawful prizes. Accordingly, both vessels were forfeited to the Royal Danish Treasury.⁴⁷

The judgment of the Combined Commission made it explicitly clear that under Danish law the crimes of Nievervaarts and Jansens were considered felonies, not mere minor offences.⁴⁸ These harsh sentences were designed to act as a clear signal by the Danish authorities as to how serious they viewed smuggling.⁴⁹ Doubtless, the commission's fear was well founded since the economic crisis still caused many Danish merchants and seamen to turn to risky enterprises such as privateering, smuggling or licensed trade.⁵⁰

The Collapse of the Continental System

Despite the intensification of the Continental System and the infliction of harsh sentences against smugglers and blockade-runners, France and its allies failed to make the Blockade impenetrable and to destroy the British economy – quite the contrary. Though he strictly forbade his allies any commercial contact with Great Britain, Napoleon undermined his own blockade by granting licences to supply the French economy with the import of badly needed raw materials. Thus, Napoleon deprived himself of the chance to defeat Great Britain economically, at precisely the very moment the British economy slipped into an economic crisis. It was not until the breakdown of the Continental System following Napoleon's failed assault on Russia in 1812 that Great Britain experienced any economic relief.⁵¹

If Britain endured and recovered quickly, the Danish economy collapsed. In January 1813 the economic breakdown culminated in the national bankruptcy of the Danish state. Needless to say, such a collapse also deeply

affected the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein and furthermore resulted in a loss of confidence in the Danish government among the duchies' populace. One year later military collapse followed this economic breakdown. In January 1814 the Danish troops surrendered to an allied army under the command of the Swedish Crown-Prince Bernadotte, formerly one of Napoleons leading generals. Compelled to accept the humiliating Treaty of Kiel, the Danish state lost one-third of its entire territory when it was forced to hand over Norway to Sweden.⁵²

This treaty reduced the Danish state from its former status as an intermediate European power to a small state politically dependent on the great powers in Northern Europe. A combination of the effects of national bankruptcy and a loss of confidence in the government in Copenhagen became one cause for the escalation of national conflicts between the Danish- and German-speaking populations in the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵³ If the German-speaking population in the duchies demanded the maintenance of the close connection between Schleswig and Holstein and affiliation to the German Confederation, the Danish National movement demanded the incorporation of Schleswig into the Kingdom of Denmark. In 1848 this conflict culminated in the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Erhebung*, a rebellion of the German-speaking Schleswig-Holsteiners against Danish rule. From 1848 to 1852, the first war of Schleswig was fought to determine if Schleswig-Holstein should stay within Denmark or become part of a German nation state. Eventually, the German-orientated Schleswig-Holsteiners were defeated in 1851 after their Prussian allies retreated following diplomatic pressure imposed by Great Britain and Russia. After Denmark's defeat in the war against Austria and Prussia of 1864, the Danish kingdom finally lost the duchies Schleswig and Holstein – under Danish rule since 1460, both being annexed by Prussia in 1867 after the victorious Austrian-Prussian War of 1866.⁵⁴

Conclusion

All in all, a close look at the Anglo-Danish war reveals a rather confusing image. From 1807 to 1814 Denmark was one of Napoleon's most loyal allies. Nevertheless, the attitude of the Danish authorities remained contradictory. On the one hand, letters of marque were issued and the authorities severely punished merchants and seamen convicted of smuggling and blockade-running. On the other hand, despite Denmark's political will to punish the British for acts of war against the Danish state, the Danish merchants and seamen maintained their economic contacts with Great Britain. Thus, in Denmark, as in the rest of continental Europe under French control, a form of populist resistance against the Continental System developed and thrived, though motivated more from necessity than from patriotism or

political persuasion. At the same time official licences were granted by the Danish authorities to support Norway and the Danish islands in the north with supplies of grain and other essentials.

Further research is required to better understand the role of Denmark in the maintenance and ultimate destruction of the Continental System. One thing, however, remains clear with regard to the national conflict between the Danish- and German-speaking populations within the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein in the early nineteenth century: the long-term consequences of the war and the Continental System proved disastrous.

Notes

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10

Defying the Continental System in the Periphery: Political Strategies and Protests by Norwegian Magnates

Bård Frydenlund

The Swedish economic historian Eli Heckscher labelled the Continental System a 'self-blockade' on Napoleon's Empire.¹ Although the Emperor intended to keep Great Britain out of European trade, the British navy and even his own allied partners showed Napoleon otherwise. But the situation was even worse for one of Napoleon's few real allies, the composite state of Denmark-Norway. If the Continental System meant a self-blockade on Napoleonic continental Europe, it resulted in the disintegration of Denmark-Norway in the long run. The presence of the British navy, French privateers and other vessels in Skagerrak, Kattegat and the North Sea divided the Oldenburg monarchy into its two crown realms: Denmark and Norway. Since Great Britain was the most important trade relation for southern Norway and timber was a high-demand commodity in London, economic warfare threatened Norwegian commerce and exports. As a consequence, Norwegian merchants, estate and ironwork owners began to question whether the Danish authorities in Copenhagen were able to protect Norwegian interests within the composite state. Moreover as the Danish central authorities chose to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Napoleon between 1807 and 1813, tensions towards the government in Copenhagen developed among the Norwegian economic elite. On one hand, Norway's peripheral position in the Napoleonic theatre of war and commerce had its drawbacks concerning trade information and the political attention of the government in Copenhagen – on the other hand, such geographical distance had obvious advantages when adapting to the shifting political and judicial conditions necessary to survive the Continental System.

This chapter explores the ways Norwegian magnates dealt with the vast challenges presented by the Continental System and the strategies they chose given the conditions the System set for international trade. The many initiatives taken by key magnates of southern Norway indicated at least two sets of strategies: one open and publicly practised for regional authorities in Norway and central authorities in Copenhagen and another secretive approach that operated locally or through old relations in Sweden and

Great Britain to secure the best possible livelihood under the exceptional blockade conditions.²

The Peaceful 'Pre-Continental System' Situation – the Anglo–Norwegian Timber Trade

Norway was a periphery in the broad sense of the word. Added to the obvious geographical fact that Norway was the northernmost part of the northernmost state of Europe, since the turn of the century the head of state, Danish Crown Prince Frederik, practised a highly centralized version of a capital-focused kind of absolutism which emphasized even more Norway's explicit outsider position. The distance made it more difficult for the merchants of Christiania (today Oslo) than for their colleagues in Copenhagen to influence Danish trade policies. During times of peace the situation was, nevertheless, far from intolerable as Denmark-Norway enjoyed more or less peaceful relations since the Great Northern War in 1720, and the state's merchants had gained substantial profits and developed reliable and trustworthy trade relations throughout Europe.

Nearly as important as the capital Copenhagen was the influence of London for Norwegian trade. Since the seventeenth century, significant commercial links developed between southern Norway and Great Britain. Plank from pine trees cut at the saw mills around the Christiania Fjord, known as 'Christiania Deals', was a trademark Norwegian commodity in London.³ The towns of southern Norway were the most 'English' towns in the Danish state, and trade agents (factors) from London settled in Norway. Cultural and social relations developed during the eighteenth century and the grandest elite families, like the Anker and Collett families of Christiania, played a significant role in the establishment of the Nordic Society in London in 1789, where Danish and Norwegian citizens gathered for social visits, listened to lectures, read Scandinavian papers and collected the latest information from across the North Sea. Norwegian aristocracy were also members of British agricultural societies and even the Royal Society. Since the merchants in Denmark-Norway did not have access to formal political decision-making arenas like representative estates, such informal social relations played an important role in the merchants' political and economic relationships and activities. Merchants with personal connections in Copenhagen, and instrumental relationships in ports like London, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Leith and Gothenburg were the best equipped to gather pertinent information to favourably influence their own situations.

The upper strata among these Norwegian merchants were the magnates of Norway. They were involved in a multitude of enterprises like saw mills, estates, mines and ironworks, and their family fortunes had created substantial profits and regional power bases. The combination of their international trade network with local and regional state offices distinguished them from

other merchants. Their wealth, political status and international networks further strengthened their significant positions in Norway as well as within the composite state of Denmark-Norway.

The ties between these magnates in southern Norway were strong. Although their estates and properties were scattered over vast areas, they interacted socially at their estates and in Christiania. Most of them were related to each other and exchanged technology, workforce or financial support to improve their businesses and tighten their social relations. During the Continental System, this cooperation was strengthened even further as they helped each other by procuring grain for their workforces, gunpowder for the mines or exchanging licences and the latest news on trade and politics in Europe amid the destructive economic warfare. Their many international links among business agents, ship captains, consuls and merchants in centres like London and Hamburg were important to 'check' the official communications issued from the autocratic government in Copenhagen. This 'competition for information' between these private magnates and the officials and civil servants in Norway and Copenhagen was a fundamental factor leading up to the two competing political factions during the constitutional assembly in Norway in 1814.⁴

Initial Responses to the Continental System: Patriotism and Passive Response

The first real consequences of the Continental System on Denmark-Norway did not cause any serious disruptions in Norway during its initial phase. On the contrary, the bombardment of Copenhagen in September 1807 and later the war between Denmark-Norway and Sweden created a patriotic wave within Norway. Regarded as a loyal satellite of Copenhagen, an interim government ruled Norway. The government was led by the head of the armed forces in southern Norway, Prince Christian August. He was an integral member of the social circles of Christiania and won considerable popularity when he led the Norwegian forces to victory against the Swedes in the spring of 1808. The Danish high officials had more or less become assimilated into the local elite of Christiania since 1750, but with the crisis situation in 1807 new tensions arose between the officials and the merchants, even though the head of the new government was an officer and a close friend of the merchants. The other members of the new government for Norway included both state officials and magnates with a dominance of high-ranking members of the civil service.⁵

The patriotic movement was also manifested by the many subscriptions mobilized for helping the homeless in Copenhagen and for equipping land forces in Norway in the military operations along the Swedish-Norwegian borders.⁶ Crown Prince Frederik issued the Privateer Decree of 14 September 1807, giving permission for civilians to board 'enemy' vessels and set prizes

in provisional courts.⁷ Officials in Copenhagen expected Norwegian merchants and ship captains to rally their forces and equip their fleets for the privateer business. Many shipowners responded appropriately, but there was never the expected landslide of support in 1807. In response, more explicit measures were taken by leading officials in Norway to galvanize public opinion. The Lord Chief Justice of southern Norway and member of the provisional government for Norway, Enevold Falsen, published an attack on Great Britain in the semi-official newspaper *Tiden* in March 1808 and called for patriotic support for the privateer business:

If the British Men have abandoned their civilized culture and once again awoken the Brutality that Philosophy once hoped to have put to sleep forever, then: Norwegian Men of Honour, Hear the calling of your Fathers! Arm yourself! Equip your Privateers against the Robbers of the Fleet! Set Sails for a Viking Expedition, rally old Courage and Love of your Fatherland, and the Barks shall give you Revenge and Gold to your Coastlines!⁸

The prosperity of ship captains and owners increased dramatically along with the expanding privateer enterprise in 1808 and 1809. Even public privateer companies were established and invited members of high society to sign shares at a value of 100 Danish *riksdaler* each.⁹ Some Danish high officials even combined their state obligations in Norway with a prosperous privateer business. The County Governor of Christianssand County, Emanuel Thygeson, publicly announced that the citizens should arm themselves as early as 25 August 1807, and many supported the privateer business wholeheartedly. Indeed, Christianssand, at the southern tip of Norway, became the capital of the privateer business in Norway. It was the only coastal town in Norway that did not stagnate demographically and economically between the years 1807 and 1814, and the town's fleet of privateers counted 70 ships which captured approximately 300 ships as prizes during the same period.¹⁰ Governor Thygeson had a significant impact on Christianssand's good fortune, as he became the most influential owner of privateers in the area. Although owning only the third largest fleet, he was the most successful as he did not have the same expenses as the other shipowners. In contrast to Thygeson, who made a substantial profit after deducting only salaries for the crew and the ship investments, others had to compensate their newly achieved profits with their running expenditures and previous economic losses.¹¹

But not every Norwegian supported the patriotic and warlike momentum. Merchants heavily involved in trade with Britain foresaw a problematic future that could complicate their long-term business. Yet, they assumed present conditions would not last and calculated that privateers would create employment competition against their own enterprises. So the magnates

around the Christiania fjord did not support the privateer initiative like they had supported other such patriotic projects as the building of grain storehouses, new poor relief initiatives and raising money for the army. Peder Anker, one of the leading patrons of southern Norway, gave large donations to improve poor relief and grain storage facilities. He initiated new school projects, both civil and military education, sponsored the planning for a Norwegian university, and set up, with the assistance of his son-in-law, Count Herman Wedel-Jarlsberg, a private military company of riflemen, to be used as a reserve unit in the war against Sweden. When it came to supporting the privateer business, however, he signed only two shares at the Christiania Caper Compagni.¹² This relatively marginal investment on his part was the least he could contribute to still be considered a patriot in his home region.

Grain shortage emerged as the most serious challenge to the Norwegian community during this period. Norway did not produce enough grain to supply their own demand, and a grain monopoly remained in effect until the late 1780s, forcing grain to be imported only from Danish Jutland or Copenhagen.¹³ And after the lapse of the monopoly in 1788, Norwegians had neither taken initiatives to improve their grain production nor gained any real support from Copenhagen to deal with the deficit. So when the Blockade came into effect after 1807 and the supply ships from Jutland stopped their grain deliveries to Norway, the government in Copenhagen and the interim government in Christiania were at their wits' end. The eager County Governor of Buskerud County, west of Christiania, Count Herman Wedel-Jarlsberg, then took actions into his own hands with the help of his father-in-law, Anker, and his business associates in Norway, Jutland and Sweden. Swedish Gothenburg emerged as a key position and junction for all trade to southern Norway, but specifically for the grain import. The presence of Admiral Saumarez and the British navy outside the Gothenburg harbours was another key feature of this area. Although the navy searched all ships they apprehended and potentially could confiscate cargo, this potentially negative consequence was counterbalanced with secure convoys transporting goods between the Baltic Sea and Great Britain.¹⁴ By using Anker's personal accounts and credit, Wedel-Jarlsberg started to find new ways of importing grain to Norway without a clear mandate from any Danish or Norwegian authority.¹⁵

Anker, whose family's lineage originally came from Gothenburg, was the best-connected merchant in Norway at the time and benefitted from a range of business connections and friends in western Sweden.¹⁶ Apart from the heads of several merchant houses in Gothenburg – most significantly, Gustaf Ekman of Ekman & Co., Immanuel Norling of Anderson & Wohlfahrt (later Wohlfahrt & Norling) and David Low and John Smith of Low & Smith – he had a personal relationship with the Bage family. An influential industrialist in Scandinavia like Anker, Peter Bage experimented in canal

building and imported new technology from Great Britain to modernize his enterprises. More important for the personal relationship between Bagge and Anker was Anker's employment of Bagge's son Samuel in 1804. Anker hired Samuel Bagge to review a canal plan in Norway, as he was an engineer and a director of Trollhättan Canal & Lock Works just north of Gothenburg, and to help improve the waterways to Peder Anker's saw mills.¹⁷ In 1807 Bagge engaged in grain transactions with Wedel-Jarlsberg in Gothenburg, and later Prince Christian August and Wedel-Jarlsberg sent him as a delegate to Swedish authorities to negotiate general trade concerns in 1807, the deliverance of prisoners of war in 1808 and the Crown Prince question in Sweden in 1809.¹⁸ Bagge was not the only Swede in Anker's and Wedel-Jarlsberg's service; Swedish stewards and iron masters filled influential roles in Norway, even when Denmark-Norway engaged in hostilities against Sweden.¹⁹ As a result of Swedish contact, Wedel-Jarlsberg, and to some extent Anker, were looked upon with suspicion by Danish officials in Norway.

1809: Protests and Active Adjustments to the Continental System

The resigned attitude towards the Continental System and benign policies of the central government developed into despair and hostility in 1809. The immediate loss of income was not the biggest challenge for the Norwegian magnates as they had diverse investments to cover short periods of general losses. As the Blockade lasted, the merchants faced a bigger and more fundamental problem. Since Norwegian deals failed to arrive in British harbours in 1808, importers of timber questioned the ability of the Norwegians to fulfil their orders and started to look elsewhere to meet their timber needs. This was a devastating blow to established trade relations as it questioned the very core of long-term trade relations, especially the centrality of mercantile trust. The fact that specific commodities should be delivered on time was a fundamental criteria in business as was the expectation that correct payment should be made on time. Trust was a crucial component in international commerce during the period; it took ages to establish, but a short time to ruin. Such problems did not fully affect merchants like Peder Anker, who had personal friends in London and enjoyed huge respect among agencies and mercantile houses in the City. Yet those merchants with only 'weak links' to London could be devastated by such break-downs in business confidence.

Along with the fall in timber trade, the lack of bullion and coin emerged as a significant problem. Absent money from commercial interactions with London, Copenhagen or Hamburg meant that the cash flow diminished and a shortage of coins appeared. This posed a real threat to the estate, ironwork and sawmill owners in southern Norway as it jeopardized the entire enterprise and the magnate's authority. The social order at the estates

and the mines, mills and ironworks in Norway reflected an autocratic and centralized system of government. These small communities functioned as a state within the state. The magnate patron represented the head of state and the workers accepted the patron's employment terms for a set payment and social security. Although this social contract situation looks asymmetric and unjust in a contemporary view, many Norwegians preferred it to the status of a 'free' peasant or independent worker without the security associated with a magnate's resources. This deferential notion, created by the patrimonial system, influenced the magnates' political base and activities as political patrons of rank and 'protectors' of hundreds or thousands of workers. When, for instance, a man like Peder Anker could not pay the approximately 2500 workers in his mines, ironworks and the estate, as well as transport workers, millers, smiths, clerks, agents, stewards, messengers, ship captains and servants, the very order of society was at stake. Magnates presented these apocalyptic arguments to their full extent to regional and central authorities.

The lack of cash payments meant that workers sought to look elsewhere for employment. Moreover, the Blockade created new inner markets in Norway, and as a way of compensating for the lack of imports, these markets created new jobs, setting the single worker in a negotiating position never experienced before. New endeavours such as smuggling and privateering attracted former miners, lumberjacks and shipmen to try their luck in more unstable but potentially more profitable businesses. Peder Anker's enterprises faced this experience, evidenced in reports from his stewards throughout southern Norway who complained that the workers demanded higher wages and better social conditions and that competing enterprises also sought their labour.²⁰ This situation, however, did not uniformly affect all workers as inland labourers faced severe challenges as they struggled to meet their needs through grain shortages and threatening unemployment.

A further dimension of this shift in commerce manifested itself in the disparagement of Norwegian timber. After the timber trade resumed in 1809 weekly bulletins were sent from the Wolffs & Dorville Company in London complaining that some of the Norwegian planks were of bad quality and were 'not merchantable'. The lumber had either been stored as cut timber or the lumber had remained too long in water before it was sawed. This situation lasted until summer 1810.²¹

Popular reactions to Norway's increasingly isolated and compromised situation grew in number and strength in 1809. The author and ironwork owner Jacob Aall put it bluntly in a letter to the head of the interim government in Norway in September 1809:

The restrictions on trade are many, the limits of industry are strengthened, the roads of Enlightenment stopped. No bank, no free trade, no academy or university, few of our country's able men in significant

positions. ... If only the Danish Government would listen to the complaints and petitions we Norwegians put forward!²²

In the meantime, merchants used several other strategies to manage these challenges. Apart from influencing local officials and ministers of the central government like the Danish Minister of Finance, Ernst Schimmelmann, they also ignored state regulations and designed a range of strategies to deal with the economic crisis.²³

Schimmelmann was known as a 'friend of Norway'; his wife's salon in Copenhagen was frequently visited by Norwegians, and Count Wedel-Jarlsberg had been in his service a couple of years before the bombardment of Copenhagen. He also had a profitable monopoly on provisioning southern Norway with sugar and had been known to undertake informal services for Norwegian merchants.²⁴ Although he had been the Minister of Finance since the palace revolution in Copenhagen in 1784, he did not have Frederik's full attention or trust anymore. The regent sought to act independently, and only his military advisors – army officers (not navy!) – had frequent access to the regent.

Unfortunately, protests, letters and petitions did not create necessary solutions. Though King Frederik reluctantly allowed the licence system to take place in 1809, allowing ships to pass with British licences and Danish letters of safe conduct, trade was neither safe nor predictable. Moreover, confusion and insecurity persisted when new regulations and customary laws were issued at a rapid frequency, identifying new legal or illegal goods and commodities to transport, as well as new papers necessary to secure a safe voyage. This environment created a lack of trust in commercial law itself among those involved in shipping and trade. The licence system triggered a wide range of deceptive measures. To ensure success, a ship needed at least two sets of official documents: British licences for the British navy showing Leith, London or any other British port as destination, and Danish *Lejdebrev* for French, Danish or Norwegian privateers indicating a cargo destined for Amsterdam, La Rochelle or another continental harbour.²⁵ A widespread practice of forgery, false papers and camouflaging goods existed among the ships carrying Norwegian goods, causing international trade in the North Sea and the neighbouring waters to develop into a lawless situation that ultimately assisted Great Britain in undermining the Continental System.

One other crucial component of these strategies included the discreet advancement of trade relations between southern Norway and western Sweden. Anker remained a key person for this activity, although other Norwegian magnates as well as merchants participated, including members of the Pløen, Thrane, Tank, Mathiesen and Rosenkrantz families. Iron, gunpowder, various colonial goods and other commodities were transported in illegal and creative manners by land or sea to avoid customs officers, the British navy, privateers, landed militia or other controlling officials.

The volume of this trade was by no means like the proportions of the Heligoland, Altona or Tønning business in the south, but it nevertheless demonstrated that the Norwegians also chose to defy the Continental System in a multitude of ways.

The Norwegian magnates communicated freely with British representatives and Swedish merchants and authorities alike, and in situations when new decrees required new regulations on trade, Norwegian merchants just changed 'partners'. For shipments travelling to Leith by convoy, they either contacted the authorities in London or the British Consul in Gothenburg for a licence and a berth on the next convoy. When they had to bring questionable goods to Norway, they tried to evade the British navy by either taking the risk of going directly to the point of destination or traversing the shallow waters along the coastline of Båhuslen (Sweden) and Smålenene (Norway) counties between Gothenburg and Christiania. Goods were transported partly by road and partly by sea, according to the regulations in force. Swedish merchants in Gothenburg facilitated the Norwegians in creating new trade routes, issuing papers – lawful as well as false – and arranging transportation. The consuls were also key facilitators, and the ones in London and Gothenburg were as significant for the North Sea trade as those in Hamburg were for the Heligoland and Altona business in the southern part of the Danish state.²⁶

Officials in Copenhagen learned that merchants in southern Norway had established close relations with leading Swedish merchants and politicians, but remained unable to control the situation north of the blockaded zones. The existing commercial and social relations led to meetings in which political matters, like the overthrow of the 'semi-absolute' royal rule in Sweden in 1809, were discussed. The search for a new Crown Prince of Sweden had begun as the elected king, Charles XIII, was an old and uninspiring leader. The Swedes eyed Prince Christian August as a potential successor. Anker and Wedel-Jarlsberg were most frequently mentioned in both Danish and Swedish sources. As Peder Anker made use of his international trade network for political purposes, he facilitated meetings in April and August 1809 at his estates under the leadership of his son-in-law, Count Wedel-Jarlsberg. In April they introduced Prince Christian August, the head of the provisional government of Norway, to the Swedish minister Baltzar von Platen, who informed the prince about the Swedish situation and what support he would get if he would accept the title of Crown Prince of Sweden. After much correspondence and several attempts from the Danish court to stop him, Christian August went to Stockholm to become the successor to the Swedish crown in December 1809.²⁷

The choice of Christian August as Swedish Crown Prince under the new name Charles August strengthened support for uniting Sweden with Norway as a new Scandinavian state formation. Sadly, Charles August died in May 1810, paving the way for Jean Baptiste Bernadotte to become new Crown

Prince of Sweden as Charles John (Karl Johan). Bernadotte fulfilled the Scandinavian plan on Sweden's behalf with support from the Great Powers between 1812 and 1813, making the demand for Norway as compensation for the loss of Finland in the war with Russia in 1809. But the compensation was not entirely fulfilled. A personal union between Sweden and Norway made the Swedish monarch king of two kingdoms, and the Norwegian constitution of 1814 remained a defence against Swedish interference in Norwegian politics. As mediators for a peaceful union between Norway and Sweden, Peder Anker and Count Wedel-Jarlsberg played significant roles, becoming prime minister and minister of finance in the Norwegian government within the union.

A Case Study: The Norwegian 'Gunpowder Plot' of 1810

A case study from the spring of 1810 demonstrates the controversial conditions that shaped Norwegian commerce and the extraordinary measures taken to manage it during the Continental System. Norway was dependent on the export of a whole range of commodities. The mining industry imported the gunpowder necessary for ore extraction. There were very few gunpowder mills in southern Norway, and due to a lack of potassium nitrate they under-produced gunpowder, which hurt the ironwork industry.

Peder Anker owned several mines along the Norwegian coastline and faced grave difficulties in the period between 1807 and 1814, among them declining gunpowder supplies. The steward of Anker's largest mine at Langø Island outside the town of Kragerø (Telemark County), Peder Falchenberg, reported frequently back to Peder Anker at his estate outside Christiania, and in January 1810 the message was final: the amount of gunpowder was so short that production would not last more than a couple of months. All imports from Denmark had stopped, and the local supply chains from the Norwegian gunpowder mills had been blocked as well.

Gunpowder had to be bought from the east, so Anker activated his Swedish connections as he had in managing the grain shortage. Among his trading partners in Gothenburg, Immanuel Norling was of great importance. He connected Anker and his son-in-law, Count Wedel-Jarlsberg, to grain traders in southern Sweden, northern Germany and the Baltic area and acted as a financial agent for the Danish state on behalf of the Wohlfarth & Norling company. Norling was recommended for the position as agent when the central government in Copenhagen wanted to take control of the provisioning of Norway in 1810 (after relying on Peder Anker's private accounts in Gothenburg until 1810).²⁸

Norling creatively dealt with the obstacles of the Continental System. In April 1810 he placed an order for gunpowder for Anker and organized a crew for its transport. In a letter from 30 April Norling reported to Anker that he now had obtained 30 'centner' of gunpowder (1.5 tons) without

mentioning its source and that he had ordered a ship to deliver it to the harbour of Brevik not far from Anker's mines. With the ship, he hired a ship captain from Brevik, Simon Wilberg, to stay with the cargo as he should transport other goods from Brevik to Christiania. Norling obtained licences from Low & Smith, and everything appeared in order. Yet in the same letter he reported that he had to put 'groats' on the barrels of gunpowder and cover them with straw and sawdust, remarking that 'such measures have to be taken these days'. After that Peder Anker did not hear from Norling until he received a letter on 23 May confirming that the payment for the gunpowder had arrived in Gothenburg. At this moment Norling stated that it was absolutely necessary to have 'the right English licences' as Admiral Saumarez and his 12 warships stopped every vessel outside Gothenburg.²⁹

The shipment met problems. The steward, Falchenberg, sent Anker a letter on 8 May recounting that he could not get the barrels of gunpowder out of the customs house. An eager customs officer had discovered the real contents of the barrels and held them back for further inquiries. Anker then acted quickly by contacting his son-in-law Count Wedel-Jarlsberg who sat in the interim government of Norway, and the government issued an official statement to Anker that he had free passage to take the barrels 'with no further evidence required', signed 15 May by the new head of the Interim Government of Norway, prince Friedrich of Hessen, and the three other members – and close friends of Peder Anker – Wedel-Jarlsberg, Marcus Rosenkrantz and Mathias Sommerhielm. On 25 May Falchenberg thanked Anker for his quick intervention and confirmed the barrels of gunpowder at Anker's mine at Østre Langøe.³⁰

But the gunpowder transaction had a peculiar and interesting aftermath. Following the barrels of gunpowder discharge in Norway, the Brevik ship captain, Wilberg, sent a complaint to Anker. He complained in strict terms to Anker about the appalling conditions of the sea passage from Gothenburg to Norway and that the ship had been stopped and searched several times at sea. It was only by his personal contribution that the shipment reached Brevik safely, and he wanted financial compensation for the unpleasant journey. At the end of the letter he stated that he knew the consequences such a transaction would have for Anker if his important shipment were to be known among 'the high lords of Copenhagen'.³¹

Anker considered Wilberg's complaint as blackmail and responded severely. The exact words used are not known, but considering the humble answer from Wilberg and letters from ship captain Jens Halvorsen of Brevik and ironwork owner and County Governor Severin Løvenskiold (another close friend of Anker), it must have been tough. Instead of merely denying Wilberg extra compensation, he counter-attacked and promised to see Wilberg in court. A 'pipe' of Madeira Wine (450 l.) was missing from the shipment and Wilberg had to answer for that. Though Halvorsen and

Løvenskiold supported that Wilberg had never seen or heard of the wine, they also withdrew their support for his accusations against Anker.³²

But the case had a further epilogue. The key facilitator in Gothenburg, Immanuel Norling, was entitled by King Frederik as *Commerceraad* (Danish Royal Advisor of Commerce) a year later. This seemed an unusual act towards a subject of a hostile country, but Norling's service as trade agent for the Danish state had saved 20 Danish shipmen from apprehension by British authorities on Swedish soil.³³ That the gunpowder transaction was mentioned in a secret report from Swedish County Governor Georg Adlersparre to Crown Prince Charles John in the summer of 1812 is also intriguing. The report states, among other things, that Swedish sentiment is low in Norway at the time being, and only Count Wedel-Jarlsberg and Peder Anker can be reckoned as 'friends of Sweden'. But at the end of the same page, there is a remark by Adlersparre saying that he would gladly inform the Crown Prince on the details of *l'infame Complot* by the Norwegians and how they obtained the finest gunpowder from His Majesty's own Army Storehouse at the town of Filipstad (northeast of Gothenburg).³⁴ Whether Carl Johan sought more knowledge on this or not is not known, but considering the fact that Anker was made the first Norwegian prime minister and Wedel-Jarlsberg was made the first minister of finance in Norway in the new union with Sweden two years later, it is more likely that he did not care. The Swedish Crown Prince and head of government had of course experienced much graver incidents of smuggling and other dubious transactions earlier when he served as French field Marshal Bernadotte during the wars on the continent.

The Gunpowder Plot demonstrates how local elites in Norway and Sweden cooperated to manage and survive the Continental System, and in particular how these resourceful and self-righteous merchants in the periphery took measures to overcome local obstacles issued by central authorities. Danish and Swedish authorities understood the regional challenges faced by the System and responded flexibly by turning their eyes from the merchants' operations and thus contributed indirectly to the undermining of their own diplomatic obligations towards Napoleon.

Political Developments in Norway

In the years of war and economic crisis the substance of patriotism changed in Norway. Indeed, the Continental System contributed to significant political implications as the breach between the men of the state and the men of commerce grew rapidly, leading to the disunion with Denmark and the constitutional convention in 1814. During that crucial year Denmark signed the Treaty of Kiel, which ceded Norway to Sweden and diminished the Danish Kingdom as a northern power. In response to this event a Norwegian constitutional assembly met, Danish absolutism ceased, Danish Crown Prince Christian Frederik emerged as sovereign of an independent Norway,

war with Sweden commenced, diplomatic conspiracies ensued, and the year ended with the rather autonomous union between Norway and Sweden (which lasted until 1905) led by one of Napoleon's former field marshals.

On this path to a new political order a new association, the Royal Patriotic Society for Norway, emerged during the winter of 1809 and 1810. Established by the magnates who assumed leading roles within the patriotic society, its projects would extend beyond promoting industrial and economic progress in Denmark-Norway. Run by a board consisting of the most important merchants, state officials and clerics in Norway, Peder Anker and Count Wedel-Jarlsberg were among the directors and financial backbones of the society. Divided into committees according to professions, it had links with regional and local patriotic societies. As Norway was still severed from its *de facto* political centre in Copenhagen and the role of the interim government was weakened by the king, the Patriotic Society took the form of a proto-government with local administrations in counties and local communities. The establishment of a university in Christiania in 1811 represented the most significant result of the work of the Society. Despite inner tensions between officials and merchants and the controversial Count Wedel-Jarlsberg as a leading figure, the society was a peaceful arena where its members were committed to the same goal of developing Norway.³⁵ If officials remained loyal to Copenhagen, the contents (or meaning) of patriotism shifted during these years towards a stronger national programme for Norway as a sovereign entity. The vital roles in this process were played by magnates like Peder Anker and Wedel-Jarlsberg.

During the years of the Continental System and its many challenges the magnates consolidated their role as internal opponents of Danish rule in Norway. Both Wedel-Jarlsberg and Severin Løvenskiold resigned their posts as county governors in 1813, and Anker and Wedel-Jarlsberg resumed talks with Swedish ministers, leading Norway into its political revolution in 1814. At the constitutional assembly at Eidsvoll, Anker, Wedel-Jarlsberg and Løvenskiold assumed the role of leaders of the so-called 'Union Party', favouring a peaceful union with Sweden instead of the war and blockades associated with Danish rule. Indeed, following the defeat of a badly equipped, supplied and organized Norwegian army, the Swedish king appointed Anker and Wedel-Jarlsberg as the two most significant ministers of Norway for the new political order.

Conclusion

The Norwegian magnates undermined the Continental System in cooperation with British and Swedish partners. The convoy system was a key factor and helped Norwegian exporting survive. Anthony Ryan is right in saying that 'the only trade they could have in the circumstances of the time was trade with Britain'. However, his ultimate conclusion that 'It proved ... a

durable relationship governed on both sides by a wary recognition of mutual dependence' is flawed.³⁶ In 1812 British authorities issued a food blockade that compelled Norwegians to rely on risky shipments from Danish Jutland and through Sweden. Britain's timber needs were met increasingly by the Canadian and Baltic forests, which reduced the political resistance to blockade Norway. A new tariff was also introduced by the authorities in London, putting heavy customs on all Norwegian commodities. As Norway would experience later, Great Britain was at best a temporary partner when it suited their interests, not a long-term benefactor.

The realities of the northernmost area of the Continental System support the conclusion that Napoleon's economic campaign failed. Of the 'two-trigger engine', the French emperor had failed in both pistons: the aim of disrupting the British economy had resulted in the self-destruction of his own imperial vision and even more the self-destruction of his closest ally – Denmark-Norway.³⁷ Moreover, the new 'market design' fell on its own absurdity, as neither Napoleon nor any of his advisors had enough regional or naval knowledge to foresee the development of trade or to influence the conditions to create a French economic and industrial hegemony.

Among the inner forces working against these imperial visions, the Norwegian magnates showed flexibility and pragmatism as they managed the obstacles presented by the Continental System in the northern waters. Norwegian commerce lost a great deal and endured tough times as trustworthy trade relations diminished, safe sea routes and local enterprises became endangered, bankruptcies multiplied and the weak spot of Norway – the frail grain situation – had been exposed with painful consequences. Although weakened as a social elite, a combined 'public-and-secret' policy, working through local authorities, political contacts and trade relations in several European ports, aided the magnates to survive as mercantile participants. This fuelled new political processes in Norway as the meaning of patriotism increasingly oriented towards Norwegian sovereignty and generated a fundamental split within the Norwegian elites that would influence and outlive the new political order of 1814. The magnates of southern Norway played a particular role here in their struggle against the Continental System and the government in Copenhagen, making their developing trade relations useful for political purposes. As the Continental System strengthened the division of Denmark and Norway it also stimulated Norway's path to independence within a free constitutional union with Sweden.

Notes

1. Eli Heckscher, *The Continental System: An Economic Interpretation*, trans. C.S. Fearenside (Oxford, 1922).
2. The material for this article is sourced from articles and books I have published in Norway over the last three years about merchants, estate, saw mill and ironwork

owners in Norway as business leaders and lobbyists in the period 1775–1825. Among a multitude of sources, the Private Archive 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø in Oslo (after Peder Anker and Count Wedel-Jarlsberg) and Private Archive C6 Ekman & Co Slåktarkiv in Gothenburg (after Gustaf Ekman) have been the most important.

3. Stein Tveite, 'Trelasthandelen og Christiania-patrisiatet', in *Christianias handelspatrisiat: En elite i 1700-tallets Norge*, ed. John Peter Collett and Bård Frydenlund (Oslo, 2008), 53.
4. Collett and Frydenlund, *Christianias handelspatrisiat*. The two factions at the constitutional assembly at Eidsvoll in April–May 1814 were called the 'Independence' or 'Danish' party (a majority roughly consisting of officials, clerks and officers) and the 'Union' or 'Swedish' party (a minority of roughly merchants, estate owners and ironwork owners). The Union Party was led by Peder Anker, Count Herman Wedel-Jarlsberg, Jacob Aall and Severin Løvenskiold, all significant private magnates who at the same time had strong relations with the Danish state. The Independence Party was led by Christian Magnus Falsen, the son of Enevold Falsen.
5. In 1807 the other members were the Lord Chief Justice of Southern Norway Enevold Falsen, County Governor Gebhard Moltke and County Governor Marcus Rosenkrantz (Rosenkrantz was also one of Norway's most significant estate owners). Falsen committed suicide in November 1808 and was replaced by County Governor Herman Wedel Jarlsberg (the son-in-law of Peder Anker). Rosenkrantz was heavily influenced by the industrial magnates and merchants of Norway. Moltke was replaced by the Danish minister Frederik Julius Kaas for a short while in 1809–10, until Mathias Sommerhielm filled the vacant position in 1810. Sommerhielm was also County Governor and an estate owner. When Prince Christian August accepted the Swedish Crown Prince obligation, he was replaced by another high-ranking officer of German birth, Prince Friedrich of Hessen. Tor Weidling, *Enevoldets menn I Norge: Sivile embetsorganer og embetsmenn 1660–1814* (Oslo, 2000).
6. Anna Tranberg, 'Frivillige bidrag fra det norske folk', in *Samfunn i krig: Norden 1808*, ed. Morten Ottosen and Rasmus Glenthøj (Oslo, 2012), 127–47.
7. Joh. N. Tønnessen, *Kaperfart og skipsfart 1807–1814* (Oslo, 1955), 29–31.
8. Enevold Falsen in *Tiden* 5–6 (1808) (5 March).
9. Tønnessen, *Kaperfart*, 41.
10. Finn-Einar Eliassen, 'Krigen og de norske byene: Militarisering, folketap og en overklasse foran undergangen', in *1807 og Danmark-Norge: På vei mot atskillelsen*, ed. Bård Frydenlund and Rasmus Glenthøj (Oslo, 2009), 72. Johan Tønnessen has counted 268 ships as Norwegian privateers in public records in the period 1807–14 (and more than double that number of Danish privateers, Tønnessen, *Kaperfart*, 472–3).
11. Thygeson made a profit of approx. 500,000 riksdaler in the period 1808–11. Tønnessen, *Kaperfart*, 467.
12. Bård Frydenlund, *Stormannen Peder Anker: En biografi* (Oslo, 2009), 166.
13. John Herstad, *I helstatens grep. Kornmonopolet 1735–88* (Oslo, 2003).
14. Anthony N. Ryan, 'Trade between Enemies: Maritime Resistance to the Continental System in the Northern Seas (1808–12)', in *The North Sea: A Highway of Economic and Cultural Exchange – Character – History*, ed. A.B. Andersen et al. (Stavanger, 1985), 181–95.
15. Frydenlund, *Stormannen*, 154–6.

16. Anker was what the network sociologist Ronald Burt would call a 'structural hole', as he was the most significant individual connecting Norwegian merchants and politicians to Swedish networks of merchants and politicians, and vice versa. Ronald Burt, *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition* (Cambridge, 1992).
17. Frydenlund, *Stormannen*, 113–18.
18. Frydenlund, *Stormannen*, 171–4. In between the private waterway work for Anker and the diplomatic business, Bagge got permission and money from Anker to travel on a Grand Tour in Britain (November 1806–April 1807) to get fresh motivation from British ironwork, coal mining, canal and bridge-building technology. Riksarkivet (hereafter RA), Oslo, PA 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø privatarkiv, L nr 83 'Uordnede Breve 1794–1807'.
19. Frydenlund, *Stormannen*, 207–8.
20. Letters from the stewards Bruun (Solberg Mine), Falchenberg (Østre Langøe Mine), Embretsen (Bærum Iron Work) and Grüner (Brekke Saw Mill), to Peder Anker 1808–12, in RA, Oslo, PA 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø, L nr 14–17.
21. Letters from Wolffs & Dorville to Peder Anker 1809–1810, in RA, Oslo, PA 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø, L nr 18–19.
22. Letter from Aall to Prince Christian August of 21 September 1809, in C. Aall, *Breve fra slekten Aalls arkiver 1738–1905* (Oslo, 1940), 183.
23. Bård Frydenlund, "'...at den danske Regiering villigere vilde høre paa de Klager, som vi Nordmænd have at fremføre": Den østnorske handelselitens politiske interessesfære 1807–1814', in Frydenlund and Glenthøj, eds, *1807 og Danmark-Norge*, 151–8.
24. Erik Gøbel, *Det danske slavehandelsforbud 1792: Studier og kilder til forhistorien, forordningen og følgerne* (Odense, 2008), 33.
25. See for instance Tønnessen, *Kaperfart*; Ryan, 'Trade between Enemies', or Jacob Worm-Müller, *Norge gjennem Nødsaaene 1807–1810* (Oslo, 1918), 491–502.
26. Peder Anker had 'consular advantages', as he was a friend of the British consuls David Low and John Smith in Gothenburg, the Danish consuls George and Jens Wolff in London, and the Danish consul Johann Georg Rist in Hamburg.
27. Frydenlund, '...at den danske Regjering villigere vilde høre', 157–9.
28. Confirmed in a letter from Count Wedel-Jarlsberg as head of the Provisioning Committee for Norway, to Ekman & Co., in landsarkivet Göteborg, Gothenburg, Ekman & Co. privatarkiv, Package 15, 10 March 1810. Thirty centner was the amount needed for a year's mining production in Anker's two largest mines.
29. Letters from Wohlfarth & Norling 12, 23 and 30 April and 23 May 1810, in RA, Oslo, PA 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø, L nr 19.
30. Letters from Falchenberg 8 and 25 May 1810, in RA, Oslo, PA 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø, L nr 19, and L nr 348, Letters from the Interim Government of Norway, 15 May 1810.
31. Letter from Simon Wilberg 8 May 1810, in RA, Oslo, PA 278 Løvenskiold-Vækerø, L nr 19.
32. Letter from Severin Løvenskiold 23 May 1810, in L nr 84 (with letters from Wilberg to Løvenskiold, from Halvorsen to Løvenskiold and Halvorsen to Anker attached to it). Løvenskiold was familiar with the situation and had asked for Anker's help with gunpowder in Sweden as early as 1808 as Anker was a 'well connected man with our Neighbours in the East'.
33. Letter from Danish Consul W. Browne of Gothenburg to The Board of Trade 21 January 1811, i 'Rapporter fra konsulatene i Sverige 1800–1814', in Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Kommercekollegiets arkiv, Handels- og konsulatfagets sekretariat.

- The royal document entitling Norling as Danish Commerceraad can be found in Riksarkivet, Stockholm, Dossier-aktnr 0342 Norling, Immanuel, Arkivfragment.
34. Intelligence report on Swedish 'sympathies' in Norway from Georg Adlersparre to Carl Johan 16 July 1812, in Bernadotteska familjearkivet, Stockholm, Karl XIV Johans arkiv, pk 227a, 'Norvège'. Anker had also another illegal trade route from the same gunpowder storehouse in Filipstad, arranged by a Swedish shopkeeper in the Norwegian town Kongsvinger close to the border (Johan Albrechtson).
 35. John Peter Collett, 'Radikaliseringen av de nasjonale særkravene: Kampen om et norsk universitet 1809–1811', in Frydenlund and Glenthøj, eds, *1807 og Danmark-Norge*, 177–94.
 36. Ryan, 'Trade between Enemies', 192.
 37. Katherine B. Aaslestad, 'Lost Neutrality and Economic Warfare', in *War in an Age of Revolution 1775–1815*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge, 2010), 381.

11

Economic Warfare, Organized Crime and the Collapse of Napoleon's Empire

Michael Rowe

... take the case of sugar and coffee which have proved their world-historical importance in the nineteenth century by the fact that the lack of these products, occasioned by the Napoleonic Continental System, caused the Germans to rise against Napoleon, and thus became the real basis of the glorious Wars of Liberation of 1813.

– Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*¹

The French Tariff Barrier on the Rhine, 1798–1806

Born three years after Waterloo, Karl Marx never experienced Napoleon's Continental System. For his parents it would have been a fact of everyday life in his native Trier, a city that before 1814 belonged to the French Empire. It lay about 90 km west of the Rhine which from 1798 marked the tariff barrier separating France from the world beyond. Trier bounds the Moselle, which joins the Rhine at Koblenz, home of Joseph Görres. This writer counted among the republicans in the 1790s. Under Napoleon he grew disillusioned with French rule and emerged as a prominent German nationalist whose strongly Francophobic message reached a wide audience in 1814 and 1815 via his newspaper, the *Rheinischer Merkur*. The Continental System, however, hardly figures in its pages, which condemn French rule for reasons other than the scarcity of coffee: military conscription, high taxation, requisitioning and the arrogance of native French officials. The *Rheinischer Merkur* repeatedly warned against bureaucratic government, and not only in France, and readers would most likely have identified the *Direction générale des douanes* as an obvious manifestation of this phenomenon. They were reasonable to do so: in 1812 the total number of customs agents in the French Empire peaked at approximately 35,000, including four thousand *agents de bureaux*, and 30,750 organized into 'brigades' that patrolled the frontiers. Of the latter 3200 deployed to the *départements*

réunis bordering the Rhine, covered by *directions* based in Mainz, Cologne and Wesel.² Expressed in another way, the total of 3200 'brigaded' *douaniers* amounted to 241 per 100,000 of the population, a level that matches almost exactly the relative number of police in present-day England and Wales – a staggering statistic that reflects Napoleon's determination to police the frontier.³ Only approximately 3 per cent of customs-men originated from the region. The vast majority – over 80 per cent – were natives of 'old' France, and the rest mainly from the Belgian departments.

The French tariff frontier moved from the Maas to the Rhine in 1798, a year before Napoleon overthrew the Directory (1795–99) and eight years before the Berlin Decree (21 November 1806) that formally instituted the 'Continental Blockade'. From the Rhenish perspective, the Continental System largely came into effect, both in legislative and institutional terms, at this earlier date. The already impressive corpus of restrictive French legislation, including notably the Law of 10 Brumaire V (31 October 1796) that prohibited the import of British manufactures, was enforced in the four newly established Rhenish departments from 1798 onwards, despite the fact that these departments were only officially annexed to France following the Peace of Lunéville (9 February 1801).⁴ The impact on the regional economy of the restrictions was felt well in advance of 1806, as for example revealed in some detail by the memorandum submitted to the Interior Minister by Bonn's mayor, Johann Joseph Eichhoff, under the Consulate (1799–1804). With this document, Eichhoff reinforced his reputation as an authoritative voice on the subject and helped ensure his appointment as the first Director-General of the Rhenish *Octroi*, established in 1805 to regulate commerce on the Rhine.

Eichhoff identified the destruction of commerce caused by the new tariff as the main regional grievance against France. Eichhoff was political enough to blame this on the Directory, a regime he accused of acting 'passionately' rather than 'rationally'. The fundamental problem was that the Rhineland – the wider region bounding *both* sides of the river – formed a single economic zone, irrespective of government. Eichhoff conceded that in the long term, fundamentals might change, as improved transport infrastructure allowed the left bank to reorientate itself towards France. However, in the short-to-medium term, the tariff undermined two key areas that accounted for regional prosperity: the export of agricultural produce and manufactures and the transit trade along the Rhine. Both guaranteed the accumulation of capital and sustained the employment of vast numbers, including the operators of the estimated 1300 boats plying their trade on the river; the tariff removed incentives for higher productivity. Eichhoff recommended for the long term increased investment in roads and canals linking the region to France, but more immediately urged the concession of free-port status to Cologne and Mainz. This would mean relocating the tariff barrier so that it ran along their landward fortifications. Eichhoff concluded by observing that punitive duties simply encouraged fraud, in which context he reported the establishment of brokerages on both banks of the Rhine that insured

smuggled wares crossing the frontier at a rate of 10, 15 or even 20 per cent of their value.⁵

Indications as to the existence of a smuggling infrastructure on the Rhine predate even Eichhoff's memorandum, let alone the Berlin Decree. General Wirion, commander of the newly established Gendarmerie in the Rhenish departments, informed Paris as early as December 1798 – within half a year of the Rhine tariff's creation – of the activities of insurance agents, syndicates and armed bands. The ability of this network to breach the frontier can be gauged from the fact that the insurance rate at this juncture was reportedly only 6 per cent.⁶ Wirion wrote this at a time when French rule was undermined by setbacks in the early stages of the War of the Second



Figure 11.1 Soldiers and officers of French customs (*Douaniers*)

Source: part of the uniform series 'Abbildung der Uniformen aller in Hamburg seit den Jahren 1806 bis 1815 einquartirt gewesener Truppen', drawn by Christoph Suhr and engraved by Cornelius Suhr. Original manuscript in Stiftung Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv, Hamburg. Photo taken by Markus Stein, Napoleon Online.

Coalition. This emboldened opponents of French rule and allowed for organized resistance to the tariff to take root. This was especially so in the former Hohenzollern territories of the Lower Rhine. Here Prussian provincial authorities still based on the right bank (and dominated by that inveterate Francophobe, Karl Freiherr vom Stein) lost no opportunity to provoke France by challenging the frontier. This included encouraging armed attacks against *douaniers*.⁷

French victory and the Treaty of Lunéville (1801) did much to alleviate pressure on the frontier. However, even then the sense among Rhinelanders that the French were but squatters never disappeared entirely and resurfaced whenever they were rumoured to have experienced setbacks, as occurred in the wars of 1805, 1806, 1809 and, of course, in 1813. The Rhine never really took on the status of a barrier in the collective psyche. Historically, this geographical feature had never been a determining factor in shaping borders of the numerous polities through which it flowed. The larger territories tended to span the river. This is not to ignore that territorial fragmentation under the Old Regime hindered the development of the Rhine as a commercial artery; the fact that no one effectively had ownership of it discouraged the necessary investment. French rule from this perspective would be immensely beneficial *in the long run*. However, territorial fragmentation under the Old Regime never seriously impeded movement *across* the Rhine. The region, as Eichhoff correctly stated, had long formed a whole in economic terms. Territorial fragmentation even helped to the extent that it encouraged 'states' to compete for investment. The Wittelsbach duchies of Jülich (on the left bank) and Berg (on the right) in particular adopted pro-business policies that encouraged entrepreneurs deterred by the restrictions they encountered, especially in the imperial cities, where the guilds remained influential.⁸

Napoleon's *Direction des Douanes*

Napoleon, who, as noted, inherited rather than created the Rhine tariff and its attendant infrastructure, was not deaf to arguments that it might damage the economy of an area that was now French. Regional lobbying carried weight in high-level deliberations, including in the Council of State over turning Cologne and Mainz into free ports.⁹ For Napoleon, however, tariff policy was ultimately an adjunct to the wider struggle against Britain, and regional interests were subordinate. In this view, which is likewise reflected in the Council of State, the smuggler resembled more a rebel than a simple criminal. Government acted accordingly, demonstrating also a determination to strike at what it described as the *entrepreneurs de brigandage* who directed the smuggling operations from behind the scenes. These were to be treated with equal severity should the ventures they organized take on the form of attracting capital punishment for those actually engaged in handling the contrabands – something that implied capital punishment in

cases where gangs were involved and weapons discharged. The government similarly took a dim view of smuggling by those entrusted with policing the frontier. *Douaniers* suspected of collusion were to be tried before *tribunaux spéciaux*, even in cases where no weapons were used.¹⁰

Evidence from the Rhine suggests that fear of corruption spreading within the *Directions des douanes* was not misplaced. The *directeurs* of Cologne (Gorsas) and Cleves (Turc) were both subject to denunciations, and the latter's guilt is lent credence by the fact that he was one of the candidates nominated by the departmental electoral college during elections for the *Corps Législatif* – certainly this is how the prefecture interpreted this otherwise inexplicable occurrence! Also suspicious was the low number of seizures made during Turc's 12-year tenure, and the extraordinary fact that more than a third of the 400 customs agents under him made no seizures at all.¹¹ Nor did reports of corruption diminish over time. For example, a police report from Cologne in January 1811 accused the local customs administration of colluding with the major financial houses of the city – Oppenheim, Schoeffen and Cassel were all named – in the lucrative business of currency speculation.¹² In December 1812 the prefect of the Rhin-et-Moselle department ordered the gendarmerie to arrest the *receveur des douanes* in Breitscheid for fraud.¹³ The fact that humble *préposés*, who enjoyed only a modest annual salary of 500 francs, were susceptible to corruption is easier to explain: though they had a right to a 'prize' share of seizures, this needed to be set against the physical dangers of vigorously opposing smugglers. It would be unfair, however, to dismiss the *Directions des douanes* as 'institutionally' corrupt. There are too many examples of its employees bravely doing their duty at considerable risk. Assaults against *douaniers* occurred from the beginning: on 6 July 1798, two days after the Rhine tariff became active, a crowd in Mainz faced off customs agents attempting to seize foodstuffs, though on this occasion they survived unharmed. Less lucky were two colleagues murdered in nearby Bingen two months later, a fate the administration expected was in store for other *douaniers* given the level of public hostility. The situation was no better further north. In the same month as the Bingen murders, Cologne's chronicler, the Augustinian Anno Schnorrenberg, recorded a series of clashes between *douaniers* and smugglers. In the following May a pitched battle reportedly occurred in nearby Xanten in which a detachment of *douaniers* was defeated by an armed band, though with no deaths on either side. So it went on, year-by-year, even as the Napoleonic administration bedded down and the prospect of an alternative to French rule receded.¹⁴

Public Opinion

That smugglers enjoyed a fairly wide base of public support among the general population is well documented. It is fair to say that smuggling and customs fraud were socially acceptable crimes. It is easy to see why. So far as

Rhinelanders were concerned, they were victimless crimes. The same could not be said of banditry, which created an atmosphere of fear in parts of the countryside among ordinary property owners who were its primary victims. Nor were draft-dodging and desertion without costs that needed to be borne locally, as the relevant legislation demanded that young men from the same localities where the deserters were from be called up to replace them. Smuggling, in contrast, appeared to harm no one. To this should be added the tacit support afforded smuggling operations by the Prussian authorities that remained in control of the right bank of the Lower Rhine region, at least until the war of 1806. This would have had an impact on the opposite (left) bank, where loyalty to the Hohenzollern dynasty survived the onset of French rule.

Public support for smuggling took on various forms. At one level, it expressed itself in the inclination of native judges and juries to either acquit or else show leniency to defendants. For example, two-thirds of the smugglers tried before Cologne's court of first instance in the period of 1803 to 1811 got away with fines. It was this tendency that finally persuaded Napoleon's government to create a new network of specialized courts (the *tribunaux ordinaires des douanes* and superior *cours prévôtal des douanes*) as part of the final tightening of the Continental System instituted by the Fontainebleau Decree (18 October 1810). The personnel of the new customs courts established along the Rhine – based in Mainz, Cologne and Wesel – initially included a high proportion of native German-speakers, but by 1812 the balance had shifted in favour of natives of the Meurthe department, in whose *chef lieu* (Nancy) the relevant *cours prévôtal des douanes* was located. Not surprisingly, this last institution passed the harshest sentences, though perhaps not as draconian as might be expected. Of 123 cases brought to this court from the four Rhenish departments, only two ended in the application of the death penalty. The effects of this tightening up can be seen in the composition of the prison population in Cologne. In June 1806, of the one hundred persons locked up in Cologne's prison, only five were smugglers; by September 1811, in contrast, 39 of the 106 prisoners were there for customs offences.¹⁵

At another level, public support for smugglers manifested itself in large-scale riots against *douaniers*, such as occurred for example in Cologne in November 1798 when an estimated 1200 persons attacked *douaniers* attempting to seize coffee that had just been smuggled in. Regular troops under General Jacobé-Trigny prevented the customs agents from being lynched. Worryingly, both the municipality and civic guard stood to one side. Nor did the municipality bother to report the affair to the commissioner-general based in Mainz. When challenged on this, the municipality replied that the whole affair was the fault of the customs-men.¹⁶ At least the army did its duty on this occasion. This was not always the case; Jacobé-Trigny, who saved the day in Cologne, was one of seven generals who were complicit in

the movement of contraband across the Rhine. The case of General Charles Georgeon is especially interesting. He served as commander of the French garrison in Cologne in the 1790s, and while there he married into a prominent local family involved in the illegal export of cereals. Georgeon subsequently used his position in the Gendarmerie to assist in this, until he was removed.¹⁷

Collusion in smuggling between native Frenchmen and locals undermines the notion that the phenomenon was 'national'. Even within Paris the customs policy was publicly contested, at least under the Consulate. Among the most eloquent opponents of the policy was Marc-Auguste Pictet. Pictet's arguments, which were published, made a powerful case against a policy of high tariffs and prohibition: the cost of implementation consumed a large proportion of the proceeds; fraud only increased with measures to counter it; the policy created a permanent state of war on the frontiers; those entrusted with its implementation were exposed to corruption; it stifled industry in frontier regions; draconian laws against smugglers marked a regression to the emergency conditions of the Jacobin Republic; forced import substitution diverted capital away from areas such as agriculture where France enjoyed a comparative advantage and 'false' (*faux*) enterprises that emerged as a consequence could only be sustained through 'artifice', unlike 'natural' or 'real' ones which sustained themselves.¹⁸

While restrictive tariffs and prohibitions found their critics in Paris, so too did they win defenders in the Rhineland where opinion was not unanimously hostile. In the northern Roer department – the most important of the four in terms of population and wealth – one can broadly identify support for the tariff policy and its post-1806 outgrowth (the Continental System) in the western part of the department among the industries clustered near the Belgian border. In the eastern part, closer to the Rhine, where commerce rather than industry predominated, hostility to the tariff was more apparent, including in the years of relative prosperity during the early empire. However, even this east–west split is a simplification. What mattered was the balance between costs and benefits unique to each enterprise. The von der Leyen silk manufacturing business, though located just a few kilometres from the Rhine in Krefeld, emerged as a winner. The concern had been a flourishing one already under the Old Regime, when Krefeld was ruled by Prussia, a state that also pursued a policy of boosting domestic manufactures as part of a wider project of import substitution. The turmoil of the 1790s damaged the von der Leyen business, but not to the extent that it did not recover dramatically under the Consulate and Empire. Privileged access to the Italian market (after 1806) and protection from British competition encouraged this. By 1810 the business employed 3000 workers and had an annual turnover of three million francs – higher than ever before.¹⁹

To the south, in Cologne, business interests represented in the Chamber of Commerce lobbied for exemptions and privileges for the city that, if

granted, would have effectively exempted it from French tariff legislation. It is easy to understand why, if one accepts the statistics collected by Eichhoff on the volume of imports and exports passing (legally) through the city: between 1807 and 1809 alone, imports fell by 38 per cent and exports fell a staggering 63 per cent. The figures for Mainz were hardly more encouraging. Long-distance trade between the Rhineland and the Netherlands was hit disproportionately hard. The volume of goods imported into Cologne from Holland fell by 87 per cent between 1807 and 1809, and exports fell by 71 per cent.²⁰ Given this, it is hardly surprising smuggling and fraud should take hold. Cologne's wealthiest individual in the Napoleonic period, the banker Abraham Schaaffhausen, engaged in large-scale smuggling activities, the proceeds of which were, in part, used to make even more money through speculation in *biens nationaux*. The 100,000-franc fine imposed on him by the authorities for the illegal export of wheat appears hardly to have dented his finances.²¹ However, when in 1811 manufacturers from neighbouring Berg petitioned Paris for the Grand Duchy's annexation to the French Empire, Cologne's Chamber of Commerce suddenly changed its tune. Now it sang the praises of the Rhine tariff, which it credited with encouraging the return to the left bank of business 'unfairly' lost to the right under the Old Regime.²²

Grand Duchy of Berg

Berg, which Napoleon in 1806 transformed into the satellite Grand Duchy and entrusted initially to Murat, emerged as arguably the biggest loser from the emperor's commercial policies. This was not clear from the beginning, however, when the Rhine tariff threatened rather to make competitors on the left bank uncompetitive (because of the extra cost for them of imported raw materials). The early years also brought the benefits of the elimination of the internal customs barriers within the territory of the Grand Duchy and the beginnings of improved communications linking mining areas with ones engaged in manufacturing. The Grand Duchy also benefitted from the illegal flow of contraband, which passed along the Right Bank of the Rhine following its entry into the Continent via the Netherlands and Hanseatic ports. From this perspective, the Berlin and Milan Decrees (respectively, 21 November 1806 and 17 December 1807), instituting the Continental System proper, made little difference. The real blow to Berg came in 1810 with the Trianon and Fontainebleau Decrees (respectively, 5 August and 18 October) and the annexation of Holland and the Hanseatic cities to the French Empire. Berg was now cut off from suppliers and markets; the dream expressed in 1806 by a deputation of its business leaders of a *grand système fédératif*, including France and its satellites, lay in tatters. Larger states of the Confederation of the Rhine, like Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg, could, to an extent, get away with applying Napoleon's decrees

'flexibly' – indeed, the sovereign of the last named kingdom even appears to have had fraudsters acting on his account.²³ Such defiance was not possible for Berg, where the first festive burning of seized British wares (in Düsseldorf on 10 December 1810) coincided with the descent of the Grand Duchy's economy into a profound crisis. It was in this context that Berg's desperate manufacturers organized a deputation that arrived in Paris in early April 1811 to present a petition signed by 4000 individuals begging for annexation to the French Empire. This illustrates the expansionary impetus built into the policy. The initial displacement of the tariff line to the Maas in 1795 had provoked calls for '*reunion*' with France among Rhenish manufacturers who feared exclusion from traditional markets. Their wish came true in 1798; however, the problems of policing the new frontier without controlling the right bank beyond provoked calls after 1798 for intervention on the right bank.²⁴ Nonetheless, there were countervailing pressures, and Berg's calls for annexation fell on deaf ears, in part because of lobbying by manufacturers within France (who themselves were suffering from the Europe-wide downturn that started in late 1809).²⁵

A second reason for rejecting the incorporation of Berg was that the River Rhine proved far more viable as a customs frontier in policing terms than a line following the eastern frontier of the Grand Duchy, which was devoid of any major natural obstacles. This can be seen in the relative failure of the customs barrier running from Rees on the Rhine to Bremen that was set up by the imperial decree of 18 July 1809 to stem the flow of British wares from Holland to Germany. Insurance premiums to cross this line only amounted to about 6 to 8 per cent.²⁶ The rate for crossing the Rhine frontier, in contrast, ran at about 30 per cent in July 1809, and would rise to about 50 per cent at the end of the year, a rate that was maintained into 1811. This compares to only 6 per cent for the Rhine in 1800, 10 per cent from 1801 to 1802, and 26 per cent from October 1806 to June 1808.²⁷ Why should Napoleon throw away this achievement and restart the process of creating a new line further to the east? Obviously, the Napoleonic 'achievement' on the Rhine was only relative. Contraband never ceased crossing the river even though it became more difficult to smuggle wares across the frontier in the years 1810 and 1811. If one believes that the entire Continental System was ultimately counterproductive, then this tightening only damaged the long-term economic prospects of continental Europe, including France. However, from the perspective of proponents of the Continental System, the creation of an absolutely watertight frontier along the Rhine was not the ultimate measure of success. Even states today, with all the resources at their disposal, cannot prevent entirely the movement of contraband across their borders. A lower threshold for judging the intended 'success' of Napoleon's Continental System will do; insurance rates pushed to a level where non-French wares simply became uncompetitive.²⁸

The Sociopolitical Impact of Napoleon's Continental System

Of greater concern for the rest of this essay are the social and political consequences of the Continental System in the Rhenish departments and, in particular, whether Marx was correct in identifying the policy as an important factor in the collapse of French rule. The first observation is the social diversity of those engaged in smuggling and customs fraud. Records evaluated by Bertrand in the 1950s from the *tribunal prévôtale des douanes* at Nancy, which covered the Rhenish departments after its establishment in 1811, indicate that the majority tried by this court were relatively poor: 68.5 per cent, including casual workers and poorer artisans. Those at the upper end – businessmen – represent only 6.34 per cent, but this seems a generous reflection of their proportion within society as a whole. The fairly prominent position of boaters, carters and tavern owners among the accused – collectively, they represented just over 10 per cent of the total – makes sense given the usefulness of such trades in smuggling operations.²⁹ Women and children were often involved on the assumption that they would be treated more leniently if caught. Smuggling and fraud appear as socially inclusive activities, which made Rhinelanders cohere rather than fragment. This was very much unlike banditry, which was the result rather of social breakdown.³⁰ At one level, one might conclude that this was a good thing from the perspective of the administration. At least smuggling was not a sign of the kind of social implosion that made places like Spain and Calabria virtually ungovernable. On the other hand, it also made smuggling harder to suppress as the authorities could not rely on the cooperation of elements within the local community who felt threatened.

A second observation relates to the first: the collusion of local government, run by notables, in smuggling and fraud. This needs to be seen in the context of the autonomy traditionally enjoyed by local communities under the Old Regime, the legacy of which influenced political culture even under the more centralized Napoleonic System. Historically, for example, local administrations in the Rhineland enjoyed the authority to contract debts, a facility much made use of in the 1790s to meet the demands of the French army of occupation.³¹ The experience of the 1790s, when occupation by the French army cut the link between the localities and the princely governments that removed themselves to the right bank, reinforced this tradition of self-reliance that went on to shape responses to military conscription and the Continental System. It is, thus, not surprising to uncover cases of *maires* reacting to military conscription by organizing the provision of replacements, an activity that spawned an insurance industry not dissimilar to that concerned with the smuggling of contraband. The complicity of municipal authorities might extend no further than hushing up smuggling activities. It might extend to providing smugglers with early warning of imminent searches by *douaniers* or, most seriously of all, it might culminate in

municipal administrations acting as the operational hub of smuggling operations.³² Such involvement, in part, explains the surprising knowledge of the law that those engaged in fraud and smuggling displayed. Court records from Nancy together with police reports of actual operations indicate that smugglers knew very well that smuggling of contraband was treated more seriously (it constituted a crime, potentially carrying with it the death penalty) than mere fraud (which was a correctional matter, punishable with a custodial sentence of not more than six months); that arrest as an individual rather than as a member of a larger group similarly tended to attract more lenient treatment by the authorities; or that it was sensible to arm oneself with weapons that could be characterized as ‘dual use’ (for example, knives) rather than with those that could not (for example, firearms).

A third observation is that smuggling in no way constituted a ‘national’ activity. True, *douaniers* were generally French and smugglers more often than not German. However, smuggling operations – certainly the larger ones – involved a collaborative effort between individuals of different nationalities: Norman merchants, Rhenish bankers, Dutch fishermen and British manufacturers. All were attracted by the profits that were in the offing. These were considerable and increased as a tightening of the Continental Blockade and other restrictive practices increased the price differential of commodities between the two banks of the Rhine. The smuggling of tobacco following the institution of the imperial monopoly in 1810 provided an especially good opportunity for making large sums of money. A report from the special police commissioner based in Cologne dated 4 December 1811 described this fraud as ‘très considérable’, and estimated the annual quantity of tobacco introduced illegally via the city at more than one million kilos. On the left bank, imperial tobacco cost 3 francs per kilo; on the right, in contrast, it cost 16 sols per kilo, resulting in a profit (assuming a rate of 20 sols per franc) of 44 sols (or 2 francs 20 centimes). The potential profit from 1,000,000 kilos would, therefore, amount to 2.2 million francs; this, at a time when an agricultural labourer might earn something in the region of 1 franc 50 centimes per day.³³

The Apogee and Collapse of Napoleon’s Continental System

Such profits explain the sophistication and scale of smuggling operations, as for example reported by the secret agents despatched to the Rhine frontier at the time of the Trianon Decree.³⁴ One of these produced an especially detailed report on smuggling operations, grounded in part on seized documents, and a summary of which formed the basis of the police *Bulletin* of 6 September 1810. The report described Frankfurt as a ‘vaste entrepôt’ of prohibited English wares, including ‘immense’ quantities of cotton thread. These wares had been transported to the Continent via British-controlled Heligoland, and landed somewhere between the mouths of the rivers Weser

and Ems. Peasants then transported them from farm to farm and to the great depots of Bremen, Oldenburg, Kniphausen, Aurich and Emden, located in the newly annexed Hanseatic departments. These were the principle centres for the conclusion of business arrangements whereby the rates for subsequent illicit transport across the customs barrier were agreed. Further south, Osnabrück (previously in the Kingdom of Westphalia, but annexed to France in 1810) and Münster (initially part of the Grand Duchy of Berg, but annexed to France in 1811) served as relay posts and centres of the 'insurance' industry. The report calculated that the insurance costs together with those for transport increased the price of the wares by 50 per cent by the time they reached Düsseldorf, Mainz and Frankfurt. The city of Mainz provided easy access for the entry of these wares, unlike Trier where an effective customs administration made it difficult. The report concluded with the optimistic observation that the increased controls were making this kind of fraud unprofitable, but also suggested the displacement further to the east – towards the Baltic coast and Oder – of smuggling operations. The ingenious tricks employed by smugglers – carriages with false bottoms, stuffed carp, carrier pigeons, women wearing multiple levels of clothing – are well documented and make for entertaining reading, but are covered in the secondary literature; they need not detain us here.³⁵

As already noted, 1810 witnessed a general reinforcement of the state's efforts to combat smuggling, though also something of a retreat from the rationale of the Continental System with the issuing of export licences designed to enable the state to tap some of the profits previously flowing into the pockets of fraudsters and smugglers. The objective of eliminating smuggling lay behind the annexation of Holland and the Hanseatic departments. So, too, were the increasingly severe punishments prescribed for smugglers, including branding the right shoulder with the letters 'VD'.³⁶ This tightening coincided with a general economic crisis that afflicted Napoleon's Empire from late 1809 onwards. Given the coincidence, it is hardly surprising that Rhenish businessmen should blame Napoleon directly for the economic downturn. The extent to which this widely shared sentiment undermined the military defence of the Rhine in 1813 is debatable.

The economic hardship inflicted in large measure by the Continental System on the Grand Duchy of Berg contributed directly to the uprising that occurred there in January 1813.³⁷ This was suppressed fairly quickly and well before the advance of Coalition forces. However, it heightened fears that a similar rising might occur on the left bank, and especially in the Roer department, where the substantial numbers of industrial workers similarly faced unemployment. Colonel Jean-Pierre Henry of Napoleon's *Gendarmerie d'Elite* calculated that fear of social unrest might be exploited to attach notables in the region to the government.³⁸ This was not to occur. The Rhenish elite did fear social unrest and took measures to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis by not laying off workers and engaging in social relief. However,

this did not translate into attachment to the regime, as seen for example in the great reluctance to cooperate in the formation of the 'Guards of Honour' that were mobilized in the final months of Napoleonic rule. What the unrest in Berg achieved was to make the French feel they were operating on hostile territory, a sentiment transmitted to native Frenchmen employed on the left bank by the sight of streams of their compatriots fleeing across the river as the Coalition armies advanced.

The sense of impending doom on the left bank increased when the Coalition forces finally reached the Rhine in November 1813. The French authorities responded by attempting to seal the frontier, and *douaniers* played an important role in this. Boat owners were ordered to lock up their vessels at night and deposit the keys with the local *maire*. The whole infrastructure that had developed to enforce the Continental System could now be employed in defence of the frontier. However, the reverse was also true. The smuggling infrastructure might equally be employed to assist the Coalition. There is an example of this; the Prussian raid on Neuss on 2 December 1813, when locals acted as guides and used the opportunity to demolish customs posts along the river. Reports of the incident do not identify the culprits as smugglers, but it would be surprising if those engaged in smuggling were not involved.³⁹ It can be surmised that years spent evading the French authorities created a store of knowledge on the best means of crossing the frontier undetected, knowledge that would have proved useful to Coalition commanders as they planned their main assault across the river.⁴⁰

Conclusion and Napoleon's Legacy

French rule in the Rhineland came to an end in the days following Blücher's crossing of the Rhine at Caub in the last hours of 1813. In the region, Napoleon's Continental System can be seen as a component of a wider policy of attempting to weaken existing ties between the newly annexed departments of the left bank and the territories on the right. This policy predated both the Continental System proper and, indeed, Napoleon.⁴¹ The wider policy went beyond economics and tariffs and extended to areas such as education and culture, as in the example of discouragement of the Rhenish elite from sending its sons to German universities as opposed to French institutions or forbidding them from entering the service of the Austrian Habsburgs, as had traditionally been the case. This policy of reorientation failed because it was not allowed sufficient time to succeed.

As to the longer-term impact of the Continental System and the smuggling it gave rise to, the following observations can be made. In economic terms, it encouraged the *short-term* development of manufactories on the left bank – especially those engaged in textiles and metallurgy. However, many of the enterprises founded in the Napoleonic years were under-capitalized

and withered in the face of British competition after 1815.⁴² In Berg, the impact was fairly disastrous even in the short term. What did contribute to the region's spectacular economic development later on was the territorial and institutional legacy bequeathed by Napoleon, but this could have been achieved without the Continental System.

What about the impact on Rhenish political culture, and the popular psyche? Did smuggling and fraud become somehow ingrained, corrupting society at large, as some at the time predicted it would? This seems unlikely. Smugglers, though engaged in a crime that was socially acceptable, never captured the popular imagination or attained quasi-hero status as did the most famous bandits, like 'Schinderhannes', who, despite the documented heinousness of his crimes, nonetheless quite rapidly became the subject of ballads and popular theatre.⁴³ Smuggling, like speculation in nationalized property, conformed to the kind of financial machinations that the increasingly dominant nationalist discourse of the nineteenth century associated with the Jews rather than with German virtues. Certainly it was not celebrated as a form of resistance against Napoleon. Rather, if mentioned at all, it was condemned as a form of depravity encouraged by French rule or as a product of effeminacy (similarly associated with the French) that drove demand for the latest foreign fashions at the expense of national styles and local products.⁴⁴

Neither did the smuggling and fraud of the Napoleonic era contribute to social disintegration (if anything, the opposite was true), nor generate contempt for the law in general. Rhinelanders, accustomed to the legalism of the Holy Roman Empire, appreciated the virtues of French legal reforms. They especially liked key aspects of French legal procedure: equality before the law, juries, oral proceedings, public trials and the separation of justice from administration. They fought hard after 1815 to preserve them. In lieu of constitutional government, which was not forthcoming in much of Germany after 1815, Napoleon's codes provided the next best guarantee against arbitrary government, and this was much appreciated.

This leads on to the concluding observation. Michael Broers, with his concept of an 'inner' and 'outer' empire, highlights the Janus-faced character of Napoleonic government. It had a benign face, distinguished by regular government by civilians operating within the constitution, the kind of government characteristic of the inner empire that lent credence to Napoleon's subsequent portrayal as a liberal modernizer. The other face, apparent in the 'outer' empire, was in contrast characterized by the oppressive and above all arbitrary instruments of rule: martial law, special courts, collective punishment and so forth. The Rhineland, and indeed Berg, were areas that naturally belonged to the inner empire. Their population density was high, they were relatively urban, wealthy and used to regular, as opposed to arbitrary, government. In Marx's view, they were archetypically bourgeois, thus it was quite natural that they should be receptive to many of the Napoleonic

reforms. The Continental System at its most extreme threatened all this. However, the region responded to Napoleon's recourse to the unpredictable methods of the 'outer empire' in an 'inner-empire' way: not with its own unpredictable violence, but rather with mechanisms of insurance to manage risk.

Notes

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Part one, with Selections from Parts Two and Three, Together with Marx's 'Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy', ed. and with introduction by C.J. Arthur (London, 1970), 58.
2. Conseil d'État, *Projet de Décret relatif à l'organisation des Douanes impériales* (Paris, 1812).
3. The population of the three riverine departments was approximately 1,330,000, broken down as follows: Roer = 670,000; Rhin-et-Moselle = 260,000; Mont-Tonnerre = 400,000. J.J. Eichhoff, *Mémoire sur les quatre départemens réunis de la rive gauche du Rhin, sur le commerce et les douanes de ce fleuve* (Paris, Year X [1801–02]), 14–15; for present-day policing levels, see United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime, Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, 'United Nations Surveys of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, Covering the Period 1990–2000', <http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/seventh_survey/567pvr.pdf> (28 March 2011).
4. Roger Dufraisse, 'La Contrebande dans les départements réunis de la rive gauche du Rhin à l'Époque Napoléonienne', *Francia* 1 (1973): 509–10.
5. Eichhoff, *Mémoire*, 9–70. Reference to the industry that insured against the possibility of seizure of merchandise by the authorities reoccurs throughout official reports and correspondence. Indeed, police reports, including those that fed into the regular bulletins provided to Napoleon himself, employ insurance rates as a measure of the success of government measures aimed at suppressing smuggling and customs fraud. One police report claimed that this industry was fairly well established along all the frontiers of France, and that it had been ever since the collapse, in 1793, of the Anglo–French Commercial Treaty (the so-called 'Eden Treaty') concluded in 1786. Agent Mallard to Savary (Minister of Police), 22 August 1810. Cited in Norbert Finzsch, *Obrigkeit und Unterschichten: Zur Geschichte der rheinischen Unterschichten gegen Ende des 18. und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1990), 205 n. 15. The structure and practices of this insurance industry demand further research.
6. General Louis Wirion to Charles Joseph Lambrechts (Minister of Justice), 17 December 1798. Joseph Hansen, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Rheinlandes im Zeitalter der französischen Revolution, 1780–1801*, 4 vols (Bonn, 1931–38), vol. 4, 943–4.
7. Lambrechts to the Executive Directory, 18 January 1799. Archives nationales (AN), Paris, F^{1c}43, 130. Also, General Wirion to the ministers of war, and of police, 18 October 1799. Service historique de l'Armée de Terre (SHAT), Vincennes, B¹³111, dossier '18 October 1799'.
8. For developments in the regional economy in the eighteenth century, see: F. Schulte, *Die Entwicklung der gewerblichen Wirtschaft in Rheinland-Westfalen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1959); and Max Barkhausen, 'Government Control and Free Enterprise in Western Germany and the Low Countries in the Eighteenth

- Century', in *Essays in European Economic History 1500–1800*, ed. Peter Earle (Oxford, 1974), 212–73.
9. Conseil d'État, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil d'état: séance du 26 Germinal an XI de la République* (Paris, Floréal an XI [1803]), 3.
 10. Conseil d'État, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil d'état: séance du 3 Floréal an XI de la République* (Paris, Floréal an XI [1803]), 3–6.
 11. Dufraisse, 'Contrebande', 523.
 12. Nicole Gotteri, ed., *La Police secrète du Premier Empire: bulletins quotidiens adressés par Savary à l'Empereur*, 6 vols (Paris, 1997–2003), vol. 2, 84 (Bulletin of 29 January 1811). For the broader context, see Guy Thuillier, 'Monnaie', in *Dictionnaire Napoléon*, ed. Jean Tulard, 2 vols (Paris, 1999), vol. 2, 332–4.
 13. Gotteri, *Police Secrète*, vol. 5, 428 (Bulletin of 16 December 1812).
 14. For incidents up to 1801, see Hansen, *Quellen* IV, 850, 941–2, 1098. For the later period, see Gotteri, *Police Secrète*.
 15. Klaus Müller, *Köln von der französischen zur preußischen Herrschaft: 1794–1815* (Cologne, 2005), 189, 194–5; for the personnel of the various courts, see Sabine Graumann, *Französische Verwaltung am Niederrhein: das Roerdepartement 1798–1814* (Düsseldorf, 1990), 198–9.
 16. Hansen, *Quellen*, vol. 4, 942–3.
 17. Dufraisse, 'Contrebande', 522, 525. The other five generals named by Dufraisse are Hardy, Desenfans, Chambarlhac, Callier and Lorge.
 18. Tribunal, *Discours prononcé par Pictet, membre du Tribunal: A l'occasion du projet de loi sur les douanes, séance du 3 floréal an XI* (Paris, Floréal an XI [1803]), 4, 11, 13–14.
 19. Wilhelm Kurschat, *Das Haus Friedrich & Heinrich von der Leyen in Krefeld: Zur Geschichte der Rheinlande in der Zeit der Fremdherrschaft 1794–1814* (Frankfurt am Main, 1933), 44–5, 57–60, 72–4.
 20. Johann Joseph Eichhoff, *Topographisch-statistische Darstellung des Rheines, mit vorzüglicher Rücksicht auf dessen Schifffahrt und Handlung, etc.* (Cologne, 1814), 29, 58, 60.
 21. Historische Archiv der Stadt Köln, *Die französische Jahre: Ausstellung aus Anlaß des Einmarsches der Revolutionstruppen in Köln am 6. Oktober 1794* (Cologne, 1994), 85; Müller, *Köln*, 232–3. A further sign of the involvement of Cologne's business elite in shady practices was the reported seizure of contraband, reputedly worth 11,000 francs, belonging to the city's 'tribunal de commerce'. This occurred in October 1810. Gotteri, *Police Secrète*, vol. 2, 557 (Bulletin of 9 November 1810).
 22. For a transcription of the submission from Cologne's Chamber of Commerce, see appendix E of Charles Schmidt, *Le Grand-Duché de Berg (1806–1813): Étude sur la domination française en Allemagne sous Napoleon I^{er}* (Paris, 1905), 492–7.
 23. Gotteri, *Police Secrète*, vol. 2, 621. Bulletin of 4 December 1810.
 24. Kraus, *Weg*, 203.
 25. For the impact of the economic downturn in the Rhenish departments, see Roger Dufraisse, 'La Crise économique de 1810–1812 en pays annexé: l'exemple de la rive gauche du Rhin', *Francia* 6 (1978): 407–40.
 26. Schmidt, *Berg*, 350–4.
 27. Dufraisse, 'Contrebande', 530. Also, Müller, *Köln*, 233.
 28. For certain items – especially British textiles – this calculation did not work: as the customs became more effective and such wares harder to come by, so their value in the eyes of consumers increased correspondingly; the fashion-conscious willingly paid an additional premium for their rarity value.

29. The total number of known cases employed to reach this conclusion is 475. Janine Bertrand, 'La contrebande à la frontière de l'Est en 1811, 1812, 1813', *Annales de L'Est*, 5th series, 2 (1951): 290–2.
30. For a contemporary view of banditry as a consequence of social breakdown, see B. Becker, *Actenmäßige Geschichte der Räuberbanden an den beyden Ufern des Rheins*, 2 vols (Cologne, 1804), vol. 1 (*Enthaltend die Geschichte der Moselbande und der Bande des Schinderhannes*), 7–9.
31. Conseil d'État, *Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil d'état: Séance du 5 Germinal an 11 de la République* (Paris, Germinal an 11 [1803]), 2–3.
32. Gotteri *Police Secrète*, vol. 2, 630 (Bulletin of 4 December 1810).
33. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 397–8. Bulletin of 11 December 1811, referring to the report of the special commissioner dated 4 December.
34. 'Secret' here should be qualified, as the despatch of the two agents was apparently mentioned in the British press at about the same time they made their first detailed reports to Paris. See the Police Bulletin of 26 September 1810. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 402.
35. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 309–10. For Norman involvement in smuggling across the Rhine, see Roger Dufraisse, 'Contrebandiers normands sur les bords du Rhin à l'époque napoléonienne', in *idem, L'Allemagne à l'époque napoléonienne: questions d'histoire politique, économique et sociale* (Bonn, 1992), 193–216.
36. Officially, the letters stood for 'voleur des Douanes', or customs thief, but Rhinelanders joked that it meant 'Viel Dumm' (very stupid), implying that only dim-wits got caught.
37. Schmidt, *Berg*, 461–7.
38. SHAT, Vincennes, C¹⁰136, Henry to General Clarke (Minister of War), 7 November 1813.
39. AN, Paris, F⁷8390, no. 379, Pauzle d'Ivoy (special police commissioner in Cologne) to Réal, 13 December 1813.
40. Leggiere, in his recent in-depth study of the Coalition invasion of France, notes some assistance accorded Blücher's forces by sympathetic natives of the left bank as they stood poised to cross the frontier. However, whether those involved were smugglers is unknown. Michael V. Leggiere, *The Fall of Napoleon*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2007), vol. 1 (*The Allied Invasion of France, 1813–1814*), 224.
41. Roger Dufraisse warns against reducing the customs policies of Napoleonic France to the Continental Blockade/System: of the 32 most important items of legislation dealing with customs, most predate the Berlin decree of 21 November 1806 – only 9 per cent came after. Dufraisse, 'Contrebande', 509.
42. One of the firms to go under in these years was the von der Leyen textile business in Krefeld. Kurschat, *Haus*, 92–5. Also, more generally, Manfred Koltes, *Das Rheinland zwischen Frankreich und Preußen: Studien zu Kontinuität und Wandel am Beginn der preußischen Herrschaft (1814–1822)* (Cologne, 1992), 299–300, 330, 333–4, 344–8.
43. Heribert J. Leonardy, *Der Mythos vom 'edlen' Räuber: Untersuchungen narrativer Tendenzen und Bearbeitungsformen bei den Legenden der vier Räuberfiguren Robin Hood, Schinderhannes, Jesse James und Ned Kelly* (Saarbrücken, 1997), 82–8.
44. See, for example, *Rheinischer Merkur* 96 (2 August 1814), 97 (4 August 1814).

Part IV

Urban Experiences and the Napoleonic Continental System

12

Experiencing the Continental System in the Cities of the French Atlantic

Alan Forrest

Silvia Marzagalli is right to insist that the classic view of the French Revolution and Empire as a period of continuous, almost linear, decline for French maritime trade was in urgent need of revision.¹ From Jean Meyer and François Crouzet to Jean-Pierre Poussou and Paul Butel, historians had subscribed to the view of the eighteenth century as a 'golden age' that gave way to a period of catastrophic decline during the Revolution. Crouzet, for instance, talks of a 'lasting weakening of the economy', of 'the ruin of overseas trade' and of 'economic bankruptcy'.² Here he is referring to a particular trade and the commercial interests of the ports that dominated it – the Atlantic commerce in sugar, indigo, slaves and wine that supported the economies of Nantes and Bordeaux, the two most prosperous Atlantic cities, but also smaller ports like La Rochelle and Lorient, Le Havre and Bayonne, which depended heavily on colonial trade, and in the case of Nantes in particular, on slaving.³ And of course there are economic statistics that support his verdict, not least the desperate dearth of cargoes by the end of the 1790s or the fact that even in 1815 trade levels were still below those of 1789. There are also the views of contemporaries, those expressed by chambers of commerce and merchant interests across the French Atlantic, which tended to see the future in apocalyptic terms and joined forces to oppose any move that might jeopardize their traditional sources of profit. The threat to France's colonies was a particular source of panic, 'wiping out French commerce and manufacturing industry, depriving more than six million men of the work that keeps them alive, spreading chaos in our colonies and cutting them off from metropolitan France, leaving their inhabitants to die off one after the other'.⁴

But we should be cautious. In their logbooks and journals, their commercial correspondence or their more personal letters and diaries, the merchants of a town like Nantes demonstrated their narrow vision of the world around them. They did not question the role they played or the profits they made. The moral arguments about the slave trade, which were so widely discussed in the Revolutionary years, would seem to have passed them by. Theirs was

the culture of an urban elite, sure of itself and its values. Their children were expected to follow in their footsteps and were educated to take over at the *comptoir*, to assume their place in the natural order of things.⁵ These merchants did not welcome change and they spent much of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic years yearning for the return of the world they had lost.

The Continental System in Context

It is in this wider context that their reaction to the Continental System must be seen. Napoleon's aim was never in doubt. It was to achieve the final victory that had eluded him in battle, to force Britain to capitulate by shutting off its European markets and thus 'conquer the sea through his power on land'.⁶ It was not an entirely novel idea; the Committee of Public Safety had already discussed the value of a trade war as a means of undermining Britain's morale and shared with Napoleon the view that 'Europe will be wholly free as soon as England's influence is weakened or destroyed'.⁷ But it was not something to be taken on lightly, since the challenge Britain posed was very different in kind from that of his continental adversaries. Recent precedents did not bode well. During the eighteenth century Britain had won almost every one of its wars against France, and its victories had been achieved with the help of a finely tuned 'fiscal state' which the French monarchy could not match. This stronger tax base ensured that the British government could at any moment raise the revenue needed to re-arm or to recruit additional troops for war.⁸ France did not have that capacity. Whereas Britain turned to indirect taxes to raise its war chests, the French monarchy had little choice but to stack up added debt, borrowing on the international market at ever-increasing rates of interest.⁹ It was always going to be an uneven struggle. When Louis XVI had tried to tip the scales of war at sea in France's favour during the 1780s by embarking on an ambitious ship-building programme, all he achieved was to encourage the Royal Navy to invest three times as much. Britain's threat, in other words, came as much from its commercial strength as from the traditions of its regiments or the fighting qualities of its troops.¹⁰ Napoleon recognized this clearly: following the defeat of his continental rivals on land and the establishment of his mastery over central Europe by 1806, he saw victory over Britain as being his next major priority, a step that was essential to the safety and stability of his Empire. He believed that he must destroy the profitability of British trade if he was to discomfit the powerful commercial interests in Parliament and the City and break the martial spirit of the nation. It was this that led him to invade first the Peninsula, then Russia, his two most disastrous military adventures of the entire war.¹¹

But could this be done without imposing a terrible cost on the port cities of France itself? Napoleon intended the Continental System to inflict maximum damage on Britain, while offering protection to the trade of France and its

allies. It was conceived as a form of mercantilism as well as a weapon of war, one which would isolate Britain from its markets while opening up Europe to French goods. It would, he hoped, punish Britain for its commercial exploitation of war and for its initiative in blockading French ports, and it would bring with it political benefits by undermining public confidence in London and dissolving support for the war effort across Britain. It would also bring valuable benefits to French agriculture and commerce, some of which had been stagnant after a generation of revolution and war. And it would counter the inherent economic advantage which, many Frenchmen believed, Britain had gained from the Eden Treaty of 1786 and from an almost ideological commitment – rare in a country that took such pride in its supposed moderation and pragmatism – to Adam Smith and the principles of free trade.¹²

The government thus found itself singing the praises of protectionism in a bid to win over public opinion, offering hope that, by favouring French trade and industry, the Continental System would be able to undo some of the damage that had been inflicted on the economy during the Revolutionary decade. But not all branches of economic activity could be helped in this way, and not all regions of the country were similarly affected. The Continental System had an uneven impact. It undoubtedly caused some sectors of the economy to revive and the protection offered to struggling companies was grasped with gratitude by employer and employee alike. It may have been a short-term success for an industrial sector starved of investment and exposed to competition from cheap, mass-produced goods from abroad – as Geoffrey Ellis has shown for Alsace – but such protection offered relatively few benefits for the economy of the Atlantic coast which had suffered so much from the effects of war with England.¹³ Ports like Nantes and Bordeaux could not hope to equal in wartime the levels of prosperity they had enjoyed in the two decades before 1793, with their economies so heavily dependent on wine, slaving and colonial produce. It was precisely those activities which a dozen years of war had put at jeopardy and which risked ruin if blockade cut them off from their traditional markets in Europe as well as across the Atlantic. In an attempt to win over an understandably apprehensive merchant community, the government showered the Atlantic with propagandist messages, loading blame for France's commercial troubles on the perfidious role played by Great Britain. For the British were not only blockading the French coast, they were pressurizing neutrals to abandon French ports and renege on French contracts and they were bribing French shipowners to trade with Britain by issuing them with licences. In late 1807 the Minister of the Interior condemned these practices in a letter to the merchants of La Rochelle in which he denounced the tactics of the British government and those who had betrayed the independence of their nation by 'shamefully submitting to British sovereignty and accepting to sail under licence'.¹⁴ If Napoleon was intervening in the economic marketplace, it was to offer protection to the merchants of France.

Revolution and War

The Revolution, it is now clear, was not in itself responsible for interrupting that prosperity. The Atlantic trade flourished beyond 1789, with 1790 and 1791 among the most prosperous years of the century. But the character of that trade changed during these years, with the triangular trade to Africa and the Caribbean proving less profitable than direct voyages to and from the Americas.¹⁵ Besides, the Revolution exposed the fragility of France's Atlantic economy, especially once the rebellion in Saint Domingue removed France's richest colonial possession from its control and ended its involvement in the highly lucrative slave trade. Nantes, in particular, but Bordeaux, too, in the last years of the *ancien régime*, had become unhealthily dependent on the profits of slaving, and when the triangular trade died merchants had to look quickly elsewhere – to the United States, Latin America, Ile-Bourbon and the Indian Ocean. The Revolution as a political event did not kill off trade any more than it condemned capitalism. Though the abolition of the chambers of commerce as instruments of privilege was certainly resented, the ending of corporations, trading privileges and monopolies were all welcome to merchants who flourished on the basis of individual enterprise. Less welcome was the moralistic streak in Jacobinism, which laid great emphasis on service and the duties of citizenship, and the spread of Terror. In Nantes, it is true, few merchant houses were directly caught up in Terror; here, Carrier showed far more interest in rooting out political and religious opponents and destroying the last vestiges of the Vendean insurrection. But the regular executions on the Place du Bouffay and the periodic drownings of priests and others in the Loire were hardly designed to create harmonious conditions in which trade could flourish.¹⁶ In Bordeaux the threat to trade was more immediate. Here the deputies sent out on mission from the Convention identified the merchant quarter of the Chartrons with egotism and profiteering, for which they invented a new crime of *négociantisme*, a crime unknown elsewhere in France. In all, 279 merchants were charged and imprisoned for what was seen as their selfish addiction to profit, pursued at the expense of all else – the people, the Revolution and the public good. Twelve were sentenced to death.¹⁷ Risk-taking and accumulation of wealth, which merchants regarded as virtues in a *négociant*, were decried as evidence of a lack of civic consciousness.

What had proved far more damaging than the political revolution was the return of war – the declaration of war on Britain in March 1793 and what turned out to be the permanent loss of France's role in the Caribbean. By the turn of the century the major commercial cities had seen the tonnages of ships entering their ports drastically reduced, their colonial trade decimated and the strong population growth, which had been evident throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, dramatically reversed as those who had come in quest of wealth returned crestfallen to the countryside.

Individual merchants suffered serious losses as a result of the Haitian revolution. Among Nantes merchant houses Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau gives figures of 12 million for Bouteiller père et fils, 7 million for Louis Drouin, 5 for Arnous, 4.5 for Chaurand.¹⁸ There were few leading merchants who escaped with their profits and property intact. Preaching liberty and equality to men of colour, exporting revolution to Saint Domingue and failing to secure France's commercial interests in the Caribbean, all were the errors that were imputed to the revolutionaries by Nantes' merchant community. They were less united in their criticism of Napoleon, welcoming his decision to re-establish slavery in the French sugar-islands and his abortive attempt to overthrow Haitian independence. They petitioned after 1815 to be allowed to resume the triangular trade with the Americas. And they continued to seek indemnities for the colonists who had been dispossessed and forced to flee, often to the United States or to Cuba, indemnities that were only finally agreed in 1826.¹⁹

This was the context from which they judged the Berlin and Milan Decrees. By then, of course, their lot had become even more precarious, as the French fleet proved unequal to the task of holding off the Royal Navy, suffering a confidence-sapping defeat at Aboukir Bay and near-total destruction at Trafalgar. Thereafter, the British blockaded the Atlantic coastline, claiming the right to stop French commercial shipping on the high seas and seizing cargoes as legitimate prizes of war. French merchants had to invent their own stratagems for survival, whether by resorting to privateering, diverting their ships to neutral ports or using false papers and foreign vessels to transport their goods. Some of the established merchant families hesitated to do this and were forced into bankruptcy, whereas younger newcomers were sometimes more ready to take risks and cut corners in pursuit of profit.²⁰ The proximity of Bordeaux and La Rochelle to Spain and Portugal, where Napoleon never managed to impose effective control, served only to deepen their sense of grievance.

Decay and Stagnation

Many merchant houses did survive these years of shortage, though they were forced to be resourceful and often had to experiment with new markets and more risky forms of trade. Throughout the Consulate and Empire the economy of the west-coast ports was salvaged by arming merchant vessels and resorting to the high risks of *la course*.²¹ Smuggling and contraband became necessary makeshifts to evade the noisome restrictions that prevented legal trading, with smugglers' bands along coastlines and frontiers swollen by deserters and young men taking refuge to avoid the draft. These were the concomitants of every war, what Silvia Marzagalli calls the usual 'substitute activities' of merchants in wartime.²² Even in the self-styled golden age of the French Atlantic, war had incurred heavy losses,

with both the Seven Years War and American Independence bringing lean years for those engaged in Atlantic and colonial trading. But the long-term trend across the second half of the eighteenth century, years of war and peace included, had been strongly upwards: profits continued to grow, most especially from the colonial trade; the cities of the West continued to attract economic migrants from Brittany, Poitou, Gascony and the Pyrenees; and the industrial sector provided livelihoods for increasing numbers of workers, in ship-building and rope-making, textiles and wine. There were important links between the Atlantic ports, too, especially among the rich Protestant families who made up an important part of the merchant community.²³ The difference after 1792 was that war lasted for a whole generation and was waged against a backdrop of economic decline: falling populations as workers were paid off, as the young left for service in the army and the disillusioned returned to the communities they had come from. Port cities like Bordeaux and Nantes were increasingly cut off from international liaisons and were thrown back on their immediate hinterlands.²⁴ Prosperity seemed a thing of the past, a state of well-being that was recalled nostalgically and was, doubtless, much exaggerated in the telling.

By the turn of the century the Atlantic ports seemed dead and devastated, just waiting for the peace which Napoleon finally seemed to bring them with the Treaty of Amiens in 1801. And it was not just the long-haul Atlantic commerce that was hit; so, too, was European trade and coastal shipping as owners, already penalized by the impossibility of finding insurance for their vessels, took increasing precautions against loss and attack. Foreign visitors who passed through Bordeaux and Nantes during the Consulate and the first years of the Empire were unanimous in their view that previously bustling port cities had been reduced to inactivity and misery by years of war and revolution. It is the contrast with what had gone before that left the deepest impression, the descriptions of luxury and good taste that had marked the pre-Revolutionary writings of visitors like Arthur Young and Sophie de la Roche giving way to a somewhat apocalyptic vision of ships laid up and idle, docks reduced to silence, prosperity destroyed.²⁵ Lorenz Meyer, a merchant from Hamburg who had visited Bordeaux at the end of the *ancien régime* and was a great admirer of its classical architecture, is one whose correspondence betrays a deep sense of the Garonne's commercial decline in the course of the 1790s. His analysis is uncompromising, the sense that prosperity has given way to decay. Even the Bourse could boast few sales, and if people still came and milled around, they came only 'through force of habit'.²⁶ His view reflects, of course, that of Bordeaux's merchant community, with whom Lorenz mixed when he was in the city and whose outlook he patently shared. If he betrays a propensity to exaggerate the extent of the economic disaster the city was suffering, it was an exaggeration he would have heard expressed on all sides. But the message was clear: gloom and decay had set in long before the launch of the Continental System and the resort to protectionism.

Most of the merchant community put their faith in the return of peace, a peace that would allow them to resume their old, profitable ways. The Treaty of Amiens had been hailed by many as a new dawn, an invitation to resume normal commerce, and the merchant communities of all the west-coast ports had responded with eager anticipation. A report from Nantes in 1811 noted that it had been followed by a reinvigorated economy and healthy exports to the colonies, but added that the period of peace was so short that industrial capital had since been wiped out.²⁷ What is most notable here, perhaps, is the deep-seated commercial conservatism of the Atlantic ports, a faith in old ways and old sources of profit. Nantes wanted nothing more than a return to the triangular trade that had been so beneficial to the local economy in the 1780s and early 1790s and which had provided thousands of jobs in industries from textiles to ship-building, including the manufacture of the bright-coloured *indiennages* so prized by the African market.²⁸

This conservatism is easy to understand, given the extent of their losses. The war years had decimated not only the commercial traffic through the port but also production and employment in those local industries that were dependent on colonial markets. The workers of Nantes were as aware of this dependence as the city's elites. Indeed, from the moment they had heard of the first slave revolt in Saint Domingue in 1791, they had understood its implications for their jobs and their families. In an address to the king written in response to the insurrection, more than a thousand workers expressed their solidarity with their 'brothers' in Port-au-Prince who had been the victims of the massacre and went on to express their fears that the rebellion would reduce them to 'the most profound misery'. They offered to serve as soldiers to help crush the rebellion, arguing that their physical strength was the only force left to them; they existed, they said, only through the work the colonies provided, and so 'we offer you our bodies, the only possessions left to us, to go to Saint-Domingue to help our brothers'.²⁹ Their fears proved justified, as work in the *indiennages* was almost totally wiped out in the wake of the insurrection.³⁰

The statistics that were collected by Jean-Baptiste Huet for the Loire-inférieure in the Year XI made the degree of this dependence, and hence of the decline of the colonies, brutally apparent. The hat-making industry had flourished before the Revolution; the *chapelleries* of Nantes were known well beyond the immediate hinterland of the city. But this trade was tightly linked to the colonial markets and the needs of the African slave trade to which they had supplied some 50,000 hats. It was the same for linen manufacture which had seen employment halved since 1790, both among the weavers and outworkers who supplied the trade and the industrial workers in the factories of Nantes. Huet adds a word of warning here, arguing that these are losses that will not be easily remedied, since there is little money in hat-making and little incentive to train up a new generation.³¹ And French shipping seems in terminal decline. On the eve of the Peace of Amiens,

French trading houses had hit their lowest ebb, and foreign shipping, especially that of the United States, threatened to dominate the Atlantic trade routes. This accompanied a huge increase in trade with America. In 1800 the total value of American exports to France was only around 40,000 dollars, whereas by 1801 it had leapt to more than 11 million dollars.³² With the return of peace, at least for a few brief months, there were the beginnings of a recovery, with greater tonnages of shipping in the ports and with old markets suddenly restored.

Napoleon's lust for further expansion meant that Amiens was no more than a short, and some would suggest artificial, truce, so that the benefits were short-lived. The months that followed proved a marked exception to years of recession, which in Nantes lasted from the beginning of the war in 1793 through to around 1809. They lit fires of hope and convinced the inhabitants that all they needed in order to restore prosperity was a sustained period of peace. And although that promise was not sustained, the years 1804 and 1805 had been better for trade, largely through the arrival of large numbers of American vessels and their cargoes. But the Continental Blockade was imposed against a backdrop of gloom and decline: the war of the Fourth Coalition, the occupation of the Hanseatic ports which ended their neutrality, and the British attack on Copenhagen all deprived France of useful trading partners. The year 1807 witnessed another brief rise in public optimism with the signing of the Peace of Tilsit, as once again hopes were raised that the war might finally be over. It was now crystal clear that what the merchants wanted was an end to war, not state regulation. Hence, there was little public enthusiasm to greet the announcement of the Continental Blockade which was recognized for what it was – an extension of the war at sea and a move that might provide controlled outlets for commerce but which ultimately made peace a more distant prospect.³³

Merchant Opinion

Did Napoleon's Continental System benefit the west-coast ports? If it brought no immediate alleviation, it may nevertheless have contributed to recovery in the longer term. The years from 1810 to 1812 were marked by a strong upturn in both the activity of the docks and the fortunes of Nantes' dependent industries. The tonnage of ships entering the port equalled and even briefly exceeded the levels that had been reached before the outbreak of war. But that prosperity did not last. The West experienced a further slump from 1813 to 1815, and the Napoleonic years would end in recession, the quarter-century since the outbreak of Revolution showing a net decline in economic activity. Maritime tonnage in Nantes had fallen from around 237,000 tons in 1790 to only 147,000 tons by 1816.³⁴ Tax receipts dropped, too, with the fall-off in economic activity affecting the vitality and even the viability of local administration. Whereas Bordeaux had posted

a tax income of 1,700,000 francs in 1809, this fell to 1,400,000 with the downturn in 1813, a loss that was made more painful by Napoleon's habit of raiding local authorities for cash when he needed to raise extra troops for the army.³⁵

If the implementation of the Continental System evoked no great outpouring of enthusiasm from the merchant communities, neither did it arouse any great protest. The provision of some degree of protection was not of itself unwelcome, as there were many in Nantes and Bordeaux who had serious doubts about the much-vaunted benefits of the free market, especially at a time when their arch rival not only controlled the seas but had a capacity for capital investment which France sadly lacked. But there was more to it than that. They were not being freely consulted, and it would have taken a bold and foolhardy spirit to challenge in writing the wisdom of a policy in which Napoleon had invested so much personal belief. When they sought to voice even the most tenuous criticism, it had to be done surreptitiously or be carefully disguised in coded language. On 21 April 1808 for instance, the reconstituted Chamber of Commerce in Bordeaux lavished praise on imperial policy, or appeared to. The Chamber started in a duly deferential tone, claiming that the Emperor's wise policies had rallied the whole of Europe against the pretensions of the British government, while the counter measures of the British had led to significant reprisals. This was, no doubt, just what the Emperor wanted to hear. But they now urged him to adopt a different line. The Berlin and Milan Decrees, they said, had achieved all that they had been designed to achieve and more, but 'prolonging them further would do more harm than good'. Why? Not because of any shortcoming in Napoleonic policy, of course, but rather because of the Americans. Their humiliation by the British meant that they now kept their ships at home, and the neutral shipping that had been their lifeline now risked being lost. But of course, the far-seeing Emperor will have understood all that. The Chamber was careful to avoid any suspicion of criticism. Napoleon's far-sighted policy, they protested, had their total support, and it would surely work to their advantage. It might, however, take a little time. And in the meantime 'it would be useful to your people if you would adopt measures that could revive our trade a little and show the Americans who their real enemies are'; that way no advantage could possibly accrue to Britain. A simple reversal of policy will suffice, if only Napoleon would consider giving neutral shipping permission 'to come to France either in ballast, or bringing goods and merchandise from the Americas', and removing the restriction that they could not enter French ports if they had been boarded by the Royal Navy. In this way, they suggested, foreign vessels would no longer be condemned to rot away in French docks, but instead they could take on cargoes of 'our wines, our spirits, our manufactures of all kinds', and go to the ends of the earth to tell others of 'the justice which they have obtained from Your Majesty'. Once they were happy with the wording of

their masterpiece, they duly sent it to Paris in the confident belief that they had made their central point: that the benefits that could be derived from the Continental System were now over, that its objective – to punish those neutrals who gave assistance to Britain – was achieved and that it was time to get back to the task of maximizing trade.³⁶

Other cities and chambers of commerce took up the call, each in its own way arguing the case for the resumption of normal trading relations with neutral nations and insisting that the Continental System had now outlived its usefulness. The town council of Nantes was reporting the belief of its merchant community when it wrote, doubtless in hope, that ‘peace on the high seas is the greatest encouragement that the commerce of our city can be accorded’.³⁷ In January 1808 a report had been drawn up from the Emperor summarizing the views of the principal chambers of commerce in France. They urged the strengthening of commerce, but, just like Bordeaux, took care not to be seen to criticize the Continental System or, by implication, the Emperor. The merchants of Nîmes, for example, if they regretted the shortage of raw materials, stopped short of advocating a change of economic direction. They stated their support for the ‘firm and rigorous’ steps that the government had taken, adding that it was imperative that France should inflict defeat upon England. Perhaps, battered by the long years of war, they saw no alternative to pressing for outright victory, a victory that alone would bring a guarantee of peace. For so long during the Revolutionary Wars, as well as under the Empire, this had been the official mantra that they had heard repeatedly. The Continental System might not be liked by the merchant community, but the measures it imposed were seen to be necessary and were justified on the grounds that they provided ‘guarantees of a future prosperity more brilliant and especially more solidly based than it has ever been in the past’.³⁸ Like their Emperor, the Chamber seemed content to prioritize foreign policy in the pursuit of this goal and to conclude that there could be no peace without outright victory.

Licensing and Regulation

The strategic aim, of course, had not changed: both before and after 1806 Napoleon sought to strangle British commerce by cutting off its goods from continental markets. British goods were understood to include those shipped from the colonies. The legislation was intended to deprive Britain not only of markets for its manufactures but also of its profitable *entrepôt* trade with Europe. In the months that followed the screw was progressively tightened. By 1807 France declared any ship coming from a British port to be fair game for its warships and for corsairs. The ships were to be seized, along with their cargoes, as legitimate spoils of war. But 1807 proved a turning-point in other ways, too, as Britain spelt out its response to what it saw as an act of war. As the most powerful naval power of the time Britain

had no intention of capitulating to Napoleon at sea, and with its control of the seas recently reconfirmed, the British government took an initiative of its own by forbidding neutral shipping from moving between any ports controlled by the Empire. This measure was aimed especially at American vessels which had become by far the most important suppliers of the French Atlantic coast during the previous few years. But it spread the net widely. Britain's Orders in Council placed all the ports of France and its allies and colonies in a state of blockade and forbade any neutral ship from entering them without first passing through a British port and paying a newly imposed tax to Britain. Napoleon responded by threatening to take measures against any neutral ship that dared to submit to such conditions. This had the effect of strengthening the Blockade as the last American ships stayed away, though from the viewpoint of French merchants it at least had the advantage of allowing them to regain a proportion of their former commerce.³⁹ But that was small consolation since they were now unable to trade without being in breach of either the French or the British blockade of the French coast.

On the French side, they were faced with a new raft of government restrictions on their movements if they were not to break the law – new, though not necessarily more restrictive. Before 1806 a merchant seeking to import British manufactures would be driven to conceal his activity to avoid arrest, hence the considerable number of voyages made indirectly through ports in the Baltic or towns just outside France's borders, most notably Brussels. But such activity was clandestine, the stuff of subterfuge, involving underhand deals with third parties and false papers for cargo, since the import of colonial goods into France almost invariably aroused suspicion. The new regulations still prohibited all trade with Britain, but the French authorities showed greater flexibility, and by applying for licences and submitting to a pile of paperwork, merchants could once more hope to engage in trade without breaking the law. This encouraged a gradual reprise of trade to other European cities in the first place, but gradually also to the Americas. By 1810 the complaints largely dried up as merchant firms in Bordeaux and Nantes sought to take advantage of the new regulations and found new ways to elude capture and seizure by the British.

But at what price would this be achieved? What did the restrictions imposed by the government imply for the merchants of Bordeaux and Nantes, and how did they affect day-to-day life in the Atlantic ports? Were they really so intrusive or so intolerable for cities that had been starved of commerce for so long? At the very least, the Continental System allowed the merchant community – or a majority among the merchant community – to re-engage in commerce, albeit on terms of the government's choosing. The reason for the new policy was straightforward enough: though Napoleon at no time allowed mere economic considerations to stand in the way of his foreign-policy initiatives, his government accepted the need to import

certain primary materials and to allow French industry and agriculture – and viticulture in the south-west – to sell abroad. But the policy, introduced by imperial decree in April 1808, was applied selectively. Merchants could not trade freely, and they needed to obtain a licence from the imperial authorities, a process that often proved cumbersome and time-consuming. During 1808, indeed, very few voyages were authorized, though by the following year greater numbers of merchants were applying for licences or using up the licences issued in the previous year. Indeed, 1809 was generally perceived as a boom year in French trade, when the Bordeaux wine merchants, among others, could again sell to their traditional markets.⁴⁰ It gradually became more plausible for the imperial authorities to claim that they were acting with the interests of trade at heart – a constant refrain in communications from Paris across the war years. As the chambers of commerce were reminded in 1813, ‘the Emperor has made war to gain the liberty of the seas, for the prosperity of French industry and commerce’.⁴¹ Responsibility for their losses lie elsewhere.

Where licences were issued there was usually a good strategic reason for doing so. In April 1808, for example, while passing through Bayonne, Napoleon authorized 15 commercial voyages from Bordeaux to France’s overseas colonies, a gesture which he presented as a measure to encourage Bordeaux’s commercial activity as well as to take much-needed supplies to Martinique, Guadeloupe and Cayenne. The size of the ships was carefully regulated as well as the cargoes and their destinations, and the expeditions were to be entrusted to men ‘whose morality, ability and solvency will be investigated and judged by the chamber of commerce of Bordeaux’. The decree also outlined plans for financing the mission, with the state taking a share in the enterprise. Each merchant was to divide the value of his venture into a determined number of shares, and the state would use its sinking fund (*caisse d’amortissement*) to take up a third of the shares in each voyage to a maximum value of 60,000 francs. In other words, this was not trade freely entered into by the merchant. Both the crew and the cargo had to be officially approved. Besides, the ships were to be fitted out for war, and any merchant who asked to have troops on board to help defend the ship would be supplied with them. Approval would be given by the minister for the Navy, who would use the merchant vessel to take between 10 and 20 soldiers out to the Antilles.⁴²

The government could also take refuge in the argument that controls were not all of their making and that the French system of issuing licences was made in response to a similar initiative by the British government as it sought to tighten the blockade of French ports. The purpose, of course, was very different from Napoleon’s. The British authorities did not wish to ossify trade around Europe; they merely intended that it serve British, and not French, national interests and that British ports and British markets would reap the benefit. The Board of Trade, too, instituted a system of licences for

neutral vessels, which they sold at a modest cost to the ships of all non-combatant nations, discriminating, of course, against those sailing under the flag of France or its allies. If the licences were inexpensive, they were also widely available and speedily delivered. A single application could be made for multiple voyages, and the result was a predictable rush to apply; in 1810 alone the Board of Trade received nearly 15,000 applications, and it granted the great majority of them. This had the effect, of course, of freeing up trade again, offering markets for the cunning and unscrupulous and encouraging more evasion and subterfuge by the French. Bordeaux merchants, for instance, exported around 5000 barrels of wine to England in 1812 and more than double that in 1813.⁴³ But licensing was also something of a diplomatic coup by Whitehall, and one that punched holes in the already pervious skin of Napoleon's maritime defences.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The Continental Blockade would prove a dangerous policy for France and its allies, inviting retaliation and proving almost impossible to enforce effectively. Napoleon believed that it would so damage Britain's commercial prosperity as to destroy public confidence in the war in London and pressure the government to sue for peace. This was a serious miscalculation. The Royal Navy was too strong, especially after Trafalgar, for France to offer a serious challenge at sea, and no British government could afford to accept any measure that interfered with its commercial sea lanes. The only possible response was to retaliate, and the consequences were soon felt in France, not least in the Atlantic ports which had enjoyed such dramatic prosperity in the generation before the French Revolution and which had suffered so grievously from the loss of Haiti and from a colonial struggle with Britain that had engulfed much of the Caribbean. Unable to open up new markets and deprived of the raw materials to invest in the new heavy industries, their economies continued to decline and their population to diminish. The first half of the nineteenth century would see a structural shift in French prosperity from Atlantic commerce to continental manufacturing, a shift that would prove difficult to reverse.

What did not change was the faith of the merchant community in their traditional sources of wealth, nor their intense economic conservatism. Between 1815 and the late 1820s France's Atlantic cities tried to regenerate eighteenth-century trade patterns in the face of a raft of new economic and political realities: a revolution that had abolished the slave trade in Britain and the United States, the growth of free-trade economics and the decline of mercantilism, and independence movements that threatened the Spanish and Portuguese empires in Central and South America. The slave trade proved a particular source of contention. Britain, in the person of its foreign minister, Lord Castlereagh, was in no mood to allow France to profit from

slaving, and at Vienna in 1814 Castlereagh tried to impose a ban across the whole of the North Atlantic. To many merchant houses in Nantes and Bordeaux, this seemed little more than a provocative attempt by Britain to impose its commercial interests and its Protestant morality on a defeated adversary. As Serge Daget has shown, the illicit trade would continue through the Restoration and into the July Monarchy, albeit on a reduced scale and with all the added costs that came with clandestine shipments. Nantes merchants in particular found it difficult to refocus their activity or seek new markets in the Levant or the East Indies or to renounce their dependence on a slave trade that had been at the heart of their prosperity in the eighteenth century, when its legality had been unquestioned and it had been 'honoured, protected and subsidized by the state'.⁴⁵

Notes

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3. Paul Butel, *Histoire de l'Atlantique de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris, 1997), 134–9.
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8. Patrick O'Brien, 'The Nature and Historical Evolution of an Exceptional Fiscal State and Its Possible Significance for the Precocious Commercialization and Industrialization of the British Economy from Cromwell to Nelson', *Economic History Review* 64 (2011): 408–46.
9. Arnaud Orain, 'Soutenir la guerre et réformer la fiscalité: Silhouette et Forbonnais au Contrôle général des finances (1759)', *French Historical Studies* 36 (2013): 417.
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15. Jean Meyer, *L'armement nantais dans la deuxième moitié du 18e siècle* (Paris, 1969), 249.

16. Jean-Joël Brégeon, *Carrier et la Terreur nantaise* (Paris, 2002), 175–93.
17. Alan Forrest, *The Revolution in Provincial France: Aquitaine, 1789–1799* (Oxford, 1996), 241.
18. Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *L'argent de la traite: Milieu négrier, capitalisme et développement, un modèle* (Paris, 1998), 177.
19. See Laure Pineau-Defois, 'Les grands négociants nantais du dernier tiers du 18e siècle: Capital hérité et esprit d'entreprise', doctoral thesis (University of Nantes, 2008).
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33. Crouzet, 'Bilan de faillite', 497–500.
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37. AN, Paris, AFIV 1307, pétition de la Ville de Nantes 'à Sa Majesté l'Empereur des Français, Roi d'Italie et Protecteur de la Confédération du Rhin', 8 August 1808.
38. AN, Paris, AFIV 1060, 'Ministère de l'Intérieur, Rapport à Sa Majesté Empereur et Roi', Paris, 20 January 1808.
39. Crouzet, 'Bilan de faillite', 499–500.

40. Ibid., 502.
41. ADCM, La Rochelle, 41 ETP 1, circular letter from the Minister of Industry and Commerce to the Chamber of Commerce of La Rochelle, 23 November 1813.
42. ADCM, La Rochelle, 41 ETP 1, extrait des minutes de la Secrétairerie d'Etat, Bayonne, 30 April 1808.
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13

Choices and Opportunities amid Economic Warfare: Strategic Decisions of the Business Elite in the Young Harbour Town of Antwerp during the Napoleonic Era

Hilde Greefs

In the world of business, unstable political circumstances exert a critical influence in determining commercial activities, especially when circumstances are accompanied by unrest and economic insecurity. Periods of instability and political transitions increase social and economic uncertainty as well as challenge established business patterns and disrupt familiar business channels and connections. This was especially the case during the French–British wars from 1793 to 1815. These hostilities occurred amid a broader process of social, political and economic transitions, of which the French Revolution and industrialization in Great Britain were pivotal. In long-term perspective, economic modernization in Great Britain was accompanied by a shift in trade activities and routes, a development that challenged the competitive position of many continental ports.¹ I argue that the French–British War, which deployed economic measures as a means of warfare, disrupted economic life and challenged business people. Rather than focus solely on the detrimental effects, in line with recent historiography this chapter presents a case study that demonstrates that the conflict also offered opportunities to those who could capitalize on them and who had the power and means to adapt their business strategies.²

Economic warfare, of which the Continental Blockade was one of the most devastating measures, challenged the established position of many merchants, traders and business elites. Prohibitions on trade and increasing transportation risks drastically transformed transaction costs. Consumers and manufacturers, however, still required provisions. Their demand for commodities as well as the heightened risks in trade influenced prices and offered incentives for business people to speculate and take risks or consider new business niches. These particular circumstances obliged business people to reflect on new possibilities and potential benefits, as they also confronted restricted alternatives. Continuing to conduct business as usual

for as long as circumstances allowed was only one option. One could also wait and eventually rely on business's deposits, or spread the business's risks by diversifying. One could also opt to adjust and react flexibly to new and even unfavourable conditions. Wartime presented opportunities for inventive entrepreneurs and merchants who were willing to take risks. I argue that business people who weathered the conflict had to adapt their business behaviour, and that these strategic choices determined further developments for their own enterprises and in a way for the economic future of the cities from which they operated.

The case of Antwerp lends itself to an examination of the choices made by business elites, especially as the point of departure for Antwerp's story is unique. The French removed the lock on the Scheldt River in 1795, thereby enabling the port's first direct access to the sea in more than two centuries. The Scheldt and Antwerp were now reopened to all maritime imports.³ Antwerp was officially annexed the same year and integrated into the French Republic, becoming the Empire's 'youngest' river port to the North Sea. The Antwerp business community hoped that the city could regain the importance and prestige it had enjoyed during the golden sixteenth century, when Antwerp was an international port city. Yet merchants elsewhere in the country and abroad were also attracted by the city's new prospects. A study of Antwerp demonstrates that first-generation immigrants and the native Antwerp businessmen reacted differently to the precarious situation and that their divergent choices not only determined further postwar economic development but transformed the business elite of the young continental port.

To understand how these two business groups – native businessmen and 'newcomers' – adapted their business strategies, it is necessary to examine their business and trade in the years following the reopening of the Scheldt. This review will illustrate how (and if) they adapted their initial strategies during the Napoleonic era, in particular following the Continental Blockade when the conflict hindered commercial ambitions. Next to business instincts and risk behaviour, their business experience and professional networks and relations were crucial. Analysing the scope and extent of their business relations and acquaintances allows for situating their individual economic actions into a social context and stresses the importance of a network of trustworthy relations.⁴ Especially during these years of war and unrest, trustworthy relations were essential for garnering access to strategic information and for reducing business risks. Before delving into the decisions of these two groups, I will examine significant specificities of the Antwerp port and its business community during the French period.

Antwerp and Its Business Community under French Rule

Annexation of the southern Netherlands into France (1795–1814) brought economic advantages for the region. It now benefited from a toll-free French

'export' market and the early implementation of French revolutionary laws. Moreover, in 1806 the Continental Blockade protected its fledgling industries from British competition until 1814. Certain manufacturing regions emerged in the southern Netherlands that would later result in Belgium becoming the first industrialized power on the continent. The textile industry set the pace for these developments from about 1800 until 1810. However, mechanization was limited to specific regions.⁵ The qualitative changes and innovations bypassed Antwerp, although the city's textile sector had flourished during the eighteenth century. According to historians, the reopening of the Scheldt and the commercial orientation of Antwerp's industrialists were each partially responsible for the collapse of the local textile industry. Indeed, the industry's sharpest crisis appears to have taken place exactly during the French regime.⁶

After 1795 Antwerp regained its position as a well-located harbour town in the southern Netherlands, a densely populated region with a growing economy. If the country's modernization process would enable Antwerp to function as an important gateway for industries in the immediate hinterland, the city's favourable geographic position towards the North Sea and Britain offered possibilities to reconnect with transatlantic commerce. Trade on the east–west axis to Britain and across the Atlantic Ocean was important for colonial commodity trade; it also functioned as an import route for raw cotton, essential for the booming textile industry. Moreover, the river port's deep inland position reduced transportation costs, and its central location offered an advantageous hub for transit trade to other parts of France, as well as to the northern Netherlands, the Rhineland and Switzerland.⁷ Attentive to these advantages and urged on by the local business community, the French government invested heavily in renewing the infrastructure of the town and the port, all of which was in deplorable condition after two centuries of neglect. Napoleon visited Antwerp twice, as a consul in July 1803 and as an emperor in July 1810. Although his intentions had initially related to the city's commercial future and were part of a strategy to gain the support of the local population, his military expeditions and conflicts prompted him to revise these objectives. For Napoleon, Antwerp became a naval port, 'a pistol directed to the heart of Britain', and therefore military vessels – not trading ships – were constructed in its new shipyards (see Fig. 13.1).⁸

The Antwerp business community welcomed this revivification of the port. Its renaissance as a port town, however, was hindered by structural shortcomings, including a lack of both maritime trade experience and related trade networks. Indeed, research into eighteenth-century Antwerp has shown that the city had in fact been merely a regional trading hub on the periphery of even the important domestic commercial activities. Such unpromising prospects eventually led important business elites to withdraw from commerce during the 1700s and adopt an aristocratic lifestyle.⁹ Moreover, they also began to invest capital in industrial activities, especially



Figure 13.1 Napoleon's New Shipyards in Antwerp, artist J. van Regenmorter, water-colour, c.1804, private collection, Berchem, Belgium

in the establishment of centralized textile enterprises that specialized in the production of cheap yet fashionable mixed-cotton fabrics and in cotton printing.¹⁰

In general, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Antwerp business community was a close-knit group and deeply embedded within Antwerp society through business relations and family connections. International contacts, on the other hand, were atypical. The only evidence for such contacts points to associates in Spain, France and the Rhineland, and (due to the port's status) in the northern Netherlands.¹¹ These networks' geographic extent and socio-economic composition varied from person to person. Of course, there were also merchants in the city who were well connected and operated in an international trade network.¹² In general, however, the scope of these commercial networks reveals that Antwerp's economic situation in the eighteenth century and its status in the trade environment of the southern Netherlands was of regional importance. As its lack of effective networks of international relations was a consequence of the city's long absence from overseas trade, this presented a major obstacle to maritime development after the reopening of the Scheldt. This disadvantage for locals would worsen with the emergence of competition from foreign 'newcomers'.

The native business community began to face competition from a group of first-generation migrants who had moved to Antwerp in the early nineteenth century, attracted by the city's new commercial potential. Before the Scheldt had been reopened, Antwerp attracted few foreign immigrants; most arrived from the northern Netherlands, thanks to the city's privileged

contacts with the Holland staple market. After the reopening, business people from France, Switzerland, Spain, and especially from the Rhineland, relocated to Antwerp. This was particularly the case following the Peace of Amiens and temporary cessation of the conflict; many new merchants settled in Antwerp. This migration continued even after the Continental Blockade began to paralyse maritime trade in 1806.¹³ The difficult political and economic circumstances appear to have reinforced geographic mobility and even offered opportunities to ambitious business people keen on travelling or relocating.¹⁴ Moreover, the constant necessity to modify commercial routes – due both to the structural reorientation of international trade and to ongoing warfare – opened new prospects. In this perspective, moving to Antwerp may have been part of a plan to adapt the structure of business networks to changing circumstances and to redirect mercantile patterns obstructed by the French–British commercial war. A notable example of this was the population of young business people who, backed by trading companies in their home countries, settled in newly developed port towns and worked there as commissioners for their contacts abroad.¹⁵ Antwerp, a well-situated, inexpensive and newly developing harbour town, offered a promising base of operations.

This chapter explores choices made by these Antwerp business groups – natives and ‘newcomers’, respectively – and the kinds of business and trade that captured their interest. It uncovers how they utilized their experience, knowledge and networks to survive and even prosper during an era of international and commercial warfare. This chapter first examines their business behaviour following the reopening of the Scheldt and looks at how these business people adapted their initial strategies to the ongoing changing circumstances of the Napoleonic Era.

The Return of Commerce: Immigrants and Maritime Trade during Difficult Years

In-migrants, who relocated shortly after the reopening of the harbour, arrived in Antwerp with a deliberate purpose – to trade. Initially, their trading routes were often directed towards their home regions or cities, where they still had relatives, business contacts and friends. Typical examples include Christophe Duhring, from Denmark, and David Parish, of Hamburg, both of whom resettled in Antwerp to import goods from northern ports. These initial trading routes, however, were easily susceptible to wartime obstructions. Following Britain’s blockade of the mouths of the Elbe and the Weser in 1803 the number of ships arriving from the German northern seaports collapsed. More ships now began arriving from the Baltic Sea and Scandinavia, obliging merchants to redirect their trade routes.¹⁶ Of particular importance to Antwerp’s future as a port city was the arrival of colonial commodities from the Spanish, French and Dutch colonies. Such commodities

were shipped via American ports such as Philadelphia, Charleston and New York. The vessels sailed directly from the American ports to Antwerp, thereby bypassing other ports under French control.

The American shipping business profited from the French wars. Likewise, American exports grew extensively until 1807, thanks to the country's neutrality in the continental conflict. Shipping between non-belligerent countries and France was possible, provided that neutral merchants and ships were involved. Such ships were sent from America to the continent, not only to ports such as Bordeaux, Hamburg and Livorno, but also to Antwerp, an indication that the city had quickly established a foothold in the transatlantic commercial circuit.¹⁷ Of the 184 intercontinental ships that arrived in Antwerp between 1801 and 1807, 167 ships (most of which were American) had departed from American ports.¹⁸ How did Antwerp merchant houses venture into this long-distance trade, and what kinds of relations did they rely upon? I examined the ship records of vessels that arrived in Antwerp's harbour, in particular the records that indicate which merchants and merchant houses received the goods.¹⁹ These samples indicate that the merchant house Ridgway, Mertens & Co. held a major share in this commodity trade.

Jacob Ridgway was American by birth; he was born in Monrsoth County in New Jersey, and moved to Philadelphia as a child. According to an anonymous trader, it appears that he began a career as a small grocer when he established the firm Smith & Ridgway in Philadelphia.²⁰ The firm specialized in European trade; Ridgway moved to Antwerp around 1802 in order to boost his trading business. This was a strategic relocation, intended to facilitate commodity trade between his hometown and the continent. Thanks to his contacts in America, he could act as a person of trust for American merchants he already knew or with whom he established contact via recommendations from friends, relatives and business relations. Because of the distance and instability inherent in such trade, merchants had difficulties in garnering up-to-date information; thus, they had to rely on a trustworthy partner for the consignments of their ships or commodities. This was of particular importance during these tumultuous years.²¹ The firm Ridgway, Mertens & Co. imported goods in consignment but also acted on its own account. In October 1802, for instance, the ship *Phoebe Anne* departed from Philadelphia with colonial commodities, including coffee, sugar and cacao imported from such places as Martinique, Calcutta, Norfolk and Guadeloupe. In Philadelphia, Richard Smith and the firm Smith & Ridgway acted as exporters of the freights alongside other American merchant houses.²² Thanks to the neutral status of the Americans in the ongoing continental conflict, the freights could be shipped to Antwerp.

In Antwerp, Ridgway became associated with Louis Joseph Mertens, a merchant from Frankfurt-am-Main, thereby bolstering his commercial ties with the Rhineland, an important transit destination. He also became a

commercial agent and, later, consul of the United States in Antwerp, thus institutionalizing his position in trade with America.²³ His particular evolution strongly resembles that of many American merchants who settled in Bordeaux during the French period.²⁴ In Bordeaux, however, other options were possible. Many Bordeaux merchants took initiative in the opposite direction: to facilitate trade, they delocalized their businesses, reorienting them to American ports and relying heavily on their former colonial trade relations. In Antwerp a comparable strategy was pursued by David Parish, a young merchant who resettled in the port city, but who continued to rely upon his business contacts abroad.

Parish hailed from a business family in Hamburg and he relocated to Antwerp around 1802. According to a contemporary, his initial successes stemmed from astute financial speculations on the new outbreak of hostilities between France and Britain. His speculations had been particularly successful thanks to a tip from a long-time friend of his family, the French minister of foreign affairs, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand. Parish met with Talleyrand in Antwerp in July 1803 during Napoleon's visit to the city. He subsequently bought a large amount of colonial commodities and, after prices skyrocketed due to the outbreak of war, realized a huge profit.²⁵ In 1806 Parish departed Antwerp for New York and Philadelphia on the basis of contacts he had established with the merchant bankers Hope & Co. in Amsterdam. The firm had contacted Parish to act as their agent in America. The deal originated from the French house Ouvrard & Co. and was intended to oversee ships leaving Spanish America; these ships, bearing colonial goods and *piasters* to the Continent, would sail under protection of the Spanish and French governments.²⁶ Peter Labouchère, of the firm Hope & Co., took the lead in arranging this business and decided that the neutral vessels should be routed to Antwerp. Impressed by Parish's rapid success in Antwerp, Labouchère appointed him as the American agent for the transactions.²⁷ To protect the ships against actions from the British fleet, Parish contacted the British firm Baring Bros. in London, who specialized in the Atlantic trade.²⁸

Parish realized a great deal of money from these arrangements – roughly estimated at around 721,000 dollars. Yet his gains were likely even higher, because he could also work for his own account. Transatlantic shipping of *piasters* was a risky venture, and so the money was primarily used to pay advances to American firms in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans for transport of their commodities to Europe. Parish acted as a middleman and contacted firms in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Nantes and Antwerp. In Antwerp, the business was entrusted to the firms David Parish & Co. and Ridgway, Mertens & Co., both of which thus enjoyed excellent provision of colonial commodities during these difficult years.²⁹ These arrangements, although supported by the French government and important merchant bankers, remained a hazardous undertaking. In late 1807

the cargoes of seven American ships consigned to Parish and Ridgway were confiscated by French authorities, to be publically sold. Although David Parish explained that they were acting on behalf of the French treasury and that neither the cargoes nor the merchants and firms involved were British, a letter from David Parish in 1810 indicates that after three years the affair remained unresolved and that the situation remained difficult, not least because the advances had already been paid.³⁰ As evidenced by such developments, these business arrangements and transactions posed various hazards. Nonetheless, backed by their international business relations and networks, some merchants and firms opted to assume the risks.

How the firms David Parish & Co. and Ridgway, Mertens & Co., managed later to survive the Continental Blockade is unclear. From the end of 1807 onwards neutral shipping from American ports ceased. On 20 December of 1807 the American government embargoed all transatlantic shipping to Britain and France. British ships now controlled the mouth of the Scheldt, and between 1809 and 1810 the only way for merchants to continue maritime imports was through an import licence from the central authorities.³¹ In early 1809, amid growing tensions on the continent, Labouchère asked to close the Spanish–American transactions. Parish's contacts in America, Britain, the Netherlands, France and Hamburg had likely offered him alternative opportunities. Richard Ehrenberg estimated that in 1809 alone the firm Parish & Co. in Hamburg received 50 shipments from American ports, with a total value of more than three million dollars. Various members of the Parish family engaged in smuggling commodities from Heligoland and via Hamburg to Frankfurt, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.³²

David Parish appears to have been successful in his business ventures during these years. In the 1810s he bought extensive plantations in America and invested considerably in an American state loan devised by his friend and one of the leading businessmen in Philadelphia, Stephen Girard. Despite widespread rumours about his adventurous character and imprudent speculations, Parish maintained respectable appearances and lived 'in a style of great splendour' in Philadelphia.³³ Jacob Ridgway is thought to have returned to Philadelphia around 1813 with a prodigious amount of capital, worth some three to six million dollars, and was popular thanks to his charity work.³⁴ Because of their relocation back to America, Parish and Ridgway's capitals now partially flowed away from Antwerp; their business contacts, however, remained in the port town. After their departures, the trading houses Parish, Agie & Co. and Ridgway, Mertens & Co. continued under Parish and Ridgway's previous business partners: the former was conducted by Grégoire Agie from Lorient under the merchant house Agie & Insinger, and the latter under Louis Joseph Mertens with the firm name Mertens, Mosselman & Co. Though each associated with new partners, both merchant houses became important intercontinental traders after the Napoleonic wars.

Another way to continue trade during wartime was to provision via inland navigation from the northern Netherlands, a strategy pursued by nearly every trading firm in Antwerp. According to notices in the *Journal du Commerce*, products imported from small ports in the northern Netherlands included not only foodstuffs, such as fish, grain and cheese, but also colonial products such as coffee, hides, sugar and tea. Such trade in colonial commodities was not forbidden, but in 1808 France banned, by Napoleonic orders, imports via illegal routes from England.³⁵ Nonetheless, substantial amounts of colonial commodities still arrived in Antwerp in 1810.³⁶ This likely explains why various merchants moved from Amsterdam and Rotterdam to Antwerp during this period, including Jan Vanderhoeven and John Knight (1807), Adriaan Saportas (1808) and Jean Jacques Legros (originally from Liège, 1810). As a distribution centre for forbidden colonial goods imported via the northern Netherlands, Antwerp emerged as an attractive locale for these merchants. The rising prices for colonial commodities offered significant economic incentives for smuggling. In Antwerp, the price of coffee from Java or San Domingo doubled between 1806 and 1810 and the price of American cotton tripled.³⁷ For Napoleon, this trade in colonial commodities along the northern border was an irritant, but it was only after the empire's annexation of the Kingdom of Holland that this commodity flow came to a standstill. In 1811, according to Antwerp brokers, legal imports via the northern borders included only some cheese, butter and fish.³⁸ This collapse in imports evidences the importance of this transport route for illegal commodities.

Much more stringent than these measures were the orders against the importation of British manufacturing goods. Such commerce was considered smuggling, and those involved faced prosecution from the French government. Merchants also used land routes for illegal commodity trade from the northern and southern Netherlands to France and the Rhineland. Dufraisse and Marzagalli have suggested that British products were smuggled via Amsterdam, Breda and Rotterdam by way of Antwerp to the Rhineland and France.³⁹ Eugène Rymenans, in Düsseldorf, was an important middleman for the Paris businessman Jean François Gaudoit. He dispatched French lace to England and trafficked forbidden English commodities into the Empire. Antwerp functioned as a transshipment zone in this smuggling operation. Lace was transported by way of stage coach to Antwerp, where Vanderschriedt functioned as a middleman. Importing British commodities was far more challenging. London merchant houses dispatched the commodities to Rotterdam, Amsterdam or Breda, where specialists insured the transport to France. Rymenans, born in Malines, operated from Düsseldorf in these years; he also worked in Antwerp with the mercantile houses of Jean Donnet, Jacob Dirven and Daniël Thuret, all of whom had moved to Antwerp early in the century. Many of the wartime entrepreneurs were not unknown to the French authorities. For instance, Jean Bissiliat Donnet,

originally from Chimay, was convicted for illegal transportation of *marchandises d'Indes* by way of Bergen op Zoom and Breda to Antwerp and Paris between 1805 and 1808.⁴⁰ After the Napoleonic wars Rymenans settled in Antwerp, where he specialized in maritime trade with Hubert Havenith, of Raeren. Likewise, Donnet, Dirven and Thuret remained active in Antwerp in the mercantile business after the war.

Although the relevant information is limited, available data suggest that business people who moved to Antwerp early in the nineteenth century were able to survive the Continental Blockade by continuing to trade via legal, and sometimes illegal, channels. Because of the war, they faced unusually high risks and thus had to be constantly informed so as to effectively adapt their commercial trajectories. They relied on trustworthy partners and relations abroad to minimize risks. In doing so, they were partially able to circumvent prohibitions instituted by the French government and the blockades imposed by the British. In Antwerp, transplanted business people kept their capital mobile and flexible; they also strengthened their contacts, such as through joining the Chamber of Commerce or by institutionalizing privileged positions in certain trade routes.⁴¹ Although their initial capital in Antwerp may have been quite modest, some quickly managed to accumulate significant wealth during these years. After the war they again used their international networks to successfully restore their maritime trade. Moreover, alongside even newer immigrants who had settled in the port city between 1814 and 1815, they came to dominate maritime imports.

Reorientation and Diversification: The Strategy of the Native Businessmen

How did native business people survive these difficult years, and what decisions did they make in doing so? Local merchants and traders originally from Antwerp were surely motivated by the new opportunities offered by the reopening of the Scheldt. Changes in market orientation, however, often constituted obstacles. For example, during the early years of French control, many Antwerp merchants found it difficult to break from their usual trading routes via ports in the northern Netherlands, such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam. In their reticence, they exhibited a notable degree of path-dependency in their trade orientation. They continued importing commodities through the northern Netherlands ports, just as they had before the Scheldt was reopened.⁴² Many of the more successful maritime traders within the Antwerp group were from wealthy Antwerp families who had been active in the trade world before 1795.⁴³ Local merchant houses profited notably from the 1802 Peace of Amiens, which freed shipments to French ports and from unification with France. The latter development prompted them to begin importing regional products, such as wine, oils and fruit from harbours on the Atlantic coast, including Bordeaux and Nantes.⁴⁴ Other

Antwerp business people now explored more distant commodity markets. Examples include Nicolas Werbrouck and Nicolas Joseph De Wael, who imported Brazilian colonial commodities via Lisbon, a city that enjoyed neutral status in the French–British conflict. Werbrouck and De Wael frequently relied on business relations and distribution channels they had used before the turn of the century. De Wael had been a prominent trader in hides in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁵ When the war obstructed trading channels, they, like myriad other foreign mercantile houses, requested permission from the authorities to import commodities. Werbrouck was licensed by the authorities to import hides on French ships via Ostend, whereas De Wael was granted permission to import American hides through London.⁴⁶

Antwerp's native business community, however, also had other options and, unlike the merchants who had arrived more recently, they did not always focus exclusively on trade. For merchants who only occasionally imported through the harbour, the choice was fairly simple, and they now opted to concentrate on other activities, such as production of luxury goods or financial services. Likewise, many of the foremost merchants appeared to have modified their business orientation or tried to diversify so as to spread risk. Likewise, during the French period some Antwerp business people, unlike the new immigrants, secured capital by investing or even speculating in real estate.⁴⁷ Moreover, in contrast to traditional Antwerp historiography, local business people were not only interested in protecting their money and investments, they also searched for alternatives and took risks during the Napoleonic Era.⁴⁸ These native business people relied on their experience and earlier business contacts to revise their business behaviour and to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances. Industrial investment patterns are a striking example. For example, investments in the previously flourishing textile industry were phased out, whereas the rising processing industries, such as sugar-refining, enjoyed renewed interest. This shift in investment patterns will be used to illustrate business adaption strategies.

By the 1790s the textile industry in Antwerp encountered difficulties. In 1801 cotton printers and manufacturers of mixed textile fabrics complained that political instability had curtailed their annual turnovers.⁴⁹ Five years later, in 1806, the number of cotton spinners and weavers had fallen by half. At the end of the French period, Antwerp's three huge calico printing manufacturers had shut their doors.⁵⁰ In contrast to developments in other textile centres, the port city's cotton textile business collapsed. Three explanations were presented for these developments. First, that the unstable political situation and the regime changes had wrought severe economic difficulties. Yet this was not a local phenomenon. Second, that Antwerp's cotton industry was technologically backward, despite available technological knowledge. This was linked to a third explanation: that the city's business classes had been unwilling to invest in its textile industry. Lis and Thijs have argued that Antwerp's capitalists were no longer interested in investing in

production activities; rather, they preferred to invest in trade and finance, which were considered more profitable, whereas small textile entrepreneurs had inadequate financial means to modernize.⁵¹ Lis and Thijs's arguments are compelling, yet one question remains: Who dominated the imports of raw cotton during these years? This is a central question, as involvement in the cotton trade would, at least hypothetically, have spurred interest in investing in the cotton industry.

According to the records of ship arrivals in 1805, only one Antwerp textile firm imported cotton wool and fibres via the port; the firm of De Heyder & Lombaerts, which imported raw cotton from Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Gouda. One partner, De Heyder, had contacts in Hamburg, Bordeaux, Dieppe, La Rochelle and Paris and delivered raw materials to cotton manufacturers in Ghent, Brussels and France.⁵² However, he was not involved in the direct maritime importing of raw cotton via the American ports. This trade was dominated by the previously mentioned American-German merchant companies. In 1806 and 1807 ships from America were still arriving in Antwerp; these arrangements, however, became much more difficult from the end of 1807 onwards, and traders and manufacturers suffered. Likewise, in Nantes and Hamburg the collapse of American imports paralysed the calico printing industries.⁵³ Smuggling raw cotton remained possible but was always risky, as De Heyder experienced when ships bearing commodities for his firm were embargoed in 1807.⁵⁴

De Heyder sold out to his partners in 1806. He subsequently used his stocks and the capital of his trading business to modernize his cotton plant in Lier, where, compared to Antwerp, wages were lower and real estate properties cheaper.⁵⁵ His trading partner, the widow Lombaerts, bought a sugar refinery in Antwerp that same year. Similarly, Jean François Vermoelen and the firm Janssens & Le Grelle, former shareholders in cotton business in Antwerp, now opted to specialize in the import of raw sugar and invested in the sugar-refining business. For example, in 1800 Jean Guillaume Le Grelle, then 66 years old, invested fresh capital in the sugar industry; he gave up textiles, and, together with his mother-in-law – the widow of Adriaan Janssens, who had ranked among the most important cotton printers in Antwerp in the second half of the eighteenth century – concentrated on importing colonial goods such as tea, coffee and sugar. The firm's change in commercial orientation was accompanied by reorientation in its production activities, which shifted from textiles to the sugar-refining business.⁵⁶ Vermoelen established a sugar refinery in 1812, the same year when the bankers Albert and Joseph Henri Cogels invested fresh capital in the sugar refinery Cogels, Koelman & Co.⁵⁷

Since early in the century, most of these Antwerp merchants had anticipated opportunities in importing raw sugar, before this particular commodity trade came to be dominated by foreign traders. Their willingness to invest in the sugar-refining business was stimulated by the growing shortage of

sugar on the European market and by the advantages of locating the industry in a harbour town. In the long term this was the logical consequence of ports beginning to specialize in processing industries that depended on sea access for the supply of raw materials. Existing refineries were expanded, and new refineries were established, individually or in collaboration with experienced refiners. Antwerp merchants also bought existing firms, taking advantage of unstable sugar imports that threatened smaller, less profitable refineries. The sugar business was soon booming thanks especially to the growing import of raw sugar and to the sales potentials afforded by French outlets.⁵⁸ The firm Cels Aerts & Co. saw profits rise from 8.9 to 17.4 per cent between 1800 and 1804; in the years from 1806 to 1808 its profits rose to 40 per cent, largely due to the growing disparity between the purchasing and the selling price (from 28.1 per cent in 1806 to 59.2 per cent in 1808).⁵⁹ Furthermore, the sugar-refining business, besides requiring less capital, fewer workers and less technological investment, since its businesses were small and operated in a traditional way, was also more remunerative. The sector was dominated by local businesses, and foreign firms and merchants showed little interest in the processing industries during these years.

These examples demonstrate that there was minimal resistance to reorientation and production investments in Antwerp. Antwerp business elites even renewed their interest in local industry, although they were no longer willing to invest in the city's textile business. These business people were generally attracted only temporarily to maritime trade. Foreigners who remained in Antwerp managed to survive the impediments imposed by the French regime via reliance on international contacts. Antwerpers, on the other hand, were keenly aware that they held advantages in locally embedded economic activities; this was especially so as competition from foreign merchants had been growing markedly in international trade. Local niches also offered favourable prospects to Antwerp's business people. Indeed, that local merchants and firms were deeply embedded and rooted in the vast local capital market often compensated for their initial backwardness in maritime trade.

Conclusion

Even before 1815, when the wars on the continent ended and normal maritime trade along the North Sea and the Atlantic re-emerged, changes in business orientation had already taken place in Antwerp, and these changes would initiate further developments. At the start of the century immigrants to Antwerp had seized upon opportunities to trade in the 'new' port town, supported by their experiences and networks abroad. These newly relocated merchants and firms were able to weather the Continental Blockade by using their international trading networks and by reconsidering their trade opportunities. As necessitated by the current situation, they relied on

relations abroad, travelled or delocalized their businesses, and speculated. Some managed to garner wealth, became members of the city's business elite and developed additional new commercial enterprises. Relations in their home country or elsewhere abroad would have greatly facilitated their entrance into Antwerp's commercial world, as well as aid them in circumventing blockades and trade prohibitions.

Antwerp's traditional business elite, despite being similarly keen to capitalize on the myriad new opportunities afforded by the Scheldt's reopening, were only moderately attracted to maritime trade. Some took advantage of French unification and endeavoured to explore the markets of port cities in France, Spain and Portugal; others, however, had more difficulty in adapting their commercial routes, and so confined themselves to familiar import channels via staple markets in the northern Netherlands. Confronted with stark competition from a varied, constantly changing group of immigrants, Antwerp's business people soon keenly appreciated the advantage of having strong roots in the local community. Their subsequent diversification and focus on local sectors were crucial to their surviving the difficult wartime years. In short, local elites cannot be faulted for their reluctance to specialize in international trade. Their successful reorientation from textiles to the sugar business, for instance, indicates that Antwerp's business people also adapted their business strategies.

These two different groups each made distinctive and valuable contributions to Antwerp's transformation process during the French period. These various merchants, traders and firms concentrated on areas where they could realize profits and availed themselves of relevant networks and connections. They acted from clear economic logic and were supported by acquaintances and associates. S.D. Chapman's research on Britain suggests certain fundamental similarities to the Antwerp model. For example, in Britain, particularly in Liverpool, foreign commission traders and agents with reliable contacts in their home countries controlled imports of raw cotton and exports of British textiles, whereas English firms controlled domestic textile production and local distribution.⁶⁰ In Le Havre, another harbour town that was expanding during this period, local business elites feared competition from recently arrived foreigners. Yet, as with Bordeaux and elsewhere, these local business elites would hold their own and remain successful.⁶¹

These patterns appear to have been reinforced by the continental wars, obliging business people to reconsider their business strategies. The examples discussed in this chapter demonstrate that different groups of business people were able to benefit commercially from the wartime situation and sought to bypass obstacles imposed by ongoing economic warfare. Yet, this is the story of the 'successful' ones. Many others faced further difficulties in adapting to the challenges embedded in economic warfare; they were forced to withdraw from business or even went bankrupt. Yet even these developments offered prospects for merchants and traders who were able to pursue

new product streams.⁶² In Antwerp, however, the major victim was the local community. Various factors, including social and economic instability, sharp price increases in consumption goods and unemployment caused by the collapse of the city's textile industry, rendered the average citizen's daily life insecure and without stable perspective. These working men and women found themselves disadvantaged not just by the policies of Napoleon but by the tactics and strategies now pursued by local capitalists.

Notes

1. Paul Bairoch, *Commerce extérieur et développement économique de l'Europe au 19e siècle* (Paris, 1976), 77; Ralph Davis, *The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade* (Leicester, 1979), 13–15; François Crouzet, (ed.), *Le négoce international, XIIIe–XXe siècles* (Paris, 1989).
2. The interest of historians for the effects of the war on economic development and behaviour is not new. See: François Crouzet, *L'économie britannique et le blocus continental, 1806–1813* (Paris, 1987), 2 vols, or Eric Aerts and François Crouzet, eds, *Economic Effects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Louvain, 1990). Especially in France recent research emphasizes the flexibility and adaptability of businessmen. A good overview is Silvia Marzagalli, 'Le négoce maritime et la rupture révolutionnaire: un ancien débat revisité', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française* 352 (2008): 183–9.
3. After the fall of Antwerp in 1585, the estuary of the Scheldt came under the control of the northern Netherlands. This meant that seaworthy ships could no longer sail directly to Antwerp. Instead, their cargoes had to be loaded onto smaller vessels under the control of the northern Netherlands. Bruno Blondé and Harald Deceulaer, 'The Port of Antwerp and Its Hinterland: Port Traffic, Urban Economies and Government Policies in the 17th and 18th Centuries', in *Maritime Industries and Public Intervention*, ed. Randi Ertesvag (Stavanger, 2002), 21–44.
4. See for instance Jonathan Brown and Mary B. Rose, eds, *Entrepreneurship, Networks and Modern Business* (Manchester, 1993); the various essays on 'Réseaux marchands' in *Annales, Histoire, Sciences sociales* 58 (2003): 569–674; or Margrit Schulte Beerbühl and Jörg Vögele, eds, *Spinning the Commercial Web: International Trade, Merchants, and Commercial Cities, c.1640–1939* (Frankfurt, 2004).
5. Herman Van der Wee, 'The Industrial Revolution in Belgium', in *The Industrial Revolution in National Context. Europe and the USA*, ed. Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge, 1996), 64–77; Hilde Greefs, Bruno Blondé and Peter Clark, 'The Growth of Urban Industrial Regions: Belgian Developments in Comparative Perspective, 1750–1850', in *Towns, Industries and Regions: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c.1700–1840*, ed. N. Raven and J. Stobart (New York, 2005), 210–27.
6. Catharina Lis, *Social Change and the Labouring Poor: Antwerp, 1770–1860* (New Haven, 1986), 17–23.
7. For structural developments, see Karel Veraghtert, 'From Inland Port to International Port: 1790–1914', in *Antwerp, a Port for All Seasons*, ed. Gustaaf Asaert et al. (Antwerp, 1986), 274–422.
8. For a recent overview of the impact of Napoleon on Antwerp, see *Bonaparte aan de Schelde: Antwerpen in een Franse stroomversnelling*, ed. Jan Parmentier (Antwerp, 2013).

9. Karel Degryse, 'The Aristocratization of the Antwerp Mercantile Elite (17th–18th Century)', in *Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship in Early Modern Times. Merchants and Industrialists within the Orbit of the Dutch Staple Market*, ed. Clé Lesger and Leo Noordegraaf (Den Haag, 1995), 35–40.
10. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, 'Restructuring the Urban Textile Industries in Brabant and Flanders during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', in *Textiles of the Low Countries in European Economic History*, ed. Erik Aerts and John Munro (Louvain, 1990), 105–13.
11. Karel Degryse, *De Antwerpse fortuinen: kapitaalsaccumulatie, -investering en -rendement te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw* (Antwerp, 2005).
12. As for instance the diamond trader James Dormer in the early eighteenth century. Tijn Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants* (London, 2011), 67–94.
13. Hilde Greefs, 'Exploiting International Webs of Relations: Immigrants and the Reopening of the Harbour of Antwerp on the Eve of the Nineteenth Century', in *Trade, Migration and Urban Networks in Port Cities, c.1640–1940*, ed. Adrian Jarvis and Robert Lee (Newfoundland, 2008), 81–107.
14. Poussou noticed the same migration patterns in Bordeaux. Jean Pierre Poussou, 'Faut-il parler d'une autonomie des mouvements migratoires? L'exemple de Bordeaux à la fin du premier Empire (1809–1813)', in *Immigration et société urbaine en Europe occidentale XVIe–XXe siècles*, ed. Etienne François (Paris, 1985), 26–9.
15. See also François Crouzet, 'Wars, Blockade, and Economic Change in Europe, 1792–1815', *The Journal of Economic History* 24 (1964): 567–88. Stanley Chapman, *Merchant Enterprise in Britain. From the Industrial Revolution to World War I* (Cambridge, 1992).
16. Karel Veraghtert, 'The Antwerp Port, 1790–1814', in *The Interactions of Amsterdam and Antwerp with the Baltic Region. De Nederlanden en het Oostzeegebied, 1400–1800*, ed. W.J. Wieringa et al. (Leiden, 1983), 193–9.
17. Douglas North, 'The United States Balance of Payments, 1790–1860', in *Trends in American Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1960), 580–5; Silvia Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards de la fraude': le négoce maritime et le Blocus continental, 1806–1813, *Bordeaux, Hambourg, Livourne* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1999), 77, 91, 97; and especially idem, 'Establishing Transatlantic Trade Networks in Time of War: Bordeaux and the United States, 1793–1815', *Business History Review* 79 (2005): 811–44.
18. Karel Veraghtert, 'The Port of Antwerp and America, 1790–1900', in *Global Crossroads and The American Seas*, ed. Clark Reynolds (Missoula, MT, 1988), 58.
19. 'Etat des Bâtimens français et étrangers entrés au port d'Anvers', *Journal du Commerce d'Anvers* (Antwerp, 1805 and 1810).
20. A merchant of Philadelphia, *Memoirs and Auto-biography of Some of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia, with a Fair Estimate of Their Estates – Founded upon a Knowledge of Facts* (Philadelphia, s.a.), appendix, Jacob Ridgway, 1767–1843.
21. See also Marzagalli, 'Establishing', 832–4.
22. National Archives, Philadelphia, RG 36 US Customs Service, Collector of customs at Philadelphia, Outward Foreign Entries, 1789–1897, box 1718 (1802), 28 October 1802.
23. State Archives, Antwerp, Provincial Archives Antwerp, series J, nr. 217/B, map Ridgway.
24. Marzagalli, 'Establishing', 839–41.
25. Vincent Nolte, *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres* (New York, 1854), 80–1.

26. Marten Buist, *At spes non fracta: Hope & co., 1770–1815. Merchant Bankers and Diplomats at Work* (Den Haag, 1974), 187, 290–6, 311–14.
27. Philip Walters and Raymond Walters, 'The American Career of David Parish', *The Journal of Economic History* 4 (1944): 151.
28. Stanley Chapman, *The Rise of Merchant Banking* (London, 1984), 11, 40.
29. Buist, *At spes*, 316–20.
30. Archives nationales, Paris, F/12, Commerce et Industrie/608, Port d'Anvers, 1807–10, Navires américaines, letter of David Parish to the ministre of Finance, 9 June 1810.
31. B. De Jouvenel, *Napoléon et l'économie dirigée: Le Blocus continental* (Brussel, 1942), 347–55; Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards', 77, 91, 97.
32. Richard Ehrenberg, *Das Haus Parish in Hamburg* (Jena, 1925), 116; Nolte, *Fifty Years*, 162–3; Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, 'Crossing the Channel: Nathan Mayer Rothschild and His Trade with the Continent during the Early Years of the Blockades (1803–1808)', *The Rothschild Archives: Review, 2007–2008* (London, 2008), 44–6.
33. George Wilson, *Stephen Girard: America's First Tycoon* (Pennsylvania, 1995), 265–7, 277–8; Townsend Ward, 'Second Street and the Second Street Road and Their Associations', *The Pennsylvania Magazine* 4 (1880): 405.
34. *Mémoires and Auto-biography*, appendix Jacob Ridgway; 'The Diaries of Sidney George Fisher, 1857–1858', *Pennsylvania Magazine* 86 (1963): 467.
35. De Jouvenel, *Napoléon*, 347–55.
36. Hilde Greefs, 'Un rêve abruptement interrompu. Illusions et désillusions dans le milieu d'affaires sous le régime napoléonien et les stratégies d'une "nouvelle" élite orientée vers le marché international à Anvers', in *L'Empire napoléonien. Une expérience européenne ?*, ed. François Antoine et al. (Paris, 2014), 360–75.
37. Roland Demoulin, *Guillaume Ier et la transformation économique des Provinces Belges (1815–1830)* (Liège, 1938), 402–4.
38. State Archives, Antwerp, Provincial Archives Antwerp, J 184/B, Observations. Deuxième semaine November 1811.
39. Roger Dufraisse, 'Contrebandiers Normands sur les bords du Rhin à l'époque Napoléonienne', in idem, *L'Allemagne à l'époque Napoléonienne: Questions d'histoire politique, économique et sociale. Etudes de Roger Dufraisse réunies à l'occasion de son 70e anniversaire par l'Institut Historique Allemand de Paris* (Berlijn, 1992), 209–11; Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards', 100.
40. Archives nationales, Paris, F/7, *Police générale* 8008, file 59 (Jean Donnet); *ibid.*, 8016, file 16 (Jean Baptiste Gaudoit) and file 220 (Eugène Rymenans).
41. With the exception of Jean Donnet, the others were member of the Chamber in Commerce early after their arrival: Ridgway (1803–09), Parish (1803–10), Dirven (1803–04) and Thuret (1810–13).
42. Greefs, 'Un rêve'.
43. Degryse, *De Antwerpse*, appendix, Ia–b.
44. Of a total of 265 ships in 1805, 180 came from the Atlantic coast, especially from French ports (157), but also from Spain and Portugal (23). Veraghtert, 'The Port', 58.
45. By the time of the wars the importance of Bordeaux as a transshipment port for colonial commodities weakened and went to ports such as Lisbon, but also Hamburg, Copenhagen and Triëste. Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards', 94–6; Crouzet, 'Wars', 568–9.
46. State Archives, Antwerp, Provincial Archives Antwerp, J 204/B, Licenses.

47. Hilde Greefs, 'Les tensions sur le marché du logement à Anvers, dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle: Une opportunité d'investissement pour l'élite des affaires', *Articulo: Revue de sciences humaines* 1 (2009): 1–15.
48. See for example: Guillaume Beeteme, *Antwerpen, moederstad van handel en kunst*, 3 vols (Antwerp, 1892–93), vol. 2, 14; Karel Jeuninckx, 'De verhouding van de haven van Antwerpen tegenover deze van Amsterdam en Rotterdam tijdens het Verenigd Koninkrijk', *Mededelingen van de Marine Academie van België* 11 (1958–59): 156–7.
49. State Archives Antwerp, Provincial Archives, J 222/B, Manufactures et Fabriques. Etat général des manufactures et fabriques existant dans le département des Deux Nèthes, an IX (1801).
50. Alfons Thijs, 'Schets van de ontwikkeling der katoennijverheid te Antwerpen (1753–1813)', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 53 (1970): 183–4.
51. Lis, *Social*, 17–26; Alfons Thijs, *Van 'werkwinkel' tot 'fabriek': De textielnijverheid te Antwerpen (einde 15de-begin 19de eeuw)* (Brussel, 1986), 216–17.
52. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Een groot bedrijf in een kleine stad: De firma De Heyder en Co te Lier, 1757–1834* (Lier, 1987), 43.
53. Crouzet, 'Wars', 570–2.
54. Lis and Soly, *Een groot*, 43.
55. Lis and Soly, *Een groot*, 46–51, 118–20.
56. From the business records of the firm, it is possible to see that the trade and printing of cotton was reduced, while sugar import and production increased with the reopening of the Scheldt. Degryse, *De Antwerpse*, appendix VIII, 1–2.
57. State Archives, Antwerp, Notarial Records Antwerp, N 1164, Charles Rutgeerts, nr. 275 (19 October 1812); Helma Houtman-De Smedt, 'Korte historische schets van de suikerraffinaderij "Cels, Aerts en Co" (1760–1806) en van haar latere evolutie (1806–1951)', *Liber Amicorum K. Van Isacker*, special issue of *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 63 (1980): 306.
58. S. Peeters, 'Antwerpens zoete verleden. Historische schets van de suikerhandel en -nijverheid tot en met de negentiende eeuw', Master's thesis (University of Louvain, 1983), 98, 225.
59. Houtman-De Smedt, 'Korte', 303–4.
60. Chapman, *Merchant*, 15, 51–6, 68–70.
61. Louis Bergeron, 'Permanences et renouvellement du patronat', in *Histoire des français, 19e–20e*, ed. Yves Lequin, 3 vols (Paris, 1984), vol. 2, 153–292; Marzagalli, 'Le négoce'.
62. See for example, Charles A. Jones, *International Business in the Nineteenth Century: The Rise and Fall of a Cosmopolitan Bourgeoisie* (Brighton, 1987), 2, 27–8; Marzagalli, 'Les boulevards', 249–57.

14

Riga Export Trade at the Time of the Continental Blockade (1807–1812)

Anita Čerpinska

By the end of the Great Northern War, Russia emerged a Baltic power. Riga became a Russian city in 1710 when it capitulated to the Russian army. As a consequence of the Treaty of Nystad in 1721, Riga was incorporated into the Empire as the administrative centre of the Vidzeme Government and became an important stronghold in the Russian frontier. After the city recovered from the dual destruction of the war and the Black Death, it experienced considerable growth due to the almost uninterrupted increase in trade. In 1809 Vidzeme Professor Johann Petri of the Erfurt Grammar school described Riga:

Trade brings wealth and life to Riga ... Money calls, it allures and draws one here ... One can easily go broke here and prosper with the same ease ... Most people spend all they earn and choose a way of life whereby they can barely make both ends meet. Only some plan ahead and put aside some money to be able to survive later: they count on the endless stream of trade that brings them its treasures from day to day ... Everyone can earn money with ease unless they are stripped of reason, competence and knowledge. Money is easily the cheapest commodity, and one worries little about the future.¹

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Baltic Sea comprised 85 per cent of Russia's foreign trade.² Despite privileges granted to St Petersburg to develop its status as an imperial port, Riga remained Russia's second largest export port to western states. By 1800 Riga, with a population of roughly 30,000 inhabitants, supported a substantial amount of Russia's export trade. Commercial growth since 1750 generated a demand for labour in the city, and consequently in the summer season Riga attracted workers from neighbouring regions. Every year the city attracted new residents, and during exceptionally favourable conditions the number of incomers could make up even one-third of the total number of city inhabitants.

Before 1806 Riga encompassed 20 per cent of Russia's export in the Baltic Sea and 20 to 24 per cent worth of Russia's total export. The Daugava River region played a significant role in ensuring the well-being of Riga since the export goods came to the city down the river. Prior to 1806 two-thirds of Riga's export goods comprised of the so-called 'technical crops': hemp, flax, linseed (for sowing and oil) and hempseed. If 10 to 15 per cent of Riga's export comprised of crop products, about as much consisted of timber. In some years Riga provided more than half of the corn, flax, hempseed and linseed and 30 per cent of the hemp and timber that Russia exported. In the time period from the 1760s until 1800 the amount of export goods (flax, hemp, linseed and spars) brought to Riga from Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and other inner-Russian territories continued to increase.³ The last decades of the eighteenth century also saw an increase in the prices of export flax and hemp indicating stable demand.

As an importer Riga remained a local centre covering only 5 per cent of Russia's imports as it supplied imported goods to the neighbouring areas of Kurzeme and Vidzeme and to some extent Lithuanian and Belarus territories. The principal imported goods invariably were salt (20 per cent of the import of Riga) and herring. The inner-Russian governments provided little salt to the Baltic region, and the territory of present-day Latvia depended on foreign salt deliveries.

The main Russian export goods from St Petersburg included bread, iron, hemp and flax. The amount of technical crops and half-processed materials in the export had gradually increased since the 1770s and they constituted two-thirds of Russian exports, whereas corn products formed one-fifth of exports in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is important to note that the field of export trade was almost equally divided between England and Russia, and in some years English merchants' share of Russia's exports was bigger than that of the local merchants.⁴ Thus, in the years between 1802 and 1804 Russia's ports were visited by 2100 English ships (20.1 per cent of the total number of ships), and their total storage capacity was 217,503 lasts, or 37.7 per cent of the total tonnage.⁵

To a great extent, life in Riga depended on trade. A large portion of the burghers of Riga engaged in commerce, whereas the common people laboured in the port or warehouses and transit trade. Historians estimate that up to 20 per cent of the residents of Riga were involved in trade.⁶ Otto Hoon, a local doctor, wrote,

Trade is highly respected here. Many people of different classes, unrelenting activity, joint application of forces and means bring about reflection on the value of trade, on increasing of the common good with the help of trade and on the influence of trade on the arts and sciences. Trade is a creative force that turns the local sandy meadows into merry fields and

gardens, which brought Riga city to a blooming state, which feeds and spreads the arts and sciences and which brought Vidzeme out of a wild and barbaric state ...⁷

Russian regulations in Riga forbade foreigners to trade among themselves, therefore Riga burghers were mostly involved as middlemen. The Manifest of 1807 enabled foreigners to gain residency in Russia as well as the rights of a Riga burgher. Riga merchants specialized in exports of certain goods and several dozens of wealthy merchants held up to 80 per cent of the turnover. In most cases, they bought export goods from suppliers and sold them to representatives of the Western European companies engaged in export. The family of Barclay de Tolly was one of the leading families in Riga's timber trade and Russian Field Marshal Michael Barclay de Tolly, who became War Minister in 1810, devoted much attention to fortifying Riga against possible attack by Napoleon.

According to the Riga Trade Law of 1765, all the principal export goods in Riga had to be sorted, weighed or measured, and packed. All goods entering the city by barge or by road had to be inspected, weighed, sorted and stored.⁸ This ensured earnings for Riga merchants and auxiliary workers though it delayed the turnover of goods and increased prices. In addition, the city collected various duties for the state or itself – export duty, duty from vehicles, duty for the benefit of the city weighing room, duty for trade agents, duty for auxiliary workers, duty for destitute people and so on. Thus, the well-being of the entire city depended heavily on commerce. For the duration of the eighteenth century the value of Riga's exports exceeded by several times over its imports in bringing wealth to the city, promoting Riga's reputation as an expensive and lavish city.

Implementation of the Continental Blockade

As in Russia generally, the Continental Blockade in Riga was implemented at the end of 1807. On 17 November 1807, the Riga Stock Exchange published and enforced the *ukase* (proclamation by the tsar that had the force of law) of Tsar Alexander I regarding the break in relations with England that had transpired on 7 November 1807.⁹ From 11 November to 13 November, 49 ships managed to leave Riga; 41 of them were English.¹⁰ Most of them carried goods (hemp, flax, linseed) purchased by English companies and departed straight for the English ports. The *ukase* provided for creating a special Liquidation Commission in Riga that was subject to the Liquidation Commission of St Petersburg. The Commission consisted of the Riga military governor, a town councillor, a court councillor, a guild alderman and two local merchants.¹¹ In March 1808 John Mitchell and William Cumming – representatives chosen by the English – joined the Riga Commission.

The Riga Liquidation Commission was responsible for implementing the embargo. These tasks included the sequestration of English ships and goods and handing over perishable goods for public trade. Along with reviewing the complaints of foreign and Russian merchants related to imposing the embargo, the Commission gathered information on the English in the city, their shares and bills in the Russian Empire. It also gathered information on the claims of Russian subjects against the English outside Russia who did not have offices or properties in Russia. The Riga Liquidation Commission was responsible for goods not only in the port of Riga but also in the ports of Tallinn, Haapsalu, Ventspils and Liepāja.

After 14 December 1807 it was forbidden to buy or take as a pledge English immovable and non-goods property.¹² People whose companies had English shares or bills were to inform the Riga Liquidation Commission, a practice that only began in May 1808. An order to stop business with English goods and properties was sent by the trade court to notaries, timber graders, measurers, carrier and scale supervisors, hemp scutchers and carriers of salt and wine.¹³

The English had to submit information to the Commission regarding their properties in the territory of Russia. Although they did not hurry to submit their statements, those who wanted to leave Russia were forced to submit them in order to receive travel documents. Following the publication of the *ukase*, English merchants registered in Riga filed a claim with the trade court. They were willing to present their goods, but only if they were considered as guests that had immunity granted to their personal property by Russia.¹⁴ Their claim did not go further than the board of the Vidzeme government, but the English were soon excluded from Russia's list of 'guests', and the money they had deposited went to the Riga Liquidation Commission.¹⁵

Table 14.1 presents a review of goods sequestered at storehouses at the port. It was prepared by the Riga port customs and submitted to the Riga Liquidation Commission in February 1808. Timber represents the greatest portion of the goods. Technical crops made up a comparatively small proportion of the confiscated goods. Russian merchants submitted purchasing documents to the Riga Liquidation Commission for some of the goods. If payments had been made before the embargo had been imposed, the Riga Liquidation Commission made the decision to give the goods to the claimant.¹⁶ If the goods in Russia were ordered by the English, the Riga Liquidation Commission charged to the claimant a certain percentage of the cost of the goods for removing the sequester and added the money to its budget.¹⁷

By 1810 Russia started to hastily secure its western border for the impending war against Napoleon. At that moment it turned out that there was not enough timber in Riga and its expense and added costs associated with delivery would mean additional expenditures for the state and require lots of time. For this reason, in the summer of 1810 the War Ministry made the decision to take over the timber (particularly logs and oak wood) sequestered from the English in Riga and use it for the construction of city fortifications.¹⁸

Table 14.1 Companies – owners of the goods sequestrated in Riga

Company	Registered as 'guests' in Riga	Goods (in RBL)	
		Timber	Technical crops
John Morrison	John Morrison	16,204	493
Mitchell & Co.	John Mitchell	4353	0
Hay, Pierson & Co.	James Pierson, Robert Hay	1314	0
Cumming, Fenton & Co.	John Cumming, Patric Cumming, William Cumming	5652	0
Renny, Petri & Co.	Georg Renny, William Petrie	1068	0
Ramsay & Garry	James Ramsay, Nicholas Garry	1991	0
Hill Jacobi & Co.	James Hill, J.M. Jacobi	402	843
Caesar Corsellis	Caesar Corsellis	1201	879
Total		32,185	2215

Source: LSHA, Fund 673, Entry 1, File 241, 106–34.

The Course of the Continental Blockade

Although general historical accounts of Riga assert the considerable negative influence of the Continental Blockade on the city's trade, very little special research has been carried out regarding the Blockade and its consequences. In fact, only a few publications by specialists of commercial history address the period.¹⁹ Other research examines Riga's trade at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries or the history of trade professions. Thus, there are more questions than answers about exports from Riga during the time of the Continental Blockade.

There are a few mathematical indicators that show the general tendencies. As an example, one could mention the number of ships coming to the port of Riga and the value of the exported goods, as shown in Table 14.2. When analysing this data it must be taken into consideration that the value was assessed in assignation rubles, therefore the exchange fluctuations (for example in 1811) are reflected in the decrease or increase of value. Besides, the customs officials in Riga did not keep strict records of the incoming ships, especially those with ballast. Regardless of these facts, there was a considerable decrease in the number of incoming ships during the time of the Continental Blockade. This cannot be said about the value of export – it saw a considerable decrease only in 1808 (just like in the whole of Russia) but increased in other years.

A different picture unfolds when looking at the amount of Riga's key export goods that were shipped abroad during the Continental Blockade in comparison to the five years prior to the Blockade, as shown in Table 14.3.

Table 14.2 Dynamics of Riga export trade, 1801–17

Year	Number of incoming ships	Export value (in thousands RBL)
1801	1006	14,324
1802	1128	12,531
1803	1178	11,872
1804	1151	12,167
1805	2096	16,513
1806	2016	15,547
1807	1154	11,525
1808	284	5882
1809	745	19,596
1810	436	10,293
1811	372	9809
1812	553	17,852
1813	637	16,352
1814	765	27,943
1815	899	28,120
1816	947	15,899
1817	1774	71,399

Source: LSHA, Fund 4038, Entry 2, File 1074a, leaf 182.

Table 14.3 Riga exports (average data per year in thousands of units)

Period	Hemp Flax		Linseed		Corn	Potash	Logs	Spars
	<i>Ship pounds</i>		<i>For sowing</i>	<i>For oil</i>	<i>Lasts</i>	<i>Ship pounds</i>	<i>Pieces</i>	
			<i>Barrels</i>					
1801–06	120.3	65.9	50.2	103.1	45.4	1.63	34.2	4.83
1807–12	109.2	51.4	21.8	74	7.9	1.67	10	1.44

Source: Дорошенко, *Торговля Риги*, 27.

Here, a decrease in the export amounts of almost all goods can be observed, but it is the most apparent for timber and corn. Although interrupted relations with England and the disturbance in trade caused by economic warfare decreased the amount of exported corn, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the amount of Russia's corn export fluctuated because years of rich and poor harvests followed each other repeatedly. Also, the demand for corn in the European market remained unstable. During

the Continental Blockade, Russia experienced state-imposed restrictions on bread export. It is significant that the price of corn in the Riga market did not fall sharply because the territory of Latvia experienced several poor harvests during the Continental Blockade. Also, the country nobility preferred to use part of the corn for distilling spirits; therefore, there was a shortage of corn in the market.

The timber trade was the most disrupted by the Continental Blockade, but not only because of the English embargo. Contracts about the export of timber were concluded several years in advance to accumulate a sufficient amount of timber in the storehouses since deliveries by water and road were not reliable and often late.²⁰ Timber from the most distant governments arrived in Riga no sooner than in the second year after their harvest. Additional expenses in transit and storage could not be avoided, so merchants often took loans to cover the expenses associated with the timber trade. This investment usually paid for itself as timber brought great profit. Due to loans, customs and transporting expenses, foreigners paid for exported timber six times as much as the initial purchase price. For example, in 1800, 100 spars cost 900 silver rubles when harvested but still in the forest, yet they cost a foreign merchant 3390 silver rubles by the time they arrived in Riga. With the existing trade restrictions, the big timber merchants did not know how much timber they would be able to sell; therefore, it was complicated to determine how much timber should be purchased. Right after the beginning of the Continental Blockade there appeared a surplus in timber and prices fell sharply. Due to the decline in shipping as a result of the Blockade, the surplus of certain kinds of timber recurred also in the following years.²¹

The decrease in the export amounts of flax and hemp is also obvious although not that considerable. This can be explained by the long tradition of flax and hemp export in Riga. Before and after the Continental Blockade, Riga surpassed other Russian ports in the amount of exported flax. Flax from Riga was superior in quantity and quality; it was reputed to be the best flax exported from Russia. The constant demand for flax in Riga permitted several governments (Vidzeme, Pskov and Smolensk) to specialize in growing flax, and for many people in these regions, flax was the primary source of their living. There was constant demand in the European market for the relatively cheap Russian flax that this country could supply in great amounts. 'Who knows not the famous flax of Riga?', exclaims Petri in his description of Vidzeme.²² The principal port for hemp export remained St Petersburg, but one-third of the total amount of hemp passed through Riga where it was brought from more distant governments within inner Russia. Hemp was also in constant demand in the European market because ships needed hemp ropes and tows.

When looking at the recipients of Riga's export goods before and after the Continental Blockade, as shown in Table 14.4, one can see that prior to the

Blockade, England was a pronounced leader, followed by Denmark, Holland and the German states. The 10.3 per cent share of Riga's export market attributed to England during the Continental Blockade is actually formed by the exports of 1807 and 1812 when the Continental Blockade was either not yet implemented or no longer observed. During the years of the Continental Blockade, the United States became the biggest purchaser of Riga's goods instead of England. In certain years it was the biggest buyer of hemp, linseed, potash and iron. By the end of the Continental Blockade, England resumed its place as the dominant buyer. It is possible, of course, that trade with the United States provided a cover for ongoing trade with England. There are several references that suggest that due to its location, Riga played a significant role in illegal trade with England during the Continental Blockade.²³ For example, it was no secret in St Petersburg that sailing in the Baltic Sea (controlled by the Royal Navy) was almost impossible without a licence from the English government. It is possible that many ships that were supposedly en route to Sweden (especially Gothenburg, known as an English smuggling centre) and North America were in fact headed to England with the usual Russian goods. This view is reinforced when one considers that the number of ships officially heading to Gothenburg was near 200 in 1812 but only 20 in 1813.²⁴

Before the Continental Blockade, Sweden was an active buyer of hemp and rye, but at the time of the Blockade it extended its interest to timber and flax. Also, the role of Holland in Riga's export increased, and in 1810, for example, exports to Holland constituted half of the total export amount. In the years before the Continental Blockade, Holland purchased a comparatively small part of Riga's hemp and flax in contrast to purchases of corn and timber. During the Continental Blockade, however, the Dutch together with the Americans became the main purchasers of flax and hemp.

Analysing the amounts of export by year, we can see that there was a considerable drop in the exports of all the principal export goods in the beginning of the Continental Blockade, as shown in Table 14.5, whereas the export of some goods – flax, linseed and hemp – set records in 1809. For example, 856,000 poods of hemp were exported to Holland, 734,000 poods of hemp were exported to the United States and 215,000 poods of hemp were exported to Italy. Other goods saw no such increase. The export

Table 14.4 Countries – recipients of Riga export goods (per cent of the total amount)

Period	England	Holland	France	Spain	Portugal	Sweden	Denmark	German states	America
1801–06	35.6	12.5	2	7.8	6.4	7.3	15.9	12.1	0
1807–12	10.3	17.8	0.3	5.5	3	26.1	3	8	23.7

Source: Дорошенко, *Торговля Риги*, 28.

of corn, timber and hempseeds underwent a steady crisis that lasted for the duration of the Continental Blockade. Export of timber almost stopped in 1808 and 1809. In other years it existed only due to the purchases of a few countries: in 1810, Holland and Prussia and in 1811, Holland and Sweden.

On one hand, fluctuations in the prices of goods have not been studied sufficiently so far. Provisional data indicates no fall in prices for some of the principal export goods at Riga Customs. On the other hand, difficulties with selling more expensive kinds of timber have been noted. For instance, due to the large supply of spars, customers did not want to pay the price listed by the merchants.

Meanwhile, prices in Riga's local market during the Continental Blockade have barely been studied and cannot be analysed.²⁵ It is clear that a general increase in the price of corn and corn products in the local market took place in 1805. It reached the highest point in the first half of 1808 after which prices fell gradually. A similar increase of prices in the beginning of the Continental Blockade can also be observed for other goods, like salted fish and butter. The impact of the Continental Blockade on the local market remains ambiguous. For example, salt experienced a considerable increase in price; its price rose several times in 1808 compared to the six years before the Continental Blockade.²⁶ This was caused by the substantial drop in salt imports, which was especially striking at the beginning of the Blockade. Salt import returned to pre-Blockade levels only after 1812, as shown by Table 14.6. The steps the Russian government took to provide the Baltic region with salt and its attempts to step up production of salt locally had little effect on the salt crisis in the Baltic. During the War of 1812, Riga's military government tried to prevent Riga salt from reaching Kurzeme, an area occupied by Napoleon's army. As a result, there was a shortage of salt, and its price rose so high that common people could not afford it. Salt became rare and valuable, an object for barter and begging.²⁷

In the local market, Riga's principal export goods – hemp and flax – experienced a temporary fall in prices in the first half of 1808 – about one-fourth compared to the average indicators of the previous years. This was due to the fact that in 1808 supply to Riga of some sorts of flax and hemp remained at the level of previous years, whereas the amount of exports fell considerably. Relations between the local market and the Continental Blockade are a matter for separate study since most of the export goods arrived in Riga in transit from inner-Russian governments. Thus, price fluctuations in the local market might not be related to the Continental Blockade. There are some references available, for example the memoirs of a Kurzeme landlord, Ulrich Schlippenbach, which indicate increased poverty in Kurzeme during the trade ban.²⁸ In 1810 the Kurzeme nobility turned to the government with complaints about the damage caused by the export ban, but as of yet there are no studies regarding this topic.

Table 14.5 Export via Riga

Year	Corn										Timber			
	Flax	Hemp	Linseed for sowing	Oil linseed	Hempseed	Wheat	Rye	Barley	Oat	Round timber	Boards	Logs	Oakwood	
	poods	poods	chetverts	chetverts	chetverts	chetverts	chetverts	chetverts	chetverts	chetverts	pieces	pieces	pieces	
1800	687	758	8	63	11	57	30	1	0	9	35	41	98	
1801	494	1293	20	24	4	130	272	21	45	5	13	25	48	
1802	461	846	38	39	15	53	384	101	49	6	63	32	140	
1803	590	926	36	74	20	33	407	79	38	6	144	33	88	
1804	823	1053	48	107	12	90	228	30	3	8	139	49	73	
1805	828	960	39	100	21	232	838	52	14	2	163	30	90	
1806	675	976	16	49	20	48	887	19	1	3	132	40	63	
1807	684	1122	14	59	3	17	182	0	32	6	37	34	102	
1808	416	740	10	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	5	
1809	773	2448	35	61	0	2	0	0	0	0	9	0	42	
1810	455	815	5	75	0	26	57	6	0	0	7	3	17	
1811	247	589	14	22	0	13	86	9	0	2	10	16	32	
1812	498	614	7	31	0	19	236	37	5	0	5	4	12	
1813	394	252	31	26	0	16	117	26	47	1	57	10	11	
1814	563	490	32	57	12	5	209	11	0	2	89	31	47	
1815	404	664	43	34	4	16	120	15	19	3	136	31	71	
1816	203	331	2	42	5	29	176	26	0	2	23	21	47	
1817	594	564	54	104	22	136	997	102	140	4	80	16	26	
1818	549	782	48	81	9	82	283	153	369	4	132	22	30	

Source: Grasmane, *Daugava un Rīgas eksports*, table 2.

Table 14.6 Salt imports (in lasts)

Year	Type of salt				Price in Riga	
	Spanish	French	Coarse salt from Liverpool	Table salt from Liverpool	Number of loads	(kopecks for pound)
1800	2859	0	1042	1903	73	2 to 4
1801	217	964	997	4509	95	3 to 4
1802	6591	1402	1045	5459	198	2 to 4
1803	5320	151	1025	3520	156	1.5 to 2
1804	2991	151	726	2954	102	2
1805	4055	373	938	5986	153	no data
1806	2207	205	824	7495	142	2
1807	2914	94	780	5718	119	2 to 3
1808	281	38	25	320	16	3 to 35
1809	2208	847	0	1639	56	8.5 to 35
1810	1148	0	48	1148	63	no data
1811	1253	0	0	1367	54	no data
1812	553	88	94	1754	42	no data
1813	3005	0	798	7300	191	no data
1814	2321	478	777	2518	96	no data
1815	4873	293	671	4888	152	no data
1816	7437	922	316	1096	139	no data
1817	4000	487	91	1017	94	no data
1818	5438	1019	740	2589	157	no data

Source: LSHA, Fund 1858, Entry 1, Files 602–3.

Social Consequences of the Continental Blockade

Among the common people, the ones who suffered the most during the Continental Blockade were those employed in the declining professions related to timber and corn preparation for export and those related to processing and storing the incoming commercial goods bound for England. These included spar and oak wood graders, salt carriers, and salt and corn measurers. Spar graders tried to solve their livelihood problems by breaching the restrictions of their occupation. Although prohibited by Riga trade regulations, they tried selling the timber they graded. They also objected to expectations that they contribute to such public works as cutting ice in the Daugava River, which the Riga Town Council tried to impose on them.²⁹ It should be mentioned that at the end of the eighteenth century some spar

graders had acceded to the ranks of merchants. For many, however, their savings were not sufficient to survive the crisis caused by the Continental Blockade. Thus, the brothers Muizeli were forced to declare bankruptcy after they faced the combined problems of declining trade due to the Continental Blockade, the requisition of timber for Riga's fortifications and the burning of the timber to prevent it from falling into the hands of the French in 1812.³⁰ Corn measurers also asked in 1811 to be given partial responsibilities of other crafts as they could not make a living because of the decline in the corn trade.³¹

One of the indicators demonstrating the decline in the prosperity and status of trade crafts at the time of the Continental Blockade is the drop in the number of construction plans submitted for approval. Before the Continental Blockade those involved in trade crafts often renovated or enlarged their homes as well as built new ones. During the Continental Blockade, however, only a few construction plans were submitted to the town council.³²

Riga's officials sought to help depressed trade workers. For example, in spring 1809 timber transporters requested an increase in their service rates, and officials satisfied the request based on worries that the transporters struggling with the economy might quit their occupation prior to the time when barges arrived in Riga.³³ During the spring of 1809 the city authorities asked the governor to relieve the trade unions of the duty of artillery maintenance because they had difficulties earning their living and could not leave their workplace.³⁴ Prior to the Blockade, flax and hemp scutchers employed up to 300 workers in summer. During the Continental Blockade the demand for day hands diminished dramatically, and consequently their total wages decreased and they were periodically underemployed, especially during the summer of 1808.³⁵ During the Continental Blockade, however, the city authorities paid great attention to state purchases from merchants and commercial transactions between merchants themselves to ensure they followed the traditional procedures in processing goods in Riga that employed the underemployed flax and hemp scutchers. Thus, both trade workers and the City Treasury continued to receive their share of the profit following such commercial transactions.³⁶

The decrease in merchants' income and disturbances in the market caused a chain reaction in city finances. Thus, in the middle of 1808 there was a considerable decrease in income for the Riga City Treasury and a subsequent lack of gold or bullion.³⁷ Starting from April 1808 the Riga Town Council recorded complaints regarding its inability to perform its basic functions, let alone cover emergency expenses, due to the sharp decrease of income.³⁸ Shortfalls of coinage in the city were also apparent in other years of the Continental Blockade, therefore merchants created a special commission to address this dilemma.³⁹ The commission sought to develop a plan that would use mortgage bonds or banknotes to replace gold and bullion in

commercial exchanges and relations. The problem of reliability, however, dominated these discussions without a clear resolution. As in commerce, the year 1808 was the hardest on the city. In 1809 income returned to the same level it was before the Continental Blockade only to fall again in the following years and see its lowest point during the War of 1812.⁴⁰

In 1811 declining city income due to the Continental Blockade definitely contributed to and influenced the decision of the Riga municipality to hand over the city fortifications and artillery to the supervision of the Russian state. The War Ministry of Russia had been preparing for the war with Napoleon since spring 1810 and military plans required securing the fortress defence system. In accordance with the articles of the Accord of 1710 regulating the bilateral relations between Riga and Russia, the city remained responsible for the maintenance of the Riga fortress.⁴¹ During the Blockade, however, the city increasingly considered maintaining the fortress a burden and turned to the Emperor several times requesting that the state relieve Riga of this fiscal liability. When preparing for the war with France, the War Ministry deemed this request appropriate since it facilitated the organizing and execution of the maintenance works. On 7 May 1811 Alexander I approved the Senate's decision to take over the Riga fortress and its artillery.⁴²

Illegal trade and smuggling represented another means to survive the decline in commerce during the Blockade, even if it generated conflict with the Russian state. Yet currently there is very little information regarding the ways merchants tried to bypass the Continental Blockade. It is known that Riga broke the rules of the Continental Blockade more often than other ports of Russia because almost half of the ships and goods confiscated during the Continental Blockade were confiscated in Riga. The new capital tax also encouraged merchants to pursue illegal business.⁴³ Knowing that merchants were cheating in various ways, the government passed new decrees in 1808. In April it forbade entrance in the Russian ports for those ships from friendly states that had previously been to English ports even if they only carried ballast. In addition, sailors that left Russian ports had to confirm that they were not going to England.⁴⁴ Only the *ukase* of May 1809 stipulated that every ship entering the port should be able to present documents confirming the neutrality of the shipowner and crew and the neutrality of the cargo owner.

The negative influence of the 1810 regulations against neutral trade on Riga's export trade can also be noted. With the help of these regulations, Russia tried to solve the imbalance of foreign trade. In fact, it deviated from the Continental Blockade by trying to decrease import and increase export.⁴⁵ Although several bans on the export of goods were abolished, for fiscal reasons the export duty was increased for flax, hemp, linseed, potash and other goods.⁴⁶ These policies impacted a great part of Riga's export. As a result, the amounts of flax, hemp and linseed oil exported in 1811 fell considerably in comparison with the few previous years. There was an

insignificant increase only in the amounts of exported linseed for sowing and corn. Riga faced double losses during the Continental System, a decline in exports and, due to falling income, in public revenue.

End of the Continental Blockade

In June 1812, shortly before the beginning of the war between Russia and Napoleon, the commander of the English squadron in the Baltic Sea, Rear Admiral Thomas Byam Martin, contacted the Riga War Governor Lieutenant General Magnus von Essen offering his help in fighting the common enemy.⁴⁷ A few days into the war several English ships stopped at Riga to help arm gunboats for the defence of Daugava River in the environs of Riga.⁴⁸ On 5 July Thomas Martin arrived in Riga to meet Essen. As there were also English merchants in Riga, their talks concerned not only military matters but also addressed the reinstatement of trade relations. Thomas Martin was ready to provide convoy for ships going to England. He prepared a special certificate that indicated the holders had rights to take goods from Riga directly to England.⁴⁹ Martin claimed that until 12 July no fewer than 100 ships had left Riga with corn, hemp and timber. It is significant that this happened before 18 July, when the peace treaty with England was concluded and reinstated trade relations, although it was not ratified until 24 September.⁵⁰ Since Russia and Britain remained officially at war, this situation provoked resistance from the Russian customs and port officers who did not want to let the ships leave Riga.⁵¹ Essen solved this dilemma and ordered the officers not to delay the merchant ships. Only on 16 August 1812 was the *ukase* 'on restoring peace with England and opening trade relations with it in line with the existing legislation' issued, which opened Russian ports for English ships. Hence, until that point, ships from Riga went in the direction of London under the flags of other countries. According to the register of outgoing ships, some ships went to England only in the end of July, yet their numbers were low.⁵² Meanwhile, in July there were a considerable number of ships heading to Gothenburg, and it is very likely that they continued farther to England. In September the Liquidation Commissions were eliminated and the sequester removed from English property, so in October those once-sequestered ships left Riga for England.⁵³ It should be noted that the English did not get back all the sequestered timber. Part of it had been used for securing Riga's defence, as mentioned above. Part of it (about 100 spars and about 2000 logs and other wood) had been kept in unsuitable conditions, and therefore decayed.⁵⁴

There are only a few cases in 1812 when English merchants had been registered as exporters of goods. Still, this does not necessarily mean they were not involved in export deals because foreigners often cooperated with local large-scale merchants in Riga. Hence, it is difficult to determine the

real involvement of the English in export during the war. In 1813, however, the Mitchell, Cumming, Renny and Hill companies resumed active flax and hemp export at the very beginning of the sailing season.

Conclusion

Russia was part of the Continental Blockade for four full years. It introduced the ban on trade with England at the end of 1807. In 1812 it actually dropped out of the Continental Blockade, reinstated trade relations with England and concluded or prolonged agreements with Spain, Sweden and certain German states. Aside from 1808 the value of Riga's export did not considerably fall during the Continental Blockade. It suffered much less than the total amount of Russia's exports. The city's merchants that specialized in export trade faced significant difficulties only in 1808 when the Continental Blockade expanded to include not only England, but also Sweden, and English warships blocked access to the Baltic ports.

Although Riga's treasury remained short of money, as very few ships came to the port and very few goods were exported, only a few merchants faced bankruptcy. Auxiliary workers as well as seasonal workers experienced temporary employment problems. They might have had difficulties finding work in 1808, but it was no longer a problem in 1809 when the movement of goods recommenced, or in 1811 when hands were required by the military department. The well-being of Riga's citizens was less affected by the Continental Blockade than by the fire of 23 July in 1812 when 782 buildings burnt down and 6882 people were left homeless and without any belongings. The fire broke out after the military leaders ordered the burning of buildings around the fortress to make an open field for artillery fire. Sloppy demolition work by the soldiers, gusty winds and the work of arsonists and plunderers led to the spread of an uncontrollable fire. At that time Riga expected an attack from Napoleon's army. Though the siege never took place, the fire that emerged from the preparation for the attack changed the lives of many people and left a permanent imprint in the history of Riga. The above events therefore remain inseparable from the Continental Blockade because Alexander's rejection of Napoleon's System was one of the key reasons for the War of 1812.

It is obvious that some of the factors in evolving commercial patterns and declining trade cannot be attributed solely to the Continental Blockade. Preparation for the war also hindered the normal exchange of goods. For example, in 1811 the construction of widespread fortification works in Riga required the demolition of several buildings, storehouses included. For security reasons, engineers forbade the merchants to keep their goods by the Daugava River. Many storehouses and trading places were relocated further from the fortifications into the suburbs, which was inconvenient and disadvantageous for

the merchants. All these factors and the related lack of order and uncertainty associated with war hindered the natural movement of goods.

The Continental Blockade itself caused more harm to the traders and processors of timber and corn because the export amounts of these goods fell sharply. Export amounts of the technical crops decreased as well, but the decline was not so considerable. What changed during the Continental Blockade was not so much the amount of the exported goods as the recipients specified in the commercial documents. For the goods in demand, a reorientation of market directions took place which permitted Riga to tolerate the Continental Blockade more easily. More profound studies on the influence of the Continental Blockade on the region would require close cooperation between historians from Latvia, Russia, Belarus, Lithuania and Poland because these sometimes very distant regions were the source of Riga's key export goods in demand by British and continental consumers alike.

Notes

1. Johann Christoph Petri, *Neuestes Gemälde von Lief- und Ehistland, unter Katharina II und Alexander I in historischer, statistischer, politischer und merkantilischer Ansicht*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1809), vol. 1, 194.
2. Михаил Злотников, *Континентальная блокада и Россия* (Москва, 1966), 12.
3. Валда Петерсоне, 'Рижский экспорт в период наместничества (1783–1796 гг.)', *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis* 5 (1987): 115.
4. Злотников, *Континентальная блокада*, 24.
5. *Ibid.*, 29.
6. Teodors Zeids, ed., *Feodālā Rīga* (Riga, 1978), 272.
7. Отто Гун, *Топографическое описание города Риги* (Санктпетербург, 1803), 105–6.
8. Ilga Grasmane, *Kapitālistiskās tirdzniecības attīstība Rīgā 18. gs. un 19. gs. pirmajā pusē* (Riga, 1982), 55.
9. The operations carried out between 26 October and 5 November 1807 were considered valid. As far as it has been possible to find out, several English companies mortgaged their property to the merchants of Riga for considerable amounts of money during these days.
10. Злотников, *Континентальная блокада*, 138.
11. Latvian State Historical Archives (hereafter LSHA), Riga, Fund 673 External Archives of Riga Municipality, Entry 1, File 241, 2–4; LSHA, Riga, Fund 749 Chief Office of Riga Municipality, Entry 6, File 1084, 327–8.
12. LSHA, Riga, Fund 673, Entry 1, File 241, 13.
13. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1381 Riga Trade Court, Entry 1, File 214, 427.
14. The Manifest of 1807 declared that 'a guest' is a foreign merchant who becomes burgher for a limited time period and in addition to the customs duty pays 1.25 per cent of the capital above 50,000 bank assignment roubles. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1381, Entry 1, File 214, 424.
15. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 565, 913.
16. LSHA, Riga, Fund 673, Entry 1, File 241, 146–8.
17. *Ibid.*, 413–15.

18. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 1085, 148, 151.
19. Василий Дорошенко, 'Торговля Риги в период континентальной блокады', *Известия Академии Наук Латвийской ССР* 7 (1979): 23–32; Wilhelm Klumberg, *Die Kontinentalsperre in ihrer Auswirkung auf Riga* (Riga, 1926).
20. Ilga Grasmane, *Daugava un Rīgas eksports XVIII gs. beigās un XIX gs. pirmajā pusē* (Riga, 1973), 135.
21. LSHA, Riga, Fund 3, *Office of the Governor of Vidzeme*, Entry 5, File 1280, leaf 1.
22. Petri, *Neustes Gemälde*, vol. 1, 120.
23. Teodors Zeids, 'Rīga 18. un 19. gs. mijā', in Johans Kristofs Brotze, *Zīmējumi un apraksti*, ed. Teodors Zeids, 4 vols (Riga, 1992–2007), vol. 1, 37.
24. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1858 Riga city weigher office, Entry 1, File 207 and 208 (both numbers refer to ships carrying goods sold by weight).
25. Василий Дорошенко, 'Торговля Риги в период континентальной блокады', *Известия Академии Наук Латвийской ССР* 7 (1979): 27.
26. LSHA, Riga, Fund 4038 Society of Riga history and antiquity researchers, Entry 2, File 1054, leaf 50.
27. [Ulrich Schlippenbach], *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Krieges zwischen Rußland und Frankreich in den Jahren 1812 und 1813* (Mitau, 1813), 19.
28. *Ibid.*, 5.
29. LSHA, Riga, Fund 4 Board of the Vidzeme Government, Entry 14, File 372, leaves 2–15.
30. Johans Kristofs Broce, *Zīmējumi un apraksti*, vol. 2 (Riga, 1996), 286. Zeids, ed., *Feodālā Rīga*, 392.
31. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 230, leaves 450–1.
32. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1379 Landfogtei Court, Entry 1, Files 863–9.
33. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 568, 817–19.
34. At that time there was an opinion that the English might constitute a threat to Riga and therefore the fortress was kept ready for action.
35. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 567, 26.
36. *Ibid.*, 86.
37. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 1084, 672–3, 680.
38. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 566, leaves 687, 746, 800, 817.
39. *Rigasche Stadtblätter* 47, 48, 49, 51 (1810).
40. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1390 Board of the Riga City Treasury, Entry 4, File 411, leaves 1–9.
41. *Полное Собрание Законов Российской Империи с 1649 года*, 45 vols (Санктпетербург, 1830), vol 4, no. 2278.
42. LSHA, Riga, Fund 4, Entry 14, File 1055, leaf 2.
43. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 1084, 698.
44. LSHA, Riga, Fund 749, Entry 6, File 622, 170.
45. Галина Носова, 'О некоторых отличительных чертах торговли России со странами Европы в 1812 году', in *1812 год: Люди и события великой эпохи. Материалы междунаrodной научной конференции Москва 23 апреля 2009 года* (Москва, 2009), 106.
46. Grasmane, *Daugava un Rīgas eksports*, 74.
47. Richard Vesely Hamilton, ed., *Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thos. Byam Martin*, 3 vols (London, 1898–1903), vol. 2, in *Publications of the Navy Records Society* 12 (1898): 189.
48. A.N. Ryan, ed., *The Saumarez Papers: Selections from the Baltic Correspondence of Vice-Admiral Sir James Saumarez 1808–1812*, in *Publications of the Navy Records Society* 110 (London, 1968): 236–7.

49. Ryan, *The Saumarez Papers*, 240–1.
50. A manifest issued by Alexander I on 12 September 1812 (Old Style) regarding trade relations between Russia and England which stated that due to the ratification of peace the subjects of Russia have rights to free trade with the English.
51. Hamilton, *Letters and Papers*, 214–19.
52. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1858, Entry 1, File 207, leaves 145–71.
53. LSHA, Riga, Fund 1, Entry 12, File 410, leaf 9.
54. LSHA, Riga, Fund 4, Entry 14, File 747, leaves 67–8.

15

Significance and Consequences of the Continental System for Napoleonic Holland, Especially for Amsterdam

Johan Joor

The Continental System represented an important era for Holland in the Napoleonic period and for Dutch history generally. The founding of the Kingdom of Holland in 1806 was an unmistakable part of Napoleon's imperial political, economic and military plans in the war against England, and Louis's successive fall as king in 1810 was a direct result of his incapacity to meet the demands of his imperial brother in maintaining the Blockade. After Louis's abdication, Holland lost its independence completely and became a part of the French Empire. During the period of annexation or 'incorporation', the 'Dutch Departments' were administered separately by a general government under a French governor general. Furthermore, international trade, the mainstay of the economy of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch Republic, came to a complete standstill as a result of the Blockade. The subsequent decline in Dutch industry, large-scale impoverishment of the people and an unprecedented de-urbanization in western Holland all illustrate the hardships wrought by the Napoleonic Blockade. The impact of the Blockade was particularly intense for Amsterdam; it lost its proud position as a leading international commercial and financial centre and transformed during the Napoleonic years into a modest trade and commercial market of national and regional importance at best.

Although studies on the Batavian Revolution in 1795 and following years have grown in number, the Napoleonic Era spanning 1806 to 1813 remains historically marginalized, if not forgotten. Despite its great importance in Dutch history, the Continental System remains understudied in Holland.¹ Few modern studies on the Napoleonic period in Holland address the Continental System. One of the most informative international studies on this subject remains Simon Schama's *Patriots and Liberators*, published in 1977.²

Rich sources for detailed research into the Continental Blockade in Holland seem available, but a systematic study still remains unwritten. This chapter contributes to our understanding on this topic by concentrating on

the case study of Amsterdam. The analysis of the Dutch capital will demonstrate the consequences and impact of the Blockade on urban society. It also explores merchant strategies to adapt to Imperial regulations and practices as their traditional commercial livelihoods declined. The chapter closes with some remarks about the long-term consequences of the Continental System for Holland.

The Phases of the Continental System in Holland

Although the Kingdom of Holland emerged in June 1806 prior to the formal proclamation of the Continental Blockade in the Berlin Decree on 21 November 1806, Louis Bonaparte's appointment as king of Holland was an indissoluble part of Napoleon's greater project to construct a system of dependent states following the War of the Third Coalition. Aside from these political motives, Napoleon's purpose for the founding of the Kingdom of Holland was economic from the start. Following the Berlin Decree, the Blockade became an over-dominant theme in the personal relationship between the Bonaparte brothers and, consequently, in the relation between Holland and France. Napoleon criticized Louis for his apparent unwillingness to enforce the Blockade as he bitterly stated that Holland had turned into a 'province Anglais'.³

Although Louis Napoleon remained mindful of Dutch traditions and commercial interests, evidence of his permissive approach in evading the Blockade exaggerated his reputation as an opponent to Napoleon. The image of Louis as a stubborn and unwilling imperial partner who systematically obstructed the enforcement of the Continental Blockade to help the Dutch against his brother's tyranny has shaped national and international historiography, but is historically inaccurate. As I have argued in my work, Louis was in fact quite submissive to Napoleon's blockade policy and, indeed, seriously tried to enforce the Continental Blockade following the proclamation of the Berlin Decree. First, he proclaimed a series of official decrees and orders to enforce the Blockade in Holland during his reign. Second, he established a network of different official services and organizations to control the execution of the Blockade and to prevent illegal communication with England as much as possible. Some of these organizations included Holland's first centralized police force and a Dutch Customs Office which was modelled on the French.⁴ If we take all of Louis's measures into consideration, it is clear that he made some serious attempts to meet his brother's demands in enforcing the Blockade. Nevertheless, it is also safe to conclude that Louis appallingly failed in his attempts as he emphasized that maintaining the Blockade in Holland was as difficult as 'preventing the skin from sweating'.⁵

The proclamation of the Continental Blockade in 1806 generated intensive social tensions from the start. Popular protest in Napoleonic Holland

manifested itself practically in three main forms: unrest, including riots and revolts; incitement, in oral, written and printed form; and 'unwillingness'. The last category covers people's deliberate evasion of rules or of the requirements forced upon them by the government. In the Kingdom of Holland 'unwillingness' or evasion emerged as the primary form of protest against the Continental System. Neutral trade was key to this approach and many neutral ships were actually Dutch and reflagged by the Dutch merchants and shipowners using false identity and registration papers easily obtained in north Germany: Varel, Jever and Knipphausen. This semi-neutral shipping under a foreign flag came to an abrupt end with the proclamation of the Treaty of Fontainebleau in November 1807. In this Treaty, East Frisia or *Oost-Friesland* was added to the Kingdom of Holland and this meant that the above-mentioned East-Frisian enclaves lost their sovereignty. The involvement of Denmark and Sweden in the war also denied the loopholes of Danish and Swedish neutral flags for Dutch merchants, leaving only the Americans as neutral transporters for the import of textiles and colonial goods. Louis ordered the closure of Dutch harbours for all shipping by decree in January 1808, which forced captains of American vessels to disembark their cargoes near the coast at sea. Louis's decree seriously hampered the former lucrative American trade, and the number of American vessels that arrived in the Kingdom of Holland dropped steadily in 1808.⁶ An angry Napoleon torpedoed a half-hearted attempt of Louis to reopen his kingdom to American ships in the beginning of 1809, and, as a consequence, American traffic came to an almost complete standstill in that same year.

The gradual disappearance of the neutral shipping was almost certainly largely compensated by the growth of the illegal trade. Although systematic studies about the illicit trade in Holland remain unwritten, some incidental evidence makes perfectly clear that the practice of smuggling must have been enormous during the time of the Kingdom of Holland. The Waddenzee, a shallow sea in the north, which was very difficult to control because of the strong tides, remained an important smuggling route. This 'Emden Circuit' – the Waddenzee extends from Den Helder in Holland to Esbjerg in Denmark and covers the northwest coast of Germany – became the highway for English commodities and colonial goods to Holland. Incidental figures show that in the end of 1809 more than 170 ships were actively involved in this trade and that a few million pounds of coffee and sugar and large quantities of dyewood and indigo could be easily imported through this northern route in less than one month.⁷

An additional consequence of the big money that could be earned by smuggling and illegal communication was, of course, a staggering level of corruption. Officials of all ranks were willing to facilitate the smuggling against the payment of enormous bribes. As a result of the large-scale and almost open support of many Dutch and French officials to help merchants circumvent the Blockade, protest in the form of popular unrest against

commercial restrictions was very rare under Louis. Officials reported some cases of obvious friction between villagers and local officers in some coastal villages, but only a few people were involved in those scuffles.

In contrast to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Holland, Napoleon's decision to annex the kingdom in 1810 was strongly related to the Continental System and especially to Napoleon's new policies towards the Blockade. The Treaty of Paris between Napoleon and Louis of 16 March 1810, in which France seized the area of Louis's kingdom below the river Rhine, revealed Napoleon's blockade plans openly. Besides the secession of the departments of Brabant and Zeeland in the south and impossible military demands, the tractate provided a French Military Observation Corps and an unlimited number of French customs officials for Louis's rump kingdom in order to strictly enforce the Continental System in the cities and around the mouths of all rivers in Holland. Napoleon fully deployed the French *corps d'Observation* in May 1810, which quickly turned into an Occupation Corps within the kingdom. Louis, abandoned and terrorized by his brother, abdicated as king of Holland and fled to Austria on 3 July 1810.

A few days after Louis's flight Napoleon annexed Holland with the Decree of Rambouillet, which had been drafted in advance. This decree ended Dutch independence in a few lines by uniting Holland and the Empire in the first article. The following 12 articles concerned matters of administration, the arrival of the former third consul, Charles François Lebrun as Napoleon's lieutenant general and, above all, public finances. These articles included explicit details about the unification of the Dutch and French customs, which would be reorganized under the French *Directeur-général des Douanes*. The reduction of the interest of the national debt to one-third was also proclaimed, as was the extra payment of 50 per cent of the worth of their goods by all merchants who were trading in colonial products. As a compensation for the loss of Dutch independence, Amsterdam became the 'third city' – after Paris and Rome – of the Empire.⁸

During the Incorporation, the French regime under Lebrun was far more suppressive than that of Louis. Napoleon's policy towards the enforcement of the Continental System also fundamentally changed with several decrees during the summer and autumn of 1810, when he introduced a system of new tariffs, suppression and licensed shipping for a selective trade with England, which primarily and selectively supported French interests. From the annexation onwards, Napoleon ordered a strict enforcement of the Blockade by the military and the army of customs officials stationed in the major cities and near the coasts to protect licensed French interests. A grim system of repression was established, including a decree proclaimed on 24 January 1811 that made all sailors and fishermen in Holland who sustained communication with England subject to the terror of a Military Commission. In addition, a far more repressive French police system and secret police were introduced in Holland in early 1811.⁹

The combined control of the military forces, the police and customs officials was successful in enforcing the Continental Blockade to a large extent. Shipping and trade came to a complete standstill in 1811. Excluding some fortresses on the Gold Coast in West Africa and the small isle of Dejima in Japan, Holland had lost all its overseas possessions and strongholds, including Dutch East Asia, which transported colonial goods to the mother country until 1810. Neutral ships, especially American vessels, had transported those goods, primarily sugar and coffee, from East Asia. The downfall of the international trade in 1811 was pervasive; Rotterdam shared the bleak Amsterdam pattern and the customs office at the river Maas experienced a complete breakdown of import and export activity.

The disappearance of international trade was a deathblow for Dutch industry, which was already in decline since the third quarter of the eighteenth century. The Blockade was particularly devastating for the industries that were directly related to trade and shipping, especially that of shipbuilding and all associated crafts such as sail-making, hemp production and rope-making. Moreover, other labour-intensive industries and branches, like the herring fisheries, were also in decay. The result was massive unemployment and a steep rise in poverty.

The intensification of Imperial repression to enforce the Blockade after July 1810 successfully suspended most of the smuggling and the illegal transporting of passengers and correspondence from and to England. Popular protest against the Continental System, however, shifted from massive evasion to open unrest. In this regard, it is telling that the first large-scale revolt in Holland during the Incorporation took place in Amsterdam on 20 September 1810 and was generated by harsh control on illegal imports from England by customs officials.

Amsterdam and the Continental System

Amsterdam provides a very useful case study in exploring the broad impact of the Continental System. To best understand the role of Amsterdam in Dutch and European commerce, it is necessary to review the city's development throughout the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Research on the Dutch Republic during the 1700s demonstrates that instead of misery and decline, international trade expanded at least until the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo–Dutch War in 1780.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Dutch Republic had lost its leading international political position already with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, and England and France economically surpassed the Republic in international shipping and trade in the 1730s. Amid its relative decline in comparison with its neighbours, the Dutch economy became characterized by a concentration on trade in colonial products and the growing importance of inland German markets. Within the Republic, the economic gravity centred increasingly in Amsterdam, a process described as 'internal contraction' in Dutch historiography.¹¹

The processes of 'internal contraction' helped trade activity flourish in Amsterdam until the 1790s.¹² In addition to the economic changes within the Republic, a major structural shift took place in Amsterdam's commercial sector. As the practice of acceptance credit became increasingly professionalized and incorporated in the business activities of Amsterdam merchants and trading houses, several powerful merchant bankers emerged in the mid-1700s. Although the commodity trade continued to be significant for those merchants, their income from financial services became increasingly important. In this regard, the Seven Years War from 1756 to 1763 was of key importance. Horneca, Fizeaux & Co. became leading bankers for France, Pels & Son specialized in loans to Prussia and Hamburg, Hasselgreen mediated financially for the king of Sweden and De Smeth introduced the Russian Tsarina Catharina II to the Amsterdam capital market in 1769.¹³ During the Seven Years War the English public debt rose to £132 million, which was in large part financed by Thomas and Adrian Hope.¹⁴ Dutch bonds were low, about 2.5 per cent, in the second half of the eighteenth century, which made Amsterdam merchants and investors particularly keen on foreign loans that yielded higher interest and profits.¹⁵ Amsterdam turned into the major financial market of the world. Estimates about the total sum of Dutch international investments in the last two decades of the eighteenth century range from one billion to two billion guilders.¹⁶ This enormous sum was almost completely collected and invested by way of the Amsterdam merchant bankers at the Amsterdam stock exchange and money market.

The relatively prosperous situation of Amsterdam started to deteriorate after 1795. The new Dutch Batavian Republic became the first 'Sister Republic' of Revolutionary France and, as such, became directly involved in the war with England. International trade was seriously hampered, colonies were lost and the erstwhile impregnable East Asian Company, the *VOC*, collapsed and was liquidated in 1799. Nevertheless, trade was still ongoing in Amsterdam and the number of ships that arrived in Amsterdam in 1802, more than 3500, equalled those at the end of the 1770s and the beginning of the 1780s when international trade and shipping in that city peaked.¹⁷

The Continental Blockade was particularly devastating for Amsterdam. Between the years 1806 and 1813 the city faced total decline, including serious depopulation. The city had reached a population of approximately 240,000 in 1730, which made Amsterdam the third largest city, after Paris and London, in Europe. The population remained stable until the 1770s and started to fall after 1780. The first official census in Holland dates from 1795 when the population of Amsterdam had decreased to 221,000. This decline in population accelerated during the Napoleonic period. In 1809 the population of Amsterdam numbered an estimated 202,000, which diminished by another 1000 in the next two years. The situation deteriorated especially rapidly after 1811, bringing the population to little more than 180,000 in 1815, the first year after the Napoleonic period for which official demographic data

are available.¹⁸ The motor of the general population decline included high mortality rates caused by infectious and endemic diseases and poor hygienic conditions. The mortality rates were particularly high in the Napoleonic years, with an average of 41.7 per cent in the years 1809 to 1812.

Moreover, emigration started to surpass immigration for the first time in decades – and even centuries – after the year 1811.¹⁹ The massive abandonment of the city left its marks. Many houses left empty fell quickly into ruins (see Fig. 15.1). The view of growing slums and the canals and docks absent the activity of ships, traffic and trade was grim and depressing. Many of the elite moved to their villas and estates in the countryside, largely leaving their servants to their own devices with more dependents on poor relief as a result.

The declining economic situation was an important cause of the mass emigration from Amsterdam. The labour force of the Amsterdam shipyards, which had employed some 2000 carpenters and other workers in 1800, was already reduced by one-quarter in 1808, prior to the economically worst years of the Continental System.²⁰ More examples of trades and crafts in decay may



Figure 15.1 Amsterdam in Decay, drawing of some of the many collapsed houses in the centre of Amsterdam, especially in the Leidsestraat near the Leidseplein, artist J.H. Knoop, drawing, 1808, Stadsarchief Amsterdam (City Archives Amsterdam)

be easily added, and it is telling in this regard that even the number of inn-keepers and tapsters fell significantly in the years from 1806 to 1810.²¹

Poverty remained omnipresent and the relief resources of the much-hailed local system of civil and religious care for the poor were stretched to their limits. In 1765 less than 10 per cent of the people of Amsterdam depended on poor relief; that amount had slowly increased to 13.5 per cent in 1790. The number of the dependents of poor relief, however, exploded during the Napoleonic years and some reports and figures indicate that 30 per cent to 40 per cent of the people of Amsterdam lived on charity in the years 1807 and 1809.²² The astonishing poverty was also manifested in a strong rise in the number of beggars and dramatic increase in the abandonment of newborn babies. The regents of the *Aalmoezenershuis*, the largest almshouse and orphanage of the city, recorded an intake of more than 740 foundlings in the year 1810. The situation deteriorated further in the following two years, as police reports recorded ten babies per day left abandoned in the streets in some districts of Amsterdam in March 1813.²³

During the Incorporation, strict enforcement of the Continental System triggered several serious revolts. Following the annexation of Holland, harsh



Figure 15.2 *The Meeting of the Cellar Rats with Those of the Regie*, cartoon about the French customs officials and the officials of the French State Monopoly on Tobacco, or Regie, artist and publisher Wijnand Esser, hand-coloured etching, The Hague, 1813–14, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

controls on illegal imports from England by customs officials generated an uprising in Amsterdam on 20 September 1810. Though large-scale fights between the people and the customs officials did not occur in that city for another two years, locals continued to contest French policies privately. According to police reports, cynical jokes and hateful talk about the customs officials, nicknamed 'cellar rats', circulated frequently in the pubs and public houses (see Fig. 15.2).

By November 1813 the conditions related to the Continental System and French rule stimulated another great revolt in Amsterdam on 15 and 16 November 1813. Thousands of people protested, chanting the slogan, 'For Peace and Trade'.²⁴ The protest became particularly serious after the burning of the customs control posts and caused Lebrun to flee with all French high officials in his wake (see Fig. 15.3). According to Count Ferino, who was charged with the organization of the *National Garde* in Holland, the people of Amsterdam were particularly gunning for the customs officials. In his report to the French Minister of War Clarke on 20 November 1813,



Figure 15.3 Revolt in Amsterdam, showing the burning of the customs houses at the New Bridge in Amsterdam during the revolt of 15 and 16 November 1813, artist Gerrit Lamberts, pen brush, Amsterdam, November 1813, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

he even reported that the people of Amsterdam had thrown the babies of the women associated with customs officials in the water.²⁵ This shocking message, only reported by Ferino, can safely be considered war propaganda. Nevertheless, Ferino's message indicates the popular hatred towards customs officials, which is also reflected in the many engravings and caricatures that were printed and distributed after the flight of Lebrun.²⁶ Indeed, this urban revolt held great relevance for the Dutch, because after Lebrun's flight from Amsterdam in the early morning of 16 November 1813 the French regime in Holland almost instantly collapsed.

Amsterdam Merchants and Trade

Wealth had always been unequally distributed in Amsterdam, but the extreme poverty during the Napoleonic era represented a new phenomenon. During most of the eighteenth century only a small group could enjoy life in luxurious conditions, and within this elite, merchants were a representative group. Merchant houses that had accumulated a live capital between 100,000 and 600,000 guilders were indicated as 'modest' in the middle of the 1700s, and several merchants were millionaires or even multi-millionaires.²⁷

The elite status of merchants changed dramatically in Amsterdam during the Napoleonic years, particularly after 1810. Due to the Blockade, shipping diminished quickly and the total number of incoming ships fell rapidly from almost 2400 in 1805 to less than 400 in 1808. In 1810 only 210 ships arrived in Amsterdam, after which the situation even deteriorated further because no ship at all entered Amsterdam in 1811 and only a dozen in the two following years.²⁸ According to some estimates, Dutch trade in 1811 shrunk to less than one-quarter of the level in 1780.²⁹ Moreover, England, which already heavily overshadowed Holland in the international commodity trade for some decades, also emerged as the unchallenged nation for financial and banking services after 1806. Unlike the Seven Years War and other wars until 1790, England could finance the Napoleonic wars with home capital from the start. A further looming indication for banking in Amsterdam was the abrupt end of the registration of the rates of bills exchanged between the city and London in the official price list (*Prijs Courant*) of 1807.³⁰ By then London surpassed Amsterdam definitively as the main hub for international payments and, as such, as the leading financial centre of the world.

The Blockade hit the merchants, stockbrokers and merchant bankers of Amsterdam hard. Foreign investments decreased to a minimum of 210 million guilders in 1811.³¹ It is also telling in this regard that only 38 per cent of the 100 highest-taxed citizens in 1813 were merchants or *négociants*.³² It is important to keep in mind, however, that the highest-taxed inhabitants were not necessarily the richest persons of Amsterdam and that another 21 per

cent on the list were *rentiers*. According to Diderot, who had visited Holland in 1773, merchants in Amsterdam were not considered 'wealthy' unless they possessed more than one million guilders.³³ With this almost iconic French stereotype in mind, Napoleon found it genuinely hard to believe that merchants in Amsterdam also experienced serious impoverishment after 1806. He repeatedly pressed Louis and, successively, even more, Lebrun to show no compassion to the Dutch merchants and their complaints as he sought to squeeze this class of society financially from the first day of the annexation. As we have seen, the reduction of the interest of the national debt to one-third and the extra payment of 50 per cent of the worth of their goods by all merchants in colonial products were an integrated part of the Decree of Rambouillet of July 1810. Within this framework, Lebrun's policy was more restrained. He continued to support merchants who petitioned the Emperor in search of help and redress, and, unlike Napoleon, he was convinced that a grim and genuine poverty was hidden behind the trimmed façades of many canal houses.³⁴

Merchant Strategies for Survival

The reaction of the merchants of Amsterdam on the hostile commercial conditions was varied. Personally, people started to eat into their savings. Professionals explored both traditional and new escape routes for commerce. Although a systematic study on this topic remains as yet unwritten, research into the available case studies about Dutch merchant houses indicates that at least seven merchant strategies, or types of strategies, may be distinguished in order to overcome the economic barriers compounded by the Blockade. Most of the time, merchants did not opt for one strategy, but for a combination. Moreover, strategies could overlap, and within one type of strategy, sub-strategies could occur. These seven main strategies include: redirection, diversification, specialization, substitution, evasion, accommodation and liquidation.

In the case of redirection, the merchant continued his ongoing trade in the same goods or commodities, but he redirected his transport routes. Bienfait & Son, an Amsterdam merchant house that specialized in the trade of French wines directly from Bordeaux prior to 1806, redirected the shipments first to Altona before arriving in Amsterdam. Sometimes a ship with the firm's cargo was arrested at sea by the British, which resulted in a forced stopover in Plymouth, as happened in 1809.³⁵ In addition, merchants could shift their usual supply and stockpiling activities to other neutral or safer geographical places and areas. The northern European supply market for English textiles and colonial goods became geographically very dynamic in the wake of the Wars of the Third Coalition in 1805 and the defeat of Prussia in 1806. It shifted from Hamburg to Emden, successively to Tönning, to Altona and to other places in Denmark and even in Norway and was finally

migrated to the small village of Stickhausen in East Frisia, which became a centre for illicit northern European trade around 1809.³⁶

Diversification and specialization were, of course, merchant strategies that were also used in ordinary times. Diversification could be obtained by extension of the merchandise and commercial services and by the exploration of new geographical markets. Bienfait & Son, to give one example, became actively involved in the tea trade in addition to the trade in wines, although this process was already started in 1801.³⁷ Bienfait & Son was also one of the leading firms of Amsterdam who wanted to open up new markets, especially by strengthening trade with the Levant in 1810.³⁸

Contrary to diversification, specialization as a business strategy sought to narrow, in a selective way, products and services. The firm of Pieter & Christiaan van Eeghen, already very active on the American market in the last two or three decades of the eighteenth century, focused even more strongly on the United States during the Napoleonic period, especially on the import of rice and tobacco. The firm's American trade reached record heights in 1807, though the actual shipping of goods was completely undertaken by American shipowners and vessels.³⁹ Yet, by 1808 and 1809 American trade faltered, and collapsed completely in 1810.

The strategy of substitution was closely connected to the Continental System as trade and industry were in decline. The absence of imports, however, also offered new economic and commercial opportunities to a limited number of economic branches. This was especially the case for the cultivation and processing of crops, which were found to be useful or tolerable substitutes for colonial goods. For example, inland tobacco, chicory (for coffee) and, initially less successful in Holland, beet sugar represented new industries. Moreover, some enterprises benefitted from protective policies, like wool manufacturers and textile workers in the eastern part of Holland.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, quantitative data about the production and distribution of substitutes, as well as specifics regarding the involvement of Amsterdam merchants in this relatively new branch of trade are lacking.

New forms of transport, another form of substitution (namely the shift from maritime shipping to land transport), represented an important merchant survival strategy. Despite microeconomic data about this shift in transport for Amsterdam merchants, some reports indicate that import and export over land in Holland were strongly rising. According to the Dutch economic historian Brugmans, the Blockade structurally reframed Dutch international trade by making the land route to Germany and France the most important, if not the only significant, international trading route during the Napoleonic years.⁴¹

As addressed above and in other chapters in this volume, strategies of evasion that could be combined with corruption and protest remained the most obvious responses to merchant frustration with commercial restrictions. What follows is an account of accommodation and liquidation.

Accommodation could take many forms. For example, John Williams Hope sold his estate, *Welgelegen* near Haarlem, to King Louis for 300,000 guilders and a royal licence in order to import two ship cargoes of coffee.⁴² This transaction demonstrates Hope's involvement in semi-legal imports of colonial products and Louis's willingness to open the blockade if it was in his own interest.

In fact, a case study of Hope & Co. represents model examples of accommodation and liquidation as merchant strategies during the Napoleonic Era. Originally from Scotland, the Hope family commenced business in Amsterdam in 1722. As the firm gradually expanded, brothers Thomas and Adrian Hope emerged by 1734 as well-respected Amsterdam merchants and important advisers to the Dutch *stadholder* William IV of Orange. The breakthrough of the family Hope as leading merchant bankers came after 1762 with the founding of Hope & Co. and the inclusion of Boston-born Henry Hope, nephew of Thomas and Adrian. Although Hope & Co. continued to be active in the commodity trade and the import and export of colonial goods, its fortune was primarily boosted by an expansion of its financial services, especially the origination of foreign loans. In 1768 the firm issued a spectacular loan of 750,000 guilders on behalf of Sweden. By then Hope & Co. had already surpassed the merchant houses of Pels and of Clifford, which had been the leading financial firms in Amsterdam in foregoing years. In the following 25 years Hope & Co. strengthened its position on the Amsterdam stock exchange and capital market further, and the firm became one of the most powerful merchant bankers of Europe, if not of the world. Between 1788 and 1793 Hope & Co. issued successfully 18 foreign loans on behalf of Russia for a total amount of 53.5 million guilders. The profits of the origination of the Russian loans pushed the annual turnover of Hope & Co. to an all-time high of 76 million guilders in 1792.⁴³

The outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars made Henry Hope, an outspoken supporter of the party of the *stadholder* and of the English, move to London in 1794. Henry was accompanied by the above-mentioned John Williams Hope, who was born as John Williams but who had married Henry's niece and successively had become a partner in the firm, after which he added Hope to his surname. Pierre César Labouchère, a brilliant businessman and diplomat, ran the firm from 1793 and soon followed them. The firm in Amsterdam was left under the supervision of a clerk. Payments by the company were redirected to London where the Hopes intensified their relations with the Barings, and the two firms started to explore new land and business projects in the United States. Labouchère sealed relations between Hope and Barings, even matrimonially by wedding Dorothea Barings, the daughter of Sir Francis.

In November 1802 Hope & Co. was re-established in Amsterdam. After several delays, Labouchère and John Williams moved back to Holland. Henry Hope chose to remain in London. That same year the Hope Company

split into Hope & Co. in Amsterdam and Henry Hope & Co. in London. Labouchère was only offered a limited partnership. In practice, however, he became the moving force of Hope & Co. in Amsterdam.

Hope & Co. retained its image of a strong 'Anglo-Orange' merchant house during the Napoleonic years, and, in this respect, it is remarkable that the company nevertheless became of pivotal importance in Napoleonic financial politics. In 1804 the combination of Hope and Baring had provided for a loan of more than 11 million dollars to settle the deal at the request of France and the United States for the Louisiana Purchase. Following that successful transaction, Napoleon invited Hope & Co. to complete a complicated financial transaction regarding the encashment of Spanish payments to France with Mexican silver as a guarantee in 1807.

The company's actions on behalf of Napoleon did not escape the attention of the Emperor's relatives, to start with King Louis, who pressed Hope & Co. to place a loan for the Kingdom of Holland of 40 million guilders in 1807. Next in the imperial family, Joseph approached the house for a loan of three million guilders in May of the same year.⁴⁴ In the meantime, Hope & Co. continued its banking activities for Russia when it approached the company for a new loan in 1808.

The banking activities of Hope & Co. demonstrate well the firm's remarkable flexibility and, despite its Anglo-Orange sympathies, its willingness and capacity to accommodate the new political and economic reality in Napoleonic Europe. Without question, business became political in the survival strategy of Hope & Co. In this respect, it is also noteworthy that Labouchère was a personal friend of Talleyrand and that he was on very good terms with many other high-placed French officials.

The Incorporation of Holland in the French Empire turned out to be a turning point in the history of Hope & Co. Profitable prospects quickly faded and, much to the distress of the industrious Labouchère, the partners in London put Hope & Co. on the back-burner by cutting its budget to a minimum after July 1810. The next blow was the death of Henry Hope in February 1811, after which John Williams Hope became obsessed with a liquidation of Hope & Co. Labouchère was forced to retire at the end of that year. The death of John Williams Hope accelerated the process of liquidation in February 1813. Within five months a financial arrangement was concluded between John's widow and the two remaining partners of the Hope family in London, Thomas and Henry Philip, two grandsons of the former Amsterdam merchant Thomas Hope. This arrangement heralded the complete dissolution of the partnership. On 3 September 1813 everything related to Henry Hope & Co. and Hope & Co. was transferred to Alexander Baring.⁴⁵

The developments of Hope & Co. after 1810 also make this house a noteworthy example of the final merchant strategy of liquidation. As a means to survive a crisis, the liquidation of assets is uncertain and disputable.

However, from a personal angle, a voluntary dissolution of a firm and retirement of business could be economically preferable to the continuation of a losing enterprise. Several other distinguished firms also liquidated after 1806, like Hogguer in 1808. Many Amsterdam merchants, however, never had the choice to retire voluntarily as they confronted bankruptcy. Bankruptcies among merchants and merchant houses grew in number during the Napoleonic years and some were very spectacular, like the bankruptcy of De Smeth in December 1810, further proof of the economic distress caused by the Continental Blockade.⁴⁶

For Hope & Co., as a final remark, the dissolution of the firm in September 1813 appeared not to be the final act. Alexander Barings continued the firm's name, more or less as a prestigious façade to use as a front for a new firm. The opening of the renewed firm, absent personal and commercial ties with the Hope family, took place after the Napoleonic period. The new Hope & Co., however, was no longer the prestigious and international leading firm the former Hope & Co. had been in the years before 1806. London, with the star of Rothschild sparkling, had surpassed Amsterdam in international financial services. Amsterdam had turned into a city of demographically mediocre European proportions, the commercial and financial capacity of this former 'Third City' of the Empire devastated by the Continental System.

Conclusion

The Continental System was of major importance for Holland in the Napoleonic period. The enforcement of the Blockade propelled Napoleonic policies between 1806 and 1813 as well as the popular protest against it. The Continental Blockade was particularly devastating for Amsterdam. Socially and economically, the city was wretched by a total absence of trade, and a large part of the population emerged dependent on poor relief. The reaction of the Amsterdam merchants to the hostile commercial conditions was varied. Merchants attempted a range of strategies to stay afloat amid economic warfare. A special case is the firm Hope & Co., which was probably the most important European banking company from the middle of the 1700s until 1806. As a result of the strict enforcement of the Continental System, all profitable prospects faded away after 1810, resulting in the dissolution of the firm in September 1813.

Besides short-term effects, some long-term influences of the Continental System can also be determined. Foreign trade, which was the economic mainstay during the Dutch Republic, was fundamentally reshaped during the Napoleonic period. Transportation over land replaced ocean-going and coastal transport, and the transit trade between Germany and France became increasingly significant and emerged as a substitute for the traditional Atlantic and Asiatic sea trade. Moreover, the Continental System acted as a catalyst in the process of economic reorientation, in which agriculture

emerged as a primary sector of economic growth in the Netherlands at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

If Amsterdam had lost its leading international position on the commodity market in the course of the eighteenth century, it suffered another severe loss – its leading international financial position – due to pressure from the Continental System. As a result, during the span of the Napoleonic era Amsterdam definitely transformed from a leading world commercial and financial centre into a market of only national and regional importance.

Though a range of economic developments were already in process before the Napoleonic period, including the rise of other demographically and economically powerful European states, the Continental System contributed significantly to the Dutch economic decline and subsequent structural economic reorientation process. If not the only or primary cause, the Continental System unmistakably shaped, deepened and dramatically accelerated the waning international role of Holland and Amsterdam in commerce and finance. Following Napoleonic governance and the Continental System, Holland developed a nationally structured economy as the dominance of the sea trade ended and the primacy of the sea provinces, and especially of Amsterdam, was curbed. At the same time, political and institutional transformations under successive Napoleonic regimes assisted in the development of the modern nation-state in Holland. It would take almost another century for Amsterdam to make a new successful comeback and participate again in a newly expanding and rapidly changing world market.

Notes

1. Only one notable Dutch study is available: W.P. Sautijn Kluit, *Het Continentaal Stelsel* (s.l., 1863).
2. Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780–1813* (New York, 1977).
3. Letter of Napoleon to Louis, 19 March 1807, in F. Rocquain, *Napoléon 1er et le roi Louis, d'après les documents conservés aux archives nationales* (Paris, 1875), 96.
4. Johan Joor, *De Adelaar en het Lam: Orrust, opruiing en onwilligheid in Nederland ten tijde van het Koninkrijk Holland en de Inlijving bij het Franse Keizerrijk (1806–1813)* (Amsterdam, 2000), 415–23. See also idem, 'Le système continental et sa signification pour le Royaume de Hollande', in *Louis Bonaparte: Roi de Hollande*, ed. Annie Jourdan (Paris, 2010), 131–44, and (about the police) idem, 'Resistance against Napoleon in the Kingdom of Holland', in *The Napoleonic Empire and the New European Political Culture*, ed. Michael Broers et al.; and Rafe Blaufarb et al., *War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850* (Basingstoke, 2012), 112–22.
5. Louis Bonaparte, *Documens historiques et réflexions sur le Gouvernement de la Hollande*, 3 vols (Paris, 1820), vol. 1, 273.
6. L. van Nierop, 'Amsterdamse scheepvaart in de Franse tijd', *Amstelodamum* 21 (1924): 134, and J. Rogge, *Het handelshuis Van Eeghen: Proeve eener geschiedenis van een Amsterdamsch Handelshuis* (Amsterdam, 1949), 131.
7. Rogge, *Het handelshuis*, 135, and Schama, *Patriots*, 575.

8. For a Dutch copy, see H. Smitskamp and L.C. Suttorp, eds, *Historische teksten: Stukken betreffende de Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis* (Zwolle, 1949), 181–3.
9. See Joor, *De Adelaar*, 425–6 (Decree Military Commissions), and idem, 'Resistance', 114–15 (French police organization).
10. An important study in this field was Joh. de Vries, 'De economische achteruitgang der Republiek in de achttiende eeuw', Phil. diss. (University of Amsterdam, 1959).
11. Joh. de Vries, *De economische achteruitgang der Republiek in de achttiende eeuw* (2nd edn, Leiden, 1968), 40.
12. Clé Lesger, 'Stagnatie en stabiliteit: De economie tussen 1730 en 1795', in *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, 4 vols (Amsterdam, 2004–07), vol. 2 (part 2) *Zelfbewuste stadstaat 1650–1813*, ed. Willem Frijhoff and Maarten Prak (2005), 220–1.
13. De Vries, *De economische achteruitgang*, 63–4.
14. Joost Jonker and Keetie Sluyterman, *At Home on the World Markets: Dutch International Trading Companies from the 16th Century until the Present* (The Hague, 2000), 119–20.
15. De Vries, *De economische achteruitgang*, 63.
16. *Ibid.*, 65–6.
17. Van Nierop, 'Amsterdamse scheepvaart', 136; Lesger, 'Stagnatie', 221; and Rogge, *Het handelshuis*, 83.
18. For demographic figures, see Clé Lesger, 'Vertraagde groei: De economie tussen 1650 en 1730', in *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, 4 vols (Amsterdam, 2004–07), vol. 2 (part 2), 21; Lesger, 'Stagnatie', 219; Herman Diederiks, *Een stad in verval: Amsterdam omstreeks 1800* (Amsterdam, 1982), 19, and Joor, *De Adelaar*, 61–2 (esp. nn. 8, 11).
19. Diederiks, *Een stad*, 19 (mortality rate) and 26 (emigration).
20. Schama, *Patriots*, 577.
21. Thomas Poell, 'Het einde van een tijdperk: De Bataafs-Franse tijd 1795–1813', in *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, 4 vols (Amsterdam, 2004–07), vol. 2 (part 2), 489.
22. Maarten Prak, 'Stad van tegenstellingen 1730–1795', in *ibid.*, vol. 2 (part 2), 291; Marco van Leeuwen, *Bijstand in Amsterdam ca. 1800–1850: Armenzorg als beheersings- en overlevingsstrategie* (Zwolle, 1992), 67, 327; Joor, *De Adelaar*, 67.
23. Joor, *De Adelaar*, 67–9.
24. Marivault to Savary, 16 November 1813, in H.T. Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken der Algemeene Geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840*, 10 vols ('s-Gravenhage, 1905–22), vol. 6, 713 (nr 972).
25. Ferino to Clarke, 20 November 1813, Service historique Armée de Terre, Vincennes, Archives administratives, Armées de France, Série Xp, Hollande, documents généraux, no. 41.
26. See: H.T. Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand* (Amsterdam, 1913), 34, 36, and Johan Joor, 'Contentation et image anti-napoléonienne', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 369 (2012): 58–9.
27. C.C. van der Graft, *Lotgevallen van een Amsterdams koopmanshuis 1749–1949* (Amsterdam, s.a.), 62; Jonker, Sluyterman, *At Home*, 88.
28. Van Nierop, 'Amsterdamse scheepvaart', 136; W.L.D. van den Brink, *Bijdragen tot de kennis van den economischen toestand van Nederland in de jaren 1813–1816* (Amsterdam, 1916), 1.
29. Poell, 'Het einde', 489.
30. Jonker, Sluyterman, *At Home*, 131.
31. De Vries, *De economische achteruitgang*, 66.

32. Leonie van Nierop, 'De honderd hoogst aangeslagenen te Amsterdam in 1813', *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek* 11 (1925): 20–7.
33. Cited in Van der Graft, *Lotgevallen*, 61–2.
34. Marie du Mesnil, *Mémoires sur Le Prince Le brun, Duc de plaissance et sur les événemens auxquels il prit part sous les parlemens, la révolution, le consulat et l'empire* (Paris, 1828), 380–1.
35. A. Wichers Hoeth, *De geschiedenis van het Amsterdamsche Handelshuis Louis Bienfait & Soon* (Hilversum, s.a.), 61.
36. Van Nierop, 'Amsterdamse scheepvaart', 127.
37. Wichers Hoeth, *De geschiedenis*, 57.
38. *Ibid.*, 62.
39. Rogge, *Het handelshuis*, 132–3.
40. Schama, *Patriots*, 578–9 (substitutes); I.J. Brugmans, *Paardenkracht en mensenmacht: Sociaal-Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland 1795–1940* (Leiden, 1983), 46; and Van den Brink, *Bijdragen*, 8.
41. Brugmans, *Paardenkracht*, 41; see also Jonker, Sluyterman, *At Home*, 138–9.
42. Joor, *De Adelaar*, 90.
43. Marten G. Buist, *At Spes Non Fracta: Hope & Co. 1770–1815: Merchant Bankers and Diplomats at Work* (The Hague, 1974), 47 and 497 (overview Russian loans).
44. *Ibid.*, 339–40.
45. *Ibid.*, 68.
46. Van den Brink, *Bijdragen*, 1–2, and Buist, *At Spes*, 235.

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