

The Response of Elite European Merchant Companies  
to European Expansion into Asia and the Americas,  
c.1492-c.1530

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

## Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

## Abstract

The Response of Elite European Merchant Companies to European Expansion into Asia and the Americas, c.1492-c.1530

Eleanor Marie Russell

This thesis analyses the multi-national European merchant-banking companies who dominated European commerce at the beginning of European engagement with the Americas and with Asia via the Cape Route, focusing upon how they responded to these changes. In the first decades of the sixteenth century, it was these companies, mostly from southern Germany and the Italian city-states, who dominated the European trade in Asian and American goods, whose capital funded Spanish and Portuguese royal policies overseas, and whose agents played crucial roles in establishing the Spanish and Portuguese empires and colonial trade. Using their correspondence as its main source material, it analyses their participation in overseas trade and the networks which they used to participate; their specifically mercantile perception of the New World and Asia; and their exploitation of the opportunities newly made available, particularly through the use of luxury *exotica*, for political, social, and commercial advantage. It examines how their position changed in response to political and economic shifts, highlighting their cultural and economic flexibility that allowed them to adapt to overseas activity and to the decline of their near-hegemonic position when the growing centralisation and power of the states in the 1530s caused their previous authority to wane.

It re-examines the traditional quantitative, statistical approach to economic history and the general separation of economic and cultural history, instead prioritising the choices and motivations of these powerful individuals and groups in their political, cultural, and economic contexts, with the broader political and economic changes as background to the questions of who these merchants thought that they were, and what they thought that they were doing. This dissertation considers how merchants sought to increase their status, their wealth, their political connections, their power, and their commercial success through their trade in and conspicuous consumption of luxury items and their facilitation luxury consumption for the princes with whom they sought economic relations.

# Contents

Declaration.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
Preface.....	6
Dramatis Personae .....	8
German Companies .....	8
The Italians.....	10
The Sources.....	13
Introduction.....	14
1492: Before and After .....	21
Chapter One: The Great Companies Before 1492 .....	22
Chapter Two: Merchants in the Aftermath of the European Overseas Discoveries .....	43
Merchants and News.....	68
Chapter Three: Merchants, News, and News Networks c.1490 – c.1525.....	69
Chapter Four: News as Socio-Political Capital.....	90
Chapter Five: Merchant Attitudes to and Interest in the Americas and Asia.....	122
Chapter Six: News Media in the Early Sixteenth Century.....	146
The Emperor’s New Clothes: Soft Power and Cultural Capital .....	159
Chapter Seven: Gifts and Exotica .....	160
Repercussions .....	196
Chapter Eight: Going Solo: Agents and the Impact of Globalisation upon Multi-National European Firms .....	197
Chapter Nine: Ennoblement and Transition.....	221
Conclusion .....	235
Appendices.....	242
Appendix I: List of Voyages .....	243
Appendix II: Chronological List of Letters Analysed, 1486-1530 .....	246
Appendix III: List of Printed Newsletters Relating to Asia and the Americas until 1560.....	255
Printed in Italy .....	255
Printed in the Holy Roman Empire .....	259
Archives .....	262
Bibliography .....	263
Primary Sources .....	263
Manuscript.....	263
Printed.....	266
Secondary Sources .....	275

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I thank my parents, sister, and grandmother for their love and encouragement.

Last, but not least, I thank my friends in Australia and, especially, those of the Pembroke Graduate Parlour.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my uncle Dr Ken Russell,  
who sadly did not live to see me become the next Dr Russell.

## Preface

This dissertation uses a synthesis of cultural and economic historical approaches to emphasise the interplay between merchants' commerce from their political, social, and, especially, cultural activities.<sup>1</sup> It uses a trans-regional approach to emphasise both the connections and the variations between them and variations between merchants of different areas of Europe, challenging the limits of 'nationalist' or monolingual frameworks that underemphasise the importance of cross-border networks. It avoids the use of network theory, which, although it highlights the importance of merchant networks, does not provide any more insights into the operation of networks than do other approaches.

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The terms 'Germany', 'Italy', and 'Spain' have been used to refer to the regions now covered by the modern states and the associated adjectives have been used to refer to people from those territories. Similarly, 'Netherlandish' has been used to refer to people and items from the modern Benelux countries.

'Trans-regional', rather than 'trans-national' has been used throughout this thesis to refer to companies, networks and activities that stretched across territorial boundaries at a time when nation-states and defined borders, in the modern sense, were nascent.

'Globalisation' has been used to refer to the sudden expansion and transformation of Europe's engagement with the wider world: the opening of interactions with the Americas, and the establishment of the Cape Route that led to direct encounters between western Europeans and peoples of south India. Previously, only a minute number of European merchants, mostly Venetian, had personally travelled beyond the eastern shores of the Mediterranean and Black Seas. 'Globalisation' has also been used to refer to the transformation of the largest European companies from trading within Europe, including in extra-European commodities, to having agents in Asia and the Americas.

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When transcribing manuscripts, I have expanded abbreviations but have kept the original spelling and punctuation (or lack thereof). Translations have been rendered to give the sense

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<sup>1</sup> Carlo M. Cipolla, *Between Two Cultures: An Introduction to Economic History* (New York, London, 1991), *passim*.

of the original material rather than to be as literal as possible. I have used the most recent edition of the Chicago style with the publisher omitted at my supervisor's request.

Given the very close relationship between my argument and the nature of the sources, I will introduce the sources as I come to them.

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All pictures are in the Public Domain. The word count is 70 493.

## Dramatis Personae

### German Companies

The **Fugger** were the wealthiest company in early sixteenth-century Europe. Starting as weavers in Augsburg, they became successful enough to become textile merchants and, from the mid-fifteenth century, entered the trade in silver and copper. In 1473, they made a famous gift of cloth to Frederick III and Maximilian I Habsburg, the first instance of important deals between the two families.<sup>2</sup> From the 1480s, they entered the Tyrolese silver trade, making loans in return for silver to Sigismund of the Tyrol and then Maximilian I, to whom they also made many other loans. Under the leadership of Jacob Fugger, known as the Rich, they gained a monopoly upon the output of the Carpathian copper mines and became papal bankers, establishing a Roman curial branch.<sup>3</sup> In 1504, in a consortium with the Welser-Vöhlin, Hochstetter, Hirschvogel, Imhof and Gossembrot, they signed an *asiento* with Manuel I of Portugal to participate in the India Armada of 1505-06.<sup>4</sup> Delays in regaining payment and the difficulties of trans-continental trade discouraged them from further direct participation and they turned to dominating the internal pepper trade, shipping large consignments of Asian and later American goods from Lisbon and Seville to Antwerp.<sup>5</sup> When the Habsburgs inherited Castile and then Aragon, the Fugger made many loans to the Spanish crowns, including financing Charles V's election and coronation as Emperor, and they took on the farm of the Maestrazgo (the lands of the Spanish chivalric orders) in the 1520s onwards. This lucrative revenue included the Almadén mercury mine.<sup>6</sup> Jacob was succeeded in 1525 by his nephew Anton, who maintained the firm's position at the peak of European commerce and finance.<sup>7</sup> The death of Anton Fugger, in 1560, marked the end of the house's high period, but it remained prominent in European finance for the rest of the century. In 1568, Philip Eduard and Octavius Secundus Fugger, who had established their own company, set up the *Fuggerzeitungen*.<sup>8</sup> Other

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg: Pursuing Wealth and Honor in Renaissance Germany* (Charlottesville, 2012), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich: Merchant and Banker of Augsburg, 1459-1525*, ed. Norman Scott Brien Gras, trans. Mildred L. Hartsough (New York, 1931), 158–60.

<sup>4</sup> Franz Hümmerich, *Die Erste Handelsfahrt Nach Indien 1505/1506* (Munich, Berlin, 1922).

<sup>5</sup> Ekkehard Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung: Die „Novos Mundos“ Portugals Und Valentim Fernandes Als Ihr Mittler Nach Nürnberg Und Augsburg. Korrekturen - Ergänzungen - Anfragen', *VSWG: Vierteljahrschrift Für Sozial- Und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 96, no. 1 (2009): 51.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Kellenbenz, *Die Fuggersche Maestrazgopacht (1525-1542): zur Geschichte der spanischen Ritterorden im 16. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1967), 90–110.

<sup>7</sup> Götz Freiherr von Pölnitz, *Anton Fugger*, vol. 1: 1453-1535, 3 vols (Tübingen, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> Oswald Bauer, *Zeitungen Vor Der Zeitung: Die Fuggerzeitungen (1568-1605) Und Das Frühmoderne Nachrichtensystem* (Berlin, 2011).



family members, though generally maintaining some business involvement, became heavily involved in local politics, imperial and ducal administration, academia, and art collecting.<sup>9</sup>

The **Welser**, a patrician family from Augsburg, were the second-most successful High German company in partnership with their double in-laws the **Vöhlin** of Memmingen.<sup>10</sup> Like the Fugger, they began in the textile and metal trades before becoming involved in Tyrolean silver mining, the silver trade to Antwerp, and papal banking. They also made loans to the Habsburgs, including for Charles V's election, but were never as heavily involved in high finance as were the Fugger.<sup>11</sup> They participated in the 1505-06 voyage – Anton Welser's nephew, **Lucas Rem**, was the Welser representative to Lisbon – and became heavily involved in colonial trade, with sugar plantations on La Palma, Madeira, and Santo Domingo and commerce in American products such as brazilwood and pearls; they were also involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>12</sup> In 1528, they signed an *asiento* with Charles V giving them control of the province of Venezuela (Klein-Venedig), which they held until it was stripped from them in 1546.<sup>13</sup> Difficulties from this period combined with a disintegrating relationship with the Habsburgs, general economic downturn, and the decline of the monopoly system caused them to go bankrupt in 1618.<sup>14</sup> **Conrad Peuting**, married to Anton Welser's daughter Margarete, served as a legal advocate for the Augsburg corporations in his position as *Stadtschreiber* (city scribe)

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<sup>9</sup> Regina Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen: Das Korrespondenznetz Hans Fuggers (1531-1598)* (Tübingen, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Rolf Kießling, 'Wirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in der Region: Die Welser-Vöhlin-Gesellschaft im Kontext der Memminger Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts', in *Die Welser: Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des oberdeutschen Handelshauses*, ed. Mark Häberlein and Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin, 2002), 184–212.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Häberlein, 'Fugger und Welser: Kooperation und Konkurrenz 1496-1614', in *Die Welser: Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des oberdeutschen Handelshauses*, ed. Mark Häberlein and Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin, 2002), 224–25.

<sup>12</sup> Lucas Rem, *Tagebuch des Lucas Rem aus den Jahren 1494-1541: Ein Beitrag zur Handelsgeschichte der Stadt Augsburg*, ed. B. Greiff (Augsburg, 1861), 8; Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous* (Charlottesville, 2008), 119–21; Alberto Vieira, 'Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Azores', in *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill, 2004), 261.

<sup>13</sup> Jörg Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', in *Die Welser: Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des oberdeutschen Handelshauses*, ed. Mark Häberlein and Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin, 2002), 285–319.; Enrique Otte, ed., *Cedularios de la monarquía española relativos a la provincia de Venezuela, 1529-1552*, vol. 5 (Caracas, 1963), 241–43.

<sup>14</sup> Reinhard Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma (1560-1614)', in *Die Welser: Neue Forschungen Zur Geschichte Und Kultur Des Oberdeutschen Handelshauses*, ed. Mark Häberlein and Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin, 2002), 265–81; Robert Mandrou, *Die Fugger als Grundbesitzer in Schwaben, 1560-1618: eine Fallstudie sozioökonomischen Verhaltens am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1997).

and imperial councillor.<sup>15</sup> **Lazarus Nürnberger**, who later became an important independent trader in Seville, was also a Welser connection.<sup>16</sup>

The **Höchstetter**, also of Augsburg, were the wealthiest German company after the Fugger and Welser and, like the Fugger, they had close ties to the Habsburgs. They were heavily involved in the silver trade to Antwerp and invested in the voyage of 1505-06 and in the Lisbon-Antwerp trade in imported exotica, including spices. In the 1510s, alongside continued expansion in silver and copper trade, the company attempted to control the entire European market of quicksilver. When new mines were discovered in Spain (the Almadén) and Hungary, the company lost vast sums and, following other risky trade, including with England, collapsed in 1528.<sup>17</sup>

Other German companies who participated in the consortium of 1505 were the **Hirschvogel** and **Imhof** of Nuremberg and the Gossembrot of Augsburg.<sup>18</sup> The **Paumgartner** and the **Herwart**, both of Augsburg, and the **Tucher** of Nuremberg, were other important companies who followed the pattern of Tyrolese silver mining, trade to Antwerp, involvement (to varying degrees) in Asian and American imports, and governmental loans.<sup>19</sup>

## The Italians

Alongside a number of Genoese families, some very powerful, most Italians in the Iberian Peninsula were of Florentine origin who, unlike the Germans, had moved permanently or semi-permanently to Seville or Lisbon.<sup>20</sup> Other Florentines, such as some of the **Gondi** and the Pisan **Salviati**, had moved to Lyon or, like the **Frescobaldi** and **Gualterotti**, to Bruges and then Antwerp.<sup>21</sup> Few families who remained in Florence had much participation in overseas or even

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<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge Zu Einer Politischen Biographie* (Augsburg, 1958), 54.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 97; Enrique Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', *Mitteilungen Des Vereins Für Geschichte Der Stadt Nürnberg* 52 (1963): 129–62.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance in the Age of the Renaissance: A Study of the Fuggers and Their Connections* (1963), 151–56.

<sup>18</sup> Hümmerich, *Die Erste Handelsfahrt Nach Indien 1505/1506*.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Krag, *Die Paumgartner von Nürnberg und Augsburg: ein Beitrag zur Handelsgeschichte des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1919), 35–38; Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance in the Age of the Renaissance*, 156–58; Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India* (Munich, 1999), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Nunziatella Alessandrini, 'La Presenza Italiana a Lisbona Nella Prima Metà Del Cinquecento', *Archivio Storico Italiano* 164, no. 1 (2006): 37–54; Céline Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Genoese Merchants and the Spanish Crown* (Cambridge, 2014), 62–63; Sergio Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione. Una Banca d'affari Fiorentina Nella Francia Del Primo Cinquecento* (Florence, 2013), 32–34.

<sup>21</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 32–34.

Atlantic island trade, with the exception of the **Spinelli**, the **Capponi**, the **Cavalcanti**, and **Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici**, patron of **Amerigo Vespucci**.<sup>22</sup>

**Bartolomeo Marchionni** (1450 – 1530), the son of a Florentine apothecary, became office boy (*garzone*) to the Cambini in 1466 and was sent to Lisbon in 1469.<sup>23</sup> He quickly entered Portuguese high finance and trade, gaining a letter of protection from Afonso V in 1475.<sup>24</sup> In 1482, the Cambini went bankrupt and Marchionni was granted a letter of naturalisation by João II. He became involved in crown financial projects, such as the Santarém arsenal and the 1487 overland expedition to Prester John, and won high favour with Manuel I.<sup>25</sup> Although permanently established in Lisbon, he continued to trade with Florence and helped João II and Leonor in their patronage of Florentine convents.<sup>26</sup> He was involved in Atlantic island trade, sometimes in partnership with the Spinelli, and became a prominent investor in the Portuguese Indian voyages. In 1500, he joined a consortium with **Girolamo Sernigi**, the second-wealthiest Italian in Lisbon, and the Genoese Antonio Salvago; the consortium re-invested in 1501, 1502, and 1503; **Giovanni da Empoli** sailed on the last voyage as factor for Marchionni and the Frescobaldi and Gualterotti of Antwerp.<sup>27,28</sup> Marchionni continued to invest in later voyages, including those of 1504, 1505, 1506, 1509, 1510, 1518, and 1520, and remained wealthy and politically powerful until his death in 1530.<sup>29</sup> He worked with many other Italians, including

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<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, 'Letter to Fra Zuambatista (31 January 1513)', in *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese (1500-1525)*, ed. Marco Spallanzani (Florence, 1997), 128; Niccodemo Spinelli, 'Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli' (12 April 1508), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: 'Lettere', Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Niccodemo Spinelli, 'Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli' (28 December 1508), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: 'Lettere', Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Niccodemo Spinelli, 'Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli' (29 March 1509), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: 'Lettere', Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Niccodemo Spinelli, 'Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli' (28 August 1509), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: 'Lettere', Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Germán Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World: The Life and Times of Amerigo Vespucci*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York, 1978), 92–97.

<sup>23</sup> Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni, 'Homem de Grossa Fazenda' (ca. 1450-1530): Un Mercante Fiorentino a Lisbona e l'impero Portoghese* (Florence, 2014), xix.

<sup>24</sup> Afonso V of Portugal, 'Grant of Privileges to Bartolomeo Marchionni' (28 February 1475), Chancelaria de D. Afonso V, liv. 30, Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo.

<sup>25</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni, 'Homem de Grossa Fazenda' (ca. 1450-1530): Un Mercante Fiorentino a Lisbona e l'impero Portoghese*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Bartolomeo Marchionni, 'Letter to the Abbess of Le Murate' (8 September 1510), Corporazioni Religiose Soppresses dal Governo Francese, 81, 100, c. 211r., Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>27</sup> Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)', in *Le Nove Son Tanto e Tante Buone, Che Dir Non Se Pò : Lisboa Dos Italianos: História e Arte (Sécs. XIV-XVIII)*, ed. Nunziatella Alessandrini et al. (Lisbon, 2013), 39–60.

<sup>28</sup> Giovanni da Empoli, 'Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)', in *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, trans. Laurence A. Noonan (Lisbon, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 51.

his nephews Benedetto, who worked for him in Madeira, and Giovanni Morelli, a correspondent of Michelangelo's brother Simone Buonarroti.<sup>30</sup> His business partner and son-in-law **Francesco Corbinelli** became Portuguese factor to Goa.<sup>31</sup>

After Marchionni and the Sernigi, Count Giovanfrancesco (Giovanni Francesco) **Affaitati**, originally from Cremona, was the wealthiest Italian in Lisbon and was heavily involved in the trade in Asian commodities.<sup>32</sup> His nephew Giovan Carlo had established a branch in Antwerp, where the Affaitati made loans to the Regent.<sup>33</sup> Giovanfrancesco Affaitati's daughter Lucretia married Giovan Carlo and their daughter married **Luca Giraldi**, the wealthiest and most politically powerful Italian of the generation of merchants after Marchionni, Sernigi, and Affaitati.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)', 44; Michelangelo Buonarroti et al., *Carteggio Indiretto di Michelangelo*, vol. 2 (1988), 15–16, 18–22, 37–38.

<sup>31</sup> Marco Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese (1500-1525)* (Florence, 1997), 12–13; Virginia Rau, 'Un Florentin Au Service de l'expansion Portugaise En Outre-Mer: Francesco Corbinelli', in *Fatti e Idee Di Storia Economica Nei Secoli XII-XX: Studi Dedicati a Franco Borlandi* (Bologna, 1977), 277–86.

<sup>32</sup> Nunziatella Alessandrini, 'Os Italianos e a Expansão Portuguesa: O Caso Do Mercador João Francisco Affaitati (Séc. XVI)', in *Tra Fede e Storia: Studi in Onore Di Don Giovannino Pinna*, 2014, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Nunziatella Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi, Mercanti Banchieri Fiorentini Alla Corte Di Lisbona Nel XVI Secolo', *Storia Economica* XIV, no. 3 (2011): 383; J. Denucé, ed., *Inventaire des Affaitati: banquiers italiens à Anvers de l'année 1568* (Antwerp, 1934).

<sup>34</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi'.

## The Sources

Translations are my own where the original is also quoted in the text.

When an existing translation is used, the original is not quoted in the text. Both the original source and the translation are cited in the footnotes for reference.

Unless stated otherwise, all documents from the Archivio di Stato di Firenze were accessed in the archive. All documents from the Spinelli Archive were read in manuscript form, as were the Letterbook of Pieter van der Molen and Paulus Imhoff's *Geschenklis*.

The correspondence of the Tucher family (the Familienarchiv Tucher) was either inaccessible or illegible. A summary of each letter has been created, in German, by the Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, and these summaries were read in the archive. Discussions of the Tucher correspondence are consequently limited to the sender, recipient, and general subject, and do not attempt to analyse the contents of letters.

All other untranslated primary sources have been used in printed form. When both the printed and manuscript form have been cited in the footnotes, the manuscript source is included for clarity only.

## Introduction

In 1492, when Columbus found a route to the Americas, and in 1498, when Vasco da Gama successfully reached Calicut via the Cape Route, European commerce and finance were dominated not by the *hanses* and guilds of the medieval period, nor by the state chartered corporate companies that arose in the 1550s, but by a relatively small and distinct (although far from homogenous) group of individual merchants and family-based companies linked across territorial boundaries by highly developed socio-commercial networks. They were not Portuguese or Spanish, nor yet English or Dutch, but Italians from the northern city-states – like Columbus and Vespucci – or Germans from the southern Free Imperial Cities. In the first decades of the sixteenth century, it was these merchants and companies that dominated the European trade in Asian and American goods, whose capital funded Spanish and Portuguese royal policies overseas, and, as individuals or through their agents, played crucial roles in establishing the Spanish and Portuguese empires and colonial trade.

At their economic, cultural, and political peak in the period *circa* 1490 to 1530 – that is, the first few decades after Columbus' first voyage – these companies were led by the most influential merchants of the age, including Jacob Fugger, Anton Welser, Bartolomeo Marchionni, Ambrosius Höchstetter, and Girolamo Sernigi. These merchants had established themselves and their companies at the peak of European commerce and finance before 1500 and remained dominant until their deaths in the 1520s and 1530s. Their royal contemporaries, with whom they had close ties, were Manuel I and Maximilian, both of whom were heavily dependent upon foreign sources of financial, commercial, and bureaucratic capital and skill. Scholars have often imposed a sharp divide between the medieval (often rendered as unchanging, even backward) and early modern, so that the years c.1450 to c.1550 are frequently treated in the literature as a time of sudden departure, rather than transition, from the Middle Ages, and so that the medieval roots of early modern developments are sometimes overlooked.<sup>35</sup> Since the merchants in power before 1492 remained commercially dominant into

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<sup>35</sup> E.g. in Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich*, especially 1-4; for a discussion of the tendency to speak of an 'undifferentiated' medieval past, see Evelyn S. Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400-1600* (New Haven, 2005), 3-5; see also James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2011), 24; for the tendency to separate medieval and early modern trade, see John D. Fudge, *Cargoes, Embargoes, and Emissaries: Commercial and Political Interaction of England and the German Hanse, 1450-1510* (Toronto, 1995); and James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia Under the Habsburgs, 1580-1640* (Baltimore, 2008), 123; on connections between Spanish medieval and early modern expansion, see Javier Domínguez, 'Santiago Mataindios: la continuación de un discurso medieval en la Nueva España', *Nueva Revista de filología hispánica* 54, no. 1 (2006): 33-56; and Kelly Devries, 'Into the Atlantic or into the Mediterranean? Spanish military choices in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries', in *Studies in the Medieval Atlantic*, ed. Benjamin Hudson (New York, 2012), 207-277; for discussions around

the 1520s, attention should be placed upon the evolution of their activities rather than depicting 1492 as an abrupt break in time. The first generation following the overseas discoveries and expansion should be studied in context rather than merely as the forerunners of later developments.

These companies were distinct in size and function from the Bardi, Peruzzi, and Acciaiuoli ‘super-companies’ of the fourteenth century; from the later chartered joint-stock companies who replaced them from the 1550s; and from their smaller contemporaries.<sup>36</sup> Compared to smaller companies and traders, the elite merchants conducted trade on a greater scale and in a different form, with different ambitions, and with unique world-views that produced a singular reaction to the overseas European expansion. Most distinctively, they operated in positions of significant economic and financial power across Europe and were highly integrated across territorial boundaries with each other and with rulers, partly through participation in consortia formed with the Spanish and Portuguese governments and partly through networks mediated by the exchange of information and luxury commodities.

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Through these elaborate networks, geographically disparate merchants worked together and had similar methods of operation and ambition. Despite many scholars studying this period, from all angles, and despite the popularity of network theory, little attempt has been made to systematically examine the activities of the great merchant companies from a trans-regional perspective, preferring to examine specific cities, nationalities, expatriate communities, companies, or individuals. A trans-regional investigation, however, reveals that elite merchant companies operated across territorial divides using their highly multi-cultural networks, which were not restricted to members of the same ‘nation’.<sup>37</sup> Nor did differences in language, which often delineate the boundaries of modern research, prevent cross-cultural contact. Merchants included language studies in their education and celebrated their polyglot culture, trans-regional connections and access to Europe-wide items and culture. The advent of the

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periodisation, see Ronald Hutton, ed., *Medieval or Early Modern: The Value of a Traditional Historical Division* (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 2015), 254–55.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond De Roover, *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Chicago, 1974), 264; Frederic C. Lane, *Venice, A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, 1973); M. Bratchel, ‘Italian Merchant Organization and Business Relationships in Early Tudor London’, *Journal of European Economic History* 7, no. 1 (April 1978): 7; Hermann Kellenbenz, ‘The Role of the Great Upper German Families in Financing The Discoveries’, *Terrae Incognitae* 10, no. 1 (1978): 45–59.

discoveries and the rise of the Habsburgs prompted connections between merchants from across the commercially prominent regions of Europe to increase enormously as financial and trading consortia became an important part of their operations.<sup>38</sup> While different regions exhibited variations in their commercial, cultural, and political activities and in their response to the overseas discoveries, the continent-wide connections among merchants produced and were facilitated by many shared interests, outlooks, conspicuous consumption, and practices.

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Analysing the correspondence of these companies provides new insights into the aims and activities of elite merchant companies and reveals how their choices and motivations influenced and were influenced by their political, cultural, and economic contexts. Their letters, approached using a synthesis of cultural and economic historiographic methods, reveal that their cultural, political, and economic activities were closely intertwined, activities that are generally studied separately as a result of the general separation of cultural and economic historical methods.<sup>39</sup> Their correspondence also reveals that their unique position in European society produced a specifically mercantile perspective upon the changes that developed during this period, especially the overseas discoveries, in response to which they showed themselves to be highly adaptable.

This unique mercantile perspective, especially their reaction to the first European activity in the New World and in Asia via the Cape Route has received surprisingly little research. Merchants paid great attention to these developments, analysing and predicting their commercial, social, and political implications rather than merely reporting events. They used their mastery of information, especially on Asia and the Americas for political and commercial advantage at the same time as they used the products of the newly accessible overseas territories to enhance their intra-European ambitions.

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These activities took place against a background of broader changes, including the impact of globalisation upon European commerce in general and upon government interactions with

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<sup>38</sup> Rolf Walter, 'High-Finance Interrelated: International Consortiums in the Commercial World of the Sixteenth Century' (XIV International Economic History Conference, Helsinki, 2006), 14.

<sup>39</sup> See Carlo M. Cipolla, *Between Two Cultures: An Introduction to Economic History* (New York, London, 1991), *passim*.



trans-national companies in particular. The rise of the Habsburgs from the 1470s provided German and Italian merchants with greater freedom of movement and with new opportunities in royal finance and conspicuous consumption. The Habsburgs' notorious financial difficulties and insecure position made them dependent upon their financiers, who were thus given enormous leverage. The same relationship existed between foreign, especially German, merchants and Manuel I of Portugal, who needed foreign supplies of capital and precious metals for Portuguese trade to Africa and Asia. Because of this relationship, and as leaders in European commerce at the time of the European discoveries of America and the sea route to India, the great companies were perfectly positioned to take full advantage of the new opportunities. Elite merchants consequently oriented their activities around rulers and became important agents of state and 'colonial' formation and administration. Along with supplying exotica and information from abroad, merchants held key roles overseas as administrators, financiers, and – in the case of the Welser – conquistadors, with wider ramifications for the establishment of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. When the circumstances that had allowed the great merchant-banking families to rise to prominence in European and overseas commerce – especially the financial dependence of the Habsburgs and Iberian rulers – changed, the merchants lost the privileged position that they had enjoyed and were obliged to transform their activities or face collapse.<sup>40</sup>

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With few exceptions, merchant companies of this type were not found in Venice, France, the Hanseatic League, England, Genoa, or the Levant.<sup>41</sup> Venice did not have a small number of 'merchant princes' but rather a large amount of middling to wealthy traders working in close co-operation with the civic authorities.<sup>42</sup>

France and England were not yet commercially advanced enough to have large corporations of the type considered here: multi-branch companies with several branches abroad; multiple agents; large supplies of capital; shareholders; and with heavy involvement in government

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<sup>40</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 12–13; Joan-Pau Rubiés, ed., 'Giovanni Di Buonagrazia's Letter to His Father Concerning His Participation in the Second Expedition of Vasco Da Gama (1502–1503)', *Mare Liberum* 16 (1998): 93; Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous* (Charlottesville, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> For an example of a wealthy and influential Netherlandish merchant banking dynasty, see J. L. Meulleners, *De Antwerpsche bankier Erasmus Schetz en zijne geassocieerden Jan Vleminck en Arnold Proenen in hunne betrekking tot Maastricht en Aken* (Maastricht, 1890).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Andrea Berengo, *Lettres d'un Marchand Vénétien Andrea Berengo (1553-1556)*, ed. Ugo Tucci and Gino Luzzato (Paris, 1957).

finance, resource management, and procuring supplies for courts on a grand scale. Lyons, the financial capital of France, was dominated by Florentine merchants such as the Gondi family.<sup>43</sup> In England, the famous joint-stock companies emerged in the 1550s onwards. Although both countries had had a small number of hugely successful traders, such as Jacques Coeur and William de la Pole, these merchants were exceptional in their wealth and their political involvement; French and English kings relied upon foreign – mostly Italian – merchants for capital.<sup>44</sup> The Hanseatic League did have multi-partner companies, called *selscop* (German *Gesellschaft, Handelsgesellschaft*), but these had much smaller amounts of capital than their High German equivalents and there were no large commercial firms before the sixteenth-century Loitz company, from Stettin.<sup>45</sup>

Genoese merchants were of supreme importance as financiers, administrators, and traders in the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish territories in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Americas. However, although they competed in designing elaborate *palazzi*, the Genoese did not engage in the same use of luxury artefacts as did the Florentines, some other Italians, and High Germans.<sup>46</sup> Nor does their correspondence survive in any detail.<sup>47</sup> Pike, Epstein, and others have attributed this both to differences in commercial practice and to an extreme desire to conceal rather than share commercial and commercially relevant information, in contrast to the deliberate circulation of information practiced by Florentines, High Germans, and other merchant groups.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Leone*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Chicago, 1948), 55; Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Philippe Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, ed. D. S. Ault and S. H. Steinberg (London, 1970), 159–60, 167–68; on Hanseatic trade partnerships, see Johannes Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, trans. Katherine Vanovitch (Leipzig, 1985), 106.

<sup>46</sup> Ruth Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure: The Genoese in Seville and the Opening of the New World* (Ithaca and New York, 1966), 11–12; for arguments on Florentine merchants' contributions to artistic styles, see among other works: Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato, Francesco Di Marco Datini, 1335-1410* (New York, 1957); Robert S. Lopez, 'The Culture of the Medieval Merchant', *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1979): 52–73; Raymond de Roover, *Money, Banking, and Credit in Mediaeval Bruges: Italian Merchant-Bankers, Lombards, and Money-Changers: A Study in the Origins of Banking* (London and New York, 1999); Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500* (New York, London, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> George L. Gorse, 'Christopher Columbus and Andrea Doria: The Two Worlds of Renaissance Genoa', *Mediterranean Studies* 16 (2007): 125.

<sup>48</sup> Ricardo Court, "'Januensis Ergo Mercator': Trust and Enforcement in the Business Correspondence of the Brignole Family', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no. 4 (2004): especially 990-91; Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 11-13; for the sharing of information among Genoese business partners and the role of trust in their trade, see Steven A. Epstein, 'Secrecy and Genoese commercial practices', *Journal of Medieval History* 20, no. 4 (1994): 313-25.

Restricting economic history to the depersonalised Braudelian depiction of economic trends as large-scale cycles, as favoured before the 1960s, is insufficient.<sup>49</sup> In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, powerful individuals and companies had enormous sway upon the financial face of Europe in an important period of transition from the Medieval to the Early Modern, from scattered territories to states, and from relative isolation to the opening of Asia, Africa and the New World to European exploration and conquest. The economic, cultural, and socio-political influence of these merchant-banker families meant that their ambitions, mindsets, and worldviews (a term that became literal in this period) – topics that were central to the *Histoire des Mentalités* of the Annalist school but that have since fallen out of fashion – had serious ramifications for the course of European commerce and finance.

Because merchant companies of this time were very small, and because the time taken to communicate meant that employees and correspondents frequently had to act without consulting the head of the company, individual traders and their relationships with each other and with rulers were highly significant. The great distance between agents and their principals, and the consequent problems of communication, made agents both increasingly important and more likely to diverge in interest from their employers. Globalisation and the newly global reach of previously intra-European firms changed how merchants appointed and controlled their agents, how agents fitted into the system, and how this relationship was mediated.

Despite the importance of individuals and individual traders, they operated within commercial and socio-political networks. The wide geographical scope of their business, especially with the advent of direct trade to Asia and the Americas, made agents and lesser traders essential representatives and correspondents. Humanists and clergymen were also vital connections and correspondents; many merchants had had humanist educations and many humanists and clerics came from mercantile families.<sup>50</sup> Rather than a small number of ‘great men’, long-distance commerce involved a large group of interdependent people. An analysis of multiple

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<sup>49</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds, vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972); drawing upon Richard Ehrenberg, *Das Zeitalter Der Fugger*, 2 vols (Jena, 1896) for the ‘Age of the Fugger’; and followed by Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Cambridge, 1976) and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York, 1980); see also Raymond de Roover, ‘The Commercial Revolution of the 13th Century’, *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 16 (1942): 34–39.

<sup>50</sup> Franz Irsigler, ‘Hanskaufleute: Die Lübecker Veckinchusen und Die Kölner Rinck’, in *Hanse in Europa: Brücke Zwischen Den Märkten, 12. Bis 17. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 1973), 323; on Florentine humanist attitudes towards commerce, see Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 2009), 585–94.

organisations and individuals, using a broad range of sources, reveals that merchants understood themselves in collective terms.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. Anne Tedeschi and John Tedeschi (Baltimore, 2013).

# 1492: Before and After

## Chapter One:

### The Great Companies Before 1492

By the later fifteenth century, the commercial, financial, and technological developments of previous centuries had produced several great merchant-banking companies who were involved in governmental finance, luxury trade and entrepreneurial ventures on a grand scale, with branches across Europe and connections to European courts.<sup>52</sup> They made extensive loans to crowns and the papacy in exchange for substantial benefits and, as the fifteenth century progressed, gained increasing and sometimes total control of important commodities.<sup>53</sup> The élite merchant-banking companies of the late fifteenth century were distinguished from others by the size and scope of their trade and financial activities, the structure of their organisation, by the special licences through which they operated, and by the direct and personal, rather than institutionally mediated, nature of their relationship with rulers. These companies, who dominated European trade and commerce in 1492, consequently played a central role in Europe's first engagement with the Americas and with Asia on the maritime routes. Everything that these merchants did after 1492 was the direct application, expansion, adjustment, or radical transformation of long-established intra-European practices and principles. Success was based upon correctly judging the best response and approach to the new opportunities and upon being perfectly positioned to take advantage of them. This chapter provides an introduction to the most powerful merchant banking corporations in Europe in 1492, discussing how they reached their outstanding positions and what those positions were. It examines their relationships with rulers, their business methods, their mentality and attitudes, and the nature of their trade and finance. It lists the most important companies, individual merchant bankers, and rulers against a brief overview, based upon the literature, of the broader political and economic changes that took place in the fifteenth century.

Almost all of the great merchant companies were from northern and central Italy and southern Germany. Merchants from these regions were able to dominate trade in part because of their mastery of advanced commercial techniques, including double-entry bookkeeping, Hindu-Arabic numerals, and the use of merchant manuals such as Pegolotti's *Pratica della mercatura*

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<sup>52</sup> Edwin S. Hunt and James M. Murray, *A History of Business in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550* (Cambridge, 1999), 155.

<sup>53</sup> M. M. Postan, 'The Trade of Medieval Europe: The North', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, ed. M. M. Postan, Edward Miller, and Cynthia Postan, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Trade and Industry in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1987), 290–91; R. Kaeuper, *Bankers to the Crown: The Riccardi of Lucca and Edward I* (Princeton, 2015), 21–22, 46–47.

(c.1340).<sup>54</sup> They operated through their extensive networks, which were managed through detailed correspondence and fostered by being highly itinerant, especially as apprentices and junior merchants.<sup>55</sup> With permanent or semi-permanent agents located in important commercial cities and in constant contact with the sedentary merchants in the head office, large merchant companies could rapidly transfer information and merchandise to take advantage of changes in the market and out-compete other traders.<sup>56</sup> Traders were a heterogeneous category; the great international merchants occupied a different position in the social hierarchy to local traders and bankers were likewise sharply distinguished from money-changers and -lenders.<sup>57</sup> In acknowledgement of this diversity, the term ‘merchant’, at least in England, referred specifically to wholesale traders, especially those who traded across long distances.<sup>58</sup> Chaucer’s internationally active Merchant, derived from popular stock characters, was a prime example of the type.<sup>59</sup> Equivalent terms in other languages included the German ‘Fernhändler’ and the Italian ‘mercanti grossi’.<sup>60</sup> The lesser traders and artisans, who formed the vast majority of commercial actors and whose primarily regional and small-scale trade was collectively of a far greater volume than the commerce of the international traders, did not, in this period, become directly involved in overseas trade or governmental finance.<sup>61</sup>

Much of the success of merchants had come from their use of collective commercial organisations, especially guilds and nations. The great companies were distinguished partly by their preference for operating independently of these groups, seeking privileges obtained by direct engagement with and loans to rulers.

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<sup>54</sup> Francesco di Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica Della Mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge, Mass., 1936); Alfred Weitnauer, *Venezianischer Handel Der Fugger: Nach d. Musterbuchhaltung d. Matthäus Schwarz* (Munich and Leipzig, 1931).

<sup>55</sup> Smit, ‘Geography, Population, and the Economic Identities of Norman Sicily’, pp. 96, 98; John H. Pryor, ‘The Origins of the *Commenda Contract*’, *Speculum* 52, no. 1 (January, 1977), p. 7; Lewis and Runyan, *European Naval Power and Maritime History*, p. 56-7; Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 373–74.

<sup>56</sup> For the division of labour, see Raymond de Roover, ‘A Florentine Firm of Cloth Manufacturers: Management and Organization of a Sixteenth-Century Business’, *Speculum* 16 (1941): 3–32.

<sup>57</sup> Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, 4–6; Lopez, ‘The Culture of the Medieval Merchant’, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge, 1973), 99–102; Richard Goddard, ‘The Merchant’, in *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford, 2014), 170–72.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Häberlein, ‘Die Welser-Vöhlin-Gesellschaft: Fernhandel, Familienbeziehungen und Sozialer Status an Der Wende Vom Mittelalter Zur Neuzeit’, in ‘*Geld und Glaube*’. *Leben in Evangelischen Reichsstädten*, ed. Wolfgang Jahn, Josef Kirmeier, and Thomas Berger (Augsburg, 1998), 17–37.

<sup>61</sup> Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, 6.

The traditional historiographical argument concerning nations and guilds holds that collaborative action, by the entire merchant group, was required for success.<sup>62</sup> This, however, has been questioned in more recent scholarship.<sup>63</sup> Nations became less important in the commercial cities of England and the Low Countries during the fifteenth and especially the sixteenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> As communities of foreign merchants became more established, merchants could rely more upon their networks of business partners, relatives, compatriots, and other connections than upon nations to regulate their social, political, and commercial activities. Traditional forms of collaborative action, such as boycotts, also declined.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, merchants made use of new commercial institutions being established by civic governments and rulers.<sup>66</sup> In the 1480s, the city of Antwerp opened a house in the Hofstraat as a place of commercial and monetary exchange and was replaced with the larger Nieuwe Beurs (or Handelsbeurs) in 1532, from which the Fugger and other German merchants made loans to Charles V.<sup>67</sup>

The great companies echoed the general trend in moving away from operating through nations. They also rejected the collaborative acquisition of privileges, preferring to use their close relationships with rulers to secure exemptions from or lowering of customs duties for their own goods rather than relying upon the less favourable customs and other tax reductions obtained by nations.<sup>68</sup> Many of the other benefits that nations offered to their members were unnecessary for the great companies. Unlike smaller companies, they were able to supply their own housing and warehouses, such as the ‘splendid’ (*herlich*) house that Lucas Rem purchased in 1503 for the Welser in Lisbon.<sup>69</sup> These companies were sometimes even able to provide their own

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<sup>62</sup> Avner Greif, Paul Milgrom, and Barry R. Weingast, ‘Coordination, Commitment, and Enforcement: The Case of the Merchant Guild’, *Journal of Political Economy* 102, no. 4 (1994): 752; Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge, 2006), 91–93.

<sup>63</sup> Oscar Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce: The Institutional Foundations of International Trade in the Low Countries, 1250-1650* (Princeton, 2013), 169–70; Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000–1800* (New York, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 34; Sheilagh Ogilvie, *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis* (Princeton, 2019), 511–38.

<sup>65</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Greif, Milgrom, and Weingast, ‘Coordination, Commitment, and Enforcement’, 773.

<sup>67</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 54–55; Jeroen Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century: The Golden Age of Antwerp* (London and New York, 2015), 73–74; J. Denucé, ‘De Beurs van Antwerpen, Oorsprong En Eerste Ontwikkeling, 15e En 16e Eeuwen’, in *Antwerpsch Archievenblad* (Antwerp, 1931), 80–145.

<sup>68</sup> Donald J. Harreld, *High Germans In The Low Countries: German Merchants And Commerce In Golden Age Antwerp* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), 41; Donald J. Harreld, ‘Foreign Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries’, *The Journal of European Economic History* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 26.

<sup>69</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8; Harreld, *High Germans In The Low Countries*, 24–25.



transport; in 1480, for example, ‘Bartolomeu, a Florentine [or] Genoese merchant, resident in our city of Lisbon, told us that he wished to build a ship of two hundred tons (*Bertolameu frorentim jenoës mercador morador em a nossa édade de Lisboa nos disse que elle tinha voomtade de fazer huuma naao atee dozemtaz tonelladas...*). This was in line with the privileges of Portuguese – not resident Italian – merchants.<sup>70</sup> Their ability to provide and outfit ships was part of the reason why the German and Italian consortia were allowed to participate in the overseas voyages by the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, whose own ability to do so was insufficient.<sup>71</sup>

Not only were the privileges of great companies different from those granted to nations, so were the methods by which they secured these privileges. Medieval trade operated upon the exchange of loans, customs duties, or other grants of money in exchange for the right to trade and other privileges. Although merchants and companies sometimes made individual loans to rulers, many lent collectively to lower the risk of a defaulting debtor.<sup>72</sup> The great companies, by contrast, lent directly in return for privileges far greater than those obtained by smaller companies.<sup>73</sup> The provision of vast sums was accompanied by the provision of infrastructure and organisation that was generally beyond the capacity of the rulers involved. In this way, several companies came to monopolise, operate, and gain the lion’s share of the profit from vital commodities. As the ‘super-companies’ of the fourteenth century had managed Sicilian wheat and English wool, Augsburg and Nuremberg firms gained total control of Hungarian copper and Tyrolese silver in the 1490s and a few companies, almost all of them Italian, dominated the late fifteenth century trade in Atlantic sugar, slaves, and spices. Only the largest companies were able to raise the enormous loans necessary for such transactions and to continue extending such loans over a long period of time.<sup>74</sup> In return for these privileges, the

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<sup>70</sup> Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, ed., ‘Licence of Alfonso V to Bartolomeo Marchionni (17 April 1480)’, in *Bartolomeo Marchionni, ‘Homem de Grossa Fazenda’ (ca. 1450-1530): Un Mercante Fiorentino a Lisbona e l’impero Portoghese* (Florence, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> For the asiento permitting German participation and stipulating the conditions, see A. A. B. Andrade, ‘O Auto Notarial de Valentim Fernandes (1503) Eo Seu Significado Como Fonte Histórica’, *Arquivos Do Centro Cultural Português* 5 (1972): 521–45; Johann P. Cassel, *Privilegia und Handlungsfreiheiten, Welche Die Könige von Portugal Ehedem Den Deutschen Kaufleuten Zu Lissabon Ertheilet Haben* (Bremen, 1771), 5–10.

<sup>72</sup> Jacques Bernard, ‘Trade and Finance in the Middle Ages, 900-1500’, in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Carlo M. Cipolla (Glasgow, 1972), 326; Robert S. Lopez, ‘The Trade of Medieval Europe: The South’, in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Trade and Industry in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1987), 359; Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 175–76.

<sup>73</sup> Robert L. Reynolds, ‘Origins of Modern Business Enterprise: Medieval Italy’, *The Journal of Economic History* 12, no. 4 (1952): 365; Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 175–76; Edwin S. Hunt, *The Medieval Super-Companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence* (Cambridge, 1994), 64.

<sup>74</sup> Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 25; Hunt, *The Medieval Super-Companies*, *passim*.

great companies were vulnerable to the possibility that their princely debtors might default, the most famous example of which was Edward III's default upon his loans from the Bardi and Peruzzi, which contributed to their bankruptcies.<sup>75</sup> To operate on a grand scale, however, they required the special treatment that could only be obtained in return for such enormous loans.

Similarly, the great companies made limited use of guilds and preferred to operate independently or in consortia, which often extended beyond single cities. In 1507, for example, the Emperor Maximilian attempted to raise a forced loan from the business houses of Augsburg, Nuremberg, Memmingen, and Ratisbon, but was fought by the firms which, rather than operating through merchant organisations, used Conrad Peutinger as their agent.<sup>76</sup> After several months they advanced 150 000 florins but under conditions unfavourable to Maximilian.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the Augsburg houses used Conrad Peutinger to defend their financial investment in the Portuguese overseas voyages during the *Monopolstreit*, an attempt by the Imperial Diet to curb and punish monopolistic practices in the 1520s.<sup>78</sup> Their choice of Peutinger stemmed partly from his position as city secretary (*Stadtschreiber*) but more importantly, his role as a councillor of Maximilian I and as Anton Welser's son-in-law. Family, politics, and business were always intertwined.<sup>79</sup>

The great companies preferred to use their informal networks first and to turn to the civic authorities if these failed. When this occurred, they were able to rely – as lesser companies and traders were not – upon their recourse to rulers and their vast supplies of capital and infrastructure. Greif argued that Italian merchants, far more than the Maghribi traders, operated through institutions as well as informal networks and shared social norms, while historians such as North argue that traders made use of 'state' institutions such as central courts, upon which much of the scholarship on the so-called *lex mercatoria* has also focused.<sup>80</sup> A separate

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<sup>75</sup> Hunt, *The Medieval Super-Companies*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Conrad Peutinger, 'Denkschrift Pentingers für Maximilian gegen den Plan einer Zwangsanleihe bei den Handelsgesellschaften (1507)', in *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge zu einer politischen Biographie*, ed. Heinrich Lutz (Augsburg, 1958), 327–28; Jacob Fugger, 'Rechtfertigung Der Fugger Gegen Den Plan Maxim. I Eine Reichssteuer Auf Die Gesellschaft Zu Erheben, circa 1507' (c 1507), 2.1.12½, Fuggerarchiv.

<sup>77</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 68–69.

<sup>78</sup> Bernd Mertens, *Im Kampf gegen die Monopole: Reichstagsverhandlungen und Monopolprozesse im frühen 16. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1996), 60–66.

<sup>79</sup> Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger*, 54.

<sup>80</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, 1990); Douglass C. North, John J. Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge, 2009), especially 167–69; David Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, 'The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change and Economic Growth', *The American Economic Review* 95, no. 3 (June 2005): 546–79.

examination of the great companies indicates that they sought legal aid by making direct appeals to rulers to gain compensation in the case of cross-jurisdictional transgressions of supposedly trans-regional laws. Court proceedings against privateers and robber barons were especially difficult, taking years and enormous effort to resolve and so requiring strong incentives to pursue them.<sup>81</sup> The most powerful merchants, however, were able to regain their property by leveraging their high standing with rulers. When a ship belonging to the Medici bank and carrying cargo worth 80 000 florins, plus Angelo Tani's Memling *Last Judgement*, was stolen by Danzig pirates in 1473, the bank drew upon all available resources to regain the ship. They were able to win the support of Charles the Bold, Sixtus IV, and the Florentine Signoria and appealed to the cities of Danzig, Hamburg and Lubeck, the kings of Poland and Hungary, and Maximilian I. When this failed, Portinari turned to the Grand Council of Malines, winning a warrant to seize 6000 florins and 40 000 *écus* from the Hansards in Bruges and Antwerp.<sup>82</sup> Florentines operating in the Mediterranean and Hanseatic merchants in the Baltic also suffered piratical predations.<sup>83</sup> In 1492, one of Bartolomeo Marchionni's ships was seized by Genoese privateers, and in 1503 a cargo of sugar belonging to Francesco Corbinelli, Marchionni's son-in-law, Girolamo Sernigi and Raffaello Nardi was likewise captured by Spanish pirates. In both cases, the merchants appealed directly, and successfully, to rulers – the kings of Portugal and Spain respectively – and retrieved their property on the grounds that they had been naturalised citizens.<sup>84</sup>

The behaviour of the great monopolists not only challenges current interpretations of the importance of nations but also the assertions that such merchants were 'typical' – as Bartolomeo Marchionni was described, for example, by Bruscoli (in turn drawing upon Melis and Rau) – and that merchants can be treated as homogenous.<sup>85</sup> An examination of the elite

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<sup>81</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 185–86.

<sup>82</sup> Florence Edler de Roover, 'A Prize of War: A Painting of Fifteenth Century Merchants', *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19, no. 1 (February 1945): 3–12.

<sup>83</sup> O. Krafft, 'Eine Fehde, Ein Reichsachtverfahren und Das Ende Zweier Grafschaften: Die Kaufleute Veckinchusen Im Streit Mit Den Letzten Grafen von Ziegenhain', *Zeitschrift Des Vereins Für Hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde* 111 (2006): 31–62.

<sup>84</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 67–68; Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)', 41; *Documentos Sobre Relaciones Internacionales de Los Reyes Catolicos*, vol. 4: 1492-1494 (Barcelona, 1962), 46–48; for the Veckinchusen brothers' successful case against German counts using the same methods of appeal, see Krafft, 'Eine Fehde, Ein Reichsachtverfahren und Das Ende Zweier Grafschaften: Die Kaufleute Veckinchusen Im Streit Mit Den Letzten Grafen von Ziegenhain'.

<sup>85</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*; Virginia Rau, 'Notes Sur La Traite Portugaise à La Fin Du Xve Siècle et Le Florentin Bartolomeo Di Domênico Marchionni', *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 44 (1974): 535–43; Rau, 'Francesco Corbinelli', 277–86; Federigo Melis, *Mercaderes Italianos En España, Siglos XIV-XVI. Investigaciones Sobre Su Correspondencia y Su Contabilidad* (Seville, 1976).

companies as a distinct category (although not necessarily a self-identifying one), shows that, once their businesses reached a critical mass, the behaviour of merchants changed significantly and they moved away from established commercial trends and institutions in favour of creating their own methods, privileges, and approaches. The great companies, with their far greater access to capital and infrastructure, increasingly avoided the use of nations in favour of approaching rulers directly. By the time these élite companies entered extra-European trade, consortia formed of monopolists had come to largely replace nations hindered – from their perspective – by outdated regulatory measures with limited privileges that they could supersede with individual rather than collective action. However, they did use nations for social networks, identity, and civic ritual, echoing the gradual transition of nations from commercial to social institutions in the commercial cities of England and the Netherlands during the sixteenth century.<sup>86</sup>

In the 1480s and '90s, some of the larger companies of High Germany (*Hochdeutschland*) became merchant bankers operating on the world stage. Although never a backwater, several developments had transformed the region into a central trading and manufacturing hub in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Trans-alpine commerce had swelled in the thirteenth century and the first *Fondaco dei Tedeschi* was built in 1220s by the Venetian government to both encourage and control German merchants, who exported Italian and Levantine products such as spices, silks, and woollens to Germany and central and eastern Europe.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, the growing importance of the Alpine passes and the Rhine as trading routes between Europe's most commercialised and industrialised areas, northern Italy and the Low Countries, channelled commerce through the cities of Swabia, Franconia, and the Rhineland.<sup>88</sup>

The High Germans were thus ideally placed as middlemen in trans-European commerce. As the wealth of the German companies increased, they followed the Italian companies in undertaking entrepreneurial activities, primarily in metal ware, which was particularly important in Franconia, and textiles, with fustian becoming a speciality of Ulm and Augsburg. These items were sold at the Netherlandish fairs and cities, especially Antwerp, in exchange

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<sup>86</sup> Harreld, 'Foreign Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries', 23; Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 7; Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 45, 49–51; see also William D. Phillips, 'Local Integration and Long-Distance Ties: The Castilian Community in Sixteenth-Century Bruges', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, no. 1 (1986): 33–49.

<sup>87</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 64; J. Wesley Hoffmann, 'The Commerce of the German Alpine Passes During the Early Middle Ages', *Journal of Political Economy* 31, no. 6 (1923): 838–39.

<sup>88</sup> J. A. van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800* (London, 1977), 100–101, 108.

for spices, luxury manufactures, English cloth, raw materials for the textile industry, and other commodities.<sup>89</sup> Raw materials such as linen, previously imported from Venice or further afield, were produced locally by entrepreneurs from the later fourteenth century.<sup>90</sup> This was partly due to trading bans with Venice imposed by the Emperors Sigismund and Charles IV at several times in the early fifteenth century.<sup>91</sup> When trade bans lapsed (and often before), the German merchants continued their trade with Venice, whence they also procured Eastern imports and Italian manufactured goods (with some trade with Genoa).<sup>92</sup>

The most significant change that drove the High Germans' prosperity and entrance onto the Antwerp market was the discovery of new silver mines in the Tyrolean Alps in the early fifteenth century.<sup>93</sup> Their previous trade to Venice declined in importance with the rise of the trade in silver, fustian, and high-quality metal wares to Antwerp and other areas of western Europe including the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>94</sup> Starting from the 1430s, and in significant numbers from the 1460s, High German merchants began to arrive in the Low Countries as importers of silver and fustian.<sup>95</sup> The profits and products from these mines were re-invested into entrepreneurship and technological development. Nuremberg became a leader in the production of highly technical metal wares, especially navigational equipment.<sup>96</sup> This latter

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<sup>89</sup> van Houtte, 108; Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 27–29; for the fustian industry, see Hermann Kellenbenz, 'The Fustian Industry of the Ulm Region in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe: Essays in Memory of Professor E.M. Carus-Wilson*, ed. N. B. Harte and Kenneth G. Ponting (London, 1983), 259–76; and J. L. Bolton and Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'When Did Antwerp Replace Bruges as the Commercial and Financial Centre of North-Western Europe? The Evidence of the Borromei Ledger for 1438', *The Economic History Review* 61, no. 2 (2008): 360–79.

<sup>90</sup> Eric E. Hirshler, 'Medieval Economic Competition', *The Journal of Economic History* 14, no. 1 (1954): 53–54; Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 92.

<sup>91</sup> Kießling, 'Wirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in der Region: Die Welser-Vöhlin-Gesellschaft im Kontext der Memminger Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts', 198–99; Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 92–93; Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 46–50.

<sup>92</sup> For merchants ignoring the trade bans, see Christa Schaper, *Die Hirschvogel von Nürnberg und ihr Handelshaus* (Nuremberg, 1973), 43–47; for Germans in Genoa, see Marco Veronesi, *Oberdeutsche Kaufleute in Genua 1350-1490: Institutionen, Strategien, Kollektive* (Stuttgart, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> For the growing importance of silver, see Andrea Cobern, 'Negotiating the Reformation in Habsburg Hungary, c.1520-c.1620' (Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2013) and Renate Pieper, Claudia de Lozzane Jeffries, and Markus A. Denzel, eds., *Mining, Money and Markets in the Early Modern Atlantic Digital Approaches and New Perspectives* (London, 2019).

<sup>94</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 133.

<sup>95</sup> Bolton and Bruscoli, 'When Did Antwerp Replace Bruges as the Commercial and Financial Centre of North-Western Europe?'

<sup>96</sup> Theodor Gustav Werner, 'Das Kupferhüttenwerk Des Hans Tetzl aus Nürnberg auf Kuba und Seine Finanzierung durch Europäisches Finanzkapital. I. Teil (1545-1571)', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 48, no. 3 (1961): 299–300; David Blackbourn, 'Germans Abroad and "Auslandsdeutsche": Places, Networks and Experiences from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41, no. 2 (2015): 324–25; Christoph Adam Carl von Imhoff, 'Die Imhoff-Handelsherren und Kunstliebhaber: Überblick über Eine 750 Jahre alter Nürnberger Ratsfamilie', *Mitteilungen des Vereins Für Geschichte Der Stadt Nürnberg* 62 (1975): 27.

development arose in conjunction with growing scholarly interest in cosmography, geography, and other sciences, echoing and in correspondence with similar developments in Italy and Portugal.<sup>97</sup> One of the most significant figures in this movement was Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller von Königsberg), whose advances in the field would be felt in Portugal and Spain through the spread of German scientific literature and the movement of educated Germans such as Valentim Fernandes and, possibly, the Nuremberg-born merchant Martin Behaim.<sup>98</sup>

Most significantly, the discovery new deposits of silver and copper provided German merchants with a near-hegemony over one of the most important commodities in Europe. Lacking access to gold except from sub-Saharan Africa – a key motive for the Portuguese and Spanish conquests in North Africa and explorations along the West African coast (p.38) – the European economy was dependent upon silver, especially for trade with the Levant.<sup>99</sup>

This commercial re-orientation and their control of vital raw materials made the southern German cities perfectly situated to serve the financial needs of late fifteenth century rulers for their wars and colonial ambitions. Like the Italian merchants before them, their vast liquid supplies soon encouraged German merchants to expand into banking, including for princes and the Church. Around 1400, the Nuremberg families of Locheim, Stromer (or Stromeir), Pirckheimer, and Paumgartner remitted money and provided loans to the papacy.<sup>100</sup> By the final decades of the fifteenth century, German companies had the capital and raw materials to attract the attention of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, who needed money, copper, and silver to fund their new voyages.<sup>101</sup> With these developments, the southern German cities were transformed into one of the major commercial and manufacturing regions in Europe and large

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<sup>97</sup> Maria Berbara and Karl A. E. Enenkel, *Portuguese Humanism and the Republic of Letters* (Leiden, 2011), 433–36; Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 48–81.

<sup>98</sup> Ernst Zinner, *Regiomontanus: His Life and Work*, trans. E. Brown, vol. 1, *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Mathematics* (Amsterdam, 2014), especially 98-100; Behaim's introduction of navigational instruments is denied by E. G. Ravenstein, *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe* (London, 1908), 15–20; but has been tentatively accepted in more recent scholarship, including Hermann Kellenbenz, 'Portugiesische Forschungen Zur Behaimfrage', *Mitteilungen Des Vereins Für Geschichte Der Stadt Nürnberg* 48 (1958): 83–84; and Johannes Willers, 'Leben und Werk Des Martin Behaim', in *Focus Behaim-Globus*, ed. Johannes Willers and G. Bott, vol. 1 (Nuremberg, 1992), 182–84.

<sup>99</sup> Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung', 49; for the importance of African gold to Mediterranean trade generally, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, 510–12; on the silver trade to Venice, see, for example, J. Wesley Hoffmann, 'The Fondaco Dei Tedeschi: The Medium of Venetian-German Trade', *Journal of Political Economy* 40, no. 2 (1932): 246.

<sup>100</sup> Wolfgang von Stromer, 'Nuremberg in the International Economics of the Middle Ages', *The Business History Review* 44, no. 2 (1970): 213.

<sup>101</sup> Jürgen Pohle, 'Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa', *Bollettino Storico e Archivistico Del Mediterraneo e Delle Americhe* 7 (December 2015): 22.

corporations emerged. The most famous of these was the Great Ravensburg Company (*Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft*), formed in 1380.<sup>102</sup> Profits from their growing trans-European trade were re-invested in entrepreneurship in the industries that had made them so successful, and they made significant advances in textile manufacture and, especially, mining. New extraction and refining techniques were introduced to better exploit the silver mines.<sup>103</sup> The cost of such ventures produced a growing concentration of the metal and textile trades into the hands of a shrinking number of entrepreneurs, who, consequently, became ever more prominent in the import and export trade to Antwerp and Venice. In parallel, Augsburg and Nuremberg emerged as the most important commercial centres, and merchants from other cities, such as the Memminger Vöhlín, moved to or established branches in these cities.<sup>104</sup> The concentration of capital into the hands of entrepreneurs was repeated across Europe from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, widening the gap between the great monopolists and other companies.<sup>105</sup> In Spain and Portugal, the small size of local merchant and banking companies allowed foreign merchants to enter and dominate trade and finance.<sup>106</sup>

With the rise of Augsburg and Nuremberg, their leading merchant families became multi-branch, trans-regional merchant-banking corporations in the Italian model. The Höchstetter, Herwart, Tucher, Imhoff, Welser, and Fugger families all gained commercial pre-eminence in the last quarter of the fifteenth century from the trade in, extraction of, or manufacture of precious metals or textiles, or both.<sup>107</sup> These companies maintained this pre-eminence into the

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<sup>102</sup> Aloys Schulte, *Geschichte Der Großen Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft 1380-1530*, 3 vols (Wiesbaden, 1923).

<sup>103</sup> For southern German advances in mining, see Ekkehard Westermann, 'The Brass-Works of the Höchstetter at Pflach near Reutte in the Tyrol, 1509-1529', in *Industry and Finance in Early Modern History: Essays Presented to George Hammersley on the Occasion of His 74th Birthday*, ed. George Hammersley et al. (London, 1992); Werner, 'Das Kupferhüttenwerk Des Hans Tetzl Aus Nürnberg Auf Kuba und Seine Finanzierung Durch Europäisches Finanzkapital. I. Teil (1545-1571)'.

<sup>104</sup> Kießling, 'Wirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in der Region: Die Welser-Vöhlín-Gesellschaft im Kontext der Memminger Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts', 203–10.

<sup>105</sup> This argument was developed, with a Marxist perspective, by Pirenne; see, for example, Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, 7 vols (Brussels, 1900); Henri Pirenne, 'Une Crise Industrielle Au XVIème Siècle: La Draperie Urbaine et La Nouvelle Draperie En Flandre', *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique: Classe Des Belles Lettres* 5 (1905): 489–521; Henri Pirenne, 'Les Périodes de l'histoire Sociale Du Capitalisme', *Bulletin de La Classe Des Lettres et Des Sciences Morales et Politiques (Belgique)* 5 (1914): 258–99; and by G. H. Unwin, *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1904); for the German case, see Jacob Strieder, *Studien Zur Geschichte Kapitalistischer Organisationsformen: Monopole, Kartelle und Aktiengesellschaften Im Mittelalter und Zu Beginn Der Neuzeit* (Munich and Leipzig, 1914).

<sup>106</sup> Ramón Carande, *Carlos V y sus banqueros*, vol. 1: La vida económica de España en una face de su hegemonía, 1516–1556 (Barcelona, 1983), 124; Antonio Henrique R. de Oliveira Marques, *História de Portugal*, vol. 2: Do Renascimento às Revoluções liberais (Lisbon, 1998), 87.

<sup>107</sup> Kießling, 'Wirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in der Region: Die Welser-Vöhlín-Gesellschaft im Kontext der Memminger Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts', 195–96, 200–202; Imhoff,

sixteenth century even as German trade expanded into the Iberian Peninsula and beyond Europe. In the late fifteenth century, the Nuremberger Imhoff and Paumgartner families almost entirely controlled the saffron trade from Aquila and Apulia.<sup>108</sup> In the next century they, and the Nuremberger Tucher family, would be heavily involved in the southern Italian and Spanish saffron trade and both the Imhoff and Paumgartner invested in the Portuguese spices fleets in 1505.<sup>109</sup> The Great Ravensburg Company did not embark upon large-scale loans to rulers, preferring to maintain focus upon trade (especially in low-volume, high-value commodities), and was soon outcompeted, as were the merchants of the Hanse.<sup>110</sup>

By the mid-fifteenth century, southern German merchants had adopted Italian practices and techniques, often sending their sons – most famously a young Jacob Fugger – to Venice for an apprenticeship at the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*. Some German boys were sent elsewhere; the Fugger's chief accountant, Matthäus Schwarz, apprenticed in Milan.<sup>111</sup> Apprentices were instructed in double-entry bookkeeping and Italian (firmly established as the commercial *lingua franca*) and would gain knowledge and experience of markets and commodities.<sup>112</sup> Apprenticeships and a series of junior positions, often in several cities, allowed young merchants to begin to form the network of relationships – with family members, close associates, and merchants from other cities and regions, including Italy – upon which they would rely as traders; this pattern once more followed the Italian model. Their technical proficiency, knowledge of international markets, and trans-regional networks, through which both commodities and information were transferred, allowed German merchants, especially those of Augsburg and Nuremberg, to compete on the European commercial stage.<sup>113</sup> By the early fifteenth century, the Hansard merchant Sivert Veckinchusen could write that ‘the

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‘Die Imhoff-Handelsherren und Kunstliebhaber: Überblick Über Eine 750 Jahre Alter Nürnberger Ratsfamilie’, 27.

<sup>108</sup> von Stromer, ‘Nuremberg in the International Economics of the Middle Ages’, 212.

<sup>109</sup> von Stromer, 211–12; Imhoff, ‘Die Imhoff-Handelsherren und Kunstliebhaber: Überblick Über Eine 750 Jahre Alter Nürnberger Ratsfamilie’, 27; for the European saffron trade generally, see David Abulafia, ‘Crocuses and Crusaders: San Gimignano, Pisa and the Kingdom of Jerusalem’, in *Outremer - Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem Presented to Joshua Prawer*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar, H. E. Mayer, and R. C. Smail (Jerusalem, 1982), 227–43.

<sup>110</sup> Philippe Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, ed. D. S. Ault and S. H. Steinberg (London, 1970), 159–60; O. Quelle, ‘Die Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft und Ihre Beziehungen Zu Spanien’, *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv* 1, no. 2 (1925): 160–63; for the company in general, see Schulte, *Geschichte Der Großen Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft*.

<sup>111</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 29–30; Matthäus Schwarz, ‘Trachtenbuch’ (1560 1520), Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum.

<sup>112</sup> von Stromer, ‘Nuremberg in the International Economics of the Middle Ages’, 214; Jacob Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich*, 16–18.

<sup>113</sup> Mark Häberlein and Johannes Burkhardt, *Die Welser: Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des oberdeutschen Handelshauses* (Berlin, 2002), 220.



Nuremberg merchants and Lombards' (*dey Norenberger kopen [Kaufen] und Lumbarden*) were those trading groups who dominated the export trade from Venice.<sup>114</sup> Their technical proficiency also gave them an important role in Netherlandish commerce.<sup>115</sup>

German merchants also expanded into the Iberian market.<sup>116</sup> German silver and copper were exported from Antwerp to the Iberian Peninsula, where German merchants purchased saffron and, in the case of the Great Ravensburg Company, became involved in Valencian sugar production.<sup>117</sup> The German traveller Hieronymus Münzer, who journeyed to Spain in 1494-95, met or was hosted by several resident German merchants, whom he noted were particularly populous in Barcelona, and visited a monastery established by 'the chief officer of the great company of Ravensburg'.<sup>118</sup>

At the same time, many of the most successful companies became involved in papal banking. The Fugger were involved in papal finance from the 1470s, transferring tithes from Scandinavia to Rome, then opened a branch in Rome, benefiting from Markus Fugger's role in the papal chancery.<sup>119</sup> Like Italian commercial families, the German family companies, all of which derived from or sought entry into the urban patriciate, included many members in universities, court and civic bureaucracies, and the clergy, with whom they worked to gain entry into royal and papal finance and, later, into overseas trade.<sup>120</sup> In the 1480s and '90s, some of these companies, including the Fugger, Welser, Höchstetter, Paumgartner, and Imhoff, gained control over Europe's supplies of silver and copper by investing in mines or by lending to rulers against the output of mines in their territories.<sup>121</sup> The extreme importance of silver and copper to European trade – including, it would soon be discovered, with the Asian market –

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<sup>114</sup> Sivert Veckinchusen, 'Letter from Cologne to Hildebrand Veckinchusen in Bruges (18 July 1410)', in *Hildebrand Veckinchusen: Briefwechsel Eines Deutschen Kaufmanns Im 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wilhelm Stieda (Leipzig, 1921), 36–38.

<sup>115</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 84–85; Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 4–5.

<sup>116</sup> Götz Freiherr von Pölnitz, *Jakob Fugger*, vol. 2: Quellen und Erläuterungen (Tübingen, 1951), 14.

<sup>117</sup> Quelle, 'Die Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft und Ihre Beziehungen Zu Spanien', 296–97.

<sup>118</sup> Hieronymus Münzer, *Doctor Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary (1494 and 1495) and Discovery of Guinea*, ed. James Firth (London, 2014), 25–26, 31–32.

<sup>119</sup> Aloys Schulte, *Die Fugger in Rom, 1495-1523*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1904), 11–12; Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 15–16.

<sup>120</sup> Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge Zu Einer Politischen Biographie*, 38–39; Schaper, *Die Hirschvogel von Nürnberg und ihr Handelshaus*, 39; Irsigler, 'Hanskaufleute: Die Lübecker Veckinchusen und Die Kölner Rinck', 323; on the Fuggers' entry into the patriciate, see Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 27–29; and for the debate surrounding whether or not they behaved as patricians see Olaf Mörke, 'Die Fugger Im 16. Jahrhundert: Städtische Elite Oder Sonderstruktur? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag', *Archiv Für Reformationsgeschichte* 74 (1983): 141–61; Katarina Sieh-Burens, *Oligarchie, Konfession und Politik Im 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1986).

<sup>121</sup> For their involvement in mines other than the Tyrolese and Carpathian, see, for example, Imhoff, 'Die Imhoff-Handelsherren und Kunstliebhaber: Überblick Über Eine 750 Jahre Alter Nürnberger Ratsfamilie', 27; Strieder, *Studien Zur Geschichte Kapitalistischer Organisationsformen*, 463–74.

gave the firms enormous leverage with European rulers, particularly the Habsburgs and the Aviz. By dominating the silver and copper trades, they could play a major role in European princely finance, Indian and American commerce, and the import of European and foreign luxuries for the next half-century. Other merchants who participated in mining, such as the Schetz of Aachen, also became extremely successful in 'state' finance and 'colonial' commerce.<sup>122</sup>

The most important European silver mines, those of Tyrol, were owned by the indigent archduke Sigismund of Tyrol, who mortgaged their output at a below-market price against loans from local merchants and then (from the mid-1480s) from the far wealthier Augsburg and Nuremberg corporations.<sup>123</sup> When Maximilian acquired the Tyrol in 1490, he continued borrowing from this small number of companies, with whom he had existing credit relationships.<sup>124</sup> The riches which these companies derived from the Tyrolean silver and copper, which they sold in Venice and Antwerp, are clearly illustrated by the tax records of the Paumgartner.<sup>125</sup> Hans Paumgartner's tax grew from 31 guilders in 1496-97, a number that placed him among the wealthiest citizens in Augsburg, to 114 guilders in 1498-1503 after he began lending to Maximilian in 1496.<sup>126</sup> The Fugger became the wealthiest company in Europe by serving as Maximilian's most important creditors and by gaining control over the Hungarian copper mines; they leased the papal mint from 1509.<sup>127</sup> The emerging German multi-regional companies and the Habsburgs were mutually dependent upon each other for the great successes which they enjoyed in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The Habsburgs' dizzying rise, through a series of astonishingly fortuitous marriages, from Archdukes of Austria to *de facto* hereditary Holy Roman Emperors and rulers of the Burgundian territories; Castile and its Atlantic and American empire; Aragon and its Italian and Mediterranean possessions; and Hungary and Bohemia, allowed their main creditors, the High German merchants, to expand their business more readily across Europe.<sup>128</sup> The Fugger company leased the Carpathian mines

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<sup>122</sup> van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 183.

<sup>123</sup> Götz Freiherr von Pölnitz, *Jakob Fugger*, vol. 1: Kaiser, Kirche und Kapital in der oberdeutschen Renaissance (Tübingen, 1949), 22-23; Krag, *Die Paumgartner von Nürnberg und Augsburg*, 33-35; Karl Otto Müller, ed., *Quellen zur Handelsgeschichte der Paumgartner von Augsburg (1480-1570)* (Stuttgart, 1955).

<sup>124</sup> Müller, *Quellen zur Handelsgeschichte der Paumgartner*, 22-23.

<sup>125</sup> Bolton and Bruscoli, 'When Did Antwerp Replace Bruges as the Commercial and Financial Centre of North-Western Europe?', 364-65; van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 108; Rolf Sprandel, *Das Eisengewerbe im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1968), 270-72; von Pölnitz, *Jakob Fugger*, 1949, 1: Kaiser, Kirche und Kapital in der oberdeutschen Renaissance:71.

<sup>126</sup> Müller, *Quellen zur Handelsgeschichte der Paumgartner*, 23-24.

<sup>127</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 24-26, 31-34, 47; Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 66-67.

<sup>128</sup> For their successful appeal to Maximilian to challenge the ban upon silver exports from Antwerp imposed by his son Philip, duke of Burgundy, see Anton Welser, 'Brief des Anthoni Welser vom 11. December 1504 an Dr.

with the aid of Maximilian, who sought peaceful relations with Vladislaus II, thereby gaining control over Hungarian copper and silver.<sup>129</sup> The Habsburgs were also notoriously cash-poor and were embroiled in expensive wars, making them dependent upon loans from wealthy merchants; the German companies were their natural first choice.<sup>130</sup>

The rapid adoption of Italian business methods and of the opportunities presented by Imperial and ‘colonial’ finance demonstrates the highly flexible mentality of the southern German merchants and the Italian merchants whom they imitated.<sup>131</sup> Novelty was not seen as positive in late medieval thought and the Hanseatic League’s decline from the early fifteenth century has long been attributed partly to political and commercial conservatism.<sup>132</sup> Their eager response to new opportunities, as much as their business methods, made the Italian and German merchants distinct.

In the 1490s, therefore, a small number of German merchant companies, almost all of them from Augsburg or Nuremberg, became perfectly situated to take advantage of the new opportunities presented by the opening of the Cape Route and of trade with (in reality, mostly one-sided extraction from) the Americas. They had the entrepreneurial drive, trans-regional presence and connections, patronage of the Emperor, monopoly over vital commodities, and, above all, enormous supplies of liquid capital necessary to dominate the German presence in American and Asian trade.

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In the early fifteenth century, the cities of central and northern Italy were the most advanced centres of trade, finance, and industry in Europe. In Italy, Venice was the most important centre for European trade in Asian commodities, with important roles played by Genoa and the

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Conrad Peutinger, und Auszug eines Handlungsbriefes der Welser Compagnie in Antorf, vom 18. Nov. 1504’, in *Tagebuch des Lucas Rem aus den Jahren 1494-1541: Ein Beitrag zur Handelsgeschichte der Stadt Augsburg*, ed. B. Greiff (Augsburg, 1861), 163–66.

<sup>129</sup> von Pölnitz, *Jakob Fugger*, 1949, 1: Kaiser, Kirche und Kapital in der oberdeutschen Renaissance:50–51; Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 26.

<sup>130</sup> Müller, *Quellen zur Handelsgeschichte der Paumgartner*, 22, 24–33.

<sup>131</sup> For the hybrid identity of Genoese merchants in the Spanish Mediterranean, see Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition*, 7–9.

<sup>132</sup> Wim Blockmans, ‘Burghers as Cultural Agents in the Low Countries and the Empire’, *Vorträge und Forschungen* 56 (8 January 2015): 407; Dollinger, *The German Hansa*; Konrad Fritze, *Am Wendepunkt der Hanse: Untersuchungen zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte wendischer Hansestädte in der ersten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1967); Johannes Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*; Fritz Rörig, *Die Europäische Stadt Im Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 1955); translated into English as Fritz Rörig, *The Medieval Town* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), particularly 98-110; for an overview of the literature on this subject, see A. von Brandt, ‘Recent Trends in Research on Hanseatic History’, *History* 41, no. 141/143 (1956): 25–37.

Catalans.<sup>133</sup> Many Italian companies had agents in multiple European cities and the largest companies had branches in all of the major commercial cities of central and western Europe, where they imported Asian spices and Italian manufactured wares.<sup>134</sup>

Florentine, Genoese, and some other Italian companies had served as papal bankers since the twelfth century and soon moved into royal tax collection and administration in England and other territories.<sup>135</sup> Some firms extended their financial partnership with governments into the management – and therefore control over – certain vital exports in return for significant privileges such as reduced customs charges. In the fourteenth century, for example, the Bardi, Peruzzi, and Acciaiuoli, played a key role in managing the export of Sicilian wheat and English wool.<sup>136</sup> This system, replicated by the High German merchants and other large companies, involved the exchange of licences and significant privileges, such as reduced customs charges and other duties, in exchange for managing export trades. This was an expansion upon the existing principles of medieval trade, in which the right to trade was granted through contracts with civic or princely governments, with different merchant groups securing different privileges based upon the level of favour they enjoyed.<sup>137</sup> In Bruges, Tommaso Portinari, branch manager of the Medici bank and a ducal councillor, was granted the toll of Gravelines, a major port, in 1465.<sup>138</sup> Some of these merchants also entered politics (although their role as licence holders was hardly apolitical); Nicola Acciaiuoli, for example, became Grand Seneschal of Naples in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>139</sup>

The late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries were marked by economic restructuring, with the decline of the old luxury woollens industry – driven by changes in the English wool trade and in Flemish textile production – and the rise of growing investment in industry, particularly

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<sup>133</sup> Lane, *Venice, A Maritime Republic*, 2.

<sup>134</sup> de Roover, *Money, Banking, and Credit in Mediaeval Bruges*, 1, 77; J. A. Goris, *Étude Sur Les Colonies Marchandes Méridionales (Portugais, Espagnols, Italiens) à Anvers de 1488 à 1567* (Louvain, 1925); Postan, 'The Trade of Medieval Europe: The North', 168.

<sup>135</sup> Glenn Olsen, 'Italian Merchants and the Performance of Papal Banking Functions in the Early Thirteenth Century', *Explorations in Economic History*, Economy, Society, and Government in Medieval Italy, 7, no. 1 (1 September 1969): 43–63; Kaeuper, *Bankers to the Crown*; Robert Jowitt Whitwell, 'Italian Bankers and the English Crown', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (December 1903): 175–233; J. R. Strayer, 'Italian Bankers and Philip the Fair', *Explorations in Economic History* 7, no. 1–2 (Autumn 1969): 113–21.

<sup>136</sup> Hunt, *The Medieval Super-Companies*, 64.

<sup>137</sup> Reynolds, 'Origins of Modern Business Enterprise', 365; Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 175–76; Bernard, 'Trade and Finance in the Middle Ages, 900-1500', 326.

<sup>138</sup> Raymond De Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank: 1397-1494* (Boston, 1963), 341.

<sup>139</sup> David Abulafia, 'Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy, 1265-1370', *The Economic History Review* 34, no. 3 (1981): 981.

high-quality manufactured wares and textiles, by merchant-entrepreneurs.<sup>140</sup> In Florence, entrepreneurs such as Tommaso Spinelli invested in or operated silk workshops for the export market.<sup>141</sup> The Castilian traveller, Pero Tafur, observed silk weaving in Bologna and said of Bruges in the 1430s that ‘here was all Italy with its brocades, silks and armour’.<sup>142</sup> The European manufacture of silk (first produced in Lucca), glass (a Veneto speciality), and other commodities previously imported from Byzantium and Asia, reduced the trade imbalance between Asia and Europe and reduced the number of transactions between production and final sale. The aim of controlling all stages between manufacture to customer – to seek out the original source of commodities – was one of the most important reasons for Europeans to search for direct routes to the Asian spice regions; a few brave Italians, such as Marco Polo, were already making overland voyages.<sup>143</sup>

At the same time, developments in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean encouraged the Italian merchants, whose Mediterranean trade had been focused upon commerce with the Levant and, in the case of the Venetians and Genoese, with their island colonies, to reorient their trade towards the west.<sup>144</sup> The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 hampered European trade with the Levant, as did their conquest of the Venetian and Genoese colonies. Although other merchants, particularly Genoese and Catalans, continued to participate, the Levant trade was largely reduced to a Venice-Alexandria axis.<sup>145</sup> Many merchants such as the Genoese Giovanni da Pontremoli had already had some trade with North Africa and increased their commerce with that area. The Iberian Peninsula also gained more attention from Italian merchants. The Genoese and Venetian galleys had stopped in the Spanish countries and Portugal for centuries on their way to England and Flanders (the Florentine galleys since the

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<sup>140</sup> T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977), chap. 8; Pirenne, ‘Une Crise Industrielle Au XVIème Siècle: La Draperie Urbaine et La Nouvelle Draperie En Flandre’; Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 81–86; for the origins of the debate over whether the Renaissance was a period of economic growth or decline, see Robert Sabatino Lopez, ‘Hard Times and Investment in Culture’, in *The Renaissance* (New York, 1953), 29–53; and the reply by Carlo M. Cipolla, ‘Economic Depression of the Renaissance?’, *The Economic History Review* 16, no. 3 (1964): 519–24.

<sup>141</sup> Bruno Dini, ‘La ricchezza documentaria per l’arte della seta e l’economia fiorentina nel Quattrocento’, in *Manifattura, commercio e banca nella Firenze medievale* (Florence, 2001), 29; William Caferro, ‘The Silk Business of Tommaso Spinelli, Fifteenth-Century Florentine Merchant and Papal Banker’, *Renaissance Studies* 10, no. 4 (December 1996): 417–39.

<sup>142</sup> Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, trans. Malcolm Letts (London, 1926), 31, 200.

<sup>143</sup> Robert S. Lopez, Irving Woodworth Raymond, and Olivia Remie Constable, eds., *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents* (New York, 2013), 281–89, 355–58.

<sup>144</sup> Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 30–31.

<sup>145</sup> Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, 208–14, 227–45; Stefan Halikowski-Smith, ‘Portugal and the European Spice Trade, 1480-1580’ (Thesis, European University Institute, 2001), 33–37.

early fifteenth century) and, like in other countries, merchants such as the Bardi had long played an important and privileged role in the export trade and in governmental finance.<sup>146</sup>

A further incentive was the beginning of the Spanish and Portuguese exploratory voyages into the Atlantic and their annexing or conquest of Cabo Verde, the Madeiras, the Azores, and the Canaries. With their superior navigational skills and experience in outfitting fleets, Italians were eagerly welcomed as participants and were actively recruited by Henry the Navigator. Merchants quickly took advantage of the opportunities presented by the new colonies, growing sugar and other produce in the islands and importing slaves from Africa. In 1479, a gold mine was discovered in 'Guinea', which massively increased wider interest in African and other overseas trade among merchants such as Vespucci.<sup>147</sup>

Among the Italian families active in the Iberian Peninsula, many of whom permanently immigrated and gained high positions in society, were the Perestrello family into whom Christopher Columbus would later marry.<sup>148</sup> Other immigrant families, particularly Genoese, entered into commerce, banking, and royal lending. With the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the Italians gained further dominance over Iberian trade and finance.

By the late fifteenth century, Italians had established themselves as the wealthiest and most powerful merchants in the Iberian Peninsula. In Seville, the Spanish gateway to North Africa and the Atlantic islands, Genoese merchants and some Florentines – notably the Berardi company for whom Amerigo Vespucci worked – dominated trade and finance.<sup>149</sup> In Lisbon, the Florentine community, who were closely tied to their counterparts in Spain, played the same role.<sup>150</sup> Here, a few outstanding merchants emerged above the rest by means of their capital and, importantly, the close relationships which they formed with João II (1455 – 1495) and then Manuel I (1495 – 1521). These were Bartolomeo Marchionni, the Sernigi family under

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<sup>146</sup> Lane, *Venice, A Maritime Republic*, 126; Michael E. Mallett, *The Florentine Galleys in the Fifteenth Century with the Diary of Luca Di Maso Degli Albizzi, Captain of the Galleys, 1420-1430* (Oxford, 1967); Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 10.

<sup>147</sup> Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World*, 98.

<sup>148</sup> Luisa d'Arienzo, *La Presenza Degli Italiani in Portogallo al Tempo Di Colombo* (Rome, 2003), chap. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Giuliano Pinto, 'I mercanti fiorentini dalla Toscana all'Europa all'Atlantico (secoli XIII-XV)', in *Amerigo Vespucci e i mercanti viaggiatori fiorentini del Cinquecento*, ed. Margherita Azzari and Leonardo Rombai (2013), 11; Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, especially 48-50; Luisa d'Arienzo, 'La società Marchionni-Berardi tra Portogallo e Spagna nell'età di Cristoforo Colombo', in *Actas das 2.as Jornadas Luso-Espanholas de História Medieval*, vol. 4 (Porto, 1990); Consuelo Varela, *Colón y los florentinos* (Madrid, 1988), especially 35-58.

<sup>150</sup> Many studies have been written on this community, such as Rau, 'Notes Sur La Traite Portugaise à La Fin Du Xve Siècle et Le Florentin Bartolomeo Di Domênico Marchionni'; Alessandrini, 'La Presenza Italiana a Lisbona Nella Prima Metà Del Cinquecento'.

Girolamo, and the Affaitati under Count Giovanfrancesco (Giovanni Francesco). With close affiliations with the Frescobaldi and Gualterrotti in Bruges and Antwerp and with the Gondi in Lyon, as well as with Florence, they gained enormous influence over Portuguese trade and finance.<sup>151</sup> With their knowledge of and connections to the Florentine and Netherlandish art and art markets, they were able to facilitate and advise upon Portuguese courtly consumption. They were also tied to Florentine intellectual circles – whose members stemmed from the same families – and thus were aware of developments in geography, cartography and cosmography, with Vespucci being the most obvious example.

These Italians were also crucial participants in the settlement and exploitation of the Atlantic islands, as were some Flemish families such as the Huerter, into which Martin Behaim married.<sup>152</sup> Many Italians, including Bartolomeo Marchionni, entered the sugar and slave trade or established sugar plantations.<sup>153</sup> Apart from the great profits on offer, the popularity of Atlantic investment among Italians was partly because of improvements in marine insurance that went some way towards accommodating the high-risk, yet high-reward, nature of long-distance trade.<sup>154</sup> Some form of marine insurance had existed for centuries, but the modern form, using a third party as underwriter, developed among fourteenth-century Italian merchants.<sup>155</sup> By the fifteenth century, it had spread across the western Mediterranean; Bruges was an important insurance market by the middle of the century.<sup>156</sup> Protection against the many risks of maritime transport was essential in encouraging investment in the Atlantic trade, which in turn drove the adoption of maritime insurance in north-western European cities such as Antwerp.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Alessandrini, 'Os Italianos e a Expansão Portuguesa: O Caso Do Mercador João Francisco Affaitati (Séc. XVI)', 100.

<sup>152</sup> Kellenbenz, 'Portugiesische Forschungen Zur Behaimfrage', 80.

<sup>153</sup> d'Arienzo, *La Presenza Degli Italiani in Portogallo al Tempo Di Colombo*, 275–76; Vieira, 'Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Azores', 45–49; Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 49–50.

<sup>154</sup> Christopher Kingston, 'Governance and Institutional Change in Marine Insurance, 1350-1850', *European Review of Economic History* 18, no. 1 (2014): 2.

<sup>155</sup> Karin Nehlsen-von Stryk, 'Aspetti dell'assicurazione marittima nella vita economica veneziana del Quattrocento', *Centro Tedesco Di Studi Veneziani* 18 (1980): 3-4; Adrian Leonard, 'Genoa, 1340-1620: Early Development of Marine Insurance', in *Marine Insurance: Origins and Institutions, 1300-1850*, ed. Luisa Piccinno (Basingstoke, 2016), 25.

<sup>156</sup> Dave de Ruysscher, 'Antwerp 1490–1590: Insurance and Speculation', in *Marine Insurance: Origins and Institutions, 1300-1850*, ed. Adrian Leonard (Basingstoke, 2016), 80; and, generally, Goris, *Étude Sur Les Colonies Marchandes Méridionales*.

<sup>157</sup> Andrea Addobbati, 'Italy 1500–1800: Cooperation and Competition', in *Marine Insurance: Origins and Institutions, 1300-1850*, ed. Adrian Leonard (Basingstoke, 2016), 47; Jeroen Puttevils and Marc Deloof, 'Marketing and Pricing Risk in Marine Insurance in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp', *The Journal of Economic History* 77, no. 3 (September 2017): 796–837..

The availability of new colonial luxuries changed the demands of the European market. Some of the sugar grown in Sicily, the Algarve, and the Atlantic islands, and much of the sugar grown on Madeira, was shipped not only to the Mediterranean but to Bruges and, later, Antwerp, including that grown by the Great Ravensburg Company in Valencia and by Martin Behaim's father-in-law Josse van Huerter, the Flemish-born captain of Faial.<sup>158</sup> The growing exposure to foreign luxuries combined with the economic recovery from the mid-fifteenth century and the colonial explorations of the Iberian rulers to produce a growing demand for spices and other Oriental products.<sup>159</sup> This demand and the difficulties and expense of trade with the Levant increased the desire among Europeans to purchase spices at the source.

At the same time, new geographic ideas developed, including among Italian scholars such as Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, which held that Asia was accessible either by sailing across the Atlantic or by travelling around Africa.<sup>160</sup> Behaim's *Erdapfel*, created just before Columbus' return from his first voyage, visually captures the belief in an easy voyage across the Atlantic to Asia.<sup>161</sup> Concurrently, the medieval belief that spices were expensive due to their scarcity was replaced with the growing suspicion that a series of middlemen merchants, including the Venetians and especially the Mamluks, were artificially inflating prices.<sup>162</sup> The Venetian chronicler Girolamo Priuli noted that the products sold in Venice had changed hands many times before reaching Venice so the price had increased: 'the spices that come to Venice pass through all of Syria and the land of the [Ottoman] sultan, and in every place pay great impositions...' (*le spetie, che venivano a Venetia, passavano per tutta la Siria e per tuto il paexe del Soldano, et in ogni locho pagavano angarie grandissime*).<sup>163</sup>

By going to the source, many Europeans came to believe, they could obtain spices cheaply and in great quantities.<sup>164</sup> This belief survived the initial direct contact with India: the Lisbon-based

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<sup>158</sup> Martin Behaim, 'Letter from Antwerp to His Cousin Michael Behaim (11 March 1494)', in *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (London, 1908), 113; the original German is in Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany, *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim* (Nuremberg, 1853), 106–7; Quelle, 'Die Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft und Ihre Beziehungen Zu Spanien'.

<sup>159</sup> Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, 107–8.

<sup>160</sup> Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo: The Man Who Gave His Name to America* (London, 2006), 18.

<sup>161</sup> Johannes Willers and G. Bott, eds., 'Verebnete Segmente Des Behaim-Globus Mit Zwei Polkappen', in *Focus Behaim-Globus*, vol. 1, 2 vols (Nuremberg, 1992), 258–71.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven, 2008), 130–45; Paul Freedman, 'Mastic: A Mediterranean Luxury Product', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 26, no. 1 (June 2011): 108.

<sup>163</sup> Girolamo Priuli, *I Diarii Di Girolamo Priuli*, ed. Arturo Segre, vol. 1 (Città di Castello, 1912), 156.

<sup>164</sup> Paul Freedman, 'Spices and Late-Medieval European Ideas of Scarcity and Value', *Speculum* 80, no. 4 (2005): 1209–27.



Florentine merchant Girolamo Sernigi, reporting upon da Gama's first voyage, wrote that 'The Portuguese who returned home brought a few precious stones of little value, for, in truth, they had neither gold nor silver to buy any. They say that these jewels are very dear there, as also are pearls, but I believe they are to be had cheap. This is my opinion, but those they bought were in the hands of Moorish brokers, who sell at a fourfold profit'.<sup>165</sup> This statement may also have been a criticism of the Portuguese voyagers and their commercial inexperience. Sernigi was among those Italians who sent their own representatives in the very next voyage, repeating the Portuguese circumvention of middlemen.<sup>166</sup>

Most important was the extensive capital which Italians were able to provide, in quantities which vastly exceeded those that could be supplied by native bankers. They were able to invest in overseas ventures and, crucially, to lend to rulers in exchange for licences to participate in and benefit from these and other important trades. The European system of exchanging licences for monopolistic or near-monopolistic control of certain trades by a small number of liquid capital-rich firms – almost all Italians – was extended wholesale into the Atlantic. In 1486-93 and 1490-95, the wealthiest and most powerful merchant in Lisbon, Bartolomeo Marchionni, held licences granting a vast share of the slave trade coming from Guinea.<sup>167</sup>

In 1492, therefore, Italian merchants were established as the wealthiest and most powerful and influential merchants in the Iberian Peninsula, with close ties to the Portuguese and Spanish thrones a strong presence in the Atlantic trade, and a dominant role in the import and circulation of new culture and intellectual ideas. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the man who launched the Spanish expeditions, Columbus, was Genoese; that the expedition was outfitted by Amerigo Vespucci, a Florentine, who also determined that the newly discovered 'islands' were a separate landmass; or that the Florentine printer Piero Vaglienti claimed that Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli himself or his writings and map, which showed that India could be accessed by the Cape Route and could also be reached by sailing across the Atlantic, was

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<sup>165</sup> Girolamo Sernigi, 'First Letter to a Gentleman in Florence', in *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (Cambridge, 1898), 130; Girolamo Sernigi, 'First Letter (10 July 1499)', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglienti*, ed. Piero Vaglienti (Florence, 2006), 131-37.

<sup>166</sup> Carmen M. Radulet, 'Girolamo Sernigi e a Importancia Economica Do Oriente', *Revista Da Universidade de Coimbra* 32 (1984): 74.

<sup>167</sup> António Carreira, *Notas sobre o tráfico português de escravos: circunscritos à costa ocidental africana* (Lisbon, 1978), 22-23; for a revised view of the nature of the licence system, see Ivana Elbl, 'The Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521', *The Journal of African History* 38, no. 1 (1997): 55-56.

introduced to Manuel I by Bartolomeo Marchionni, one of the chief financiers of early Portuguese voyages.<sup>168</sup>

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The substantial revisions or transformations to the old, established patterns of medieval trade in the Mediterranean were echoed in northern Europe. The age of Bruges as the great commercial entrepôt around which northern European trade revolved ended in 1484 when Maximilian I ordered the remove of foreign merchants, most of whom went to Antwerp, after Bruges refused to acknowledge his regency.<sup>169</sup>

The fifteenth century also saw the – not yet obvious – beginning of the decline of the Hanseatic League, which had dominated the Baltic and Baltic commerce for centuries, due to internal divisions and the growing interference of Scandinavian rulers and English and Dutch merchants.<sup>170</sup> With these changes went the old patterns of medieval trade: the Baltic dominated by the Hanse, the spice trade near-monopolised by Venice, the huge imbalance of trade between northern and southern Europe and between Europe and the Levant, and the orientation of trade towards the Mediterranean and the overland routes between Venice and Bruges. Antwerp's rise to the status of a 'world-city' in the early sixteenth century came with new relationships between merchants, cities, and rulers.<sup>171</sup>

To conclude, the merchants who witnessed and responded to these changes and then to Columbus' and da Gama's returns and the new opportunities that these provided were operating based upon pre-existing ideas, attitudes, and behaviours. Post-Columbian trading patterns were instigated by merchants working with pre-Columbian worldviews, which sometimes evolved and sometimes changed abruptly.

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<sup>168</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 54–55; Piero Vaglianti, 'Elogio Di Manuel I', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti* (Florence, 2006), 159.

<sup>169</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 142, 155.

<sup>170</sup> The classic text on the Hanseatic League is Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, 180; see also Postan, 'The Trade of Medieval Europe: The North', 272–81; for the role of the English, see T. H. Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse, 1157–1611* (Cambridge, 1991), especially 235–91.

<sup>171</sup> Herman van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy: Fourteenth-Sixteenth Centuries* (New York, 2013), 113–19; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century, With a New Prologue* (Berkeley, 2011), 175–77.

## Chapter Two:

### Merchants in the Aftermath of the European Overseas Discoveries

This chapter examines the engagement of the Florentine and German companies in the overseas trade of the Spanish and Portuguese after Columbus, focusing on the period before 1525, and seeks to provide an overview of the themes that will be discussed in later chapters.

The large Italian firms based in Lisbon immediately ventured into the overseas trade. Already key players in the Portuguese colonial project, as outlined in the previous chapter, they capitalised upon their established pattern of exchanging loans to the crown for privileged entry into areas of trade which were otherwise reserved for citizens. They, and the German companies who soon followed, possessed the capital, organisational ability, political connections, and networks necessary to participate directly in the Cape Route trade.

The success of the Germans and Italians occurred in the crucial first decades of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, during which the Portuguese Empire in Asia was founded almost in totality and the patterns of the Spanish conquest of the Americas were also created. Certain outstanding features of Portuguese and Spanish engagement with those regions had yet to develop, however, and it was their absence that allowed the great European trading companies to flourish, as will be explored below. The years from 1492 to roughly 1525 were marked by instability and uncertainty as the Spanish and Portuguese voyaged further into the unknown, established (or failed to establish) relations with local rulers, and dealt with the ramifications of the sudden acceleration of European trade. The Portuguese and Spanish crowns' liquidity problems and the uncertainty surrounding the establishment of their overseas activities allowed those Italian and German merchants with the capital, business structure, and nerve to take great risks to dominate both the sourcing of commodities from Asia (although they remained dependent upon local links) and, in competition with the Venetians importing from the Levant, their distribution within Europe.<sup>172</sup>

This chapter focuses upon the period from 1498, when Vasco da Gama returned from India, to 1525, when the first stage of the Florentine and High German merchants' engagement in overseas trade ended. During this time, these merchants were almost entirely removed from

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<sup>172</sup> Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge Zu Einer Politischen Biographie*, 54; David Abulafia, *The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans* (London, 2019), 569; for the seventeenth-century struggle by European powers to gain control of spices at their source - that is, the Spice Islands - see Giles Milton, *Nathaniel's Nutmeg: How One Man's Courage Changed the Course of History* (London, 1999).

Spanish colonial activities but were heavily integrated into those of the Portuguese. They participated in person and by investment in establishing the Cape Route spice trade and dominated the dispersal of Asian goods within Europe. Florentine merchants were participants in securing the Portuguese foothold in Asia, the defining moments of which were the 1510 Battle of Goa and the 1511 Battle of Malacca, after which the Portuguese Empire was established almost to its fullest extent. Three Florentines held crucial trading posts for the Portuguese administration, and one of these was an important member of the first Portuguese embassy to Ming China, in 1517.<sup>173</sup>

This period, which saw the establishment of the Portuguese Empire in Asia and of the Asian spice trade in Europe, also predated the Spanish treasure fleets, which radically altered Europe's economy after they were established in the 1540s.<sup>174</sup> Before then, the Portuguese and Spanish crowns faced a serious shortage of silver and needed to look for other sources of capital, which they found in the cash-rich German and Italian firms.<sup>175</sup> Although the Portuguese imported large quantities of gold from the Mina coast in west Africa, this did not satisfy the Indian market, which preferred silver and copper.<sup>176</sup> As long as they were short of silver and copper, the Iberian rulers were dependent upon, and thus conciliatory to, the foreign merchant companies. Once their cash shortage declined, the rulers were free to abandon their favourable treatment of the merchant companies.<sup>177</sup> Once these 'teething problems' declined with the solidification of Portuguese and Spanish control and with the large-scale import of American gold and silver, the Florentines and Germans lost their privileged position.

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The European discovery of the Cape Route and the Americas is one of the most studied topics in history. Many of these analyses have focused upon, or included, the rise of truly global trade and the role of merchants within it. Early sixteenth-century merchants, however, have been given far less attention than the great joint-stock companies of the late sixteenth and

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<sup>173</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 12–13.

<sup>174</sup> Fernand Braudel and Frank C. Spooner, 'Prices in Europe from 1450 to 1750', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, vol. 4: The Economy of Expanding Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge, 1967), 447–49; Earl J. Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934).

<sup>175</sup> Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, ix; Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge Zu Einer Politischen Biographie*, 54.

<sup>176</sup> William Brooks Greenlee, *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives* (London, 1938), xvi; Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *L'Économie de l'empire portugais aux XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1969), 173–244.

<sup>177</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 131.

seventeenth centuries, while scholarship on the period traditionally focused upon analysis of individual merchants and merchant companies, particularly Jacob Fugger.<sup>178</sup> The various nationalities have generally also been studied separately. This reflects the fact that the businesses, business partnerships, and networks of merchants were largely confined to their compatriots. However, this thesis will demonstrate how the demands of the overseas trade increased the connections and mutual dependency between merchants of different nations. It will also seek to provide an alternative viewpoint to studies of individual ‘nations’, or expatriate communities, such as the Florentine community in Lisbon, instead emphasising how merchants relied upon their trans-European connections when conducting trade on a global scale.<sup>179</sup>

It will also explore the full global distribution of the merchants’ trade, which goes against the general trend of studying European activity in Asia and the Americas separately. This is generally logical due to the different reactions to and activities in those regions, with European activity in Asia taking the form of a militarily-aggressive attempt to gain the dominant position in the Indian Ocean and the spice trade, largely by the Portuguese, and the activity in America, conducted largely by the Spanish, taking the form of settlement and colonial exploitation. The division is less logical when applied to the activities of the great companies, many of which invested in both the Americas and Asia. In the case of most German companies, this investment in both spheres was sequential, with a focus upon India in the first decades and then a transition to the Americas from the 1520s. The Florentine expatriate Bartolomeo Marchionni, by contrast, simultaneously invested in the voyage to Brazil in which Vespucci participated and in Gama’s second voyage to India, in which Matteo da Bergamo travelled as a factor; the two fleets overlapped and exchanged news at the Cape Verde islands.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> For an example of the tendency to dismiss or fail to mention early sixteenth-century companies, see David Ormrod, *The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in the Age of Mercantilism, 1650-1770* (Cambridge, 2003), 1-13 and his sources; challenged by James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia Under the Habsburgs, 1580-1640* (Baltimore, 2008), xii; for scholarship on ‘Great Men’, see Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich*; Hermann Kellenbenz, *Die Fugger in Spanien und Portugal Bis 1560*, vol. 1, 3 vols (Munich, 1990); Pölnitz, *Anton Fugger*, vol. 1; Hubert Freiherr von Welser, *Bartholomäus Welser und Seine Zeit* (Augsburg, 1962); Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*.

<sup>179</sup> For example, Alessandrini, ‘La Presenza Italiana a Lisbona Nella Prima Metà Del Cinquecento’.

<sup>180</sup> Matteo da Bergamo, *Viaggio di Matteo da Bergamo in India sulla flotta di Vasco da Gama (1502-1503)*, ed. Prospero Peragallo (Ann Arbor, 1902); Amerigo Vespucci, ‘Letter II to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici’, in *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci’s Discovery of America*, ed. Luciano Formisano, trans. David Jacobson (New York, 1992), 19–27.

From the beginning, the Portuguese and Spanish crowns restricted entry into the overseas trade to their own citizens. In Spain, Florentine and German merchants played little part in colonial trade until the 1520s, when Charles V opened up investment to them.<sup>181</sup> The Genoese, who had dominated Spanish banking for decades, were already heavily involved.<sup>182</sup> In Portugal, however, exemptions were made immediately for the Italian merchants, and later the Germans, owing to the inferiority of the commercial networks and experience of Portuguese merchants; their limited access to raw materials and manufactured items; and, above all, their inadequate supplies of liquid capital. For all of these, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns were obliged to turn to the great European trading companies, offering direct access to and even participation in overseas commerce in return. After da Gama's first voyage, the Portuguese crown used foreign capital to part-fund all its voyages to India.<sup>183</sup> Italian merchants had been heavily involved in the Atlantic explorations of the Spanish and Portuguese for decades before Columbus's first voyage. The Spanish and Portuguese crowns had relied upon foreign, largely Italian, capital for their colonial projects, namely sugar plantations in the Atlantic islands and the Guinean slave trade (where, however, there was a substantial Portuguese merchant contingent).<sup>184</sup> Several Italian merchants, such as Bartolomeo Marchionni, were in addition bankers to the crown and had consequently been made naturalised citizens, thus removing the barriers to entry that they had faced as foreigners. With the discovery of the Cape Route, the Florentine companies were able to capitalise upon these precedents, their vastly superior capital and organisational abilities that the Portuguese merchants lacked, and their close connections to the Portuguese and Spanish crowns to gain entry into the Cape Route trade.

The opportunity to invest was readily seized by the Florentine merchants, whose response to the overseas discoveries was immediate and enthusiastic.<sup>185</sup> In 1500, a consortium formed of Marchionni, Girolamo Sernigi, and the Genoese Antonio Salvago financed the *Anunciada*, owned by D. Álvaro of Braganza, for the second Portuguese fleet to India. Although the voyage did not achieve many of its political aims, it did succeed in returning with a large cargo of

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<sup>181</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 98.

<sup>182</sup> Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*; Jacques Heers, 'Le Rôle Des Capitaux Internationaux Dans Les Voyages de Découvertes Aux XVe et XVIe Siècles', in *Les Aspects Internationaux de La Découverte Océanique Aux XVe et XVIe Siècles* (Paris, 1968), 273–93.

<sup>183</sup> Hermann Kellenbenz, 'The Portuguese Discoveries and the Italian and German Initiatives in the Indian Trade in the First Two Decades of the 16th Century', in *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a Sua Epoca*, vol. 3: *Economia e comércio marítimo* (Porto, 1989), 610.

<sup>184</sup> Vieira, 'Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Azores', 64–67.

<sup>185</sup> A detailed study of the mercantile perspective upon the European discoveries will be given in the next chapter.

spices.<sup>186</sup> The Marchionni consortium invested again in the voyages of 1501 and 1502. For the latter, the Florentine Giovanni de Buonagrazia served as captain for one of the ships and Matteo da Bergamo was sent as a factor. A wealth of sources survives for these early voyages, including those sent by Bergamo from Cabo Verde and commentary upon the returning ships by Giovanni Francesco Affaitati in Lisbon.<sup>187</sup> On the next voyage, of 1503, Giovanni da Empoli was sent as factor for the Marchionni consortium in partnership with the Frescobaldi and Gualterroti of Bruges and Antwerp.<sup>188</sup> Marchionni continued to invest in later voyages, including those of 1504, 1505, 1506, 1509, 1510, 1518, and 1520.<sup>189</sup>

The High German merchants did not enter the overseas trade until 1505, when the Vöhl-Welser and a consortium of the Fugger, Hochstetter, Hirschvogel, Imhof, and Gossembrot invested in the voyage under Almeida.<sup>190</sup> Unlike the Italians, the German firms did not have long-standing engagement in Portuguese or Spanish trade, particularly not in the Atlantic islands.<sup>191</sup> They lacked most of the features that had allowed the Italians to enter the overseas trade: commercial privileges, naturalised status, a crucial existing role in Portuguese trade, and close relationships with the Portuguese crown. Instead, their inclusion in overseas voyages derived from their monopoly over the European supply of silver and copper, which had proven to be the most important trade articles for the Indian market.

A shortage of liquid capital and precious metals had caused problems during da Gama's first voyage, which had shown that there was little market in India for European manufactures. This was noted by a wide range of observers, including the Florentines Girolamo Sernigi and Guido Detti, the anonymous narrative of da Gama's first voyage and Manuel I also noted that there was no market for European merchandise.<sup>192</sup> Most eloquent was the Lisbon-based Florentine

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<sup>186</sup> Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)'.

<sup>187</sup> Bergamo, *Viaggio di Matteo da Bergamo in India sulla flotta di Vasco da Gama (1502-1503)*; Francesco Corbinelli, 'Letter of Francesco Corbinelli', in *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese (1500-1525)*, ed. Marco Spallanzani (Florence, 1997), 76–79; Giovanni Francesco Affaitati, 'Letter to Domenico Pisani (26 June 1501)', in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 124–29.

<sup>188</sup> Giovanni da Empoli, 'Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)', in *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, trans. Laurence A. Noonan (Lisbon, 1989).

<sup>189</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 51.

<sup>190</sup> Hümmerich, *Die Erste Handelsfahrt Nach Indien 1505/1506*.

<sup>191</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 2, 96.

<sup>192</sup> Manuel I of Portugal, 'Letter to Their Highnesses Ferdinand and Isabella of Castile', in *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (Cambridge, 2010), 113; Sernigi, 'First Letter to a Gentleman in Florence'; Sernigi, 'First Letter (10 July 1499)'; Guido di messer Tomaso Detti, 'Copy of a Third of a Letter from Lisbon from Guido Di Messer Tomaso Detti of the 10th Day of August 1499, of This Same, Which Comes to Verify Everything', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti (Florence, 2006), 141–45.

merchant Giovanni Francesco Affaitati, who wrote that, ‘India, according to them, does not want a lot of merchandise; the primary fundamental thing [that they want] is cash money, of which there is very little in this kingdom’ (*India, secondo costoro dicono, non voler se non pochi merchantia; el primo fundamento si è danari contanti, li quali sono pochissimi in questo regno*).<sup>193</sup> Copper and silver, rather than manufactured goods, were in demand in Malacca, and copper was also important for the African trade.<sup>194</sup> By 1504, according to the Venetian observer Vincenzo Querini, the majority of the merchandise taken to India consisted of silver bullion: ‘And then they prepared all the provisioning of the ships to send them on this journey to India, the cargo of which is worth 900 in 100 thousand ducats, a quarter on the account of the king, and three quarters on behalf of merchants. Of all [of this] the sum of 25 thousand ducats is in merchandise – that is *Ramo* [copper?], *Cenabio* [hemp?], silver, lead, and corals – [and] the rest of silver ‘in bulk’ and cash’ (*Et poi essendo preparato il tutto il fa’ cargar di d[etti] nauì per mandarle a questo uiaggio d’India, il qual cargo tra ogni cosa è stato fin’hora di ualuta di 900 in 100M[ille] docati, ciò e un quarto à conto del Rè, e tre quarti à conto di Mercadanti. Tra tutta la qual somma da 25M[ille] docati sono di mercantia, ciò e Ramo, Cenabio, Argentiuiui, pionpo, e coralli, il resto d’Argenti in massa, et contanti cargato*).<sup>195</sup>

Antwerp became the centre for Asian and American imports and of northern European trade and finance.<sup>196</sup> To access German silver and copper, imported there in large quantities from the 1460s, the Portuguese crown made Antwerp the pepper staple in 1498 at the latest and established sales of other colonial products.<sup>197</sup> Antwerp, the meeting place between Mediterranean and northern European merchants, was already the northern European hub for the spice trade; the Eastern spices imported by Venetians were readily (although not entirely

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<sup>193</sup> Giovanni Francesco Affaitati, ‘Copia de Una Letera, Scrita Di Lisbona, Dil Viazo Di Le Caravele in La India (26 September 1502)’, in *I Diarii Di Marino Sanuto*, by Marino Sanudo, ed. Niccolò Barozzi, vol. IV (Venice, 1880), col. 665.

<sup>194</sup> *Copia Der Newen Zeytung Aus Presillg Landt* (Nuremberg, 1514); van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 175–76.

<sup>195</sup> Vincenzo Querini, ‘Relatione Del Clarissimo Sig. Vincenzo Quirino Ritornato Ambasciatore Da Filippo d’Austria Rè Di Castiglia Dell’anno 1504’ (1504), fol. 205v, Italian Castle Archive, box 91, folder 7, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>196</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, vol. 2: *The Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley, 1982), 138.

<sup>197</sup> Goris, *Étude Sur Les Colonies Marchandes Méridionales (Portugais, Espagnols, Italiens) à Anvers de 1488 à 1567*, 250; van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 175–76, 260; van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy*, 124–30.



or permanently) replaced by Portuguese imports.<sup>198</sup> Antwerp's prominence was also aided by its ownership by Philip the Handsome and then Charles V, kings of Castile.<sup>199</sup>

Like the import of Asian and American commodities to Europe, their redistribution from Antwerp across Europe was quickly monopolised by the usual few large European companies, including the Fugger, Welser, Frescobaldi and Gualterrotti, and Affaitati. The Portuguese licensing system and the other attendant costs of importing, refining (p.53), and exporting Asian, Atlantic, and American goods kept these trades – and those of European luxuries, such as wine and sugar, and other vital commodities such as alum – in the hands of a small number of merchants, almost all Italian and German; regional commodities, such as textiles, were managed by local traders.<sup>200</sup> The profits of the overseas trade and accumulation of capital in Antwerp encouraged Affaitati, Fugger, and Welser, among others, to extend loans from there to the Spanish crown, and Antwerp became an important financial market.<sup>201</sup>

Some German companies, however, desired direct access to the Asian spices and other commodities. Like the Italian companies, they wished to circumvent the middlemen and to purchase spices directly rather than through the Portuguese crown factor to Antwerp. Other German merchants, building upon the same impulse, had already established trade with the Iberian Peninsula. Members of the Great Ravensburg Company had been active in the Valencian sugar trade for decades and also exported many other high-value commodities, with saffron being the most important.<sup>202</sup> Several company members had established charitable foundations and become prominent in local commerce, providing important points of contact for Hieronymus Münzer and quite possibly for newly arriving Augsburgers and Nurembergers.<sup>203</sup> The Imhoff, among others, had been trading with the Ravensburgers for many decades, while Anton Herwart, of a prominent Nuremberg merchant family, was one of Münzer's travel companions and was knighted by Manuel.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 16; Frederic C. Lane, 'The Mediterranean Spice Trade Further Evidence of Its Revival in the Sixteenth Century', *The American Historical Review* 45, no. 3 (1940): *passim*.

<sup>199</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 155–56.

<sup>200</sup> Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 68–71.

<sup>201</sup> van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 219–21; J. Denucé, ed., *Inventaire des Affaitati: banquiers italiens à Anvers de l'année 1568* (Antwerp, 1934).

<sup>202</sup> Quelle, 'Die Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft und Ihre Beziehungen Zu Spanien'.

<sup>203</sup> Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary*, 18–19, 25–26, 31–32, 35, 40–43.

<sup>204</sup> Imhoff, 'Die Imhoff-Handelsherren und Kunstliebhaber: Überblick Über Eine 750 Jahre Alter Nürnberger Ratsfamilie', 10–12, 19, 28; Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary*, 2, 85–86.

In 1503, Lucas Rem, Scipio Lowenstein, and Simon Seitz, representatives of the Welser-Vöhlín, were sent to the Portuguese court to form an agreement with Manuel, offering German silver and copper in return for the right to invest in the India fleets.<sup>205</sup> On 13 February 1503, Seitz secured extensive privileges for the firm, including a 15-year exemption from customs duties on gold and silver imports and a 5 per cent cap on customs dues for purchases from India.<sup>206</sup> Other items included in the privileges were brass, raw copper, mercury, lead, and bulk materials for shipping such as masts and pitch.<sup>207</sup> These privileges were extended to all Germans willing to invest at minimum 10 000 *cruzados*, although these other companies were given a 10 per cent customs cap.<sup>208</sup>

Manuel's generous privileges to the Welser-Vöhlín demonstrate the importance that he placed upon German investment.<sup>209</sup> As long as the Germans monopolised these commodities and had the backing of Maximilian, their ability to participate in the overseas trade seemed secure. Accordingly, in 1504 Rem wrote that 'On the first of August we made the contract with the King of Portugal on the arming of three ships bound for India' (*Primo Aug<sup>o</sup> tat wir den vertrag mit portugal king der armazion 3 schiff, per Indiam*).<sup>210</sup> The contract demanded 65 400 *cruzados* for the three ships, three quarters in cash and a quarter in precious metals, of which the Welser provided 20 000 *cruzados*. The Fugger and Höchstetter provided 4000 *cruzados* each, the Imhoff and Gossembrot each invested 3000 *cruzados*, the Hirschvogels 2000, and the remaining 29 400 by an Italian consortium that included Marchionni, Giovanfrancesco Affaitati, and the Sernigi.<sup>211</sup>

At the end of March 1505, a fleet of twenty ships under D. Francisco de Almeida left Lisbon, carrying three German agents on the *Lionardo*, *São Rafael* and *São Jeronimo*. Both Balthasar Sprenger (or Springer), the agent of the Welser, and Hans Mayr left detailed accounts of the

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<sup>205</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 7–8.

<sup>206</sup> J. Denucé, 'Privileges Commerciaux Accordes Par Les Rois Du Portugal Aux Flamands et Aux Allemands (XVe et XVIe Siecles)', in *Arquivo Historico Portugues* (Lisbon, 1909), 381–83; Cassel, *Privilegia und Handlungsfreiheiten, Welche Die Könige von Portugal Ehedem Den Deutschen Kaufleuten Zu Lissabon Ertheilet Haben*, 5–10.

<sup>207</sup> Konrad Haebler, *Die Überseeischen Unternehmungen Der Welser und Ihrer Gesellschafter* (Leipzig, 1903), 12.

<sup>208</sup> Pohle, 'Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa', 22.

<sup>209</sup> Pohle, 22.

<sup>210</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8.

<sup>211</sup> Haebler, *Die Überseeischen Unternehmungen Der Welser und Ihrer Gesellschafter*, 23–24.

voyage.<sup>212</sup> When the ships returned in 1506, Rem estimated profits of 150 per cent, that is, of 30 000 *cruzados*, which Häbler has revised upwards to 160 per cent, and which the early sixteenth century Augsburg chronicler, Wilhelm Rem, suggested were 175 per cent.<sup>213</sup> That Rem's estimates were more conservative than those of modern historians indicate the merchants' realistic rendition of overseas profits, at least at the beginning of the sixteenth century, compared to the more idealistic views of chroniclers (who, moreover, suffered from receiving information second hand). The enormous profits offered by the Indian trade encouraged the Germans to reinvest in the following year. In 1506, the Welser and Imhoff invested in a Portuguese fleet to India, in partnership with the Portuguese New Christian Rui Mendes. This investment was far less successful than the previous one.<sup>214</sup> Two of the ships were lost on the voyage to India, and the cargo of the surviving ship was confiscated by Manuel once the fleet returned to Lisbon.<sup>215</sup>

Unlike the German merchants, the Italians continued to participate in overseas voyages. In 1510, Marchionni, the Sernigi, and some other Florentines sent three ships under Vasconcellos with the intention of travelling to Malacca. When they arrived in India, however, they came into conflict with the Viceroy, Afonso de Albuquerque, who demanded that they take part in the Battle of Goa rather than sail directly on to Malacca. This conflict, described in detail by Giovanni da Empoli, who was there as Marchionni's representative, worsened when Vasconcellos' fleet attempted to leave without Albuquerque's permission. Once the merchants returned to Europe, having being forced to participate in the Battles of Goa (1510) and Malacca (1511), they capitalised upon their close ties to Manuel I to persuade him to take their side.<sup>216</sup> Empoli, moreover, was able to use his connections to the Medici to gain compensation for Albuquerque's depredations by having Leo X demand the same from Manuel.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Balthasar Sprenger, 'Merfart', in *Balthasar Springers Indienfahrt, 1505/06*, ed. Franz Schulze (Strasbourg, 1902); Hans Mayr, 'The Voyage and Acts of Dom Francisco, Viceroy of India, Written in the Ship Sam Rafael of Oporto, Captained by Feman Suarez', in *South-East Africa: 1488-1530*, ed. Eric Axelson (London, 1940), 231–38.

<sup>213</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8; Häbler, *Die Überseeischen Unternehmungen Der Welser und Ihrer Gesellschafter*, 23–24; Wilhelm Rem, "'Cronica Newer Geschichten" von Wilhelm Rem, 1512-1527', in *Die Chroniken Der Schwäbischen Städte: Augsburg*, ed. Friedrich Roth, vol. 5 (Leipzig, 1896), 1–246.

<sup>214</sup> Pohle, 'Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa', 27.

<sup>215</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8.

<sup>216</sup> Laurence A. Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque* (Lisbon, 1989), 60–61.

<sup>217</sup> Leo X, 'Letter to Manuel I of Portugal (25 February 1515)', in *Miscellanea Di Storia Italiana*, vol. 9, Terza Serie (Turin, 1904), 407.

Although the Italians maintained their privileged position, their participation in the overseas trade declined somewhat after this period. Marchionni had previously invested in almost every voyage, but afterwards contributed only to the fleets of 1518 and 1520 (he died in 1530).<sup>218</sup> The decreased security of the Florentines' and Germans' position made them reorient their interests towards the internal trade of exotic commodities (p.53).

The great companies had proven themselves able to adapt to dramatic political and economic changes. In contrast to the success of the Genoese, Florentines, and High Germans, both Venice and the Hanseatic League were increasingly marginalised in sixteenth-century trade, which recent research has attributed to the behaviour of merchants as well as to the Atlantic shift of European commerce.<sup>219</sup> It was the willingness of the great companies to radically adapt their business and cultural practices and to gamble upon the potential great rewards of overseas trade, despite the extreme risks, that gave them such advantages. Later in the sixteenth century, the declining benefits of being foreign prompted merchants to reject their traditional habit of endogamy and return to their homeland in favour of naturalisation and cultural adaptation.<sup>220</sup>

Foreigners also fulfilled other roles in overseas activities. Two Italians sailed as military engineers under da Gama in 1502 to India, where they made artillery for the Zamorin of Calicut.<sup>221</sup> German gunners (*bombadeiros*) were particularly important to the military conquests of the Spanish and Portuguese and included the author of an anonymous narrative of Gama's second voyage of 1502-03 and the explorer Hans Staden.<sup>222</sup> Both Italians and Germans were known for their superior navigational skills: Münzer's famous letter to João II recommended 'Martin Behaim, and many other expert mariners', while Bartolomé de Las Casas suggested that Vespucci might have been present in Cabral's fleet as 'a man trained in

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<sup>218</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, chap. 5.

<sup>219</sup> Domenico Gioffrè, ed., *Lettere Di Giovanni Da Pontremoli, Mercante Genovese, 1453-59* (Genoa, 1982); Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade* (London, 2015), 84; Magdalena Naum, 'Material Culture and Diasporic Experiences: A Case of Medieval Hanse Merchants in the Baltic', *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 26, no. 1 (September 2015): 72–86; for the decline of the kontore, see Mike Burkhardt, 'The German Hanse and Bergen – New Perspectives on an Old Subject', *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 58, no. 1 (1 March 2010): 60–79; and Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, 312–17.

<sup>220</sup> Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 7–9; Wilhelm Stieda, *Hildebrand Veckinchusen: Briefwechsel Eines Deutschen Kaufmanns Im 15. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1921).

<sup>221</sup> Ludovico de Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico Di Varthema: In Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix in Persia, India, and Ethiopia, A.D. 1503 to 1508*, ed. John Winter Jones and George Percy Badger (London, 1863), 260–61; Querini, 'Relatione Del Clarissimo Sig. Vincenzo Quirino Ritornato Ambasciatore Da Filippo d'Austria Rè Di Castiglia Dell'anno 1504', fols 207v–208r.

<sup>222</sup> Miloslav Krása, Josef Polišenský, and Peter Ratkoš, eds., 'The Anonymous German Narrative', in *The Voyages of Discovery in the Bratislava Manuscript Lyc. 515/8: European Expansion, 1494 - 1519; (Codex Bratislavensis)* (Prague, 1986); Hans Staden, *Hans Staden's True History* (Durham and London, 2008).

navigation and learned in cosmography’ (and indeed, Vespucci did proclaim himself superior in these areas than the Portuguese).<sup>223</sup> The participation of these men, like that of the merchants, arose from a skills shortage among the Spanish and Portuguese.

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With the failure of the 1506 voyage, the Germans changed their focus from direct participation in overseas trade to domination of exotic goods within Europe.<sup>224</sup> As they had with mining and textiles in the previous century, the great companies became entrepreneurs in the new industries. German merchants, some of whom had agents, such as Jorg Pock, who were gem traders in India, became involved in jewel cutting in Lisbon and Antwerp, and, along with Italians such as the Affaitati, were dominant in Antwerp’s sugar refining industry.<sup>225</sup> By 1508, the Welser owned land in Tenerife and soon afterwards bought a sugar plantation and processing plant on La Palma.<sup>226</sup>

Opportunities for dominating the European trade of exotic goods was aided by the licensing system established by the Portuguese crown to control the distribution of its overseas imports. Accordingly, the Casa da Índia was founded as an independent institution in 1506. (It had previously been part of the Casa della Mina, which Hieronymus Münzer had visited at João III’s request in the 1490s.)<sup>227</sup> Before this, Querini observed, each merchant ‘could sell his spices to whomever he wanted, and as much as he wanted’ (*poteua uendere le sue spetie à chi uoleua, et per quanto uoleua*), but afterwards all returning spices, even those belonging to independent traders, were brought to the Casa da Índia and sold from there ‘at a fixed price’ (*à un prezzo sempre fermo*).<sup>228</sup> The Portuguese crown turned the pepper trade into a monopoly, in which it sold the rights to the trade in return for advance payments of cash and metals.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Hieronymus Münzer, ‘Letter to João II of Portugal (14 July 1493)’, in *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (London, 1908), 113; Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Las Casas on Columbus: Background and the Second and Fourth Voyages*, ed. Nigel Griffin, vol. 12, *Repertorium Columbianum* (Turnhout, 1999), 51–52; for Vespucci’s criticism of the Portuguese navigators and statement of his own superior skills, see Amerigo Vespucci, ‘Letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici (1501)’, in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 154, 158.

<sup>224</sup> See later chapters for more on the import trades.

<sup>225</sup> van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 170; Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010), 20–21; Denucé, *Inventaire des Affaitati*, introduction.

<sup>226</sup> Vieira, ‘Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Azores’, 261.

<sup>227</sup> Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer’s Itinerary*, 91–93.

<sup>228</sup> Querini, ‘Relatione Del Clarissimo Sig. Vincenzo Querino Ritornato Ambasciatore Da Filippo d’Austria Rè Di Castiglia Dell’anno 1504’, fol. 210v.

<sup>229</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 97–98.

The pepper was transferred from Lisbon to Antwerp and, from there, was distributed across Europe under the control of the Portuguese crown factor to Antwerp and those firms with the capital to advance large sums in return for spices. By the later 1500s, the pepper trade was monopolised by Italians including the Affaitati (who had major branches in both Lisbon and Antwerp) and the Frescobaldi and Gualterotti (who had close ties to Marchionni). From 1515, they were replaced by high German merchants, including the Fugger, Welser, and Höchstetter; then by Portuguese New Christians, including Diego Mendez. In the 1540s the monopoly was held by the Schetz and the Antwerp-based German Imhoff family, who exported most of the spices to Germany. In 1559 a contract was extended to a group of Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards. The presence of Spanish and Portuguese merchants among the contractors shows the growing capital of those nations' traders; the absence of Netherlandish merchants, bar the Schetz, indicates that Netherlandish merchants as yet lacked the capital or political power to enter monopolistic trade.<sup>230</sup> In Lyon, which in the early sixteenth century had risen to become one of Europe's greatest financial centres, the spice trade was also dominated by a small number of merchants, in this case Florentines.<sup>231</sup>

The licence system of European trade (outlined in the previous chapter) and the increasingly monopolistic nature of fifteenth-century European commerce and finance, expressed through the use of licences, and the concentration of trade into the hands of capital-rich entrepreneurs, was replicated in Spanish and Portuguese overseas trade. The preference for cartels was partially the result of the market itself. The growing investment of German companies in copper mining, in response to the demand from the Indian market, caused the European market to become saturated, bankrupting several firms. From 1515, the market stabilised due to the Fugger-Höchstetter cartel, which continued until 1520.<sup>232</sup> These merchants were able to successfully respond to shocks caused by new developments and so, for the first few decades after the overseas discoveries, monopolies and cartels remained the most successful and therefore the dominant form of commerce. In some cases, the crowns granted exclusive licences for the exploitation of particular areas or commodities to individual merchants, companies, or consortia. In 1502, the Portuguese crown had granted a consortium of New

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<sup>230</sup> Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 69.

<sup>231</sup> Richard Gascon, *Grand Commerce et Vie Urbaine Au XVIe Siècle. Lyon et Ses Marchands (Environs de 1520–Environs de 1580)* (Paris, 1971), 81–95, 219–30.

<sup>232</sup> Krag, *Die Paumgartner von Nürnberg und Augsburg*, 57.

Christians a charter to export brazilwood and other items from Brazil.<sup>233</sup> The import of African slaves to the Americas was strictly regulated through a system of licences, which had also been used to control and tax the import of slaves to the Atlantic islands and Europe in the fifteenth century.<sup>234</sup>

The enormous profits of the India trade and its monopolistic nature aggravated the distance between the great companies and smaller traders, which was echoed on a socio-political level. As both Dürer and Pires' accounts demonstrate, the Portuguese factor to Antwerp not only worked closely with, but also dined and socialised with, the resident merchants of prominent German and Italian companies, perpetuating the oligarchic nature of overseas commerce.<sup>235</sup>

This system, and particularly the creation of the Portuguese royal factory in Antwerp to bring together Asian spices and German metals, was a major factor in making Antwerp the centre of northern European trade and finance.<sup>236</sup> As the Venetians and the Florentines had predicted, the introduction of the Asian spice trade to Portugal caused European merchants to turn to Lisbon and Antwerp rather than Venice for spices and other exotic commodities.<sup>237</sup> Giovan Carlo (João Carlos) Affaitati established a branch there in circa 1514 but connections between merchants in Lisbon, Seville, and Antwerp already existed; Giovanni da Empoli was sent to India in 1503 as agent for Bartolomeo Marchionni in Lisbon and the Frescobaldi and Gualterrotti of Bruges and Antwerp.<sup>238</sup> His news was received by despair with Venetians; Priuli remarked that the Portuguese have 'found a new voyage... And this news was held by the learned to be the worst news which the Venetian Republic could have had'.<sup>239</sup> (The alarm

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<sup>233</sup> Piero Rondinelli, 'Letter from Seville (3 October 1502)', in *Raccolta Di Documenti e Studi Pubblicati Dalla R. Commissione Colombiana : Pel Quarto Centenario Dalla Scoperta Dell'America*, vol. 2, 3 (Rome, 1893), 120–21.

<sup>234</sup> Martin de Zubizarreta, 'Martin de Zubizarreta, Basque Merchant, in Nombre de Dios, Terra Firma, to His Employers Juan Sáez de Aramburu, Francisco de Churruca, Martin Pérez de Achotegui and Company, in Seville (28 September 1526)', in *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies: Sixteenth Century*, ed. James Lockhart and Enrique Otte (Cambridge, 1976), 19–24.

<sup>235</sup> Tomé Pires, 'The Suma Oriental', in *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires : An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, Written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515 ; and, the Book of Francisco Rodrigues, Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical Rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East before 1515*, ed. Armando Cortesão, 2 vols (London, 1944), 1–306; Albrecht Dürer, *Memoirs of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries* (Auckland, 2010), 48, 58, 77–85.

<sup>236</sup> Halikowski-Smith, 'Portugal and the European Spice Trade, 1480-1580', especially 71-86.

<sup>237</sup> Christopher H. H. Wake, 'The Changing Pattern of Europe's Pepper and Spice Imports, c. 1400-1700', *The Journal of European Economic History* 8, no. 2 (1979): 373–74; Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 13.

<sup>238</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 383; Nunziatella Alessandrini, 'The Far East in the Early 16th Century: Giovanni Da Empoli's Travels', in *Global Encounters, European Identities*, ed. Mary N. Harris, Anna Agnarsdóttir, and Csaba Lévai (Pisa, 2010), 218.

<sup>239</sup> Girolamo Priuli, *I Diarii Di Girolamo Priuli*, ed. Roberto Cessi, vol. 2 (Città di Castello, 1913), 156.

would ultimately turn out to be exaggerated; Venice and other European powers continued to import spices, including some pepper, from the Levant.<sup>240</sup>)

The Florentines, by contrast, were positively gleeful; one of Marchionni's *govani* remarked that they would be able to tell the Sultan and the Venetians to 'go stare at the sun'.<sup>241</sup> The German companies reoriented their interests from Venice, where they had long traded and held apprenticeships, and where the Paumgartner, among other companies, had their own room in the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, to Antwerp and its spice staple.<sup>242</sup> By the 1500s all of the foreign merchants, except for the Hanseatic consul of Bruges, had moved to the city.<sup>243</sup>

The German and Florentine companies, which had granted loans to enter the overseas trade and pepper monopoly, used the profits from this trade to give further loans and increasingly turned their focus away from commerce to finance. Antwerp, as the site where Asian and American commodities were exchanged for German-owned copper and silver, became the most important financial centre in northern Europe. In Antwerp, Charles V raised funds for his wars from the city and from the resident merchants.<sup>244</sup>

The transition towards banking and the rise of Antwerp underscore how European merchants responded to changes within, far more than beyond, Europe in deciding the course of their financial and commercial investments.

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The Spanish and Portuguese discoveries and the consequent explosion of European activity represented the first example of globalisation, which had significant impacts upon trade within as well as beyond Europe. Inter-continental links within Europe were being driven by both the growing commercial links between the commercial centres of Seville, Lisbon, Antwerp, Lyons, and Genoa, and by the rapid expansion of the Habsburg family to control almost all these cities.

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<sup>240</sup> Lane, 'The Mediterranean Spice Trade Further Evidence of Its Revival in the Sixteenth Century', *passim*; Wake, 'The Changing Pattern of Europe's Pepper and Spice Imports, c. 1400-1700', 371-75.

<sup>241</sup> Piero Vaglianti, ed., 'Lettera Di Un Govane Di Bartolomeo Marchionni, in Lisbona, a Piero Panciaticchi (1508)', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti* (Florence, 2006), 216-17.

<sup>242</sup> Krag, *Die Paumgartner von Nürnberg und Augsburg*, 39.

<sup>243</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 2: The Wheels of Commerce: 138; on the Hanseatic merchants, cf. Bolton and Bruscoli, 'When Did Antwerp Replace Bruges as the Commercial and Financial Centre of North-Western Europe?', 364-65.

<sup>244</sup> van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 219-21.



Their successful adaptation to the great changes of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was made possible by the fluid nature of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century trade, which were characterised not by rigidly separated companies but by many simultaneous and overlapping forms of trading relationships through which merchants could form huge networks across Europe. Their business structure and practices allowed them to rapidly reorganise to suit new trading opportunities, particularly the opportunity to monopolise the spice trade. Such was the size and complexity of the spice trade that even the largest companies were obliged to form partnerships between themselves in order to gain a monopoly.<sup>245</sup> For the pepper trade, merchants were obliged to use joint ventures and draw upon their networks across the major European ports.<sup>246</sup> Florentine and German merchants could call upon their web of relationships, with connections at every important trading centre, to adjust to these new demands and corner the market.<sup>247</sup>

The difficulties of global trade obliged merchants to form connections with merchants of other nations in a move away from the long-established practice of working primarily with people of one's own network. Collaborations between Florentines, Genoese, and German merchants became vital elements of participation in the Portuguese voyages to India and in the internal trade of Asian commodities.

The German merchants, lacking connections in the Iberian Peninsula, quickly entered into business with Italian traders. Upon his arrival in Saragossa in late December 1502 or early January 1503, the Welser factor, Lucas Rem, exchanged gold alongside a 'Cesaro Berzi', almost certainly the Cesare Barzi who worked with Marchionni in the slave trade and wrote a letter to the Venetian ambassador, Piero Pasqualigo, on 'the things from Calicut' (*le cosse de Colocut*).<sup>248</sup> This presaged the 1505 voyage, in which the German merchants worked closely with Bartolomeo Marchionni, as Peutinger wrote to Maximilian: 'Last year we, in the name of Bartolomeo Marchionni, a citizen of Florence, made an arrangement with the most serene king of Portugal, that we should arrange, for his serene highness, to send three ships to India under certain pacts and articles' (*Superiori anno quarto nos per nomen Bartholomei Marchionis civis Florentini fecimus compositcionem quandam cum serenissimo rege Portugalliae, ut nobis sua*

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<sup>245</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 40.

<sup>246</sup> Tognetti, 39–40.

<sup>247</sup> Alessandrini, 'Os Italianos e a Expansão Portuguesa: O Caso Do Mercador João Francisco Affaitati (Séc. XVI)', 39; Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 379.

<sup>248</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8; Cesare Barzi, 'Copia de Una Lettera Di Valenza al Ditto Orator Nostro, Di 5 Septembrio 1503', in *I Diarii Di Marino Sanuto*, by Marino Sanudo, ed. Federico Stefani, vol. V (Venice, 1981), 132.

*Serenitas naves tres versus Indiam sub certis pactis et capitulis ordinaret*).<sup>249</sup> By working with Marchionni, the German merchants overcame the limited familiarity with, and presence in, Lisbon that had delayed their investment in the overseas trade for several years after the Italians.

Later German investments in overseas voyages also involved collaborations with merchants from other nations. In 1506, the Welser and Imhoff formed a consortium with the Portuguese New Christian Rui Mendes (a relative of the famous Gracia Mendes), to invest in the India Armada.<sup>250</sup> The Antwerp Affaitati also worked closely with the Mendes, signing a joint contract with João III to buy spices in 1532.<sup>251</sup> In later decades, the Fugger were represented in Spain and Portugal by the Fleming Cristobal de Haro, who was based in Lisbon and then Seville.<sup>252</sup>

Close co-operation between Italian and German companies was not restricted to the Iberian Peninsula. In 1555, the prominent Nuremberg merchant Lazarus Tucher wrote from Gallifort, his castle near Antwerp, to his cousin Linhart, in Nuremberg, that that he was doing an exchange business to ‘Barselona, Saragossa und Castilla’ and trading with the Affaitadi. Lazarus Tucher was one of the most prominent independent merchants in Antwerp and an important lender to both the Statthalterin, Mary of Hungary, and the English crown.<sup>253</sup> In the same letter, Linhart wrote that a ship that had left the previous December had returned to Lisbon [*Lix.a*] on 7 June laden with spices from India. He had also made a loan to the king of Portugal. After a discussion of the difficulties of other German traders, the letter concludes with the exchange rates of Augsburg, Nuremberg, Spain, and Lyon, reflecting the distribution of Linhart’s business.<sup>254</sup> This letter included a supplement, probably written afterwards, on the recently arrived ship carrying Indian spices: 2000 quintals of pepper and 6000 of cloves. He estimated that this would affect the price of cloves, but that the price of pepper might yet remain

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<sup>249</sup> Conrad Peutinger, ‘Zwei Entwürfe Peutingers für ein Schreiben an Maximilian betr. den Prozeß der an der Indienfahrt beteiligten Kaufleute mit dem portugiesischen König’, in *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge zu einer politischen Biographie*, ed. Heinrich Lutz (Augsburg, 1958), 326–27.

<sup>250</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8; Pohle, ‘Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa’, 27.

<sup>251</sup> Denucé, *Inventaire des Affaitadi*, 21; see also Alessandrini, ‘Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi’, 383–84.

<sup>252</sup> Hermann Kellenbenz, ‘Die Konkurrenten Der Fugger Als Bankiers Der Spanischen Krone’, *Zeitschrift Für Unternehmensgeschichte / Journal of Business History* 24, no. 3 (1979): 94; Blackburn, ‘Germans Abroad and “Auslandsdeutsche”’, 330.

<sup>253</sup> John Guy, *Gresham’s Law: The Life and World of Queen Elizabeth I’s Banker* (London, 2019), 47.

<sup>254</sup> Lazarus Tucher, ‘Brief Lazarus Tuchers Aus Gallifort an Seinen Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg’ (30 November 1555), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 188, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

constant. Another four ships remained in India; the next fleet was expected in August.<sup>255</sup> Tucher's letter strongly suggests that he was buying spices, probably from the Affaitati.

In Lyon, the local branch of the prominent Salviati family, which had close ties to the Medici through business and marriage, became collectors of the Lyonnais gabelle (tax) upon cloth imports in partnership with the Welser.<sup>256</sup> Likewise, the Spinelli, a mid-size Florentine company, collaborated with German merchants.<sup>257</sup> Previously, the family had had little involvement with German merchants, with the exception of Tommaso Spinelli's stint in Basel during the Council; there, however, his clients were almost all Italian clerics and his business contacts and partners entirely Italian.<sup>258</sup> A letter of 1524 reveals important details about how the Spinelli's banking evolved in response to the rise of the Habsburgs to rule the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, and much of Italy. In the letter, Bartolomäus Welser ('Bartolomeo Belzer'), in Antwerp, requested that Gerard de Plena ('Gerart di Pleyne'), count de la Roche and ambassador to Galicia, Spain ('Embassador della Galizia'), repay a loan from Tommaso Spinelli.<sup>259</sup> Plena served as Charles V's ambassador alongside Giovanni Battista Spinelli, and a Tommaso Spinelli (there are many) was an ambassador to Spain at the same time. This letter indicates how the smaller companies, as well as the greater ones, were becoming increasingly involved in financing rulers and their courtiers in areas outside their homelands. The rise of the Habsburgs not only brought a Florentine merchant family into the inner circles of the Spanish court, it allowed them to rely upon German merchants for mutual support in actions against those same courts.

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As their trade became more international in scope, merchants began to face the problems of operating across jurisdictions and outside long-established patterns of trade. While, in some cases, merchants were able to rely upon social regulations and institutions such as commercial

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<sup>255</sup> Tucher.

<sup>256</sup> Alamanno Salviati, 'Libro Di Debitori e Creditori Degli Eredi Di Alamanno Salviati e C. Di Lione, Di Bartolomeo Belge per Conto Della Gabella Dell'entrata Di Drappi Nel Regno Di Francia' (1542-1532), Archivio Salviati, Serie I Libri di Commerci 506, Biblioteca della Scuola Normale Superiore.

<sup>257</sup> This section is based upon the paper "The Spinelli Family: A mid-sized Florentine firm's response to the opening of the Americas and Cape Route trade, 1450-1520" given at the 2019 Economic History Society Conference.

<sup>258</sup> Kurt Weissen, 'Ci Scrive in Tedesco! The Florentine Merchant-Banker Tommaso Spinelli and His German-Speaking Clients (1435-72)', *The Yale University Library Gazette* 74, no. 3/4 (April 2000): 112-25.

<sup>259</sup> Bartholomäus Welser, 'Letter to Gerard de Plena' (30 July 1524), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

courts, the great companies preferred to leverage their influence with rulers.<sup>260</sup> When the Welser approached Manuel I in 1502 to barter for entry into the Cape Route trade, they sent a delegation comprised of Simon Seitz, Lucas Rem, and Scipio Löwenstein to the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>261</sup> Rem, who was Anton Welser's nephew, stayed in Saragossa for three months whilst the others went on to Portugal where in February 1503 Seitz obtained substantial privileges for the Welser.<sup>262</sup> It is notable that the German companies chose to send representatives from Germany rather than use people already in Lisbon, who would have been more familiar with local trading customs but not well-known to the company heads.

For the German companies in the overseas trade, their establishment of a direct relationship with Manuel I, and later Charles V, was also prompted by the limited number of upper Germans in Lisbon and Seville; there was no German nation through which they could have operated should they have chosen to do so. However, as Hieronymus Münzer noted in his *Itinerary*, there were many German merchants in Portugal.<sup>263</sup> Members of the Great Ravensburg Company, among others, were active in the Madeiran sugar trade, followed by the great Augsburg and Nuremberg companies in later decades: the Welser acquired sugar plantations on Madeira by 1509 and on La Palma in 1513.<sup>264</sup> Münzer interacted with many of these merchants but does not appear to have made use of them politically. Instead, both he and Martin Behaim had letters of recommendation from Maximilian when they sought out the court of João II.<sup>265</sup> Members and affiliates of élite companies could obtain letters of recommendation from rulers as well as, or instead of, gaining credentials by associating themselves with the local community of expatriates.

For the Welser party in 1503, local knowledge was provided by Valentim Fernandes, the German-Moravian printer long resident in Lisbon, who was made notary to the German merchants under the contract. Thus, even when they acted collectively to apply for privileges from the Portuguese king in 1503, using Valentim Fernandes as representative and intermediary, the German merchants formed their own collaborative group rather than

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<sup>260</sup> See also Chapter Five.

<sup>261</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 7–8.

<sup>262</sup> Pohle, 'Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa', 22.

<sup>263</sup> Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary*, 19, 25–26, 31, 34, 35–37, 41–43, 89, 94, 133.

<sup>264</sup> William D. Phillips, 'Sugar in Iberia', in *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill, 2004), 33–34; Vieira, 'Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Azores', 67–69.

<sup>265</sup> Kellenbenz, 'Portugiesische Forschungen Zur Behaimfrage', 88.

operating through the existing German community of Lisbon. Fernandes was already known to the High Germans due to his correspondence with Conrad Peutinger, Anton Welser's son-in-law, and due to his work with Martin Behaim on the African voyages. Moreover, as shield-bearer to Queen Leonor, he moved in court as well as commercial circles, and furthermore had a great interest in the overseas explorations.

The privileges that the Welser obtained in the treaty of 1504 were later extended to all German merchants willing to provide at least 10 000 *cruzados* to the crown. However, the Welser maintained a more privileged position, being obliged to pay 5 per cent in tax rather than the 10 per cent imposed upon other merchants.<sup>266</sup> These privileges, with their high entrance fee, were increased in 1504, 1508, 1509, 1510, and 1511 and were clearly aimed at the great merchant bankers of Augsburg and Nuremberg; Hanseatic merchants only had privileges from 1517.<sup>267</sup> The German merchants were in high favour with the emperor, while Valentim Fernandes was the shield-bearer or squire (*escudeiro*) of Queen Leonor.<sup>268</sup> This suggests that, just as the great companies did not generally approach rulers as members of merchant nations, so rulers did not treat monopolists based upon their status as a member of a nation.

Personal relationships with rulers were crucial because the greatest barriers to entry that merchants faced were not those provided by international commerce itself but by monarchs.<sup>269</sup> In 1504, the same year that they secured privileges from Manuel I, the Welser and other German merchants were unable to export silver to Lisbon, where it was used in the trade to India, because 'the prince [Philip, duke of Burgundy and newly king of Castile] has forbidden the export of any silver from his Grace's land' (*es vom Prinzen verpotten ist, ainig Silber aus seiner Gnauden Land ze fieren*).<sup>270</sup> Anton Welser therefore asked his son-in-law, Conrad Peutinger, to intercede with Maximilian, Philip's father.<sup>271</sup> To overcome these barriers, merchants had to form close ties to rulers through repeated loans, commercial transactions, and gifts.<sup>272</sup> It was Maximilian's great interest in the Portuguese overseas activities, on one hand,

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<sup>266</sup> Pohle, 'Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa', 22.

<sup>267</sup> Pohle, 23.

<sup>268</sup> T. O. Marcones de Souza, 'O Ato Notarial de Valentim Fernandes de 20 de Maio de 1503', *Revista de História* 34, no. 2 (April 1958): 369.

<sup>269</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 97–98.

<sup>270</sup> Welser, 'Brief des Anthoni Welser vom 11. December 1504 an Dr. Conrad Peutinger, und Auszug eines Handlungsbriefes der Welser Compagnie in Antorf, vom 18. Nov. 1504'.

<sup>271</sup> Welser; See also J. F. Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii XIV: Ausgewählte Regesten Des Kaiserreiches Unter Maximilian I. 1493-1519*, vol. 4 (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar, 1990), 1088, 1098–99.

<sup>272</sup> Chapter Four

and his favouritism of the Nuremberg and especially the Augsburg merchant-bankers, on the other, that enabled their participation in the India Armada. Both elements of this dynamic were found in his close collaboration with Peutinger on legal, cultural, dynastic, and commercial matters.<sup>273</sup>

In contrast, the Germans had only limited connections to Manuel I, with whom they operated through Valentim Fernandes. It is possible that this distance is why the Germans struggled to reclaim their goods after they were seized in the return of the fleet from India in 1506, and why they subsequently stopped investing directly in the overseas voyages. In contrast, the Florentines, with their deep ties to the Portuguese crown, continued, and successfully, to invest. The confiscations underline the fact that the closer ties that the overseas trade produced between monarchs and merchants were pragmatic, deriving from particular constraints that made the Portuguese (and Spanish) crowns dependent upon foreign capital. This development reached a high point in a particular context and under particular constraints and, once those constraints ended, declined and eventually broke down.

The preference for operating through personal connections also informed Marchionni's choice of Giovanni da Empoli as his representative when he, Marchionni, contributed a ship to the 1503 Indian Armada. Empoli was serving as the Indian factor for the Frescobaldi and Gualterrotti company in Bruges. Marchionni's heavy commercial ties to the Frescobaldi and Gualterrotti assured him, it seems, of Empoli's quality (and Empoli spent several months in Lisbon before embarking), but Empoli neither had any experience with Lisbon, nor, most probably, fluency in Portuguese (although it is similar enough to Italian that this would have only been a short-term impediment). Unlike the Germans, the Florentine merchants were not short of available people; the Florentine community in Lisbon was well-established. The choice to use Empoli instead points to the international nature of the Florentine diaspora, which was not, for the great merchants, limited to a particular city.

In this way, although merchant nations are highly significant, they should not be emphasised overmuch as categories: at the elite level, the diaspora was extremely fluid, with merchants moving readily between cities. Focusing upon the communities-by-origin of different cities and the privileges that each group obtained from rulers can hide the importance of the connections between different areas, especially for large companies, whose major trading

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<sup>273</sup> See Chapter Seven, on gifts, and Chapter Eight, on institutional versus informal regulation.

partners were often in other cities. In this vein, studies of the Iberian branch of the Affaitati have emphasised their connections to the Florentine community of Lisbon and to their company members in Antwerp, but not their extremely strong ties to the Gondi in Lyon.<sup>274</sup>

As the importance of nations declined, the rise of overseas trade saw the creation of new institutions that became significant for the foreign merchants, namely the *Casa de Contratación* and the *Casa da Índia*. The Spanish *Casa de Contratación* in Seville was possibly created due to the Genoese councillor Francisco Pinelo (Francesco Pinello), in a case of merchants creating as well as interacting with commercial infrastructure. All overseas trade was obliged to pass through these departments, including the goods of privileged merchant companies. Despite these restrictions, these institutions were not necessarily opposed by the merchants: when Charles V allowed ships to sail to America from ports other than Seville in 1529, his decision was overturned following pressure from Sevillian and Genoese merchants.<sup>275</sup> In this case, the merchants preferred to maintain their monopoly upon overseas trade, even when it was in partnership with government institutions.

Ultimately, many great merchants would abandon foreign nations altogether by becoming naturalised, preferring the advantages of citizenship over the privileges given to foreign resident groups. Far from being rigid, the great companies' use of nations and other institutions was highly flexible, drawing upon multiple different institutions, sometimes simultaneously, alongside the pursuit of individual special treatment.

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The capital and networks required to participate in overseas commerce excluded all but the largest firms from direct investment in the trade in Asian and American commodities and from the pepper monopoly and other intra-European commerce in foreign commodities. As was the case with high finance and entrepreneurial ventures such as mining and weaving, most merchants could not participate. Instead, the beginnings of overseas commerce widened the divisions between most traders and the multinational firms.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*; Alessandrini, 'La Presenza Italiana a Lisbona Nella Prima Metà Del Cinquecento'; Charles Verlinden, *La Colonie Italienne de Lisbonne et Le Developpement de l'economie Metropolitaine et Coloniale Portugaise* (Milan, 1925); For Southern European merchant communities in Bruges, see Goris, *Étude Sur Les Colonies Marchandes Méridionales (Portugais, Espagnols, Italiens) à Anvers de 1488 à 1567*.

<sup>275</sup> Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 10–11.

<sup>276</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 130–31.

As explored in the previous chapter, by the time of Columbus' and Gama's first voyages, recent European economic structural changes had seen the emergence and growing hegemony of great family companies, which acted as entrepreneurs as much as traditional merchants, investing their capital in new technologies in mining and the textile industry. These companies not only sold the output of weavers and mines, they supplied the raw materials for smelting and weaving and often owned shares in mines and cloth companies. All stages of commerce, therefore, became concentrated under companies able to procure vast amounts of capital.<sup>277</sup> This monopolistic system was exacerbated by the fact that many of the most important raw materials and most reliable sources of income, such as the Tyrolean silver mines and the Spanish Maestrazgos (the income of the three knightly orders), were under royal control and could be obtained only by providing substantial loans, and quickly, to the ruler in question.<sup>278</sup> In this way, the Fugger and other German firms came to monopolise the resources of both the Tyrolean mines (from the end of the fifteenth century) and the Maestrazgos (from the 1520s).<sup>279</sup> Consequently, when the overseas trade opened, it was only these great entrepreneurs who could invest in the voyages and the pepper monopoly. All of the German firms who participated in the overseas voyages – the Fugger, the Welser, the Paumgartner, and others – were involved in Central European mining, whence they derived the capital needed to invest in the Portuguese fleets.<sup>280</sup>

Under these circumstances, it was extremely difficult for smaller companies to enter colonial trade. The business model of Florentine and German firms, however, allowed smaller companies to participate by co-operating with or working for the large firms to circumvent the significant barriers to entry that otherwise excluded them. The fluidity of boundaries between companies allowed smaller firms and individual traders to become heavily integrated into the commerce of the great companies whilst remaining independent. This model was helped by the nature of contracts granted by rulers. In Portugal, the privileges granted to Marchionni extended to his factors, such as the Barzi.<sup>281</sup> Under this model, much of Marchionni's trade was

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<sup>277</sup> Johnson, 93.

<sup>278</sup> Johnson, 93–94.

<sup>279</sup> Johnson, 94.

<sup>280</sup> Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung', 50.

<sup>281</sup> Afonso V of Portugal, 'Grant of Privileges to Bartolomeo Marchionni' (28 February 1475), fol. 68r, Chancelaria de D. Afonso V, liv. 30, Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo.



conducted by men who were often technically not his employees, including the Barzi, Francesco Corbinelli, and, overseas, Giovanni da Empoli.<sup>282</sup>

The barriers to trade in exotic commodities were particularly acute for merchants without Iberian branches, and they remained largely focused upon intra-European trade.<sup>283</sup> Among the Florentines, only smaller families were involved in colonial trade: the Spinelli, the Capponi, and the Cavalcanti, plus Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici of the *popolano* branch of that family.

Lorenzo *il Popolano*, who was Vespucci's patron, lacked the capital to invest in Vespucci's voyages to the New World. His continued patronage of Vespucci, however, demonstrates how these relationships extended beyond the financial. (Their families, like most Florentine patrician *case*, had been connected for generations: Bernardo Vespucci, a Florentine galley captain, had been close to Lorenzo's father Pier Francesco.<sup>284</sup>) In return for the socio-political advantages that he could secure from Lorenzo's high position in Florence, Vespucci directed his famous letters to Lorenzo, thus providing him with the news of the voyage in advance of other Florentines. Just as his reputation and credibility were enhanced by dedicating a copy of his 'Soderini letter' to René of Lorraine – or so Las Casas claimed – his choice of Lorenzo improved his own and his letters' status.<sup>285</sup>

The Capponi were probably already trading between Lisbon and Pisa in 1513, when the author of the letter to Fra Zuambatista requested that any letters be sent to him via Pisa 'in the hands of the Capponi', with whom he did business (*faretimi risposta per via di Pisa, che v'è sempre per mandate le lettere per mano de' Capponi, che con loro fo mie facende*).<sup>286</sup> In 1510, Bartolomeo Marchionni, who managed Queen Leonor of Portugal's patronage of the Murate convent in Florence, shipped her gifts to the Capponi in Pisa, to be delivered by them to the

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<sup>282</sup> Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni and the Trade in African Slaves in the Mediterranean World at the End of the Fifteenth Century', in *Schiavitù e Servaggio Nell'economia Europea. Secc. XI-XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence, 2014), 383.

<sup>283</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion on merchants and their interest in the Americas.

<sup>284</sup> Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World: The Life and Times of Amerigo Vespucci*, 25.

<sup>285</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, 'Chapters from Las Casas, Which Discuss the Statements of Vespucci', in *Letters of Amerigo Vespucci, and Other Documents Illustrative of His Career*, ed. Clements R. Markham (Cambridge, 2010), 69.

<sup>286</sup> Anonymous, 'Letter to Fra Zuambatista (31 January 1513)', 128.

convent: ‘one of my juniors comes with this ship to deliver everything to the Capponi in Pisa’ (*...un mio giovane che vien con dita nave per consegnare tuto a Pisa à Capponi...*).<sup>287</sup>

The account books of the Florentine Spinelli family show a significant increase in their trade in Flemish cloth, one of the mainstays of European commerce. Previously, the Spinelli had largely traded in Florentine goods. Their records, and those of other families such as the Salviati and Gondi, show that the most important growth in trade items, at least for Florentine companies, was in European, rather than exotic, items. They did, unusually, have a presence in the Atlantic trade. In 1509, Niccolemo Spinelli was trading in the Madeiras in partnership with Bartolomeo Marchionni and the Frescobaldi, sending sugar back to Spain and Italy.<sup>288</sup> This partnership probably developed out of the Spinelli family’s presence in Antwerp, where they had been trading from at least 1470, exporting the Flemish cloths that formed a large share of their trade.<sup>289</sup> In Antwerp and Bruges, they would have encountered the Frescobaldi through the networks of the Florentine nation. The Spinelli also enjoyed prominent connections in Spain. Tommaso Spinelli was an ambassador to Spain and the family corresponded with Giovanni Corsi, another Florentine ambassador to Charles V.<sup>290</sup> The Spinelli family’s presence in the great trading centres of Antwerp and Bruges was strengthened during this period by the residency of a Spinelli family member – generally Niccodemo Spinelli – in Antwerp in association with Leonardo Spinelli, a cleric based at the court of Henry VIII.<sup>291</sup> The growing connections across Europe, driven by overseas activities and the hegemony of the Habsburgs, could be exploited by Florentines, whose great flexibility in business practice allowed even companies without representatives to participate indirectly.

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<sup>287</sup> Bartolomeo Marchionni, ‘Letter to the Abbess of Le Murate’ (8 September 1510), *Corporazioni Religiose Soppressate dal Governo Francese*, 81, 100, c. 211r., Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>288</sup> Niccodemo Spinelli, ‘Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli’ (12 April 1508), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: ‘Lettere’, Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Niccodemo Spinelli, ‘Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli’ (28 December 1508), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: ‘Lettere’, Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Niccodemo Spinelli, ‘Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli’ (29 March 1509), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: ‘Lettere’, Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Niccodemo Spinelli, ‘Niccodemo Spinelli to Leonardo Spinelli’ (28 August 1509), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: ‘Lettere’, Lettere scritte al Leonardo Spinelli, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>289</sup> Benedetto Spinelli, ‘Letter from Antwerp’ (4 December 1470), Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filza 114, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>290</sup> See for example the letter written from Valladolid: Giovanni Corsi, ‘Letter from Giovanni Corsi’ (20 May 1523), fol. 2502, Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filza 124, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>291</sup> See, among others, Niccodemo Spinelli, ‘Lettere Scritte al Leonardo Spinelli’, Spinelli Archive, Spinelli Family Papers, Filze 161-168: ‘Lettere’, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Among the Germans, individual merchants and smaller companies such as Lazarus Nurnberger and Lucas Rem were likewise able to enter the trade in colonial commodities through employment in and then continued connections with the great companies, particularly the Welser.<sup>292</sup>

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The great merchant companies seized upon the new opportunities presented by the overseas activities of the Spanish and Portuguese, leveraging their supplies of capital and monopoly over important raw materials to win extensive privileges, especially the right to participate in the overseas voyages, from the Portuguese crown. In this way, the phenomena of trade and finance being dominated by large companies through the use of government licences granted in return for enormous loans, which had become the dominant model of trade within Europe and in European activities in the Atlantic, was extended into European trade with Asia and the New World.

As they had done with European raw materials, the great companies sought to be present at every stage of the production, processing, transport, and sale of overseas commodities. By investing the profits of this trade in more loans, they also increased their dominance of finance in the new financial centre of Antwerp, which grew in importance in parallel to the overseas trade and the rise of the Habsburgs. The new commercial opportunities that the overseas trade produced were accompanied by the reorientation of many of the great commercial houses towards being primarily financial in nature, increasing their close financial ties to rulers.

In their rapid transformation from European to globally active companies, the merchants relied upon their networks to radically shift and expand their trade within Europe. This was encouraged by the policies of the Iberian crowns; the pepper trade emphasises how the size and complexity of the spice trade put it beyond the ability of any one company to manage. These networks also allowed smaller companies to participate by operating alongside the great firms.

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<sup>292</sup> Harreld, 'Foreign Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries', 18–20; Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnbergger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 134; Blackbourn, 'Germans Abroad and "Auslandsdeutsche"', 331–32.

# Merchants and News

## Chapter Three:

### Merchants, News, and News Networks c.1490 – c.1525

By the sixteenth century, the distances across which merchants traded had prompted the rise of highly developed news networks among the merchants from the northern and central Italian cities and southern Germany, both with their compatriots and with merchants, scholars, bureaucrats, and printers from other regions. Through these networks, they kept in contact with their agents and business partners, monitored developments, and responded to commercial changes.<sup>293</sup> The reciprocal exchange of information strengthened ties amongst these merchants and with other people in their networks.<sup>294</sup>

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The surviving archives of the Spinelli, Salviati, Medici, and Tucher families, among others, testify to the strength of merchant communications and to the value that merchants placed in their correspondence. The sixteenth century correspondence of the Tucher family indicates how a smaller Nuremberg company, but one with close connections to the great firms, exchanged news. Each month, company agents sent a letter (*Brief*) and report (*Rechnung*) to the head office outlining their expenses, current events, and the movements of company members.<sup>295</sup> With company members and close connections in Lyon, Antwerp, and Spain, plus more itinerant contacts, the Tucher could remain abreast of commercial change.

News could also be communicated orally and face-to-face conversations remained important and, often, preferable.<sup>296</sup> When the German merchant Linhart Rotengatter received a letter from a boy wanting to be hired, probably as an apprentice, Rotengatter said that he wished to speak

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<sup>293</sup> For existing studies on mercantile correspondence specifically, see for example Mario Infelise, “From Merchants” Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi: Notes on the Origins of Public Information’, in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond, vol. 3, Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700 (Cambridge, 2007), 33; Jesse Sadler, ‘News as a Path to Independence: Merchant Correspondence and the Exchange of News during the Dutch Revolt’, in *In Praise of Ordinary People: Early Modern Britain and the Dutch Republic*, ed. Margaret C. Jacob and Catherine Secretan (New York, 2013), 65–66.

<sup>294</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 4–6; for the function of communication, see Reinhard Fiehler, ‘Kommunikation, Information und Sprache Alltagsweltliche und Wissenschaftliche Konzeptualisierungen und Der Kampf Um Die Begriffe’, in *Information Ohne Kommunikation? Die Loslösung Der Sprache Vom Sprecher*, ed. Rüdiger Weingarten (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 109.

<sup>295</sup> Familienarchiv Tucher, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>296</sup> Woodruff D. Smith, ‘The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism: Amsterdam as an Information Exchange in the Seventeenth Century’, *The Journal of Economic History* 44, no. 4 (1984): 995.

to the boy in person.<sup>297</sup> The preference for oral communication conflicted with the far-flung nature of company business, so the branch managers and other agents were obliged to return to headquarters at least once a year to give a report. This was the case for the fifteenth-century Medici company, which obliged Agnolo Tani to return to Florence annually.<sup>298</sup>

For the actual transport of letters from place to place, merchants sent correspondence with their own couriers (*corrieri* or *Boten*) or those of other companies in the absence of a fully developed public postal service. While the literature focuses heavily upon the rise of print and the introduction of postal services, sixteenth-century merchants continued to rely upon correspondence as their main and most valued and reliable source of information.<sup>299</sup> In 1543, sending news via the post was still uncommon enough for Christof Kurtz to mention having received a letter by the ‘ordinaj posten’.<sup>300</sup>

So superior were merchant news networks that they had served the papal post since the early thirteenth century and had been providing news to papal and lay rulers for even longer.<sup>301</sup> In 1439, Bernardo Portinari, a Medici employee in Bruges, declined a request to deliver a papal bull appointing the new bishop of Arras.<sup>302</sup> Despite this, news routes often remained unclear and letters often had to pass through multiple hands, some of them possibly unknown to the writer, before reaching their intended recipient. In 1494, Martin Behaim asked his cousin to ‘Tell Ulrich Futterer to write to me to [via] Genoa, whence my letters will be forwarded by way of Lisbon to the Ilha de Madeira and so on to the Ilhas dos Azores, and greet him warmly, and let me know to whom I am to write at Genoa in order that my letters may reach him, and to what street and what is the man's name’.<sup>303</sup>

The contents of merchant letters varied depending upon the parties involved. Employers might send their employees instructions; their employees would respond with accounts (as the Tucher

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<sup>297</sup> Lorenz Tucher, ‘Brief Lorenz Tuchers Aus Nördlingen an Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg’ (30 November 1533), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 445, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>298</sup> Armand Grunzweig, ed., *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis* (Brussels, 1931).

<sup>299</sup> Sadler, ‘News as a Path to Independence’, 68–71.

<sup>300</sup> Christof Kurtz, ‘Letter to Anton Tucher in Nuremberg’ (30 December 1543), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1149, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>301</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven, 2014), 29, 45.

<sup>302</sup> Philip, duke of Burgundy, ‘Letter from Saint-Omer to Bernardo Portinari (17/12/1439)’, in *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis*, ed. Armand Grunzweig (Brussels, 1931), 1–2.

<sup>303</sup> Behaim, Martin, ‘Brief an Seinen Vetter Michael’ (11 March 1494), Sign. Rep. E 11, II, Nr. 569,4, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg; transcribed in Martin Behaim, ‘Brief Martin Behaims an Seinen Vetter Michael Behaim’, in *Focus Behaim-Globus*, ed. Johannes Willers and G. Bott, vol. 2, 2 vols (Nuremberg, 1992), 727; translated in Behaim, ‘Letter from Antwerp to His Cousin Michael Behaim (11 March 1494)’.

did, p.69) and summaries of trade and financial exchange: that of the company and of the market generally. Letters generally ended with a list of prices and exchange rates and sometimes noted the arrival or departure of ships.<sup>304</sup> Alongside commercial information, merchants' letters gave news and, often, analysis of politics, war and other current events; discussed family matters; and gave other information not strictly related to trade.<sup>305</sup> Some companies, such as the Medici branch in Bruges and the Tucher, sent both company and 'private' letters, the former of which relate strictly to commercial and financial transactions and generally finish with a list of exchange rates, and the latter giving fuller details on business matters, updates on company members and their friends and relatives, current events, and other information.<sup>306</sup> The Veckinchusen likewise spoke of reckoning and writing (*rekend und scryvet*) as separate, although paired, functions.<sup>307</sup> Although these types of letters were often treated separately by historians, wider topics still affected trade. Weddings, for example, represented the formation of an alliance between two families, thus shifting commercial relationships among that network, making them a prime topic of conversation for merchants as they were in the Tucher correspondence, among other places.<sup>308</sup>

The tone of letters also varied depending on the nature of the relationship between writer and recipient. The potential delicacy of the conversation meant that merchants had to be skilled in the art of rhetoric and letters, as was exhorted by merchant manuals such as Cotrugli's.<sup>309</sup> Factors generally took a hesitant, apologetic, and sometimes pessimistic tone when writing to their employers, often depicting current conditions as poor but with better times to come and making frequent exhortations to God.<sup>310</sup> In 1507, both Jacob Fugger and Conrad Peutinger wrote pessimistically about trade and its many dangers in letters to Maximilian, which may have been part of their (successful) attempt to prevent a forced loan.<sup>311</sup> In contrast, Jacob

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<sup>304</sup> Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', in *Fama e Publica Vox Nel Medioevo* (Att del Convegno Internazionale, Ascoli Piceno, 4-5 December 2009, Rome, 2011), 133.

<sup>305</sup> Mario Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe', in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Maurice Dooley (Abingdon, 2010), 51.

<sup>306</sup> Grunzweig, *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis*.

<sup>307</sup> Veckinchusen, 'Letter from Cologne to Hildebrand Veckinchusen in Bruges (18 July 1410)', 37.

<sup>308</sup> See for example the long series of letters discussing Sabine Welser's failed marriage and the negotiations for the return of her dowry, including Anton Welser, 'Letter from Augsburg to Linhart Tucher in Nuremberg' (11 September 1536), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1588, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>309</sup> Benedetto Cotrugli, *Il Libro Dell'arte Di Mercatura*, ed. Vera Ribaldo (Venice, 2016), 133, 154; Benedetto Cotrugli, *Benedetto Cotrugli: The Book of the Art of Trade*, ed. Carlo Carraro and Giovanni Favero (Cham, 2016), 120–21, 138.

<sup>310</sup> James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies: Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1976), 18.

<sup>311</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 169.

Fugger's letter to Charles V demanding the repayment of loans took an authoritative tone not disguised by the usual references to humility and servitude: after listing his complaints, he wrote, 'Taking all this into consideration, my respectful request to Your Imperial Majesty is that you will graciously recognise my faithful, humble service, dedicated to the greater well-being of Your Imperial Majesty, and that you will order that the money which I have paid out, together with the interest upon it, shall be reckoned up and paid, without further delay'.<sup>312</sup> The great influence which the Fugger held over the Emperor owing to his financial dependency upon them permitted such a tone.

Given its central place in trade, merchants placed enormous importance and value upon correspondence. Requests for news were unsurprisingly frequent.<sup>313</sup> In 1518, Jacob Fugger complained to Anton, then at the branch in Rome, that 'I need much better information from Rome than I have been sent, and I feel that the trade is not being undertaken diligently' (...*ich gar gutter und besserer Information vom Rom bedürfe, und ich spüre darin, dass der Handel nicht mit Fleiß bedacht wird*).<sup>314</sup> Before his departure for India, Jörg Pock wrote to Michael Behaim, saying, 'Truly I want to write to you often... so you should too write me a very good letter every year'.<sup>315</sup> Pock's comment underlines the reciprocal nature of news exchange, which relied upon and enforced relationships between correspondents.

Letter writing was an important feature of any merchant's education.<sup>316</sup> Merchants spent many hours at their writing desks; Bartolomeo Marchionni's nephew, Giovanni Morelli, complained in 1509 about the hours which he spent writing for the company.<sup>317</sup> Merchant manuals, such as Cotrugli's, emphasised the need to carefully categorise correspondence and to keep copies of dispatched messages.<sup>318</sup> Consequently, several documents of non-Italian origins, such as the travel account of the Portuguese secretary Thomé Lopes, survive only in Italian copies,

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<sup>312</sup> Jacob Fugger, 'Letter to Charles V (1523)', in *Jacob Fugger the Rich: Merchant and Banker of Augsburg, 1459-1525*, by Jacob Strieder, ed. Norman Scott Brien Gras, trans. Mildred L. Hartsough (New York, 1931), 153–55.

<sup>313</sup> Bernard Doumerc, 'Par Dieu Écrivez plus Souvent! La Lettre d'affaires à Venise à La Fin Du Moyen Age', in *La Circulation Des Nouvelles Au Moyen Âge. Atti Del XXIV e Congrès de La S.H.M.E.S. (Avignon, Juin 1993)* (Rome and Paris, 1994), 99; Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 122.

<sup>314</sup> FA, 5, 2, 1 a / 22. III. 1518; transcribed in von Pölnitz, *Anton Fugger*, 1: 1453-1535:44.

<sup>315</sup> Jörg Pock, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (27 March 1520)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853), 118; translated in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 34.

<sup>316</sup> Sadler, 'News as a Path to Independence', 71.

<sup>317</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 42.

<sup>318</sup> Cotrugli, *Il Libro Dell'arte Di Mercatura*, 138; Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 122–23; Lockhart and Otte, *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies*, 18.



indicating how the value that these merchants placed upon news was far greater than that given by other groups.<sup>319</sup>

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Whether merchants circulated or hoarded information has been the subject of some debate in the literature. When addressing the topic, it is important to distinguish late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from earlier periods. In the medieval period, merchants attempted to gain information before their competitors did.<sup>320</sup> The Florentine Paolo da Certaldo's mid-fourteenth century merchant handbook cautioned to read their own letters, and to act upon them, before passing on correspondence to other people, who were inherently untrustworthy.<sup>321</sup> The Genoese, who were notoriously secretive, often did not include the destination of the merchandise in contracts, nor, frequently, did the Catalans.<sup>322</sup> Merchants often wished to hide trade with Muslim lands, particularly Alexandria, for which they would have been taxed, at best, or excommunicated, at worst.<sup>323</sup>

Overall, however, merchants preferred to distribute rather than hoard information. An open information market reduced the need for merchants to collect information individually, thus lowering transaction costs and the risk caused by limited or incorrect information.<sup>324</sup> This was encouraged by broader developments in communication. From the late fifteenth century, the rise of print and printed newsletters, of public price lists in Antwerp and other major commercial centres, and of public institutions such as bourses also began to erode the viability and usefulness of restricting information.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Thomé Lopes, 'Navigatione Verso l'Indie Orientali Scritta per Thomé Lopez, Scrivano de Una Nave Portughesa', in *Primo Volume Delle Navigationi et Viaggi Nel qua Si Contine La Descrittione Dell'Africa, et Del Paese Del Prete Ianni, on Varii Viaggi, Dal Mar Rosso a Calicut, & Infin All'isole Molucche, Dove Nascono Le Spetierie et La Navigatione Attorno Il Mondo*, ed. Giovanni Battista Ramusio (Venice, 1550), 143–56.

<sup>320</sup> Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 137.

<sup>321</sup> Paolo da Certaldo, 'Book of Good Practices', in *Merchant Writers: Florentine Memoirs from the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Vittore Branca, trans. Murtha Baca (Toronto, 2015), 46; Paolo da Certaldo, 'Libro di buoni costumi', in *Mercanti scrittori: ricordi nella Firenze tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan, 1986), 49.

<sup>322</sup> Yves Renouard, *Les Hommes d'affaires Italiens Au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1949), 96.

<sup>323</sup> Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, 8–23.

<sup>324</sup> John J. McCusker, 'The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World', *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (April 2005): 303–7; Smith, 'The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism', 988; Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 144–45.

<sup>325</sup> Filippo de Vivo, 'Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice', *Media History* 11, no. 1 (2005): 43; Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 31, 82; John J. McCusker, 'The Role of Antwerp in the

Within their own commercial circles, the blurred boundaries between these companies and their resulting mutual dependency made the sharing of news among business partners and connections much more beneficial than any advantage produced by restricting its flow.<sup>326</sup> These same networks could be used to facilitate communication with strangers.<sup>327</sup> In 1543, for example, Christof Kurtz thanked Linhart Tucher for providing his opinion of the writer of a letter that he, Kurtz, had received in the post.<sup>328</sup>

Sharing information was also encouraged by merchants' use of each other to pass along letters. In 1538, merchants in Antwerp, such as the van der Molen, used the couriers of the Affaitati family; the Habsburg post would not be made public until 1551.<sup>329</sup> The Tucher also sent letters via other companies, using their networks to convey correspondence. In 1533, letters for the Tucher from 'Albiges' (possibly Albi), Lyon, and Geneva were sent via the 'Fucker' (Fugger) in Augsburg.<sup>330</sup> (This example also indicates the rather roundabout, hence slow, routes of some correspondence.) The use of other companies to pass along letters grew with direct trade with the Americas and Asia due to the scanty presence of merchants. On a letter sent by Jorg Pock from Cochin in 1522, the recipient, Michael Behaim, wrote that he had received the letter via the Herwart company and had obtained another 'antwort' via Jacob Fugger's factor.<sup>331</sup> As was standard, Pock had sent multiple copies in case one was lost.

Even with the growing preference for circulating information, merchants still had to act carefully. Sensitive information might be sent in code or cipher. Matthäus Schwarz, the Fugger's chief accountant, sent coded instructions to regional managers.<sup>332</sup> The power of information meant that discretion was prized.<sup>333</sup> The English Crown's financial agent to Antwerp, Thomas Gresham, criticised the Nuremberg banker Lazarus Tucher for being 'a very extreme man and very open mouthed', who would spread news of the English crown's attempt

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Emergence of Commercial and Financial Newspapers in Early Modern Europe', in *Cities and the Transmission of Cultural Values in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Europe* (Brussels, 1996), 303–32.

<sup>326</sup> Armando Sapori, 'La Cultura Del Mercante Medievale Italiano', *Rivista Di Storia Economica* 2 (1937): 68–69; Federigo Melis, *Documenti per La Storia Economica Dei Secoli XIII-XVI* (Firenze, 1972), 15–16.

<sup>327</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 355.

<sup>328</sup> Kurtz, 'Letter to Anton Tucher in Nuremberg'.

<sup>329</sup> Pieter van der Molen, 'Letterbook of Pieter van Der Molen' (1538-1544), IB 2898, Insolvente Boedelkamer, fol. 3; Denucé, *Inventaire des Affaitadi*, 38; E. J. B. Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe* (The Hague, 2012), 9.

<sup>330</sup> Tucher, 'Brief Lorenz Tuchers Aus Nördlingen an Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg', 30 November 1533.

<sup>331</sup> Jörg Pock, 'Letter from Cochin to Michael Behaim (1 January 1522)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853), 120–22.

<sup>332</sup> Ulinka Rublack, Maria Hayward, and Jenny Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion: The Book of Clothes of Matthaeus and Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg* (London, New York, 2015), 7.

<sup>333</sup> Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 136.

to reduce the interest rate upon an existing loan.<sup>334</sup> Merchants who failed to show discretion lost the trust of other traders.

The general habit of sharing letters meant that even when letters were written by a single merchant to a single recipient, they were rarely entirely private documents meant to be seen only by the writer and addressed recipient. Unlike the anonymous *avvisi* (p.147), which could be (but were not always) distributed to a large audience, merchant correspondence was generally sent to a single recipient.<sup>335</sup> These letters, however, were often read aloud, circulated, copied, and translated, functioning like *avvisi*. The theologian and scholar Zanobi Acciaiuoli (who, along with Vespucci, was in the circle of Toscanelli) wrote to Benedetto Dei, in Milan, mentioning a letter about the conversion of a Guinean king: ‘multiple noble citizens were in the piazza, among whom was Zanobio del Nero, who read out a letter from Portugal’ (...*sendo in piazza a cerchio con molti nobili cittadini, infra quali era Zanobio del Nero, el quale legea una lettera da Portogallo...*).<sup>336</sup> Many of these letters ended up in chronicles and collections, such as the *Codice Vaglianti* and the diaries of Sanudo and Priuli.<sup>337</sup> The *Codice Vaglianti* was compiled by Piero Vaglianti, a printer and merchant in the circle of Lucrezia Tornabuoni who had been introduced to Vespucci by the merchant and humanist Benedetto Dei, with whose company Vaglianti had served an apprenticeship.<sup>338</sup> The presence of several unpublished letters in his codex, including those of Marchionni, his apprentice, Guido di Tommaso Detti, and an anonymous source, indicate that these letters were circulated around Florence, especially in the humanist circles in which Vaglianti moved.<sup>339</sup>

The circulation of letters was not restricted to specific nations. In the sixteenth century, the importance of trading relations between Italian and German firms and the general merchant preference for disseminating information, especially about overseas voyages, meant that news was exchanged between merchants from different regions. This was particularly the case for

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<sup>334</sup> Quoted in Guy, *Gresham's Law*, 77.

<sup>335</sup> Bruscoli, ‘Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo’, 144; see also Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi’.

<sup>336</sup> Lorenzo di Giovanni Tornabuoni, ‘Letter to Benedetto Dei (4 November 1486)’, ed. Kate Lowe, *Italian Studies* 65, no. 3 (November 2010); for Acciaiuoli’s relationship with Vespucci, see Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World: The Life and Times of Amerigo Vespucci*, 93.

<sup>337</sup> Piero Vaglianti, ‘Codice Vaglianti’ (1499-1513), MS. 1910, Biblioteca Riccardiana; printed as Piero Vaglianti, ed., *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti* (Florence, 2006); Priuli, *I Diarii*, 1912; Marino Sanudo, *I Diarii Di Marino Sanuto*, ed. Niccolò Barozzi, vol. 4 (Venice, 1880).

<sup>338</sup> Luciano Formisano, ‘Introduction’, in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti (Florence, 2006), 15–29.

<sup>339</sup> Vaglianti, ‘Codice Vaglianti’.

the larger companies, whose most important trading partners were often based in other locations and whose networks, which also included humanists and scholars, were necessarily multi-national. For example, Conrad Peutinger obtained and translated a copy of Matteo da Bergamo's account of da Gama's second voyage from his Welser in-laws in Rome.<sup>340</sup> There were extensive and 'deep' connections between the German and Italian commercial and intellectual circles born out of their mutual involvement in humanism, commerce, and the Habsburg court. Merchants' emphasis upon circulating news means that historians should avoid studying information exchange from a strictly national perspective.

Nor were merchant networks populated only by merchants. The kinship ties that formed the basis of commercial networks meant that the wealthiest merchants were in close correspondence, or direct conversation, with the whole élite within and beyond their home cities. In the case of humanists and especially printers, their networks were often so closely intertwined with those of merchants that, in some ways, they should not be treated separately. Humanists and printers were crucial members of merchant networks, and vice versa, rather than separate. Very few of the oligarchical families of commercial cities had no merchant members, and people from those families who were not themselves merchants nonetheless often directly or indirectly participated in trade. The Spinelli family, for example, were aided by the high offices held by Leonardo and Tommaso Spinelli, respectively papal nuncio and ambassador to Henry VIII of England, who were able to send news of political and commercial developments from London.<sup>341</sup>

Humanists were also an important source of news for merchants, with scholars constantly exchanging information under the 'Republic of Letters'.<sup>342</sup> They were also highly itinerant and could thus carry commercially-relevant news. In 1494, the *Seefahrer* Martin Behaim told his cousin Michael that, 'Doctor Jeronimus will tell you all how things are with me'.<sup>343</sup> He was referring to Hieronymus Münzer, a Nuremberg scholar returning from the Iberian Peninsula. They also, as merchants did, sent news about overseas activities to European elites, such as when the Portuguese scholar Damião de Gois sent news to Cardinal Bembo; this letter would

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<sup>340</sup> B. Greiff, ed., 'Brief von Der Portugalesischen Meerfahrt Vom 30. März', in *Tagebuch Des Lucas Rem Aus Den Jahren 1494-1541: Ein Beitrag Zur Handelsgeschichte Der Stadt Augsburg.*, trans. Konrad Peutinger and Cristof Welser (Augsburg, 1861), 133–38.

<sup>341</sup> Philip Jacks and William Caferro, *The Spinelli of Florence: Fortunes of a Renaissance Merchant Family* (Pennsylvania, 2001), 6–7.

<sup>342</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 6.

<sup>343</sup> Behaim, 'Letter from Antwerp to His Cousin Michael Behaim (11 March 1494)'.

become a newsletter.<sup>344</sup> Another Italian newsletter referenced the ‘opinions of many scholars who print books sent from India in Germany, whence they are sent across all of Europe’ (*Opinioni de Molti Dotti Che La Stampa de Libri Uenessi de India in Alamagna, Donde Esparsa per Tutta Europa*), underlying the value placed upon humanists as important contributors to knowledge.<sup>345</sup> The continued engagement of humanists in commercial activities challenges interpretations of humanists holding themselves apart from trade. Although some stigma was extended towards scholars who continued to participate in commerce, such eminent figures as Benedetto Dei, most famous as a humanist and politician, continued to engage in commerce and the circulation of commercial news long after he had ceased being a merchant proper.<sup>346</sup> The intellectual and commercial responses to the Portuguese and Spanish discoveries were mutually supportive and closely intertwined.

The practice of disseminating information and its uneasy balance with information monopoly to ensure commodity monopoly was extended to news from beyond Europe. News was particularly difficult to access, although not because of a closed information market. With the advent of direct trade with Asia and the Americas, existing communication problems were enormously exacerbated by distance, multiple jurisdictions and thinly populated news networks. The great multi-national companies’ domination of information facilitated their domination of commerce, with smaller companies and individual traders able to gain access to detailed news almost entirely by operating with the multi-national corporations. Consequently, they had strong incentives to restrict information. However, the same factors that encouraged the sharing of information concerning Europe also applied to news from the New World and Asia. Few people had access to detailed knowledge of overseas activities, all news of which came from only a few sources.<sup>347</sup> These people included members of the great merchant-

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<sup>344</sup> Damião de Góis, *Avisi de Le Cose Fatte Da Portuesi Ne l’India Di qua Del Gange, Nel MDXXXVIII Scritti in Lingua Latina Dal Signor Damiano Da Goes Cavalier Portuese al Cardinal Bembo* (Venice, 1539); Damião de Góis, *Avisi de Le Cose Fatte Da Portuesi Ne l’India Di qua Del Gange, Nel MDXXXVIII Scritti in Lingua Latina Dal Signor Damiano Da Goes Cavalier Portuese al Cardinal Bembo* (Italy, 1549).

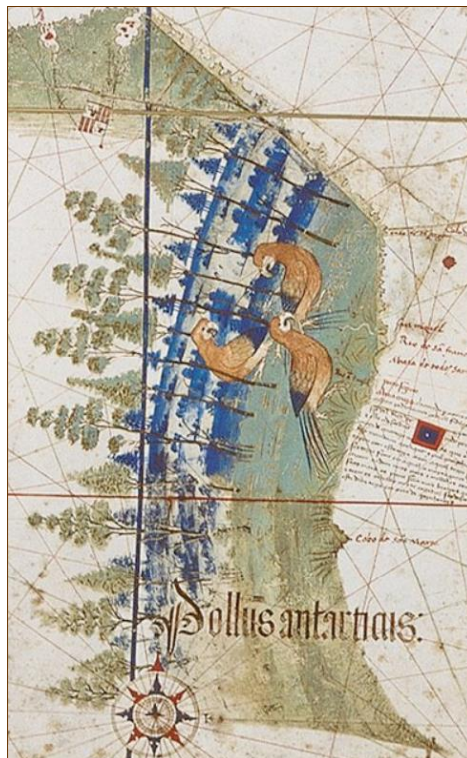
<sup>345</sup> *Impresa Del Gran Turco per Mare et per Terra Conta Portughesi, Quali Signoreggiano Gran Parte de Lindia [Sic] et Savicinnano [Sic] al Sepolchro de Mahometho. Vittorie Grandissime Del Invittissimo Re Di Portugallo Contra Turchi, Mori, et i Indiani, Quali Hanno Artigliaria Grossa Allusanza [!] De Christiani. Descrizione de Molti Luoghi Del Preteiani Amico et Confederato de Portughesi. Nomi Moderni et Antichi Di Alcune Cittadi et Porti de Quali Fa Mentione Ptolomeo. Opinioni de Molti Dotti Che La Stampa de Libri Uenessi de India in Alamagna, Donde Esparsa per Tutta Europa* (Italy, 1531).

<sup>346</sup> Roberto Barducci, ‘Dei, Benedetto’, in *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani* (Rome, 1988).

<sup>347</sup> Renate Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt: Amerika im Nachrichtennetz des Habsburgischen Imperiums 1493-1598* (Mainz, 2000), 44–45.

banking companies – who had, by default, close connections at court and to investors – even when they were not investing themselves, and some smaller merchants.

The Tuscan merchant Simone dal Verde, who sold velvet and brocade to the Spanish court at Valladolid and had close ties to the Columbus family, informed a certain Piero Niccoli in Florence of Columbus' return in 1493 and '94.<sup>348</sup> He was able to speak 'with three persons who returned with those twelve caravels; one of them was a captain of those caravels, another the pilot, and another was master of one of the caravels that went there'.<sup>349</sup> Not only this, he managed to view the commodities with which they returned, including a parrot.<sup>350</sup>



The 'Land of the Parrots'  
The Cantino Planisphere (1502)

Merchants were also able to obtain information from humanists, cartographers, and other intellectuals due to the close connections between them. The German explorer Martin Behaim, for example, having travelled on at least one Portuguese venture down the African coast, wrote down Diogo Gomes' account of his voyage in the same area for Valentim Fernandes and, in

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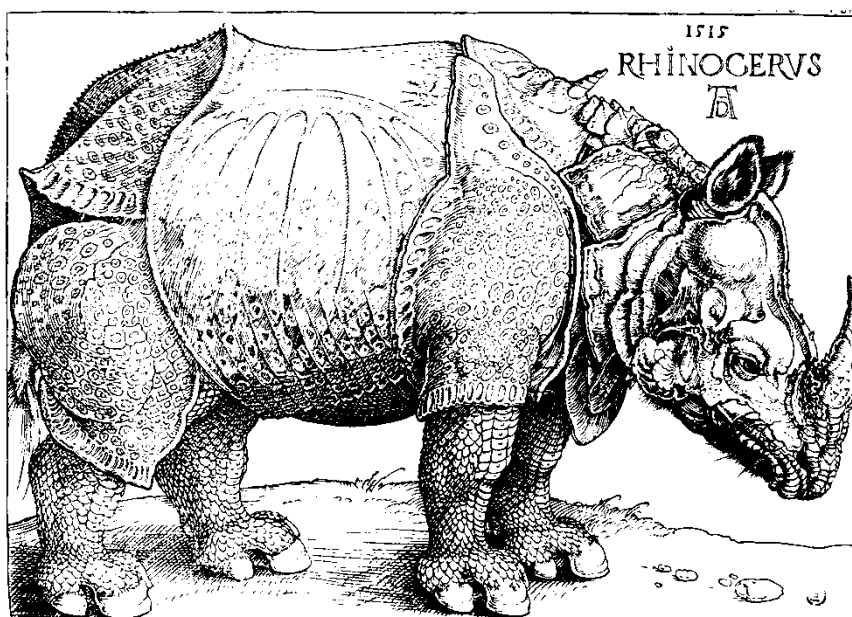
<sup>348</sup> Simone dal Verde, 'Letter to Piero Niccoli (20 March 1493)', in *Italian Reports on America, 1493-1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, ed. Geoffrey Symcox, vol. 12, Repertorium Columbianum (Turnhout, 2002), 31–34.

<sup>349</sup> dal Verde, 31–34.

<sup>350</sup> dal Verde, 32–33.

1492, produced the world's earliest surviving globe for Nuremberg patricians and scholars.<sup>351</sup> Both Gomes and Fernandes had close ties to the Portuguese crown; Fernandes' codex included nineteen maps of the Atlantic Ocean. It was never published but was sent to Conrad Peutinger upon Fernandes' death in 1518 or 1519, spreading the information to the High German firms. Fernandes also corresponded with Hieronymus Münzer and the Nuremberg merchant Stefan Gabler, who had been a factor of the Fugger in Lisbon. This correspondence may have occurred under the auspices, or even with the encouragement, of Manuel I, who benefited from the German companies being well-informed about the market for their copper and silver in Africa and India.<sup>352</sup>

Humanists in turn benefited from their commercial connections. Conrad Peutinger was able to obtain news through his Welser relatives, such as Cristof Welser's translation of an Italian account of da Gama's 1502 voyage, and from Valentim Fernandes in Lisbon.<sup>353</sup> Other humanists, such as Willibald Pirckheimer, were also in correspondence with Fernandes; it was through Pirckheimer that Dürer obtained the original image from which he produced his famous sketch of Manuel's rhinoceros.



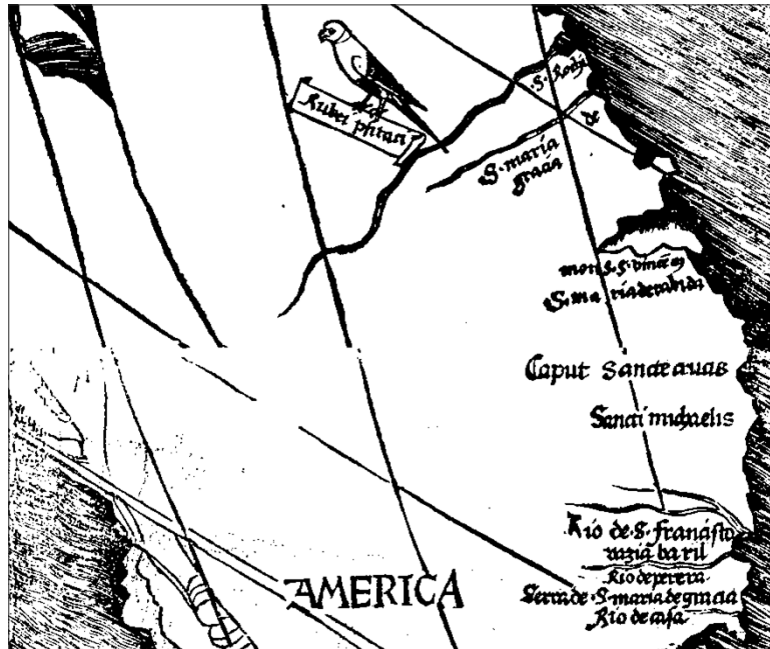
*Rhinocerus*, Albrecht Dürer

<sup>351</sup> Diogo Gomes, 'De prima inuentione Gujnee', in *O manuscrito 'Valentim Fernandes'*, ed. Valentim Fernandes (Lisbon, 1940), 187–200.

<sup>352</sup> Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung', 54; for more on Valentim Fernandes' connections to the Germans, see Andrade, 'O Auto Notarial de Valentim Fernandes (1503) Eo Seu Significado Como Fonte Histórica'; Marion Ehrhardt, ed., *A Alemanha e Os Descobrimentos Portugueses* (Lisbon, 1989), 32–35; Barbara and Enekel, *Portuguese Humanism and the Republic of Letters*, 433–34.

<sup>353</sup> Greiff, 'Brief von Der Portugalesischen Meerfahrt Vom 30. März'.

The Augsburger Hans Burgkmair likewise made a print of the rhinoceros (p.141), which he presumably also derived from images sent by merchants residing in Lisbon: his collaboration with the Welser agent Balthasar Sprenger in 1508 indicates that by 1515 he already had close ties to the Augsburg mercantile elite.



Detail of a parrot ('rubei psitaci': Lat. 'red parrots')  
Waldseemüller's *Universalis Cosmographia* (1507)

Peutinger's interest as a humanist was closely connected to his interest in commerce as a relation of the Welser.<sup>354</sup> He was also interested as a councillor of Maximilian, who was a keen supporter of the Augsburg and Nuremberg investors in Portuguese voyages.<sup>355</sup> With his Welser connections, Peutinger could supply news to Maximilian about the progress of the Germans involved in the 1505-06 voyage: 'Most sacred king. In the first quarter of the year, the serene king of Portugal sent money and merchandise on certain ships towards India and received certain aromatic spices and other things...' (*Sacratissime rex. Superiori quarto anno serenissimus rex Portugalliae super certis navibus pecuniis et mercibus versus Indiam transmittendis reportandisque certis speciebus aromatibus et aliis rebus...*).<sup>356</sup> By keeping Maximilian abreast of developments, Peutinger strengthened his position and that of the German merchants, who were able, in the same year, to dissuade Maximilian from his plan of

<sup>354</sup> Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge Zu Einer Politischen Biographie*, 54.

<sup>355</sup> Lutz, 54; Harald Kleinschmidt, *Ruling the Waves: Emperor Maximilian I, the Search for Islands and the Transformation of the European World Picture C. 1500* ('t Goy-Houten, 2008), 181–208.

<sup>356</sup> Peutinger, 'Zwei Entwürfe Peutingers für ein Schreiben an Maximilian betr. den Prozeß der an der Indienfahrt beteiligten Kaufleute mit dem portugiesischen König', 326.



a forced loan from those companies.<sup>357</sup> The great Augsburg and Nuremberg companies' use of Peutingger (who was Anton Welser's son-in-law) underscores their preference for operating through personal connections rather than merchant corporations.

Despite the growing incentives to circulate news, the possession of information was not equal. With their vastly superior networks, Italian and southern German merchants had long been able to outcompete merchants from other areas by securing information long in advance and from many more sources.<sup>358</sup> In the early fifteenth century, the Hanseatic merchant Sivert Veckinchusen observed this and encouraged his brother Hildebrand to send more letters to their agent in Venice (p.84).<sup>359</sup> The insufficiency of news supplies faced by merchants outside the great companies and their orbit was a significant factor in explaining the variation in responses among merchants. Poor decisions cannot only be attributed to 'irrationality' but also to limited knowledge and an 'information asymmetry', in which some merchants had far more access to information than others. Even when two merchants received the same information, they could respond differently due to different circumstances and motivations, which might include the desire for power and status as well as economic success.<sup>360</sup>

The great merchant companies, such as the Affaitati, had some of the best communication networks in Europe, relying upon their agents and business contacts as sources of information.<sup>361</sup> The most successful merchants were those with the best information networks: both the web of correspondents and the infrastructure to transfer news rapidly across Europe.<sup>362</sup> Information asymmetry could be somewhat resolved by negotiation between parties. Even the elite companies, however, did not have total control of information. Unlike some other text types, correspondence occurred in 'real time', with merchants making observations and calculations about current events, often with inconsistent and dubious information. Rather than the picture of a complete information market sometimes presented in classic economic theory, letters show that merchants had to act without full knowledge of events. Those merchants with

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<sup>357</sup> Peutingger, 'Denkschrift Pentingers für Maximilian gegen den Plan einer Zwangsanleihe bei den Handelsgesellschaften (1507)'; and Fugger, 'Rechtfertigung Der Fugger Gegen Den Plan Maxim. I Eine Reichssteuer Auf Die Gesellschaft Zu Erheben, circa 1507'.

<sup>358</sup> Douglass C. North, 'Transaction Costs in History', *The Journal of European Economic History* 14 (1985): 564–65.

<sup>359</sup> Veckinchusen, 'Letter from Cologne to Hildebrand Veckinchusen in Bruges (18 July 1410)', 37–38.

<sup>360</sup> Alessandro Stanziani, 'Information Économique et Institutions. Analyses Historiques et Modèles Économiques', in *L'information Économique, XVIe-XIXe Siècle, Journées d'études (Paris, 21 Juin 2004 et 25 Avril 2006)*, ed. D. Margairaz (Paris, 2008), 17–35.

<sup>361</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 14–15, 21–23.

<sup>362</sup> Jean Favier, *Gold & Spices* (New York, 1998), 75.

branches or connections in most of the important cities greatly improved their mastery of information. Cities formed important centres of news exchange, where merchants circulated news among their business partners and to their clients, including newsletter printers.<sup>363</sup> Within cities, guilds, ‘nations’, and other public or semi-public spaces such as market squares and exchange centres were important places in which to distribute information. Different types of information were circulated in different spaces and networks.<sup>364</sup> Individual merchants and small companies could gain access to the more exclusive spaces and the news exchanged therein by working with larger companies who, in return, relied upon their vast webs of connections for information.

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News networks not only spread news, they were essential to the formation and maintenance of relationships.<sup>365</sup> If news can be described as social capital, then its exchange was a reciprocal act designed to maintain networks and build relationships. Discussions of news exchange were thus full of transactional language. The Florentine merchant Cesare Barzi wrote that he was sending news of the voyage to Calicut to Venice ‘to satisfy my debt’ (*pur per satisfar al debito mio*).<sup>366</sup> Other merchants also spoke of news as an exchange. In 1510, Valentim Fernandes wrote to Stephan Gabler, a Nuremberg merchant who had traded as a Fugger agent in Lisbon for many years, promising news from India in exchange for an astrolabe, a copy of Pierre d’Ailly’s *Imago Mundi*, and for Gabler to ask a scholar about a new version of Ptolemy.<sup>367</sup>

By looking at all the people in a network, including the smaller traders, connections between different groups can be made clear. Some individual traders, such as Lazarus Nürnberger, connected multiple larger groups and gained prominence across mercantile networks. Exchanging personal information, in particular, helped to strengthen bonds and, therefore, the reliability and quality of communication between correspondents.<sup>368</sup> The Hirschvogel factor to Lisbon, Jörg Pock, mentioned Lazarus Nürnberger, another merchant resident between Lisbon

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<sup>363</sup> Sadler, ‘News as a Path to Independence’, 71.

<sup>364</sup> Paul Arblaster, *From Ghent to Aix: How They Brought the News in the Habsburg Netherlands, 1550–1700* (Leiden, 2014), 29.

<sup>365</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 8.

<sup>366</sup> Barzi, ‘Copia de Una Lettera Di Valenza al Ditto Orator Nostro, Di 5 Septembrio 1503’.

<sup>367</sup> Valentim Fernandes, ‘Schreiben Des Valentin Fernandez in Lissabon an Stephan Gabler, Kaufmann Zu Nurnberg’ (26 June 1510), Reichsstadt Nürnberg, XI (Handel u. Industrie), Id, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg Historisches Archiv; Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 221 note 26.

<sup>368</sup> Bruscoli, ‘Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo’, 135.

and Seville, in a letter to Michael Behaim in Nuremberg.<sup>369</sup> From Lisbon in 1509, Bartolomeo Marchionni's nephew Giovanni Morelli wrote that his brother Benedetto was on Madeira.<sup>370</sup> The Florentine Piero di Giovanni di Dino, like other merchants, gave updates on other Florentines in Asia whilst he was in India.<sup>371</sup> His letter mentioned Giovanni da Empoli, Empoli's assistant Benedetto Pucci, Niccolo Cianchi, Francisco Corbinelli, Vincenzo Ridolfi, Piero Strozzi, and Andrea Corsali, and his descriptions of them are illuminating in providing insights into whether or not, and how much, Florentines abroad saw themselves as a collective and if they operated together. Piero's knowledge of the movements of these other Florentines indicates that he collected information about them and believed that his recipient would likewise value such news.

The letter was addressed to Benedetto's uncle, Antonio Pucci, a cardinal from a family with close ties to the Medici; this again shows how closely merchants were connected to and worked with religious élites.<sup>372</sup> Although Antonio would naturally have an interest in nephew's movements, Piero's inclusive language indicates that he viewed all Florentines there as a loose community: he used 'nostro' to describe Andrea Corsali, Giovanni da Empoli, Benedetto Pugli, and Francesco Corbinelli. By gathering and passing on information about other Florentines, Piero aided the business plans of those travelling merchants' employers but also provided news to concerned family members; his letter informed Antonio Pucci of his nephew's death, a highly common occurrence.

The movement of letters also shows the operations of networks.<sup>373</sup> For example, Matteo da Bergamo, agent of the Affaitati, wrote a letter about da Gama's second voyage (in which he was a participant), which ended up in the hands of Conrad Peutinger, probably via an unknown copy made by Lucas Rem, the Lisbon agent for the Welser, or Valentim Fernandes.<sup>374</sup>

The importance of news plus the expense and connections needed to obtain it made the possession of information a significant source of prestige in commercial (and academic and court) circles. The appearance of being informed and in command of current events became essential to a merchant's creditworthiness and ability to conduct trade.

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<sup>369</sup> Pock, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (27 March 1520)', 118.

<sup>370</sup> Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)', 50.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*.

<sup>372</sup> Spallanzani, 32.

<sup>373</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 9.

<sup>374</sup> Greiff, 'Brief von Der Portugalesischen Meerfahrt Vom 30. März'.

Even in the early fifteenth century, Peter Karbow, the Venetian-based agent of the Hanseatic Veckinchusen brothers, asked them to send him news with every courier from Bruges so that he appeared well-informed and well-connected. Sivert Veckinchusen agreed, telling his brother Hildebrand that it could bring them great profit: ‘Likewise dear brother... Peter would very much like you to send tidings, by all messengers travelling from Bruges to Venice, of crude and worked goods and of all merchant business and of all sorts of new tidings and goods. I think that it could not do you much harm to fulfil Peter’s wish and also it might bring in great profit. Also, it would be a great honour for Peter to receive a letter with every messenger like other people do’ (*Item leyve broder... Peter moget sere, dat gy eme nicht by allen lopern, dey van Brugge ut to Venedyen wart teyn, al tydynghe scryven van crude und wercke und van allerley kopenscap und van allerley nye tydynghe und gude und my duncket, dat kunde ju nicht vele schaden na deme dat Peter eynen wyllen darinne hevet und ok mochtet uns grot profyt inbrenge und dat were Peter ok eyn wylle und grot ere, dat hey ummer by allen lopern breyve hedde lyk andern luden ...*). These ‘other people’ were the southern German and Italian merchants (*dey Norenberger kopen und Lumbarden und ander lude*), whose superior news networks (and business techniques) eventually drove the Veckinchusen out of the market.<sup>375</sup>

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“Distance: Enemy Number One”.<sup>376</sup>

Braudel’s oft-quoted phrase is of unique importance for commercial news networks in the early sixteenth century. At few other times had established methods for communicating and travelling over distance been put under such strain than in this period, when activities and networks that had previously been confined to well-trodden commercial routes within Europe (and sometimes in only parts of it) became suddenly global, posing great difficulties for communication. The proliferation of news, on one hand, and the greater distances across which news travelled, on the other, meant that merchants obtained more and more accounts of news, much of which conflicted and most of which was dubious.

Merchants consequently gave their opinion of news as well as news itself in their letters. The Tuscan merchant Simone dal Verde wrote that ‘I have spoken with three persons who returned with those twelve caravels; one of them was a captain of those caravels, another the pilot, and

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<sup>375</sup> Veckinchusen, ‘Letter from Cologne to Hildebrand Veckinchusen in Bruges (18 July 1410)’, 37–38.

<sup>376</sup> Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*, 1: 355.

another was master of one of the caravels that went there. I will tell you what I learned from them, not without fear of writing uncertain things. So as not to err or place myself at risk of telling lies, I will tell that part of what I heard which seems likely to me'.<sup>377</sup> By naming his sources and emphasising that he was unsure that everything was true, dal Verde sought to limit the chance of presenting incorrect information as fact, which could cause his reputation as a source of reliable information and as a merchant to suffer.<sup>378</sup> By stating his sources, by writing to a fellow Tuscan, and by presenting the relative reliability of the information, dal Verde met the criteria by which merchants judged information: the source, the sender, and the assessment of truth.<sup>379</sup> It was particularly important to name sources when the news came from abroad. In his diary, the Sieneese Allegretto Allegretti wrote of Columbus' discoveries that '[We know this] by way of several letters from our merchants in Spain, and by word of mouth from several people'.<sup>380</sup> Both dal Verde and Allegretti emphasised that they had obtained information from multiple people. Merchants sought out multiple sources, ideally from a wide variety of people, which they could compare and contrast to arrive at a balanced conclusion.<sup>381</sup>

The merchants who succeeded were those who took a sceptical attitude towards dubious information rather than rejecting it.<sup>382</sup> Rather than avoiding risk, the great companies sought to alleviate it. Various methods existed to determine the accuracy of a letter, and merchant letters were written so as to best provide the answers to these questions.

News was also affected by the slow rate of transfer. Even the largest merchant companies were subject to serious delays in communication, especially between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe.<sup>383</sup> In 1547, Gabriel Tucher wrote from Saragossa about the difficulties of sending letters: that a letter had taken almost two months to reach Lyon because there were no direct or reliable services and so letters had to be sent via Barcelona; it was also difficult to send letters to Toulouse as few messengers travelled in that direction. He suggested that the

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<sup>377</sup> dal Verde, 'Letter to Piero Niccoli (20 March 1493)', 31.

<sup>378</sup> Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 142.

<sup>379</sup> Sadler, 'News as a Path to Independence', 80; Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 142.

<sup>380</sup> Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America, 1493-1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, vol. XII, *Repertorium Columbianum* (Turnhout, 2002), 27.

<sup>381</sup> Zsuzsa Barbarics, 'Handwritten Newsletters as Interregional Information Sources in Central and Southeastern Europe', in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Maurice Dooley (Abingdon, 2010), 178.

<sup>382</sup> For a discussion of the emerging 'scepticism' towards news in this period, see Brendan Maurice Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore and London, 1999).

<sup>383</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 61–62.

company establish a handling point in Avignon (*Avygnong*).<sup>384</sup> In the middle of the century, the Fugger estimated that, on average, it would take a month to send a letter from Augsburg to their factor at the Spanish court: ‘Arrias Vaes and Company shall give us a letter of exchange from Benitto Rodrigues, who is at the [Spanish] court, during the May Fair, so that he can pay us rightly and well on 15 April 1554’ (*Arrias Vaes e c[onpani]a soll vns auf ein wexlbrieflein vom Benitto Rodrigues dem es die am hof in die feria de mayo zu wexel geben so er auf 15 ap[ri]l 1554 zalen sol list richtig vnd gut gelt*).<sup>385</sup> The value of news decreased with its age, as it ceased to be current and became outdated.<sup>386</sup> The great companies, with their superior news networks, had the massive advantage of being more up-to-date than the majority of their competitors but still faced frequent delays that had a significant impact upon the conduct of trade.

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The unreliability of much information caused merchants and other consumers of news to respond to information conservatively. Often, they would delay their response until more information arrived.<sup>387</sup> While operating upon dubious or unreliable information could have serious consequences, failure to consider such information could also have negative ramifications. The Venetians, who only trusted news when it came from reliable sources, did not investigate or believe the reports of Portuguese ships in Asia until 1501 despite the physical evidence of the pepper that had reached Lisbon. This over-caution meant that they did not respond to the Portuguese activities, which threatened their own monopoly over spices, for several years.

Venice was a major centre of news exchange, particularly between East and West, and placed great emphasis upon assessing the reliability of news before considering it valid, so that news coming from Venice had an international reputation for excellence.<sup>388</sup> When, in August 1499, the first news arrived that three Portuguese ships had arrived in Aden and Calicut under

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<sup>384</sup> Gabriel Tucher, ‘Brief Des Gabriel Tucher Aus Saragossa an Seinen Vater Linhart in Nürnberg’ (1547), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 510, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>385</sup> Kellenbenz, *Die Fugger in Spanien und Portugal Bis 1560*, 1990, 1:466.

<sup>386</sup> Bruscoli, ‘Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo’, 124; Sheila Barker, ‘“Secret and Uncertain”: A History of *Avvisi* at the Court of the Medici Grand Dukes’, in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden, 2016), 730.

<sup>387</sup> See also Giovanni Matteo Cretico, ‘Letter of Giovanni Matteo Cretico, 27 June 1501’, in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 119–23.

<sup>388</sup> Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political *Avvisi*’, 36–38; Bruscoli, ‘Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo’, 125.

‘Columbus’, Priuli commented: ‘letters written in June came from Alexandria, which wrote of the letter from Cairo [written] by men who had come from India, [from which] it was understood that three caravels of the kin of Portugal arrived at Calicut and Aden, the principal cities of India, which had been sent there to enquire after the Spice Islands and which were commanded by Columbus’ (*ne foronno lettere de Alexandria de zugnio che scrivanno come per lettere dal Chaiero per homeni venutti de India intendevanno come a Colochut et a Adem in la India, citade principale, heranno capitate tre caravelle del re di Portogalo, el quali li haveanno mandate ad inquerir dele ixolle dispesse et che di quelle hera patron il Colombo*).<sup>389</sup> Priuli, a merchant and statesman, immediately grasped the implications, observing that ‘this news seems, to me, to have enormous significance if it is true, but I will be slow to authenticate [it]’ (*Questa nova et effecto mi par grandinisimo, se l’he vero; tamen io non li presto autenticha fede*). Priuli’s dismissal of this piece of news was with good reason, given that the news was so garbled that Columbus, not da Gama, was named as leader of the expedition! That the (probably Venetian) writers in Alexandria could confuse Columbus – who was attempting to reach India, but from the other direction – and da Gama shows precisely how inaccurate and inadequate news transmitted across long distances could be, and how little most Europeans, even those active in trade, the Near East, and information gathering, understood about the Spanish and Portuguese ventures.<sup>390</sup> It also demonstrates how carefully Venice filtered the news which it received, giving it a reputation as an authoritative source of information.<sup>391</sup>

Rather than believing the news, Priuli wrote that the Senate ‘sent [il Cretico] to that place [Portugal] on purpose to learn minutely the truth of the voyage to India begun by that king... which event was of greater importance to the Venetian state than the Turkish war, or any other wars which might have affected her’.<sup>392</sup> More accurately, in September 1500, the Venetian Senate appointed Domenico Pisani ‘orator’ to Spain to raise the possibility of a war against the Ottomans.<sup>393</sup> Pisani sent his secretaries, Angelo Trevisan and Il Cretico, to Portugal to obtain information, and himself visited Manuel I and then spoke to sailors from the voyage to obtain

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<sup>389</sup> Priuli, *I Diarii*, 1912, 1:153.

<sup>390</sup> For the role of Venetian merchants and officials in Alexandria in information gathering, see Georg Christ, *Trading Conflicts: Venetian Merchants and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria* (Leiden, 2012).

<sup>391</sup> Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi’, 36–38; Bruscoli, ‘Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo’, 125.

<sup>392</sup> Girolamo Priuli, ‘Extracts’, in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 131–32.

<sup>393</sup> Donald Weinstein, *Ambassador from Venice: Pietro Pasqualigo in Lisbon, 1501* (Minneapolis, 1960), 20.

different perspectives.<sup>394</sup> Pisani also obtained information from Giovanni Francesco Affaitati who, seeing the opportunity to gain favour in Venice, sent a letter to Pisani outlining what he knew of Portuguese activities.<sup>395</sup> As an investor and long-term resident in Portugal with ties to the court, Affaitati was much better placed than Pisani and his secretaries to access and interpret information returning from the Indies. Bartolomeo Marchionni's associate Cesare Barzi also sent a letter, which he described as 'a recount up to which I can understand for certain' (*uno raccolto di quello fino a chi posso intender per certo*), emphasising that he was only providing reliable information.<sup>396</sup> Ca' da Masser, posing as a merchant, was also sent to Portugal to gather information.<sup>397</sup>

When il Cretico's letter arrived in Venice in July 1501, Priuli's tone changed completely. He included a copy of il Cretico's letter in his *diarii* and wrote that 'when this news was truly learned in Venice... this news was held by the learned to be the worst news which the Venetian Republic could have had, to lose the liberty abroad'.<sup>398</sup> Priuli's language was coloured by hindsight, as he lamented the situation into which the Venetians had gotten themselves through their slow reaction.

Similarly, unlike its dismissal of the scanty reports that had trickled in from Asia and Western Europe since 1498, the Senate responded with alacrity to the arrival of Pisani's letters. Three days afterwards, it appointed Piero Pasqualigo as ambassador to Portugal, although this, like Pisani's voyage, may have been more to do with a request for joint action against the Ottomans.<sup>399</sup> Many Venetians maintained, as Priuli lamented, that the Portuguese could not hope to succeed in the long term due to the loss of life and damage to merchandise on the Cape Route (which was probably true), and this may have caused them to have little interest in acting against the Portuguese themselves. On this matter, Venice's demand for information confirmed rather than rumoured information had been a weakness.<sup>400</sup> The great merchant companies, by

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<sup>394</sup> Angelo Trevisan, *Lettere Sul Nuovo Mondo, Granada 1501*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Venice, 1993); Cretico, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

<sup>395</sup> Affaitati, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

<sup>396</sup> Barzi, 'Copia de Una Lettera Di Valenza al Ditto Orator Nostro, Di 5 Septembrio 1503'.

<sup>397</sup> Leonardo da Ca' Masser, 'Relazione Di Leonardo Da Ca' Masser Alla Serenissima Republica Di Venezia Sopra Il Commercio Dei Portoghese Nell' India Dopo La Scoperta Del Capo Di Buona Speranza', in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, ed. G. Scopoli, vol. 2, Appendici (Florence, 1845), 168; translated in Leonardo da Ca' Masser, 'Extracts', in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 142–44.

<sup>398</sup> Priuli, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India', 132–33.

<sup>399</sup> Weinstein, *Ambassador from Venice: Pietro Pasqualigo in Lisbon, 1501*, 22.

<sup>400</sup> Weinstein, 22.



contrast, succeeded because they were willing to respond to inadequate information, even when knowing that it was inadequate.

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In conclusion, merchants were among the most important sources of news in the late medieval and early modern periods. The overwhelming success of the great companies stemmed partly from their far greater access to information, which allowed them to outcompete other traders, and from their ability and readiness to act upon inadequate and unreliable news, which allowed them to respond more quickly to the European discoveries of the Americas and the Cape Route. Smaller companies and individual traders could benefit from the superior news networks of the large companies, who in return relied upon their connections among these smaller traders to gain information. Consequently, huge commercial networks comprising many traders in many locations arose as merchants traded news and other favours, using the supply of vital information to advance themselves within commercial circles. Later in the sixteenth century, the growing availability of news limited the great companies' advantages, but the early sixteenth century was marked by the struggle to access news outside the circles of the monopolist firms.

## Chapter Four:

### News as Socio-Political Capital

The supply and transfer of news was one of the greatest advantages that merchants could provide to rulers, and growing attention has been paid to this role.<sup>401</sup> In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, political developments increased the princely demand for news, presenting merchants with new opportunities to win the ruler's favour. Merchants involved in overseas activities in particular were encouraged by such developments, as they had both near-exclusive access to radically new information and, as expatriates, had great incentive to maintain the goodwill of the rulers of their home territory. The trust and reputation facilitated by the provision of news depended upon that news' accuracy. Consequently, those with recourse to accurate news increased their standing. Merchant correspondence was considered to be particularly accurate, making it especially attractive to rulers.

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In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, political and cultural developments, particularly chronic warfare, and the advent of European engagement in the Americas and (directly) in Asia, increased the demand for news among rulers and the status attached to possessing it. The quest for information was accompanied by the pursuit of novel physical artefacts with the rise of *studioli*, such as Lorenzo de' Medici and Isabella d'Este's collections, and proto-*Wunderkammern*.<sup>402</sup> This developed in conjunction with the growing availability of news from ambassadors and printed and handwritten newsletters. Merchants exploited these developments to win the favour of rulers and to win some of the status granted by the possession of news for themselves.

In the late fifteenth century, the supply and form of news available to rulers expanded with the emergence of *avvisi* in conjunction with the rise of resident ambassadors in the Italian city-

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<sup>401</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 5; Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek, and Badeloch Noldus, *Your Humble Servant: Agents in Early Modern Europe* (Hilversum, 2006).

<sup>402</sup> Christine Shaw, *Isabella d'Este: A Renaissance Princess* (Abingdon, 2019), 103–45; Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 277; on Lorenzo, see F. W. Kent, *Lorenzo De' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore, 2007), particularly 29–40; Melissa Meriam Bullard and Nicolai Rubinstein, 'Lorenzo de' Medici's Acquisition of the Sigillo Di Nerone', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 62 (1999): 283–86; for the later role of merchants in creating Wunderkammer proper see, for example, Mark A. Meadow, 'Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer', in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pamela Smith and Paula Findlen (New York and London, 2013), 182–200.

states; this would be repeated in the western European ‘states’ in the early sixteenth.<sup>403</sup> The primary function of ambassadors, beyond representing their ruler to a foreign court, was to report back on that court.<sup>404</sup> Most famously, Philip II was known as ‘the Spider’ for his ‘web’ of news networks across the Spanish Habsburg territories that kept him abreast of developments and gave him power over less well-informed rivals.<sup>405</sup> This role was often fulfilled by merchants and the ennobled sons of merchants, who possessed the skills and experience required for delicate negotiations with foreign rulers.

The emergence of ambassadors in the Italian courts marked a shift towards a new institutional structure which linked courts through ambassadorial information channels.<sup>406</sup> These channels, resulting from the emergence of resident ambassadors and *avvisi*, were already in existence in the Italian courts at the time of Columbus and da Gama’s first voyages and were essential to the rapid dissemination of news of their success. As well as individuals at courts sending news to their personal and business correspondents, ambassadors sent news – official correspondence, copies of other letters (especially mercantile), and *avvisi*, both their own and those written by merchants and news writers – to their home court.<sup>407</sup> As such, sixteenth century rulers had multiple sources of news available to them, including merchant correspondence and reports from ambassadors, who frequently cited merchant letters and *avvisi*.<sup>408</sup> Writing letters functioned as an act of service to monarchs. Merchants readily adapted to the growing demand for news and the emergence of ambassadors, drawing upon their ‘established networks’ to supply news and analysis to ambassadors and directly to rulers for political gain.<sup>409</sup> By supplying ambassadors with news, merchants could influence diplomatic correspondence and, ultimately and in some small way, major political decisions.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Although somewhat outmoded, the classic text remains Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston, 1955), 61–70, 87–103, 120–39; see also Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political *Avvisi*’, 34–35.

<sup>404</sup> Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe*, 1.

<sup>405</sup> Cristina Borreguero Beltrán, ‘Philip of Spain: The Spider’s Web of News and Information’, in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Maurice Dooley (Abingdon, 2010), 23–50.

<sup>406</sup> Such as the great number of ambassadors’ reports from 1454–1494 that survive in the Milanese archives, as seen in Vincent Ilardi, ‘Index’, in *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494–95: Antecedents and Effects*, ed. David Abulafia (Aldershot, 1995), 430.

<sup>407</sup> Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political *Avvisi*’, 34–35; Borreguero Beltrán, ‘Philip of Spain: The Spider’s Web of News and Information’, 30.

<sup>408</sup> Smith, ‘The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism’, 990.

<sup>409</sup> Infelise, ‘From Merchants’ Letters to Handwritten Political *Avvisi*’, 34–35.

<sup>410</sup> As de Vivo argues was done deliberately by Paolo Sarpi: Vivo, ‘Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice’, 42.

Rulers' growing demand for news produced a growing interest in and regard for mercantile correspondence. The benefits of supplying news to rulers had been identified and exploited for centuries by merchants, especially Italian, using their superior networks of news and of personnel. Leon Battista Alberti wrote with pride of how his ancestors had kept Clement VI's favour by supplying him news about Sicily and Louis of Hungary.<sup>411</sup>

In the early sixteenth century, mercantile correspondence provided the richest and most consistent supply of information upon overseas voyages. It was also considered to be more detailed, accurate, and enlightening than other sources. Unlike handwritten *avvisi* and pamphlets, their letters might contain sensitive information and, most importantly, analysis of news by experts.<sup>412</sup> The Spanish and Portuguese rulers' restrictions upon sensitive information, the poor quality of communication services, and the attempted restriction of up-to-date and detailed news to élite circles limited the amount of people who had detailed knowledge of overseas activities. This number included members of great companies – who had, by default, close connections at court and to investors – even when they were not investing themselves, but also smaller merchants such as Simone dal Verde, who sent news back to Florence from the Spanish court. The limited number of people with news increased its worth to recipients and also to distributors, who could use their superior access to rare information for political or other forms of gain. The benefits of supplying news are much greater if that news is exclusive.

Despite its exclusivity, merchant news was easily obtainable for well-connected rulers since merchants willingly sent their letters to these princes, especially those in their cities of origin, for political gain. The best-informed foreign rulers, namely, those on the Italian peninsula, were those with strong links to merchants who were resident in the Iberian Peninsula.

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As merchants did amongst themselves, rulers used the reciprocal provision of news to strengthen ties between members of networks and foster new connections. In 1515 the Elector Frederick of Saxony asked his correspondent Anton Tucher to send Frederick's letters on to

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<sup>411</sup> Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 124.

<sup>412</sup> Jérôme Hayez, 'Avviso, Informazione, Novella, Nuova: La Notion de l'information Dans Les Correspondances Marchandes Toscanes Vers 1400', in *Information et Société En Occident à La Fin Du Moyen Âge. Actes Du Colloque Tenu à l'Université Du Québec à Montréal et à l'Université d'Ottawa, 9-11 Mai 2002*, ed. Claire Boudreau et al., *Histoire Ancienne et Médiévale* 78 (Paris, 2004), 132; Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 34–35.

Charles V at the Imperial Court.<sup>413</sup> Frederick took advantage of Tucher's access to the superior news networks of Nuremberger merchants. Two years later, Frederick asked Tucher to send a letter to Frederick's councillor Degenhart Pfäffinger, either to Pfäffinger's house or wherever Tucher believed him to be.<sup>414</sup> This strongly suggests that Frederick believed that Tucher's knowledge of the movements of Frederick's councillors was better than Frederick's own, once more underlining the superiority of merchant communication networks. Merchants could therefore use the supply of news to rulers to create or strengthen mutually beneficial relationships. Although the function of news as an item of exchange is generally understood, less attention has been given to its role as a gift, especially in the early post-Columbian period. Gifts were often sent along with letters: Philip II received gifts such as pearls and precious stones with much of his correspondence.<sup>415</sup> A letter, however, was itself valuable and, if discussing the Americas or Asia, a luxury item: a rare and collectible commodity that bestowed high status upon the possessor.

The prestige that merchants attached to possessing news was shared by court circles, where the importance of information for political security and the prestige attached to manuscripts enhanced the royal favour that merchants could win by supplying information. The new importance of news and news networks meant that high status came to be bestowed upon those who possessed, and wielded, information. (In modern parlance: information was a form of soft power as well as hard power.) Philip II often boasted that he was better informed than other rulers, but this superior access required enormous financial and administrative resources.<sup>416</sup>

The value of news and the high status given to rare information turned manuscripts, maps, and letters into collectable items.<sup>417</sup> Just as rulers filled their courts with scholars, artists, and educated courtiers, so they surrounded themselves with valuable texts to display their sophistication, taste, and humanist education. The *condottiere* Federico da Montefeltro, who successfully transformed his image from that of a mercenary to a Renaissance prince-poet, created a library of around 900 manuscripts and made 'literary culture' a central aspect of his

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<sup>413</sup> Friedrichs von Sachsen, 'Brief Friedrichs von Sachsen an Anthoni Tucher in Nürnberg' (28 October 1515), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1517, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>414</sup> Friedrichs von Sachsen, 'Brief Friedrichs von Sachsen an Anthoni Tucher in Nürnberg' (14 September 1517), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 725, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>415</sup> Borreguero Beltrán, 'Philip of Spain: The Spider's Web of News and Information', 250.

<sup>416</sup> Borreguero Beltrán, 244; see more generally Geoffrey Parker, 'Philip II, Knowledge and Power', *Military History Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1998): 104–11.

<sup>417</sup> Leah R. Clark, *Collecting Art in the Italian Renaissance Court: Objects and Exchanges* (Cambridge, 2018), 140.

court.<sup>418</sup> The outstanding Fugger library, which was purchased by the Emperor in the seventeenth century, contained manuscripts, almost 14 000 printed books, *objets d'art*, and *exotica*.<sup>419</sup> The manuscripts held in these libraries were attractive for their uniqueness and were thus in great demand among the aristocracy, who exchanged them among themselves in a display of courtly virtue.<sup>420</sup> By lending or giving manuscripts, nobles and rulers declared their possession and appreciation of rare objects of high cultural worth.

Texts describing overseas, or from there, were particularly desirable for their great rarity. In 1502, Ercole I d'Este, the duke of Ferrara, had the Cantino map depicting the Portuguese discoveries smuggled out of Portugal.<sup>421</sup>



*Cantino Planisphere*

The possession of news as a form of status explains why interest in collecting Asian and American commodities was highest among rulers who had no direct connection to colonial activities: the Wittelsbach, the Medici, the Este, and René II of Lorraine.<sup>422</sup> Although they lacked the direct engagement and vast resources of Philip II and other Iberian rulers, these rulers all possessed exceptional networks of merchants and ambassadors, which they could use to lay claim to knowledge of and access to the Portuguese and Spanish successes by acquiring

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<sup>418</sup> Heinz Hofmann, 'Literary Culture at the Court of Urbino during the Reign of Federico Da Montefeltro', *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 57 (2008): 33; M. Peruzzi, *Cultura Potere Immagine. La Biblioteca Di Federico Di Montefeltro* (Urbino, 2004).

<sup>419</sup> George T. Matthews, ed., *News and Rumour in Renaissance Europe: The Fugger Newsletters* (New York, 1959), 13, 15.

<sup>420</sup> Fernando J. Bouza Alvarez, *Corre manuscrito: una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid, 2001), 49.

<sup>421</sup> Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey, *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492-1750* (Cambridge, 2017), 1-2.

<sup>422</sup> Christian F. Feest, 'Collectors, Collections, and Collectibles: Early Native American Collections in Europe and North America', in *Uncommon Legacies: Native American Art from the Peabody Essex Museum* (New York, 2002), 30-31.

physical objects and information and the status that came with it. As Ferrara did not have colonial ambitions – or, at least, the ability to fulfil them – and was not a vassal state of the Spanish, Ercole’s actions can be ascribed to the desire for being better informed than his peers and to the Renaissance desire for the collection of information for its own sake.<sup>423</sup>

The ritual exchange of manuscripts was swiftly extended to texts and maps on Asia and the Americas. Manuel I gave the Mixtec Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I to Clement VII; as a non-European textual source, its value came from its extreme rarity.<sup>424</sup> According to tradition, Charles V gave the Castiglioni planisphere to Baldassare Castiglione, apostolic nuncio to the Spanish court in the late 1520s.<sup>425</sup> Merchant letters could also be circulated as collection pieces. The humanist Zanobi Acciaiuoli’s 1491 letter to Benedetto Dei, about a king from Guinea, survives in a copy sent by Alfonso d’Este (son of Ercole) to his sister Isabella.<sup>426</sup> Like her father, Isabella was one of the outstanding collectors of the Italian Renaissance, with an exceptional proto-Wunderkammer – her *studiolo* – and an interest in rarities, antiques, and curios.<sup>427</sup>

Consequently, merchants had enormous incentive to supply news to rulers. By so doing, they increased the ruler’s dependence upon them and their status as close connections to the prince and possessors of valuable information. The importance of news supply for gaining seignorial favour was particularly the case for expatriates, who could use correspondence to maintain relationships with the ruler of their place of origin. Merchants routinely asked to be recommended or remembered to various European rulers, which became particularly important as they travelled further and further from those patrons or potential patrons. Philipp von Hutten, the Welser captain, wrote: ‘I offer again as before, I would like to write new tidings for the Welser. This would be the greatest demonstration of friendship that I have, if you can do this for me at this time. I also ask you, when the opportunity arrives, to commend me to my gracious lord [Count Heinrich III of Nassau-Breda-Vianden], so that his grace always has me in gracious memory, and also [remember me] to our young lord, the prince [René of Orange]’ (*Ich bit*

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<sup>423</sup> J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New: 1492-1650* (Cambridge, 1970), 30.

<sup>424</sup> Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2016), 13; Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 32–33.

<sup>425</sup> Armando Cortesão, ‘Note on the Castiglioni Planisphere’, *Imago Mundi* 11, no. 1 (January 1954): 53.

<sup>426</sup> Kate Lowe, ‘Africa in the News in Renaissance Italy: News Extracts from Portugal about Western Africa Circulating in Northern and Central Italy in the 1480s and 1490s’, *Italian Studies* 65, no. 3 (November 2010): 317; Paul H. D. Kaplan, ‘Isabella d’Este and Black African Women’, ed. T. F. Earle and Kate Lowe (Cambridge, 2005), 125–54.

<sup>427</sup> Shaw, *Isabella d’Este*, 103–45.

*nochmals wie vor, wollet mir new Zeittung schreiben durch die Welser. Das ist mir die grost Freuntschafft, ßo ir mir zw dieser Zeit auff Ertrich [auf Erden] thun mogt. [Au]ch bit ich euch, wan es etwa zw propost kumbt [wenn Sich etwa die Gelegenheit ergibt], mein gegen meinen gnedigen Hern zum besten zu gedenken, damit mich sein Gnad alzeit in gnediger Gedechtnus hab, auch gegen vnserm jungen Hern, den Printzen.).*<sup>428</sup>

In Florence, the rapid turnover of regimes obliged expatriate merchants to form relationships with a new regime on multiple occasions rather than to maintain an existing rapport. Giovanni da Empoli consequently sent letters and gifts to both Lorenzo de' Medici and Piero Soderini. Ingratiation was vital for those expatriates who had been affiliated with disfavoured former regimes. Empoli and his family had been supporters of Savonarola, who was described as 'Reverendo Padre Frate Ieronimo da Ferrara' in the *Vita*, giving them extra incentive to win the favour of following regimes.<sup>429</sup> Letters, moreover, could be supplied without the merchant having to travel personally: Empoli visited Florence in 1504 and met with Piero Soderini to great success, but he negotiated with Lorenzo de' Medici entirely from a distance.<sup>430</sup>

Several merchants carried out correspondence with rulers over many years, often alongside more traditional activities of lending, selling, and sourcing. These provide some of the best examples of the use of information exchange to create and maintain relationships. By acting in this way, merchants sought to transform themselves from traders supplying rulers into crucial members of their inner circle, with the concomitant socio-political benefits.

Between 1512 and 1523, the Nuremberg merchant and politician Anton Tucher (1458 – 1524) and Frederick III of Saxony, known as the Wise, carried on an extensive business and political relationship through correspondence. Most of their letters related to politics, reflecting Tucher's office as *losunger*, the administrator of city finances and highest-ranked officer in Nuremberg's government. He was thus an ideal source of information relating to Nuremberger and Imperial politics. He was also able to supply information from further afield using his commercial connections, as when, in October 1521, he sent Frederick news about the

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<sup>428</sup> Philipp von Hutten, 'Brief Aus San German de Puerto Rico an Den Kaiserlichen Rat Matthias Zimmermann Zu Breda Vom 28. Januar 1535', in *Das Gold Der Neuen Welt. Die Papiere Des Welser-Konquistadors und Generalkapitäns von Venezuela Philipp von Hutten 1534-1541*, ed. Eberhard Schmitt and Friedrich Karl von Hutten (Hildburghausen, 1996), 90–91.

<sup>429</sup> Girolamo da Empoli, 'La Vita Di Giovanni Da Empoli, Da Che Nacque a Che Mori, Scritta Da Girolamo Da Empoli, Suo Zio', in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, vol. Appendice 3 (Florence, 1846), 22–23.

<sup>430</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 49.



Ottomans.<sup>431</sup> Their correspondence also discussed European affairs, including the king of Poland, the war in Sweden, and the king of France's fiscal activities. Tucher's role in this correspondence was, therefore, primarily that of a politician, but he also arranged loans and commissioned luxury items for Frederick. In 1523, Friedrich acknowledged the supply of four hundred and fifty marks of silver from Tucher (*vierdhalb hundert margk silbers*).<sup>432</sup> Among other items, letters of 1512 and '13 reveal that Anton Tucher sold a gold chain decorated with pearls to Frederick.<sup>433</sup> These pearls may well have been obtained from German traders active overseas or at least in the Iberian Peninsula. Tucher's international network of other Tucher family members, more distant relatives, and other Nuremberg and High German merchants gave him the ability to supply international information and commodities to the Elector. Tucher also sent many gifts to the Elector including Italian fruit, once more reflecting, and flaunting, his international connections.<sup>434</sup>



*Frederick the Wise of Saxony*

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<sup>431</sup> Anton Tucher, 'Brief von Anthoni Tucher Der Ältere an Kurfürst Friedrich von Sachsen' (12 October 1521), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 714, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg. I was unable to access this letter and so do not know what information about the Ottomans was discussed.

<sup>432</sup> Friedrichs von Sachsen, 'Quittung Für Anton Tucher in Nürnberg' (10 December 1523), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 694, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>433</sup> Anton Tucher, 'Brief von Anthoni Tucher Der Ältere Samt Beilagen an Kurfürst Friedrich von Sachsen' (4 June 1512), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 714, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg; Degenhart Pfäffinger, 'Brief von Degenhart Pfäffinger in Weimar an Anton Tucher in Nüremberg' (26 July 1513), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1314, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>434</sup> Bernhard von Hirschfeld, 'Bernhard von Hirschfeld in Würzburg an Anton Tucher in Nürnberg' (29 May 1521), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1512, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

In return for his service, Tucher was in turn sent information from Frederick and, perhaps more importantly, gained the Elector's gratitude and esteem. In 1523, Frederick sent his thanks for the two *Lägel* of sweet wine that Tucher had sent and wrote that he hoped to be able to reciprocate, indicating that Tucher's ability to procure valuable commodities was far from inferior to Frederick's, and that his gifts were not interpreted as tribute but as part of a relationship based upon reciprocity.

As the wealthiest and most influential merchants of the so-called 'Age of the Fugger', the Fugger family were correspondingly among the most important suppliers as well as receivers of news. Extensive studies have been devoted to the *Fuggerzeitungen* of Philip Eduard and Octavius Secundus, but only recently has attention been given to their role in providing news to the House of Bavaria.<sup>435</sup> Although Jacob Fugger had had some correspondence with the duke of Bavaria, it was later in the century that the Fugger increased their activities as news suppliers, reflecting the mid-century flourishing of *Zeitungen*. Hans Fugger (son of Anton) and Hans Jakob Fugger (son of Anton's brother Raymund) both provided extensive information to the Bavarian ducal court.<sup>436</sup> The Fugger had married into the southern German nobility since the beginning of the century, seeking to gain alliances with families that held important positions at the Bavarian court.<sup>437</sup> These relatives served as important members of the Fugger news networks.<sup>438</sup> By supplying such news, the Fugger sought to secure their position in Bavarian aristocratic circles. In later decades, they would supply news to Philip Ludwig, Pfalzgraf of Neuburg, and, almost certainly, to Alessandro and Cosimo I de' Medici.<sup>439</sup>

As Frederick did, rulers might also supply news to merchants. Because of Valentim Fernandes' high standing in court and the great trust placed in him by Manuel I, he received the reports of helmsmen returning from India immediately after they visited the king.<sup>440</sup> By supplying Fernandes with news, Manuel I also ensured that the great German merchant-bankers whom Fernandes represented and who supplied Manuel I with the silver, copper and brass items needed in Africa and India were well-informed about trading conditions. Fernandes

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<sup>435</sup> Bauer, *Zeitungen Vor Der Zeitung*; Matthews, *News and Rumour in Renaissance Europe: The Fugger Newsletters*; on the Fugger and their provision of news to the dukes, see Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 5–6.

<sup>436</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 5–6, 25–26.

<sup>437</sup> Sieh-Burens, *Oligarchie, Konfession und Politik Im 16. Jahrhundert*, 95.

<sup>438</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 21.

<sup>439</sup> Dauser, 354; Alessandro de' Medici, 'Letter to the Governor of Bologna' (13 June 1534), Mediceo del Principato 181, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; Donato de' Bardi da Vernio, 'Letter to Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence' (7 March 1554), Mediceo del Principato 422, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>440</sup> Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung', 54.

communicated with the Germans via their representatives in Spain and Portugal, such as Lucas Rem, and through his correspondents Conrad Peutinger in Augsburg and Hieronymus Münzer and Stefan Gabler (a Höchstetter agent previously in Lisbon) in Nuremberg.<sup>441</sup> Manuel I thus sought to regulate, not ban, the flow of sensitive information through trusted channels, thus limiting (hopefully) its distribution. His 1505 letter to the Catholic Kings on Portuguese achievements in India and his 1513 letter to the pope announcing Portugal's conquest of Goa and Malacca, both of which spread to the reading public in the form of *avvisi*, fulfilled this same goal.<sup>442</sup> He also ensured the spread of general information to commercial rivals. When Portuguese ships returned from India in 1501, the Venetian agent il Cretico reported that Manuel had requested that he, il Cretico, pass on the news to the Senate: 'I was with the Most Serene King, who called me and told me that I might congratulate him because his ships had arrived from India, loaded with spices; and so I rejoiced in due form with him. He had a feast held in the palace that evening and a ringing of bells throughout the land (city), and on the following day he had solemn procession made throughout the land. Afterward, when I found myself with His Majesty, he referred again to his ships and he told me that I should write to Your Serenity that from now on you should send your ships to carry spices from here.'<sup>443</sup> Alongside the pragmatic motivations, the supply of news was a great display of trust and confirmed merchants' standing in the eyes of their patrons.

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Merchants' influence over the news and their close connection to the printing industry also gave them the opportunity for self-aggrandisement. Some merchants sought to use the

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<sup>441</sup> Yvonne Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes: Ein Deutscher Buchdrucker in Portugal Um Die Wende Vom 15. Zum 16. Jahrhundert und Sein Umkreis* (Frankfurt, 2007), 18.

<sup>442</sup> Manuel I of Portugal, *Copia d'una Lettera de Re Di Portogallo Mandata al Re Di Castella Del Viaggio e Successo in India* (Milan, 1505); Manuel I of Portugal, *Copia de Una Littera Del Re de Portogallo Mandata al Re de Castella Del Viaggio et Successo de India* (Rome, 1505); Manuel I of Portugal, *Sendtbriff Des Grosmechtigen und Unuberwindtligisten Emanuelis Kunig Zu Portugal. Von Der Uberwindung Dye Geschehen Ist in India und Malacha Pabst Leo. Dem Zehenden Zu Geschriben.* (Nuremberg, 1513); Manuel I of Portugal, *Epistola Potentissimi Ac Invictissimi Emanuelis Regis Portugaliae et Algarbiorum. Etc. De Victoriis Habitis in India et Malacha. Ad. S. In Christo Patrem et Dominum Nostrum Dominum Leonem. X. Pont. Maximu.* (Erfurt, 1513); Manuel I of Portugal, *Epistola Potentissimi Ac Invictissimi Emanuelis Regis Portugaliae, et Algarbiorum. Etc. De Victoriis Ha Bitis in India, et Malacha. Ad. S. In Christo Patrem et Dominum Nostru. Do. Leonem. X. Pont. Maximu* (Vienna, 1513); Manuel I of Portugal, *Epistola Potentissimi Ac Invictissimi Emanuelis Regis Portugalie et Algarbiorum. De Victoriis Habitis in India et Malacha. Ad s. In Christo Patrem et Dominum Nostru. Dñm Leonem Decimu. Pont. Maximu* (Nuremberg, 1513); Manuel I of Portugal, *Abtruck Ains Lateinnischen Sandtbriefes an Bapstliche Heiligkeit, von Künigklicher Würden Zue Portegall Diß Jars Außgangen, von Der Eroberten Stat Malacha: Anderen Künigrychen und Herschafften in India, Auch Gegen Auffgang Der Sonnen, Erstlich Zu Rom in Latein Getruckt und Nachmaln in Teüsch Gebracht.* (Strasbourg, 1513).

<sup>443</sup> Cretico, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

influence which they had over news and print networks for more than gaining the thanks of rulers for having provided information. They sought to promote their own version of events, to increase or transform their status, and to win the favour of rulers in pursuit of a further agenda. The most outstanding example of the age was Amerigo Vespucci, whose great success resulted from his deliberate appeal to his intended audience, Europe's humanist-educated élites, to whom he presented himself as an authority, and his successful exploitation of news networks and of the press (with significant roles played by printers).

Vespucci framed his letters to appear credible and interesting to the rulers and scholars who could support his cause. In earlier centuries, Mandeville – in contrast to Marco Polo's mercantile 'lens' – had, through his writing style and relation to the world which he described, 'align[ed] himself not with merchants and adventurers but with the great Franciscan voyagers like William of Rubruck and Oderic of Podernone'.<sup>444</sup> Merchants likewise reshaped their texts to appeal to various audiences and to enhance their own image, seeking to transform themselves into wandering scholars and knights errant and gaining the attendant honour and fame.

Vespucci's letters – that is, those written in his own hand rather than the printed versions – were deliberately written to appeal to an intellectual audience. Vespucci's intention was, as he wrote in his 1501 letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 'to come to fame [*fama*] at a distant time if I return in safety from this voyage'.<sup>445</sup> To do so, he drew upon his humanist ('Latinist') education to depict himself as an authoritative source. It was his ability to construct and sell a certain image of himself as an expert in all of these things through his letters and through conversation, the latter primarily in Florence, that gained him his great reputation.<sup>446</sup> Vespucci commented upon cartography on several occasions, always emphasising how his knowledge exceeded that of the Portuguese. From Cabo Verde, he wrote that 'the fleet had neither a cosmographer nor a mathematician in its company (which was a great error)... I have somewhat corrected it [their report] with the *Cosmography* of Ptolemy'.<sup>447</sup> With this and other such claims, Vespucci depicted himself as a skilled participant in the voyage, rather than a spectator. His reference to

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<sup>444</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1992), 26.

<sup>445</sup> Vespucci, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

<sup>446</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 4–7.

<sup>447</sup> Amerigo Vespucci, 'Letter to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (4 June 1501)', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti (Florence, 2006), 117–21; Vespucci, 'Letter II to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de' Medici', 20.

the *Cosmographica* stressed both his mathematical-technical and humanist education, aligning himself with the Florentine humanist-trained élites to appeal to rulers and scholars.

He also exaggerated his role within the leadership and organisation of the voyage.<sup>448</sup> Las Casas complained that ‘For as Americo was a Latinist, and eloquent, he knew how to make use of the first voyage he undertook, and to give the credit to himself, as if he had been the principal captain of it. He was only one of those who were with the captain, Alonso de Hojeda, either as a mariner, or because, as a trader, he had contributed towards the expenses of the expedition’.<sup>449</sup> It even is possible that Vespucci was only a financier and did not even participate in some or all of the voyages, although a document stated to be by Alonso de Hojeda, captain of the voyage of 1499-1500, named ‘Morigo Vespuche’ among the pilots.<sup>450</sup> Vespucci’s claim that the *Mundus Novus* discusses his ‘third journey’ is certainly false; at the most, he had embarked upon two. References to four voyages, however, are possibly the work of publishers rather than Vespucci himself.<sup>451</sup> That Vespucci was successful in persuading the reading public of his pivotal role in the identification of America and of his status as an authoritative witness is made clear by Waldseemüller’s statement that he had named the continent ‘after its discoverer, Americus, a man of perceptive nature’ (*ab Americo Inventore sagacis ingenii viro*).<sup>452</sup> In Las Casas’ words, ‘all the foreigners who write of these Indies in Latin, or in their own mother-tongue, or who make charts or maps, call the continent America, as having been first discovered by Americo’.<sup>453</sup>

The fame (*fama*) which Vespucci desired was closely associated with reputation and honour (*onore*), which merchants could advertise in and seek to increase through their letters. As has been shown, participation in overseas activities, particularly within the administration, was

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<sup>448</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 67–68.

<sup>449</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de Las Indias*, ed. Feliciano Ramírez de Arellano Fuensanta del Valle and José León Sancho Rayón, vol. 2 (Madrid, 1875), 268–69; translated in Las Casas, ‘Chapters from Las Casas, Which Discuss the Statements of Vespucci’, 69.

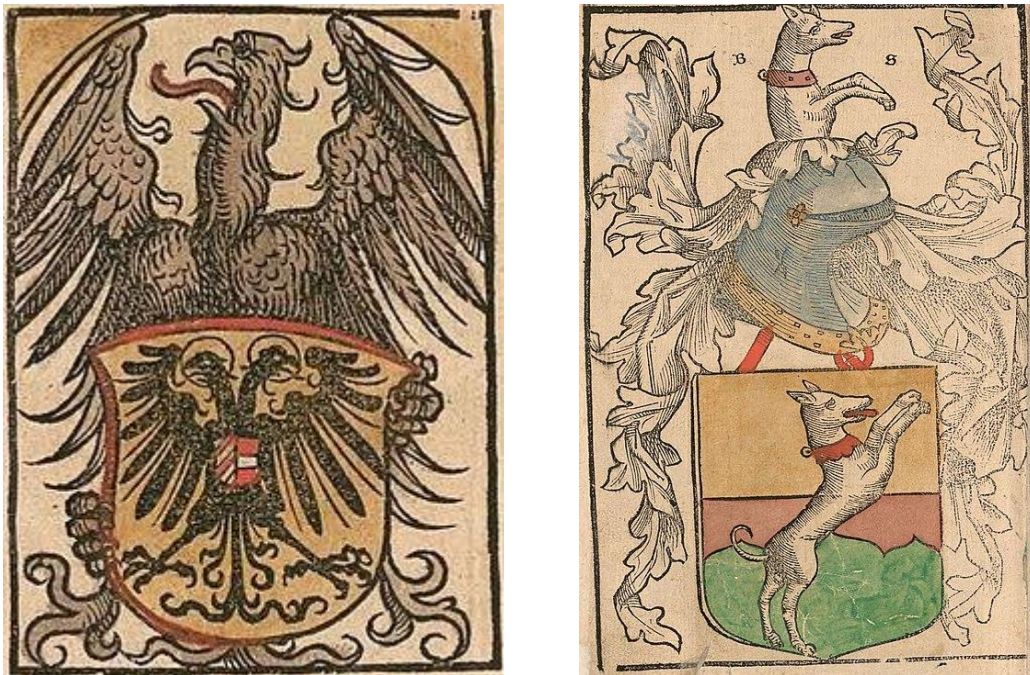
<sup>450</sup> Charles R. Markham, ed., ‘Evidence of Alonso de Hojeda Respecting His Voyage of 1499-1500’, in *The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci, and Other Documents Illustrative of His Career* (London, 1894), 30.

<sup>451</sup> Amerigo Vespucci, ‘Mundus Novus’, in *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci’s Discovery of America*, ed. Luciano Formisano, trans. David Jacobson (New York, 1992), 54–55; Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 122–23.

<sup>452</sup> Matthias Ringmann, *Cosmographiae Introductio Cum Quibusdam Geometriae Ac Astronomiae Principiis Ad Eam Rem Necessariis. Insuper Quatuor Americi Vespucii Navigationes. Universalis Cosmographiae Descriptio Tam in Solido Quam Plano, Eis Etiam Insertis, Quae Ptholomaeo Ignota a Nuperis Reperta Sunt*. (Saint-Dié, 1507), 30; translated in Charles G. Herbermann, *The Cosmographiae Introductio of Martin Waldseemüller in Facsimile, Followed by the Four Voyages of Amerigo Vespucci, with Their Translation into English* (New York, 1907).

<sup>453</sup> Las Casas, ‘Chapters from Las Casas, Which Discuss the Statements of Vespucci’, 69.

considered a great source of honour.<sup>454</sup> Raffaello Galli wrote that Empoli was to be factor to Sumatra ‘with great authority and honour’ (*con molta altorità e onore*), and likewise Corbinelli was described as returning from Asia ‘with great riches and great honour’ (*chon grande richeza e con grande onore*).<sup>455</sup> Honour was highly prized among both merchants and nobles, and its possession allowed merchants to move into the aristocracy or at least to claim possession of ideal noble traits. That their letters were intended to stress their elevated status is neatly visualised in the printed edition of the *Merfart*, in which the Imperial eagle on the frontispiece is followed by the Sprenger coat of arms.



The *Merfart*: the Imperial and Sprenger coats of arms

By stressing the honour that their overseas voyages had brought them, merchants enforced these changes in their home countries.

As outlined above, princes in the Renaissance amassed collections of manuscripts in response to humanist and courtly culture, which asserted that élite identity was contingent upon mastery of the courtly as well as the military arts. Rulers surrounded themselves with items of the new high culture and patronised their producers: artists, humanists, other scholars, and other members of the intelligentsia. By framing their texts to fit this mould, merchants sought to

<sup>454</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 88.

<sup>455</sup> Raffaele Galli, ‘Letter of Raffaele Galli (1 April 1515)’, in *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese (1500-1525)*, ed. Marco Spallanzani (Florence, 1997), 137–40.

make their letters into collection pieces and to make themselves ‘collectible’ as erudite masters of new knowledge.

Vespucci was not alone in his emphasis upon his humanist learning. In his biography of his nephew Giovanni, Girolamo da Empoli gave a detailed account of his education and noted that he acquired very good Latin and a little Greek (*‘...imparò assai bene il latino. Ed ancora dava opera a imparare un poco di greco’*).<sup>456</sup> Humanist training might also be demonstrated through references to ancient and more recent authorities. Ptolemy was referenced by Vespucci, Vincenzo Querini, Il Cretico (indirectly), and the *Vita* of Giovanni da Empoli, among others, while multiple writers, including Conrad Peutinger (p.194) and Bartolomeo Marchionni, referred to Pliny.<sup>457</sup> According to the *Vita*, upon his return to Florence, Empoli ‘was visited by many respectable and learned young people, all eager to hear about those new things from those countries; and to all he satisfied: and among others, Lultanzio Tedaldi and Domenico Boninsegni, young men who well understood the world map and navigational charts, and Ptolemy had told them of those countries there... and [Empoli] so satisfied many friends and relatives that he was very cheerful and pleasant and gained a very good reputation (*...dove fu visitato da molti giovani dabbene e persone dotte, tutti desiderosi d’udire di quelle cose nuove di que’ paesi; e a tutti sodisfaceva: e in tra gli altri, Lultanzio Tedaldi e Domenico Boninsegni, giovani che intendevano bene l’ appamondo [mappamondo], e la carta da navigare, e quello n’ aveva detto Tolomeo di que’ paesi di là... e così sodisfece a molti amici e parenti, che era molto allegro e piacevole, e acquistò molta buona fama.*).<sup>458</sup>

Most merchants, like Vespucci, focused upon their skills in navigation, cartography, and cosmography owing to the great interest displayed in these among humanists, humanist-educated urban élites, and aristocrats. By including such information, they sought to depict themselves as travelling scholars in a superior position through claims of expertise over esoteric

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<sup>456</sup> da Empoli, ‘Vita Di Giovanni Da Empoli’, 21–22.

<sup>457</sup> Querini, ‘Relatione Del Clarissimo Sig. Vincenzo Quirino Ritornato Ambasciatore Da Filippo d’Austria Rè Di Castiglia Dell’anno 1504’, fol. 209r; Cretico, ‘The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India’, 119–20; da Empoli, ‘Vita Di Giovanni Da Empoli’, 27; Conrad Peutinger, ‘Brief an Sebastian Brant (7 April 1507)’, in *Konrad Peutingers Briefwechsel*, ed. Erich König (Munich, 1923), 77–78; Bartolomeo Marchionni, ‘Lettera in Lisbona (27 Giugno 1501)’, in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti and Luciano Formisano (Florence, 2006), 114–16; translated in Bartolomeo Marchionni, ‘Letter to Florence (27 June 1501)’, in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 148; Bartolomeo Marchionni, ‘Lettera in Lisbona (Iuglio 1501)’, in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti and Luciano Formisano (Florence, 2006), 116–17.

<sup>458</sup> da Empoli, ‘Vita Di Giovanni Da Empoli’, 27.

knowledge. As explored in previous chapters, many of the Germans and Italians participating in Portuguese and Spanish colonial activities did so as technical experts, including on artillery and navigation. This technical knowledge was echoed among the intellectual élite of southern Germany and the central and northern Italian cities.

The strong cartographical tradition in Germany was expressed most famously in the 1507 production of Waldseemüller's map, the *Universalis Cosmographia*.<sup>459</sup> Earlier, Martin Behaim claimed to be a cartographical and navigational expert, having trained under the astronomer and cartographer Regiomontanus, which has been disputed, particularly as the information on the *Erdapfel* is poorly rendered and outdated.<sup>460</sup> More likely, he was an importer of Nuremberg-made navigational instruments, such as the quadrant, for the Portuguese voyages.<sup>461</sup> Behaim was informed about the coast of Africa, as is shown by the detailed rendering of the West African coast on the *Erdapfel*, which was based upon a *mappa mundi* made by Behaim, and he was highly regarded by Münzer and Fernandes, who recorded that Behaim transcribed Diego Gomes' travel narrative.<sup>462</sup> Much of this information, however, may have been obtained from the Catalan world atlas, other extant maps, and from writers such as Marco Polo.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Martin Lehmann, ed., *Die Cosmographiae Introductio Matthias Ringmanns und Die Weltkarte Martin Waldseemüllers Aus Dem Jahr 1507. Ein Meilenstein Frühneuzeitlicher Kartographie* (Munich, 2010).

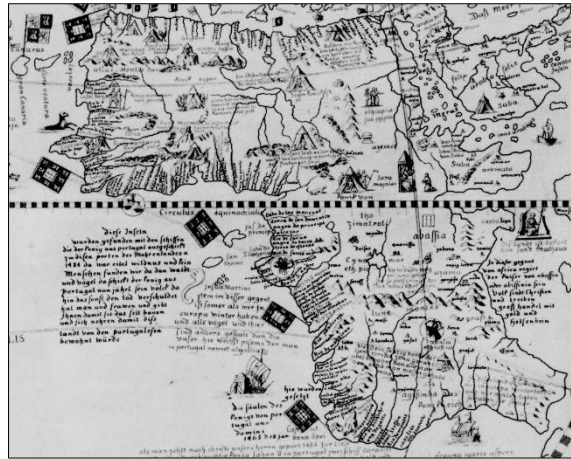
<sup>460</sup> Willers, 'Leben und Werk Des Martin Behaim', 182–84.

<sup>461</sup> Willers, 183; Werner Schultheiß, 'Des Seefahrers Martin Behaim Geburts- und Todestag', *Mitteilungen Des Vereins Für Geschichte Der Stadt Nürnberg* 42 (1951): 353–57.

<sup>462</sup> Georg Holzschuher, 'Statement of Expenditures for the Erdapfel (26 August 1494)', in *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (London, 1908), 111–12; for the dispute around Behaim's participation in any voyage, see Willers, 'Leben und Werk Des Martin Behaim', *passim*; Kellenbenz, 'Portugiesische Forschungen Zur Behaimfrage', 86.

<sup>463</sup> Johannes Willers, 'Der Behaim-Globus und Die Kartographie Seiner Zeit', in *Focus Behaim-Globus*, ed. Ulrich Knefelkamp and G. Bott, vol. 1, 2 vols (Nuremberg, 1992), 217–22; for Behaim's use of Marco Polo, see David Woodward, 'Medieval Mappaemundi', in *The History of Cartography*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward, vol. 1: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean (Chicago, 1987), 316.





Detail, Behaim-Globus<sup>464</sup>

If Behaim was not a student of Regiomontanus, then his ability to portray himself as a navigational expert to both João II and Maximilian, who recommended him to Manuel for a proposed expedition to America, and his supply of information for Nuremberg's *Erdapfel* makes him a direct parallel of Vespucci.<sup>465</sup>

Merchants capitalised upon their connections to the intelligentsia and their own humanist education to assert their superior understanding. Italian maps, such as that of the mathematician Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, encouraged Portuguese explorations westwards. The prestige that intellectual knowledge and connections conveyed may have been behind Piero Vaglienti's suggestion that Toscanelli or his map were introduced to Manuel by Marchionni: 'To whom do we owe this discovery [of America]? To a doctor of medicine, a Florentine, Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, a most exceptional man, who announced this route to the Florentine Bartholomeo Marchioni [sic], who was at the court of Lisbon. He gave this information to the King...'<sup>466</sup> Vaglienti had obvious reasons for such an assertion: his brother was married to a Marchionni and his *Cronica* was intended to glorify Florence.<sup>467</sup>

As has been noted, many merchant letters on Asia and the Americas were littered with references to cartography. Piero di Giovanni di Dino commented that his ship determined the position of the Southern Cross relative to the South Pole (*vicina al polo antartico*) 'with the

<sup>464</sup> From the reproduction in Ghillany, *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*.

<sup>465</sup> Münzer, 'Letter to João II of Portugal (14 July 1493)'.

<sup>466</sup> Piero Vaglienti, 'Cronica' (1492-1514), fol. 42, Codex Magliab., segn. II, IV, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze; Piero Vaglienti, *Storia Dei Suoi Tempi, 1492-1514*, ed. Giuliana Berti, Michele Luzzati, and Ezio Tongiorgi (Pisa, 1982).

<sup>467</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, xvii.

astrolabe and the quadrant' (*con l'astrolabio et col quadrante*).<sup>468</sup> The Southern Cross was also noted by Vespucci (and Andrea Corsali), who, like Piero di Giovanni di Dino, quoted Dante in a passage that has been used to argue that he did sail below the Equator.<sup>469</sup> Literary allusions to Dante and other texts also enhanced the image of the writer as an accomplished humanist.<sup>470</sup> In the case of the Venetian ambassador Vincenzo Querini, his detailed description of how the Portuguese used the combination 'of paper, of compass, and of astrolabe' (*di Carta, di bussolo, et d'Astrolabio*) to navigate would have been of great interest to the Venetians as a sea-power and one seeking to uncover Portugal's designs.<sup>471</sup>

Lazarus Nürnbergger carefully recorded the distances between the locations along their journey, and also between those places and others nearby, such as the Barbary Coast: 'On April 19 we arrived at Gran Canaria island at the city of Las Palmas, which belongs to the king of Spain, as do six other islands that are nearby. A lot of sugar grows there. This island is thirty-two miles long and is also very hot. Wheat, barley and other cereals were all imported... There are also many camels, which come from Barbary, the land of the Moors, forty miles from this island' (*Adi 19 aprill kamen wir in die insel gran Canaria die stade Cydady palma gehort dem k[önig] von hispania mit sambt andern 6 inseln so darbey ligen zue, da wechst vil zuckers Disz insel ist gros 32 meyl auch ist ser grosz hitz in diser insel, das korn gersten und ander getrayd war alles eynggeführt... auch hat es vil kamelthier so ausz Barbaria ist der moren landt, leyt 40 meyl von diser insel komen*).<sup>472</sup> His account is unusual for its precise rendering of degrees of latitude and his description of the equator: 'On May 10 we passed the [Equatorial] Line which, it is said, is the middle of the world; it is so hot that it is unspeakable.... Here day and night are always equal, the day twelve hours and the night twelve hours. This place is called the coast of Guinea. The Line is 800 miles from the Canary Island' (*Adi 10 mayo kamen wir untter die Linea, da man dann sagt, sey mitten in der welt, da ist es so haysz, dasz nit dorvon zuzagen*

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<sup>468</sup> Piero di Giovanni di Dino, 'Letter of Piero di Giovanni di Dino (1 January 1519)', in *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese (1500-1525)*, ed. Marco Spallanzani (Florence, 1997), 164.

<sup>469</sup> Amerigo Vespucci, 'Letter I to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de' Medici', in *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci's Discovery of America*, ed. Luciano Formisano, trans. David Jacobson (New York, 1992), 6–7; Andrea Corsali, 'Letter from India to Giuliano de' Medici (October 1516)', in *Andrea Corsali, Fiorentino, A Watcher of the Austral Skies: La Lettera Dalla India*, ed. and trans. Sergio Sergi (Canberra, 2013); Piero di Giovanni di Dino, 'Letter of Piero di Giovanni di Dino (1 January 1519)', 163; Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 79–81.

<sup>470</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 104–6.

<sup>471</sup> Querini, 'Relatione Del Clarissimo Sig. Vincenzo Quirino Ritornato Ambasciatore Da Filippo d'Austria Rè Di Castiglia Dell'anno 1504'.

<sup>472</sup> Lazarus Nürnbergger, *Le Voyage de Lazarus Nürnbergger En Inde (1517-1518)*, ed. Anne Kroell (Paris, 1980), 63.

*ist... hier ist der tagk und nacht alzeyt gleych, der tagk 12 und die nacht 12 stunde, hir heystt es die cost von Jenea Di linia leynt von diser Insel Canaria 800 meyl).*<sup>473</sup>

Nürnberg's focus reflected what would be of interest to his addressee, the scholar Willibald Pirckheimer, and to the wider Nuremberg mercantile and intellectual élite, who were keenly interested in cosmography. This interest, demonstrated most spectacularly by Martin Behaim and his *Erdapfel*, was shared by Pirckheimer: he owned a copy of the Eichstätt map, a printed derivation of Nicholas of Cusa's 1454 map of central Europe (Conrad Peutinger owned the copper plates for this map).<sup>474</sup> Nuremberg was a major centre for cartography and Nürnberg's information would have been of fundamental importance. Other merchants may have used cartographical details, and other demonstrations of their humanist learning, to appeal to intellectual circles, transforming themselves in the eyes of their audience from mere sailors and traders into scholar-travellers. In early centuries, Mandeville had associated himself with travelling monks and pilgrims rather than merchants, partly through the assertion of cosmographic and geographic knowledge.<sup>475</sup> Cartographical details were also of interest to general audiences and made their way into *Zeitungen*; merchant accounts thus supplied popular demand.<sup>476</sup>

In his letters to Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici, Andrea Corsali provided detailed geographic and ethnographic accounts.<sup>477</sup> He voyaged primarily as 'a man of letters and scholars' rather than a merchant (in the words of fellow Florentine Piero di Giovanni di Dino), but his topics were repeated by other merchants, including Piero di Giovanni di Dino, who also provided a description of 'the other Ursa, or rather the Chariot, called Antarctic, which is a cross of stars'.<sup>478</sup> This overlap shows the narrow range of European interests in the Americas and Asia, ones that were simultaneously for entertainment value and to fulfil scholarly curiosity.

Few Europeans had access to the growing number of printed maps that allowed 'a basic visualisation of space relations' and clarified previously shaky and somewhat fantastical idea

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<sup>473</sup> Nürnberg, 63–64.

<sup>474</sup> 'Eichstätt Map' (1491), British Museum.

<sup>475</sup> John Mandeville, *Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. Malcolm Letts (London, 1953), 128–29; Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 26.

<sup>476</sup> *Copia Der Newen Zeytung Aus Presillg Landt*.

<sup>477</sup> Andrea Corsali, *Lettera Di Andrea Corsali Allo Illustrissimo Signore Duca Iuliano de Medici. Venuta Dellindia [!] Nel Mese Di Octobre Nel MDXVI* (Florence, 1516); translated as Corsali, 'Letter from India to Giuliano de' Medici (October 1516)'.

<sup>478</sup> Piero di Giovanni di Dino, 'Letter of Piero di Giovanni di Dino (1 January 1519)', 162.

of faraway countries.<sup>479</sup> Italian rulers, including Cosimo I de' Medici and the Pope, would later create map rooms that allowed them to visualise the territories for which they or other European rulers had ambitions while simultaneously showing off their knowledge and collections.<sup>480</sup> By providing rich detail, particularly cartographic, letter writers sought to provide a verbal map that allowed their reader to visualise the places being described. The Venetian secretary Angelo Trevisan promised his employer, the Venetian envoy Domenico Pisano, 'that you will learn upon our arrival [from Portugal] as many particulars as though you had been at Calicut and farther, and Your Magnificence will be made a participant in everything, as perhaps others will not'.<sup>481</sup> Many merchants gave cartographical details, as noted above, including distances, the shape of coast lines, and sailing routes, and compared many of the things which they saw to the equivalent (or nearest) in Europe.

The close connections between printers and merchants gave merchants, most famously Vespucci, ready access to print itself and to the benefits of mass communication. The tight knit, yet international, networks of merchants, humanists, and printers had resulted in Valentim Fernandes' lynchpin role in communications between Manuel I and the German high financiers. These links, and merchants' role as suppliers of news to ambassadors and rulers, gave merchants potentially huge influence over the press and thus over the distribution of information across Europe. At the same time, printers gained great influence over manuscript letters, which they often heavily adapted to suit their own interests.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, printing in the Iberian Peninsula was dominated by German printers, all of whom had mercantile connections and several of whom, such as the Seville-based Jacob Cromberger, were merchants themselves.<sup>482</sup> Of these, Valentim Fernandes, in Lisbon, was the most influential, being very important in court circles and consequently very well informed.<sup>483</sup> These printers, and their merchant partners, had great influence over the dispersal of information about European overseas activities with strong

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<sup>479</sup> Brendan Maurice Dooley, 'Introduction', in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Maurice Dooley (Abingdon, 2010), 7.

<sup>480</sup> Brendan Maurice Dooley, 'Making It Present', in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Maurice Dooley (Abingdon, 2010), 95.

<sup>481</sup> Angelo Trevisan, 'Extracts from the Letters of Angelo Trevisan to Domenico Malipiero', in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 123–24.

<sup>482</sup> Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 136 f.

<sup>483</sup> Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes, passim*.

implications for when merchants sought to promote their own version of events for political gain.

Germans and other Central Europeans dominated printing in the Iberian Peninsula from the beginning and only grew in number from in the late 1400s when they were invited to settle by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns to replace Jewish printers.<sup>484</sup> It is possible that the Great Ravensburg Company, already established in Iberian commerce, had brought printing into the Peninsula; they had certainly brought printers to Valencia.<sup>485</sup> Fernandes became the most important printer in Lisbon, while, Jakob Cromberger, who was probably originally from Nuremberg, was the most important printer in Seville and one of the most important in Spain.<sup>486</sup> The privileges offered to the German printers indicate how highly they were valued by the rulers. In Portugal, Valentim Fernandes was made squire to Queen Leonor and given the privileges of the royal household.<sup>487</sup> In 1508, Manuel I tried to persuade Jakob Cromberger and other Spain-based German printers to move to Portugal by offering them the privileges of nobility of the royal house.<sup>488</sup>

The exceptional privileges given to Fernandes reflected his vital role as an agent of royal propaganda. As well as printing royal commissions, such as Ludolf of Saxony's *De Vita Christi*, Fernandes specialised in works relating to Asia, thus bringing greater awareness of these to the reading public.<sup>489</sup> He translated Marco Polo's work into Portuguese, fuelling interest in the East, and his codex, one copy of which was posthumously sent to Conrad Peutinger, contains several accounts of early explorations, including the Welser factor Hans Mayr's recount of the journey to India and a narrative by Diogo Gomes that was supposedly

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<sup>484</sup> Hendrich, 58; C. Griffin, *The Crombergers of Seville: The History of a Printing and Merchant Dynasty* (Oxford, 1988), 1–2.

<sup>485</sup> Quelle, 'Die Große Ravensburger Handelsgesellschaft und Ihre Beziehungen Zu Spanien'; Griffin, *The Crombergers of Seville*, 2.

<sup>486</sup> Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 132.

<sup>487</sup> Marcones de Souza, 'O Ato Notarial de Valentim Fernandes de 20 de Maio de 1503', 369.

<sup>488</sup> Carl Heinrich Panhorst, *Deutschland und Amerika. Ein Rückblick Auf Das Zeitalter Der Entdeckungen und Die Ersten Deutsch-Amerikanischen Verbindungen, Unter Besonderer Beachtung Der Unternehmungen Der Fugger und Welser* (Munich, 1928), 30; Friedrich Kunstmann, 'Die Deutschen in Portugal', in *Germania: Archiv zur Kenntnis d. dt. Elements in allen Ländern d. Erde*, ed. Wilhelm Stricker, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1848), 89; Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 132.

<sup>489</sup> Ludolph of Saxony, *De Vita Christi*, trans. Nicolau Vieira (Lisbon, 1495); Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, 29–30; Marion Ehrhardt, ed., 'Frühe Deutsche Drucker in Portugal', in *Portugal - Alemanha - África: do imperialismo colonial ao imperialismo político: actas do 4 Encontro Luso-Alemão* (Lisbon, 1996), 27–28; Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes*, 15.

scribed by Martin Behaim.<sup>490</sup> (That Behaim was both a merchant-adventurer [but not a Merchant Adventurer] and a scholar – he was also responsible of the *Erdapfel* – once more highlights the overlap between commercial and intellectual circles in Europe’s commercial cities.) Fernandes’ interest in and connection to German explorers was echoed by correspondence with Peutinger.<sup>491</sup> By providing news to the Portuguese public and the Nuremberg merchants (whom he later represented), Fernandes helped to drive investment in Portugal’s colonial ventures.<sup>492</sup>

Pieper has likewise suggested that the great enthusiasm shown for Vespucci’s letters in the German states and the patronage of Waldseemüller’s map was Maximilian’s attempt to fund German merchants’ participation in the 1505-06 India Armada and subsequently to demonstrate the riches of the East to Maximilian’s reluctant Diet to encourage them to support him.<sup>493</sup> Maximilian was, however, certainly interested in the overseas voyages and in its cartographical representation due to his claims to universal rule. Like other rulers, he used images of Asia and the Americas in propaganda such as Hans Burgkmair’s *Triumph of Maximilian*.<sup>494</sup> If Pieper’s assertion is true, this once again shows how closely merchants, printers, cartographers and rulers worked together. Given that the Waldseemüller map and the *Cartographia* were under the patronage of René II, the supposition about Maximilian’s direct involvement seems tenuous. Her argument that, since most of the German editions were printed in commercially active cities, they were in demand by German merchants interested in American trade, is more convincing.<sup>495</sup> In 1504, an edition of Vespucci’s letter appeared in Augsburg, with more editions appearing in Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Strasbourg (on the Rhine) in 1505.<sup>496</sup> As the Welser, Fugger, and other corporations participated in the voyage of 1505-06, confirmed by an *asiento* in 1504, Vespucci’s letters would have provided a useful reference for company headquarters. All of these publications, except that edited by Ringmann,

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<sup>490</sup> Marco Polo, *Marco Paulo, Ho Livro de Nycolao Veneto. O Trallado Da Carta de Huum Genoves Das Detas Terras* (Lisbon, 1502); Valentim Fernandes, ‘De Insulis et Peregrinatione Lusitanorum’ (1518), Codex monacensis hispanicus 27, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek; Valentim Fernandes, *Códice Valentim Fernandes: Oferecido Pelo Académico Titular Fundador, Joaquim Bensaúde; Leitura Paleográfica, Notas e Índice Pelo Académico de Número José Pereira Da Costa.*, ed. José Pereira da Costa (Lisbon, 1997); Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes*.

<sup>491</sup> Hendrich, *Valentim Fernandes*, 169–207.

<sup>492</sup> Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, 29–30.

<sup>493</sup> Renate Pieper, ‘Between India and the Indies: German Mercantile Networks, the Struggle for the Imperial Crown and the Naming of the New World’, *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3, no. 1 (30 June 2014): 1–10.

<sup>494</sup> Kleinschmidt, *Ruling the Waves*, 185–86.

<sup>495</sup> Pieper, ‘Between India and the Indies’, 6–7.

<sup>496</sup> Appendix III.



Sprenger's *Merfart*, were also heavily adapted for print.<sup>502</sup> Such are the distortions imposed upon Vespucci's letters that their authenticity, and especially the authenticity of the *Mundus Novus*, continues to be debated among modern historians.<sup>503</sup> A further explanation for the sensationalism of aspects of Vespucci's letters is that they were written in an attempt to win the favour of rulers and money from investors.<sup>504</sup> Both Vespucci and Columbus, well aware of the political potential of information, turned to the press to promote their voyages.

Merchants' access to print was particularly strong in Italy, a leading centre of printing generally and Americana in particular.<sup>505</sup> Rome was an important distribution centre and many editions printed in northern Europe were based upon Roman copies, with German printing networks being particularly influential.<sup>506</sup> Rome was also populated by many foreign merchants and bankers, including members of the Welser and Fugger houses, who were interested or even invested in overseas voyages and could encourage the distribution of printed material. Northern Europe also played a pivotal role in distributing both Vespucci and Columbus' letters. Parisian printers issued several editions of Columbus' letters and was the first city, in 1503, to issue a copy of Vespucci's *Mundus Novus*. The origins of this letter are unclear, although it is probably a corrupted derivation of a Vespucci original, perhaps obtained from merchants or carried by French armies returning from Italy, where they had control of Florence.<sup>507</sup> The title, which radically altered European perceptions of the newly discovered territories, possibly derived from a letter of Columbus to Isabel and Ferdinand, written in 1498, in which he stated '...and that here there is another world' (*y que esta de acá es otro mundo*).<sup>508</sup> From Paris, the letter spread rapidly across Europe, becoming a true bestseller.<sup>509</sup>

Patronage networks were also essential for printing. Printed texts could readily reach rulers, both by being dedicated to them and because, just as the mercantile élite was restricted and

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<sup>502</sup> Sprenger, 'Merfart'.

<sup>503</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 120–35.

<sup>504</sup> For the debate surrounding the authenticity of Vespucci's letters, both printed and manuscript, see Angel Delgado Gómez, 'The Earliest European Views of the New World Natives', in *Early Images of the Americas. Transfer and Invention*, ed. Jerry M. Williams and Robert E. Lewis (Tuscon, 1993), 3–20; for their sensationalism, see David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (London, 2008), 143.

<sup>505</sup> Elizabeth Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America: Geographic Imagination in the Age of Encounters* (Cambridge, 2018), *passim*.

<sup>506</sup> Pieper, 'Between India and the Indies'.

<sup>507</sup> Pieper, 5–6; Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 120–26.

<sup>508</sup> Christopher Columbus, *Textos y Documentos Completos: Relaciones de Viajes, Cartas y Memoriales*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid, 1982), 207; For the debate around what Columbus meant by this, see Iliaria Luzzana Caraci, 'Columbus' "Otro Mundo": The Genesis of a Geographical Concept', *Renaissance Studies* 6, no. 3/4 (1992): 336–51.

<sup>509</sup> Pieper, 'Between India and the Indies', 6–7.



tight knit, so was the number of highly skilled printers and engravers, with heavy overlap between the two groups. Balthasar Sprenger's *Merfart* was dedicated to Maximilian and included woodprints by Hans Burgkmair the Elder, who was also responsible for Maximilian's *Theuerdank*.<sup>510</sup> In Lorraine, Ringmann and Waldseemüller operated under the patronage of the duke.



*Theuerdank*

Vespucci took advantage, and the Dominican friar and supporter of Columbus, Las Casas, wrote that Vespucci 'secured authority and fame by dedicating his Navigations to King René of Naples [René II of Lorraine]'.<sup>511</sup> More accurately, it was the work of the *Gymnasium Vosganese* (*Gymnase vosgien*) at Saint-Dié – the humanist-cartographical circle that included Martin Waldseemüller and Matthias Ringmann – which made Vespucci's texts so influential. René founded the Gymnasium with the explicit purpose of writing and printing cartographic and geographic texts, making him the ideal recipient of Vespucci's letter: not only was his interest in such topics confirmed, he was sure to pass on new information to the Gymnasium.<sup>512</sup> Unusually, the Saint-Dié circle also had access to Vespucci's letter to Soderini; Vespucci, it seems, sent a copy to René, simply changing the dedication. If so, this was possibly facilitated by Florentine and German humanists such as Zanobi Acciaiuoli and Johann Reuchlin (who had visited Florence), potentially at René's initiative.<sup>513</sup> Waldseemüller and the *Gymnasium* played

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<sup>510</sup> Jean Michel Massing, 'Hans Burgkmair's Depiction of Native Africans', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 27 (1995): 39–51.

<sup>511</sup> Las Casas, 'Chapters from Las Casas, Which Discuss the Statements of Vespucci', 69.

<sup>512</sup> There is almost no scholarship on René II. Studies of the Gymnasium, its members, and its output rarely mention any more than that he was the patron and founder; a few works note that he also supplied a copy of the 'Soderini' letter.

<sup>513</sup> Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World: The Life and Times of Amerigo Vespucci*, 83–85, 291–93.

a crucial role in making Vespucci's letters the definitive source upon the New World – as it was now called.

Among the first copies of Vespucci's letters to be printed in the Empire were those issued in Strasbourg by Matthias Hupfuff, with Matthias Ringmann as editor and translator of the second edition.<sup>514</sup> In 1507, Ringmann and Waldseemüller published the *Cosmographiae Introductio*, a work meant to serve as an update on Ptolemy's *Geographia*, with accompanying maps and gores.<sup>515</sup> It was this work, probably more than any other, that secured Vespucci's position as an authority on what was now to be called America. Vespucci's 'Mundus Novus' and 'Soderini' letters were included in Ringmann's book, which, moreover, used his writings as its most important modern source. Waldseemüller likewise drew heavily upon Vespucci for textual information, writing that 'we have therefore arranged matters so that in the plane projection we have followed Ptolemy... while on the globe... we have followed the description of Amerigo'.<sup>516</sup> Vespucci was treated on a par, therefore, with the premier geographer of the classical age. Waldseemüller consequently added Vespucci's name to the newly discovered islands, which he rendered – following Vespucci – as a separate continent.<sup>517</sup> In this way, printers played an extremely influential role in shaping European perceptions of the Americas – and Asia – by interpreting and reshaping texts for their own purposes.

Las Casas consequently complained that 'all the foreigners who write of these Indies in Latin, or in their own mother-tongue, or who make charts or maps, call the continent America, as having been first discovered by Americo'.<sup>518</sup> Rather than using the letters of Columbus, whom Las Casas supported, or the official accounts of the Spanish and Portuguese writers (many as yet unwritten), Vespucci's account, first published in 1502 across several countries, dominated the press and, consequently, European interpretations of events. Columbus' letters, which were

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<sup>514</sup> Amerigo Vespucci, *Von Den Nüwen Insulen und Landen so Yetz Kürtzlichen Erfunden Synt Durch Den Künig von Portugall* (Strasbourg, 1505); Vespucci, *De Ora Antarctica per Regem Portugallie Pridem Inventa*; Amerigo Vespucci, *Von Den Nüwen Insulen und Landen so Yetz Kürtzlichen Erfunden Synt Durch Den Künig von Portugall* (Strasbourg, 1506).

<sup>515</sup> Lehmann, *Die Cosmographiae Introductio Matthias Ringmanns und Die Weltkarte Martin Waldseemüllers Aus Dem Jahr 1507. Ein Meilenstein Frühneuzeitlicher Kartographie*.

<sup>516</sup> Martin Waldseemüller, 'Extract from Martin Waldseemüller's *Cosmographiae Introductio*', in *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci's Discovery of America*, ed. Luciano Formisano, trans. David Jacobson (New York, 1992), 123.

<sup>517</sup> Seymour I. Schwartz, *Putting 'America' on the Map: The Story of the Most Important Graphic Document in the History of the United States* (Buffalo, 2007), *passim*.

<sup>518</sup> Las Casas, 'Chapters from Las Casas, Which Discuss the Statements of Vespucci', 69.

mostly distributed in manuscript form through channels heavily managed by the Spanish crown, and in order to glorify the crown rather than him, had less success.<sup>519</sup>

Vespucci's letters were not unique in being altered by printers, who routinely 'improved' texts for the market by simplifying them, reducing commercial details (in the case of commercial letters) and increasing their entertainment value.<sup>520</sup> The printed edition of Balthasar Sprenger's *Merfart* was translated from Latin into German, and the first version was heavily abridged so that the text served only to explain Hans Burgkmair's woodcuts; the full text was included in a second edition.<sup>521</sup> The images are primarily of native peoples of Africa and India, showing their dress (or lack thereof) and weapons, plus a baobab tree and a procession of the king of Cochin. They thus fell into the category of 'curiosity literature', emphasising the strange customs of foreign peoples, and lacked the detailed description of battles and political activities which are the main focus of Sprenger's original text. Sprenger's role in reshaping his text to appeal to an audience interested in exotic tales rather than trading details is unclear. Vespucci, in contrast, unquestionably participated in livening his texts with lurid descriptions of Native American promiscuity, cannibalism, and other European stereotypes, drawing upon the medieval tradition that he encountered in Marco Polo and Mandeville.<sup>522</sup>

Other printed texts discussing the Americas and Asia were likewise generally intended to provide entertainment value as much as information. A 1522 *Zeitung*, for example, was described as beautiful (*Schöne*) and diverting (*kurtzweylich*).<sup>523</sup> The consistent use of such language indicates that the audience for *Zeitungen* consisted of armchair travellers reading for curiosity rather than deeper engagement.<sup>524</sup> The audience for *Zeitungen* (and *avvisi*) was largely restricted to an élite of scholars, princes, upper clergymen, and wealthy merchants; they were not aimed at a popular audience lacking humanist education. Those who wished for more information and interpretation could turn to more 'serious' texts such as books and letters.

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<sup>519</sup> Pieper, 'Between India and the Indies', 5; see also Renate Pieper, 'News from the New World: Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century', in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden, 2016), 495–511.

<sup>520</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 99.

<sup>521</sup> Sprenger, 'Merfart'.

<sup>522</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 100–103.

<sup>523</sup> *Ein Schoene Neue Zeytung so Kayserlich Mayestet Ausz India Yetz Nemlich Zukommen Seind. Gar Hüpsch vo 'Den Newen Ynseln, Vnd von Yrem Sytten Gar Kurtzweylich Zülesen* (Augsburg, 1522).

<sup>524</sup> See Appendix Three for more examples.

Although extremely useful for rulers, merchants' command of news and news networks, and especially their desire to circulate information about the overseas, could also create problems. Their influence over information was not only extensive but escaped much of the regulation imposed upon writers of *avvisi* and pamphlets (pp.118-19). The great success of Vespucci's letters resulted partly from them being distributed through print and from places dominated by merchant as well as court networks. The Spanish court had enormous influence over but did not manage to fully control the information in and distribution of handwritten newsletters concerning the Americas.<sup>525</sup> Unlike Spanish and Portuguese printers, Venetian, Florentine, and other Italian printers did not have the same incentive – or pressure – to promote official versions of information such as the letters of the Iberian kings. Foreign rulers, likewise, sought out all sources of news, seeking to compare different versions. Consequently, despite receiving a letter from Manuel I sent via the orator Domenico Pisani, the Venetian Senate sent various agents to Portugal to collect news and eagerly accepted letters sent by merchants who were resident in Lisbon, such as Affaitati.<sup>526</sup>

With the advent of overseas expansion, the Portuguese and Spanish rulers sought to maintain their monopoly over trade to Asia and the Americas by controlling the dispersal of information about navigational routes.<sup>527</sup> Maps that showed sailing routes were heavily restricted, and a Venetian secretary, Angelo Trevisan, who was in Portugal to gather information about the Cape Route, noted that 'it is impossible to procure the map [*carta*] of that voyage because the king has placed a death penalty on anyone who gives it out'.<sup>528</sup> The Florentine merchant Guido di Tommaso Detti, writing from Lisbon about da Gama's return, stated that 'the king of Portugal has had confiscated all of their navigational charts on pain of death and confiscation of their goods... so that we do not know their way or the way to go in these areas, and to prevent other people from interfering'. Detti followed this with the opinion that any such attempt at

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<sup>525</sup> Pieper, 'Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century', 507; Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 27.

<sup>526</sup> Domenico Pisani, 'From Spain, from Sier Domenego Pixani, the Cavalier, Our Orator', in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 138–41; Affaitati, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

<sup>527</sup> For the argument that the Portuguese suppressed all information, see Jaime Cortesão, 'Do Sigilo Nacional Sobre Os Descobrimientos. Crônicas Desaparecidas, Mutiladas e Falseadas; Alguns Dos Feitos Que Se Calaram', *Lusitania* 1 (1924): 45–81; for a summary of the resulting debate, see Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo'; for earlier Italian attempts at censorship, see Luciana Frangioni, *Organizzazione e Costi Del Servizio Postale Alla Fine Del Trecento: Un Contributo Dell'Archivio Datini Di Prato (Quaderni Di Storia Postale)* (Prato, 1983), 125.

<sup>528</sup> Trevisan, *Lettere Sul Nuovo Mondo, Granada 1501*; translated in Trevisan, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'; see also the letter of Cretico, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

ensorship was ultimately unsustainable: ‘But I believe that, whatever he does, everything will be known’ (*Questo re à fatto torre tutte le charte da navichare sotto pena de la vita e chonfischazione de’ loro beni, coè ttutte quelle che danno lume di questa chosta, perché non si sappi quella gita, overo l’andare a chamino per quelle bande, accò non vi si meta altra gente. Chredo potrà ben fare ma tuto s’à a sapere*).<sup>529</sup>

Consequently, the earliest surviving maps, both manuscript and printed, to show the Portuguese discoveries survived not in Portugal but in Italy: the 1502 Cantino Map, smuggled out by an agent of Ercole d’Este, and the printed Contarini-Rosselli map of 1506.<sup>530</sup> The earliest surviving books on the new voyages were also published in Italy, and especially Venice, which was a leading area of printing, especially of cartographic material, and rapidly developed an interest in Americana and literature on Asia.<sup>531</sup> The *Paesi Novamente Retrovati* was published from a collection of sources, almost all Italian, in 1507.<sup>532</sup> In the same year, part of Peter Martyr d’Anghiera’s *Decades* were published in Venice without his permission, for which he blamed the Venetian explorer Alvise da Ca’ da Mosto: ‘Cadamosto borrowed and plagiarised whatever he wrote, from the first three books of my first three Decades... he evidently thought that my works would never be given to the public’.<sup>533</sup> Venetians, beyond the reach of Spanish and Portuguese censorship (although not the Spanish court’s influence upon the flow of handwritten information, next page), and benefitting from undermining the Spanish and Portuguese monopoly on news of the New World and Asia, were eager to seek out and publish concealed information. That they routinely did so – Cadamosto, if he was the culprit, was in company with Trevisan, da Ca’ Masser and il Cretico – could only seem to confirm the established stereotype of merchants as morally suspect.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Detti, ‘Copy of a Third of a Letter from Lisbon from Guido Di Messer Tomaso Detti of the 10th Day of August 1499, of This Same, Which Comes to Verify Everything’, fol. 70v; published in Carmen Radulet, *La Primo Circumnavigazione Dell’Africa 1497-1499* (Reggio Emilia, 1995), 195–96.

<sup>530</sup> The purchase of the map is discussed in Alberto Cantino, ‘Letter to Ercole d’Este (19 November 1502)’, in *Italian Reports on America, 1493-1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, ed. Geoffrey Symcox, vol. 12, *Repertorium Columbianum* (Turnhout, 2002), 60–61; Norman J. W. Thrower, *Maps and Civilization: Cartography in Culture and Society, Third Edition* (Chicago, 2008), 70.

<sup>531</sup> Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America*, 89–142; for the Italian interest in maps, see Genevieve Carlton, *Worldly Consumers: The Demand for Maps in Renaissance Italy* (2015), especially 109–17.

<sup>532</sup> Fracanzio da Montalboddo, ed., *Paesi Novamente Retrovati, et Novo Mondo Da Alberico Vesputio Florentino Intitulato* (Vicenza, 1507).

<sup>533</sup> Peter Martyr d’Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr d’Anghera*, ed. Francis Augustus MacNutt, vol. 1 (London and New York, 1912), 249.

<sup>534</sup> For attitudes towards merchants, see Davis, *Medieval Market Morality* and Chapter One.



*Cantino Planisphere*

In Spain, too, the government sought to control information to portray its empire in a powerful light. The majority of handwritten newsletters addressing the Americas originated in Spain or were derived from Spanish originals, giving the Spanish court significant influence over the information that the newsletters contained.<sup>535</sup> Consequently, in later decades newsletters first depicted the Armada as a Spanish victory, and it was not for several months that the truth was revealed.<sup>536</sup>

Merchant correspondence could provide alternative, and sometimes more accurate, information than official or regulated sources. Several merchants in the Iberian Peninsula sent news of overseas voyages to Venice, whose previous control of the spice trade made them potential enemies of the Spanish and Portuguese. From Lisbon, Giovanni Francesco Affaitati sent letters to Domenico Pisani in 1501 and Piero Pasqualigo, the Venetian ambassador to Spain, in 1502 and 1503.<sup>537</sup> In 1503, a partner of Bartolomeo Marchionni, Cesare Barzi, sent a letter to Pasqualigo from Valencia, apparently with Marchionni's knowledge: 'I am sending you your letters from Lisbon, for which you must be advised extensively of the things of Calicut: to satisfy my debt, and by order of our *messer* Bartolomeo Marchionni, I will tell you no more' (*Io vi mando doi vostre lettere da Lisbona, per le qual doverete esser advisato molto largamente de le cosse de Colocut: pur per satisfar al debito mio, et per ordinamento dil nostro missier Bartholamio Marchioni, ve ne dirò alcuna cossa*).<sup>538</sup> Cortesão even suggested that

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<sup>535</sup> Pieper, 'Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century', especially 502-8.

<sup>536</sup> Pieper, 502-3.

<sup>537</sup> Affaitati, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'; Affaitati, 'Copia de Una Letera, Scrita Di Lisbona, Dil Viazo Di Le Caravele in La India (26 September 1502)'; Giovanni Francesco Affaitati, 'Copia Di Lettere Di Zuan Francesco Di l' Afaitada, Data a Lisbona a Di 19 Avosto [1503], Scrita a l' Orator Nostro è in Spagna, Sier Piero Pasqualigo Dotor', in *I Diarii Di Marino Sanuto*, by Marino Sanudo, ed. Niccolò Barozzi, vol. V (Venice, 1881), 129-30.

<sup>538</sup> Barzi, 'Copia de Una Lettera Di Valenza al Ditto Orator Nostro, Di 5 Septembrio 1503'.

Marchionni was, simultaneously using his network not only to circumvent censorship, but to assist it.<sup>539</sup> The Venetian Leonardo Massari, or da Ca' Masser, who was sent by the Senate to Portugal to obtain information on the India fleets and their cargoes, was arrested almost immediately upon arriving in Lisbon, which he blamed upon a certain Benetto Tondo, nephew of Marchionni, who had extensive information concerning the activities of the Venetian Senate.<sup>540</sup> If true, Marchionni was using his network to send news to Venice even as he aided the king of Portugal in censoring information, thereby gaining the favour of both governments.

Consequently, rulers had good reason to be suspicious of foreign merchants and their intentions concerning information about the Americas and Asia. In the mid-sixteenth century, German merchants also came under suspicion owing to the Valois-Habsburg conflict and the rise of Protestantism. Even those Germans who had long been in Spain, such as Jacob Cromberger, maintained links with other Germans and northern Europeans. Jacob Cromberger, who had been in Spain since the 1490s, printed translations of Erasmus in 1520 and thus played a central role in spreading Erasmus' ideas, and those of other reformers, in Spain.<sup>541</sup> Merchants and printers brought in intellectual ideas as well as trade goods through channels largely outside the reach of authorities. Erasmus' texts were proscribed by 1560, long after Cromberger's death.<sup>542</sup> So too was the Spanish explorer Enciso's *Suma de Geografía*, thought to be too revealing of delicate information, and which Cromberger had also published<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Jaime Cortesão, *A expedição de Pedro Alvares Cabral e o descobrimento do Brazil* (Lisbon, 1994), 76–77.

<sup>540</sup> Leonardo Loredan, 'Commissione a Leonardo Da Ca' Masser (3 July 1504)', in *Archivio Veneto*, vol. 2 (Venice, 1871), 203–5; quoted in Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 15–16.

<sup>541</sup> Griffin, *The Crombergers of Seville*, 152; Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 131.

<sup>542</sup> Griffin, *The Crombergers of Seville*, 152; Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y España, estudios sobre la historia espiritual del siglo XVI* (Mexico and Buenos Aires, 1950), 131–32.

<sup>543</sup> Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 135.



Frontispiece, *Suma de Geographia*

In consequence, merchant letters were not infrequently monitored. In 1552, Sixt Tucher reported from Lyon that letters were being detained and even opened, and worried that his father might not have received his letters and accounts. This monitoring was clearly political in nature, as Tucher noted in the same letter that the route from Aragon to France was still blocked, but that, according to the man from Zollikofer, Philip II had already granted privileges to Castilian merchants for the transfer of goods.<sup>544</sup> Two years later, Gabriel Tucher wrote from Saragossa to Nuremberg counselling that, following the seizure of an earlier letter, they should keep silent for the time being.<sup>545</sup>

The prominent place of merchants in the creation and dissemination of news, therefore, gave them significant influence over it. In return for supplying news, merchants sought to form or

<sup>544</sup> Sixtus Tucher, 'Brief Sixt Tuchers Aus Lyon an Seinen Vater Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg' (January 1552), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 544, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>545</sup> Tucher, 'Brief Des Gabriel Tucher Aus Saragossa an Seinen Vater Linhart in Nürnberg'.



strengthen their relationships with rulers. However, the differing attitudes towards news held by rulers, who wished to control information, and merchants, who wished to disperse it for the right price, caused potential conflicts when the Portuguese and Spanish crowns sought to limit knowledge of the routes to Asia and the Americas. As religious tensions grew within Europe and as conflict broke out between the emerging nation-states, the ability of merchants to communicate and even travel freely across borders came under threat.

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Therefore, the great interest that rulers expressed in mercantile correspondence for political security and status gave merchants the opportunity to form relationships with rulers in exchange for the supply of news. Those rulers with mercantile connections were best placed to obtain news and information about overseas that they could then use for political power and as status symbols. Merchants, in turn, could use this to their own advantage. Merchants could exploit the superiority of their news networks, including their close connection to the press, and of their correspondence itself to gain royal favour and support, rendering their texts as collectible items worthy of humanist libraries, and themselves as learned travellers worthy of humanist patronage. The desire of merchants to circulate information and their access to news about the overseas, however, caused potential conflicts with the Portuguese and Spanish rulers, who sought to censor such information.

## Chapter Five:

### Merchant Attitudes to and Interest in the Americas and Asia

In their response to the New World and to direct engagement with Asia, the great companies were very different from most Europeans. They almost immediately became involved (Italians in Lisbon immediately, Germans from 1506 when they were permitted entry) and fully understood the commercial significance of the discovery.

Extensive research has been done upon the role of merchants collectively and individually in the discoveries as funders and active participants, while letters, including those of merchants, are acknowledged as an important source for early European exploration.<sup>546</sup> However, there has been very little research upon the specifically mercantile response to the New World and Asia. The conclusions drawn by scholars examining the European conceptualisation of the Americas and Asia do not fully apply to merchants, whose focus was upon identifying and exploiting the trading opportunities newly available to them. By approaching the New World and Asia as places with which to trade and from which to extract resources, they held different perspectives from the Portuguese and Spanish administration, and also differed from the popular emphasis upon the strange and marvellous and the intellectual debates surrounding the confirmation or denial of established European beliefs about the wider world. As their interests in commercial information set them apart from those focused upon conquest, so were their letters distinct in content and tone. By examining merchant letters from across western Europe, the heterogeneity of European responses to the New World and Asia can be more clearly revealed.

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In a landmark work on European responses to the Americas, Elliott argued that there was a slow dispersal of awareness about and interest in the New World in sixteenth century Europe; that the great excitement caused by Columbus' return in 1493 and Vespucci's announcement

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<sup>546</sup> Rau, 'Francesco Corbinelli'; Melis, *Mercaderes Italianos En España*; Radulet, 'Girolamo Sernigi e a Importancia Economica Do Oriente'; Marco Spallanzani, *Giovanni Da Empoli, Mercante Navigazione Fiorentino* (Florence, 1984); Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*; Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni and the Trade in African Slaves in the Mediterranean World at the End of the Fifteenth Century'; Gustavo Uzielli, 'Piero Di Andrea Strozzi: Viaggiatore Fiorentino Del Secolo Delle Scoperte', in *Memorie Della Società Geografica Italiana*, vol. 5 (Rome, 1895); Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America, 1493-1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, Repertorium Columbianum, vol. 12 (Turnhout, 2002); Greenlee, *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India*; Alvaro Velho and Joao de Sá, eds., *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499* (London, 1898).

that the islands were a New World was followed by a sharp decline in interest in the Americas that persisted for several decades.<sup>547</sup> In a slightly earlier article, Scammell, similarly, held that the discovery of the Americas had a limited effect upon European society and beliefs.<sup>548</sup>

Later scholars have argued that Elliott's case has been overstated.<sup>549</sup> Among other examples, the Italian *Paesi novamente ritrovati* was translated into German and published in Nuremberg a year afterwards, with a second, expanded issue published in 1534. Nonetheless, interest in the Americas remained low, as it did for Asia.<sup>550</sup> Access to physical items from those areas was also severely limited. (It ought to be pointed out, moreover, that Vicenza – in the Veneto – and Nuremberg were centres of commerce as well as print.) However, it has generally been accepted that the reaction to the European discovery of the New World was limited for many decades among the wider public and that humanist and other intellectual circles took many decades to acculturate the concept of the New World as new. Ryan, among others, argued that that it was not the discovery, but the idea of novelty *per se*, that took time to be processed, while Anthony Pagden similarly focused upon acculturation from encounter to possession of the New World.<sup>551</sup>

As was shown in previous chapters, the great merchant companies of Europe, most of whom took advantage of the new opportunities almost immediately, were in many ways a striking exception to these scholars' ideas about Europeans' slow engagement. They are, moreover, a somewhat overlooked one. Their unusual level of interest and engagement has been addressed in studies of merchants in the Iberian Peninsula and of what might be termed 'reaction literature', those letters that respond to Columbus' early voyages and the arrivals of other ships in Lisbon and Seville (and Antwerp) in the following few decades.<sup>552</sup> However, there has yet to be a specific study of the mercantile response to the two great European discoveries of the 1490s, and studies have focused upon humanists, to whom merchants were closely connected and with whom they engaged in information exchange, but from whom they had different motives and perspectives.

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<sup>547</sup> Elliott, *The Old World and the New*.

<sup>548</sup> G. V. Scammell, 'The New Worlds and Europe in the Sixteenth Century', *The Historical Journal* 12, no. 3 (September 1969): 389–412.

<sup>549</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 19–20.

<sup>550</sup> Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. Volume I: The Century of Discovery. (Cambridge, 1965), xii.

<sup>551</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 3.

<sup>552</sup> For studies that note the unusual rate of attention that merchants gave, see, among others, Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo'.

Other studies argue that the European responses to the Americas were primarily concerned with Europe's understanding of itself.<sup>553</sup> Among the most prominent scholars, Greenblatt explored Europe's 'colonisation of the marvellous', while Anthony Grafton has demonstrated how Europeans interpreted the New World by comparison to antiquity and by drawing upon ancient texts.<sup>554</sup> Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions*, one of the most important works in the field, gives no particular consideration to merchants in its analysis.<sup>555</sup> His examination of gift exchange focuses upon how European used the Native Americans' exchange of gold, pearls, and other precious items for European 'trinkets' to assert European superiority.

Many studies of merchants in the earliest decades of European overseas expansion have been written, but few of these engage with the above literature. In Alessandrini's analysis of Giovanni da Empoli's depiction of the Far East, she argues, drawing upon Said's theories, that his letters show the growth of European knowledge about Asia, moving from an entirely commercial focus to discussing the various societies and how they differed from those of Europe.<sup>556</sup> Johnson's study of Klein-Venedig and the 'El Dorado' mentality has shown how the opening of direct trade with the Americas to foreign investors and the discovery of Peru in the mid-1520s, which launched a new wave of foreign – especially German – interest in overseas trade, was accompanied by changing attitudes towards overseas in mercantile correspondence.<sup>557</sup>

The debates surrounding the European response to Asia and the New World do not focus upon merchants partly because they took a very different view from other Europeans. Their materialist, commercial approach concerned itself less with the existence of cannibals and more with depicting trade in India, say, in terms that European merchants could understand. In this way, the debates are not entirely useful for the study of merchants and are not used in this thesis as the primary way of approaching early modern traders.

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<sup>553</sup> Sabine MacCormack, 'Limits of Understanding: Perceptions of Greco-Roman and Amerindian Paganism in Early Modern Europe', in *America in European Consciousness 1493-1750*, ed. K. Kupperman (Chapel Hill, 1995), 79-129; Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1986); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993); Peter Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic* (Baltimore, 1998); Carina L. Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy in Sixteenth-Century Europe: The Ottomans and Mexicans* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>554</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*; Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

<sup>555</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 12.

<sup>556</sup> Alessandrini, 'The Far East in the Early 16th Century: Giovanni Da Empoli's Travels', 215.

<sup>557</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 119–21.

As the above paragraphs have indicated, studies of European reactions to the discovery of the Americas, and the methods used therein, have generally been separated from studies of their encounters with Asia. Even works on merchants trading to both areas sometimes fail to present their activities in the Asian and trans-Atlantic trade as linked even though, at the start, Europeans assumed that the New World was somehow part of Asia, hence their continued use of ‘Indies’ for both areas.<sup>558</sup> Studies of America consider how the New World had to be fit into existing European ideas of the world (or not), whilst studies of Asia look at how Europeans compared what they encountered to ancient texts, frequently confirming rather than denying established beliefs such as Prester John. Not only would a comparison between the two regions be of great interest, but merchants were active in both, although they were far more interested, at least at first, in Asia.

Merchant letters examined both specific interactions and global perspectives and both Asia and the Americas might be mentioned in the same letter, as Giovanni da Empoli and Filippo Contarini, among others, did.<sup>559</sup> Marchionni’s letter discussing Cabral’s voyage mentions (American) parrots alongside (Asian) spices but did not distinguish between the two ‘Indies’.<sup>560</sup> Almost certainly, he would have believed that the two areas were one and the same: Vespucci’s *Mundus Novus* letter (1503) had yet to be published, and merchants, like other Europeans, were slow to accept Vespucci’s findings.<sup>561</sup> The difference was also somewhat moot. Merchants embarked upon extra-European trade for the purposes of obtaining the commodities in which they already traded within Europe at the source, thereby circumventing the elevated prices imposed by middlemen (p.49). As long as they found the source of exotic commodities, or at least a significantly cheaper supply, the exact location – and its cartographical and intellectual ramifications – was quite possibly not of great concern. Many of these commodities, moreover, were found in both Asia and the Americas. Vespucci’s original interest in the Americas – then still believed to be a previously unknown part of Asia – was as a source of pearls, which he reported bringing back in his first letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco.<sup>562</sup> In general, merchants

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<sup>558</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 122.

<sup>559</sup> da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)’; Filippo Contarini, ‘Letter to Sier Vctor Querini (4 September 1501)’, in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 140–41.

<sup>560</sup> Marchionni, ‘Letter to Florence (27 June 1501)’, 149.

<sup>561</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 3.

<sup>562</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*; Vespucci, ‘Letter I to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici’, 10, 16.

were interested in obtaining known commodities – with established European markets – rather than new ones, which limited their initial interest in the Americas.

Other merchants also confused the two Indies and obviously had a limited understanding of the routes taken by voyagers. Girolamo Sernigi, for example, writing in July 1499 on da Gama's first voyage, mistook the Laccadive Islands for the West Indies: 'The mariners of that part [Calicut], namely the Moors... when they cross the gulf [the Indian Ocean] to that side, so they [the Portuguese] were told by the pilot, they leave a thousand or more islands [the Laccadive Islands] to the right... I am inclined to think that they be those which were discovered by the King of Castile'.<sup>563</sup> His confusion was exacerbated because, like Columbus, and Europeans generally until the release of Vespucci's *Mundus Novus*, merchants writing in the 1490s would have believed that the Americas were part of Asia. In 1503, one year before the first printing of Vespucci's letters, Empoli wrote that 'the Antilles of the King of Castile, and also the land of Corte Reale [Newfoundland, Labrador, and Greenland], is presumed and judged to be all one with the land of Malacca'.<sup>564</sup> That someone who had visited both the East and West Indies continued to confuse them shows how revelatory Vespucci's announcement would have been.

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The unique interests of merchants gave their letters distinguishing characteristics. Compared with other correspondence, merchant letters were shorter, more practical, and placed more emphasis upon quickly supplying accurate and detailed information. They were not without the immediate excitement at the new opportunities available shown by many European writers. A Florentine in Lisbon, Guido di messer Tommaso Detti, wrote upon da Gama's return in 1499 that 'this is a beautiful discovery, and the King of Portugal deserves great congratulations from all Christians'.<sup>565</sup>

The Tuscan merchant Simone dal Verde, based at the Spanish court in Valladolid, reported back to Italy that the success of Columbus' voyage had been somewhat exaggerated, commenting that the 'cinnamon' that he brought back was probably fake, and that the 'wool' (actually cotton) was not as good as the Spanish were reporting: 'if it were to have any use at

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<sup>563</sup> Sernigi, 'First Letter to a Gentleman in Florence', 134.

<sup>564</sup> da Empoli, 'Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)', 209.

<sup>565</sup> Detti, 'Copy of a Third of a Letter from Lisbon from Guido Di Messer Tomaso Detti of the 10th Day of August 1499, of This Same, Which Comes to Verify Everything', fol. 69v.

all, it would be for mattresses'.<sup>566</sup> This reflected his emphasis elsewhere upon exact measurements, such as his description of the parrots which Columbus had brought back: 'I measured one of them and found it to be from head to tail, that is, to the end of the tail, one *braccio* [arm's length] and a quarter long, or thereabouts'.<sup>567</sup> (Bartolomeo Marchionni, speaking of the return of Cabral's voyage, also reported that 'they brought back two parrots of different colours which are an arm and a half long', and likewise il Cretico Querini, the Venetian agent, wrote that 'towards the west they have discovered a new land. They call it that of the parrots [*papaga*], because some are found there which are an arm and a half in length, of various colours. We saw two of these'.<sup>568</sup>) Dal Verde continued: 'I will tell you what I learned from them, not without fear of writing uncertain things. So as not to err or place myself at risk of telling lies, I will tell that part of what I heard which seems likely to me'.<sup>569</sup> When he was uncertain, he indicated as much with repeated use of the word 'approximately'.<sup>570</sup>

Merchants' emphasis upon exact details meant that their accounts differed greatly from the more sensationalist tones of the early handwritten and printed newsletters, which generally focused upon gold (pp. 131, 142).<sup>571</sup> In July 1499, Girolamo Sernigi wrote that 'Chalicut' was 'inhabited by Christians'.<sup>572</sup> This was the belief of da Gama as reported, among others, by Guido di messer Tommaso Detti and by the anonymous chronicler of da Gama's first voyage, who wrote that 'When we arrived [at Calecut] they took us to a large [Christian] church... Within this sanctuary stood a small image which they said represented Our Lady'.<sup>573</sup> In his second letter Sernigi corrected this, having spoken to more people including Gaspar da Gama, who 'says that in those countries there are many gentiles, that is idolaters, and only a few Christians; that the supposed churches and belfries are in reality temples of idolaters, and that the pictures within them are those of idols and not of Saints'. Like other merchants, he sought out multiple sources to prevent spreading false information and was willing to repudiate

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<sup>566</sup> dal Verde, 'Letter to Piero Niccoli (20 March 1493)', 33.

<sup>567</sup> dal Verde, 31–34.

<sup>568</sup> Marchionni, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India', 149; Cretico, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India', 120.

<sup>569</sup> dal Verde, 'Letter to Piero Niccoli (20 March 1493)', 31–34.

<sup>570</sup> dal Verde, 32.

<sup>571</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 16.

<sup>572</sup> Sernigi, 'First Letter to a Gentleman in Florence'; Sernigi, 'First Letter (10 July 1499)'.  
<sup>573</sup> Detti, 'Copy of a Third of a Letter from Lisbon from Guido Di Messer Tomaso Detti of the 10th Day of August 1499, of This Same, Which Comes to Verify Everything', fol. 69v; Anonymous, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (Cambridge, 2010), 52–53.

previous beliefs when presented with new data. He continued to mention Prester John, whose existence had yet to be disproved (or even questioned).<sup>574</sup>

A German example of the practical focus of merchant letters is shown by a passage of Lazarus Nürnberger's letter, where he states, 'This island has a town called Kilwa, which is said to be 6 miles in circumference, with very beautiful houses built of stone. The inhabitants are Moors and good friends of the Portuguese, who trade in copper and other commodities.' (*Dise insel hat ain stade heyst kylüa, sagen sey 6 meyl grosz in die ründe und hat ser schone hawser von stain gebawt und dasz volck ist moren sein gut freundt der portugaleser und die portugaleser handtiren dar hin mit küpffer und ander kawfmanschafft*)<sup>575</sup> Nürnberger, that is, highlights the information of greatest interest to merchants: important cities, their size, the ethno-religious status and political allegiance of their residents, and their commerce. The reference to copper would have been of particular importance to the Augsburg and Nuremberg merchants who controlled its supply.

The information that merchants supplied about overseas lands focused upon the same categories of information that they provided about trading centres in Europe. In the letter mentioned on the previous page, Girolamo Sernigi described Calicut by discussing similar categories to those outlined by Nürnberger: its merchants – mostly Moors – and their relationship with the ruler; the types of spices and other merchandise to be found there, their selling prices, and the places from which they had been brought; the currency; and the ships.<sup>576</sup>

That merchants rendered overseas in the same way as they described European cities is made clear in the Paumgartner *Welthandelsbräuche*, the first known handbooks of world trade customs.<sup>577</sup> The Paumgartner were among those High German companies who participated directly in overseas voyages: a Fugger-Paumgartner-Herwart-Gossembrot syndicate supplied copper to Portugal from 1498, and the Paumgartner were also investors in Loaísa's 1525 expedition to the Spice Islands on behalf of Spain.<sup>578</sup> More recent scholarship has attributed the documents to Fugger factors (parts 1 and 3) and a Fugger or Nuremberg Welser factor (part

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<sup>574</sup> Girolamo Sernigi, 'Second Letter to a Gentleman in Florence', in *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (Cambridge, 2010), 137–40; Girolamo Sernigi, 'Second Letter', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti (Florence, 2006).

<sup>575</sup> Nürnberger, *Le Voyage de Lazarus Nürnberger En Inde (1517-1518)*, 65.

<sup>576</sup> Sernigi, 'First Letter to a Gentleman in Florence'; Sernigi, 'First Letter (10 July 1499)'.

<sup>577</sup> Karl Otto Müller, ed., *Welthandelsbräuche*, 5 vols (Stuttgart, 1934).

<sup>578</sup> Hermann Kellenbenz, 'Os Mercadores Alemães de Lisboa Por Volta de 1530', *Revista Portuguesa de Histori* 9 (1961): 9; Ehrenberg, *Das Zeitalter Der Fugger*, 1: 395.



2).<sup>579</sup> If true, the origin of these texts in other companies fits the trading partnerships between these companies and merchants' preference for circulating rather than hoarding information (pp.73-5).

In three parts, the handbooks record the commercial customs of southern Germany, Italy, Austria, and Hungary in 1484-94; the trade customs and commodities of Africa and Portuguese East India, in 1503; and calculations for the cost of saffron and spice purchases in Abruzzo and Venice in 1497-1502.<sup>580</sup> For each area, the handbooks follow the established layout of merchant manuals: it listed weights and measures, currency conversions, trade items, and taxes. It recorded that the king of Spain obtained 140 000 ducats from the 'fifth penny' (that is, a twenty per cent tax) from 'the Islands' (in the Atlantic) and had from 'Aragon and the Indies [a] yearly income of 126 000 ducats'.<sup>581</sup>

Through their emphasis upon precise, comparable details, Asia and the Americas were depicted in relatable terms. Although they discussed the strange customs and peoples of lands overseas (pp.131-32), merchants' commercial emphasis meant that their letters brought descriptions of overseas in line with discussions of European markets.

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The primary interest of all mercantile letters was unquestionably commercial. No matter their humanist education, merchants acted and wrote as traders more than scholars.<sup>582</sup> Those whose letters were almost entirely humanist rather than commercial were not viewed as merchants by their contemporaries, and so should not be interpreted as humanist-oriented merchants by modern historians. Piero di Giovanni di Dino mentioned 'our Andrea Corsali, a man of letters', reflecting the scholarly rather than commercial tone of Corsali's correspondence.<sup>583</sup> To these merchants, Asia and the Americas were not primarily places to convert or conquer but places to trade with, extract resources from, and, as a secondary objective, to understand intellectually. Their primarily commercial focus distinguished these merchants from Columbus. Although he was a merchant by trade, Columbus' imperial, messianic language, which emerged in his later

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<sup>579</sup> Theodor Gustav Werner, 'Repräsentanten Der Augsburger Fugger und Nürnberger Imhoff: Als Urheber Der Wichtigsten Handschriften Des Paumgartner-Archivs Über: Welthandelsbräuche Im Spätmittelalter und Am Beginn Der Neuzeit', *Vierteljahrschrift Für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 52, no. 1 (1965): 3.

<sup>580</sup> Müller, *Welthandelsbräuche*.

<sup>581</sup> Müller.

<sup>582</sup> Alessandrini, 'The Far East in the Early 16th Century: Giovanni Da Empoli's Travels', 217.

<sup>583</sup> Piero di Giovanni di Dino, 'Letter of Piero di Giovanni di Dino (1 January 1519)', 162; Corsali, 'Letter from India to Giuliano de' Medici (October 1516)'.

letters as he struggled to maintain control of the situation in the Caribbean, was strikingly different from that of other merchants and was intended to preserve the support of the Catholic Kings.<sup>584</sup>

European merchants approached trade with Asia and the Americas mostly as an expansion of their trade within Europe.<sup>585</sup> Most obviously, commercial and financial success in Asia and the Americas allowed merchants to dominate trade within Europe, and several merchants referred to this in their letters. One of Marchionni's apprentices, (vainly) anticipating that Porto Pisano would become a great re-export centre for spices from Portugal, wrote that, 'If things in Italy work out to make Porto Pisano the backbone for all the spice dealers of Italy, then with time Pisa is apt to become a new Venice.... We can then tell the Sultan and the Venetians to go sun themselves [*a stare al sole*]. And if these things happen, then with time Pisa—that is, Porto Pisano—will become a new Venice to the convenience of all Italy.... Thus with time everything will happen [here] in Portugal and there at Porto Pisano'.<sup>586</sup>

This desire to circumvent the middleman was the intent behind the Welser's decision to contract with the Spanish crown to receive the province of Venezuela (Klein-Venedig) and ruled between 1528 and 1546. The Welser were even able to obtain the exceptional right to send three ships directly to Antwerp without going through the Seville monopoly and its associated taxes, a privilege which all other settlers had requested but were unable to secure.<sup>587</sup> With this privilege, the Welser achieved the aim of every long-distance merchant, one which had fuelled European overseas explorations: to control the chain of supply from its source through every stage until the point of sale. Using African slaves and German miners, both brought in by the Welser, to extract gold, pearls, and brazilwood, with the right to sell these and Indian slaves to Santo Domingo, Seville, and the trading entrepôt of Antwerp – which had by this point become the centre of European trade in Americana, in thanks partly to the presence of German merchants and their silver – the Welser willingly departed from established patterns of non-Iberian commercial engagement with the Americas to become settler-conquerors.

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<sup>584</sup> Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), particularly 52-4; Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind* (London, 2008), 86; Valerie Irene Jane Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, 1992), 208–10; Mary Alexandra Watt, *Dante, Columbus and the Prophetic Tradition: Spiritual Imperialism in the Italian Imagination* (London and New York, 2017).

<sup>585</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 121.

<sup>586</sup> Vaglianti, 'Lettera Di Un Govane Di Bartolomeo Marchionni, in Lisbona, a Piero Panciatichi (1508)'; Translated in Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 158.

<sup>587</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 293–94.

As other Europeans did, merchants approached the Americas and Asia as places that could be fit into existing frameworks of knowledge and practice, in this case commercial. It was not until the 1520s that new types of engagement would be introduced in accompaniment with changes in European attitudes towards the Americas (Chapter Six).

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Merchants did not restrict their letters to commercial matters; humanist interest, although deliberately secondary, was present and valued. The accounts provided by writers such as Piero d'Andrea Strozzi and Piero di Giovanni di Dino, and the less detailed but still valuable accounts of, among others, Empoli, Vespucci, and Sprenger (whose description of a baobab was turned into a woodcut, p.140), discussed the people and places that they encountered in rich detail, often in terms indicative – as was their intent – of a humanist education.<sup>588</sup>

Like medieval travel accounts, often-sensationalist *Zeitungen* and *avvisi*, and chronicles, merchant accounts generally, although not always, mentioned strange local customs such as sexual and marital practices, festivals, cannibalism, religious beliefs, and clothing. They mentioned the wealth and abundance of gold and silver in the New World and the kingdoms of the East, and discussed strange flora and fauna, constellations, and other natural phenomena as yet unknown to Europeans. In doing so, they frequently referred to ancient authors, either confirming or challenging established beliefs.

The differences between merchants' discussion of ethnography and those of humanists and writers of popular news raise interesting questions about where members of the great companies fit in modern scholars' ideas about how Europeans approached and understood Asia and the New World. The travel accounts of medieval voyagers, including merchants, missionaries, and adventurers, had provided Europeans with vivid ideas about the East, a place populated with great empires but also with strange and sometimes sub-human peoples, pagans, monstrous creatures, the Earthly Paradise, and endless riches. Not all texts had supplied such a fantastical image, but the huge popularity of Mandeville made these images dominant in the European imagination. Mandeville's text featured many outlandish claims, including ones that could be disproved by his contemporaries, such as his statement that Indians had green and

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<sup>588</sup> Piero Strozzi, 'Letter di Piero Strozzi, in Goa, al padre Andrea, in Firenze, 20 dicembre 1510', in *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese (1500-1525)*, ed. Marco Spallanzani (Florence, 1997), 213–15; Piero di Giovanni di Dino, 'Letter of Piero di Giovanni di Dino (1 January 1519)'.

yellow skin.<sup>589</sup> Merchant letters were not without fantastical details, but they were sometimes presented differently. The Tuscan merchant, Simone dal Verde, found the idea of cannibalism in the Americas so doubtful that he spoke to multiple people and only then concluded that the rumours must be true: ‘I have spoken with three persons who returned with those twelve caravels; one of them was a captain of those caravels, another the pilot, and another was master of one of the caravels that went there. I will tell you what I learned from them, not without fear of writing uncertain things. So as not to err or place myself at risk of telling lies, I will tell that part of what I heard which seems likely to me... Since this [cannibalism] is a horrible thing to think about, let alone assert that it actually happens, I have made every effort to obtain reliable information, and I find it without any doubt to be true’.<sup>590</sup> His repetition of doubt and his identification of his sources and their qualifications read almost like a scientific paper.

Ethnographic, geographic, and other descriptions always remained secondary to commercial matters in merchants’ correspondence. Giovanni da Empoli concluded his first letter, of 1503, with ‘Remind me to tell you of the manners and customs of the Malabars and pagans of India, which, because of my bad memory, I have overlooked. The said pagans are idolators; they eat no meat nor fish nor eggs, nor anything which has blood; they eat only rice and vegetables. They are neat and clean people, and they live in well-built houses of brick and mortar. They regard the cow as god-like for them, and there is an abundance of them throughout the land. This is what we have learned, and thus I let you know. May God give you long life!’<sup>591</sup> Elsewhere in the letter he had briefly mentioned the ‘bestial’ habits of the people of the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>592</sup> Otherwise, his letter, addressed to his father, was dedicated to the difficulties of the journey and to the trading negotiations carried out between the Portuguese captains and the various Indian kings.

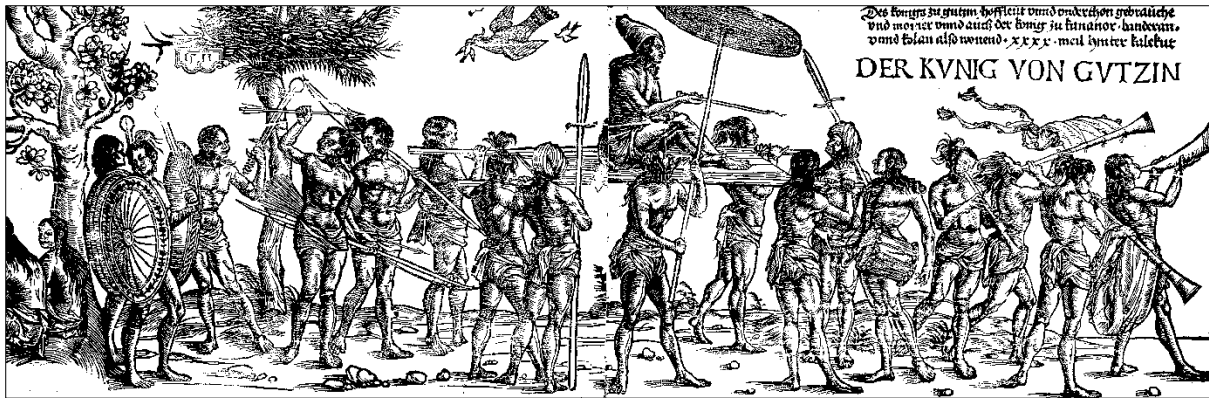
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<sup>589</sup> Mandeville, *Mandeville’s Travels: Texts and Translations*, 116.

<sup>590</sup> Simone dal Verde, ‘Letter to Piero Niccoli (10 May 1494)’, in *Italian Reports on America, 1493-1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, ed. Geoffrey Symcox, vol. 12, *Repertorium Columbianum* (Turnhout, 2002), 31–32; this passage is also analysed in Rachel B. Herrmann, *To Feast on Us as Their Prey: Cannibalism and the Early Modern Atlantic* (Fayetteville, 2019), 55.

<sup>591</sup> da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)’, 145.

<sup>592</sup> da Empoli, 208–9.



‘Der Kvnig von Gvtzin’ (Der König von Cochin), *Merfart*

He also provided a detailed description of the procession of the king of Calicut coming to meet the arriving Portuguese and the subsequent negotiation between the parties. His other letters, too, described such events at length. Empoli’s account reflects the importance of ritual and diplomatic negotiations in the establishment of trading relations and the value that merchants placed upon these. Empoli’s view of commerce, like that of his fellow travelers, was holistic.

German and Italian merchants, as foreigners, were less beholden than Iberian writers to portray the actions of the Spanish and Portuguese in a positive light and were not infrequently critical of imperial policies. In 1518, Lazarus Nürnberger gave a recount of Lopo Soares’ disastrous attempt to conquer the Dahlak islands, in the Red Sea, noting that this, Portugal’s second attempt to gain a stronghold in the Red Sea to control the trade coming from ‘Arabia’, was ‘a great blow’ (*ain grossen stosz* [Stoß]).<sup>593</sup> He believed that ‘at this time there is in India under the Portuguese a very bad government’ (*auf dytz zeydt ser bosz regiment in India untter den portugalesern ist*) and that ‘for sure, if the Romern arrive in India before the fleet of Portugal, I think India goes to the Romern.’<sup>594</sup> (The ‘Romern’ are Ottomans; that is, people from the Sultanate of Rum.) Finally, he noted that ‘it is true that all India and Malacca are very poorly supplied by the Portuguese’ (*gantz India und Mylaca ser ubel versehen ist von den portugalesern*).<sup>595</sup> His account indicates a good understanding of the political situation in India, not only in the Portuguese administration but among the various Indian groups, and he was aware of the encroachment of the Ottomans and the impact that this would have upon the local political situation. Although he displayed due preference for Christians, his political assessment indicates a certain neutrality regarding the ambitions of the Portuguese. One of Jörg Pock’s letters, written while he was still in Lisbon, likewise reveals an ambiguous attitude

<sup>593</sup> Nürnberger, *Le Voyage de Lazarus Nürnberger En Inde (1517-1518)*, 69.

<sup>594</sup> Nürnberger, 69.

<sup>595</sup> Nürnberger, 69.

towards the Portuguese.<sup>596</sup> Giovanni da Empoli's letters were openly hostile to the Portuguese, especially Afonso de Albuquerque, and positioned the Italian merchants (including various Sernigi members) as victims of the Portuguese administration (p.228).<sup>597</sup> By examining such accounts, different perspectives can be obtained than are given by Portuguese chroniclers, and the understanding of a cohesive 'European' response is challenged.

There were many reasons for merchants to include non-commercial details. Primarily, however, they were to appeal to the interests of intended readers and to portray the merchants as educated observers. Many of the letters written by merchants concerning their own or others' overseas activities were directed to non-mercantile recipients and have a correspondingly different tone than do letters intended for other merchants. As outlined above (p.82), the reciprocal supply of news served to create and cement ties between members of commercial networks and with their wider, non-commercial circle. By adapting their letters to the recipient's desires, merchants sought to enhance the recipient's gratitude and thus the socio-political benefits that they hoped to accrue by supplying the letter.

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O'Gorman argued that European writings upon America 'invented' rather than 'discovered' those continents, and that writings were more about European ideas rather than local realities.<sup>598</sup> This post-modernist analysis has been challenged in various ways, but it is generally accepted that the novelty of the New World took decades to fully penetrate European intellectual and popular beliefs.

The language used to describe the New World echoed that applied to freak natural phenomena occurring in Europe. Many *Zeitungen* and *avvisi* were devoted to natural phenomena, such as storms, the birth of conjoined twins, and prophecies. The German-language versions of these texts made frequent use of the word '*wunderbarlich*', a word which was frequently applied also to descriptions of the lands beyond Europe.<sup>599</sup> Although '*wunderbarlich*' and similar language was used to depict the New World as an exotic, almost unnatural place, such

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<sup>596</sup> Jörg Pock, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (25 and 30 March 1519)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853), 114–16.

<sup>597</sup> Giovanni da Empoli, 'Letter to His Father Leonardo on His Travels in Malacca (1514)', in *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, trans. Laurence A. Noonan (Lisbon, 1989).

<sup>598</sup> Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry Into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington, 1958).

<sup>599</sup> Emil Weller, ed., *Die Ersten Deutschen Zeitungen*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim, 1962).

vocabulary was not restricted to the New World, which was instead fitted into existing ideas about strange distant lands and uncanny events within Europe. As merchants did, writers of *avvisi* and *Zeitungen* rendered overseas places in European terms.

O’Gorman and other scholars focus upon European intellectual debates which, although influenced by and influencing merchants, remained separate from commercial thought. The primary concern of merchants was to depict overseas in terms comparable to Europe so that trade could be established between regions, weaving together their expectations, things that they were familiar with from their own society, and the unfamiliar. Sixteenth-century European depictions of Asia were not monolithic, but rather showed an awareness of the diversity of cultures.<sup>600</sup> Like Mandeville, merchants carefully distinguished between various groups.<sup>601</sup> They emphasised the variations between places, commenting upon where to find the best spices; the different weights and measures, currencies, and prices; and the political situations. Sernigi, among others, commented that while Calicut was the biggest market for spices, they originated elsewhere: the best cinnamon could be found in another island (identified by other merchants as Ceylon) and ‘pepper and cloves come from more distant parts’.<sup>602</sup> With enough effort, they believed, at least at the beginning, that they could come to understand everything. As Simone dal Verde wrote about the voyages to America, ‘Day by day they will go on discovering and will obtain perfect knowledge of everything’.<sup>603</sup>

In his letter of 1503, Giovanni da Empoli juxtaposed his description of China, where ‘things here are of great substance, and there are very many great things and great walled cities, trade in merchandise and wealth, different customs and ways of living’, with India, which in comparison ‘is the least and the poorest thing there is here’. Likewise, he said of Malacca that in comparison ‘we are mere nothings’ and that it was far wealthier and a greater trading hub

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<sup>600</sup> cf. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York, 1978), 1, 3, 7; for reinterpretations of Said and for more balanced arguments see, among others, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon, 1994); Paul Smethurst, ‘The Journey from Modern to Postmodern in The Travels of Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo’s Divisament Dou Monde’, in *Studies in Medievalism XIII: Postmodern Medievalisms*, ed. Richard Ure and Jesse G. Swan (Cambridge, 2005), 159; Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton, 1994), 43; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton and Oxford, 2011).

<sup>601</sup> Smethurst, ‘The Journey from Modern to Postmodern in The Travels of Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo’s Divisament Dou Monde’, especially 159; on Mandeville and his treatment of the East more generally, see Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, chaps 2–3.

<sup>602</sup> Sernigi, ‘Second Letter to a Gentleman in Florence’, 137.

<sup>603</sup> Simone dal Verde, ‘Letter to Mateo Cini (2 January 1499)’, in *Italian Reports on America, 1493-1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, ed. Geoffrey Symcox, vol. 12, *Repertorium Columbianum* (Turnhout, 2002), 80–81.

than India.<sup>604</sup> Rather than depicting Asia and the Americas as the ‘Other’, merchants attempted to depict those countries in European terms to demonstrate that the regions were commercially compatible.<sup>605</sup> The letters of merchants, such as Lazarus Nürnberger’s, indicate that, except on religious grounds, they did not see the Christian West as superior to the East. Asian goods had been traded in Europe for millennia and Italian merchants, most famously Marco Polo, had been visiting the East for centuries. This increased contact, both physical and textual, somewhat ‘de-mythologised’ Asia in European perspectives before they themselves ever visited those lands.<sup>606</sup> In contrast, European writers were often dismissive of Native Americans and Africans, whom they regarded as ‘bestial’ or ‘half-wild’ (*halb wild*).<sup>607</sup>

If there were an ‘Other’ in this period, it was the Ottomans with whom many of the Europeans were at war.<sup>608</sup> Muslim merchants, often called Moors (a loosely defined term), were consequently treated with great suspicion. Il Cretico and Giovanfrancesco Affaitati, among others, wrote that they dominated trade in Calicut and partially or entirely blamed them for the conflict that arose between that city’s ruler and the Portuguese in 1500.<sup>609</sup> In an extreme example, Jörg Pock wrote from India in 1522 that ‘every day the Moors think about how they want to kill all the Christians’ (*...all tage dencken di moren wy si di cristen all erschlagen wollen*).<sup>610</sup>

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Although the behaviour and outlook of the great companies challenge current scholarship about European responses to the New World and Asia, the great companies were themselves ‘exceptions to the rule’ in their own time. Their reactions to overseas trade were different to those of smaller traders, even those from the same cities, whose levels of engagement more closely aligned to the limited interest shown by most Europeans.

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<sup>604</sup> da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)’, 196.

<sup>605</sup> cf. Alessandrini, who argues that Empoli was ‘revealing a new conception of alterity’ by discussing the Other. Alessandrini, ‘The Far East in the Early 16th Century: Giovanni Da Empoli’s Travels’, 215.

<sup>606</sup> Smethurst, ‘The Journey from Modern to Postmodern in The Travels of Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo’s Divisament Dou Monde’, 166.

<sup>607</sup> Quoting respectively da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)’, 208–9; and Sprenger, ‘Merfart’, 100ff.

<sup>608</sup> For the ‘Otherness’ of the Ottomans, see Marianna D. Birnbaum, ‘Renaissance Orientalism’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 28, no. 1/4 (2006): 379–89.

<sup>609</sup> Cretico, ‘The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India’, 120–22; Affaitati, ‘The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India’.

<sup>610</sup> Pock, ‘Letter from Cochin to Michael Behaim (1 January 1522)’, 120.



As discussed previously, the Spinelli family, although not among the great traders and although still based in Florence, were nonetheless active in Madeira in partnership with the Marchionni and were also trading from Antwerp, where they worked with the Frescobaldi-Gualterrotti. Those family members based in the Iberian Peninsula and Antwerp could not have avoided news from the New World and Asia, especially when their trading partners were so heavily involved, and yet no mention of it is made in their correspondence. It seems most probable to conclude that the territories overseas simply did not interest them, either personally or as merchants monitoring current events that would affect trade.

The Welser agent to Lisbon, Lucas Rem, wrote nothing about the German participation in the India voyage of 1505-06 except to say that ‘On the first of August we made the contract with the Portuguese King about arming 3 ships for India’ (*Primo Aug.º tat wir den vertrag mit portugal king der armasion 3 schiff, per Indiam*), which cost 21 000 *cruzados* (*armirt Ich ob M/21 Cruciatu*).<sup>611</sup> Rather than eagerly observing events, he asked his employers not to send him again to Portugal and bitterly complained about his business trips to the Atlantic islands. In contrast, he gave detailed descriptions of his travels around Europe and of the various shrines and relics he visited. Like the Spinelli, his engagement with overseas trade did not prompt any further interest.

Commenting upon the arrival of the spice fleets was not, however, restricted to merchants who were direct participants. In a letter of 29 August 1533, Lorenz Tucher, in Nördlingen (Swabia), reported that news had come from Antwerp that four ships laden with spices from India had arrived in Portugal, and estimated that these goods would not be available cheaply before the Easter fair; that is, in approximately seven months’ time.<sup>612</sup> Account books and other letters indicate that the Tucher purchased saffron in Spain, but this letter suggests that they were possibly also trading in Indian spices. Saffron was the spice Europe produced better than elsewhere and a letter of 1552, written by Sixt Tucher from Saragossa, indicates that most Aragonese saffron was normally sent to India. There had been no India armada that year, allowing Sixt to purchase the unusually large amount of 40 bales of saffron; he was unable to do so in France due to conflict between ‘the two lords’ – that is, Charles V and Henri II – which had raised demand for and, he hoped, the price of saffron in Spain.<sup>613</sup> Sixt’s letter provides a

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<sup>611</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 8.

<sup>612</sup> Lorenz Tucher, ‘Brief Lorenz Tuchers Aus Nördlingen an Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg’ (29 August 1533), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 421, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>613</sup> Sixtus Tucher, ‘Brief Sixt Tuchers Aus Saragossa an Seinen Vater Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg’ (1 February 1552), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 542, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

discussion of the wider political and current events that would impact trade and indicates a good understanding of how the Indian trade affected commerce in Europe. As well as these two letters, Lorenz Tucher sent Linhart Tucher, in Nuremberg, a list of prices in Spain and Lyon in a letter of 14 July 1561, followed by news of the arrival of a ship from Lisbon ['Lix.a'], itself bringing news of the arrival of 'ein Scheff aus India' bringing '2000 piper' and other spices.<sup>614</sup> Like other merchant letters, Tucher's carefully traced the route of information and provides exact numbers but provides no other detail. Beyond these rich details of imports and discussion of the impact of overseas activities upon European trade, both of which reflect the Tucher family's wide web of correspondents, the Tucher letters do not mention overseas events, peoples, or curiosities. As with most merchants, their interest in the Americas and Asia did not, it seems, go beyond the impact that these places had upon their trade.

The correspondence of the Behaim family, who were also from Nuremberg, reveals that interest could vary wildly even within families. Several family members showed far more interest in overseas activities than did the Tucher. This interest had begun with Martin Behaim, whose famous voyages and creation of the *Erdapfel* had won him the praise and endorsement of Maximilian and João II, although he had died in poverty and disgrace under Manuel I.<sup>615</sup> Other family members followed in Martin's footsteps to the Iberian Peninsula. His younger brother, Wolf Behaim, served as a Hirschvogel agent and importer of Nuremberg-made timekeeping, navigational and cosmographical instruments in Lisbon, where he died in 1507.<sup>616</sup>

Martin Behaim's cousin Michael, the head of the family, closely monitored the activities of his relatives in the Iberian Peninsula, including his brother Wolf and Martin Behaim's son, and of Germans active in overseas trade.<sup>617</sup> Michael's familial interest was accompanied by personal

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<sup>614</sup> Lorenz Tucher, 'Brief Lorenz Tuchers an Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg' (14 July 1561), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 300, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>615</sup> Wolf Behaim, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (22 November 1491)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853), 105; Kellenbenz, 'Portugiesische Forschungen Zur Behaimfrage', 81–82.

<sup>616</sup> Johannes Willers and G. Bott, eds., *Focus Behaim-Globus* (Nuremberg, 1992), 180.

<sup>617</sup> See his correspondence: Michael Behaim, 'Letter to Jörg Pock in Lisbon (12 November 1518)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853); Michael Behaim, 'Letter to Jörg Pock (16 December 1518)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853), 113–14; Michael Behaim, 'Letter to Jörg Pock in Lisbon (25 and 30 March 1519)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853); Behaim, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (22 November 1491)'; Wolf Behaim, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (5 December 1492)', in *Geschichte des Seefahrers Ritter Martin Behaim*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Ghillany (Nuremberg, 1853), 106.

curiosity, as indicated by the Hirschvogel agent Jörg Pock's request for information 'about the strange things that have transpired in Germany, so I will tell you what is strange in India'.<sup>618</sup>



*Wappen des Michel Beheim*  
Albrecht Dürer, c.1520

Other family members showed little to no interest in the overseas. Michael Behaim's grandson Paulus kept a *Geschenkliste*, a record of the gifts he received in 1558-68, which mentions no American or Indian items whatever.<sup>619</sup> This contrasted with Paulus' status as an enthusiastic collector who (in company with Willibald Pirckheimer and other prominent Nurembergers) started his own library.<sup>620</sup>

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Merchants' direct involvement with overseas and their supply of overseas information and commodities to areas of Europe otherwise disconnected from the Spanish and Portuguese voyages gave them the potential to shape European understandings of Asia and, especially, the New World. Merchants' imports of foreign commodities, especially spices, had a direct impact – materially and intellectually – upon Germans and Italians in a way that the conquests of the Spanish and Portuguese did not. On one hand, therefore, the actions of the great companies dominated Italians' and especially Germans' encounters with Asia and the New World. On the

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<sup>618</sup> Pock, 'Letter to Michael Behaim (27 March 1520)'; translated in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 34.

<sup>619</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>620</sup> Eva Pleticha, *Adel und Buch: Studien zur Geisteswelt des fränkischen Adels am Beispiel seiner Bibliotheken vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Neustadt an der Aisch, 1983), 52.

other, the great companies' heavy involvement in overseas activities widened the gulf between them and the rest of society. The growing anxiety around and criticism of merchants, especially during the *Monopolstreit*, would emerge in the 1520s partly because of this divergence.

The Welser agent Balthasar Sprenger's *Merfart* (*Meerfahrt: Sea Voyage*) was hugely important as one of the first and most influential printed texts to provide pictures of Asians and Africans.<sup>621</sup> Sprenger (or Springer) had moved to Lisbon in 1503 for the Welser and sailed on the 1505 voyage to India. Upon his return, he wrote an account for his employers, which was published in 1508 accompanied by woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair the Elder.<sup>622</sup> The images include one picture of a baobab and two coats of arms; the rest are studies of African and Indian peoples, including one depiction of a procession of the King of Cochin (p.133).



These images of Africans and Indians were reproduced in multiple texts and artworks into the seventeenth century.<sup>623</sup> Through Hans Burgkmair, Balthasar Sprenger (and Valentim Fernandes) shaped early European conceptions about the appearance and clothing of newly encountered peoples. The printed *Merfart* was an early example of the popular genre of 'costume books' that appealed to Europeans' interest in the appearance of foreign people.<sup>624</sup> A

<sup>621</sup> Sprenger, 'Merfart'.

<sup>622</sup> S. Leitch, *Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture* (2010), chap. 4.

<sup>623</sup> Massing, 'Hans Burgkmair's Depiction of Native Africans'.

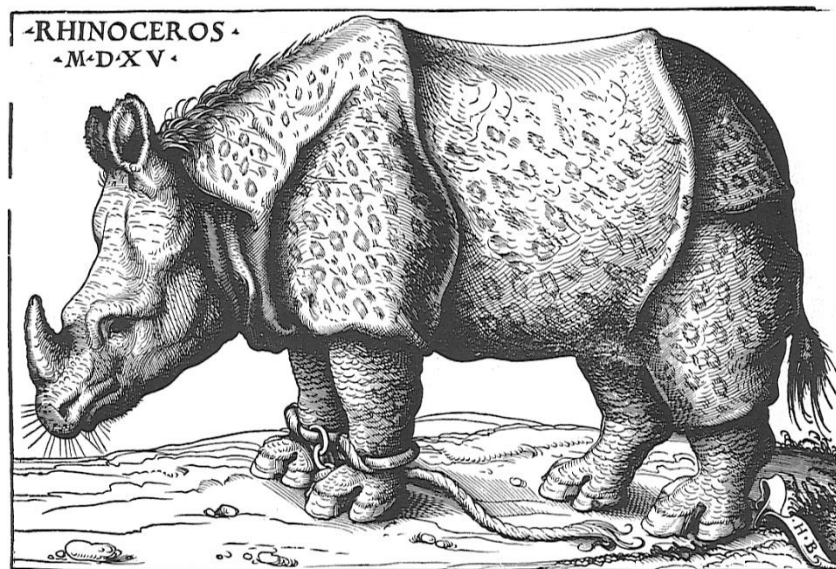
<sup>624</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Cesare Vecellio's Floridians in the Venetian Book Market: Beautiful Imports', in *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492-1750*, ed. Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey (Cambridge, 2017), 248-69.

famous example is the German Christoph Weiditz's paintings of Native Americans whom he observed upon a journey to Spain in 1529.<sup>625</sup>



An 'Indian' Woman  
Weiditz

Sprenger's inclusion of a picture of a baobab reflected the European fascination with foreign flora and fauna, which was indicated also by the enormous popularity of Dürer's famous *Rhinoceros* (Burgkmair also printed an image) derived from a sketch sent by Valentim Fernandes of the rhinoceros brought to Manuel I.



*Rhinoceros*, Hans Burgkmair the Elder

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<sup>625</sup> Christoph Weiditz, *Das Trachtenbuch Des Christoph Weiditz: Von Seinen Reisen Nach Spanien (1529) und Den Niederlanden (1531/31): Nach Der in Der Bibliothek Des Germanischen Nationalmuseums Zu Nurnberg Aufbewahrten Handschrift* (Tübingen, 1927); with an English translation in Christoph Weiditz, *Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the 'Trachtenbuch'* (Mineola, 1994); for an Italian example, see Jones, 'Cesare Vecellio's Floridians in the Venetian Book Market: Beautiful Imports'.

Not only does Sprenger's text show that these interests and attitudes were present from the beginning, it demonstrates the narrow scope of broader European engagement with overseas and how this contrasted with that of members of participating trading companies. The first edition was almost entirely pictorial, with Sprenger's text reduced almost entirely to descriptions of the images, while the second edition, published in 1511, contained the full letter.<sup>626</sup> Sprenger's account was transformed into images to appeal to a public interested not primarily in trade or conquest – the focus of Sprenger's letter to his Welser employers – but in the strange and marvellous.

When Charles V permitted merchants from his other territories to trade directly with the Americas at the same time as the discovery of Peru in the mid-1520s, the renewal of investment in foreign trade occurred alongside changing views about the New World. Although some European merchants were already exporting slaves, pearls, and brazilwood, among other commodities, from the Americas, European merchants, especially the largest German and Italian companies, had originally been more interested in Asia, with which they had traded for centuries, if at a remove, and about which they were consequently comparatively well-informed.<sup>627</sup> As discussed previously, foreign merchants had begun to withdraw from direct investment in trade to Asia in the early 1520s. It was not until that decade that some of them became involved in settlement, agriculture, and resource extraction, although the latter would be in goods in which they already traded: pearls, precious metals, and brazilwood.<sup>628</sup> Annexing the province allowed them to trade in larger quantities, not – apart from Indian slaves – increase the number of commodities which they traded.

The discovery of Peru in 1526, which was little mentioned in printed newsletters, but much discussed in mercantile correspondence, caused existing ideas of American gold to evolve into visions of endless wealth that would eventually develop into the myth of and search for El Dorado. For merchants, Peru's discovery and the arrival of enormous, but tangible and

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<sup>626</sup> Franz Schulze, ed., *Balthasar Springers Indienfahrt, 1505/06* (Strasbourg, 1902), 9–11.

<sup>627</sup> On the earliest European exports from the Americas, see Pierre Chaunu and Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique, 1504-1650*, 4 vols (Paris, 1955); summarised in Pierre Chaunu and Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et l'Amérique Aux XVIe et XVIIe Siècles* (Paris, 1977), 221–351; Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, *El Primer Oro de América : Los Comienzos de La Casa de La Contratación de Las Yndias, 1503-1511* (Madrid, 2002), 32–46.

<sup>628</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 290–91; for the low volume of American imports, see Haebler, *Die Überseeischen Unternehmungen Der Welser und Ihrer Gesellschafter*, 49, 123; Enrique Otte, 'Die Welser in Santo Domingo', in *Festschrift Für Johannes Vincke*, vol. 2 (Madrid, 1963), 482.

quantifiable, amounts of Incan gold legitimised treasure hunting.<sup>629</sup> This was in direct contrast to earlier beliefs; Girolamo Sernigi in 1499 wrote that ‘in my opinion, all of the riches in the world have been found and there is no more that can be discovered’ (*a mio iudicio stimo che tutta la ricchezza del mondo sia trovata et già altro non si possa schoprire*).<sup>630</sup>

Almost a decade after the discovery of Peru and the development of this idea, in 1535, the Welser captain, Philip von Hutten, complained to his brother that ‘People perhaps believe back home the rumours that all who travel to India must return rich’ and that they did not understand ‘with what effort and danger riches are acquired here, and how many thousands of Christians these Indians cost and how some fleets can go astray, before one finds a Peru’. While he thought the process more difficult than might have been hoped, this nonetheless indicates that he and other higher-status Germans continued to believe, despite years of little to no success, that great riches could be obtained by finding and plundering undiscovered empires.<sup>631</sup> Other merchant writers spoke in similar terms. The merchant Ulrich Neukomm, of one of Lindau’s most prominent families, included in his family chronicle *Neukomm’sche Chronik* a letter of 1535 from his cousin Titus Neukomm, whom he describes as the son of a former Burgomaster.<sup>632</sup> Titus, who was in Welser-controlled Venezuela, wrote a letter describing the geography, wildlife and peoples of Coro and its hinterland and the Spanish and German activities and commerce in the area.<sup>633</sup> According to Ulrich, Titus travelled to the imperial court upon returning to Europe, indicating the social mobility made possible by conquistador activities. Ulrich’s inclusion of Titus’ letter in his chronicle suggests that having an adventurer in the family lent great prestige.

It was in this context that the Welser entered into negotiations with Charles V for the territory of Venezuela (Klein-Venedig). They were already importing American goods, including guaiac wood, brazilwood, pearls, and gold, and exporting copper commodities to the Caribbean (as were the Fugger). In 1532 they would purchase a sugar plantation in Santo Domingo in addition to their existing plantation in the Canary Islands, bought before 1509.<sup>634</sup> With the

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<sup>629</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 118–21; for the place of El Dorado in the activities of the Welser captains, see Denzer, ‘Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele’.

<sup>630</sup> Sernigi, ‘First Letter (10 July 1499)’.

<sup>631</sup> von Hutten, ‘Brief Aus San German de Puerto Rico an Den Kaiserlichen Rat Matthias Zimmermann Zu Breda Vom 28. Januar 1535’; translated in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 120.

<sup>632</sup> Ulrich Neukomm and Alexius Neukomm, ‘Neukomm’sche Chronik’ (n.d.), *Literalien* 25, Stadtarchiv Lindau.

<sup>633</sup> Titus Neukomm, ‘Brief Eines Lindauers Aus Venezuela Vom Jahre 1535’, ed. Franz Joetze, *Forschungen Zur Geschichte Bayerns* 15 (1907): 271–78.

<sup>634</sup> Blackbourn, ‘Germans Abroad and “Auslandsdeutsche”’, 332; Otte, ‘Die Welser in Santo Domingo’, 126; Haebler, *Die Überseeischen Unternehmungen Der Welser und Ihrer Gesellschafter*, 32.

*asiento*, they saw the possibility to gain a geographic monopoly upon these trades, being present at every stage of the movement from extraction to customer.<sup>635</sup> The *asiento*, signed with Charles V in 1528, stipulated that the Welser were to establish at least two fortified towns and three forts, in return for which they had a monopoly upon slave imports (of Africans) and exports (of captured Native Americans), the export of other trade items such as pearls and brazilwood, and the right to mine for gold.<sup>636</sup> For the latter, which Großhaupt suggests was the primary motivator for the Welser to colonise Venezuela, they contracted to bring in 50 German miners.<sup>637</sup>

Although the *asiento* did not include references to plunder, it was certainly intended from the beginning.<sup>638</sup> The Welser contract, although having more stipulations and privileges, followed the pattern of the grants made to Spanish settlers, who were almost always conquistadors who became involved in commerce and settlement rather than vice versa. Settlement and export were only possible as a result of conquest, and conquest in Spanish America always included the search for saleable commodities, including slaves (whom the Welser were licensed to capture) and gold.<sup>639</sup> From the beginning, Ambrosius Ehinger (Alfinger, Dalfinger), the first Welser commander, launched expeditions to explore and conquer the Venezuelan interior. Although later captains would ignore Welser policy and abandon the slave export trade and any attempt at mining in favour of campaigns into the interior to find an El Dorado, conquest was always planned.

The Welser, in short, had to adopt quite a different approach and mentality to the ones that they had for the Asian trade. They were already involved in the export of American commodities such as pearls, sugar (including their own), and brazilwood from Santo Domingo; in this area their extraction of commodities from Venezuela represented only an expansion and indicated how their intentions remained primarily commercial.<sup>640</sup> Settlement and conquest, however,

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<sup>635</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 290–91.

<sup>636</sup> The 1528 *asiento* has been transcribed in Otte, ed., *Cedularios de la monarquía española relativos a la provincia de Venezuela, 1529-1552*, vol. 5, 241–43; and Eberhard Schmitt, 'Der Asiento Aus Dem Jahr 1528', in *Dokumente Zur Geschichte Der Europäischen Expansion*, ed. Eberhard Schmitt, vol. 4: Wirtschaft und Handel der Kolonialreiche (Munich, 1988), 37–47.

<sup>637</sup> Walter Großhaupt, *Bartholomäus Welser (25. Juni 1484 Bis 28. März 1561): Charakteristik Seiner Unternehmungen in Spanien und Übersee* (Graz, 1987), 280–81.

<sup>638</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 119–20.

<sup>639</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 296–97.

<sup>640</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 119–21.



were entirely different from their established trading activities, a transformation in thought and activity that reflected wider changes in European attitudes towards the Americas.

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The commercial activities, consumption habits, and correspondence of the great trading companies and their connections demonstrate that German merchants, especially the Welser, were a striking exception to the otherwise slow and ‘blunted’ European response to the discovery of a New World. They, and the Italian merchants, were also unusually interested in Europe’s engagement with the East.<sup>641</sup> Although German and Italian merchants supplied information to humanists and worked closely with them, and despite their humanist education, they approached the New World and Asia from a commercial rather than an intellectual mindset, making them exceptions to the intellectual debates concerning the place of the New World in European thought.

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<sup>641</sup> Elliott, *The Old World and the New*.

## Chapter Six:

### News Media in the Early Sixteenth Century

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the emergence of print and of new text types, including handwritten and printed newsletters, printed books, and the dispatches of resident ambassadors, transformed the amount of news available to Europeans and the ways in which they accessed and consumed it. In analyses of these changes, which have grown enormously in recent decades, the contributions that merchant letters made, and merchants' uses of other types of news, have not received enough attention; some analyses of printing and news barely discuss merchants at all.<sup>642</sup> Moreover, these studies generally treat the sixteenth century as a whole, following the emergence of the new news types that fully flourished in the middle of the century. In the early sixteenth century, these text types were still largely underdeveloped, making merchant letters – already a fully developed genre – of enormous importance to the dissemination of news.

Analyses of the spread of news about the Americas and Asia have mostly focused upon the second half of the century. In this period, the growth of printed and handwritten newsletters and the impact of the Catholic-Protestant conflicts upon news networks were major factors in how news was disseminated. The mid-century was also when the largest bodies of sources, such as the *Fuggerzeitungen* and the Medici collection of *avvisi*, began to be accumulated.

This, however, does not cover the first half, and especially the first quarter, of the sixteenth century. Many factors that would have enormous impact upon European thought about and policy concerning Asia and the Americas, and that have consequently been the focus of most research, were embryonic or non-existent in the immediate aftermath of Columbus' and da Gama's first voyages. Information was far scarcer and unreliable and was largely restricted to merchant letters and official dispatches, so that merchants with large networks had much more up-to-date information than the wider population.

The time discrepancy between the news received by merchants and the news that was transferred to the general public either through the new *avvisi* and *Zeitungen* or through

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<sup>642</sup> Such as Brendan Maurice Dooley, ed., *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2010).

chronicles, and the impact that this had upon how these two different groups received and interpreted news, remains understudied.

Unlike the reading public, merchants had access to information that was not years or even decades old but as new as possible. They relied upon obtaining the latest information, ideally, ahead of their competitors, in order to capitalise upon changes in the market. Not only this, merchants received or sought to receive information from a very wide array of correspondents, ideally from both within and outside their companies and from multiple locations, with the aim of creating a broad array of knowledge. This gave these companies crucial advantages in the scramble to benefit from European overseas expansion, both by trading in exotic commodities and by forming financial relationships with the powers involved.

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The introduction of printed and handwritten newsletters in the late fifteenth century had an enormous impact upon information exchange over the following centuries.<sup>643</sup> Handwritten newsletters, or *avvisi* ('notices'), emerged in Italy in the late fifteenth century, where dedicated professionals wrote newsletters for subscribing customers.<sup>644</sup> The merchant and scholar Benedetto Dei wrote reports for some of his contacts and used other members of his network, especially Florentine merchants, to obtain information.<sup>645</sup> By the sixteenth century, *avvisi* were widespread across central and northern Italy as an important source of news; this was replicated across Europe at the end of the century.<sup>646</sup> *Avvisi* generally discussed military and political information.<sup>647</sup> This reflected their origins in ambassadorial and commercial correspondence.

The introduction of *avvisi* did not devalue merchant letters. Indeed, the most crucial sources for *avvisi* were merchants' letters and the reports of ambassadors.<sup>648</sup> Both merchants and

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<sup>643</sup> The classic text on printing as an 'agent of change' is Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, 1980).

<sup>644</sup> For *avvisi* in Italy, see Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: alle origini della pubblica informazione, secoli XVI e XVII* (Bari, 2002); Mario Infelise, 'Roman *Avvisi*: Information and Politics in the Seventeenth Century', in *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492–1700*, ed. Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (Cambridge, 2002), 212–28; Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe'; Vivo, 'Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice'.

<sup>645</sup> Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe', 52–53.

<sup>646</sup> Mario Infelise, 'La Circolazione Dell'informazione Commerciale', in *Il Rinascimento Italiano e l'Europa*, ed. Franco Franceschi, Richard A. Goldthwaite, and Reinhold C. Mueller, vol. IV: *Commercio e cultura mercantile* (Treviso, 2007), 499.

<sup>647</sup> Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe', 51.

<sup>648</sup> Smith, 'The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism', 990; Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe', 51–53; Georg Christ, 'A Newsletter in 1419? Antonio Morosini's Chronicle in the Light of Commercial Correspondence between Venice and Alexandria', *Mediterranean*

ambassadors were sometimes themselves the writers of *avvisi*, and ambassadors in turn routinely cited *avvisi* and merchants' letters in their correspondence.<sup>649</sup> Merchants, such as Benedetto Dei (p.147) had been some of the earliest writers of *avvisi*, recognising the socio-political benefits of distributing political and commercial news to an audience beyond their business contacts, and especially to ambassadors.<sup>650</sup>

Something of this sort can be seen to be occurring in 1501, when Giovanni Francesco Affaitati wrote a letter to the Venetian orator to Spain, Domenico Pisani.<sup>651</sup> Pisani shortly thereafter sent three letters to Venice: a letter from Manuel, his own letter, and 'the copy of a letter received from Lisbon on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of June from Zuan Francesco Afaitado'.<sup>652</sup> In 1503, Affaitati again wrote to the Venetian ambassador, now Piero Pasqualigo, as did Bartolomeo Marchionni's associate Cesare Barzi.<sup>653</sup> As merchants adjusted to the new possibilities, they adapted their correspondence to resemble *avvisi* and appeal to a non-commercial audience.<sup>654</sup>

In this way, the three text types of *avvisi*, ambassadorial reports, and merchant letters became closely intertwined, performing complementary but separate functions. Compared to formal ambassadorial dispatches, *avvisi* and merchants' letters gave more details and different viewpoints.<sup>655</sup> As was discussed in Chapter Four, Merchant correspondence was valued for its analysis of news as well as the news itself.<sup>656</sup> Chroniclers and diarists, such as Sanudo, made use of all three text types, along with other official documents, pamphlets, and gossip.<sup>657</sup> Even

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*Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (1 June 2005): 35–66; Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi'; Renate Pieper and Zsuzsa Barbarics, 'Handwritten Newsletters as a Means of Communication in Early Modern Europe', in *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge, 2007), 53–79.

<sup>649</sup> Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe', 51, 53; Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 34–35; Smith, 'The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism', 990.

<sup>650</sup> Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 34–35; on the rise of the resident ambassador, see Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*; Borreguero Beltrán, 'Philip of Spain: The Spider's Web of News and Information', 30–33; Christ, 'A Newsletter in 1419?'

<sup>651</sup> Affaitati, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

<sup>652</sup> Sanudo, *I Diarii Di Marino Sanuto*, vol. 4, col. 87; translated in Marin Sanudo, 'Extracts', in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 139; and Pisani, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India'.

<sup>653</sup> Affaitati, 'Copia Di Lettere Di Zuan Francesco Di l' Afaitada, Data a Lisbona a Di 19 Avosto [1503], Scrita a l' Orator Nostro è in Spagna, Sier Piero Pasqualigo Dotor'; Barzi, 'Copia de Una Lettera Di Valenza al Ditto Orator Nostro, Di 5 Septembrio 1503'.

<sup>654</sup> Infelise, 'News Networks between Italy and Europe', 51–53; Christ, 'A Newsletter in 1419?'

<sup>655</sup> Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 37.

<sup>656</sup> Hayez, 'Avviso, Informazione, Novella, Nuova: La Notion de l'information Dans Les Correspondances Marchandes Toscanes Vers 1400', 132; Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 34–35.

<sup>657</sup> Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 36; Pieper, 'Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century', 497.

when they provided the same information, as the letters of Affaitati and Pisani did in 1501, Sanudo transcribed all documents, reflecting the variations between each type and the practice of comparing multiple accounts of the same event to increase accuracy.

Printed newsletters also appeared in late fifteenth-century Italy and spread rapidly to the other commercialised areas of Europe which, unlike with *avvisi*, did not lag behind Italy in the number of documents produced.<sup>658</sup> Pamphlets were the most prolific form of print and, also unlike *avvisi*, were affordable and readily available to a wide audience, especially in the highly literate commercial cities such as Venice.<sup>659</sup> Venice had been at the centre of news networks for centuries due to its position as a political and especially commercial centre and as the meeting-place of East and West.<sup>660</sup> By the sixteenth century, it had become an important centre of the print trade, especially for texts on Americana and for pamphlets.<sup>661</sup> German printing – both books and *Zeitungen* – likewise played an important role in distributing news about the Americas and Asia, with Nuremberg one of the major printing centres.<sup>662</sup> Connections between the two regions flourished with the close ties between Italian and southern German humanists and merchants and, by the late fifteenth century, the presence of German printers, such as the Rome-based Johann Besicken, on the Italian peninsula.<sup>663</sup>

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As was the case with *avvisi*, the full impact of printed newsletters was not felt until the middle of the sixteenth century. Pieper concludes that the number of *Zeitungen* on the Americas and Asia increased exponentially from that period; the first half of the century had almost none.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Chiara Palazzo, ‘Promoting the Catholic Cause on the Italian Peninsula: Printed Avvisi on the Dutch Revolt and the French Wars of Religion, 1562–1600’, in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Nina Lamal and Noah Moxham (Leiden, 2016), 677.

<sup>659</sup> Laura Carnelos, ‘Words on the Street: Selling Small Printed “Things” in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Venice’, in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden, 2016), 740–41; Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007), 5–6; Infelise, ‘News Networks between Italy and Europe’, 54; for a specific example of inter-urban transmission of *avvisi*, see Cristina Dondi and Neil Harris, ‘Exporting Books from Milan to Venice in the Fifteenth Century: Evidence from the Zornale of Francesco de’ Madiis’, *La Bibliofilia* 116, no. 1–3 (2014): 121–48.

<sup>660</sup> Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, 5–6; Carnelos, ‘Avvisi at the Court of the Medici Grand Dukes’, 739.

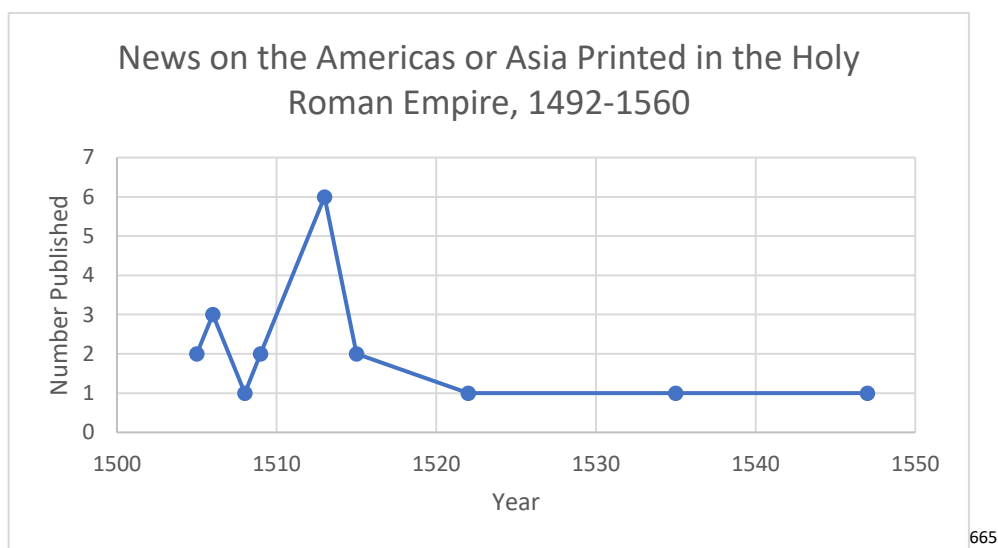
<sup>661</sup> Carnelos, ‘Avvisi at the Court of the Medici Grand Dukes’, 739; Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America*, 4–5.

<sup>662</sup> Pieper, ‘Spain’s Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century’, 498.

<sup>663</sup> Manuel I of Portugal, *Copia de Una Littera Del Re de Portagallo Mandata al Re de Castella Del Viaggio et Successo de India*.

<sup>664</sup> Pieper, ‘Spain’s Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century’, 509–10.

This is supported by analysis of printed documents classified as ‘News Books’ in the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC). (‘News Books’ includes printed newsletters and pamphlets as well as books, proper.) The following four graphs were created by searching for ‘News Books’ from the Holy Roman Empire (defined by the USTC as excluding the Low Countries), and Italy, and then by checking each item for reference to Asia or the Americas. Of the 1888 news items printed in Germany up to 1560, only eighteen (1 per cent) relate to the Americas or Asia: five German-language copies of Vespucci, a translation of the *Paesi*, five copies of Manuel I’s letter announcing the conquest of Malacca, plus six more letters, two of which are duplicates of each other.



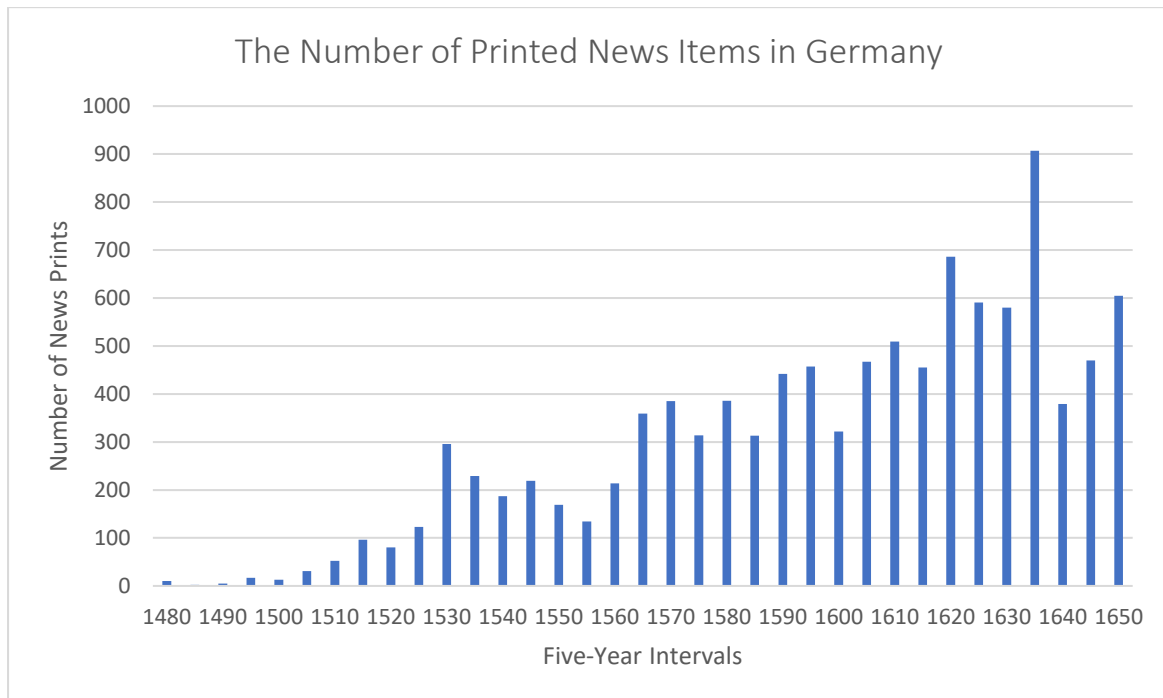
The release dates of German *Zeitungen* confirm Elliott’s observation that the great interest in the New World immediately after Columbus was not replicated until the later sixteenth century.<sup>666</sup> After the five editions of Vespucci’s letters – one in 1505, two in 1506, and two (identical) in 1509<sup>667</sup> – and the six copies of Manuel I’s letter to Leo X published in 1513 announcing the Portuguese conquests of Goa and Malacca, there were almost no newsletters

<sup>665</sup> Universal Short Title Catalogue.

<sup>666</sup> Elliott, *The Old World and the New*.

<sup>667</sup> Vespucci, *Von Den Nüwen Insulen und Landen so Yetz Kürtzlichen Erfunden Synt Durch Den Künig von Portugall*, 1505; Amerigo Vespucci, *Van Den Nygen Insulen und Landen so Ytzundt Kortliken Befunden Sindt Dorch Den Koningk van Portugal*. (Magdeburg, 1506); Vespucci, *Von Den Nüwen Insulen und Landen so Yetz Kürtzlichen Erfunden Synt Durch Den Künig von Portugall*, 1506; Amerigo Vespucci, *Wie Die Zwen Durchlüchtigsten Herren Her Fernandus. K. Zu Castilien und Herr Emanuel. K. Zu Portugal Haben Das Weyte Moer Ersuchet Unnd Funden Vil Insulen Unnd Ein Nüwe Welt von Wilden Nackenden Leüten, Vormals Unbekant*. (Strasbourg, 1509); Amerigo Vespucci, *Wie Die Zwen Durchlüchtigsten Herren Her Fernandus. K. Zu Castilien und Herr Emanuel. K. Zu Portugal Haben Das Weyte Moer Ersuchet Unnd Funden Vil Insulen Unnd Ein Nüwe Welt von Wilden Nackenden Leüten, Vormals Unbekant*. (Strasbourg, 1509).

on the subject.<sup>668</sup> None at all were published on the Aztecs, despite some issues of Cortés' letters.<sup>669</sup> Only one *Zeitung* was published in response to the discovery of Peru and its gold, which had long been dominant in the European image of the Americas: a newsletter of 1535 that 'commenced with a list of the treasures sent to Spain from Peru by Pizarro in January, 1534'.<sup>670</sup>

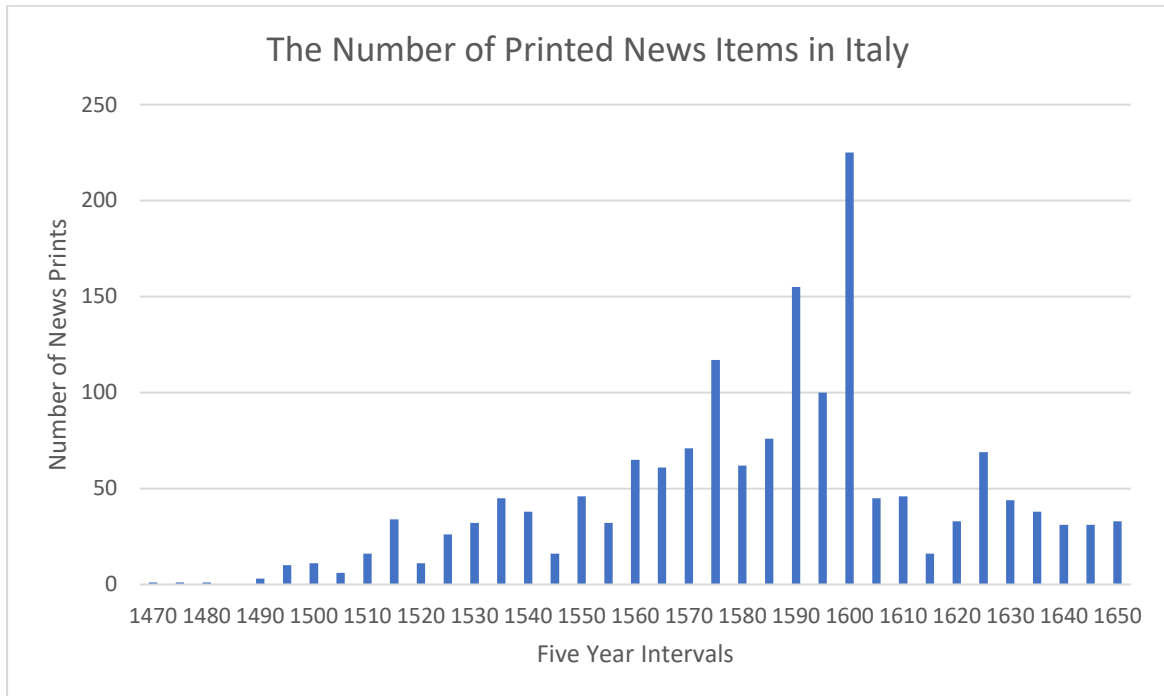


<sup>668</sup> Manuel I of Portugal, *Sendtbriff Des Grosmechtigen und Unuberwindtligisten Emanuelis Kunig Zu Portugal. Von Der Uberwindung Dye Geschehen Ist in India und Malacha Pabst Leo. Dem Zehenden Zu Geschriben.*; Manuel I of Portugal, *Epistola Potentissimi Ac Invictissimi Emanuelis Regis Portugaliae et Algarbiorum. Etc. De Victoriis Habitis in India et Malacha. Ad. S. In Christo Patrem et Dominum Nostrum Dominum Leonem. X. Pont. Maximu.*; Manuel I of Portugal, *Epistola Potentissimi Ac Invictissimi Emanuelis Regis Portugaliae, et Algarbiorum. Etc. De Victoriis Ha Bitis in India, et Malacha. Ad. S. In Christo Patrem et Dominum Nostru. Do. Leonem. X. Pont. Maximu*; Manuel I of Portugal, *Epistola Potentissimi Ac Invictissimi Emanuelis Regis Portugalie et Algarbiorum. De Victoriis Habitis in India et Malacha. Ad s. In Christo Patrem et Dominum Nostru. Dñm Leonem Decimu. Pont. Maximu*; Manuel I of Portugal, *Abtruck Ains Lateinischen Sandtbrieves an Bapstliche Heiligkeit von Künigklicher Wurde Zu Portegall Dis Jars Ausgangen von Der Eroberten Stadt Malacha Anderen Künigreychen Unnd Herrschaften in India Auch Gegen Aufgangk Der Sunnen Erstlich Zu Rom Auf .IX. Tag Augusti in Latein Getruckt und Nachmaln Auf .v. Tag Septembris Zu Augspurg in Tewtsch Gebracht (Germany, 1513)*; Manuel I of Portugal, *Abtruck Ains Lateinischen Sandtbrieves an Bapstliche Heiligkeit, von Künigklicher Wurden Zue Portegall Diß Jars Außgangen, von Der Eroberten Stat Malacha: Anderen Künigrychen und Herrschafften in India, Auch Gegen Auffgang Der Sunnen, Erstlich Zu Rom in Latein Getruckt und Nachmaln in Teüsch Gebracht.*

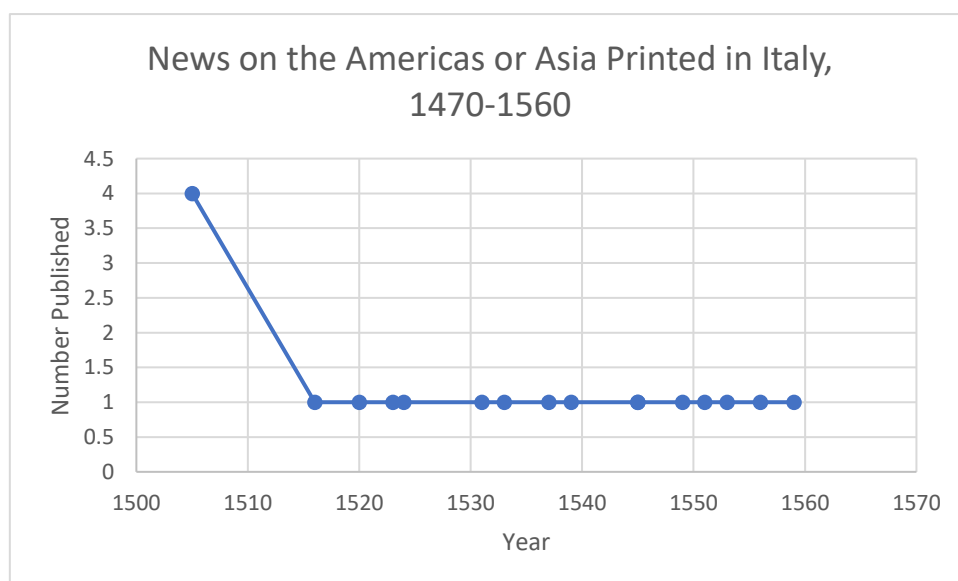
<sup>669</sup> Anthony Pagden, ed., 'Translator's Introduction', in *Letters from Mexico* (New York, 1971), lx-lxii.

<sup>670</sup> *Copey Etlicher Brieff so Ausz Hispania Kummen Seindt Anzaygent Die Eygenschafft Des Newen Lands so Newlich von Kay. May. Armadi Auff Dem Newen Moer Gefunden Ist Worden Durch Die Hispanier.* (Nuremberg, 1535); Joseph Sabin, *A Dictionary of Books Relating to America: From Its Discovery to the Present Time*, vol. 15 (New York, 1885), 165.

In Italy, the number of printed news items, and the reliance upon them for information, was much lower due to the early success of *avvisi*: only 456 news items were printed between 1470 and 1560.<sup>671</sup>



Of these, only nineteen relate to Asia or the Americas, and one to Prester John (3.73 per cent). Four concern Jesuits, and several are copies of each other (see Appendix 2.1). This was a far higher proportion of printed news than in Germany, reflecting the unusual levels of interest in the Americas and Asia in Italy, but was still a very small number.



<sup>671</sup> Universal Short Title Catalogue.



No *Zeitungen* were published in Augsburg until 1515, and there were no *Zeitungen* on the Americas or Asia at all until 1505, after the great companies had gained entry into overseas trade.<sup>672</sup> In the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese empire was, as outlined in Chapter Two, established almost to its fullest extent with the Battle of Goa in 1510 and the Battle of Malacca in the following year and the great period of activity of German and especially Italian merchants in Portuguese Asia lasted only until c.1525.

*Zeitungen* and *avvisi* were inadequate for obtaining the quality and quantity of news required to interpret and respond to these events, as they were for monitoring current events within Europe. Not only were they insufficient numerically, they were published far later than merchant letters were received and than the period in which they could be most useful. News rapidly lost its value as it aged. In a late example, a letter of 1561 on the return of ships from Peru, the Medici agent Fabrizio Ferrari noted that the *avvisi* that he was sending to Cosimo were old: ‘Attached here are some old notices that you have received’ (*Qui alligato sono alcuni avvisi vecchi che ha havuti*).<sup>673</sup> It was not until the second half of the sixteenth century, in Italy, and the seventeenth century, in the rest of Europe, that handwritten letters were fully fledged as a major source of news, moving beyond court circles to become regular and widely available to the broader reading public.<sup>674</sup> News, written or printed, was exchanged at a far lower volume, and by a far smaller number of people, in the first half of the century. Only merchant letters, and the dispatches of the Portuguese and Spanish overseas administrations, had practical use, giving those with access to them enormous advantages over everyone else.

Likewise, a regular, even weekly postal service existed in several European cities in the second half of the sixteenth century, but was only in an embryonic state in the first.<sup>675</sup> From the very late fifteenth century, the Habsburg family had commissioned the Tassis (Taxi) family as postmasters, creating an Imperial postal service that, by the mid-sixteenth century, stretched across the vast Habsburg territories to Spain, the Netherlands, and Germany.<sup>676</sup> This postal

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<sup>672</sup> *Copia Der Newen Eytung Ausz Presilg Landt* (Augsburg, 1515); *Ein Schoene Neue Zeytung*.

<sup>673</sup> Fabrizio Ferrari, ‘Letter to Cosimo I de’ Medici in Florence’ (6 August 1561), Mediceo del Principato 3108, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>674</sup> Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture*; Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*; Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*; Vivo, ‘Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice’, 37; Pieper, ‘Spain’s Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century’, 509–10.

<sup>675</sup> Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe*, *passim*, including 1-4, 9.

<sup>676</sup> Anna Frey-Schlesinger, ‘Die Volkswirtschaftliche Bedeutung Der Habsburgischen Post Im 16. Jahrhundert’, *Vierteljahrschrift Für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 15, no. 3/4 (1919): 399–465; Borreguero Beltrán, ‘Philip of Spain: The Spider’s Web of News and Information’, 28.

service and those created by other courts and cities were used by courts, ambassadors, civic authorities, and merchants, especially those with multiple branches.<sup>677</sup> In 1494, Martin Behaim told his cousin Michael that ‘If any of you desire to write to me now let them address the letter to the factor of the King of Portugal, here at Antwerp, or here at Brugge [*sic*], ...and the factor will then forward them every month. The factor lives in the house next to that of the Velj at Antwerp. The servants of the Velj at Antwerp will forward your letters’.<sup>678</sup> Behaim’s letter indicates that, though the Portuguese royal factor was technically in charge of post, it was really merchants who were organising and undertaking the actual transport of letters. As Behaim’s letter suggests, the growing demand for better communications, especially for trade and diplomacy, had prompted other courts and some of the major commercial cities to create postal services themselves, but these, and the Habsburg one, were still insufficient.<sup>679</sup> An ordinary postal service between Madrid and Brussels, the two main cities in the Spanish Habsburg lands, was not introduced until 1560.<sup>680</sup> It was not until the seventeenth century that the postal services of merchants and other private groups were replaced by public ones, especially over long distances.<sup>681</sup>

Like *avvisi* and *Zeitungen*, books on the Americas and Asia were scarce in the first decades after Columbus’ voyage of 1492. They were not a source for actors in this period and reflect later attitudes; they must be studied with this in mind. Chronicles, letter compilations and other books, which have long been important sources for studies of early European activity in Asia and the New World, were mostly printed in the second quarter of the sixteenth century and onwards. The great exception was Ragusio’s *Paesi Novamente Retrovati*.<sup>682</sup> Published in Venice in 1507 and translated into German in Nuremberg the following year, it was a compendium of pre-Columbian travel accounts, such as those of Marco Polo, Ludovico Varthema, and Alvise da Ca’ da Mosto; merchant letters, including Vespucci’s *Modus Novus*; and the letters of Venetian ambassadors. It was extremely popular: eight more additions were published by 1515 and fifteen editions were published in the sixteenth century.<sup>683</sup> Like the

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<sup>677</sup> Borreguero Beltrán, ‘Philip of Spain: The Spider’s Web of News and Information’, 28; Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 5.

<sup>678</sup> Behaim, ‘Letter from Antwerp to His Cousin Michael Behaim (11 March 1494)’.

<sup>679</sup> Arblaster, *From Ghent to Aix: How They Brought the News in the Habsburg Netherlands, 1550–1700*, 35; Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 5.

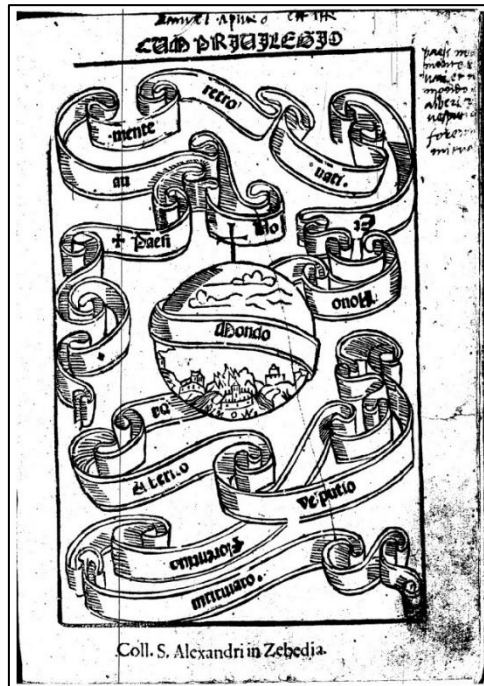
<sup>680</sup> Borreguero Beltrán, ‘Philip of Spain: The Spider’s Web of News and Information’, 28.

<sup>681</sup> Rene Barendse, ‘The Long Road to Livorno: The Overland Messenger Service of the Dutch East India Company in the Seventeenth Century’, *Itinerario* 12, no. 2 (1988): 31–32.

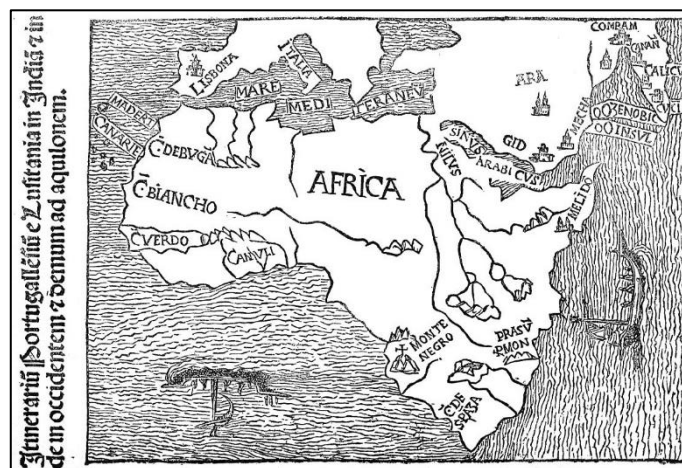
<sup>682</sup> Montalboddo, *Paesi Novamente Retrovati*; Fracanzio da Montalboddo, ed., *Neue Vnbekante Landte*, trans. Jobst Ruchamer (Nuremberg, 1508).

<sup>683</sup> Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America*, 34.

illegitimate copy of Peter Martyr's decades, published in Venice in 1504, the *Paesi* was published outside the reach of Spanish and Portuguese censorship and in a polity with a rich humanist and mercantile tradition. The same applied to Waldseemüller's map which, however, had a limited print diffusion and was printed – in 1507 – too late for the German and Italian merchants.<sup>684</sup>



*Paesi Novamente Retrovati*, Frontispiece



*Paesi Novamente Retrovati*

<sup>684</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*.

That documents written at a later date must be considered within their own context – that the distance between the time of writing and the events being described must be incorporated into analyses – is well-known and hardly needs to be said. Nonetheless, it should be noted that these printed texts have been the primary source of analysis for the events of the sixteenth century, which has inevitably coloured the view of historians towards the earlier decades of that century. In the case of printed and handwritten newsletters and their distribution, much attention has been given to how news and news networks were shaped by political and religious divisions. In Catholic Europe, *avvisi* were crucial for the dissemination of news about Asia and the New World, although Venice was an important producer of pamphlets, whereas Protestant Europe relied more upon printed newsletters. The contents of these newsheets could be strikingly different: the Spanish government, for example, suppressed news of Spanish defeats, which were naturally celebrated in Dutch newsletters. These divisions, however, were not fully felt in the press until the 1580s.<sup>685</sup>

Merchants and other actors operating in the first decades after Columbus not only pre-dated such divisions, they lacked the rich body of sources that survives from later periods. It was their ability to extrapolate successfully from limited data and to take and accommodate the enormous risks caused by this uncertainty that separated them from the rest.

The other important factor that distinguished merchant correspondence from published chronicles, and the publicised letters of Columbus, Vespucci, Cortés, and other such writers, was the agenda of the author. Although merchants frequently used their correspondence for political gain, their letters did not serve as propaganda for Spain or Portugal – in the case of the chroniclers – or their own achievements – in the case of Columbus and Vespucci. Instead, as outlined above (p.90), they emphasised accuracy and clarity of information, producing significantly different accounts to those of other writers.

Before the rise of *avvisi* and *Zeitungen*, merchant letters were, although exclusive, by far the most important source of information, giving merchants and elites great control over information transfer and information itself.<sup>686</sup> Having observed that the rise of *avvisi* and *Zeitungen* was a gradual progress across the sixteenth century – that there was not an abrupt

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<sup>685</sup> Pieper, 'Spain's Monopoly in the European Network of Handwritten Newsletters during the Sixteenth Century', 502–3, 509–10; Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 270–71.

<sup>686</sup> Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political *Avvisi*', 33; Vivo, 'Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice', 37.

change from a medieval period without news to a flourishing early modern news culture – it becomes clear that this statement applies to the early sixteenth century.

Even in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, merchants had far better access to news than other Europeans due to their extensive networks, which connected them to people able to provide both information and analysis from multiple perspectives.<sup>687</sup> Consequently, despite the rise of *avvisi* and printed newsletters, private correspondence remained the most important news medium throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>688</sup> The Netherlandish trader Daniel van der Meulen subscribed to *avvisi* from Venice, Rome, Cologne, and other major commercial centres, and also purchased several pamphlets, but his primary source of news was the correspondence that he received from over 400 writers in at least 77 different locations.<sup>689</sup> Even in the late sixteenth century, merchants relied far more upon mercantile correspondence than upon *avvisi*.

Other consumers of news also valued merchant letters more than either pamphlets or *avvisi* and were heavily reliant upon them. Ambassadors, as discussed above (p.148), routinely quoted merchant letters in their correspondence. Newsletters placed even more value upon letters: by stressing that they had a prestigious source, publishers gave credibility to their newsletters.<sup>690</sup>

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As such, the biggest determinants for the circulation of news in the sixteenth century – the rise of printed and handwritten newsletters and the Catholic-Protestant split in this earlier period – were actually only significant factors from the mid-sixteenth century, especially regarding news from overseas. Moreover, the most important early texts on Asia and the Americas, which have been the focus of studies upon the European reaction to overseas discoveries, largely date from later in the century and did not influence or necessarily reflect the mentality of those people and groups acting in earlier decades. Although studies of the later periods make useful

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<sup>687</sup> Giorgio Doria, 'Conoscenza Del Mercato e Sistema Informativo: Il Know-How Dei Mercanti-Finanzieri Genovesi Nei Secoli XVI e XVII', in *La Repubblica Internazionale Del Denaro Tra XV e XVII Secolo*, ed. Aldo de Maddalena and Hermann Kellenbenz (Bologna, 1986), 77–78; Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 33.

<sup>688</sup> Sadler, 'News as a Path to Independence', 65–66; Smith, 'The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism', 990; Bruscoli, 'Circolazione Di Notizie e Andamento Dei Mercati Nel Basso Medioevo', 145.

<sup>689</sup> Sadler, 'News as a Path to Independence', 67–68.

<sup>690</sup> Palazzo, 'Avvisi at the Court of the Medici Grand Dukes', 683–84; Infelise, 'From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political Avvisi', 37.

conclusions, their focus upon this divide cannot be retroactively applied without careful adjustments.

The most significant factors for the early sixteenth century, and ones missing from the latter half, were the scarcity, exclusivity, and delay of information and the related pre-eminence of mercantile correspondence. It was under these conditions, and before the Catholic-Protestant split of news and the full flourishing of *avvisi* and printed newsletters, that merchants operated in the first crucial decades of the sixteenth century in which the Portuguese Empire was near-totally established and the patterns that would shape European commerce on the Cape Route and with the Americas were put in place.

# The Emperor's New Clothes: Soft Power and Cultural Capital

## Chapter Seven: Gifts and Exotica

The great companies' domination of the import of Asian and American luxury commodities, combined with their prominent place in the trade and manufacture of European high-value wares, gave them the opportunity to increase their socio-political standing by supplying, procuring, and giving these items to rulers. The supply of luxury items to facilitate rulers' conspicuous consumption, artistic and religious patronage, lavish court rituals, and gift exchanges was one of the most significant ties between monarchs and merchants, especially those of the great companies. Conspicuous consumption and civic and court rituals were of newly crucial importance in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, when rulers relied heavily upon symbolism, spectacle and display as expressions of authority.<sup>691</sup> Combined with a boom in luxury and especially artistic production and with the opening of the New World and Cape Route trades, the heightened importance of luxury items to the establishment and reinforcement of elite identity greatly increased merchants' opportunities for economic and political gain. The elite companies, whose capital and connections allowed them to dominate luxury trades, gained a near-monopoly upon these opportunities. They shaped rulers' consumption of luxury artefacts and artworks through their influence over commissions, their superior knowledge of art and art markets, and their role as agents of cultural exchange.

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In the Middle Ages, status competition among the nobility through conspicuous consumption transformed cities into industrial and trading centres producing luxuries, basic foodstuffs, and other requirements.<sup>692</sup> Long-distance, trans-continental commercial networks developed to import foreign commodities, especially Asian silks and spices, to the European courts. From the very beginning the demand for luxury items by the aristocracy and rulers was a crucial element of economic development and trade. In the late fifteenth century, a new aspect of this demand developed when the courtier emerged as the aristocratic ideal in the central and northern Italian courts.<sup>693</sup> A humanist education, the deployment and patronage of art, music,

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<sup>691</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London, 1950); Peter J. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca and London, 1996), 127–59.

<sup>692</sup> Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: The Merchant in Medieval Europe* (New York, 2002), 59, 63.

<sup>693</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (North Chelmsford, 2012); Peter Burke, 'The Courtier', in *Renaissance Characters*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Chicago and London, 1991), 98–123.



and other aspects of high culture and fashionable dress became essential to creating and maintaining aristocratic and seignorial or royal identity.<sup>694</sup>

At the same time, the largest European merchant-banking companies gained extensive control over the trade in luxury items. Over eighty per cent of merchants trading from Antwerp, the centre of northern European commerce, specialised in one commodity, while a few wealthy companies traded in multiple items and dominated the supply of key commodities, such as silver.<sup>695</sup> In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these same companies monopolised Antwerp's luxury cloth, tapestry, art, gemstone and spice industries, alongside the trade in Asian and American goods.<sup>696</sup> These were the places where the great companies already had connections to producers, intermediaries, fellow merchants, and transporters, and so could easily integrate the new trade into their existing activities. (In reverse, when European merchants entered into overseas trade, they traded in existing products but in new locations. Their reliance upon a tight web of connections to fellow merchants, however, remained the same). The great commercial cities of southern Germany and Italy were also important centres for luxury industries, which were dominated by merchant-entrepreneurs such as Tommaso Spinelli, who owned a silk workshop in the later fifteenth century.<sup>697</sup>

As such, the supply of luxury items to rulers – as commissioned or purchased items or as gifts – remained central to their activities overseas and to their interactions with rulers. The Fugger chief accountant, Matthäus Schwarz, was heavily involved in buying what he described as 'subtle merchandise' (*subtille kaufmannschaft*): luxury fabrics, precious stones, and spices alongside more prosaic items such as raw materials for the cloth industry.<sup>698</sup> An interesting parallel might be drawn between Schwarz's term and the modern phrase 'soft power'.

By procuring and commissioning *objets d'art* for rulers, merchants played an influential role as agents of cultural exchange. In the fifteenth century, Italian merchants – with the Medici among the most prominent – were responsible for disseminating Netherlandish oil paintings and tapestries across Europe.<sup>699</sup> Florentine expatriates were especially important as agents of

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<sup>694</sup> Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.

<sup>695</sup> Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 36–37.

<sup>696</sup> Puttevils, 59–62.

<sup>697</sup> Caferro, 'The Silk Business of Tommaso Spinelli, Fifteenth-Century Florentine Merchant and Papal Banker'.

<sup>698</sup> Ulinka Rublack, 'Renaissance Dress, Cultures of Making, and the Period Eye', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 23, no. 1 (2016): 12–14.

<sup>699</sup> See, for example, the correspondence of Gierozzo de' Pigli, a Medici agent: Gierozzo de' Pigli, 'Letter from Bruges to Giovanni de' Medici (10 November 1453)', in *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis*, ed. Armand Grunzweig (Brussels, 1931), 26–31; Gierozzo de' Pigli, 'Letter from Bruges to Giovanni de' Medici

artistic exchange and patronage in the Iberian Peninsula, where rulers, particularly the Portuguese crown, favoured Netherlandish and Florentine art and architecture.<sup>700</sup> The Sernigi procured for Manuel the outstanding *Bíblia dos Jerónimos*, considered one of the best examples of Renaissance Florentine illumination, under a contract that stipulated that Chimenti Sernigi was responsible for ensuring the quality of the illumination.<sup>701</sup> The Sernigi had also contracted with Andrea Sansovino in 1492 to produce a sculpture for Manuel's predecessor João II.<sup>702</sup> In competition with Genoese and local merchants to give loans, Florentine merchants were able to gain royal favour by offering their knowledge of and connections to the Florentine art market.

Merchants also supplied luxury items, especially cloth, for court ceremonies.<sup>703</sup> The growing importance of imagery and strategic demonstrations of luxury produced a Europe-wide trend in the mid-fifteenth century to increase the splendour of ceremonies and of the ruler.<sup>704</sup> This, concomitantly, increased the opportunities that could be gained from dominating supply. The Fugger, in particular, were heavily involved in Habsburg ceremonies; not only did they fund Charles V's election, they also paid for his coronation procession to Aachen and the coronation itself.<sup>705</sup> They, and other powerful merchants, were also able to gain some control over the symbolism of civic rituals for their own purposes.<sup>706</sup> Jacob Fugger used the occasion of Ferdinand's wedding to Anna of Hungary in Linz to give 9946 florins' worth of gifts, including

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(30 December 1453 and 8 June 1454)', in *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis*, ed. Armand Grunzweig (Brussels, 1931), 31–36; Gierozzo de' Pigli, 'Letter from Bruges to Giovanni de' Medici in Florence (8 and 9 July 1454)', in *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis*, ed. Armand Grunzweig (Brussels, 1931), 43–45; Gierozzo de' Pigli, 'Letter from Bruges to Piero de' Medici (29 March and 13 April 1454)', in *Correspondance de La Filiale de Bruges Des Médicis*, ed. Armand Grunzweig (Brussels, 1931), 38–43; Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 77–78.

<sup>700</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 18.

<sup>701</sup> Contract between Chimente di Cipriano di Sernigi and Attavante degli Attavante for the *Bíblia dos Jerónimos* (23 April 1494). G. Milanese, *Nuovi Documenti per La Storia Dell'arte Toscana Dall Xii al Xvi Secolo* (Rome, 1893), 164–66; for the debate over whether the Sernigi (and possibly Marchionni) commissioned the *Bíblia* as a gift for Manuel or at his request, see Sarah Emily Bromberg, 'The Context and Reception History of the Illuminations in Nicholas of Lyra's Postilla Litteralis Super Totam Bibliam: Fifteenth-Century Case Studies' (Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 61–69; Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)'.

<sup>702</sup> 'Conductio Facta Magistri Andree Scultoris a Domino Clemente Sernigii pro Rege Portugalli Publicata et Restituta Partibus Prout Hic Jacet' (9 December 1492), 317r–20, Notarile antecosimiano B2247, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; transcribed and analysed in Janez Höfler, 'New Light on Andrea Sansovino's Journey to Portugal', *The Burlington Magazine* 134, no. 1069 (1992): 234–38.

<sup>703</sup> Florence Edler de Roover, 'The Van Der Molen, Commission Merchants of Antwerp: Trade with Italy, 1538–44', in *Medieval and Historiographical Essays in Honour of James Westfall Thompson*, ed. James Lea Cate and Eugene N. Anderson (Chicago, 1938), 116–17.

<sup>704</sup> Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 127–59.

<sup>705</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 78–79.

<sup>706</sup> For the participation of more ordinary merchants in rituals within their guilds or nations, see, for example, Richard C. Trexler, ed., *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca, 1991), 247–48, 252.

to authorities responsible for the Hungarian copper mines which he controlled.<sup>707</sup> The pre-ducal Medici family's usurpation of rituals for their own veneration, especially the *fiesta* of the Magi, has already been noted in the scholarship.<sup>708</sup> The role of the Magi as patrons of both merchants and kings suited the Medici, who decorated their chapel with a fresco of the Three Kings in which they themselves appeared alongside Italian princes.<sup>709</sup>



*Journey of the Magi*

Detail showing Sigismondo Malatesta, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, and Cosimo and Piero de' Medici

Similarly, in August 1509, Giovanni Morelli wrote, 'on the 13<sup>th</sup> of this month, the king [Manuel] came here from Evora and went to Sintra. When he was a league off from here, my employer [Bartolomeo Marchionni] and we others went to meet the said king in a boat' (*Dipoi, addì 13 del presente venne qui el Re che veniva da Evora e andava a Sintri. Quando fu presso qui 'n una leggha, questo mio maggiore e noi altri andamo in chontro a detto Re cho una barcha*). Marchionni boarded the ship, spoke to Manuel (*gli favellò*), and then they went together to a feast in the port.<sup>710</sup> Marchionni had usurped the traditional role of the civic representatives, transforming a meeting between ruler and city into a celebration of his close relationship with the king.

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<sup>707</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 25.

<sup>708</sup> Rab Hatfield, 'The Compagnia de' Magi', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 108.

<sup>709</sup> Hatfield, 108.

<sup>710</sup> Giovanni di Paolo Morelli, 'Letter to Giansimone Buonarotti (25 August 1509)', in *Carteggio Indiretto di Michelangelo*, ed. Paola Barocchi, Kathleen Loach Bramanti, and Renzo Ristori, vol. 1, 2 vols (Florence, 1988), 15–16.

Accompanying the procurement and sale of luxury items were merchants' gifts to rulers. Gift giving and gift exchange were of supreme importance and accompanied almost all significant interactions across society, including those made by merchants. As the Renaissance developed, rulers made growing use of elaborate rituals and the ritual exchange of gifts to express and increase their authority and project valorised images of themselves and their dynasties. Fifteenth and sixteenth century merchants were full participants in contemporary gift culture. Spending large sums on religious donations and presents to members of their commercial and socio-political circle and their patrons, they adapted the wider customs surrounding gifts to suit their unique needs. The outstanding favour enjoyed by the merchants explored here as case studies – Bartolomeo Marchionni and the Fugger – was partly facilitated by the sumptuous gifts that they provided to rulers and religious institutions, leading to privileged commercial status and ultimately to entrance into the nobility.

These exchanges, which have hitherto received little attention, and particularly when involving merchants, were an essential element of the relationship dynamics between rulers and merchants, through which they sought to form long-term ties and create obligations of reciprocity.<sup>711</sup> Following the sociological-anthropological theory of gift exchange developed in the early twentieth century by Mauss and Malinowski, gifts, 'are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested'.<sup>712</sup> These principles, although developed out of observations of Pacific Islanders who exchanged gifts of extremely low commercial value, applied equally to the great merchant companies of fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe and the lavish gifts which they bestowed upon kings.<sup>713</sup>

The value of gifts reflected the worth of both giver and recipient. 'Make the gift in proportion to your own status', wrote the mid-fourteenth century Florentine merchant Paolo da Certaldo, and 'look at to whom you are giving the gift, and whether he is worthy of it'.<sup>714</sup> These medieval concepts were augmented by the well-developed market economy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which attached monetary as well as symbolic value to gifts.<sup>715</sup> Merchants demonstrated their wealth by throwing it away upon expensive gifts which, in a

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<sup>711</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London, New York, 2014); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1966).

<sup>712</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 1.

<sup>713</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*; Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2010); for works using the same approach, see Moses I Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York, 2002); and John M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto, 1995), 92–93.

<sup>714</sup> da Certaldo, 'Book of Good Practices', 87.

<sup>715</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*; Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism*.

commercialised society, could serve as a source of bullion and jewels should rulers run out of money, as they frequently did. The emperor Maximilian I's plate collection was almost always pawned due to his vast expenditure, obliging him to pay exorbitant rates of interest.<sup>716</sup>

Despite the enormous importance of gifts, gift exchange has received limited attention in the literature, especially compared to the enormous amounts of research by cultural historians that have been dedicated to mercantile religious patronage, particularly in Florence, and to court and civic culture.<sup>717</sup> In traditional economic historiography studies of gift exchange remain relatively rare. The very concept of gift-giving and its concomitant short-term losses conflicts with traditional interpretations of profit maximisation as practiced by the 'proto-capitalist' corporations of the sixteenth century. However, more recent scholarship has demonstrated that the merchants of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, like the Peruzzi and other firms of previous centuries, operated not only as individuals but as members of commercial and client-patron networks.<sup>718</sup> Merchant companies sought to gain economic profit within, or appearing to be within, the norms of their societies.<sup>719</sup> Gift and economic exchange should instead be understood as co-operating functions at a time when elite companies operated both individually and within existing socio-commercial frameworks.

In 1473, Ulrich Fugger and Company gave presents of cloth to the Emperor Frederick III for his meeting with Charles the Bold in Trier to negotiate the marriage of his son Maximilian to Charles' daughter Mary. According to Hans Jacob Fugger, writing in the later sixteenth century, Frederick, who was notoriously destitute, wanted his train 'to be habited in plain coloured cloth and furnished forth right merrily, and Ulrich Fugger was commended to him by the Chancellor, Hans Rebwein, as an honest and sound man to furnish His Majesty with good cloth and silks... whereon the Emperor made him as a free gift without payment his coat of arms of the lilies, and this was the first Trade and Business which the Lords of Austria had with the House of Fugger'.<sup>720</sup>

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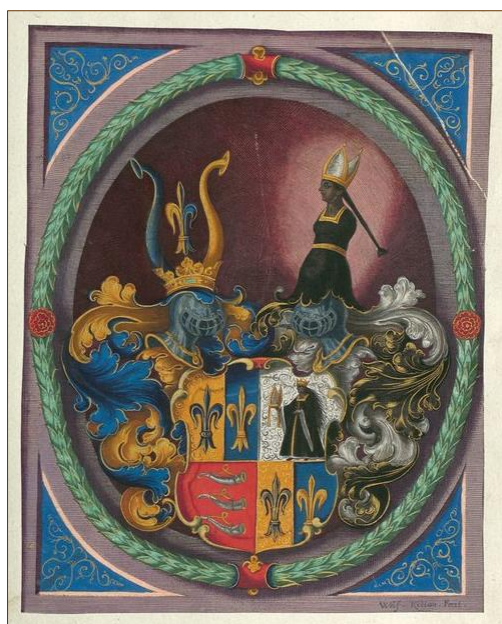
<sup>716</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 34.

<sup>717</sup> On ritual gift-giving between merchant organisations and rulers, see Wim Blockmans and E. Donckers, 'Self-Representation of Court and City in Flanders and Brabant in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', in *Showing Status*, ed. Wim Blockmans and A. Janse (Turnhout, 1999), especially 94-95; and Tamar Cholcman, 'The Merchant Voice: International Interests and Strategies in Local Joyeuses Entrées. The Case of Portuguese, English, and Flemish Merchants in Antwerp (1599) and Lisbon (1619)', *Dutch Crossing* 35, no. 1 (1 March 2011): 39-62.

<sup>718</sup> See the next section, upon company structures and merchant networks.

<sup>719</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 5-6.

<sup>720</sup> Ehrenberg, *Das Zeitalter Der Fugger*, 1:88; translated in Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 66.



*Fugger Coat of Arms in The Secret Book of Honours (c.1548)*

Hans Jacob's emphasis that the Fuggers' coat of arms was freely given derived from the great honour bestowed by gifts, which supported commercial exchanges by establishing relationships and credit. Unlike in modern concepts of the gift as altruistic and 'free' from expectations, the transactional nature of both relationships and gifts were openly acknowledged by fifteenth and sixteenth century European society, which was grounded in notions of exchange.<sup>721</sup> The Fugger were thus already favoured by Maximilian when he gained ownership of the Tyrol silver mines in the 1490s. In addition, their coat of arms added prestige, raising them in the eyes of the Imperial court. This exchange of gifts was far from unique, but rather a particularly successful example of a wider social phenomenon in which gifts were an important part of relationships, commerce and finance.<sup>722</sup> Between merchants and monarchs, they served to convey honour and creditworthiness to both parties, and to form or cement economic, social, and political partnerships that extended beyond single transactions.

Participating in gift-giving thus rendered merchants' activities more acceptable to fifteenth and sixteenth-century society. For example, interest upon loans was sometimes said to be a 'gift' to circumvent ecclesiastical bans.<sup>723</sup> Depicting something as a gift, therefore, theoretically rendered it acceptable, even if it was generally known that such 'gifts' were really concealed interest. In this way, the practice of gift-giving is one of the best pieces of evidence of the

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<sup>721</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 1; Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 287; Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*; cf. Ronald F. E. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013).

<sup>722</sup> Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism*, 146.

<sup>723</sup> Diana Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought* (Cambridge, 2002), 187.

problem of economic historians' emphasis upon the importance of profit maximisation to companies of this era.<sup>724</sup> Gift-giving could take the form of selling an item at significantly below the market rate, representing a direct loss in account books and other quantitative sources favoured by traditional economic history. For example, in 1510, the Fugger bank in Rome, which served as a papal bank and tax collector, sold a diamond to Julius II for 18 000 ducats.<sup>725</sup> Although they had bought this diamond for 20 000 ducats from the liquidators of the Venetian Agostini bank, this did not represent a loss for the company. It was a small price to pay for entrenching their position as papal bankers and as suppliers for the Curia.

Sales of luxuries could be as compelling as gifts in tying rulers to merchants. This was made unusually overt in the loans from the Fugger company in Venice to Cosimo I de' Medici, whom they generally obliged to buy a jewel as part of the agreement. Although these gift exchanges date from later in the sixteenth century, they are so demonstrative of the phenomenon – and yet, on the other hand, of the exceptional ability and conduct of the Fugger – that they have been included here as a case study. In 1554, Cosimo borrowed 75 000 ducats and bought a jewel for 23 600 gold scudi.<sup>726</sup> This represented approximately one third of the loan and was thus a considerable financial investment, far from a token gesture.<sup>727</sup> His agent to Venice, Bernardo Vecchietti, wrote on 29 September that the agreement for the loan had been made as far as possible 'As for the contract with the lords Fugger... it is necessary before the interactions are concluded to have an answer from signor Antonio... [and] to obtain the jewel from him as much as any other particular' (*Quanto al partito con li signori Fuccheri... bisogna prima che interamenti si concluda, hauere una risposta dal signore Antonio... per hauere da lui si della gioia come d'altro ogni particolare*).<sup>728</sup> The Medici, Vecchietti's letters reveal, did not have the upper hand 'in the negotiations concerning the state of the jewel' (*da la differentia, del setuare le gioie*).<sup>729</sup> By selling desirable artefacts to Cosimo, the Fugger sought to ensure repayment and further connections whilst emphasising their own wealth, their commitment to the transaction, and their recognition of the monarch's glory that made them worthy of such

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<sup>724</sup> For criticism of this view, see Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 4; and Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma (1560-1614)', 280.

<sup>725</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 72.

<sup>726</sup> Ehrenberg, 112.

<sup>727</sup> For conversions between ducats and florins, see Carlo M. Cipolla, *Money in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 65.

<sup>728</sup> Bernardo Vecchietti in Venice to Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence (29 September 1554). Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, Carteggio Universale vol. 2970, f. 707.

<sup>729</sup> Bernardo Vecchietti in Venice to Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence (13 October 1554). ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale vol. 2970, f. 726.

possessions. For the rulers, the purchase of the jewel was an immediate commitment to the loan and a demonstration of credit: both the willingness to fulfil the exchange and the ability to do so. Through these luxury items, rulers were more closely bound to the merchants and to their contracts.

Such sales to rulers challenge the notion, first proposed by Mauss, that market exchanges fail to create relationships between parties. This argument was adopted by many historians who saw the rise of capitalism or proto-capitalism as the breakdown of the connection between the item being transacted and the people involved in the transaction.<sup>730</sup> Rather, merchants established their creditworthiness and formed associations through repeated transactions with other merchants and with rulers. Many individual merchants or companies served as court suppliers for many years, using their personal connections to make advantageous sales. Tommaso Portinari, head of the Bruges branch of the Medici bank, clearly saw selling valuable cloth to the court as one of his chief duties. He justified his participation in the 1473 meeting between Charles the Bold and Frederick III at Trier (for which the Fugger had supplied Frederick III's clothing), which necessitated an absence from the bank of several months, by arguing that he would be able to sell luxury textiles to the court and to gather information.<sup>731</sup> Merchants who wished to navigate court circles were learning that they had to act as courtiers.<sup>732</sup>

Gifts and sales of gift-worthy items were particularly important in the absence of commercial privileges and protection, making merchants reliant upon the good opinion of the ruler and their courtiers rather than upon legal protection. By selling and giving luxury items, of which they had superior access than did local merchants (who were, however, eagerly entering the market), they were able to gain and maintain protection and further trade privileges.

As well as granting coveted items and honour, gifts established, underlined, or redefined the nature of the relationship between giver and recipient. By exchanging gifts, merchants and monarchs negotiated their relationship, projected idealised images of themselves, and demonstrated their attitudes towards each other and their ambitions for the partnership. In the fifteenth century, the socio-political rise of the Medici and their unusual position as both bankers and pseudo-princes was reflected through their interactions with the valuables of others

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<sup>730</sup> For a discussion of this debate, see Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism*, particularly 151-57.

<sup>731</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 44.

<sup>732</sup> Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.



in their circle. Lorenzo il Magnifico took precious items, such as the silver of Cardinal d'Estouteville, as collateral against loans, but was also given Paolo Uccello's *Rout of San Romano* by the Bartolini family 'in respect of services rendered in resolving a family dispute'.<sup>733</sup> Gifts enabled reciprocity without direct exchange whilst emphasising the nature of the relationship. The Bartolini's gift confirmed Lorenzo's role as the chief patron – both *Maecenas* and *padrone* – of Florence.

Rulers also gave gifts to their subjects. Conrad Peutinger was given a silver goblet as a reward for his work on the Habsburg genealogy that Maximilian had commissioned.<sup>734</sup> Such presents, although not always repaying, in monetary terms, the merchant's efforts, conveyed enormous amounts of prestige. demonstrated the giver's generosity and ensured the loyalty of the recipient.

In other cases, elaborate gifts to merchants could be supplicatory and provide evidence of a ruler's insecurity and dependence upon their commercial agents. The great number of gifts given to Anton Tucher, who as *losunger* (treasurer) was the highest-ranked official in the Nuremberg government, indicate how much Frederick III of Saxony and other German princes depended upon his political intercession and his commercial and information networks.<sup>735</sup> The gifts included two hazel grouse from Sebald Pfinzing, another patrician; two partridges from Hans Stromer; wild boar from Gabriel von Eyb, bishop of Eichstätt; and a book from Bernhard von Hirschfeld, treasurer for Frederick of Saxony. In 1511, Frederick of Saxony's councillor, Degenhart Pfäffinger, sent Frederick's correspondent Anton Tucher a little barrel (*Fässlein*) of venison (*Wilpret*), which could only be obtained by hunting, an exclusively aristocratic pursuit.<sup>736</sup> These gifts gave Anton Tucher the trappings of nobility otherwise unavailable to him, which he could show off in feasts and other celebrations.

In this period, it was the new or weak rulers, such as Maximilian I, and Cosimo I de' Medici and Charles V early in their reigns, who made supplicatory gifts, not Henry VIII of England or Philip II of Spain. The Medici, whose dynasty remained precarious throughout the mid-sixteenth century, were particularly beholden to their creditors. In the winter of 1553-54, Cosimo was struggling to borrow from the Fugger due to conflicts over their use of the *Beni*

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<sup>733</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 108.

<sup>734</sup> Lutz, *Conrad Peutinger: Beiträge Zu Einer Politischen Biographie*, 51.

<sup>735</sup> See the previous chapter for the correspondence between Anton Tucher and Frederick III of Saxony.

<sup>736</sup> Degenhart Pfäffinger, 'Brief von Degenhart Pfäffinger in Weimar an Anton Tucher in Nüremberg' (31 October 1511), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1307, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

*fiscali*, Leonor di Toledo's Neapolitan estates. The previous Fugger factor in Venice, Christoph Müllich, had recently been replaced, and so Bernardo Vecchietti, Cosimo's agent in Venice, obtained Cosimo's permission to win the favour of the new factor and obtain further loans with the gift of a chain, probably of gold: 'the chain to give to this minister [i.e. factor] of the lords Fugger in accordance with the order of your Most Illustrious Excellency, worth two hundred gold scudi' (...*la catena per donari a questo ministro delli signori Fuccheri conforme al hordine di Vostra Eccellenza Illustrissima che moneta Δ digiento d'oro...*).<sup>737</sup> Humiliatingly, Vecchietti had so little money that he was obliged to borrow from the Fugger to pay for the chain, which reflected poorly upon Cosimo's credit.<sup>738</sup> Vecchietti's loan from the Fugger to obtain the gold chain is yet more proof of the power of the gift.<sup>739</sup> The benefit to the Fugger lay not in money but in the great honour of receiving a gold chain from the duke of Tuscany, which was almost beyond price. The gift exchange also demonstrates Cosimo's reliance upon the Fugger, which he sought to conceal to protect his credit and his authority: Vecchietti had been ostensibly sent to Venice to purchase jewellery and racehorses.<sup>740</sup> Cosimo's dealings with the Fugger and his loans from other merchants, such as the Grimaldi of Genoa, were a state secret.<sup>741</sup>

On several occasions, Cosimo I de' Medici ordered gifts for the Imperial postmasters including the Tassi or Taxi family. On 13 November 1544, his chief secretary, Pier Francesco Riccio, wrote that Cosimo had approved a gift to Johann Anton von Taxis, the Imperial postmaster in Rome: 'His Excellency [Cosimo I] has done well occasionally, indeed often, to send [gifts of] acknowledgement to the master of the post offices of [various] places: gold chains, money, silver cups, or textiles. I would never have taken this assumption without being charged to do so, but, to me, it seems to be worthy of consideration that the Tassi [Johann Anton von Taxis] of Rome is also given some [gifts of] acknowledgement from His Excellency, and, especially in these times, I would also suggest that the messengers of the post office should receive

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<sup>737</sup> Bernardo Vecchietti in Venice to Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence (26 June 1554). Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, Carteggio Universale vol. 2970 f. 481.

<sup>738</sup> Bernardo Vecchietti, 'Letter to Cosimo I de' Medici' (26 June 1554), fol. 481, Mediceo del Principato, Carteggio Universale 2970, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; Götz Freiherr von Pölnitz, 'Cosimo I. Medici und Die Europäische Anleihepolitik Der Fugger', in *Quellen und Forschungen Aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, vol. 32 (Rome, 1942), 220–21.

<sup>739</sup> Bernardo Vecchietti, 'Letter to Cosimo I de' Medici' (30 June 1554), fol. 483, Mediceo del Principato, Carteggio Universale 2970, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>740</sup> Bernardo Vecchietti, 'Letter to Cosimo I de' Medici' (16 June 1554), fol. 473r-v, Mediceo del Principato, Carteggio Universale 2970, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>741</sup> Pölnitz, 'Cosimo I. Medici und Die Europäische Anleihepolitik Der Fugger', 214–15, 218–19; Götz Freiherr von Pölnitz, 'Fugger und Medici', *Historische Zeitschrift* 166, no. 1 (1942): 11.

kindnesses from His Excellency' (*Ha bene usato sua eccellenza mandare qualche volta, anzi spesso, ricognoscimento a' maestri delle poste de' luoghi, o in cathene d'oro o in danari o in tazze d'argento o in drappi. Imperò io senza commissione non userei piglare [pigliare] questo assunto, ma mi pare ben degno di consideratione che ancho il Tassi [Johann Anton von Taxis] di Roma ne riporti qualche ricordanza da sua eccellenza, et specialmente in questi tempi ne' quali anche approverei gli garzoni delle poste sentissero della benignità di sua eccellenza...*). Cristiano Pagni, another secretary, added: 'If the Tassis have not been recognised he wants them to be. And he wants the others to send a gift to the men of the post office, to be given in the name of His Excellency and not of the ambassador [Averardo Serristori] to the major-domo' (*Se il Tassis non è stato riconosciuto vuole che sia. Et alli altri vuole si mandi la mancia a quelli delle poste, che se li dia a nome di sua eccellenza et non dello imbasciatore al maiordomo...*).<sup>742</sup> In 1545, 'a gold collar worth 25 scudi' (*una collana di 25 scudi*) was also ordered for Lorenzo Borgogna, postmaster of Trent, 'about which we have spoken several times concerning recognising him with some favour so that he may have cause to serve [us] well' (*del quale s'è parlato più volte di richonoscerlo con qualche gentilezza acco [accidò] abbia causa di servire bene*).<sup>743</sup> The Council of Trent would start in December, which may have been Cosimo's motivation to win the favour of the Trent postmaster, but Trent was also an important city on the route into northern Europe. Lacking political security, Cosimo used his command of Florence's superior manufacturing (which he encouraged with the establishment of various workshops, such as the *Arazzerie Medicee*) to create and strengthen alliances with other important members of the Imperial circle, asserting his own position within the Habsburg sphere and indirectly pledging his loyalty to the Emperor by demonstrating his appreciation of the Imperial postal system. His cultivation of the postmasters was not unique. Paulus Behaim, a Nuremberg patrician, received presents from the postmaster to Stein, the postmaster Conz Osterreicher, and a postal messenger, Endres Reüter. As a city councillor (*Ratsherr*) with, as his gift list shows, connections to the aristocracy and to internationally active merchants, Behaim was a powerful ally.<sup>744</sup>

The ambiguous power dynamic between ruler and merchant was further symbolised through Cosimo's preference for gold chains as gifts. Gold chains were powerful symbols of authority,

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<sup>742</sup> Letter from Pier Francesco Riccio to Cristiano Pagni (13 November 1544). ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale vol. 1169, fol. 512r.

<sup>743</sup> Letter from unknown to Lorenzo di Andrea Pagni (before 31 July 1545). ASF, MdP, Carteggio Universale, vol. 1171, fol. 503r.

<sup>744</sup> Linhart Tucher, 'Geschenkliste' (1526), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 1711, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

appearing in most portraits of rulers such as Henry VIII, Francis I, and Charles V – although not, interestingly, in any of Cosimo’s.



*Henry VIII, detail*



*Francis I*



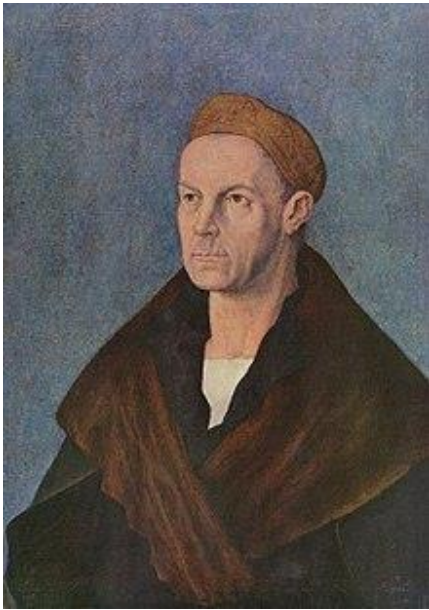
*Charles V*



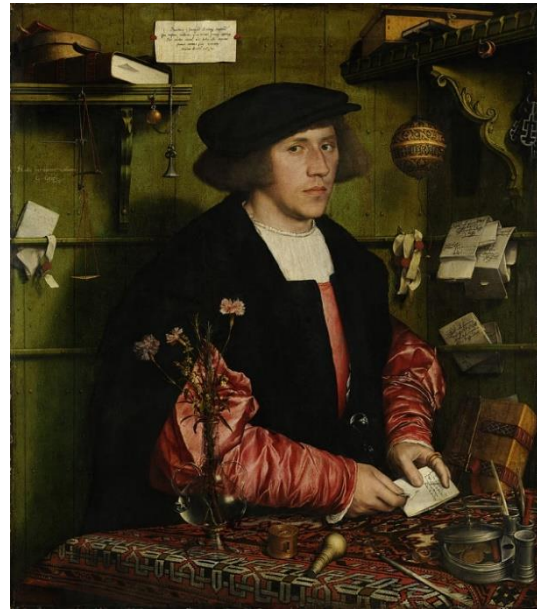
*Cosimo I, detail*

Nor do they appear in the traditional portraits of merchants created by Dürer and Holbein, which show merchants – respectively Jacob Fugger and Hanseatic merchants of the Steelyard

– in comparatively sober dress, although of the highest quality and in luxurious, Burgundian black.<sup>745</sup>



*Jacob Fugger*



*Georg Giese*

Later portraits of merchants, however, such as those of Christoph (1541) and Hans Jacob Fugger (1543), by Christoph Amberger, deliberately imitated the clothing and pose of aristocratic portraits and include large gold chains and swords, symbolising the Fuggers' transition into the nobility.

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<sup>745</sup> Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, 74–75; Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 20–21.



*Christoph Fugger*



*Hans Jacob Fugger*

In return for their dealings with Cosimo, the Fugger factor and the Imperial postmasters gained high-status jewellery to reinforce their social ascendancy.

For the same reasons as they proffered lavish items to rulers, gifts played a central role in commercial client-patronage networks. Merchant manuals, such as Paolo da Certaldo's mid-fourteenth century 'Book of Good Practices' frequently spoke of the need to give gifts to win political favour and thus commercial advantage.<sup>746</sup> Andrea Strozzi instructed his son Piero, one of the several Florentine voyagers to India, to send valuable and exotic gifts to Filippo di Matteo Strozzi, by far the richest and most powerful member of their *casa*, in order to win favour: 'If you bring some presents to give to the said Filippo, it will do you good and these are useful things for anyone who wants to remain in Florence'.<sup>747</sup> Piero had become enriched from the precious gem trade – the dispute over his will indicates that he was worth 8300 gold florins upon his death in 1522 – had been made a Portuguese factor; and 'not only by each one [of us] but by the major captain and his son he is highly reputed and loved' (*non solum da ogniuno ma dal capitano maggiore e suo figliolo è molto riputato et amato*).<sup>748</sup> Andrea and

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<sup>746</sup> da Certaldo, 'Book of Good Practices', 55; Giovanni di Paolo Morelli, 'Memoirs', in *Merchant Writers: Florentine Memoirs from the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Vittore Branca and Murtha Baca (Toronto, 2015), 153–55.

<sup>747</sup> Uzielli, 'Piero Di Andrea Strozzi: Viaggiatore Fiorentino Del Secolo Delle Scoperte', 144.

<sup>748</sup> Anonymous, 'Letter to Fra Zuambatista (31 January 1513)', 127; Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 40–42.

Piero were from a comparatively poor branch of the Strozzi *casa* and Andrea obviously saw Piero's overseas success as an opportunity to gain social status.

Lorenzo il Magnifico's clients, according to his biographer Valori, competed to send him beautiful and expensive items.<sup>749</sup> In a monetised society, these gifts reflected not only the inner virtue and moral credit of the merchant, but their financial credit as well, conveying honour and security upon their commercial transactions with rulers and with other merchants.

Merchants' letters and accounts make clear the great importance that they assigned to gifts as commercial and socio-political tools. In an entry of 1524, for example, Matthäus Schwarz noted that 'the caul was a gift from Marx Rot and the bonnet from Wolf Haller in Antwerp'.<sup>750</sup> Three German merchants, Lucas Rem, Linhart Tucher, and Paulus Behaim, kept lists of the presents they gave or received, or both, over the course of several years. By recording their gifts, they able to track what they owed each individual, both monetarily and socially, and what other members of the gift exchange network thought of them as expressed through their choice of gift; the nature of gifts was indicative of the status of the networks within which they were exchanged.

Lucas Rem used his *Tagebuch* (daybook) both as an autobiography and to record important dates and events, including his wedding. He recorded the amount he and his bride spent on their clothing, the value of the gifts he gave her, her dowry, and the cost of the wedding itself. 222 florins were spent on food, including *fl.*12.5 for a 'spicery' (*specerey*) and *fl.*87.5 on meat. Christof Egensperger, Jacob Fugger, the bishops of Augsburg and Prem, Weigan von Dynhaym, and Anton Honolt of Kaufbeuren each gave him venison for the feast.<sup>751</sup> He spent 254 florins on clothing – slightly more than on food – for the groom's and the bridal party, including taffeta from Antwerp, *stamet*, samite, damask, and cloth from Lindau.<sup>752</sup> Anton Fugger likewise provided (even more lavish) gifts of clothing to his wedding party; Schwarz, who was 'the man in charge to keep order in the bridal chamber', noted of his fetching red silk

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<sup>749</sup> Niccolò Valori, 'Vita Di Lorenzo de' Medici', in *Philippi Villani Liber de Civitatis Florentiae Famosis Civibus Ex Codice Mediceo Laurentiano Nunc Primum Editus et de Florentinorum Litteratura Principes Fere Synchroni Scriptores Denuo in Lucem Prodeunt / Cura et Studio Gustavi Camilli Galletti.*, by Filippo Villani, ed. G. C. Galletti (Florence, 1847), 164–82.

<sup>750</sup> Schwarz, 'Trachtenbuch', fol. 67; translated in Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 118.

<sup>751</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 43–49.

<sup>752</sup> Rem, 46–47.

and velvet outfit that ‘everything was a gift except for the bonnet’.<sup>753</sup> The cost of the wedding reflected the importance that merchants attached to hosting splendid ceremonies, which served as ritual spaces for publicised conspicuous consumption and, in the case of weddings, for the re-negotiation of socio-economic ties.<sup>754</sup> He also included a list of guests and the value of their presents, which included two covered cups and two silver rosaries. Some guests simply gave cash, such as the gift of three ducats by Conrad Rehlinger, and most of the gifts were assigned a value and no description.<sup>755</sup> He also noted the presents that he gave at the weddings and ceremonies of other people, totalling 309 13/15 florins, including a marten-fur robe; an outfit for Conrad Peutinger at his daughter Felicia’s funeral; a ‘Rubintafel’ (a ruby-studded plate?), gold cloth from Antwerp, a ring, and a silver gilt goblet. In most cases, however, he only recorded the value of the gift, and on several occasions, he simply gave money: in 1533 and 1534, for example, he gave ‘10 florins in cash’ (*fl.10 in gold*). This habit, which he shared with other merchants, indicates that it was the monetary value of the gift that was important, far more the item itself. Schwarz, who did care a great deal about items for their own sake, knew the cost of the bonnet sent to him by Wolf Haller in Antwerp: ‘it is scarlet red and from super fine [material] from Valencia in Spain, costs 8 florins and has gold threads, I went to Andre Schregl’s wedding like this’. It was the only time that he noted the price of an item, possibly to reduce his taxes; his decision to do so clearly stemmed from the great value he placed upon the item precisely because of its costliness.<sup>756</sup>

Carefully recorded in *Tagebücher* (and similar documents), gifts provided a means by which merchants could to monitor, perpetuate, and modify their relationships with other members of their network. Consequently, the price of Rem’s gifts varied considerably depending upon the importance of the receiving party to him. He spent *fl.63* and *fl.31*<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> on his brothers-in-law, Staffel and Jörg Echäin, respectively, and *fl.11*<sup>1</sup>/<sub>5</sub> on two salt cellars (*Saltzfas*, modern *Salzfäßchen*) for his niece Anna Rem, but most presents cost less than five florins.

Among the other weddings that he attended were those of Augsburg patricians, such as the Burgermeister’s daughter. Many, perhaps a majority, of these merchants were his relatives or business connections, or both, so that Rem’s attendance and bestowal of gifts had both a socio-

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<sup>753</sup> Schwarz, ‘Trachtenbuch’, fol. 86; translated in Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 133.

<sup>754</sup> Lyndal Roper, “‘Going to Church and Street’”: Weddings in Reformation Augsburg’, *Past & Present*, no. 106 (1985): 62–101.

<sup>755</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 50–52.

<sup>756</sup> Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 32.



political and a commercial function. The marrying couple displayed their wealth through their peers in the sumptuous clothing of the wedding party and the lavish feast held afterwards; through wedding gifts, the guests could also participate in status display through ritualised conspicuous consumption. At Lucas Rem's wedding, Jacob Fugger's gift of venison, to be served at the feast, flaunted his title of *Reichsgraf*. Rem's own gift, to his brother-in-law, of gold cloth purchased in Antwerp demonstrated his wealth – the cloth cost *fl.*24 – and his commercial success, as it indicated that he had connections to what had become northern Europe's most important trading centre.

Several weddings were in other cities, including Nuremberg, Ulm, Cologne, and Lindau; Rem's attendance, sometimes in the company of his wife, reflected the highly migratory lifestyle of merchants, including Rem himself, and the trans-regional nature of merchant networks. At weddings, these merchants could reunite to reinforce their ties through face-to-face interaction, still considered the most important form of contact, and to show off their wealth.<sup>757</sup>

A similar document to Rem's *Tagebuch* is the *Geschenkliste* of Linhart Tucher, a list of the presents that he sent in 1526 to other members of Nuremberg's patriciate, including the Nutzel, Kress, Pfinzing, Tucher, and Volckamer families, crossing out each item after it had been sent.<sup>758</sup> (Many of these families were also mentioned by Rem in his *Tagebuch*.<sup>759</sup> Once again, this indicates the heavy overlap between the elites of Augsburg and Nuremberg and how these long-distance relationships were maintained through gift exchange and shared participation in festivals.) Baskets of figs were the most common present, but Tucher also sent almonds, capers, grapes, raisins, and, on one occasion, saffron. He would have obtained most, if not all, of these items, from his family company's trade with Spain; the Tucher were important saffron importers, providing them with a valuable commodity for trade and for gifts.<sup>760</sup> Mediterranean fruit was also an expensive and exotic status symbol in growing demand among merchants and nobles in northern Europe.<sup>761</sup> Anton Tucher sent Italian fruit to Frederick of Saxony on several occasions.<sup>762</sup> Merchants also gained status by supplying these items as they could demonstrate

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<sup>757</sup> Smith, 'The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism', 995.

<sup>758</sup> Tucher, 'Geschenkliste'.

<sup>759</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 50.

<sup>760</sup> von Stromer, 'Nuremberg in the International Economics of the Middle Ages', 212.

<sup>761</sup> van Houtte, *An Economic History of the Low Countries, 800-1800*, 147–48.

<sup>762</sup> Hirschfeld, 'Bernhard von Hirschfeld in Würzburg an Anton Tucher in Nürnberg'.

their trade connections and success. By recording gifts of such items, Linhart was thus able to assure that he had performed his obligations to his close social contacts.

In a later example, between 1558 and 1568, Paulus Behaim, of a prominent Nuremberg patrician family, kept a directory of gifts – 128 incidences in total – that he had received, carefully recording the item and the name of the giver.<sup>763</sup> These gifts included, in order of frequency: various types of fish; hares; venison; game birds; sausage (including Bolognese salami); chicken; grapes; wild boar; a bowl; other types of food; gifts from his sister for his children upon her husband's death; crabs; red wine; figs, raisins and almonds; and forty-three gifts without a description. Unlike Rem's list, which focused upon the value of the items, Behaim's emphasises the nature of the presents which he received. All but six of the identifiable gifts were of food and, of these, most were high-status items restricted to the nobility or to those holding landed estates. As sumptuary laws forbade hunting to all but the nobility, a gift of venison – of which Paulus Behaim received eleven – allowed him to circumvent these regulations and, by serving venison, wild boar (given three times), and game birds (nine times) at elaborate dinners, to advertise his connections to the landed aristocracy and his corresponding socio-political importance. The thirteen identifiable members of the nobility, or their high-ranking servants, and the two bishops who gave gifts to Behaim demonstrate that his network stretched beyond that of the Nuremberg patriciate into the surrounded landed aristocracy and the Imperial Court; he received a gift from a courtier of the Empress in 1559.

As this indicates, Behaim carefully recorded the status of each individual, noting that Bernhardt Nuztl and Hans Haller, for example, were both *Pflegern* (administrators). The *Geschenkliste* consequently provides invaluable insights into the network around the Behaim family. Like Rem, Behaim also exchanged gifts with family members, neighbours, important business partners, and other connections. He received three gifts from his neighbour Peter Obermair and presents from his brother-in-law Cristof Tetzl and the widow of his brother Cristoff, as well as many gifts from members of prominent Nuremberg families, including the Imhoff, Kres, Haller, and Rott. Some of these individuals, such as 'Herr Jorg Tetzl, Landspfleger', also held titles, reflecting the growing overlap between the urban and the feudal elite. Behaim also received presents from Italians: Girolamo Zini of Florence, Raphael Murrari of Lucca, and 'Goshart Murari's servant at the gold cross' (*Goshart Mürari seine dients beim guld kruz*). The presence of these Italians, almost certainly merchants, indicate that Behaim's network stretched

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<sup>763</sup> Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Familienarchiv Behaim no. 56 (1 January 1558 – 29 July 1568).

beyond the Alps. He therefore had access to Italian manufactures and foodstuffs, such as the Bolognese sausage given by Zini.

The essential use of gift exchange provided the merchant companies with the dual opportunities of providing rulers with gifts to give to other parties, and by themselves proffering gifts to rulers. Their command over the trade and sometimes the manufacture of luxury commodities allowed them to monopolise gift-giving to rulers and, therefore, to strengthen their relationships with European princes and with other members of their social and commercial circles.

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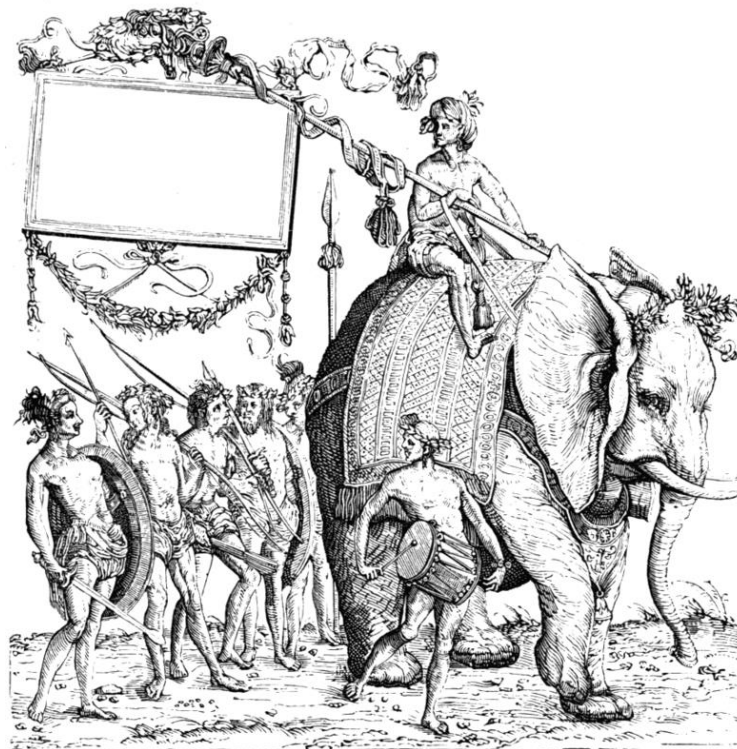
The importance of eastern goods, particularly in creating and demonstrating elite identity, made them popular items in gift giving, court ceremonies, and private collections. Within the practice of gift-giving between rulers – facilitated by merchants – and by merchants to rulers, exotica formed a vital role that increased dramatically with the advent of the oceanic trade to Asia and the European discovery of the New World. The elite merchant companies, which dominated the import and intra-European trade in luxury items, including exotica, were consequently able to corner the supply of such items to rulers, further enhancing their standing. To advertise their role in the overseas trade, merchants also consumed exotica, not only imitating but equalling royal consumption. Their trade and connections made them much better placed than most Europeans to access news and items returning from Asia and the Americas. Merchant letters and those of other writers routinely comment upon the gift exchanges between Spanish and Portuguese explorers and the local peoples. With their practice in giving gifts to rulers, they emphasised the importance of pomp, were greatly interested in the details of non-European ceremonies, were also chosen to participate in gift-giving ceremonies.

The demand for exotic goods, particularly but not only by European courts, was a major factor driving the exploratory voyages of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>764</sup> By the fifteenth century, exotica had become a crucial aspect of the display of wealth through clothing, material

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<sup>764</sup> Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism*, trans. W. R. Dittmar (Ann Arbor, 1913); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2009), 114–65; C. S. Simões, ‘The Symbolic Importance of the “Exotic” in the Portuguese Court in the Late Middle Ages’, *Anales de Historia Del Arte* 24 (2014): 517–25; cf. Stefan Halikowski Smith, ‘The Mystification of Spices in the Western Tradition’, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 8, no. 2 (2001): especially 121; E. Ringmar, ‘Audience for a Giraffe: European Expansionism and the Quest for the Exotic’, *Journal of World History* 17, no. 4 (December 2006): 376–77.

objects, and rituals that were in turn becoming major elements of how rulers expressed their wealth, status, and power.<sup>765</sup> Foreign items, particularly silk, had always been important to elite identity, and remained so even after the development of the silk industry in Europe.<sup>766</sup> With the European discovery of Asia and the Americas there was a significant growth in rulers' and nobles' consumption and especially collection of exotic goods as a form of status display.<sup>767</sup> Americana were included in court ceremonies and performances such as parades, ballets, and theatre productions.<sup>768</sup> In 1562, Montaigne noted the presence of several 'Indians' – Tupinambás from Brazil – in a procession held in Rouen for Charles IX.<sup>769</sup> Similarly, 'savages from Calicut' were included in the *Triumphzug* (Triumphal Procession), a series of prints commissioned by the emperor Maximilian, who lacked, as usual, the cash needed to host the real thing.



'The Savages of Calicut'

<sup>765</sup> Simões, 'The Symbolic Importance of the "Exotic" in the Portuguese Court in the Late Middle Ages', Abstract.

<sup>766</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 7–8.

<sup>767</sup> Simões, 'The Symbolic Importance of the "Exotic" in the Portuguese Court in the Late Middle Ages', 518; Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 5.

<sup>768</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 48; Andrea Sommer-Mathis, 'Amerika im Fest und auf der Bühne im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert', in *Federschmuck und Kaiserkrone: das barocke Amerikabild in den habsburgischen Ländern*, ed. Friedrich B. Polleross, Christopher F. Laferl, and Andrea Sommer-Mathis (Vienna, 1992), 127–58.

<sup>769</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. William Carew Hazlitt, trans. Charles Cotton, vol. 1 (London, 1877), chap. 30: 'Of Cannibals'.

Making visual representations of exotic items and peoples extended the number of Europeans who could observe and, to a degree, possess them. Maximilian's claim to world emperorship, untenable in reality, could still be depicted in propagandic art.<sup>770</sup>

Rulers publicly exhibited their foreign treasures to proclaim their power over foreign lands. As Portugal expanded into the Atlantic and beyond, its kings incorporated exotic items, such as Asian fabrics and spices, into their clothing, feasts, gift giving, and other ceremonies to transform Portugal's reputation.<sup>771</sup> Exotic animals were sent to other European rulers, most famously the elephant, Hanno, sent to Leo X (né Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici) for his accession in 1513.<sup>772</sup> Previously seen as both geographically and politically marginal, Portugal, through its rulers' strategic use of gifts, would be recognised as a powerful, wealthy, and cultured nation within and beyond Europe.<sup>773</sup>

Cortés' gifts of over 600 Mexican goods to Charles V were displayed at the royal palace in Brussels in 1520, where they were seen by Albrecht Dürer: 'Also I have seen the things which they have brought to the King out of the new land of gold: a sun all of gold, a whole fathom broad, and a moon, too, of silver, of the same size, also two rooms full of armour... These things are all so precious that they are valued at 100 000 gulden'.<sup>774</sup> Much of the Americana then travelled through Spain as a moving exhibition; other items were kept in Brussels in a proto-*Wunderkabinet* by Margaret of Austria, Charles V's aunt and regent, who kept most objects for display but gave several to family members and allies.<sup>775</sup> This had the effect of circulating the items as widely as possible, demonstrating Spain's new wealth and conquests. Even when an item could not be transported, pictures of it could be. In 1553, the French ambassador to Constantinople showed Suleiman a painting of the unicorn horn that had been seized from the Duke of Corsica following the French invasion: 'On the fourth of March Monsieur di Cotognato, commander of the king [Henri II], arrived in Constantinople... he spoke of the sack of Vercelli and of the taking of the treasure of the duke, in which there were jewels, he said, worth three million gold [ducats], including a unicorn horn of 11 ½ handspans in length, a picture of which he showed to the Sultan' (*Alli 4 di marzo stante arrivò in*

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<sup>770</sup> For Maximilian's interest in Asia and the Americas, see Kleinschmidt, *Ruling the Waves*, 181–208.

<sup>771</sup> Simões, 'The Symbolic Importance of the "Exotic" in the Portuguese Court in the Late Middle Ages', particularly 519–20.

<sup>772</sup> Silvio A. Bedini, *The Pope's Elephant* (London, 2000).

<sup>773</sup> K. J. P. Lowe, ed., *Cultural Links between Portugal and Italy during the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>774</sup> Dürer, *Memoirs of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, 56.

<sup>775</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 10–11.

*Gostantinopoli Mons.r di Cotognato commandato del Re... Disse del sacco Vercelli e dello spoglio del tesoro del Duca, nel quale erano gioie disse per tre milione d'oro, tra le quali è un corno di liocorno lungo palmi XI 1/2, che ne ha qui un ritratto qual porta a mostrare al Signore [Suleiman II]).*<sup>776</sup> The exchange and display of exotica was a crucial aspect of diplomacy.<sup>777</sup>

Such display could be for economic and political reasons more explicitly. In 1494/5, Hieronymus Münzer reported that when he was in Lisbon, 'We were sent by the King's command to see his *Mina*, that is a big building in the seaport where the copious trade goods are stored which he sends to Africa'. In this warehouse, Münzer wrote, there were coloured cloths from Tunis, hangings, spears, copper goods, glass, and other materials. Another building in the same city held imports from Africa.<sup>778</sup> This list of items foretells the goods carried by the earliest Portuguese fleets to India; the presence of copper, almost certainly German-extracted Hungarian copper, was already worth commenting upon. In sending Münzer to the *Mina*, Manuel I ensured that a first-hand account of his riches would reach Maximilian. It had been Münzer who had, in Maximilian's name, written a letter to João II in 1493 suggesting that he launch another attempt to reach India by the sea route and proposing that it be led by Martin Behaim.<sup>779</sup> Münzer was, moreover, accompanied by German merchants, including a member of the Herwart family, on his journey in 1494-95.<sup>780</sup>

Manuel's and the Habsburgs' amassment of exotica both served public, ritual purposes and were part of early modern collecting.<sup>781</sup> Art collections pre-dated Columbus but Asian and American goods, such as Eleanor duchess of Ferrara's Chinese porcelain, became central elements of many studios.<sup>782</sup> Natural artefacts, such as 'unicorn' horns, were particularly popular.<sup>783</sup> The trend for amassing manuscripts, including those relating to or originating from

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<sup>776</sup> Giovanni Battista di Ippolito Buondelmonti, 'Letter to Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence (24 March 1553)' (24 March 1553), fol. 1331, Mediceo del Principato, Carteggio Universale, vol. 413a, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>777</sup> On gifts and diplomacy, see Nancy Um and Leah R. Clark, 'Introduction: The Art of Embassy: Situating Objects and Images in the Early Modern Diplomatic Encounter', *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 1 (26 January 2016): 3–18.

<sup>778</sup> Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary*, 91–93.

<sup>779</sup> Münzer, 'Letter to João II of Portugal (14 July 1493)'.

<sup>780</sup> Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer's Itinerary*, 2.

<sup>781</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 13; Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 7–8; on early modern collecting, see Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994); Clark, *Collecting Art in the Italian Renaissance Court*; Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London and New York, 2013); and, for exotica especially, see Joseph Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions: The History of Art Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena Wherever These Have Appeared* (New York, 1982).

<sup>782</sup> Leah R. Clark, 'The Peregrinations of Porcelain: The Collections of Duchess Eleonora d'Aragona of Ferrara', *Journal of the History of Collections*, February 2019.

<sup>783</sup> Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 3.

non-European regions, has already been discussed. These early collections were the forerunners of the famous late sixteenth and seventeenth ‘cabinets of curiosity’, in which foreign items were especially valued.<sup>784</sup>

In their consumption of exotica, rulers were heavily dependent upon the great European trading companies, which specialised in low-volume, high value commodities in their overseas trade – as they did in their European trade – and successfully monopolised these luxury trades to a large extent. As nobles and princes came to rely more and more upon the use of foreign clothing and exotic gifts and collections to assert their status, not only was luxury consumption always mediated through and heavily influenced by long-distance merchants, but so too was noble and royal identity and prestige itself. By supplying exotica to rulers – as gifts or as sales – merchants achieved enormous influence and prestige.

Luxury commodities, especially spices, jewels, and parrots, were consequently the focus of European merchants’ overseas activities and of their interest in the voyages. In 1502, for example, Giovanni Francesco Affaitati wrote that the ships returned from India with ‘a thousand quintals of pepper, a little more or less, 450 quintals of cinnamon, about 50 quintals of ginger, lac, 50 quintals of benzoin (resin), [and] Moorish things, the sum of which was worth 4000 ducats’ (*pepe mille quintali, pocho più o mancho, canella 450 quintali, zenzero circha da 50 quintali, Iacha, bolzui altri 50 quintali, cose moresche, la summa che valeano, 4000 ducati*).<sup>785</sup>

Private merchants dominated the imports of other spices, diamonds, silks, and cottons from Asia to Portugal.<sup>786</sup> As such, although foreign imports had to pass through the Casa de Contratación, in Seville, or the Casa da Índia, in Lisbon, they were not – unless seized, as not infrequently occurred – the property of the state and had to be procured from merchants. Lazarus Nürnberger was one of the most important pearl traders in Europe, sometimes in partnership with Sebastian Neidhart, and carried out large sales to the Spanish court for decades. Between 1535 and 1537 he bought significant amounts of pearls for Charles V from the auctions at the Casa de la Contratación and also acted directly as a court supplier of pearls

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<sup>784</sup> On cabinets of curiosity, see, among others, Meadow, ‘Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer’; and Feest, ‘Early Native American Collections in Europe and North America’.

<sup>785</sup> Affaitati, ‘Copia de Una Letera, Scrita Di Lisbona, Dil Viazo Di Le Caravele in La India (26 September 1502)’, col. 664.

<sup>786</sup> Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia Under the Habsburgs*, 40.

for the Empress, on one occasion obtaining 1600 pieces for her.<sup>787</sup> He also sold pearls to other merchants and jewellers, including a sale worth over 130 000 maravedís (60 187 marks) in 1529.<sup>788</sup> After gold and silver, pearls were the most valuable export from the Americas.<sup>789</sup> Vespucci described the New World as ‘the land of pearls’ and brought back many to Europe, including some which he showed, and then was obliged to give, to the queen: ‘We bartered for a shell in which were born 130 pearls, [which]... the Queen took, and others I put aside that they might not be seen’.<sup>790</sup> Pearls could also be obtained from several of the African cities that Europeans visited on the Cape Route trade. Both Balthasar Springer and Hans Mayr mention pearls as one of the main precious items to be found in Kilwa when they plundered the city in 1505.<sup>791</sup> In demonstrating their command of these non-European, luxurious artefacts, merchants were able to make themselves near-indispensable. Nevertheless, as Queen Maria’s demand of the pearl-studded shell from Vespucci indicates, they remained subservient to rulers, whose whims they were obliged to obey.

Jewels had been popular as collecting items in antiquity, a habit that was revived in the Renaissance, most famously by the Medici.<sup>792</sup> Consequently, they were particularly profitable for Italian and German companies, which sent agents overseas to purchase jewels and then processed and sold them throughout Europe. In the 1520s, for example, Jörg Pock, agent to India for the Herwart company, purchased diamonds in Narsinga.<sup>793</sup> The explorer Andrea Corsali wrote at length of the jewels available in Asia, discussing in detail where the best of each type was available. Seilon (Thailand), he wrote, ‘is the origin of a greater quantity of jewels and even more of spices, more jewels than in the rest of all India’.<sup>794</sup> The wealth of merchant adventurers was often in the form of precious gems. Giovanni da Empoli’s will indicates that his wealth was in cash, jewels and jewelled items, and ebony.<sup>795</sup> The court case

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<sup>787</sup> Otte, ‘Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels’, 141.

<sup>788</sup> Otte, 142.

<sup>789</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 72.

<sup>790</sup> Amerigo Vespucci, *Letters of Amerigo Vespucci, and Other Documents Illustrative of His Career*, ed. Clements R. Markham (Cambridge, 2010).

<sup>791</sup> Mayr, ‘The Voyage and Acts of Dom Francisco, Viceroy of India, Written in the Ship Sam Rafael of Oporto, Captained by Feman Suarez’; Sprenger, ‘Merfart’.

<sup>792</sup> For a discussion of gem collecting in classical antiquity, see Gisela M. A. Richter, *The Engraved Gems of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans*, 2 vols (London, 1968); Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 20; Leah R. Clark, ‘Transient Possessions: Circulation, Replication, and Transmission of Gems and Jewels in Quattrocento Italy’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 15 (2011): 185–211.

<sup>793</sup> Pock, ‘Letter from Cochin to Michael Behaim (1 January 1522)’.

<sup>794</sup> Corsali, ‘Letter from India to Giuliano de’ Medici (October 1516)’.

<sup>795</sup> Giovanni da Empoli, ‘Ultime Volontà e Testamento’, in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, vol. 14, 5 (Florence, 1894), 322–29.



surrounding Piero d'Andrea Strozzi largely concerned jewels and, according to Corsali, he bought in Pulicat (*Paliacati*) 'an extremely beautiful clear diamond... one of the most beautiful pieces which have been sold in India for quite some time. On his return, which will be at the end of two years, he will take the diamond to Lisbon. It seemed to me that it would be of significance to let Your Lordship know of this because, in my opinion, due to the great size of this stone it would be suitable for a Lord'.<sup>796</sup> Merchants might assist rulers by notifying them about possible purchases as well as facilitating those purchases.

Merchants' superior access to foreign commodities was especially the case when selling to non-Iberian rulers, as the collecting habits of the Medici and Giovanni da Empoli's presents to them demonstrate. Feest has argued that direct participation in the conquest of the Americas did not determine interest. Instead, it was precisely those rulers who were not involved in overseas activities, particularly the Wittelsbach and the Medici (ducal and otherwise), who created enormous collections of Americana.<sup>797</sup> The Medici jewellery inventories of the 1560s and '70s listed seven separate items containing 'two oriental pearls' (*due perle orientale*) and also included 'an emerald stone from Peru' (*uno smeraldo ciottolo del Perù*).<sup>798</sup> To this list of keen collectors with limited overseas engagement might also be added René II of Lorraine, patron of Waldseemüller and dedicatee of Vespucci's letters (p.113), and the Este family, especially Isabella.<sup>799</sup> These rulers, although not directly involved with overseas activities, had strong ties to participating merchants. Merchants already acted as their sellers and procurers of jewellery and gemstones, including antiques, which routinely changed hands between European rulers.<sup>800</sup> It was their mercantile as much as, if not more than, their political connections that allowed these rulers to add to their collections and thus to their standing among Europe's rulers.

Alongside the Medici, probably the most notable collector of Americana was Albrecht V of Bavaria (Cosimo I's brother-in-law), whose renowned *Kunstammer* was sourced by

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<sup>796</sup> Corsali, 'Letter from India to Giuliano de' Medici (October 1516)'.

<sup>797</sup> Feest, 'Early Native American Collections in Europe and North America'.

<sup>798</sup> 'Inventario Di Gioie Che Sono in Mano Della Illustre Signora Camilla' (21 April 1574), *Miscellanea Medicea* 12/1, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; 'Inventario Delle Gioie Di Cosimo I, Tenuto Da Tommaso de' Medici e Bernardo Vecchietti, Ed Uscita Delle Gioie' (2 July 1566), *Mediceo del Principato* 643 (Carteggio Universale), Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>799</sup> Shaw, *Isabella d'Este*, 103–45.

<sup>800</sup> Clark, 'Transient Possessions: Circulation, Replication, and Transmission of Gems and Jewels in Quattrocento Italy'.

merchant-agents such as Philipp Hainhofer from across Europe.<sup>801</sup> In 1558, he bought the library of humanist Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter including the pre-Columbian *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*, previously owned by Clement VII, who had in turn been given it by Manuel I.<sup>802</sup>



Page from the *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*

The Medici had been interested in the exotic in general and the overseas voyages in particular from the beginning: Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici had been Vespucci's patron and had received two letters from Vespucci describing the spices and precious stones with which the fleet returned.<sup>803</sup> Both Medici popes were some of the earliest collectors of Americana in Italy, and, as mentioned, Clement VII (né de' Medici) owned the Mixtec *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*.<sup>804</sup> The ownership and collecting of Americana was, therefore, heavily influenced by social and political ties to the Spanish and Portuguese courts. Later in the sixteenth century, Cosimo I made extensive use of Americana in his public ceremonies.<sup>805</sup> Just as Lorenzo de'

<sup>801</sup> On Albrecht's Kunstkammer, see Lorenz Seelig, 'The Munich Kunstkammer, 1565-1807', in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur Gregor (Oxford, 1985), 76-89.

<sup>802</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 51; 'Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I' (Fourteenth century), Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

<sup>803</sup> Vespucci, 'Letter I to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de' Medici'; Vespucci, 'Letter II to Lorenzo Di Pierfrancesco de' Medici'.

<sup>804</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 13-14, 23.

<sup>805</sup> Markey, 20-21.

Medici's collection in the fifteenth century had been part of his campaign to establish himself as a quasi-prince, so the ducal Medici sought to secure their fledging dynasty through the strategic use of magnificence.

Despite their enthusiasm, and although spices were imported into Tuscany through Livorno in the earlier sixteenth century, American imports were limited until the 1560s.<sup>806</sup> (This was partly due to the fact that Livorno was not an important port until the mid-sixteenth century.) Lacking direct access, and with disputed authority over Florence until 1531, the Medici instead relied upon their connections in the Iberian Peninsula to supply them with news and material artefacts from Asia and the Americas, providing merchants with the opportunity to gain favour and patronage. Merchants, although without access to the great treasures of the Aztecs distributed by Charles V, had more incentive than he to win the favour of the Medici and thus were more eager to lavish the Medici – their lords rather than their vassals – with gifts.

Soon after his return from Asia, Giovanni da Empoli wrote two letters to Lorenzo de' Medici, then ruler of Florence, in which he promised to send gifts from Malacca. To Leo X he was sending 'a most beautiful dead bird' (*uno ucello morto molto bellissimo*), silk cloth, and aloe wood; to Giuliano de' Medici, a dagger (*adaga*); and 'other things' to Lorenzo.<sup>807</sup> By supplying the Medici with gifts, Empoli also gave them the ability to participate in the overseas conquests and trading successes second-hand as they were unable to do so directly. As with their use of Americana to associate themselves with Charles V, so the Medici drew upon the networks of Florentine merchants to acquire Asian goods in order to emphasise their connections to Portugal, their wealth, and their sophistication.

Empoli wrote a second letter to Lorenzo II de' Medici, on 9 February 1515. As he had done in the earlier letter, he stated that the gifts were not of great quantity or value but that he hoped that they would please Lorenzo because of their novelty: 'I advised that I had decided to send some favours which I had lately brought from the new countries of Malacca in India. It seemed to me that your lordship would take pleasure from them, not because they are of great substance, as was requested, but because they are novelties' (*avisavo aver disegnato di*

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<sup>806</sup> Filippo Strozzi, 'Letter from Rome to Francesco Vettori in Florence (23 May 1533)', in *Filippo Strozzi: Tragedia*, ed. G. B. Niccolini (Florence, 1847), 188.

<sup>807</sup> Giovanni da Empoli, 'Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici (9 February 1515)', in *Iddio Ci Dia Buon Viaggio e Guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 1910, Codice Vaglianti*, ed. Piero Vaglianti (Florence, 2006); Giovanni da Empoli, 'Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici (9 January 1515)', in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, vol. 6, Quarta Serie (1880), 168.

*mandare certe gentilezze che ultimamente ho portato delli nuovi paesi di Malacha in India; parendomi che la Signoria Vostra, n'habbi a pigliar piacere, non per esser cose di molta sustantia, come a quella si richiedeva, ma per esser cosa nuova*).<sup>808</sup> He took this opportunity to reiterate his and his family's loyalty to the Medici and signed himself 'your lord's humble vassal' (*Umil. Vassallo di Vostra Signore*).<sup>809</sup> As former supporters of Savonarola, the Empoli family needed to prove their loyalty to the restored Medici family.<sup>810</sup> On 13 January 1515, Bernardo de' Medici, captain of Livorno, wrote to Lorenzo II that Empoli's gifts had been misplaced but would be sent on soon. He described Empoli as 'an excellent man of some importance, who is held in great regard by the King of Portugal'.<sup>811</sup> Through his presents, Empoli had endeared himself to the Medici family. That he succeeded was demonstrated by a letter of Leo X, who requested that Manuel I recompense Empoli for Albuquerque's treatment of him.<sup>812</sup>

Empoli did not limit himself to the Medici but sent gifts to whomever was in power in Florence. He promised to give 'a most beautiful piece of very fine cloth that he had brought from those countries' (*una bellissima pezza d'una tela molto sottile che aveva portato di que' paesi*) to Argentina Soderini, wife of the *gonfaloniere* Piero Soderini.<sup>813</sup> Subsequently, he returned to Florence and won much favour with Piero Soderini, giving public speeches and transforming himself into something of a celebrity. Through gifts of foreign goods, Empoli confirmed his fabulous accounts and obtained the favour of Florence's rulers, who in turn interfered to secure his status in Portugal. The domination of the luxury trades, especially foreign, by a few large companies allowed those companies to monopolise the supply of exotica to rulers, gaining wealth, status, and patronage.

As exotic goods were used as gifts within Europe, so European goods were taken as gifts to foreign potentates. The Spanish and Portuguese activities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas made the need for appropriate gifts become particularly crucial and particularly difficult due to the distance required to carry goods, the complete absence of pre-existing relations, and the scarcity of knowledge about local gift-giving customs. There has been very little analysis of gift exchanges between Europeans and non-Europeans, particularly Americans, in the context

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<sup>808</sup> da Empoli, 'Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici (9 February 1515)'.

<sup>809</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 88.

<sup>810</sup> da Empoli, 'Vita Di Giovanni Da Empoli', 22–23.

<sup>811</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 88.

<sup>812</sup> Leo X, 'Letter to Manuel I of Portugal (25 February 1515)'.

<sup>813</sup> da Empoli, 'Vita Di Giovanni Da Empoli', 27.

of the sixteenth century European expansion. Elliott gives no analysis of gift theory and limited attention to gift giving generally.<sup>814</sup> Greenblatt discusses exchanges of goods, both in an economic and a gift sense, between Europeans and Native Americans. He argues that the Europeans framed their exchange of ‘trinkets’, such as glass beads, for luxuries (‘truck’), such as gold objects and pearls to argue that Native Americans were ignorant, using European ideas about absolute value to assert their economic superiority.<sup>815</sup> However, he does not examine exchanges that were overtly a form of gift-giving and which took a distinctly different form from these apparently unequal exchanges. An exemption to this paucity of analysis is Siebenhüner’s study of the first meeting between Vasco da Gama and the Zamorin of Calicut, in which da Gama’s failure to provide adequate gifts – the few items that he had brought were rejected as ‘not a thing to offer to a king’ – gave a poor impression: ‘The king [Zamorin] then said that he had told him that he came from a very rich kingdom, and yet had brought him nothing’.<sup>816</sup> Siebenhüner demonstrates that the Zamorin was able to use the inadequacy of the proposed gifts to suggest that Portugal was economically and politically weak and thus position himself as the more powerful ruler, refusing to negotiate with da Gama as an ambassador of a foreign (great) power.<sup>817</sup>

Many writers, including Columbus, commented upon the gift exchanges of the Portuguese or Spanish voyagers, noting the importance of pomp and showing great interest in the details of non-European ceremonies.<sup>818</sup> The author of the letter describing the discovery of Brazil, Pedro Vaz de Caminha, noted that, at Cabral’s first meeting with native peoples of America, the parties were unable to communicate but exchanged two caps for a feather hat and string of shells.<sup>819</sup> Merchants and their associates routinely described the gift exchanges between Spanish and Portuguese explorers and the local peoples. They emphasised the importance of pomp and were greatly interested in the details of non-European ceremonies. In 1491, the Florentine humanist Zanobi Acciaiuoli wrote to the Ferrarese physician-astrologer Antonio Arquato that ‘a vessel arrived in Pisa from Portugal and has given news of Guinea’ (*è arivato*

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<sup>814</sup> Elliott, *The Old World and the New*.

<sup>815</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 182–83.

<sup>816</sup> Anonymous, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*.

<sup>817</sup> Kim Siebenhüner, ‘Approaching Diplomatic and Courtly Gift-Giving in Europe and Mughal India: Shared Practices and Cultural Diversit’, *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2013): 526.

<sup>818</sup> See, for example, Christopher Columbus and R. H. Major, ‘First Voyage of Columbus’, in *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus: With Other Original Documents, Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World* (Cambridge, 2012), 6–7.

<sup>819</sup> Pedro Vaz de Caminha, ‘Carta a El Rei D. Manuel (1 May 1500)’, in *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, ed. William Brooks Greenlee (London, 1938), 9.

*uno legno di Portogallo ad Pisa & ha dato novae de Ghinea*).<sup>820</sup> When the Portuguese travellers met the local king, wrote Acciaiuoli, ‘he brought gold and jewels, which on his behalf he gifted to the king of Portugal, he presented to those from the ship wine and other victuals, and having honoured them he dismissed them’ (*Facto questo fece portare oro & gioie, lequale da sua parte donassino al re di Portogallo, cussì presentò ad quelli di la nave vino & altre victualie, et honorati li licentiò*). Acciaiuoli commented that the news ‘in part seems to me to be fabulous’ (*in parte me parano fabulose*), but did not question the gift ceremony, which would not have seemed alien to him; indeed, it is probably the least ‘fabulous’ part of the whole letter.<sup>821</sup> Similarly, the Lisbon-based Cremonese merchant Giovanni Francesco Affaitati, in his letter of 26 June 1501 to Venice on the second Portuguese armada to India, reported on Cabral’s arrival in Calicut, with which da Gama had created poor relations. Affaitati observed that ‘The captain [Cabral] had a talk with the king of that place [Calicut], and in the name of this Most Serene King [of Portugal], made him presents of many things, so that they became great friends. And the captain returned to the ship and he instructed the chief factor, with the other designated officials, that they were to remain on land; and they began to contract and to exchange their merchandise’. In Cochin, ‘After the ships were entirely laden, the king sent another fourteen small boats of spices... as a gift, without money or anything else in exchange’.<sup>822</sup> Affaitati clearly attributed the (temporary) alleviation of the tensions caused by da Gama to the exchange of gifts. On the voyage of 1505, the Portuguese carried ‘a gold crown worth 900 *cruzados*’ (*eine goldene Krone dar, im Wert von 900 Cruzados*) as a gift for the ruler of Cochin, which, *en route*, was appropriated to crown the new king of Kilwa.<sup>823</sup>

As da Gama’s poor impression indicates, knowledge of the need to provide appropriate presents – and of what made an appropriate present – was essential. In the seventeenth century, such information might be obtained from local contacts.<sup>824</sup> In the early sixteenth century, however, such contacts were limited and the Portuguese (and Spanish) captains, who were

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<sup>820</sup> Zanobi Acciaiuoli, ‘Copia Unius Capitoli Quarandam Litterarum Zanobii Azaroli Ad Antonium Arquatam Civem Ferrarie (18 March 1491)’, in *Fonti Italiane Dei Secoli XV–XVII Sull’espansione Portoghese*, ed. Stefania Elena Carnemolla (Pisa, 2000), 13–14; translated from the version in Lowe, ‘Africa in the News in Renaissance Italy’, 327–28.

<sup>821</sup> Acciaiuoli, ‘Copia Unius Capitoli Quarandam Litterarum Zanobii Azaroli Ad Antonium Arquatam Civem Ferrarie (18 March 1491)’; translated from the version in Lowe, ‘Africa in the News in Renaissance Italy’, 327–28.

<sup>822</sup> Affaitati, ‘The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India’, 126–27.

<sup>823</sup> Mayr, ‘The Voyage and Acts of Dom Francisco, Viceroy of India, Written in the Ship Sam Rafael of Oporto, Captained by Feman Suarez’, 216; Sprenger, ‘Merfahrt’, 112.

<sup>824</sup> João Melo, ‘Seeking Prestige and Survival: Gift-Exchange Practices between the Portuguese Estado Da Índia and Asian Rulers’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56, no. 4–5 (1 January 2013): 690.

generally from noble rather than commercial backgrounds, were not always aware of the importance of gift-giving. Merchants such as Affaitati, unlike da Gama, were aware of the importance of foreign fashions and had experience in providing gifts to foreign powers from different cultures. This offered them the opportunity to enhance their prestige by providing the gifts given by their princely patrons to foreign rulers.

Particularly rich gifts from merchants might themselves be passed on to other rulers. On two occasions, items supplied by Marchionni were used as gifts for Eastern rulers. In 1515, Manuel I ordered that a magnificent brocade ‘that we have [received] from Bartolomeo’ (*que ouuemos de bertollameu*) be sent to Prester John and in 1539, João III wished to send the king of Cambay three valuable ‘panels of arms’ (*pannos de armar*) that he had received from Marchionni.<sup>825</sup> Manuel’s gift may have been commissioned from Marchionni for the occasion, but João’s present must have originally been a gift from Marchionni as, in 1539, the latter had been dead for nine years. With his knowledge and connections to art markets across Europe and his knowledge of fashions and the tastes of princes, Marchionni was able to supply gifts fit for princes and for international diplomacy, perpetuating his reputation and association with the highest of luxuries even after death and, consequently, his standing with Portugal’s kings.

Passing on a gift indicated that the original recipient attached high value to the item, which in turn enhanced the relationship between the original giver and recipient. The strong and continued association of the gifts with Marchionni underlines the importance of gifts in reminding the recipient of the donor; as Mauss argued, ‘gifts are never completely separated from the men who exchange them’.<sup>826</sup> The items were particularly valued because they had been supplied by a merchant high in the king’s favour and known for his wealth and superior taste. Objects formerly owned by distinguished individuals were imbued with value and conveyed prestige by association upon later owners.<sup>827</sup> By supplying gifts fit for not one but several kings, Marchionni indelibly inserted himself into the favour of the Portuguese crown.

Merchants were experienced in mediating trade relationships with and between foreign rulers through gift exchange and were co-opted into this role in extra-European contexts. Their participation in, or even leadership of, embassies and other diplomatic efforts was a running

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<sup>825</sup> Bruscoli, ‘Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)’, 42–43.

<sup>826</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 31.

<sup>827</sup> Igor Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditisation as Process’, in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, 1988), 64–92.

theme in the experience of Italian, and some German, merchants in Spanish and Portuguese foreign encounters. Giovanni da Empoli was called upon by Albuquerque to negotiate with the rulers of Pedir and ‘Pazze’ (Pacem) during the voyage of 1510-11.<sup>828</sup> In 1516, he successfully negotiated with the king of Pacem to establish the Portuguese factory of Sumatra and set prices for pepper and other goods following a successful first meeting. As was by then standard, Empoli was entrusted with a letter and present from Manuel to present to the king of Pacem. The Portuguese chronicler Castanheda wrote that ‘when the king [of Pacem] learnt that Empoli was bringing a letter and a present, he ordered him to be met by all the principal people of his court, all seated on elephants with great pomp, and he received him in person very cordially, and he showed himself very happy with the friendship of the King of Portugal’.<sup>829</sup> By charging Empoli with the letter (his own words) and present (reflecting the high value that he gave to the king of Pacem and to the relationship that he hoped to form), Manuel demonstrated the trust and value that he placed in Empoli. By presenting the items, Empoli verified this relationship to the king of Pacem, who in turn placed Empoli in high standing. The king personally received Empoli only after learning that Empoli was bringing a letter and a present, that is, that he was complying with the appropriate customs for ambassadorial activities and, in so doing, had proved himself and the polity that he represented to be of a high status, worthy of such an elaborate greeting. By taking a prominent role in gift-giving and diplomacy, therefore, merchants ensured their high and trusted position within the Portuguese overseas administration.

Merchants were themselves keen consumers of exotica, although to varying degrees. With their liquid capital, their direct or secondary participation in and multiple connections to the overseas trade, their friends at court, their scientific-humanist interest, and their desire to advertise all of these things through material possessions, the wealthiest merchants could become outstanding collectors in their own right.

Many of the items of non-European origin that were once owned by powerful German merchants can be found in the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum*, in Nuremberg. One of its curiosities is a lidded coconut cup created for the Holzschuher in 1535. The sides of the coconut are carved with bacchanalian scenes while the lid is decorated with pictures of mining

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<sup>828</sup> da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo on His Travels in Malacca (1514)’, 191–94.

<sup>829</sup> Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India pelos Portugueses*, vol. 4–5 (Lisbon, 1833), 386; Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 97.



activities. This was almost certainly a reference to the Tyrolese silver mines in which the Holzschuher were involved.



*Kokosnusspokal der Familie Holzschuher*

Gabriel Holzschuher would travel to India (and die on the return voyage) in the 1580s for Konrad Rott, but the Holzschuher were not among those families involved in the 1505 voyage.<sup>830</sup> Their possession of a coconut cup instead derived from a general interest in and consumption of exotica among German urban elites in a deliberate imitation of rulers and as a form of emphasising their trade links, their wealth, and their participation in the humanist culture surrounding the European analysis of information returning from overseas.

The enormous wealth of the merchants and their superior trading connections allowed them to participate in collecting exotica almost to the level of princes. The *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I* given by Manuel I to Clement VII was later owned by the German humanist Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, and finally was purchased by Albrecht V of Bavaria.<sup>831</sup> This path shows that not only the collecting interests, but the actual collected items, of princes and

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<sup>830</sup> Gabriel Holzschuher, 'Ein Brief Des Gabriel Holzschuher Aus Indien Im Januar 1580', in *Anzeiger Für Kunde Der Deutschen Vorzeit*, ed. Hans Bösch, vol. 6 (Nuremberg, 1883).

<sup>831</sup> Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence*, 51.

elite members of the high German cities overlapped; these burghers possessed items worthy of princes.

Merchants lacked the resources and zoos to own the large exotic animals so popular with rulers, such as elephants and rhinoceroses, and were anyway not permitted to hunt.<sup>832</sup> They were, however, enthusiastic purchasers of parrots as much as were princes. (Pope Julius III's brother, for example, would send Leonor de Toledo a little parrot or parakeet (*pappagallino*) in 1551.<sup>833</sup>) Michael Behaim wrote that he wanted a parrot so much that 'I don't care whether it can talk or not'.<sup>834</sup> Parrots made popular gifts; Dürer and his wife were given several parrots, one of which was from Malacca, as well as some 'Calicut feathers', by Rui (or Rodrigo) Fernandes de Almada, a *fidalgo da casa real* at the Portuguese factory in Antwerp.<sup>835</sup> Similarly, Lucas Rem recorded that in 'the first three years in Lisbon, I have [purchased] foreign, new parrots, cats, and other strange, amusing things, and then in the last three years, in Antwerp, [I purchased] painted panels, animals, etc., which for the most part I exported and gave away' (*Die ersten drey Jar, zuo Lisbona, hab ich fil um fremd niu papagey, katzen, ander seltzam lustig ding, und dan lesten 3 Jar zuo Antorff um gemel, tafeln, ticher etc. den mertail vertramt und verschenkt*).<sup>836</sup>

As rulers did, merchants and members of their circles advertised their ownership of these curiosities to show their wealth and their knowledge of the New World and Asia, which in turn spoke to close connections to the new colonial powers. Conrad Peutinger told the humanist Sebastian Brant that, 'I want you at some point to see my parrots (*papageios*) speaking like humans (I don't call them *psitacos*, since they have a different colour than Pliny describes), and the many other things that have been sent to me from India by our factors: woods, bows, skins, shells, and so on'.<sup>837</sup> In disputing Pliny, Peutinger emphasised not only his ownership of non-European goods but his humanist ability to build upon Pliny's knowledge of foreign items in response to new material, testing as well as confirming ancient knowledge. In referring

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<sup>832</sup> See also the heavy restriction upon riding horses in Portugal, lifted for Bartolomeo Marchionni by João III, in Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, ed., 'Licenza Di Giovanni III a Bartolomeo Marchionni, 17 Novembre 1522', in *Bartolomeo Marchionni, 'Homem de Grossa Fazenda' (ca. 1450-1530): Un Mercante Fiorentino a Lisbona e l'impero Portoghese* (Florence, 2014).

<sup>833</sup> Tommaso di Iacopo de' Medici, 'Letter to Pier Francesco Riccio' (14 September 1551), *Mediceo del Principato* 1176, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

<sup>834</sup> Behaim, 'Letter to Jörg Pock (16 December 1518)'; quoted from translation in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 34.

<sup>835</sup> Dürer, *Memoirs of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, 54, 63, 103.

<sup>836</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 31.

<sup>837</sup> Peutinger, 'Brief an Sebastian Brant (7 April 1507)'; quoted from translation in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 34.

to 'our factors', Peutinger stressed how his connection to the Welser company gave him ownership not only over American and Asian goods, but over the trade in them. Bartolomeo Marchionni had likewise referred to Pliny when he described a parrot, but believed that Pliny had been correct: '[The voyagers] brought back two parrots of different colours... And they gave notice of many other and various birds and animals, so that where Pliny told untruths, these prove his history'.<sup>838</sup> In their pursuit of foreign items and news for personal interest and status, elite merchants again made themselves striking exceptions to the slow dispersal of awareness of and interest in the New World.

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Expanding upon merchants' use of luxuries reveals important insights into their cultural practices, and by extension, their individual and collective mentalities. As well as demonstrating a merchant's wealth, exotica displayed a merchant's connections to the overseas trade and the companies and rulers which conducted it, connections which relied upon a merchant's honour and creditworthiness. As culturally significant items, art and exotica also conveyed taste and prestige upon the owner in a society heavily influenced by humanist collecting traditions. Rather than driven entirely by profit maximisation, in conflict with sixteenth-century social and religious norms, merchants sought to increase their honour and social standing within existing social parameters. On the other hand, their eager consumption of exotica reveals how the interests and perspectives, of the great companies were different, and increasingly so, from those of lesser traders.

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<sup>838</sup> Marchionni, 'Lettera in Lisbona (27 Giugno 1501)', 116; Marchionni, 'The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India', 149.

# Repercussions

## Chapter Eight:

### Going Solo: Agents and the Impact of Globalisation upon Multi-National European Firms

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, larger companies across the commercially developed areas of Europe relied upon agents, or factors (*feitor, fattor*), to conduct trade and financial dealings abroad.<sup>839</sup> As the geographical spread of companies increased at dizzying speed following the opening of the Cape Route and American trade routes, distance, inadequate supplies of information, and, often, entanglement in crown finance and colonial projects affected the principal-agent relationship and the traditional means of regulating it. The power of agents grew enormously as they became responsible for consortia and other contracts with rulers, yet the power of companies to discipline their agents declined. Many rogue agents – a category that have gone almost without study – were working for the greatest companies, such as the Medici, Welser, and Fugger, who had excellent networks and communications systems yet were unable to control their agents.<sup>840</sup>

To examine how the principal-agent relationship worked post-1492, this chapter will engage in a series of case studies to question the repercussions of the extremely rapid expansion upon internal company organisation and management and to highlight the importance of individuals and their relationships with each other even within the largest firms. Harreld asserts that ‘great merchant firms’ such as the Welser could have branches in every city but ‘less wealthy merchants had to rely on the relationships they formed’.<sup>841</sup> Harreld’s argument is somewhat simplistic. Not only did smaller companies, such as the Spinelli, operate with and within greater companies, but the relationships formed by members of large companies were extremely significant to their companies’ success. Antonio Gondi and Company, in Lyons, did not have branches in Antwerp or the Iberian Peninsula but were closely integrated to firms in those regions. Alessandro Gondi, for example, procured Flemish tapestries from his brother-in-law Filippo Gualterotti in Bruges.<sup>842</sup> Bernardo Gondi, who moved between Florence and Lyon,

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<sup>839</sup> Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, 104–5; Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 76–77.

<sup>840</sup> Franz Irslinger, Cord Meckseper, and Elisabeth Schraut, ‘Kaufmannsmentalität Im Mittelalter’, in *Mentalität und Alltag Im Spätmittelalter*, vol. 2 (Göttingen, 1991), 58.

<sup>841</sup> Harreld, ‘Foreign Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries’, 20.

<sup>842</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 77.

invested in the 1503-4 voyage with Bernardo de Pilli as his representative; Pilli was also an investor in his own right.<sup>843</sup>

In contradistinction to much of the literature, the case studies will show that both private and institutional measures frequently failed in the face of human activity. Not only did merchants often lack all the information that they required, the activity of each individual was determined by a wide range of motivations, any one of which they might favour over company policy.<sup>844</sup>

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The methods by which merchants ensured the honesty of their agents and business partners have been subject to extensive study (pp.202-05). Less consideration, however, has been given to how these were impacted by the enormous expansion in geographic spread and capital that occurred when merchants entered into high finance from the 1490s. Gelderblom has pointed out that, in the absence of an effective 'central, state-sponsored court system', the 'private order solution was certainly widespread in premodern Europe, but it presupposes the kind of routine trading that does not fit the many merchants that either allowed their trading partners full play or even dealt with strangers to explore new markets and products'.<sup>845</sup> As agents and trading partners moved further and further away from headquarters and as they entered into foreign markets, these problems became more frequent and began to undermine traditional methods of internal and external monitoring and regulation. Although Trivellato has highlighted some of the advantages of trading with agents outside one's own network, serious problems began to emerge as this began to be prioritised over trading within one's network.<sup>846</sup>

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By having multiple agents, multi-branch companies were able to be present in every stage of the supply chain in Europe. Not only were the Fugger leaders for several decades in the Antwerp pepper market, they had an agent in Lisbon who regularly shipped large amounts of pepper to Antwerp.<sup>847</sup> Although the German merchants had largely withdrawn from direct trade with Asia after their Indian imports were confiscated in Lisbon by Manuel I in 1506, they were

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<sup>843</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 36, 81-82.

<sup>844</sup> Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*.

<sup>845</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 103.

<sup>846</sup> Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, 2014), especially 153-63.

<sup>847</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 71.

nevertheless able to dominate the European trade in Asian goods due to their factors in Lisbon.<sup>848</sup> In doing so, they had better knowledge of and control over supplies than did smaller companies, who were obliged to outsource consignments to third parties.

When functioning correctly, the principal-agent relationship was mutually beneficial, exchanging the importance of having someone ‘on the ground’ for the opportunities that were available only to members of the largest of companies. Multiple agents greatly increased the networks of great companies, making it much easier to expand into new markets and find new trading connections. Each correspondent in a mercantile network had their own network and expertise.<sup>849</sup> Factors had to form their own networks, built upon those of their employers and their pre-existing networks of family and friends. Companies would often hire multiple people from the same family, building upon the principles of mutual ties, obligations, and liability, and taking advantage of the pre-existing ties between their employee and his relatives. When the Tetzels wished to operate from the Americas, they established connections with the Welser through their agents in Seville, where Hans Tetzels became partners with Lazarus Nürnberger, a former Welser employee who remained heavily involved in the Welser business. He was in communication with the main Welser agents, Bartholomeus Nürnberg and Justus Walther, who informed Tetzels about the Welser mines in Spain and the West Indies.<sup>850</sup>

In return for their services, agents were given access to the benefits of being in a large company. As merchant companies expanded across Europe and overseas, and as precious metals and exotica became subject to cartels and monopolies, the barriers to entry into new trade dramatically increased. For German merchants, participation in the overseas trade was restricted to those able to pay the vast licence fee of 10 000 *cruzados* under an edict of 1503.<sup>851</sup> Agents of the great companies could avoid such costs. Factors also obtained the protections and privileges issued to their employers. The *carta de protecção* issued to Marchionni by Alfonso V in 1475 applied to him, his factors, and his merchandise.<sup>852</sup> As independent, small-scale merchants, they would have only been able to obtain the protections supplied to foreign merchant nations. The huge sums of money required of foreigners to enter colonial trade,

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<sup>848</sup> Westermann, ‘Auftakt Zur Globalisierung’, 51.

<sup>849</sup> Sadler, ‘News as a Path to Independence’, 68.

<sup>850</sup> Werner, ‘Das Kupferhüttenwerk Des Hans Tetzels Aus Nürnberg Auf Kuba und Seine Finanzierung Durch Europäisches Finanzkapital. I. Teil (1545-1571)’, 305–6.

<sup>851</sup> Pohle, ‘Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa’, 22.

<sup>852</sup> Afonso V of Portugal, ‘Grant of Privileges to Bartolomeo Marchionni’; transcribed in Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 11.

including before 1492, made joining a company probably the only way to enter this most attractive of markets. The most famous Italian merchants to visit the Americas, Columbus and Vespucci, both came to Seville not as independent merchants but as agents of the Centurione family and of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici respectively.<sup>853</sup> Some factors were permitted to trade independently alongside their duties to their employers, as Raffaello Galli was allowed to do in Asia in his contract for Giovanni da Empoli, but almost all seem to have done so regardless.<sup>854</sup>

Particularly attractive was the opportunity to use the connections and income that they had gained under their employers to establish themselves as independent merchants, as agents of the Veckinchusen, the Medici, and many other companies did.<sup>855</sup> Lucas Rem, a nephew of Anton Welser, was in 1502 to '09 the Welser agent to Lisbon but travelled widely across the Welser network, forming connections to the Welser agents and other merchants in those places that he would continue to use as an independent merchant.<sup>856</sup> Many of the Fuggers' agents, including Bernhard Stecher, Matthias Oertel, and Wolff Haller, moved permanently to Antwerp. Some of these, especially Wolff Haller, became extremely important financiers in their own right.<sup>857</sup>

A factor's ending of his employment was not, however, necessarily a loss to the company: the connections between both parties transmuted rather than ended. Overly strict delineation of different roles has caused historians to underemphasise such lasting ties. Bruscoli suggests, for example, that Andrea del Maestro remained for some time in Marchionni's orbit once he left Marchionni's employ.<sup>858</sup> More precisely, del Maestro was not only married to Isabel di Bartolomeo Marchionni, he remained linked to Marchionni through the Florentine community and through, above all, extremely strong commercial incentives to do so. Likewise, Lazarus Nürnberger acted on behalf of the Welser after he had left their service.<sup>859</sup> Factors who transitioned into court financiers could maintain their ties to their former employers, providing the latter with important connections in court circles. Wolf Haller von Hallerstein, whose father

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<sup>853</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo*, 51.

<sup>854</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 130–31.

<sup>855</sup> Irsigler, 'Hanskaufleute: Die Lübecker Veckinchusen und Die Kölner Rinck', 315.

<sup>856</sup> Harreld, 'Foreign Merchants and International Trade Networks in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries', 18–19.

<sup>857</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 174–75.

<sup>858</sup> Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)', 44–45.

<sup>859</sup> Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', 140.



Wolff Haller zum Ziegelstein had been Imperial Chamberlain (*Hauskämmerer*), was the agent of the Fugger in Antwerp from c.1517 but was in 1526 made an imperial counsellor and given many privileges, including being made mayor for life of Nuremberg (despite no longer being a citizen). As an independent agent, he continued to represent the Fugger and Paumgartner for financial transactions to the great benefit of those companies.<sup>860</sup> Nürnberger's transition out of the Welser employ followed his permanent settlement in the Iberian Peninsula, in Lisbon and then Seville, as his local knowledge and ties came to outweigh his connections to his home city. In doing so, he followed a growing trend. Although Nürnberger remained extremely useful to the Welser, other agents prioritised their local interests whilst remaining in service with negative consequences for their employers.

The distance between factor and headquarters frequently caused conflict between the outdated requests of employers and the immediate demands faced by agents. As distances increased, making communications with factors more difficult, merchants issued elaborate instructions designed to cover all possibilities. The Imhoff company's instructions to its Antwerp agent, Paul Behaim, about a loan to the Count of Brussels, show the lengths to which merchants attempted to address all potential outcomes. Since Behaim did not know the financial agent of the Court, he was to ask the Welser's Antwerp agent to extend the repayment of the Imhoff's money. 'But if you cannot get the Welser to promise that they will prolong our money, then get into touch with Kaltinhofer and Poschinger', two south German financiers who had settled in Antwerp, from whom he was only to borrow under certain strict conditions. The letter continues, discussing the bonds due from the city of Antwerp and the likely interest rates that they would pay.<sup>861</sup> Such instructions, however, faltered in the face of issues outside agents' control, especially when these agents were interacting with rulers. Agents faced the difficulty of conflicting demands from rulers, who wished to obtain further loans, and their employers, who wanted to limit excessive and unconditional credit. In 1527, the Welser's Roman agent was imprisoned after he refused to lend 1000 ducats to the pope.<sup>862</sup> Both this, and their better understanding of the local situation, provided strong incentives for agents to ignore the rulings of headquarters.

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<sup>860</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 175–77.

<sup>861</sup> Ehrenberg, 169–72.

<sup>862</sup> Ehrenberg, 143.

The need for merchants to monitor agents increased with distance, which also made it more difficult to maintain the face-to-face communication that still formed the core of interactions.<sup>863</sup> As agents moved further and further away from company headquarters, so did the responsibility and trust placed in them become enormous and the ability to monitor and control them decline. This, along with their entanglement in local affairs, presented the greatest threat to the agent-merchant relationship as the two groups struggled to communicate with each other. Unlike the earlier *commenda* contract, which encouraged agents to perform well by assigning them a percentage of the profits, travelling agents and factors of the great fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as the Welser captains in Venezuela (p.209 ff.), were generally salaried and their fees were not related to the value of their transactions.<sup>864</sup> Their distance from their employers and the nature of their position meant that factors had great freedom despite their strict contracts. Located days' if not months' worth of travel away from their employers and outside their home city's jurisdiction, why did trading agents not take the money and run? The traditional answer to this question is that 'commercial transactions were embedded in close-knit networks of relatives and friends where information about the past performance of prospective agents was readily available, agency relations were reciprocal, and shared social norms and cultural beliefs created strong incentives to honour obligations'.<sup>865</sup> Merchants drew upon both these social networks of family ties and mutual interests, and upon institutions such as law courts which, however, increasingly failed in the face of expansion across jurisdictions.

Family ties were the basis for most of the multi-branch companies. The Höchstetter family as a rule had a family member head the factory in Antwerp, the first factory to be established there (in 1486) by Augsburgers.<sup>866</sup> Many merchants displayed a distinct preference for employing family members or marital relations. Employing family members could also be seen as a duty; Alessandra Strozzi, on several occasions, reminded her son Filippo of his duty to employ distant, poorer relatives.<sup>867</sup> The Fugger factors in Antwerp, where they had their own house from 1508, were not Fuggers themselves but generally still had family ties. Konrad Meuting

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<sup>863</sup> Sadler, 'News as a Path to Independence', 65; Vivo, 'Paolo Sarpi and the Uses of Information in Seventeenth-Century Venice', 40–41.

<sup>864</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 76–77; for the *commenda*, see John H. Pryor, 'The Origin of the Commenda Contract', *Speculum* 52, no. 1 (1977): 5–37; for Venetian merchants trading on commission, see for example Frederic C. Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo: Merchant of Venice, 1418-1449* (Baltimore, 1944), 93–94; for the Hanseatic *sendeve* contract, see Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, 106.

<sup>865</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 77.

<sup>866</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 151.

<sup>867</sup> Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, *Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi: Letters to Her Sons*, ed. Judith Bryce (Tempe, 2016).

(agent in 1507) was married to Jacob's sister Barbara when Fugger women and their marital families had yet to be excluded from the company.<sup>868</sup> Likewise, Bartolomeo Marchionni married his daughters Maria and Isabel to his factors Francesco Corbinelli and Antonio del Maestro respectively, making their ties permanent even when they ceased to be his factors.<sup>869</sup> Family ties, however, were not always enough. When the situation in Venezuela deteriorated Bartholomeus Welser sent his son, also called Bartholomeus, to the colony in an attempt to restore the situation. Unfortunately, the younger Bartholomeus followed the other factors in pursuing a policy of conquest over settlement.<sup>870</sup> At such a great distance, and under very different circumstances and pressures than those faced in Germany, the interests of factors and headquarters could sharply diverge, overriding family ties.

Most companies nevertheless contained non-family members even in the upper levels; Giovanni Villani, for example, had been the managing director of the Buonaccorsi company in the 1340s.<sup>871</sup> The names of factors in Lisbon and Seville show that they were often not family members of the largest companies despite the importance of those cities to their employer's trade. In the first two decades of the sixteenth century, the Imhoff were represented by Ulrich Imhoff, then Calixtus Schüler and Sebald Kneussel; the Fugger by Marcus Zimmerman and Jan van Schüren; and the Hirschvogel by Wolfgang Behaim, Ulrich Ehinger (brother of Ambrosius Ehinger, the first Welser captain of Klein-Venedig), and Clas Humprecht, whose brother was a Hirschvogel factor in Antwerp.<sup>872</sup> Factors might also be kept loyal by tying their successes to those of the company. The Antwerp factors Mathias Oertel (mid-century), Wolff Haller (1517-22), and Bernhard Stecher (1513-20), who had originated as salaried employees, became investors in the Fugger and other companies, so that their profits aligned with the firm's.<sup>873</sup> Genoese merchants frequently used the joint venture, which 'was itself a bulwark of trust': all participants had contributed capital, including the agent, who thus had an incentive to perform well.<sup>874</sup> The Genoese Brignole company, for example, co-owned all commodities

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<sup>868</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 65; Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 71.

<sup>869</sup> Bruscoli, 'Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)', 44–45.

<sup>870</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 317.

<sup>871</sup> Michele Luzzati, *Giovanni Villani e la compagnia dei Buonaccorsi* (Rome, 1971), *passim*.

<sup>872</sup> Reinhard Jakob, 'Der Skandal um einen Nürnberger Imhoff-Faktor im Lissabon der Renaissance: der Fall Calixtus Schüler und der Bericht Sebald Kneussels (1512)', *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 60 (2000): 93–94, 100; Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung', 51.

<sup>873</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 174–75.

<sup>874</sup> Ricardo Court, 'Trust and Enforcement in the Business Correspondence of the Brignole Family', 997.

traded in their network of business contacts, which not only made them very flexible but assured that all of their agents shared their interests.<sup>875</sup>

Under Bartholomäus Welser, the apprenticeship of Welser factors increased in length, allowing their employers more time to determine their ability and reliability.<sup>876</sup> Christoph von Stetten (b. 1506), who served along with his brother Lukas as Christoph Herwart's factor in Antwerp in the 1520s, was given training in Venice and Antwerp under the supervision of other merchants. In Venice, he was placed for almost two years under the supervision of the Rehlinger Factor, Leonhard Sulzer, and in Antwerp under the Herwart factor Claus de Clerck (Clais de Clerc), who 'tried' (probiert) him 'to see if I were willing and able to do the job' (*ob ich gehorsam [und] willig zw der Arbeit wäre*).<sup>877</sup> By circulating through several company offices, factors learnt new languages, gained familiarity with different markets, and became more tightly bound into merchant networks and thus, hopefully, increased their incentive to honour arrangements with other members.

Despite the shared social norms and, frequently, shared blood, merchants relied upon more than mutual ties to monitor and regulate the behaviour of their agents.<sup>878</sup> The exchange of information was a crucial aspect of the regulation of trade through social networks based upon reputation and shared social norms. To monitor agents, their contracts obliged them to send regular correspondence which their employers could check by comparing them with the letters that they received from elsewhere.<sup>879</sup> Price lists of commodities and exchange rates were printed in Antwerp from 1530, forming an important source of third-party information.<sup>880</sup> Despite the high volume of correspondence, it was not necessarily illuminating and letters could be full of errors; a letter of Zanobi Acciaiuoli from 1491, for example, noted that 'I believe that those who tell the story have made a mistake' (*Credo che chi racconta la novella*

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<sup>875</sup> Court, 996–97.

<sup>876</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 315.

<sup>877</sup> Albert Hämmerle, ed., *Deren von Stetten Geschlechterbuch MDXXXXVIII* (Munich, 1955), 51; Mark Häberlein, 'Fremdsprachen in den Netzwerken Augsburger Handelsgesellschaften des 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhunderts', in *Fremde Sprachen in frühneuzeitlichen Städten: Lernende, Lehrende und Lehrwerke*, ed. Christian Kuhn and Mark Häberlein (Wiesbaden, 2010), 30.

<sup>878</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 76–77; for the Venetian use of commission agents, see Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo: Merchant of Venice, 1418-1449*, 93–94; For the Hanseatic sendeve contract, see Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, 106.

<sup>879</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 81–82.

<sup>880</sup> McCusker, 'The Role of Antwerp in the Emergence of Commercial and Financial Newspapers in Early Modern Europe'.

*habii preso errore*).<sup>881</sup> The written word could also be inadequate due to lost missives and censorship in case of letters being opened. To supplement these accounts, many companies required their agents to return to headquarters at regular intervals, as Angelo Tani, manager of the Medici branch in Bruges, did in April 1464.<sup>882</sup> As agents moved overseas, sometimes for many years, these older patterns of checks and regulations broke down.

To supplement the regulatory power of social networks, merchants also made use of multiple institutions to regulate the behaviour of agents. Agents were sworn under contracts that were frequently registered with notaries and enabled merchants to appeal to courts when their agents broke with their agreed terms.<sup>883</sup> Agents' contracts usually provided detailed information as to how often agents were required to supply accounts and reports to headquarters.<sup>884</sup> The Tucher archive contains many examples of these reports (*Rechnung*), which list in great detail transactions, exchange rates, and general information concerning current events and the movement of employees.<sup>885</sup> In 1520, Jörg Pock agreed to a contract dictating his obligations in India, from where he was to 'give each year an honest, clear, upright, honourable accounting, and also to send said accounting with the ships that sail from India to Portugal each year, and also to include a list of the cargo loaded into these ships in India and what kind of spices remain available in India, all of which to check and establish as clearly as possible, and to write down and send by a certain associate'.<sup>886</sup> These contracts emphasise how factors were not only responsible for their employers' money, but for their reputation upon which their financial credibility depended. For this reason, agents and factors were held to a high standard of behaviour (so too in Hanseatic Bergen), with contracts banning them from gambling, 'consorting with women and bad company' and using company funds for their own activities.<sup>887</sup> In the investigation against the Imhoff agent, Calixtus Schüler (pp.207-8), it was his whoring and gambling, not his neglectful account-keeping, that most raised the ire of his company. The great emphasis that merchants placed upon the behaviour of their factors underlines the power of individuals to determine the credit, and thus ability to trade and deal in money, of an entire company.

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<sup>881</sup> Acciaiuoli, 'Copia Unius Capitoli Quarandam Litterarum Zanobii Azaroli Ad Antonium Arquatium Civem Ferrarie (18 March 1491)', 14.

<sup>882</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 44.

<sup>883</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 43.

<sup>884</sup> Gelderblom, 79–80; Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 88.

<sup>885</sup> Familienarchiv von Tucher, StAN.

<sup>886</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 88.

<sup>887</sup> Johnson, 88.

The relationship between merchant and agent and the difficulty faced by the former in controlling the latter were complicated by distance and lack of information, especially as agents began to be sent to Asia and the Americas, and several agents ‘went rogue’ as a result. The vital role that agents played for their companies, the disasters caused by badly behaved factors, and the many instances of merchants responding ‘irrationally’ reiterates the importance of individuals within broader social networks and institutions, and of the need for historians to analyse people as individuals as well as studying merchants collectively. This work connects to a later literature studying the role of agents and intermediaries in the long eighteenth century and to modern behavioural economics, but is innovative and important in connecting to that later literature and demonstrating that its findings about networks and the control of expertise and excellence of knowledge also apply to the crucial period of establishing overseas trade before 1530.<sup>888</sup> Merchants at the time well understood how much a factor could influence the nature of a company’s trade but struggled to impose their authority over great distances.

An outstanding example of the power of individuals to shape the fortunes of a company is given by Tommaso Portinari, manager of the Medici branch in Bruges. Although predating 1492, his actions followed the same pattern as those of sixteenth-century rogue agents. As noted previously, his extensive involvement in ducal finance represented a new step in the role of Florentine merchants in Bruges and Burgundy: before the mid-fifteenth century, Burgundian finance, including administrative, had been dominated by Lucchese merchants such as the Rapondi.<sup>889</sup> This soon changed as Portinari became heavily involved in financing and managing Charles the Bold’s activities, against Lorenzo’s wishes.<sup>890</sup> Through his business contacts at the Burgundian court, he became a ‘confidant’ of Charles the Bold and in 1464 Philip the Good described him as a ‘faithful councillor’ in a letter to Piero de’ Medici.<sup>891</sup>

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<sup>888</sup> Reinhardt Butz and Lars-Arne Dannenberg, ‘Überlegungen Zu Theoriebildungen Des Hofes’, in *Hof Und Theorie. Annäherungen an Ein Historisches Phänomen*, ed. Jan Hirschbiegel, Dietmar Willoweit, and Reinhardt Butz, vol. 22, Norm Und Struktur. Studien Zum Sozialen Wandel in Mittelalter Und Früher Neuzeit (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2004), 1–42; Marten Düring and Ulrich Eumann, ‘Historische Netzwerkforschung. Ein Neuer Ansatz in Den Geschichtswissenschaften’, *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 39, no. 3 (2013): 369–90; Florian Ederer and Frédéric Schneider, ‘Trust and Promises over Time’, SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, 30 May 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3169881>.

<sup>889</sup> Bart Lambert, *The City, the Duke and Their Banker: The Rapondi Family and the Formation of the Burgundian State (1384–1430)* (Turnhout, 2006).

<sup>890</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 43–45.

<sup>891</sup> ‘Letter to Piero de’ Medici’ (1464), *Mediceo avanti il Principato*, filza 163, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

Portinari succeeded in creating himself as an individual: he was the only foreign merchant named in Olivier de la Marche's account of the wedding procession for Charles the Bold in 1468: 'Before the Florentine merchants walked Tommaso Portinari, head of their *nazione*, dressed as a councillor of Monseigneur the Duke'.<sup>892</sup> To increase his own and the bank's status, he moved into the Bladelinhof, originally built by the head of the Order of the Golden Fleece. His actions were not limited to ducal finance. He also involved the bank in Portuguese activities in Africa and bought two Burgundian galleys to transport goods between the Netherlands and the Mediterranean. Ultimately, however, his attempts were utterly disastrous. Portinari's loans to Charles bankrupted the Bruges branch. When the Burgundian galleys were seized by pirates, Lorenzo de' Medici withdrew from the branch, leaving Portinari with enormous debts; he died impoverished.<sup>893</sup> Portinari is a spectacular example of how, as agents became tied into local politics and trade, they pursued actions that upheld personal, local, short-term interests over the remote policies of distant headquarters. By treating agents as individuals as well as points within a network, the rogue agent – those who, rather than defrauding their employers, instead pursued policies contrary to the wishes of headquarters – emerges as a significant player in a firm's success. The ramifications of the behaviour of these agents demonstrate how much companies relied upon these people who, as they became increasingly removed from headquarters, gained ever more independence, on one hand, and entanglement in local activities on the other. Often working simultaneously as factors, as independent merchants, as partners, and as agents of local rulers, agents – like resident ambassadors – had multiple interests, not all of which coincided with those of their employers.<sup>894</sup>

For an example of how merchants responded to rogue agents, the case of Calixtus Schüler is a particularly rich and informative one. Schüler, the Imhoff factor to Lisbon, had been one of the negotiators who obtained a supply of 20 000 quintals of pepper per annum at 22 *cruzados* per quintal for a consortium of German companies for the years 1512 to 1516.<sup>895</sup> However, Schüler was accused by his employer of gambling, keeping mistresses, and, worst of all, of keeping poor accounts. Peter Imhoff deployed another factor, Sebald Kneussel, to investigate Schüler

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<sup>892</sup> Olivier de la Marche, *Mémoires (1435-1488)*, ed. H. Beaune and J. d'Arbaumont, vol. 3 (Paris, 1883), 113; translated in Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 44.

<sup>893</sup> Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 15, 44.

<sup>894</sup> Benjamin Arbel, ed., *Venetian Letters, 1354-1512: From the Archives of the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation and Other Cypriot Collections* (Nicosia, 2007), 14–18.

<sup>895</sup> Jürgen Pohle, 'Rivalidade e Cooperação: Algumas Notas Sobre as Casas Comerciais Alemãs Em Lisboa No Início de Quinhentos', *Cadernos Do Arquivos Municipal* 2, no. 3 (2015): 30.

in secret and to send a report back to Nuremberg.<sup>896</sup> He was to operate by observing and by conferring with Michael Imhoff and other Germans in Lisbon. After Kneussel confirmed the suspicions of gambling, consorting with women, and violence, Schüler was ordered back to Nuremberg.<sup>897</sup> The investigation of Schüler reveals the methods of monitoring and regulating agents, and how these methods were impacted by the transition abroad. Not only did they seek a direct eyewitness and demand company accounts, the Imhoff were able to seek the testimonies of other members of the German community in Antwerp who, however, had failed to reinforce Schüler's behaviour themselves. This suggests that, while these communities were still able to be policed by headquarters, they were not self-regulating. Rather, the individual interests of companies and especially of agents outweighed, in many cases, the social ties so emphasised in studies of *kontore* and nations.

As monopolist policies became more untenable and opportunities for entrepreneurship increased, factors had strong motivations for abandoning their employers in times of crisis for the pursuit of an independent career. According to Ehrenberg, when the Höchstetter company went bankrupt in 1529 after it failed to monopolise the European mercury supply, much of the blame was attributed to the company's agents. In Antwerp, blame fell upon the Höchstetter's agent Lazarus Tucher, who had made excessively generous loans to the Brussels court, exacerbating the problems of the attempted cartel.<sup>898</sup> While Tucher, located in Antwerp, was a more obvious problem – and an easier scapegoat – than the Höchstetter in Nuremberg, his role reveals the power of agents in deciding the fate of companies and how the interests of agents and companies could rapidly diverge. Tucher was able to extricate himself from the situation and became the greatest financier to the Court of Brussels; he was also involved in loans to the English crown.<sup>899</sup> The Höchstetter were unable to pursue him partly because of their own bankruptcy but also because he was in another jurisdiction and, possibly, protected by his patrons the Netherlandish court. From the example of Lazarus Tucher emerges a picture of the new state of finance and commerce that was developing in the late 1520s, that of individual financial entrepreneurs, who had adjusted to the financial changes caused by the growing

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<sup>896</sup> Imhoff Geschlechter Arkiv, vol. 28, fol. 21r. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, cited in Reinhard Jakob, 'Der Skandal um einen Nürnberger Imhoff-Faktor im Lissabon der Renaissance: der Fall Calixtus Schüler und der Bericht Sebald Kneussels (1512)', *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung* 60 (2000): 93–94, 100; Westermann, 'Auftakt Zur Globalisierung', 88.

<sup>897</sup> Jakob, 'Der Skandal um einen Nürnberger Imhoff-Faktor im Lissabon der Renaissance: der Fall Calixtus Schüler und der Bericht Sebald Kneussels (1512)', 93–95.

<sup>898</sup> Translated in Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 154.

<sup>899</sup> Guy, *Gresham's Law*, 47.



power of the emerging ‘nation-states’, working directly for rulers and outcompeting those companies that remained focused upon monopoly trades and were increasingly prone to bankruptcies.

One of the best-studied examples of rogue agents is the case of the Welser colony of Venezuela, or Klein-Venedig, the demise of which was caused partly by the behaviour of the factors.<sup>900</sup> The distance from their employers in Germany, and their relative isolation from other merchants, gave the factors extensive freedom.<sup>901</sup> As salaried hires rather than members of the company, their income was not directly linked to the company’s profits and they soon abandoned the long-term projects of settlement and exploitation for a short-term policy of *conquista*.<sup>902</sup> In 1530, Nikolaus Federmann led an expedition in search of the Pacific coast against the orders of the Spanish authorities in Santo Domingo and of Ambrosius Ehinger, the Welser governor.<sup>903</sup> The Welser company’s response to their factors’ misbehaviour demonstrates how traditional means of controlling factors were insufficient when applied on an international scale. Limited channels of communication meant that factors control information to their advantage and the detriment of the company. The Welser, in Augsburg, had to make policy decisions regarding Klein-Venedig based entirely upon information coming from their factors.<sup>904</sup> Not only had the factors been selected for their perceived trustworthiness, making their statements more credible, but they were able to render information in such a way as to position their desire for a policy of conquest, rather than agriculture and mining, as the best possible option.<sup>905</sup> They were probably also able to conceal information that questioned this decision (unlike Columbus, who had lost the governorship when he was unable to suppress unflattering reports from New Spain).<sup>906</sup> Consequently, despite the promise of gold and other ore supplies that suggested that mining would be highly profitable, the Welser were persuaded to liquidate the business in 1534 in favour of sending a ‘heavily armed expeditionary force

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<sup>900</sup> Denzer, ‘Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele’, 288; Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 188.

<sup>901</sup> Denzer, ‘Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele’, 315.

<sup>902</sup> Walter Großhaupt, ‘Der Venezuela-Vertrag Der Welser’, *Scripta Mercaturae* 24, no. 1 (1990): 18; Otte, *Cedularios de la monarquía española relativos a la provincia de Venezuela, 1529-1552*, 5:318.

<sup>903</sup> As recounted in Nicolas Federmann, *Indianische Historia* (Hagenau, 1557); accessed in Nicolaus Federmann, *Indianische Historia*, ed. Juan Friede (Munich, 1965).

<sup>904</sup> Eberhard Schmitt, ‘Der Beitrag Der Hutten-Papiere Zur Beurteilung Des VenezuelaUnternehmens Der Welser-Kompanie Im 16. Jahrhundert’, in *Augsburger Handelshäuser Im Wandel Des Historischen Urteils*, ed. Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin, 1996), 200.

<sup>905</sup> Denzer, ‘Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele’, 315.

<sup>906</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 97.

under Hohermuth'.<sup>907</sup> The Welser factors were, for over a decade, able to dictate the company's colonial policy. Only around 1539 did the Welser become fully aware of their factors' failings. Federmann had been arrested in 1539 upon his second return to Europe and imprisoned. After a long suit, he handed over his rights to lands in Columbia but the Welser were obliged to retract their demands for remuneration. In 1543, Bartholomeus Welser wrote to his business associate in Santo Domingo, Francisco Davila, apologising that Federmann owed Davila money and complaining that 'He [Federmann] remains greatly in debt to this firm and has caused us much unpleasantness...'.<sup>908</sup> These sentiments were echoed by the Welser factor Jacob Rembold, who reported that Federmann's 'estate has slipped through our fingers, since he disposed of it in secret and under other names... he stole easily 6000 gold piasters from the new dominion, about which we have sufficient proof, and took them with him in gold; what he did with them, we will probably never be able to find out'.<sup>909</sup> Operating over such great distances, the Welser were unable to rely upon traditional means of controlling their factors, and Klein-Venedig was ultimately a failure.

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The difficulty which the Welser faced in prosecuting their agents in Klein-Venedig, and other court cases surrounding breaches of contracts by overseas agents, reveal the multiple methods by which merchants monitored and sought retribution against their factors and how these were increasingly inadequate in trans-regional cases.<sup>910</sup> When private forms of conflict resolution failed, merchants turned to the courts to recuperate from the errors of their factors. *Pace* Greif, commission trade was not informal: merchants gave detailed instructions to their agents, who were obliged to keep and show accounts and who were placed under strict contracts.<sup>911</sup>

Despite the use of both formal and informal regulatory measures, merchants faced immense difficulties in pursuing their agents across jurisdictions, and *vice versa*, due to legal fragmentation.<sup>912</sup> Commercial law varied significantly between polities and was shaped

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<sup>907</sup> Denzer, 'Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele', 317–18.

<sup>908</sup> Bartholomaus Welser to Franz Davila in February 1543, quoted in Johann Michael Welser, 'Zur Geschichte Der Welser in Venezuela', *Zeitschrift Des Historischen Vereins Für Schwaben und Neuburg* 1 (1874): 335–36; translated in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 190.

<sup>909</sup> Jacob Rembold to Franz Davila in 1543, quoted in Welser, 'Zur Geschichte Der Welser in Venezuela', 337; translated in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 190.

<sup>910</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 101.

<sup>911</sup> Gelderblom, 79–80; Avner Greif, 'Reputation and Coalition in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders', *Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4 (1989): 857–82.

<sup>912</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 101.

heavily by local custom; the so-called *lex mercatoria* was often insufficient for trans-jurisdictional prosecution.<sup>913</sup> Nations frequently had the right to adjudicate between members and, occasionally, between one member and an outside merchant, as did local courts.<sup>914</sup> Most merchants, moreover, traded between two locations, one of which was generally their home city or town, and their needs were thus served by reciprocal trade agreements, such as the vast number created by Nuremberg.<sup>915</sup> The great companies, which traded in multiple locations, were failed by the bilateral nature of trade agreements, while the grand scale of their operations, generally with overseas parties, exceeded the abilities of local and consular courts.<sup>916</sup> Instead, as has been shown, they preferred to use their personal relationships with rulers rather than guilds and nations, avoiding or supplementing traditional jurisdictional methods with a ruler's patronage. They did, nevertheless, seek the protection of local institutions, reinforcing their private means of regulation with public ones. In Lisbon, for example, the high German merchants obtained the jurisdiction of the Lisbon Chief Justice.<sup>917</sup> Even with appeals to courts, the difficulty which the Welser faced in regaining any profit from their factors, such as Federmann, shows clearly how all of the existing issues to which the merchant-factor relationship was prone were exacerbated by overseas activities.

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With the advent of overseas trade, companies sent their agents beyond Europe to conduct trade and manage relations with local and colonial authorities, exacerbating all of the problems to which the merchant-factor relationship was susceptible within Europe. Merchants' letters regarding Asia and the New World were distinguished by their emphasis upon the familiarity of commodities, trade routes, and trading activities rather than upon novelty.<sup>918</sup> It was this ability, to transfer skills learnt in one location to another, that had served merchant companies so well as they expanded across Europe. Although their European commercial training equipped German and Italian merchants with the skills to calculate risk, supply and demand, and profit and loss, it was based upon operating within familiar networks and in familiar

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<sup>913</sup> Marianne Constable, *The Law of the Other: The Mixed Jury and Changing Conceptions of Citizenship, Law, and Knowledge* (Chicago, 1994); Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 103–4.

<sup>914</sup> Constable, *The Law of the Other*; Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 34, 103; Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 251–68.

<sup>915</sup> von Stromer, 'Nuremberg in the International Economics of the Middle Ages', 218–20.

<sup>916</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 101; cf. Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York, 1981), 24.

<sup>917</sup> For the debate concerning the date of this grant, see Jakob, 'Der Skandal um einen Nürnberger Imhoff-Faktor im Lissabon der Renaissance: der Fall Calixtus Schüler und der Bericht Sebald Kneussels (1512)', 100–101.

<sup>918</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 89.

markets. The dense commercial networks shared by merchants across Europe and the policy of circulating factors meant that, even if a particular agent was new to a particular town or city, his company would almost certainly have connections there to whom the agent could be introduced.<sup>919</sup> In a letter of 1525, for example, Wolf Tucher noted the progress of various apprentices, including one whom Linhart had recommended.<sup>920</sup> Asia and the Americas, on the other hand, represented almost or entirely new markets, with no established merchant communities, older generations of merchants who had been there to serve as mentors, or accumulated knowledge. This difference, compared to how merchants treated the New World and Asia as a ‘novelty’ or as an extension of the known, had enormous influence upon the role of companies in colonial activities.

The problems caused by the lack of established knowledge were aggravated by poor communication, which hampered the accumulation of new knowledge.<sup>921</sup> In return, factors were the most important sources of information for their employers, providing them with a comparatively steady supply of news that rivalled that supplied by ambassadors of princes and the Church.<sup>922</sup> Merchants preferred to receive information from a variety of sources. The Fugger and Welser, for example, were able to rely upon having multiple factories in the Iberian Peninsula, from which they received letters as well as *avvisi*.<sup>923</sup> Even these companies, however, faced serious delays in information exchange that made long-distance trade necessarily speculative and obliged both agents and company heads to operate based upon outdated information.<sup>924</sup>

With few other European merchants there, agents in India or the New World were forced, or able, to operate without monitoring from their employers or employers’ business partners for months at a time. The seventh Portuguese India Armada, which included ships funded by two German consortia and one Italian consortium under Marchionni, departed in March 1505 and returned in January 1506. Balthasar Sprenger (for the Vöhl-Welser) and Hans Mayr, the two German factors on this voyage, kept detailed accounts to supply their employers with

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<sup>919</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 81.

<sup>920</sup> Wolf Tucher, ‘Brief Wolf Tuchers Aus Lyon an Seinen Vetter Linhart Tucher in Nürnberg’ (17 December 1525), Familienarchiv Tucher E 29/IV 557, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg.

<sup>921</sup> Pieper, 61; for a later example, see Hans Ulrich Krafft, *Reisen und Gefangenschaft Hans Ulrich Kraffts: aus der Originalhandschrift* (Stuttgart, 1861).

<sup>922</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 14–15, 21.

<sup>923</sup> Pieper, 22–23, 61.

<sup>924</sup> Pieper, 61.

knowledge of the local markets.<sup>925</sup> Sprenger did not return to the Welser in Augsburg until late in 1506, having been absent at least since January 1505, when he was in Antwerp.<sup>926</sup> In later years, factors such as Jörg Pock would be sent out on far longer contracts, during which time their ties to their employers would progressively weaken, increasing the incentive to ‘go rogue’. Within Europe, the use of legal proxies, such as hosteller-brokers in Bruges, and of notaries for all important transactions, had declined in the fifteenth century once merchants had regular correspondence and detailed accounts that were sufficient to monitor sales and agents.<sup>927</sup> These institutional and private solutions were not present in Asia or the Americas nor, for the German merchants, in the Iberian Peninsula for the first crucial years of the monopolists’ involvement in the overseas trade, making companies heavily reliant upon individual or small groups of factors, who were in turn operating without both the usual checks and the usual means of support.

When deciding whom to send to the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, the German companies followed the traditional pattern of using family members (p.202-3). Lucas Rem, the nephew of Bartholomeus Welser, established the Welser branch in Lisbon in 1503 and remained there until 1508, travelling to India and the Atlantic Islands and participating in contracting the *asiento* of 1504.<sup>928</sup> Earlier, Hieronymus Münzer had been accompanied to Spain and Portugal by Anton Herwart, whose family later established a branch in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>929</sup> Despite the importance of their position, these merchants and others sent abroad were almost always salaried agents or very junior partners with limited authority.<sup>930</sup> Given their great distance from the superiors, however, these agents in reality had a great degree of independence.

In the most important commercial centres, factors were surrounded by compatriots, including, often, family members. In the first decade of the 1500s, representatives of the German great companies in Lisbon included Paulus Imhof, Wolfgang Holzschuher, Jacob Holzschuher, Peter Holzschuher, Martin Behaim, Wolf Behaim (Martin’s youngest brother and a Hirschvogel agent or partner), Lucas Rem, and Simon Seitz.<sup>931</sup> The Augsburg and Nuremberg high

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<sup>925</sup> Cf. Pohle, who argues that there were three German representatives, one on each of the Lionarda, São Rafael and São Jeronimo. Pohle, ‘Os Primeiros Alemães a Procurar a Índia: Maximiliano I, Conrad Peutinger e a Alta Finança Alemã Estabelecida Em Lisboa’, 25.

<sup>926</sup> Schulze, *Balthasar Springers Indienfahrt, 1505/06*, 5.

<sup>927</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 101.

<sup>928</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 162–63.

<sup>929</sup> Münzer, *Hieronymus Münzer’s Itinerary*, 2.

<sup>930</sup> Lockhart and Otte, *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies*, 18.

<sup>931</sup> Ravenstein, *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe*, 10–11.

financiers had rapidly created a small but highly-successful community. Despite this, however, factors relied heavily upon their connections with local merchants, officials, and other groups who fell outside the social networks through which they usually operated, and which were used to informally regulate trade. As they moved into new markets, merchants often had to trade with people with whom they did not have slowly cultivated relationships. Nonetheless, they still tried to recruit agents through known links.<sup>932</sup> Although there were advantages to operating with unconnected merchants – and in the Iberian Peninsula the German merchants had little choice – a remark by the agent Sebald Kneussel suggests that it was very much not their preference.<sup>933</sup> In his investigation into Calixtus Schuler, Kneussel dismissed Schüler's ties to 'many [Portuguese] compatriots' (*vil conpadres und conmadreß*).<sup>934</sup> If Kneussel's statement is representative, then the companies were failing to adjust to the new trading landscape.

The long-established practice of sending young merchants on apprenticeships abroad had meant, before 1492, that company heads and senior managers were familiar with their firm's chief trading destinations (p.204). Jacob Fugger, Matthäus Schwarz, and other Germans, for example, had been apprentices in Italy.<sup>935</sup> Merchants resident overseas, such as Marchionni and Tommaso Portinari, often began their careers abroad at a young age, as *garzoni* (office-boys) at the age of twelve.<sup>936</sup> In comparison, few German company leaders had visited the Iberian Peninsula, and almost no Italian or German company heads travelled overseas. The possible exception to the latter is Girolamo Sernigi, the second wealthiest and extremely influential Lisbon-based Florentine merchant, who, according to some sources, is reported to have commanded a ship to Malacca in the fleet of 1510.<sup>937</sup> This second-hand knowledge of current events was echoed, to a lesser degree, by the rapid political and economic changes taking place in the Netherlands, the Iberian Peninsula, and Italy. Although the heads of companies had often travelled there as factors, the political and thus financial and commercial upheavals that occurred precisely in these regions meant that the political landscape had changed significantly within a few decades, potentially making the heads' experience obsolete. Some letters reveal that, based far away in southern Germany or northern Italy, certain

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<sup>932</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 77.

<sup>933</sup> Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, especially 153-63.

<sup>934</sup> Jakob, 'Der Skandal um einen Nürnberger Imhoff-Faktor im Lissabon der Renaissance: der Fall Calixtus Schüler und der Bericht Sebald Kneussels (1512)', 93-94.

<sup>935</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 29-30; Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 33.

<sup>936</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*; Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Leone*, 15.

<sup>937</sup> Radulet, 'Girolamo Sernigi e a Importancia Economica Do Oriente', 75-76.

company heads did not understand the markets of the Netherlands and Iberian Peninsula, subjecting their factors to unrealistic demands. The letters of both Medici agents to Bruges and the van der Molen, a century apart, show that high-quality tapestries were almost inevitably bought upon commission rather than upon the open market, but that patrons, who wished to pay the lower prices commanded by ready-made tapestries, were frequently unaware of this.<sup>938</sup> This serious imbalance of knowledge within the great firms gave an advantage to the independent trader or smaller partnership, such as that between Lazarus Nürnberger and the Cromberger family, in which one of the partners had travelled overseas. Nürnberger and the Crombergers used Nürnberger's experience abroad – he had been to both the East and West Indies – to dominate the export of books to the Caribbean in the early to mid-sixteenth century.<sup>939</sup>

Lazarus Nürnberger followed the typical pattern but did extremely well. A Hirschvogel agent in Lisbon from around 1517, he travelled to India in that same year and then moved to Seville in 1520, where he married the daughter of the prominent printer Jacob Cromberger and became a partner in that company; he was simultaneously an agent for the Hirschvogel, Welser, Fugger, and Herwart; an independent trader; a seller of pearls to the Spanish crown; and a member of many important consortia.<sup>940</sup> Nürnberger shows how German factors were able to establish themselves rapidly within the Iberian Peninsula, to build up networks of merchants from the High German cities who were familiar with the Iberian Peninsula and overseas trade, to make important connections, and to use these to benefit the great German companies. Nürnberger's success, however, came over a decade after the German monopolists' first serious activity in the Iberian Peninsula, during which time their goods had been confiscated and they had withdrawn, after only a few years, from direct participation in overseas trade.<sup>941</sup> Unlike the Italian companies based in the Iberian Peninsula, who could familiarise themselves with the market and establish those crucial personal connections with rulers, the Germans instead were obliged to operate through factors, whose ability to influence royal policy seems to have been significantly less than those of company heads.

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<sup>938</sup> Edler de Roover, 'The Van Der Molen, Commission Merchants of Antwerp: Trade with Italy, 1538-44', 82–83; Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, 77.

<sup>939</sup> Otte, 'Jacob und Hans Cromberger und Lazarus Nürnberger, Die Begründer Des Deutschen Amerikahandels', particularly 136-9.

<sup>940</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 97.

<sup>941</sup> Johnson, 96–97; Schaper, *Die Hirschvogel von Nürnberg und ihr Handelshaus*, 219–20, 230–31.

The consortia and *asientos* in which the large companies became involved for their biggest undertakings were largely negotiated and managed by salaried factors, who thus saw an enormous increase in responsibility. It was their factors, not the company heads, who negotiated the contracts with the Spanish and Portuguese crowns that allowed the German companies into the overseas trade. Although Anton Welser and Konrad Vöhlin signed the *asiento* of 13 February 1503, it was their factor, Simon Seitz, who was responsible for negotiating this extremely important contract.<sup>942</sup> When these factors were from both German and Italian companies, they often provided the main form of contact between the various firms. The Welser factors Heinrich Ehinger and Hieronymus Sailer worked with Fugger agents Jörg Reihing and Christoph Müllich to trade in Spanish crown pensions (*juros*).<sup>943</sup> Unlike consortia involving merchants from the same city or region, where the heads of the companies were known to each other personally as well as from decades of mutual trading, this was not the case for a combination of German and Italian firms. When Welser factors in Italy guaranteed the exchange of three Italian companies for 55 000 guilders in 1519, they would almost certainly have received permission from their employers but would have most probably been the only members of their company to know the Italian merchants in question, making them responsible for assessing the Italians' credit.<sup>944</sup> The checks of personal knowledge, mutual ties, and shared culture had been replaced by joint contracts signed by salaried factors. These joint transactions and the importance of factors within them also had the effect of involving factors more heavily in local politics and in other companies, potentially producing conflicts of interest.

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As the great companies became ever more involved in high finance and colonial projects, so the political roles of their agents grew as factors were commissioned to negotiate and manage commercial and financial contracts and consignments with their royal customers. While this strengthened the great companies' ties to rulers, it could ultimately deprive them of their factors, who came to prioritise – willingly or otherwise – princely matters over those of their employers.

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<sup>942</sup> Franz Hümmerich, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Fahrt der ersten Deutschen nach dem portugiesischen Indien 1505/6* (1918), 65.

<sup>943</sup> Kellenbenz, *Die Fugger in Spanien und Portugal Bis 1560*, 1990, 1:69–71; Hermann Kellenbenz, *Die Fugger in Spanien und Portugal Bis 1560*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1990), 62–64; for this and other examples of co-operation between the two firms, see Häberlein, 'Fugger und Welser: Kooperation und Konkurrenz 1496-1614', 229.

<sup>944</sup> Kellenbenz, 'Die Konkurrenten Der Fugger Als Bankiers Der Spanischen Krone', 82.



Some agents effectively became diplomats and representatives for their employers and nation. They became involved in court politics and hosted important local officials and visiting dignitaries and other notables. In his journey through the Netherlands, Dürer recorded that he dined with two Fugger factors: Bernhard Stecher, ‘who gave us a costly meal’, and Wolff Haller, ‘when he had invited my lords of Nuremberg’.<sup>945</sup> The Fugger factory also hosted events that deliberately evoked courtly entertainments: Dürer wrote that ‘I have made a drawing for a mask for the Fugger’s people for masquerade’.<sup>946</sup> By acting like cultural patrons, agents upheld an image of their employers as sophisticated courtiers as well as merchant bankers. In earlier decades, Tommaso Portinari had served as an unofficial diplomat; the Milanese merchant Francesco Salvatico, for example, sought his help when he, Salvatico, was arrested in Flanders under suspicion of spying in 1471.<sup>947</sup> Such a position could be of enormous benefit to the company, providing it with power, prestige, and entry into court circles, or a serious hindrance. A politically active factor would almost inevitably face conflicts of interest, multiple loyalties, and great demands upon his time as his orbit was oriented towards political matters and away from those of the distant company headquarters. If the ruler changed his or her demands, a factor’s instructions from their superiors could become obsolete and the factor would have to operate alone. In 1547, when the relationship between the German monopolists and the Emperor had begun to deteriorate, the Welser agent Christoph Peutinger wrote to Bartholomäus Welser saying that he had gone to the Emperor’s camp at Ulm to collect an outstanding debt but was instead asked for a new loan, the amount of which was later doubled.<sup>948</sup> His pessimistic tone – shared by other factors – probably results from his desire to disassociate himself from the sudden upset to his employers’ plans, which he was hasty to point out were outside his control. The huge imbalance of power between ruler and agent, and the distance of the latter from his employees, made successful negotiations extremely difficult when circumstances changed.

This was particularly the case when factors became entangled in colonial projects, and all of the problems of managing employer-factor relations caused by distance and rapidly changing circumstances were further complicated. As noted in an earlier chapter, Albuquerque and Diogo Lopes de Sequeira, viceroys of Portuguese India, displayed a distinct preference for

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<sup>945</sup> Dürer, *Memoirs of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, 46, 61.

<sup>946</sup> Dürer, 80.

<sup>947</sup> Richard Walsh, ‘The Coming of Humanism to the Low Countries: Some Italian Influences at the Court of Charles the Bold’, *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 25 (1976): 168.

<sup>948</sup> Staats- und Stadtbibliothek Augsburg, 2°Cod. Aug. 382a; translated in Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 166–67.

Italian factors, whose commercial, administrative, and diplomatic talents far exceeded those of the Portuguese.<sup>949</sup> Consequently, Florentine factors were prominent in Portuguese India at least until c.1525, with the notable examples of Francisco Corbinelli, factor of Goa, Piero di Andrea Strozzi, factor of the Coromandel, and Giovanni da Empoli, factor of Sumatra until his death in 1517.<sup>950</sup>

Although this raised the prestige of the companies – Albuquerque wrote to Manuel that ‘I have more confidence in the clerk of Bartolomeu, alone than in all the factories and factors in India’<sup>951</sup> – it could also cause factors to have conflicting loyalties to both their employer and the king. Both Empoli and Corbinelli were obliged to become imperial factors despite their desire to return to trade in Europe. In his letter of 1515, Raffaele Galli reported that ‘our dearest Giovanni da Empoli returns to India, under the mandate of the king our lord, but he did not think that it was the time for him to return to these parts’ (*...el nostro carissimo Govanni da Empoli ritornava alle Indie, mandato da re nostro signore, che lui nonn era volta di ritornare più in quelle parte*).<sup>952</sup> Empoli himself had written of his 1510-11 voyage that ‘Right up to the end, the General [Albuquerque] badly wanted to keep me in India, in order to send me again as King’s Factor to Malacca, promising me all sorts of things, so that I had trouble escaping from his hands’.<sup>953</sup> Likewise, despite his repeated requests Francesco Corbinelli was denied permission to return to Italy from India.<sup>954</sup> Merchants, even those of the great companies, were frequently obliged to put the demands of the emerging imperial nations before their own interests and those of their companies. To this complaint, however, agents received little sympathy: blame was directed largely at people who could be brought to court; factors made an effective scapegoat in clashes between the monopolies and rulers.<sup>955</sup> After the German-funded ships returned from India in 1506, Marx Zimmermann represented the Fugger in negotiating the division of the profits with the Welser (represented by Lucas Rem) and the Höchstetter. This led to serious disagreements, including with Jan van Schüren, the other

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<sup>949</sup> Bruscoli, ‘Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)’, 39; Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, xviii–xix; da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo (1503)’; Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell’Asia portoghese*, 72–73.

<sup>950</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell’Asia portoghese*, 12–13.

<sup>951</sup> Translated in Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 25, 81–83.

<sup>952</sup> Galli, ‘Letter of Raffaele Galli (1 April 1515)’, 137–38.

<sup>953</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 81–83.

<sup>954</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell’Asia portoghese*, 73–74.

<sup>955</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 82–83.

Fugger factor, for which Zimmermann was ultimately blamed.<sup>956</sup> The great responsibility given to factors could frequently work against them.

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As old methods of monitoring and control became more difficult, and as merchants came to focus upon trading locations far away from their headquarters, they increasingly turned to local commission agents instead of factors from their own cities of origin.<sup>957</sup> Although local agents were less well-known to the head of the company than were compatriots, who moreover shared social norms and communal ties, the advantage of their local knowledge could win out. In 1511, the local Clais de Clerc was serving as an agent in Antwerp for Christopher Herwart, who was in partnership with Filippo Gualterotti as a creditor of the Netherlands government.<sup>958</sup> The trend was firmly underway by the 1530s, when the van der Molen family in Antwerp sourced tapestries, Honschoote says, and other fabrics for Italian merchants supplying Italian courts.<sup>959</sup> The van der Molen, with their knowledge of and connection to local producers, were, like other Netherlandish traders, by then better placed than their Italian partners and clients to obtain luxury goods. The profitability of multiple branches was also undermined by the growing supply of information, especially from Asia and the Americas, which could no longer be dominated by a few companies.<sup>960</sup> Among other consequences, the widespread availability of news diminished the need for having agents in each major commercial centre as rent-seeking became unviable and the great companies were no longer able to control the whole passage of a commodity from most basic manufacture to sale.

The preference for commission agents was repeated in overseas trade. From the 1520s, rather than sending agents to India, where they might lose contact with and loyalty to their employers and fall under the (conflicting) authority of the colonial powers, Italian and German companies preferred to use factors and restrict themselves to monopolising the intra-European trade.<sup>961</sup> America, a far shorter distance away, nonetheless likewise raised serious problems as home

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<sup>956</sup> Konrad Haebler, *Die Geschichte Der Fugger'schen Handlung in Spanien* (Weimar, 1897), 26.

<sup>957</sup> Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 4–5; W. Brulez, *De Firma Della Faille En de Internationale Handel van Vlaamse Firma's in de 16e Eeuw* (Brussels, 1959), especially 485–93; Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 76–77; commission agents were already in use in mid-fifteenth century Venice; see Lane, *Andrea Barbarigo: Merchant of Venice, 1418–1449*; and Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 43.

<sup>958</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 156–58.

<sup>959</sup> van der Molen, 'Letterbook of Pieter van Der Molen'; Edler de Roover, 'The Van Der Molen, Commission Merchants of Antwerp: Trade with Italy, 1538–44', 93–96, 98–99.

<sup>960</sup> McCusker, 'The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World', 298–99.

<sup>961</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 12–13.

and colonial interests sharply diverged, with the failure of Klein-Veendig being the most extreme example.

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Instead of acting solely in response to economic rationale, therefore, merchants were motivated by a multitude of factors, including highly personal, short-term reasons that soon led to divisions. The great bankruptcies of the mid-sixteenth century were driven not only by disasters, renegeing rulers, and mistakes, but by individuals ignoring or reinterpreting company policy to meet local interests. Agents sent to reside in foreign branches for years at a time often came to value their local ties and activities over those relating to their employers. Over time, some agents became permanently or semi-permanently settled in their base of operations, forming important satellite branches or even become independent, although often very much connected, companies.

When family connections and shared income were not enough to stop agents from disobeying their employers, merchants relied upon both informal social networks and formal institutions to regulate and seek restoration from their factors. Existing problems of legal fragmentation and trans-jurisdictional enforcement of contracts, however, were hugely amplified by the geographic expansion of trade post-1492. As old methods of monitoring and control became increasingly difficult, and as merchants came to focus upon trading locations far away from their headquarters, they increasingly turned to local commission agents instead of factors from their own cities of origin.

## Chapter Nine:

### Ennoblement and Transition

Before the sixteenth century, the careers of itinerant northern Italian and southern German merchants had followed an established pattern. After years or even decades abroad, merchants returned to their home city, married a daughter of a socially equal family, bought (and often rebuilt) a *palazzo* and country estate with villa, and became involved in local politics. In the sixteenth century, this pattern was gradually replaced by the adoption of noble lifestyles and, in some cases, by permanent emigration and exogamy.<sup>962</sup>

The transition of capitalists moving into the nobility has been viewed in a negative light, attributed to an economic downturn that prompted entrepreneurs to put their money into land, and to the personal inadequacies as businessmen of the third generation, with the Fugger taken as a classic example.<sup>963</sup> Such scholarship operates not only upon the notion of profit maximisation, but upon the notion that these merchants entirely abandoned commerce rather than turning themselves into commercially-involved nobility.<sup>964</sup> It also does not consider how merchants' values and social norms evolved to encourage imitation of aristocratic living.

Later historians have emphasised how the withdrawal from trade emerged not only from changing attitudes and interests but due to commercial and broader geopolitical changes.<sup>965</sup> Under these conditions, the transition into the aristocracy represented not a failure but rather 'a great ability to forecast and adapt to changes'.<sup>966</sup> Häberlein draws upon Piere Bourdieu to argue that the withdrawal of most Welser from the trade was the reinvestment of one type of economic capital (trading capital) into other forms (deposits, land ownership) and cultural capital (education).<sup>967</sup> Under this interpretation, the withdrawal from trade was not entirely due

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<sup>962</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 12; Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 406–7.

<sup>963</sup> Pirenne, 'Les Périodes de l'histoire Sociale Du Capitalisme'; translated in Henri Pirenne, 'The Stages in the Social History of Capitalism', *American Historical Review* 9 (1914): 494–515; Jacks and Caferro, *The Spinelli of Florence*, 259–62; Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich*, 92.

<sup>964</sup> An early revision was offered by Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 2: The Wheels of Commerce:479–80; for a discussion of the application of this view to the Fugger, and its revision from the 1960s, see Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 4; and Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma (1560-1614)', 280.

<sup>965</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 406; Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 113–15.

<sup>966</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 406.

<sup>967</sup> Mark Häberlein, 'Die Augsburger Welser und ihr Umfeld zwischen Karolinischer Regimentsreform und Dreißigjährigem Krieg: Ökonomisches, kulturelles und soziales Kapital', in *Die Welser: Neue Forschungen Zur Geschichte und Kultur Des Oberdeutschen Handelshauses*, ed. Mark Häberlein and Johannes Burkhardt (Berlin, 2002), 382–406, especially 386–7, 398–403; see also Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma', *passim*.

to a disinterest in commerce, nor to business incompetency, but to a belief that changing political and economic circumstances rendered a less-commercial lifestyle the most viable option. Such scholarship emphasises how merchants' commercial activities were influenced by their political, social, and cultural contexts.<sup>968</sup> Rather than interpreting merchants' actions using modern economic theories, an analysis of merchants' contexts and social norms provides better insights into their motivations.<sup>969</sup>

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In the sixteenth century, the commercial cities of southern Germany and central and northern Italy witnessed a growing tendency towards adoption or imitation of noble lifestyles, investment in and focus upon landed properties, and courtly activities among their elite citizens. Although the transition to the nobility was hardly new, with medieval merchants such as Nicola Acciaiuoli providing earlier examples, it occurred on a far larger scale in response to socio-political and commercial developments that decreased the benefits of mercantile status and increased the commercial opportunities available to aristocrats.<sup>970</sup>

In Florence, the extreme example of turning from commerce to the aristocracy given by the Medici was mimicked by the other great companies, such as the main branch of the Strozzi, many of whom, although certainly not all, began to favour other interests than trade.<sup>971</sup> This included real estate, which was a much more secure form of income than commerce but also an essential status symbol upon which merchants invested vast sums.<sup>972</sup> Both merchants returning to their cities of origin and expatriate Italians in Seville and Lisbon competed to build the grandest *palazzi* and *ville* as signs of wealth and as central elements of their pursuit of naturalised, aristocratic status.<sup>973</sup> Most elite families already owned real estate and had done so for generations, but the *ricordanze* of sixteenth century Florentine patricians show an increase in families living exclusively or mostly off land rents.<sup>974</sup> Tommaso Spinelli's nephew Guasparre di Niccodemo (1442-1501), for example, inherited his uncle's palace, bank, and silk firm but was unable to cope with the deteriorating situation in Florence. He dissolved the bank

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<sup>968</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 377.

<sup>969</sup> Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg*, 7.

<sup>970</sup> For Nicola Acciaiuoli, see Abulafia, 'Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy, 1265-1370', 981.

<sup>971</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 32; Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence*, 249-51.

<sup>972</sup> Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma (1560-1614)', 280.

<sup>973</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi'; Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 11-12; P. J. Jones, 'Florentine Families and Florentine Diaries in the Fourteenth Century', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 24 (1956): 199.

<sup>974</sup> Jones, 'Florentine Families and Florentine Diaries in the Fourteenth Century', 193-94, 197-98.

and raised his sons for other professions. His second son, Leonardo, entered the priesthood and rose to become chamberlain under Julius II and papal nuncio to the court of Henry VIII where his brother Tommaso was ambassador. Guasparre's son Benetto worked in the Medici bureaucracy and had silk trade in France and Flanders.<sup>975</sup> The emergence of a ducal court under Alessandro and Cosimo I de' Medici encouraged elite Florentines to become courtiers, adopt noble lifestyles and to gain and secure status by holding roles within the ducal administration.<sup>976</sup> Their evolving mentality and behaviour was echoed in Florentine *ricordanze*, which changed from composites collection of general history, family narratives, tax records and other miscellanea into genealogical records.<sup>977</sup> A parallel genre, the *Geschlechterbücher* (family books), emerged first in Nuremberg and then elsewhere in southern Germany around the same time.<sup>978</sup>

The adoption of a more noble lifestyle did not prompt a total break from commerce as it once might have done.<sup>979</sup> In sixteenth-century Venice, merchants, such as Andrea Berengo, increasingly purchased land in the Terraferma, but they were still involved in the Levant trade and began to invest in Venice's growing industries.<sup>980</sup> Many of these had become landowners who invested in business rather than merchant-patricians who owned land.

Like the Italians, sixteenth-century generations of the Fugger, Welser, and many other Nuremberg and Augsburg patrician and elite merchant families shifted to focus upon noble lifestyles and political interests at least partly in response to the difficulties caused by religious conflicts and the declining power of the great companies over rulers.<sup>981</sup> Stigma against trade and finance could also encourage merchants to pursue alternative careers. The Cologne merchant Johann Rinck requested, in his will of 1512, that his children not become merchants because 'such trade is not the safest for the soul' (*solcher handel nyet der sicherste der sielen en is*), preferring them to pursue peaceful and secure paths, preferably university positions.<sup>982</sup>

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<sup>975</sup> Jacks and Caferro, *The Spinelli of Florence*, 6–7.

<sup>976</sup> Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527-1800: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago and London, 2013).

<sup>977</sup> Jacks and Caferro, *The Spinelli of Florence*, 8; on *ricordanze* generally, see Giovanni Ciappelli, *Memory, Family, and Self: Tuscan Family Books and Other European Egodocuments (14th-18th Century)* (Leiden, 2014).

<sup>978</sup> Hans Burgkmair the Younger and Heinrich Vogtherr, *Augsburger Geschlechterbuch* (1545), Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung, D 2010/777,39 (KK); Christoph Weiditz, *Augsburger Geschlechterbuch* (1538, 1661), Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung, B 195, II, Titel.

<sup>979</sup> Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence*, 140, 250.

<sup>980</sup> Berengo, *Lettres d'un Marchand Vénétien Andrea Berengo (1553-1556)*; for the growth of industry in Venice, see Gino Luzzato, *Storia economica di Venezia: dall'XI al XVI secolo* (Venice, 1961).

<sup>981</sup> Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma (1560-1614)', 281.

<sup>982</sup> Irsigler, 'Hanskaufleute: Die Lübecker Veckinchusen und Die Kölner Rinck', 323.

Faced with growing commercial, financial, and socio-political instability, merchants transitioned into more secure activities. The Fugger, for example, accumulated large landholdings from the later fifteenth century which provided them with a stable income and an aristocratic lifestyle, although they did not abandon commerce.<sup>983</sup> Those who failed to evolve – most spectacularly the Höchstetter, whose company collapsed in 1529 after they attempted to monopolise Europe’s mercury trade – faced the growing possibility of bankruptcy and social disgrace.<sup>984</sup> Those who withdrew from urban life entirely could also face issues; Hans III Paumgartner, who largely lived in his castles of Baumgarten, Hohenschwangau, and Erbach from 1533, was fined for failing to uphold his duties, and taxes, as a burgher.<sup>985</sup> The Fugger, who aggressively pursued noble titles, were criticised for their aristocratic conduct, which was incongruent with the social norms of the urban patriciate.<sup>986</sup>

The transition into the aristocracy and the patricians’ imitation of noble lifestyles differentiated them from smaller merchants, whose minimal involvement in court circles did not necessitate acculturation into those spaces and whose limited capital did not allow for it. The commission agents van der Molen ended their partnership with the Venetian Zanchi company on the grounds that the latter had ‘grandiose ideas’ and were showy, clashing with the van der Molen family’s desire to depict themselves as good rather than luxurious merchants.<sup>987</sup> The van der Molen themselves possessed *terrains francs* (freehold estates) but used these to support their wealth, as the great companies had done in previous decades. They also refused to engage in banking, as stated in a letter of 4 April 1540 to their Genoese client Geronimo Azaretto: ‘You can sleep easily when your belongings are in your hands... we do not want to carry out any [financial] exchanges, neither for ourselves nor for others... We do not wish to be famous, only

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<sup>983</sup> Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 3, 21–22; Mörke, ‘Die Fugger Im 16. Jahrhundert: Städtische Elite Oder Sonderstruktur? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag’; Mandrou, *Die Fugger als Grundbesitzer in Schwaben, 1560-1618*, particularly 138-150.

<sup>984</sup> Kellenbenz, ‘Die Konkurrenten Der Fugger Als Bankiers Der Spanischen Krone’, 84; Thomas Max Safley, ‘After The Fall: The Dynamics Of Social Death And Rebirth In The Wake Of The Höchstetter Bankruptcy, 1529 To 1586’, *Studies in Central European Histories* 50 (5 July 2010): 415–34; Müller, *Quellen zur Handelsgeschichte der Paumgartner*; Strieder, *Studien Zur Geschichte Kapitalistischer Organisationsformen*, including a transcription of the Paumgartner family’s assumption of the mercury monopoly on Idria (1 August 1539), 463-74; on bankruptcy and its connections to honour and credit, see Mark Häberlein, ‘Merchants’ Bankruptcies, Economic Development and Social Relations in German Cities during the Long 16th Century’, in *The History of Bankruptcy: Economic, Social and Cultural Implications in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Thomas Max Safley (London and New York, 2013), 19–24.

<sup>985</sup> Müller, *Quellen zur Handelsgeschichte der Paumgartner*, 11.

<sup>986</sup> Sieh-Burens, *Oligarchie, Konfession und Politik Im 16. Jahrhundert*, 347; Dauser, *Informationskultur und Beziehungswissen*, 20–22; Mörke, ‘Die Fugger Im 16. Jahrhundert: Städtische Elite Oder Sonderstruktur? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag’.

<sup>987</sup> Edler de Roover, ‘The Van Der Molen, Commission Merchants of Antwerp: Trade with Italy, 1538-44’, 89–91.



to do well and live honestly' (*possiate securamente dormire quando le robe vostre sono in man nostre... de kambi non se ne vogliamo inpazare, ne per noi ne per altri... Non desideramo d'aver fama de gran facende, salvo di ben fare e viver honestamente*).<sup>988</sup> The van der Molen are an example of how the great companies were qualitatively different not only in their actions but also in their ambitions and behaviour from their smaller competitors, differences that were exaggerated by the socio-political and commercial changes of the sixteenth century. As the century progressed, it was the van der Molens and their equals, not the great companies, that would come to dominate commerce.

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Alongside the merchants who sought the security and status of ennoblement and the accumulation of real estate in their home cities were those merchants who, unlike their medieval forebears, chose permanent emigration and ennoblement in foreign countries.<sup>989</sup> This was a distinct change from the fifteenth century and earlier, when very few foreign merchants in Spain and Portugal sought naturalisation, preferring to maintain the ambiguous and thus fluid and flexible status of the resident foreigner despite being marginalised by xenophobia and prejudice against merchants.<sup>990</sup> Genoese merchants, in particular, had forged a hybrid identity for themselves.<sup>991</sup>

In the sixteenth century, as merchants stayed abroad for growing periods of time and became heavily involved in local politics and society, returning to their cities of origin became increasingly unattractive, especially as those cities became subject to religious and political turbulence and to economic difficulties.<sup>992</sup> Italian merchants such as Bartolomeo Marchionni, the Sernigi, the Affaitati, and the Giraldi had turned their attention almost entirely to the Atlantic and to the enormous profits to be made from participating in the import and re-export of Americana and Asian commodities and by lending to the Spanish and Portuguese crowns.<sup>993</sup> This obliged them to remain in Antwerp, Lisbon, and Seville due to the monopolies imposed by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns and due to the concentration of crown finance in those

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<sup>988</sup> van der Molen, 'Letterbook of Pieter van Der Molen', fols 148v–49r.

<sup>989</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 12; Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 62–63.

<sup>990</sup> Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 72.

<sup>991</sup> Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 9.

<sup>992</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 12; For a related argument, on the decline of boycotting in Bruges, see Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 169–70.

<sup>993</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 22.

cities that the monopolies produced.<sup>994</sup> Many of these merchants, moreover, were made naturalised citizens of Spain or Portugal as part of obtaining trading privileges, which allowed them to circumvent the limitations placed upon foreign participation in African, Asian, and American commerce. Marchionni and Sernigi, for example, were called ‘our natural merchants’ (*mercadores nosos naturaaees*) by João II in 1498 when he exempted them from his ban upon foreign ‘interference’ in the Madeiran sugar trade.<sup>995</sup> The protection afforded to citizens was also important in acts of war. Marchionni and, on a separate occasion, Francesco Corbinelli, Girolamo Sernigi, Raffaello Nardi, claimed to be naturalised Portuguese when – successfully – lobbying for the return of cargo seized by pirates.<sup>996</sup> As the sixteenth century continued, restrictions upon foreign participation in extra-European trade increased, encouraging other merchants to gain citizenship.<sup>997</sup>

In polities without these restrictions and with less prejudice against foreign participation or merchants, such as Antwerp, far fewer merchants ever sought naturalisation.<sup>998</sup> Those who did included Lazarus Tucher and other German merchants who had become financiers to and bureaucratic agents of the Spanish crown more than independent merchants and bankers (although they generally retained something of this function) and married into or themselves entered the Flemish nobility (p.230).<sup>999</sup> In Lyons, many Italian merchants married into local families and were Gallicised. Antonio Gondi and his descendants entered the highest circles of French aristocracy and government.<sup>1000</sup>

Many of the permanent expatriates also gained noble titles, thereby circumventing the barriers to socio-political advancement placed upon merchants in the monarchies of Spain, Portugal, and France. Bartolomeo Marchionni, Girolamo Sernigi, and Luca Giraldi were among the Florentines made Portuguese nobles.<sup>1001</sup> The tendency towards movement from commerce to

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<sup>994</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 98; Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 58–60; Blackbourn, ‘Germans Abroad and “Auslandsdeutsche”’, 333; Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 73–74; on the monopoly in Seville, see Ernst Schäfer, *El Consejo Real y Supremo de Las Indias: Historia y Organizacion Del Consejo y de La Casa de La Contratacion*, vol. 1: Historia y organizacion del Consejo y de la Casa de la Contratacion de las Indias, 2 vols (Seville, 1935).

<sup>995</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 12–13.

<sup>996</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell’Asia portoghese*, 67–68; Bruscoli, ‘Bartolomeo Marchionni: Un Mercador-Banqueiro Florentino Em Lisboa (Séculos XV-XVI)’, 41.

<sup>997</sup> Eberhard Craillsheim, *The Spanish Connection: French and Flemish Merchant Networks in Seville (1570–1650)* (Cologne and Weimar, 2016), 21–23.

<sup>998</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 54.

<sup>999</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 177.

<sup>1000</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 12, 29; for the Gondi and their involvement with Catherine de’ Medici, see Joanna Milstein, *The Gondi: Family Strategy and Survival in Early Modern France* (London and New York, 2016).`

<sup>1001</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 13–15; Alessandrini, ‘Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi’, 397.

ennoblement, real estate, and a noble lifestyle was also marked among other merchants such as the Schetz in Antwerp.<sup>1002</sup> Lesser traders, including Marchionni's nephew, Giovanni di Francesco Morelli and Valentim Fernandes also gained nobles titles or privileges.<sup>1003</sup> In 1503, Wolf (or Wolfgang) Holzschuher was made a knight in Portugal for participating in the North African wars; the Iberian kingdoms offered a place to gain status through military activity.<sup>1004</sup> The frequency of this phenomenon was observed by the Spanish economist Mercado, who, in the late sixteenth century, wrote that, 'the ennobled and hispanized merchants are persons of honour and reputation in Seville and the rest of the country... the power of gold made *hidalgos* and nobles out of merchants and commoners' and a rich merchant 'developed a taste for nobility and *hidalguía* and tried to raise himself by creating an entailed estate for his son'.<sup>1005</sup> As their former compatriots did in southern Germany and Italy, ennobled merchants accumulated real estate as a safer investment of capital and as a fundamental element of aristocratic status.<sup>1006</sup>

The fact of merchants attempting to enter the aristocracy was not a new phenomenon. Merchants such as the English de la Pole had become aristocrats in their homelands, while the Pallastrello gained noble titles in Portugal in the late-fourteenth century, participated in the overseas explorations, and became the in-laws of Columbus (Columbus himself was an excellent example of ennoblement).<sup>1007</sup> The Perestrello, as they became, behaved exactly like the Marchionni, Sernigi, and Giraldi in later generations. What was unique about the sixteenth century was the dramatic increase in expatriation and ennoblement, driven by political, social, and commercial changes that discouraged merchants from their previous habit. William de la Pole was the first English merchant to become noble and his behaviour was not common to medieval English merchants.<sup>1008</sup> Marriage alliances and the status and security provided by

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<sup>1002</sup> Henri Lapeyre, *Une Famille de Marchands: Les Ruiz* (Paris, 1955).

<sup>1003</sup> Marilia dos Santos Lopes, *Writing New Worlds: The Cultural Dynamics of Curiosity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2016), 72; Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 38–39.

<sup>1004</sup> Ravenstein, *Martin Behaim: His Life and His Globe*, 10–11.

<sup>1005</sup> Fray Tomas de Mercado, *Summa de Tratos y Contratos* (Seville, 1587), chap. 1; quoted in Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 4–7; Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 13–15.

<sup>1006</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 398; Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*.

<sup>1007</sup> d'Arienzo, *La Presenza Degli Italiani in Portogallo al Tempo Di Colombo*, 187–88; Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 8, The Ming Dynasty* (Cambridge, 1998), 336; E. B. Fryde, *William de La Pole: Merchant and King's Banker* (London and Ronceverte, 1988).

<sup>1008</sup> Eileen Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* (Oxford, 1941), 115; Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 55

noble titles were particularly important for *converso* families. In the later sixteenth century, they increased their loans to the royal treasury in return for titles of the nobility.<sup>1009</sup>

Noble status was also considered important in overseas diplomatic engagements, for which Manuel I and his viceroys favoured using Italian merchants, especially Francesco Corbinelli and Giovanni da Empoli. The overseas administrations of the Spanish and Portuguese crown were dominated by members of the nobility. In the second Portuguese India Armada, sent in 1500, the captains were chosen from noble families to best represent Portugal to the Indian princes.<sup>1010</sup> The greater opportunities afforded to nobles were noted by Giovanni da Empoli, who complained that ‘the great lords make sure of their lives, while they risk those of others’.<sup>1011</sup> After the Battle of Goa, Albuquerque knighted Empoli for valour, upon which Empoli remarked: ‘I accepted it more for the privileges that go with it than for any other reason, because merchants and knights are very different [in how they are treated]’.<sup>1012</sup> As such, he concluded, ‘seeing that things are regulated by whoever has most power, it is better to be a knight than a merchant’.<sup>1013</sup> According to Raffaele Galli, Manuel I ‘furthermore wanted to make him [Empoli] a knight of [the Order of] Christ. But he did not want to accept now, but rather upon his return [to Portugal]’ (*e più volerlo fare cavaliere de Cristo. Ma lui non à voluto acietare ora, ma per la sua tornata*).<sup>1014</sup> Empoli’s request for a delay was probably to ensure that the ceremony would take place where it could better serve as a publicised confirmation of his new status.<sup>1015</sup> Participation in the colonial administration conveyed, because it demanded, honour and status. Galli wrote that Empoli was sent as factor to Sumatra ‘with much authority and honour’ (*con molta altorità e onore*) and Francesco Corbinelli’s *Vita* stated that he returned ‘with great riches and great honour’ (*chon grande ricchezza e con grande onore*) from his time abroad.<sup>1016</sup>

The use of merchants and former merchants as diplomats also occurred in Europe. Several merchants’ sons were involved in diplomacy, drawing upon their commerce-derived skills in dealings with foreign rulers, gift exchange, and trans-regional communication. (The ennoblement of merchants, therefore, was generally also in the interest of rulers. By privileging

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<sup>1009</sup> Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia Under the Habsburgs, 1580–1640*, 213.

<sup>1010</sup> Greenlee, *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, xvii–xviii.

<sup>1011</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 59.

<sup>1012</sup> Noonan, 59.

<sup>1013</sup> da Empoli, ‘Letter to His Father Leonardo on His Travels in Malacca (1514)’.

<sup>1014</sup> Galli, ‘Letter of Raffaele Galli (1 April 1515)’, 138.

<sup>1015</sup> Noonan, *John of Empoli and His Relations with Afonso de Albuquerque*, 89–90.

<sup>1016</sup> Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell’Asia portoghese*, 88–89.

the foreign merchants and giving them high positions in the royal administration, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns sought to limit the power of the oft-truculent barons while bringing the foreign merchants and their talent more firmly under the crown's jurisdiction.<sup>1017</sup>) Francesco di Luca Giraldi served as Portuguese ambassador to England and France successively, during which period he continued to trade, through his secretary, with Venice. He had also invested in trade with India and was later made governor of Bahia in Brazil.<sup>1018</sup>

Giovanni da Empoli and the Giraldi were among many merchants who continued to participate in trade and maintain links with their cities of origin after obtaining noble titles.<sup>1019</sup> Marchionni and Antonio Gondi continued to trade with Florence and expatriate members of the Affaitati and Giraldi families continued to lend to Cosimo I de' Medici in the 1550s and '60s.<sup>1020</sup> Some of the Netherlands branch of the Affaitati returned to Cremona after their trade in Antwerp was disrupted by the Dutch Revolt.<sup>1021</sup> The descendants of ennobled merchants, however, did become increasingly naturalised and moved away from trade as their primary occupation.<sup>1022</sup>

The new opportunities presented by overseas commerce diminished the perceived incompatibility of noble status and commercial participation. The Spanish chronicler Mercado wrote in 1569 that 'the discovery of the Western Indies seventy years ago, presented a magnificent opportunity to acquire great wealth which lured the nobility to be merchants since they saw in it great profits', and that, driven by need or greed, many nobles 'marr[ied] the daughters of merchants'.<sup>1023</sup> The nobility also participated in commerce through the licence system. Charles V routinely sold or gave licences for the slave trade to high-ranking nobles, who then sold these on to merchants. For example, in 1518, the first known licence to ship African slaves to America was granted to Laurent de Gouvenot, master of the Royal Household, who sold it to a Genoese consortium.<sup>1024</sup> This offered new opportunities to

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<sup>1017</sup> Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 57–58.

<sup>1018</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Giraldi', 399–403.

<sup>1019</sup> Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 22, 57.

<sup>1020</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, filza 605 "Scritture della Depositeria generale concernenti i Partiti fatti da Cosimo primo con i Fuccheri di Augusta, con i Grimaldi e Lercari di Genova, e con altri Mercanti di Firenze e di Roma", ff. 28v-30, 39, 57r.; transcribed in Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Leone*; Milstein, *The Gondi*; Denucé, *Inventaire des Affaitadi*; Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*, 49; Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Leone*, 32–34, 115.

<sup>1021</sup> Denucé, *Inventaire des Affaitadi*.

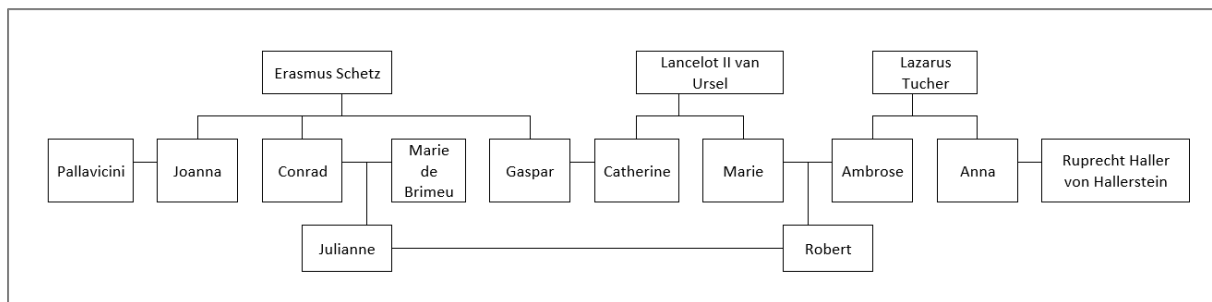
<sup>1022</sup> Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 64–65; Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 3–5.

<sup>1023</sup> Mercado, *Summa de Tratos y Contratos*; quoted in Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 5–7.

<sup>1024</sup> Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, 57–58.

merchants who, if they procured aristocratic status, would be able to continue their trade whilst enjoying the security and status of lands and titles.<sup>1025</sup>

Ennoblement and growing local involvement were echoed by changes in marital patterns. Permanent Italian expatriates to Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century, who obtained noble status to supplement their commercial status, favoured marrying their children to business associates.<sup>1026</sup> Both Marchionni and Giovanni Francesco Affaitati married their daughters to business partners and Affaitati's granddaughter married Francesco di Luca Girdali.<sup>1027</sup> Later generations of merchants showed a growing tendency towards exogamy, using marriage to aristocrats or other ennobled expatriates, including those with different cities of origin, to reinforce their ennoblement and naturalisation as well as their trade.<sup>1028</sup> In the Low Countries, for example, marriages took place between the Nuremberger Tucher, the Netherlandish Schetz, the Bavarian Haller von Hallerstein, and the Genoese Pallavicini. These families also married into Flemish noble houses. All of these families had become heavily involved in Netherlandish trade, finance, and government, as had the van Ursel.<sup>1029</sup>



*Marriages of the Schetz and Tucher Families*

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Florentine Girdali family, settled in Lisbon, used both endo- and exogamy to reinforce their new aristocratic status and their existing commerce. Three Girdali married into the Cavalcanti and Capponi families, reinforcing the Girdali family's links with Florence.<sup>1030</sup> Other family members married into aristocratic families that were deeply involved in foreign trade and administration. Most notably, Luca Girdali's daughter, Luisa, married Vasco da Gama's grandson, D. Francisco de Portugal, who was Master of the Horse

<sup>1025</sup> For the success of the Genoese in Spanish Naples as both merchants and nobles, see Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 62–63.

<sup>1026</sup> Dauverd, 64–65; for those merchants who returned to their cities of origin see, for example, Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 298–347.

<sup>1027</sup> Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni*; Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Girdali', 396.

<sup>1028</sup> For Genoese expatriates, see Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, 25; see also Phillips, 'Local Integration and Long-Distance Ties', 39.

<sup>1029</sup> Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 26–27; Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 175–84.

<sup>1030</sup> Alessandrini, 'Contributo Alla Storia Della Famiglia Girdali', 380.

(*estribeiro-mor*) and captain of Malacca in the 1560s. Their son Lucas inherited the title of *commendatore da Fronteira* and imported goods from India and their sons Vasco and Paulo were captains in Portuguese India.<sup>1031</sup> These marriages suggest a deliberate marital policy designed to cement the families' new identity as commercially, colonially active aristocrats.

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Merchants' transition into the nobility was accompanied and facilitated by their adoption of the emergent culture of the courtier. As outlined in previous chapters, merchants used their humanist education, their knowledge of the arts, and their connections to art production and luxury manufactures to imitate courtly consumption for socio-political gain.<sup>1032</sup> They decorated these lavish houses with the latest in tapestries, paintings, and *objets d'art*; threw elaborate ceremonies; devoted enormous sums to lavish clothing; and participated in civic and court rituals with great splendour.<sup>1033</sup> This competition through conspicuous consumption was not only meant to impress other merchants and urban elites, a topic which is well-known; it was also targeted at rulers from whom merchants wanted to obtain favours and the aristocracy into which merchants sought to transfer. In Germany, Matthäus Schwarz celebrated his elevation to the nobility in 1542 by commissioning a double portrait of himself and his wife Barbara.<sup>1034</sup>



*Matthäus Schwarz and Barbara Schwarz, Christoph Amberger, 1542*

<sup>1031</sup> Alessandrini, 404–5; on Paulo in India, see João de Barros and Diogo de Couto, *Da Asia de João de Barros, Dos Feitos Que Os Portuguezes Fizeram No Descubrimento e Conquista Dos Mares e Terras Do Oriente*, 14 vols (Lisbon, 1778) Decada XII, chapter XI, book II: 'De huma fragata de Hespanhoes de Manilha, que foi ter a China pera assentar pazes com os Chins, e fazer feitoria em hum de seus portos: e do que D. Paulo de Portugal sobre isso fez'.

<sup>1032</sup> Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*.

<sup>1033</sup> Tognetti, *I Gondi Di Lione*, 11–12; Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 5–7.

<sup>1034</sup> Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 11.

The rich clothing merchants donned for their portraits reflected the importance of dress as an expression of status.<sup>1035</sup> Castiglione wrote that a ‘courtier... ought to consider how he wishes to seem... and to dress accordingly and contrive that his attire shall aid him to be so regarded’.<sup>1036</sup> In Germany, even as they drove fashion trends themselves by importing and exporting textiles, wealthy Nuremberg and Augsburg merchants imitated the Italian and Spanish nobility’s fashion trends.<sup>1037</sup> In 1524, Schwarz sported a red ‘cap with golden aglets [that had] belonged to the duke of Milan or the duke of Bari’ (*dise schlap mit guldi stöffft ist greöst hörzogs von maynlant oder duco de Bari*), which he paired with purple clothing, a sword, and a lute, all items signifying noble status.<sup>1038</sup> (The duke in question may have been Ludovico ‘il Moro’ Sforza, who held the dukedoms of Bari and Milan successively.)



15 May 1524, *Trachtenbuch*

Jacob Fugger’s trademark, which he sported in every one of his portraits, was a gold beret in the Venetian style that demonstrated his exposure to and mastery of Italian courtly culture.<sup>1039</sup>

<sup>1035</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 8.

<sup>1036</sup> Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 102.

<sup>1037</sup> Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 13.

<sup>1038</sup> Schwarz, ‘Trachtenbuch’, fol. 66.

<sup>1039</sup> Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 6.





*Jakob Fugger und Sibylle Artzt, c.1500*

Jacob and Anton Fugger even made their names Italian, signing themselves ‘Jacobo’ and ‘Antonio’, and were referred to as such by other merchants, such as Lucas Rem.<sup>1040</sup> Rem, like other German merchants, flaunted his Italian learning and connections by peppering his documents with Italian words such as *adi* (or *addi*, ‘on the day’) as well as commercial Italian words such as *compania* [*sic*].<sup>1041</sup>

The greatest merchants were able to equal princes as consumers and connoisseurs of art and to capitalise upon the power and social standing which that entailed. In the fifteenth century, the pre-ducal Medici reinforced their ties to rulers and their status among the cultural and socio-political elite through the strategic use of magnificence.<sup>1042</sup> In early sixteenth century Rome, the Sieneese papal banker Agostino Chigi became the greatest secular patron of the arts and of Raphael.<sup>1043</sup> In Germany, the Fugger held a similarly exceptional role as patrons, with extensive collections of art and manuscripts.<sup>1044</sup> They were the first to bring Italianate

<sup>1040</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*, 22; von Pölnitz, *Anton Fugger*, 1: 1453-1535:49.

<sup>1041</sup> Rem, *Tagebuch*; Schwarz, ‘Trachtenbuch’.

<sup>1042</sup> The classic text is Ernst Hans Gombrich, ‘The Early Medici as Patrons of Art’, in *Italian Renaissance Studies: A Tribute to the Late Cecilia M. Ady*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London, 1960), 279–311.

<sup>1043</sup> Coriolano Belloni, *Un Banchiere Del Rinascimento: Bindo Altoviti* (Rome, 1935); Alan Chong, Donatella Pegazzano, and Dimitrios Zikos, *Ritratto di un banchiere del Rinascimento: Bindo Altoviti tra Raffaello e Cellini* (Milan, 2004); Ingrid D. Rowland, ‘Render Unto Caesar the Things Which Are Caesar’s: Humanism and the Arts in the Patronage of Agostino Chigi’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1986): 673.

<sup>1044</sup> Matthews, *News and Rumour in Renaissance Europe: The Fugger Newsletters*, 13; Otto Hartig, *Die Gründung Der Münchener Hofbibliothek Durch Albrecht V. und Johann Jakob Fugger*, vol. 3, *Abhandlungen Der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Philologische und Historische Klasse* 28 (Munich, 1917), 9.

architecture north of the Alps with the construction of the *Fuggerkapelle* and the elaborate *Fuggerhäuser*.<sup>1045</sup> By bringing Italian learning and culture to Augsburg, the Fugger chose to depict themselves as international sophisticates at the foreground of Renaissance cultural developments.<sup>1046</sup>

The ability for merchants to dress as nobles when status was reliant upon attire aggravated existing tensions concerning social mobility and merchant wealth. Sumptuary laws were reissued across the Empire as merchants increased the splendour of their attire.<sup>1047</sup> These laws accompanied, and were symptomatic of, the growing anxieties about merchants that also produced the *Monopolstreit* and Protestant reformers' attacks upon the Fugger and other monopolists.

In the face of growing political and commercial instability, merchants sought stability and status in the form of ennoblement, intermarriage with the aristocracy, and the purchase of landed estates. For merchants involved in the trade in Americana and Asian commodities, this often took the form of permanent expatriation and naturalisation. As urban elites reconsidered their engagement with the aristocracy and with royalty, they adapted their cultural outlook, their economic strategies, and their sense of their place in society.

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<sup>1045</sup> Norbert Lieb, *Die Fugger und Die Kunst*, vol. II: Im Zeitalter der hohen Renaissance (Munich, 1958), 155; Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 6–7.

<sup>1046</sup> cf. Lieb, *Die Fugger und Die Kunst*, II: Im Zeitalter der hohen Renaissance: *passim*, which depicts Jacob Fugger's art patronage as that of a typical Augsburg citizen despite his introduction of Italian architecture, among other artistic innovations, and the grand scale of his activities.

<sup>1047</sup> Schildhauer, *The Hansa: History and Culture*, 74–75; Rublack, Hayward, and Tiramini, *The First Book of Fashion*, 45.

## Conclusion

From the 1520s and 1530s, a generational turnover and wider political and economic changes eroded the exclusive position of the great companies. The Florentine and German merchants in India, such as Francesco Corbinelli and Jörg Pock, and the Italian employers of these men in Lisbon and Seville, such as Bartolomeo Marchionni and Gian Francesco Affaitati, all died in the 1520s and '30s. Afterwards, the Portuguese and Spanish crowns became far less closely involved with Florentine bankers. Individual non-Iberian merchants continued to trade in Portuguese India but did not match the financial or political importance of earlier traders.<sup>1048</sup> This generational change was mimicked among the Germans: Anton Welser, Jacob Fugger, and other elite merchants, along with Maximilian, all died around this time. Their descendants were less inclined to be direct participants in overseas trade with Asia, preferring the safer and more reliable option of dominating the trade of exotica within Europe.<sup>1049</sup> New opportunities became available when Charles V opened the American trade to foreigners and in 1528 gave Venezuela to the Welser, an investment that soon proved to be disastrous, as did most of the later attempts by German merchants to re-enter direct trade with Asia in the 1570s.<sup>1050</sup>

At the same time, wider events began to intrude upon trade more so than before. The Habsburg-Valois conflict and other wars seriously damaged international trade in the 1530s.<sup>1051</sup> In 1548, the Portuguese crown closed the factory at Antwerp, which marked the beginning of the end of Antwerp's position as Europe's spice and precious metal entrepôt.<sup>1052</sup> From the 1560s, Antwerp went into economic decline, which accelerated after the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt and severe attacks by the Spanish in 1576 and 1585.<sup>1053</sup> The latter attack, under Alexander Farnese, caused almost all international merchants to move to Amsterdam, which became the new capital of northern Europe's trade, finance, and manufacturing.<sup>1054</sup>

From the 1540s, the merchants increasingly struggled to make rulers repay their debts. As rulers made greater use of the Bourse, of Spanish gold and silver, and of *asientos* involving

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<sup>1048</sup> Rubiés, 'Giovanni Di Buonagrazia's Letter to His Father Concerning His Participation in the Second Expedition of Vasco Da Gama (1502–1503)', 93; Spallanzani, *Mercanti fiorentini nell'Asia portoghese*, 12–13.

<sup>1049</sup> Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich*, 20–21; Hildebrandt, 'Der Niedergang Der Augsburger Welser-Firma (1560-1614)', 275.

<sup>1050</sup> This argument was made at the end of Chapter Two.

<sup>1051</sup> Puttevils, *Merchants and Trading in the Sixteenth Century*, 16.

<sup>1052</sup> Gelderblom, *Cities of Commerce*, 29.

<sup>1053</sup> Harreld, *High Germans In The Low Countries*, 55.

<sup>1054</sup> Clé Lesger, *The Rise of the Amsterdam Market and Information Exchange: Merchants, Commercial Expansion and Change in the Spatial Economy of the Low Countries, C. 1550-1630* (Farnham, 2006).

small contributions from large numbers of merchants, their dependence upon each individual creditor declined, making them less inclined to act favourably.<sup>1055</sup> The arrival of the Spanish treasure fleets from the Americas utterly transformed the European economy and the German merchants lost their monopoly over the supply of silver and copper which had gained them entry into the overseas voyages and the favour of the Iberian crowns. From the 1550s, several state bankruptcies ruined many powerful merchants and the Germans had stopped being a dominant force in Iberian finance.<sup>1056</sup> The Welser were stripped of Venezuela in 1556.<sup>1057</sup>

At the same time, commercial institutions, such as the bourse in Antwerp, and the improvement of the postal system, which facilitated the circulation of price lists and exchange rates, provided greater opportunities for small companies to act on a trans-regional scale and, at the same time, encouraged larger companies and wealthy merchants to use commission agents rather than establish branches abroad, leading to a ‘democratisation’ of trade.<sup>1058</sup>

Rulers, moreover, were able to draw upon the growing hostility towards merchants that was based upon medieval precedents and driven by the Imperial Diet and the Reformation, which, in a prolonged legal conflict known as the *Monopolstreit*, framed monopolistic traders as corrupting and damaging to the economy.<sup>1059</sup> Many merchants, therefore, looked elsewhere for secure, if less spectacular riches. Many took up official bureaucratic positions within the administration or entered the aristocracy, either leaving trade entirely or becoming commercially active nobles. Those merchants who made this transition, such as Lazarus Tucher in Antwerp, became extremely successful. In 1551, the first joint-stock company, the Merchant Adventurers to New Lands, was founded, followed by the Moscow Company in 1555 and then multiple others, culminating in the famous East India Companies of England (1600) and the Netherlands (1602). The ‘Age of the Fugger’ was long over.<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1055</sup> Ehrenberg, *Capital & Finance*, 90.

<sup>1056</sup> Kellenbenz, ‘Die Konkurrenten Der Fugger Als Bankiers Der Spanischen Krone’, 93.

<sup>1057</sup> Denzer, ‘Die Welser in Venezuela: Das Scheitern ihrer wirtschaftlichen Ziele’, 286.

<sup>1058</sup> Smith, ‘The Function of Commercial Centers in the Modernization of European Capitalism’, 989; on the rise of Netherlandish merchants as prominent independent traders, see Brulez, *De Firma Della Faille En de Internationale Handel van Vlaamse Firma's in de 16e Eeuw*, 485–93; and van der Wee, *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and the European Economy*.

<sup>1059</sup> Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*, 123–65.

<sup>1060</sup> On the English companies see, in general, E. M. Carus-Wilson, ‘The Origins and Early Development of Hte Merchant Adventurers’ Organisation in London’, in *Medieval Merchant Venturers*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (London, 1954), 143–82; on the Age of the Fugger, see Ehrenberg, *Das Zeitalter Der Fugger*.

When Columbus and da Gama launched their voyages of exploration, Europe's trade and finance was dominated by a distinct group of elite merchant-banking companies who had gained control of most crown finance in the Iberian Peninsula and Holy Roman Empire; the extraction of and trade in important raw materials; and the manufacture and trade of luxury goods, forming close relationships with rulers as they did so. As they sought to invest and even participate in the Spanish and Portuguese overseas voyages, elite companies maintained their preference for working directly with rulers, often in conjunction with other monopolists, rather than through nations.

These companies responded eagerly to the new opportunities presented by trade with the New World and Asia, providing vast sums to the Spanish and Portuguese kings in exchange for the right to direct participation. They also sought, far more successfully, to control the trade of imported commodities within Europe, using their networks of merchants across the great commercial cities.

Their interest in and engagement with lands beyond Europe and information and material objects from those areas displayed by the elite merchants from the commercial cities of southern Germany and northern Italy was in great contrast with most sixteenth-century Europeans. Although they continued to assert established European beliefs about exotic places, their correspondence focused upon practical commercial details and consequently had a significantly different approach than did other letters.

News was essential to their activities and was dependent upon entrance into news networks. Merchants supplied news as an act of reciprocal exchange, greatly increasing the amount of information which individual merchants and companies could access. The rise of print culture and the overseas expansion provided new opportunities for merchants to receive and disseminate news. In the early sixteenth century, however, the slow growth of *avvisi* and *Zeitungen* and of the postal system meant that merchants remained reliant upon their own correspondence and other groups continued to favour merchant letters as a larger and more valuable source of information.

The prominent place of merchants in the creation and dissemination of news gave them significant influence over it. In return for supplying news, merchants sought to form or strengthen their relationships with rulers. The growing importance of news for political security made possessing it a great status symbol, so that information and news *per se* could serve as a

type of gift. Conflicts could emerge, however, due to the differing attitudes towards news held by rulers, who wished to control information and limit knowledge of the routes to Asia and the Americas, and merchants, who wished to disperse it for the right price.

The use of luxury items including clothes, objects, and artworks to create, display, and maintain elite identity had existed for centuries but reached new levels of importance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The new value placed upon luxury items provided opportunities for merchants to use their knowledge and connections to facilitate religious and artistic patronage, which were reciprocated through commercial and political protection and ultimately noble titles.

Luxury items might be offered in the form of gifts, which served to create and strengthen connections between merchants and monarchs. Powerful companies operated within existing systems of client-patronage and socio-political networks but sought to distinguish themselves from the rest through the provision of elaborate gifts. Gifts were also vital aspects of diplomacy, allowing parties to demonstrate their respect for the other and their own wealth and mastery of luxury commodities.

By publicly displaying images and other references to the Americas and with their semi-private collections of exotic items (American, Asian, and African), rulers demonstrated their wealth, status, culture, and, for non-Iberian powers, their connection to the Portuguese and especially the Spanish crowns and to overseas trade. American, African, and Asian goods were consequently incorporated into and became important elements in gift giving and collecting, which already favoured exotica as symbols of prestige.

Even in the case of imports from the Indies, much remained in, or passed through, the hands of private merchants, on whom rulers relied to procure exotica. Merchants, in turn, used sale and gifts of exotica to rulers to gain long-term commercial relationships, favour, and patronage. The greatest companies and their close associates deliberately imitated royal patterns of consumption to emphasise their ties to the new colonial powers, their access to and mastery over overseas trade and the intra-European trade of exotica, and their wealth and ability to spend it with taste.

Their use of luxury commodities gained more importance as the political and religious tensions of the sixteenth century damaged and destabilised commerce. As merchants became courtiers and aristocrats, their pursuit of profit took place over a gradually extending time horizon.

Successful families, seeing that trade was inherently risky, sought to maintain their wealth through the more stable methods of land and social status and risk only a small proportion of their wealth on trade. As more competitors sprang up in trade and the likelihood of making extraordinary profits fell, so merchants focused more on stable earnings rather than high-reward but high-risk ones.

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This thesis began with, and continued to hold, the premise that European trade at the time of and immediately after Columbus and da Gama's discoveries was dominated by a small number of great merchant-banking societies who had an enormous impact upon finance and commerce within Europe. Not only did they come to monopolise much of existing, internal trade and finance, they also played a fundamental role in establishing the nature of European commercial and also political interactions with the peoples of Asia and the Americas due to the licensing system and their place within 'colonial' bureaucracies.

The monopoly system that was established was an extension of licensing systems that already existed within Europe and in which the great companies already controlled key resources, particularly silver and copper. The beginnings of European commerce with Asia and the Americas were an extension of this system and the corporations quickly gained a vast share of both the import and the internal trade.

In later decades, the monopoly system that they had established and that had enabled their rise to prominence eventually became unsustainable due to the expanding size of the market and of production, to religious and political divisions, to the growing power of the new 'states', and to the declining position of the great companies, itself caused partly by a generational change. Those merchants that survived were the ones that transformed, shifting into the aristocracy or diversifying their interests, while those that failed to respond to the changes often suffered bankruptcy and social disgrace.

The activities of the great companies and the impact that they had upon their times resists categorisation either as a study of 'Great Men' or as a study of institutions and large-scale commercial developments. A small number of companies and, within them, a few outstanding individuals had a grossly disproportionate sway over European commerce and finance in partnership with a small number of rulers, but they operated within networks and succeeded because of the specific context in which they lived.

Such was their importance that they, as individual merchants and companies, are an essential element of the study of this period. Their backgrounds, perspectives, interests, and goals ought to be studied to understand the nature of their activities. Not only did the size of their operations make them quantitatively different from smaller companies and lesser traders, their ability to monopolise vital commodity and luxury trades due to market forces and licensing systems made them qualitatively different as well. They were distinguished especially by their heavy involvement in courts and bureaucracies and played essential roles in the newly emerging ambassadorial and postal services. They were also involved in art procurement and cultural transfer due to their command of the art market, using the glamour of the ‘Renaissance’ to transform themselves into merchant-courtiers. Even more unique were their responses to and perspectives upon the New World – which one of their number found and another identified – and Asia, in which they showed unusual levels of interest.

The requirements of overseas trade and licensing systems drove merchants, including but not only those within and closely connected to the monopolist companies directly participating in overseas trade, to increase their transactions and ties to merchants of other nations. The trans-regional networks that developed – which also included members of the emerging ‘state’ bureaucracies, often the result of family connections between merchants and ambassadors – were of supreme importance and could, and often did, come to outweigh the importance of ties to compatriots in their city of residence. The wealthiest and most successful merchants succeeded because of their extensive collaboration with their peers in other cities as well as in their hometown and place of residence, allowing them to have full participation in trade across Europe’s major commercial centres.

This network relied upon the participation of agents, independent merchants, and commercially active bureaucrats, aristocrats, clerics, humanists, lawyers, and members of other groups not normally associated with commerce but whose family ties, and the new opportunities afforded by the Asian and American trades, encouraged their engagement. These people, the nature of their participation, and the ties between them were necessarily fluid and resist strict categorisation.

Divisions should also be challenged when discussing Europeans’ engagement with the New World and Asia. The early voyages were driven by the desire to find the source of commodities for which there was an established demand in Europe, not to discover new commodities. Partly in consequence of this, European interest in the Americas was muted and merchants took



several decades to become heavily engaged in New World trade, a delay that was also caused by governmental policies. On the other hand, although studies of European engagement with the New World and Asia, including the use of overseas luxuries in gift-giving and court display, have generally treated them separately, the two regions were often not distinguished between in correspondence and many companies engaged in trade with both hemispheres.

After the death of Anton Fugger, Guicciardini's 'prince of merchants' (*Principe veramente de gl'altri mercatanti*), in 1560, there were no more such figures until the Rothschilds.<sup>1061</sup> The Fugger, the Welser, Marchionni, the Affaitati, and other great merchant companies were both the epitome and the last of their type, to be replaced by the joint-stock companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nonetheless, the enormous importance which they had upon their times as merchants, as bankers, as enquirers after foreign lands, as providers of news, and as procurers and consumers of art and exotica, meant that they were anything but a dead-end.

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<sup>1061</sup> Ludovico Guicciardini, *Descrittione di m. Lodovico Gvicciardini, gentilhvomo fiorentino, di tvtti i paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania inferiore: con tutte le carte di geographia del paese, & col ritratto al naturale di molte terre principali: riueduta di nuouo, & ampliata per tutto la terza volta dal medesimo autore : con amplissimo indice di tutte le cose piu memorabili* (Antwerp, 1588), 158.

# Appendices

## Appendix I: List of Voyages

Disputed and uncertain voyages have been omitted

Date	Voyage	Merchant Involvement	Notes	Accounts
1488-89	Voyage of Bartolomeu Dias		Discovered the Cape of Good Hope	None surviving
1497-98	First Portuguese India Armada (Gama)		Obtained a small amount of spices at Calicut	Anonymous chronicle
1500-01	Second Portuguese India Armada (Cabral)	The <i>Anunciada</i> , owned by D. Álvaro of Braganza, was financed by a consortium of Marchionni, Girolamo Sernigi, and Antonio Salvago (Genoese)	Discovered Brazil and sent ship back to Portugal to notify Manuel I  Built a factory in Calicut that was attacked after an outbreak of hostilities, prompting the Portuguese to bombard the city  Reached Cochin, established an alliance and factory due to enmity between Cochin and Calicut	The letter of Pedro Vaz de Caminha, to Manuel I, on the discovery of Brazil  Letter from João Faras from Brazil to Manuel I  Anonymous letter
1501-02	Third Portuguese India Armada (Nova)	Of the four or five ships, one was outfitted by, and one owned by, the Marchionni consortium. Girolamo Sernigi was possibly on board the	Possibly discovered Ceylon (Taprobana), known as the main source of cinnamon  Established friendly relations with Cannanore	

latter. Paio Rodrigues, factor of the Marchionni consortium and D. Álvaro of Braganza, was left in Cannanore.

1501-02	Second Brazil Expedition	Amerigo Vespucci was on board as an observer	Amerigo Vespucci asserted that Brazil was a new world	Vespucci wrote two letters, the first from Cape Verde, and the second upon his return to Lisbon, to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici ( <i>Il Popolano</i> )
1502-03	Fourth Portuguese India Armada (Gama)	One ship was owned by the Marchionni consortium and one was captained by the Florentine Giovanni Buonagrazia  Two Italian engineers, probably working for Venice	Gama demands tribute from Kilwa, Onor, and Batecala  Treaty with Sofala  Factories established on Mozambique and in Cannanore  Bombarding of Calicut  Beginning of the coastal patrols of India  Massacre of the Muslim ship	An anonymous Flemish account (disputed)  An anonymous Portuguese account  An anonymous German account  The diary of Thomé Lopes, clerk of Buonagrazia  Two letters of Matteo da Bergamo  Letters of Francesco Corbinelli and Giovanni Francesco Affaitati
1503-04	Fifth Portuguese India Armada (Albuquerque)	One ship was armed by the Marchionni consortium  Giovanni da Empoli sent by Marchionni and the Frescobaldi and Gualterroti of Bruges-Antwerp	Battle of Cochin against Calicut, ending the Calicut hegemony over the Malabar coast  Built fort at Cochin  Established factory at Quilon	Letter of Giovanni da Empoli

1504-05	Sixth Portuguese India Armada (Soares de Albergaria)	Bombards Calicut and Cranganore Destroys Muslim fleet off Calicut	No Italian or German participation known One ship fitted out by Lisbon merchant Catarina Dias	
1505-06	Seventh Portuguese India Armada (Almeida)	Hans Mayr and Balthasar Sprenger represented Welser-Vöhlín and Fugger-Hochstetter-Hirschvogel-Imhof-Gossembrot consortia, which owned three ships  A Genoese consortia under Marchionni invested money	Captured Kilwa and sacked Mombasa Built three forts	Accounts from Hans Mayr and Balthasar Sprenger, the latter of which was later published
1510-1511	Portuguese India Armada (Vasconcellos)	Empoli	The Battles of Goa (1510) and Malacca (1511) near-totally established the Portuguese empire  The merchants attempted to avoid participating in the Battle of Goa, leading to conflict with Albuquerque	

Appendix II:  
Chronological List of Letters Analysed, 1486-1530

<b>Date</b>	<b>Document</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Location</b>
1486 4 November	Letter to Benedetto Dei	Lorenzo di Giovanni Tornabuoni	Letter	Florence to Milan
1488 20 November	Letter to his uncle Sandro Paghangniotti	Pagholo d'Ulivieri	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1491 18 March	<i>Copia Unius Capitoli Quarandam Litterarum Zanobii Azaroli Ad Antonium Arquatum Civem Ferrarie</i>	Zanobi Acciaiuoli	Letter	Florence to Ferrara
1494-95	<i>Journey to Spain and Portugal</i>	Hieronymus Münzer	Narrative	Nuremberg
1499 10 July	First Letter to a Gentleman in Florence	Girolamo Sernigi	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
???	Second Letter to a Gentleman in Florence	Girolamo Sernigi	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1499	Abstract of Sernigi's Letter to his Brother made by Conrad Peutingen in Rome	Girolamo Sernigi	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1499 10 August	<i>Copy of a third of a letter from Lisbon from Guido di messer Tomaso Detti of the 10th day of August 1499, of this same, which comes to verify everything</i>	Guido di messer Tomaso Detti	Letter	Lisbon to Florence

1499		<i>Vasco Da Gama: The Diary of His Travels through African Waters 1497–1499</i>	Portuguese	Travel Narrative	Lisbon
1500	1 May	<i>Carta a El Rei D. Manuel</i>	Pedro Vaz de Caminha	Report	Brazil to Lisbon
1501		<i>Letter to Domenico Pisani</i>	Giovanfrancesco Affaitati	Letter	Lisbon to Venice
1501		Letter to the Signoria	Domenico Pisani	Report	Spain to Venice
1501	4 June	Letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici	Amerigo Vespucci	Letter	Capo Verde to Florence
1501	27 June	Letter from Portugal	Giovanni Camerino or Matteo (Il Cretico)	Letter	Lisbon to Venice
1501	21 August	Letter to Domenico Pisani	Angelo Trevisan	Letter	Granada to Venice?
1501	4 September	Letter to Ser Vetor Querini (in Sanudo's <i>Diarii</i> )	Filippo Contarini	Letter	Alexandria to Venices
1501	3 December	Letter to Domenico Pisani	Angelo Trevisan	Letter	Exigia (to Venice?)
1502		Letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici	Amerigo Vespucci	Letter	Lisbon? to Florence
1502		Cantino Planisphere		Map	Portugal

1502	26 September	<i>Letter on the journey of the caravels to India</i>	Giovanfrancesco Affaitati	Letter	Lisbon to Venice
1502	3 October	<i>Letter from Seville</i>	Piero Rondinelli	Letter	Seville to Florence
1502	12 October	Letter from Spain	Domenico Pisani	Letter	Saragossa to Venice
1503		Letter to his father Leonardo	Giovanni da Empoli	Letter	India to Florence
1503	8 February	<i>Ritter- Und Wappenbrief Welchen Wolf Holzschuher von König Emanuel in Portugal Erhalten Hat</i>	Manuel I of Portugal	Charter	Lisbon
1503	5 May	<i>Letter to His Father Concerning His Participation in the Second Expedition of Vasco Da Gama</i>	Giovanni da Buonagrazia	Letter	Portugal to Florence
1503	30 March	<i>Brief von der Portugalisichen Meerfahrt aus dem Longobardischen ins Deutsche übersetzt</i>	Conrad Peutinger and Christoph Welser (trans.)	Letter	Augsburg
1503	19 August	Letter to Piero Pasqualigo	Giovanfrancesco Affaitati	Letter	Lisbon to Spain
1503	5 September	<i>Copy of a Letter to Our Orator [Piero Pasqualigo]</i>	Cesare Barzi	Letter	Valencia to Venice
1504		Letter on the Second Voyage of Vasco Da Gama (1502-1504)	Francesco Corbinelli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1504		<i>Relatione del Clarissimo Sig. Vincenzo Quirino ritornato Ambasciatore da Filippo d'Austria Rè di Castiglia dell'anno 1504</i>	Vincenzo Querini	Report	Spain to Venice



1504	11 December	Letter to Dr. Conrad Peutinger	Anton Welser	Letter	Augsburg
1505		<i>Copy of a report of a journey from the year 1505. Under Francisco Almeida, Vice-Re</i>	Anton Welser	Letter	Augsburg
1506		<i>Bericht einer Reise vom Jahr 1505. Unter Franciscus Almeida, Vice-Re.</i>	Hans Mayr	Narrative	Nuremberg
1506		<i>Relazione di Leonardo da Ca' Masser alla Serenissima Republica di Venezia sopra il commercio dei Portoghese nell' India dopo la scoperta del capo di Buona Speranza</i>	Leonardo da Ca' Masser	Report	Venice
c.1506		Caverio Map	Caveri	Map	Lisbon or Genoa
Before 1507		Anonymous Narrative on the Journey of Cabral	Portuguese scribe	Narrative	America and Asia
1507		<i>Paesi novamente ritrovati</i>	Francazano da Montalboddo	Printed collection	Vicenza
1507		Universalis Cosmographia	Martin Waldseemüller	Printed map	Saint-Dié
1509		<i>The Merfart</i>	Balthasar Sprenger	Print	Nuremberg
1509	25 August	Letter to Giansimone Buonarotti	Giovanni di Paolo Morelli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1510	9 May	Letter to Giansimone Buonarotti	Giovanni di Paolo Morelli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence

1510	14 August	Letter to Giansimone Buonarotti	Giovanni di Paolo Morelli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1511	24 June	Letter to Giansimone Buonarotti	Giovanni di Paolo Morelli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1511-1525		<i>The Decades</i>	Peter Martyr d'Anghiera	Chronicle	Seville
1513	31 January	Letter to Fra Zuambatista	Florentine merchant	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1513	April	Last will and testament	Giovanni da Empoli	Will	Lisbon
1514		<i>Codice Vaglianti</i>	Piero Vaglianti	Manuscript collection	Florence
1514		<i>Copia der Newen Zeytung aus Presillg Landt</i>		Newsletter	Nuremberg
1514	January	Acknowledgement of delivery of supplies in Cochin	Giovanni da Empoli	Receipt	Cochin
1514	2 July	<i>Letter to his Father on His Travels in Malacca, 1514</i>	Giovanni da Empoli		
1514	19 October	Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici	Giovanni da Empoli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1515		<i>Copia der Newen Zeytung auss Pressillg Landt</i>	German merchant	Newsletter	Germany
1515	9 January	Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici	Giovanni da Empoli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence

1515	25 February	Letter to Manuel I of Portugal	Leo X (de' Medici)	Letter	Rome to Lisbon
1515	1 April	Letter to ser Matteo	Raffaello Galli	Letter	Lisbon to Florence
1516		<i>Memorial de Remedios para las Indias</i>	Bartolomé de Las Casas	Book	Seville
1516	10-20 September	Letter to messer Giovanni da Poppi, secretary of the Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici	Raffaello Galli	Letter	Sumatra to Florence
1516	October	<i>Lettera di Andrea Corsali allo Illustrissimo Signore Ducao Iuliano de Medici, Venuta Dellindia del Mese di Octobre Nel M.D.XVI.</i>	Andrea Corsali	Letter	India to Florence
1518	12 November	Letter to Jörg Pock	Michael Behaim	Letter	Nuremberg to Lisbon
1518	16 December	Letter to Jörg Pock	Michael Behaim	Letter	Nuremberg to Lisbon
1519	1 January	Letter to Bishop Antonio Pucci	Piero di Giovanni di Dino	Letter	Cochin (to Switzerland?)
1519	25 and 30 March	Letter to Michael Behaim	Jörg Pock	Letter	Lisbon to Nuremberg
1519	December	Letter to Michael Behaim	Jörg Pock	Letter	Lisbon to Nuremberg
1519	1 December	Letter to Willibald Pirckheimer	Lazarus Nürnberger	Letter	Iberian Peninsula to Nuremberg

1520	31 August	Letter to his Senior Partner Alonso de Nebreda	Hernando de Castro	Letter	Cuba to Seville
1522	1 January	Letter to Michael Behaim	Jörg Pock	Letter	Cochin to Nuremberg
1525		<i>The First Voyage around the World 1519–1522</i>	Antonio Pigafetta	Travel Narrative	Venice
1525	17 December	Letter to his father Linhart	Wolf Tucher	Letter	Lyon to Nuremberg
1526		<i>La Natural hystoria de las Indias</i>	Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés	Chronicle	Toledo
1526		The fifth letter of Hernan Cortes to the Emperor Charles V, containing an account of his expedition to Honduras	Hernan Cortes	Letter	Central America to Spain
1526	28 September	Letter to His Employers	Martin de Zubizarreta	Letter	Panama to Seville
1530		<i>La Vita di Giovanni da Empoli</i>	Girolamo da' Empoli	Chronicle	Florence
1532		<i>Novus Orbis Regionum ac Insularum Veteribus Incognitarum</i>	Johannes Huttich and Simon Grynaeus	Printed map	Basel
1533	29 August	Letter to Linhart Tucher	Lorenz Tucher	Letter	Nördlingen to Nuremberg

1533	30 August	Letter to Linhart Tucher	Lorenz Tucher	Letter	Nordlingen to Nuremberg
1533	30 November	Letter to Linhart Tucher	Lorenz Tucher	Letter	Nördlingen to Nuremberg
Mid-1530s		<i>Indianische Historia</i>	Nikolaus Federmann	Travel Narrative	Augsburg
1534		<i>Neue Zeitung aus Hispania</i>		Newsletter	Germany
1535		<i>La Historia general de las Indias</i>	Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés	Chronicle	Seville
1535		<i>Brief Eines Lindauers Aus Venezuela Vom Jahre 1535</i>	Titus Neukomm	Letter	Venezuela to Lindau
1535	28 January	Letter to the Imperial Councillor Matthias Zimmermann	Philipp von Hutten	Letter	Puerto Rico to Breda
1535	23 February	Letter to the Imperial Councillor Matthias Zimmermann	Philipp von Hutten	Letter	Venezuela to Germany
1538	30 July and 30 October	Letter to the Imperial Councillor Matthias Zimmermann, from Coro	Philipp von Hutten	Letter	Venezuela to Germany
1550-59		<i>Navigazioni et Viaggi</i>	Giovan Battista Ramusio	Printed collection	Venice
1552	1 February	Letter to his father Linhart Tucher	Sixt Tucher	Letter	Saragossa to Nuremberg

1558-68		<i>Verzeichnis von Erhaltenen Geschenken</i>	Paulus Behaim	Record	Nuremberg
1561	14 July	Letter to Linhart Tucher	Lorenz Tucher	Letter	To Nuremberg

### Appendix III:

#### List of Printed Newsletters Relating to Asia and the Americas until 1560

From the Universal Short Title Catalogue

##### Printed in Italy

No.	Date	Document	Author	Duplicates	Publisher	Location
1	1505	Copia de una littera del Re de Portogallo mandata al Re de Castella del viaggio & sucesso de India	Manuel I of Portugal	= 3, 4		Rome
2	1505	Copia de la lettera per Columbo mandata a li sere.mi re et regina di Spagna de le insule et luoghi per lui trovate	Christopher Columbus		Costanzo Baiguera and Simone da Lovere	Venice
3	1505	Copia d'una lettera de re di Portogallo mandata al re di Castella del viaggio e successo in India	Manuel I of Portugal	= 1, 4	Giovanni Giacomo da Legnano & Bros. and Pietro Martire Mantagazza & Bros.	Milan
4	1505	Copia de una littera del re de Portogallo mandata al re de Castella del viaggio et successo de India	Manuel I of Portugal	= 1, 3	Johann Besicken	Rome
5	1516	Lettera di Andrea Corsali allo illustrissimo signore duca Iuliano de Medici. Venuta dellindia [!] nel mese di octobre nel MDXVI	Andrea Corsali		Giovanni Stefano di Carlo	Florence

6	1520	Littera mandata della insula de Cuba de India in laquale se contiene de le insule citta gente et animali novamente trovate de l'anno MDXIX per li spagnoli				Venice
7	1523	Epistola de admirabili & novissima Hispanorum in Orientem navigatione, qua varie, & nulli prius accessae regiones inventae sunt, cum ipsis etiam Moluccis insulis beatissimis, optimo aromatum genere refertis. Inauditi quoque incolar [!] mares exponuntur, ac multa quae Herodotus, Plinius, Solinus atque alii tradiderunt fabulosa esse arguunt. Contra, nonnulla ibidem vera, uix tamen credibilis explicant quibuscum historiis insularibus ambitus describit alterius hemisphaerii, unde ad nos tandem Hispani redierunt incolumes	Maximilianus Transylvanus	= 8	Francesco Minizio Calvo	Rome
8	1524	Epistola de admirabili & novissima Hispanorum in Orientem navigatione, qua varie, & nulli prius accessae regiones inventae sunt, cum ipsis etiam Moluccis insulis beatissimis, optimo aromatum genere refertis. Inauditi quoque incolarum mores exponuntur, ac multa quae Herodotus, Plinius, Solinus atque alii tradiderunt fabulosa esse arguunt. Contra, nonnulla ibidem vera, uix tamen credibilis explicant quibuscum historiis insularibus ambitus describit alterius hemisphaerii, unde ad nos tandem Hispani redierunt incolumes	Maximilianus Transylvanus	= 7	Francesco Minizio Calvo	Rome
9	1531	Impresa del Gran Turco per mare et per terra contra portughesi, quali signoreggiano gran parte de Lindia [sic] et savicinnano [sic] al sepolchro de Mahometho. Vittorie grandissime del invittissimo re di Portugallo contra Turchi, Mori, et i Indiani, quali hanno artigliaria grossa allusanza [!] de christiani. Descrizione de molti luoghi del Preteianni amico et confederato de portughesi. Nomi moderni et antichi di alcune cittadi et porti de quali fa mentione				Italy



Ptolomeo. Opinioni de molti dotti che la stampa de libri uenessi de India in Alamagna, donde esparsa per tutta Europa

10	1533	Copia delle lettere del prefetto della India la Nuova Spagna detta, alla cesarea maesta rescritte				Italy
11	1537	Copia de una letera che a mandato il Prete Jani al santissimo pastor de Roma laqual narra la sua possanza et Richezza e lordenanzi chel tiene quando va in battaglia el numero e la quantita de lesercito chel mena con esso lui			Paulo Danza	Venice
12	1539	Avisi de le cose fatte da Portuesi ne l'India di qua del Gange, nel MDXXXVIII scritti in lingua latina dal signor Damiano da Goes cavalier portuese al cardinal Bembo	Damião de Góis	= 14		Italy
13	After 1545	Copia de una littera di nove delle Indie Orientali mandate dallo invittissimo Re di Portogallo alla Santità di N.S. la qual narra la conversione de quatro re con li loro populi				Italy
14	1549	Avisi de le cose fatte da Portuesi ne l'India di qua del Gange, nel MDXXXVIII scritti in lingua latina dal signor Damiano da Goes cavalier portuese al cardinal Bembo	Damião de Góis	= 12	Comin da Trino	Venice
15	1549	Summario delle cose successe a don Giovan di Castro governatore dello stato della India			Antonio Blado	Rome
16	1551	Lettere del padre maestro Francesco et deò padre Gasparro et altri della Compagnia di Giesù scritte dalla India ai fratelli del Collegio di Giesù de Coimbra. Tradotte di lingua spagniuola. Ricevute l'anno MDLI		Jesuits	Michele I Tramezzino	Venice
17	1553	Novi avisi di piu lochi de l'India et massime de Brasil ricevuti quest'anno del MDLIII dove chiaramente si puo intendere la		Jesuits	Antonio Blado and Battista Rosi	Rome

conversione di molte persone etiam molto principali nelle terre gia scoperte

18	1556	Avisi particolari delle Indie di Portugallo. Novamente havuti questo anno del 1555 da li reverendi padri della Compagnia di Iesu	Jesuits	Antonio Blado	Rome
19	1559	Nuovi avisi dell'Indie di Portugallo, ricevuti dalli reverendi padri della comagnia di Giesu, tradotti dalla lingua spagnuola nell'italiana	Jesuits	Michele I Tramezzino	Venice

Printed in the Holy Roman Empire

No.	Date	Document	Author	Duplicates	Publisher	Location
1	1505	Von den nüwen insulen und landen so yetz kürztlichen erfunden synt durch den Künig von Portugall.	Amerigo Vespucci	= 3, 5	Matthias Hupfuff	Strasbourg
2	1505	De ora antarctica per regem Portugallie pridem inventa	Amerigo Vespucci		Matthias Hupfuff	Strasbourg
3	1506	Van den nygen insulen und landen so ytzundt kortliken befunden sindt dorch den Koningk van Portugal.	Amerigo Vespucci	= 1, 5	Jakob Winter	Magdeburg
4	1506	Das sind die new gefunden menschen oder volcke In form unde gestalt als sie hie stend durch den Cristenlichen König von Portugall, gar wunnderbarlich erfunden			Georg Stuchs	Nuremberg
5	1506	Von den nüwen insulen und landen so yetz kürztlichen erfunden synt durch den Künig von Portugall.	Amerigo Vespucci	= 3, 5	Matthias Hupfuff	Strasbourg
6	1508	Nye unbekande lande. unde eine nye werltdt in korter vorgangener tyd gefunden [translation of <i>Paesi novamente ritrovati</i> ]	Fracanzano da Montalboddo		Georg Stuchs	Nuremberg
7	1509	Wie die zwen durchlüchtigsten Herren her Fernandus. K. zu Castilien und Herr Emanuel. K. zu Portugal haben das weyte moer ersuchet unnd funden vil insulen unnd ein nüwe welt von wilden nackenden leüten, vormals unbekant.	Amerigo Vespucci	= 8	Johann Grüninger	Strasbourg
8	1509	Wie die zwen durchlüchtigsten Herren her Fernandus. K. zu Castilien und Herr Emanuel. K. zu Portugal haben das weyte moer ersuchet unnd funden vil insulen unnd ein nüwe welt von wilden nackenden leüten, vormals unbekant.	Amerigo Vespucci	= 7	Johann Grüninger	Strasbourg

9	1513	Sendtbriff des grosmechtigen und unuberwindtligisten Emanuelis Kunig zu Portugal. Von der Uberwindung dye geschehen ist in India und Malacha Pabst Leo.dem zehenden zu geschriben.	Manuel I of Portugal	= 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	Wolfgang Huber	Nuremberg
10	1513	Epistola potentissimi ac invictissimi emanuelis regis Portugaliae et algarbiorum. etc. De victoriis habitis in india et malacha. Ad. S. In Christo patrem et dominum nostrum dominum leonem. X. Pont. Maximu.	Manuel I of Portugal	= 9, 11, 12, 13, 14	Matthes Maler	Erfurt
11	1513	Epistola potentissimi ac invictissimi emanuelis regis Portugaliae, et algarbiorum. etc. De victoriis ha bitis in india, et malacha. Ad. S. In Christo patrem et dominum nostru. Do. Leonem. X. Pont. Maximum	Manuel I of Portugal	= 9, 10, 12, 13, 14	Hieronymus Vietor and Johann Singriener	Vienna
12	1513	Epistola potentissimi ac invictissimi emanuelis regis Portugalie et algarbiorum. De victoriis habitis in India et Malacha. Ad s. In Christo patrem et dominum nostru. Dñm leonem decimu. Pont. Maximu	Manuel I of Portugal	= 9, 10, 11, 13, 14	Johann Stuchs	Nuremberg
13	1513	Abtruck ains lateinischen sandtbrieves an Bapstliche heiligkeit von Künigklicher wurde zu Portegall dis jars ausgangen von der eroberten Stadt Malacha anderen Kunigreychen unnd herrschaften in India auch gegen aufgangk der sunnen erstlich zu Rom auf .IX. tag Augusti in Latein getruckt und nachmaln auf .v. Tag Septembris zu Augspurg in tewtsch gebracht	Manuel I of Portugal	= 9, 10, 11, 12, 14		
14	1513	Abtruck ains lateinnischen sandtbrieves an Bapstliche heiligkeit, von Künigklicher wurden zue portegall diß jars außgangen, von der eroberten stat Malacha: anderen Künigrychen und herschafften in India, auch gegen auffgang	Manuel I of Portugal	= 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	Matthias Hupfuff	Strasbourg

der sunnen,erstlich zu Rom in Latein getruckt und nachmaln in teüsch gebracht.

15	1515	Copia der newen Zeytung auß presillg landt.	= 16	Hieronimus Höltzel	Nuremberg
16	1515	Copia der newen eytung ausz presilg landt	= 15	Erhard Oeglin	Augsburg
17	1522	Ein schoene Newe Zeytung so Kayserlich Mayestet ausz India yetz nemlich zukommen seind		Melchior Ramminger	Augsburg
18	1535	Copey etlicher brieff so ausz Hispania kummen seindt anzaygent die eygenschafft des newen lands so newlich von Kay. May. Armadi auff dem newen moer gefunden ist worden durch die Hispanier.		Johann Petreius	Nuremberg
19	1547	Neuwe Zeitung. Vom grossen mann so dess Koenigs auß Portugals schiffleuth haben zu wegen bracht heißt Christian groß India wie er sich vermaehlet hat mit einer jungfrawen die Christenheit. Europa genandt wirt sein leib mit seinen glidern im anfang schimpfflich beschriben auch wie die jungfraw die Christenheit Europa im werde kinder geben dises grossen mans und seines gemahels bedeutung wirt außgelegt		Laux Lercher	Germany

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Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Florence, Italy

Mediceo avanti di Principato

Mediceo del Principato

Miscellanea Medicea

Archivio Storico della Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, Italy

Archivio Salviati

Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, United States of America

Spinelli Family Archive

Italian Castle Archive

British Library, London, United Kingdom

Felixarchief Antwerpen, Antwerp, Belgium

Insolvente Boedelskamer

Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Germany

Familienarchiv Behaim

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