

HAMBURG, 1728-1811

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1. Coverage

This questionnaire discusses *Admiralitätszoll- und Convoygeld-Einnahmebücher*: Hamburg's records on Port Duties and Duties levied for the Maintenance of Convoy Ships. Hamburg never had more than three Convoys ships in service. These warships were meant to protect convoys of merchantmen; the major threat was North African corsairs. The Convoy duty was maintained even when the last of these ships was sold. The source tells us, in a narrow sense, about the trade of Hamburg, because it reflects maritime trade of the city-state of Hamburg. In a wider sense, it also tells us about the trade of the whole Holy Roman Empire because Hamburg was Germany's major seaport, channelling imports and exports of many regions of the Holy Roman Empire.

The duties were abolished under Napoleonic rule and no comparable data were collected after 1811.

2. Documents

The records include approximately 50 volumes that survived in the *Staatsarchiv* in Hamburg. Each is a very bulky annual volume on duties paid on maritime exports and imports. The first one covers 1728 and the last one 1811.

No contemporary synthesis has survived.

3. Institutional setting

The Hamburg's port authority (*Admiralität*) was responsible of the collection of the data.

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Traders and commission agents declared import and export merchandise at the scribe's desk. The harbour master checked the ships, and the *Admiralität's* scribes kept the books.

4. Motivation

The data were collected in order to register the revenue generated from the duties. The aim of the duty was to distribute the burden of financing the escorting warships relative to the costs caused by each ship. Small ships that were not sailing far, e.g. the Netherlands, were exempt. Ships going to the Baltic paid minimal duties. Ships going to France paid according to the distance between the French destination port and Hamburg. Ships going to Portugal and Spain paid higher duties and ships going to the Mediterranean paid the highest duties.

5. Methods

All non-exempt traders (or commission agents who acted on behalf of third parties) were supposed to declare all their non-exempt exports and imports. Contemporary sources (including French observers of Hamburg trade) emphasised that declarations were treated confidentially, and that the traders were generally trusted for the declarations they made. Port authorities did not double-check, e.g. by opening the packaging. This seems strange, but considering that Hamburg merchants were making the law in Hamburg, this may indeed have been the practise.

There were many exemptions, for example:

- since 1713, all transit trade (those goods not processed in Hamburg, and reshipped within 6 months)
- since 1727, all exports handled by burghers of the City of Hamburg
- since 1764, all exports of linen, yarns, ironware, copper

Subject to duties was all factorage trade (including the portion handled by burghers) and all the trade handled by non-burghers (Dutch, Sephardim, Huguenots, traders from German hinterlands ...).

Even so, the records offer important insights into structures of trade and shifts over time, and the names of the major (and minor) traders. I cross-checked them with reports from French envoys (e.g. reports from Gérard L. Champeaux, Archives Diplomatiques Paris, CP Hambourg, 73, vol. suppl. 6 ...), which offer figures coming close to those I generated from the port duty records. This may indicate that

Champeaux obtained his figures from the very persons keeping the books – but Champeaux himself assumed these figures were not complete, because of exemptions, fraud, smuggling etc. Besides the merchandise the books also kept record of the ships, with information on tonnage, armament and destination.

6. Information

The records include information both on the merchandises: name of receiving/dispatching trader, type of merchandise with vague information on quantity (package, bale, box, bundle ...), value of item (in Mark banco), duty paid; and information on ships: name of the captain, duties paid on the ship (the amount depended on its destination), tonnage, and number of guns (a ship sailing far with poor guns paid more than a ship with strong armament).

Yet, the source does not allow to attribute any merchandise to the ship transporting it. This was of no interest to the port authorities, and therefore not recorded.

Both values and quantities of goods were recorded. The values were accepted on trust from the declaring merchant. The information on quantities was vague and unreliable: it cannot be used to check the values. There was no standardisation in quantity units nor in the name of goods (which depended, presumably, on what the merchant declared). Textiles, for example, were quantified in pieces, bales, boxes, chests, etc. There are many hundreds of different goods mentioned, all in German.

The port of call of each item (which is not necessarily the product's place of origin) had to be declared in order to determine the percentage to be paid, the data include geographical information. Hundreds of European ports are mentioned.

7. Availability

A larger research project has produced a database (on the imports only, 1733-98); for availability please contact Prof. Markus Denzel, Universität Leipzig (denzel@rz.uni-leipzig.de)

8. Research questions

The data have not been used to answer any significant research question treated on a larger scale, as far as I can judge. They could be used to assess:

- Hamburg's role as a neutral port city in European maritime trade
- The role of the Holy Roman Empire in eighteenth century Atlantic trade
- The range & volume of goods imported & exported from German lands of the eighteenth century
- The short-term variations (e.g. at breakout and end of war) in the turnover of port cities (and of maritime trade of entire nations) all over Europe.

9. Bibliography

9.1. Secondary works publishing and commenting the data

- Weber K. (1999), "Les livres douaniers de l'Amirauté de Hambourg au XVIII^e siècle, une source de grande valeur encore inexploitée," *Bulletin du Centre d'Histoire des espaces atlantiques*, Nouvelle série, 9, 93–126. (a slightly extended German language version of this: "Die Admiralitätszoll- und Convoygeld-Einnahmebücher: Eine wichtige Quelle für Hamburgs Wirtschaftsgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert", *Hamburger Wirtschafts-Chronik* (2000), 1: 79–108.
- Schneider J., O.-E. Krawehl, M.A. Denzel, F. Schulenburg, (2001), *Statistik des Hamburger seewärtigen Einfuhrhandels im 18. Jahrhundert, Nach den Admiralitäts- und Convoygeld-Einnahmebüchern*, St. Katharinen, (contains many detailed tables, but few overviews).