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August Ludwig Schlözer's *General History of Trade and of Seafaring* (1758): Cameralism, Natural History and the Rise of Civilisation

Ere Nokkala

Abstract: This paper argues that August Ludwig Schlözer's (1735–1809) early work *Essay on General History of Trade and of Seafaring* (first published in Swedish as *Försök til en allmän historia om handel och sjöfart uti the äldsta tider* in 1758) was a contribution to the contemporary debates on natural history, economy, and politics. As such it exemplifies the porosity of the history of trade as a genre. It is a key text through which to understand the various currents within eighteenth century Swedish and German political economy, as well as Schlözer's own economic and political thought. The book is a history of civilisation that emphasises that the progress of civilisations is reliant on the natural inclination of human beings to trade. In it its author explored the causes of the rise and fall of ancient Phoenician trade in order to argue that commerce created societies and enhanced communication, which in turn further supported the expansion of trade and the unity of mankind. Integrating Schlözer's political and economic thought into the contemporary European transnational debates on natural history, and into the political life of the time makes his reasoning clear. This includes the early development of the German's long-lasting anti-aristocratic sentiment. The chapter concludes that Schlözer's history of trade allowed him to develop ideas springing from a variation of cameralism founded on natural history.

Introduction

Considering that Göttingen historian, political scientist, statistician and publicist August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809)¹ is a well-known name in historiography and is particularly famous for his notion of world history (*Welt-Geschichte*), it is surprising how little attention has been paid to his first book, *Essay on General History of Trade and of Seafaring*.² Schlözer, the main exponent of the Göttingen School of academic history, started his career as a historian in Sweden. His first book was published in Swedish as *Försök til en allmän historia om handel och sjöfart uti the äldsta tider* (1758),³ and historian Thomas Heinrich Gadebusch (1736–1804) later translated it into German under

¹ August Ludwig Schlözer was born in Hohenlohe, Germany. He studied at the Universities of Wittenberg, Göttingen and Uppsala. He earned his first income in the cities of Göttingen, Lübeck, Altona, Stockholm and St. Petersburg. His first academic post was in St. Petersburg, and in 1765 he became a professor in Russia. In 1769 he was appointed professor of Russian literature and history at the philosophy faculty of the University of Göttingen, and it was there that he began giving lectures on general world history. For a short biography of Schlözer and his European networks, see Martin Espenhorst, "Der 'mobile' Europäer – Zur historischen Konstruktion des europäischen Menschen bei Schlözer," in *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Martin Espenhorst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 197–212, 200–203.

² Henceforth *General History of Trade*.

³ August Ludwig Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel och sjöfart uti the äldsta tider* (Stockholm: Grefing, 1758).

the title *Versuch einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Handlung und Seefahrt in den ältesten Zeiten* in 1761.⁴ It is worth noting that the first history that Schlözer ever wrote was a history of trade intended as a history of civilisation.

This chapter explores how the history of trade was a porous literary genre through which a plurality of discourses and interpretative categories were circulated, mediated, and developed in rivalry with other discussions. For Schlözer, writing a history of trade was a way of participating in the intertwined contemporary debates on natural history, economy and *Welt-Geschichte*. The integration of his political and economic thought into the debates on natural history and political life of the time makes his reasoning clear. This chapter places his book in the intellectual, political, and economic contexts of Göttingen and Uppsala, and more broadly within the setting of European debates on the creation of wealth and the support of commerce and freedom. I also place his early work within the development of political economy in the second half of the eighteenth century, arguing that his *General History of Trade* gave him an opportunity to develop ideas springing from variations of cameralism grounded in natural history.⁵

Firstly, I argue that Schlözer's early work, which was published when he was twenty-three, is evidence of his early development as a historian. Many of the strands of thought for which he is known—such as his emphasis on innovations and technological breakthroughs rather than on the succession of rulers—are already to be found in his *General History of Trade*. Secondly, I place his essay in a new position within the context of the development of political economy by reconsidering the relationship between trade, natural history and economy. I pay special attention to his development of economic topics in Sweden and in the German lands. I argue that the young Schlözer was an advocate of a Swedish approach to the practices and discourses of statecraft known as cameralism, and that his economic thought was infused with ideas of natural history.⁶ Thirdly, I argue that developing an understanding of the Swedish political context in which the *General History of Trade* was published sheds new light on the origins of his enduring anti-aristocratic sentiment: as I will show, Schlözer in many respects sided with the so-called Cap Party and its critique of the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling Noble Estate.⁷ Taken as a whole, this chapter places the *General History of Trade* within the horizon of eighteenth-century German and Swedish political and economic thought, which itself was transnational and European in character. The chapter has been inspired by the work of Antonella Alimento and Koen Stapelbroek, in particular their emphasis on the importance of understanding the Nordic political and economic debates of the period and

⁴ August Ludwig Schlözer, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Handlung und Seefahrt in den ältesten Zeiten* (Rostock: Koppischen, 1761).

⁵ On cameralism, see Ere Nokkala and Nicholas B. Miller, eds., *Cameralism and The Enlightenment: Happiness, Governance and Reform in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Marten Seppel and Keith Tribe, eds., *Cameralism in Practice: State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017); Philipp Robinson Rössner, ed., *Economic Growth and the Origins of Modern Political Economy: Economic Reasons of State, 1500–2000* (London: Routledge, 2016); Andre Wakefield, *The Disordered Police State: German Cameralism as Science and Practice* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009).

⁶ On the relationship between natural history and economy see Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origins of Economics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005); Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁷ In Swedish historiography the period between 1719–1772 is referred to as the Age of Liberty, a term coined by contemporary writers in the 1750s, who argued that the Swedish constitution prevented the misuse of royal power. During the Age of Liberty, the four Estates—the nobility, clergy, burghers and peasants—shared power in the Diet, which in practice was independent of the king. The Estates met at a triennial *Riksdagar*. The *General History of Trade* was published in a time characterised by a fierce rivalry between two competing parties in Sweden. The Francophile Hat Party advocated the political and economic interests of civil servants from the high nobility, while the Cap Party had close contacts with Russia and England and had many members from the clergy and the peasantry. Since the end of the 1750s the Caps had been increasingly challenging the rule of the Hats, along with the established economic, political and social order. See Michael Roberts, *The Age of Liberty: Sweden 1719–1772* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

relating them to the broader eighteenth-century debates under way in Europe on the historiography of commerce and interstate politics.⁸

Schlözer's conceptions of wealth and sociability were linked with the new natural law theories of civilisation, from which political economy was born. According to these accounts, trade created commercial societies, and new theories about commercial societies fuelled by theories of civilisation served as a basis for the new discipline. In his *General History of Trade* Schlözer used the concept of civilisation to define "the second nature of man," that is, the nature of men acquired as a result of a historical process, a process which he conceptualised in terms of the progress of civilisation driven by trade.⁹ His early work not only contributed to the history of political economy but also helped him to develop ideas on politics, economy, history, and global networks. Instead of celebrating the rise of Europeans above other civilisations, Schlözer emphasised technical breakthroughs, such as the invention of glass by the Phoenicians. As Jürgen Osterhammel has argued, we owe him a debt for his insights into the networks that make global historiography possible, which he believed were created by trade and communication. In other words, for Schlözer communication and commercial networks made possible a global history that occupied a space above and beyond national and regional histories.¹⁰

Entangled intellectual background contexts: From Göttingen to Uppsala and back

Schlözer was nineteen years old when he arrived in Stockholm in May 1755, where he found employment as a tutor in the household of Andreas Murray, the dean of the German Evangelical congregation in the city. Being unhappy with his situation, he moved to Uppsala to continue the university studies that he had started in Wittenberg and Göttingen, and worked under the supervision of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) during the 1754–1755 academic year. Michaelis was an orientalist, theologian and philologist, a leading figure in the University of Göttingen, and one of Europe's foremost biblical scholars and specialists in Near Eastern languages. Not unlike Schlözer, who was a son of a priest, Michaelis grew up in an environment permeated with biblical scholarship. Although he focused on theology and oriental languages, he stated in his memoirs that history was his favourite subject, and he could be considered a neologist with a keen interest in natural history. For him, historical analysis was aimed at redefining the beliefs of Christianity and other religions.¹¹ Especially important in this respect was Michaelis's approach to the study of the Bible, which he considered a "literary and philosophical artefact of a hypothesized classical ancient Israelite civilization."¹² His methodology, which Schlözer was to follow, was historical-critical and he gave precedence to observations drawn from empirical evidence over probabilistic hypotheses.¹³ When Schlözer wrote his *General History of Trade* by applying the empirical methodology of his mentor—and echoing Michaelis's belief in the possibility that past events are of use when deducing general

⁸ Koen Stapelbroek and Antonella Alimento, "The Wealth and Freedom of the North: Scandinavian Political Cultures and Economic Ideas in the Eighteenth Century," *History of European Ideas* 40 (2014): 662–674, 668

⁹ Hans Erich Bödeker and Istvan Hont, "Naturrecht, Politische Ökonomie und Geschichte der Menschheit: Der Diskurs über Politik und Gesellschaft in der frühen Neuzeit," in: *Naturrecht, Spätaufklärung, Revolution*, ed. Otto Dann and Diethelm Klippel (Hamburg: Meiner, 1995), 80–89.

¹⁰ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 64–65.

¹¹ Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1975), 44; Lawrence J. Baack, *Undying Curiosity: Carsten Niebuhr and the Royal Danish Expedition to Arabia* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), 30–32.

¹² Baack, *Undying Curiosity*, 32.

¹³ Avi Lifschitz, "The Book of Job and the Sex Life of Elephants: The Limits of Evidential Credibility in Eighteenth-Century Natural History and Biblical Criticism," *The Journal of Modern History* 91 (2019): 739–775.

laws or maxims of trade—he allied himself with the style of historical writing that later came to be known as the Göttingen School.¹⁴ This stood in contrast to the later Physiocratic philosophy of history, which can be characterised as conjectural, hypothetical, and sceptical about the possibility of generalising empirical knowledge.¹⁵

Michaelis was interested in the Bible as a source of historical information on flora, fauna and customs. His aim was to give evidential credibility to eighteenth-century natural history and biblical criticism, two closely connected fields.¹⁶ These connections are visible in the tight collaboration and correspondence between Michaelis and the naturalist Linnaeus (1707–1778) and the philologist Johann Ihre (1707–1780), both based in Uppsala. There had been strong links between Uppsala and Göttingen since the 1740s¹⁷ since many Swedish students went to study in the German city while many non-Swedish students, especially those interested in natural history, were drawn to Sweden.

This was also the case with Schlözer's, although in truth he spent his time in Sweden on more than study. Immediately after his arrival he began work as a political journalist and commentator for the *Altonaer Reichs-Post-Reiter*, one of the foremost German journals of the period, for which he provided Swedish news for German readers, including on developments in Swedish politics and scholarship, especially as regarded the study of *historiae naturalis et oeconomiae* that was being cultivated in the country. Schlözer, it seems, believed that Sweden was a stronghold of natural history.¹⁸ As Margaret Schabas has shown, there was a methodological and conceptual overlap of natural philosophy/natural history with economic thought, and this too would be reflected in Schlözer's work, as we will soon discover in relation to the *General History of Trade*.¹⁹ After moving from Stockholm to Uppsala, Schlözer commenced studies in natural history under Linnaeus and also devoted himself to the study of the history of language under Johann Ihre, who is widely considered the founder of Swedish philology. Under Ihre's supervision, he applied himself to Gothic, Old Norse and Icelandic, and wrote his thesis on the journeys of the Nordic people to Greece. He stayed in Uppsala only for the winter of 1756–1757, after which he returned to Stockholm where he spent another year and a half working as a secretary for a commercial agency.²⁰

During his stays in Göttingen and especially in Uppsala, Schlözer developed a strong desire to explore the biblical cities of the Orient, and discussed this with Michaelis. It turned out that the famous Royal Danish Arabian Expedition (1761–1767) was to a significant extent directed from Göttingen, and that Michaelis was largely responsible for its conception.²¹ One of the mission's main aims was to obtain empirical evidence, and Schlözer was eager to participate, and corresponded with Michaelis about the possibility of being given a place. As Martin Espenhorst has argued,²² Schlözer's

¹⁴ On the term "Göttingen School of History" see Martin Gierl, "Change of Paradigm as a Squabble between Institutions," in *Scholars in Action: The Practice of Knowledge and the Figure of the Savant in the 18th Century*, ed. André Holenstein, Hubert Steinke and Martin Stuber (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1: 267–287, see page 285.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the differences between the histories of trade and the Physiocratic philosophy of history, see the introduction to this volume and the chapter by Arnault Skornicki.

¹⁶ Lifschitz, "The Book of Job," 750–751.

¹⁷ Christian Callmer, "Svenska studenter i Göttingen under 1700-talet," *Lychnos. Lärdomshistoriska samfundets årsbok* (1956): 1–30; Mathias Persson, "Det nära främmande: Svensk lärdom och politik i en tysk tidning 1753–1792" (doctoral thesis, Uppsala University, 2009).

¹⁸ Holger Böning, "Vom Umgang mit Zeitungen: Schlözer und die neuen Medien des 18. Jahrhunderts – der Publizist als Zeitungsleser, Zeitungsliebhaber, Zeitungskorrespondent und Zeitungstheoretiker," in *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Martin Espenhorst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2012), 133–155, 136, 144.

¹⁹ Schabas, *Natural Origins*, Preface, ix.

²⁰ Johann Stephan Pütter, Friedrich Saalfeld, and Georg Heinrich Oesterley, *Versuch einer academischen Gelehrten-Geschichte von der Georg-Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen*, 4 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1765–1838), vol. 2, 166.

²¹ Johann David Michaelis, *Fragen an eine Gesellschaft gelehrter Männer, die auf Befehl Ihro Majestät des Königs von Dänemark nach Arabien reisen* (Frankfurt: n.p., 1762).

²² Martin Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa: Der Historiker, Statistiker und Publizist August Ludwig (v.) Schlözer (1735–1809)* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003). Martin Peters changed his name to Martin Espenhorst in 2011. Consistent with other recent scholarship on Schlözer, I refer to him as "Eспенhorst" in the main body of the text, while citing works published

first monograph, the *General History of Trade*, was an attempt to justify and finance his study of the Orient,²³ and it appears that all his activities in the second half of the 1750s were motivated by this objective.

According to Christian Schlözer, the genesis of his father's first book was bound up with Carl Wilhelm Seele's (1707–1781) generous offer to pay for the costs of printing a volume dealing with the history of trade. Seele was a rich Swedish merchant and director of the commercial agency in which Schlözer worked as a secretary. He had been surprised to learn from Schlözer that in ancient times the Phoenicians had engaged in world trade (*Welt-Handel*),²⁴ and Schlözer dedicated his book on the Phoenicians to him, perhaps in the hope that he would also finance an expedition.²⁵ In the *General History of Trade* he stated that the topic was useful not only for merchants but also for rulers,²⁶ an emphasis that can be seen as part of his attempt to arouse the interest of merchants and other leading figures.²⁷ Schlözer clearly recognised the emerging influence of commercial interests in politics.

The history of trade as a history of civilisations

The *General History of Trade* was a product of Schlözer's growing interest in commerce and its history. In the foreword he declared that he had been inspired by Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Voltaire (1694–1778) who in numerous publications had investigated how trade had helped Europe rise out of barbarism.²⁸ He concluded that if trade had such a significant impact on the state of the world, then the history of it ought to be an essential part of the overall study of world history (*Welt-Geschichte*). The history of trade was bound to illuminate his thinking about ancient history, and in doing so to contribute to a better understanding of the Old Testament; in this we can discern a clear reference to Michaelis. Schlözer contended that the Holy Writ was to a great extent an extension of ancient history, and, in the footsteps of Michaelis, argued that the paucity of knowledge of ancient history was one of the main reasons the Bible was poorly understood. Since many parts of the Bible dealt with trade, knowing more about the history of that trade was necessary before one could explain the views of authors inspired by God.²⁹ Michaelis had argued similarly that the analysis of history contributed to a more accurate interpretation of the Bible. Understanding the holy scriptures better would lead to a keener comprehension of ancient history, and vice versa. Schlözer moreover claimed that a clearer grasp of trade history would throw light on the process of civilisation, and on the rise of trade to its current position as the idol of politics (*Abgott der heutigen Staatskunst*). He emphasised

under his previous name as "Peters" in footnotes. See Duchhardt, Heinz and Espenhorst, Martin, eds., *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012); Morgan Alexander Golf-French, *Contemplating the Revolution: Ethics, Culture, and History in German Political Thought, 1789–1815* (doctoral thesis, University College London, 19), 15, n. 5.

²³ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 44–45.

²⁴ Christian von Schlözer, *Schlözers öffentliches und Privatleben aus Originalurkunden*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1828), vol. 1, 35. It is worth noting that according to a recent account by Josephine Quinn the Phoenicians never existed as a coherent people. Ancient sources indicate that they did not constitute a group with a shared identity, history, and culture, and such a view of them was a creation of later historiography. See Josephine Quinn, *In Search of the Phoenicians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

²⁵ August Ludwig Schlözer, *August Ludwig Schlözer's öffentliches und Privat-Leben, von ihm selbst beschrieben. Erste Fragment. Aufenthalt in Dienste in Russland, vom J. 1761 bis 1765* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1802), 136.

²⁶ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 3.

²⁷ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 47.

²⁸ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, foreword.

²⁹ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, foreword.

that trade had in earlier times already demonstrated its impact on the moral and political revolutions of the human race (*des menschlichen Geschlechts*).³⁰

Schlözer openly admitted that he was building on Montesquieu when he claimed that it was trade that civilised Europe by bringing the barbarians out from the forests to embrace a more cultured life. Trade established connections and resulted in the foundation of the first states. The Phoenicians were responsible for civilising the Europeans, and therefore Schlözer justified making them the main focus of his book, explaining that they had been undeservedly neglected in the history of trade. Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721) had written about them, but had not granted them the attention that their substantial contribution deserved.³¹ The Phoenicians were the first true trading nation and the greatest merchants of the ancient world, and few nations achieved the same level of commercial power and wealth as they did.³² Schlözer's intention was to write a history of trade in the ancient world up to the era of Alexander the Great, and because he considered the Phoenicians to have been the only nation practising world trade (*Welt-Handel*) during the period he studied, he believed it justified to focus on them.³³ By taking this approach, he argued, the contents of the book were actually much broader than they might have seemed, and this justified the rather general title of his work, which nevertheless did not escape the criticism of reviewers.

Schlözer's main source was the Bible, and the *General History of Trade* contained few references to other works. He explained that if he had named all the works he had consulted, there would have been so many citations that his book would have been twenty-five per cent longer, and in any case the references would not have strengthened his arguments.³⁴ He did, however, acknowledge his indebtedness to Michaelis, Montesquieu, Samuel Bochart (1599–1667), and Voltaire, in particular stating that he was building on Bochart's *Geographia Sacra seu Phaleg et Canaan* (1648). Bochart was a Protestant biblical scholar with knowledge of oriental languages and an interest in Arabic naturalists. Pierre Daniel Huet, who had studied Hebrew with him, was subjected to rather negative treatment from Schlözer, who said that because of its brevity his *Histoire du commerce et de la navigation des anciens* (1716) had been of little use to him.³⁵ Huet's work was in fact fairly long, but it seems that the German was unhappy with Huet's treatment of the Phoenicians.

Schlözer's failure to name his sources may partly account for the initial negative reviews of the *General History of Trade* published in Sweden. He had been afraid that the fact that he was a foreigner would have either limited or undermined the reception of his book, and so had published it anonymously, although he was soon identified as its author. The work would go on to receive other negative reviews: according to one Gothenburg journal, Schlözer had done little more than recompile the works of Michaelis and Bochart.³⁶ In his father's defence, Christian Schlözer argued that this

³⁰ (A)[ugust] (L)[udwig] (S)[chlözer], ed., *Neueste Geschichte der Gelehrsamkeit in Schweden*, 5 vols (Rostock: Berger & Boedner, 1757–1760), vol. 5, 839–854: 839. This is a review that Schlözer published in his own journal. I find it likely that he himself wrote it to promote his own book. See Helmut Keipert, "Schlözer und die slawischen Sprachen," in *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Martin Espenhorst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 41–68: 42 n. 2.

³¹ It is worth noting that many well-known historians of trade start with the Egyptians and Phoenicians. See Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Histoire du commerce et de la navigation des anciens* (Paris: A. Urbain, 1716); William Perry, *A Treatise on Trade: Or the Antiquity and honour of commerce: Shewing how Trade was esteemed by the Egyptians, Jews, and Romans, and on what Footing of Worship it stands with us* (London: John Clarke, 1750); Johann Peter Schmidt *Allgemeine Geschichte der Handlung und Schifffahrt* (Breslau: Korn, 1751–1754).

³² Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, foreword.

³³ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 25.

³⁴ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, foreword.

³⁵ Huet accompanied Bochart on his journey to Stockholm to study the Arabic manuscripts in the possession of Queen Christina. On the relationship between Bochart and Huet see April G. Shelford, *Transferring the Republic of Letters: Pierre Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life 1650–1720* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 28–29 and Christopher Brooke, "Eighteenth-Century Carthage," in *Commerce and Peace in the Enlightenment*, ed. Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky and Richard Whatmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 110–124: 112.

³⁶ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 47.

accusation was too harsh since despite being an early work the *General History of Trade* still contained many of those elements for which his father later became famous, such as the study of colonial trade and of communication between nations.³⁷ Other commentators suggested that Schlözer was merely displaying his gift for languages, showing off his command of Swedish, which he had gained remarkably quickly. Whatever the case, a review in *Göttinger Gelehrten Anzeigen* was more positive,³⁸ but this may have to do with the fact that the publication was edited by Michaelis.

In many ways, Schlözer's *General History of Trade* is a history of civilisation in the tradition of Montesquieu, since it asserts that the progress of civilisations was consequent on man's inherent desire to trade. According to Schlözer, trade was not the result of a divine command, and he used an anthropological argument to explain that it originated from man's natural inclination to seek pleasure. In his account, necessities gave birth to trade, desires educated it and its final form was shaped by greed and luxury.³⁹ Furthermore, trade created societies and enhanced communication, which then supported its expansion. It was trade, not science or art, that civilised nations; it directed politics and was the mother of the arts and sciences. At variance with Rousseau's account of historical progress⁴⁰ and in accordance with Montesquieu's, Schlözer placed great emphasis on the positive effects of trade. Martin Espenhorst has suggested that his ideas of progress were most likely inspired by Turgot's *Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1751/52), but they also made plenty of references to Montesquieu. Referring to *De l'esprit des lois*, livre 21, ch. 5, Schlözer stated that the history of trade was the history of intercourse or exchange (*omgänge*) with other nations,⁴¹ a central aspect of which was the direct interchange of knowledge between merchants. In his historical and political thought he stressed the connection created via concepts of unity, focusing on analysing how communities were bound together.⁴² Phoenicians and Dutchmen had been exemplary in this respect, and their contribution to the progress of civilisations had therefore been significant.

In Schlözer's view, trade was an expression of the human longing for the original unity of mankind. It served not only the function of forming human societies but also fulfilled a theological function—God's plan—by encouraging men to use the riches of the Earth and to come together. Trade was a medium for and the primary form of the human communication that induced people to rise out of barbarism and re-establish the unity of human beings. Schlözer's *General History of Trade* was thus one of the first true histories of trade to see the buying and selling of goods as the motor of civilisation and conceived the progress of civilisation as a process defined by divine providence. Schlözer demonstrated that the agents of this progress were the flourishing Phoenicians, the civilised Greeks, the Romans and later the Venetians, the Genoans, and the Dutch. It is worth noting that according to him the Nordic nations had never played a role as such motive forces.⁴³

The rules of trade: The rise and fall of the Phoenicians

The *General History of Trade* is divided into two parts. The first is a thirty-six-page introduction comprising three chapters, the first of which provides a broad overview of the development of trade and its utility for merchants and people in power. The second delves into the origins of trade and the

³⁷ Christian von Schlözer, *Schlözers öffentliches und Privatleben*, 35–36.

³⁸ *Göttinger Gelehrten Anzeigen*, 35 Stück, 22 March 1760, 307–308.

³⁹ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 12; Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 49.

⁴⁰ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 59.

⁴¹ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 103: “Ty historien om handeln är Historien om folkslags omgänge med hwarandra”; Schlözer, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Handlung und Seefahrt*, 155: “Die Geschichte der Handlung ist die Geschichte der Gemeinschaft der Völker mit einander.”

⁴² Golf-French, *Contemplating the Revolution*, 18–19; Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 11–14.

⁴³ Bernd Roling, *Odins Imperium: der Rudbeckianismus als Paradigma an den skandinavischen Universitäten (1680–1860)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 745–47.

conditions that favour its growth, while the third explores the fortunes of trade through the ages and ends with reflections on the creation of wealth and power in the present time.

Why was the first part so short? By way of an answer, Schlözer draws a parallel between the ancient Phoenicians and eighteenth-century Dutchmen, arguing that the principles according to which commercial states rise and fall do not change. As such, the introductory element of his book could be covered relatively briefly, given that the general rules and inclinations of human beings had remained the same throughout history. The notion of a division between the ancients and the moderns, which was debated so passionately by his contemporaries, was of no particular interest to Schlözer.⁴⁴ The primary elements in the success of the Phoenicians and Dutchmen were their sea trade, their colonies and the industrious character of their people. Schlözer stresses the need to learn from these points, but on the other hand explains how lessons could also be drawn from the defects of the two peoples: in this sense, the *General History of Trade* was a vehicle used to comment on the political and economic debates of his own time.⁴⁵

The second and main part of the book consists of five chapters dealing with Phoenician trade, which Schlözer contends continued throughout ancient history until the time of Alexander the Great. He begins by discussing the Phoenicians' remarkable achievements as merchants and by describing their merits. After the fall of the Tower of Babel, the Phoenicians were the first to create a community, they spread knowledge through the whole of the ancient world and built connections via trade, and they helped bring an end to barbarism in the continent of Europe by teaching the skills of writing and land cultivation, and by opening copper mines. Their accomplishments were facilitated by their knowledge of the then cultivated Orient, for instance by their familiarity with the native plants of Asia, which thanks to them could be grown elsewhere.

Schlözer studies the origins of Phoenicians trade in the second chapter, before analysing its success further in the third. To begin with, the Phoenicians benefited from an advantageous geographical location: although their soil was poor, they were in possession of harbours and had trees suitable for shipbuilding. They were extremely innovative, being the first to produce glass, inventing the Tyrian purple dye and minting coins. They also mastered the art of navigating by the stars so that they could sail by night, and according to Schlözer were without doubt the most skilful navigators of their day: their maritime innovations helped them become the strongest sea power in the Mediterranean.⁴⁶

Schlözer also maintains that the growth of Phoenician trade relied on political institutions and moral dispositions that were essential for commercial success. He states that the Phoenicians' history of trade was the earliest verifying example of the maxim that trade flourishes under freedom. They did not live under an all-powerful king in a hereditary monarchy but rather in a country divided into several small states, each of which had its own dedicated government. Furthermore, the Phoenicians did not suffer from "the spirit of conquest," which according to Schlözer is incompatible with "the spirit of commerce."⁴⁷ In addition to the moral disposition of their rulers, Schlözer highlights the character of the Phoenicians as a whole, including their diligence and inclination to trade, but also their self-indulgence and greed. In this sense, Schlözer notes, the Phoenicians were the Dutchmen of their time,⁴⁸ and Phoenician virtues and vices were the same as those of many merchants. In his opinion, other negative evaluations of the character of the Phoenicians and Dutchmen were not an accurate description of the nations in question, but were really evidence of the jealousy of less

⁴⁴ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 48.

⁴⁵ On the use of the histories of trade as instruments of critique, see the introduction to this volume.

⁴⁶ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 121–138.

⁴⁷ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 138–139. On eighteenth-century justifications of unlimited power, see Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen, and Luisa Simonutti, eds., *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism and the Common Good* (Toronto: Toronto University Press 2007). For further discussion of the spirit of conquest and commerce, see Aris Della Fontana's chapter in this volume.

⁴⁸ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 140.

successful commercial nations,⁴⁹ something that he denounced on the basis that successful nations ought to be emulated rather than envied. On the whole Schlözer's remarks concerning the Dutch are not very original, as discourses on the "Dutch miracle" went back as far as the seventeenth century.⁵⁰

Chapter four of the second part of Schlözer's book discusses Phoenician colonies and navigation. It was here that the civilisation showed its true greatness, which could be matched only by the English. The Phoenicians were masters of enlarging and maintaining their trade, which eventually reached the borders of the old world.⁵¹ Here it is worth noting that this chapter was to a great extent a compilation of Bochart's *Geographia Sacra seu Phaleg et Canaan* with the addition of some new insights, as Schlözer readily admitted in a review of the book that he probably wrote himself.⁵²

After all the praise of the Phoenicians, the final fifth chapter of the *General History of Trade* is dedicated to studying the decline of their trade, and in it Schlözer once again highlights the similarities between them and the Dutch. The trade of both had been built on a shaky foundations, with their commercial success depending on the laziness, ignorance and barbarism of other nations. What then were the firm foundations of successful commercial nations according to Schlözer? What were the true lessons to be gleaned from the history of trade? To find an answer to this we need to return to the end of his introduction to the *General History of Trade*, where he states his most important precept: "Every country's principal wealth and proper strength consists of the abundance of its inhabitants; who nourish themselves with domestic products."⁵³ Schlözer asserts that all successful routes to power and wealth are paved by these two conditions. In his opinion gold is not enough to make a nation rich and powerful if it simply flows to other nations without causing any motion in the nation itself, and success lays in the number of diligent lives nourished by domestic products.

At first glance it seems puzzling that a book that speaks admiringly of the Phoenicians and their colonies, and considers trade as the motor of civilisation comes to the conclusion that it is best for nations—even for commercial ones—to concentrate on their internal development: on populationism, domestic expansion and internal colonisation. Schlözer declares that "each and every state has an India within itself,"⁵⁴ in an expression familiar to cameralism, which Sophus Reinert has called *ersatz imperialism*, the aim of which was not to learn from great empires how to conquer foreign lands territorially or economically, but rather "how to make the most of one's natural resources in a world of ruthless international competition."⁵⁵ At the end of his introduction to the *General History of Trade* Schlözer shows himself to be an advocate of the discipline and practice of cameralism, known for its focus on the management of the state and its own resources and for prioritising the size of its population. To fully grasp Schlözer's understanding of cameralism and how this relates to the *General History of Trade* we need to analyse his conception of the relationship between commerce, natural history and natural philosophy, and economy.

The political economy of cameralism and natural knowledge

⁴⁹ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 140–142. On histories of trade and the legitimacy of the Dutch Republic, see Koen Stapelbroek's chapter in this volume.

⁵⁰ On the Dutch miracle see Lars Magnusson, *The Political Economy of Mercantilism* (London: Routledge, 2015), 57–62.

⁵¹ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 142–215.

⁵² (S)[chlözer], ed., *Neueste Geschichte der Gelehrsamkeit*, 852.

⁵³ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 36

⁵⁴ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 36

⁵⁵ Sophus Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 238–245; Reinert's interpretation has been influenced by Istvan Hont's influential account in Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

With the *General History of Trade* Schlözer sought to convince potential financiers of the importance of an expedition to the Orient, as well as to present his credentials as an expert qualified for such an endeavour. As Espenhorst has argued, Schlözer's book was an exegetic, philological study with implications for natural history,⁵⁶ and he wrote it in a context in which natural history was unthinkable without economy. This is seen in Schlözer's description of Sweden as a stronghold of *historiae naturalis et oeconomiae*.⁵⁷ The most significant proponent of the subject in Uppsala was beyond doubt Carl Linnaeus, whose botanical work was driven by his belief in economic utility and who quite seriously planned to recreate a colonial economy within Sweden, envisioning plantations of nutmeg, mace and cinnamon in Swedish Lapland.⁵⁸ Linnaeus believed in rather concrete terms in finding India within Sweden by emphasising plant acclimatisation and native substitution strategies. He assumed a relationship between human science (economy), and divine order (theology), and for him economy was both an eternal rule and a new human science.⁵⁹ In expressing negative views on foreign trade he was largely building on an older economic doctrine familiar to the cameral sciences which suggested that states should respond to increasing international competition by becoming autarchies completely devoid of commercial bonds. Linnaeus considered international trade superfluous. His objective was to make Sweden self-sufficient and wealthy through the sciences of natural history, through plant innovations, and by his "economic botany." He would have been completely happy to isolate Sweden commercially, an idea that was often advocated enthusiastically by cameralists.⁶⁰ However, as we are about to see, not all cameralists were in favour of isolationist foreign policies.

When he wrote the *General History of Trade* Schlözer was well acquainted with Linnaeus's scheme because he had studied with him. As early as 1758 Schlözer's interest in nature was, like Linnaeus's, linked to questions of wealth creation. In this conceptual framework, the central concepts of natural history, economy and natural theology belonged to the whole science of man (*Wissenschaft vom Menschen*), which, in its broadest sense, meant that a human being was moulded by both nature and culture⁶¹: language, physiology, politics, ethics and literature all belonged to the science of man. In this context, one can talk of "an anthropological turn" in the Enlightenment, as human beings came to be seen simultaneously as both natural and historical. In the Linnaean terms with which Schlözer was so familiar, man was part of *Systema naturea*, the comprehension of which required an understanding of nature and of the culture created by human beings, as well as of the first and second natures of man. To put it anachronistically, the separation of "the natural sciences" from political and economic perspectives and interests was not something that Schlözer countenanced.

Schlözer's emphasis on the internal development of countries and his belief in the opportunities provided by internal colonialism accorded with Linnaeus's vision for Sweden. Lisbet Koerner has called Linnaeus "an orthodox cameralist," thus placing him in a rather conservative current of European economic thought.⁶² The aim was to promote domestic cultivation and prevent imports, and this kind of thinking was widespread—in fact, dominant—in Linnaeus's Sweden. In keeping

⁵⁶ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 53.

⁵⁷ Böning, "Vom Umgang mit Zeitungen," 136, 144; Christian von Schlözer, *Schlözers öffentliches und Privatleben*, vol. 1, 464.

⁵⁸ Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, 80.

⁵⁹ On Linnaeus's providential economy and his synonymous usage of the concepts of *oeconomia naturae* and *oeconomia divina* see Sophus A. Reinert, *The Academy of Fisticuffs: Political Economy and Commercial Society in Enlightenment Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 278, see also pages 556–557, endnote 54. For further intellectual context for the physic-theologist economy see Lars Magnusson, *Äran, korruptionen och den borgerliga ordningen: Essäer från svensk ekonomihistoria* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2001), 42–43.

⁶⁰ Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, 95–97.

⁶¹ On the science of man as an anthropological turn in the Enlightenment, see Hans Erich Bödeker, Philippe Büttgen and Michel Espagne, eds., *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800: Wissenschaftliche Praktiken, institutionelle Geographie, europäische Netzwerke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

⁶² Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, 2.

with this, the Commodity Act (*Produktplakat*) of 1724 had been passed to promote Swedish shipping and shipbuilding, the goal being to replace imports.

However, in the 1760s reform-oriented thinkers like Anders Chydenius (1729–1803) and Lars Salvius (1706–1773) started to question Swedish economic orthodoxy and demanded wide-ranging changes to the policy that the purpose of the state was to strengthen the domestic economy while preventing other states from taking a bigger share of existing economic exchanges.⁶³ As suggested by Reinert, the cameralist ideas that Chydenius and Salvius criticised were a reaction to increasing international commercial competition. In fact, the dominant Swedish political and economic thought of the 1740s and 1750s still adhered to orthodox German and Swedish cameralism's emphasis on the need to retain existing regulation, as well as to the discipline's advocacy of a "dirigiste attitude to economic policy."⁶⁴ This was particularly true for what Reinert has described as *ersatz* imperialism: it was not the reforms of great empires, but those of small states that needed to be emulated.⁶⁵

However, it is important to keep in mind that in one respect Swedish cameralism differed significantly from its German counterpart: unlike the Germans, the doctrine's Swedish adherents strongly emphasised the importance of foreign trade, and Linnaeus's lack of interest in this therefore made him an anomaly among his peers. When the first chair of economic subjects was established in Sweden in 1741, its first holder, Anders Berch (1711–1774), became a professor in *Jurisprudentia, oeconomiae et commercium* at Uppsala University. It was no coincidence that the professorship included commerce, since it responded to the increasingly clear desire of the Swedes to participate in foreign trade, a way of thinking that distinguished the Swedish cameralists from most of their German counterparts.⁶⁶

This brings us back to Schlözer's *General History of Trade* and its place in the development of political economy. How could Schlözer argue in a book written in praise of the civilising benefits of trade that every nation could find an India within its borders? How could he place such emphasis on domestic development? As I see it, Schlözer was to a great extent building on German and Swedish cameralist literature, although the cameralists' economic and political conceptions were not immutable nor univocally in favour of isolationist views. In short, the cameral sciences were not a static unit of analysis but represented changing discourse and practice.⁶⁷ Schlözer advocated views that went beyond the "orthodox cameralists," for he was taking foreign trade seriously into account. In general, in the secondary literature cameralists, the cameral sciences and cameralism are held to favour the self-sufficiency of states that do not involve themselves in international trade. However, a short look at the literary production of the so-called late cameralists of the 1750s onwards, especially that of the leading cameralist Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717–1771), gives us a more multifaceted picture of cameralist political and economic thought. Inspired by the broader European debates and works such as Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, Justi argued that due to the already existing connections between the European states it would be impossible for anyone to step outside their commercial bonds. Late cameralism and its adherents believed that domestic development,

⁶³ Lars Magnusson, *The Economic History of Sweden* (London: Routledge 2000), 62; Patrik Winton, "Commercial Interests and Politics in Scandinavia, 1730–1815: Introduction," in *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820*, ed. Pasi Ihalainen, Michael Bregnsbo, Karin Sennelfelt and Patrick Winton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 207–216, 212; See also Patrik Winton, "The Politics of Commerce in Sweden 1730–1770," in: *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820*, ed. Pasi Ihalainen, Michael Bregnsbo, Karin Sennelfelt and Patrick Winton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 217–228.

⁶⁴ Lars Magnusson, "Comparing Cameralisms: The Case of Sweden and Prussia," in *Cameralism in Practice: State Administration and Economy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marten Seppel and Keith Tribe (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 17–38: 36.

⁶⁵ Sophus Reinert, *Translating Empire*, 238–245.

⁶⁶ Lars Magnusson, "Comparing Cameralisms," 17, 36–37.

⁶⁷ Ere Nokkala and Nicholas B. Miller, "Introduction," in *Cameralism and the Enlightenment: Happiness, Governance and Reform in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ere Nokkala and Nicholas B. Miller (New York: Routledge, 2020), 1–20, 2.

internal colonisation and foreign trade formed a compatible policy,⁶⁸ and that trade was in the service of the progress of civilisation. Justi even entertained ideas of turning Prussia into a trading nation. Fredrick II had expressed similar wishes in the 1750s and the commercial treaty signed with France in 1753 was a step towards turning Prussia into a modern commercial monarchy.⁶⁹ Not unlike their Swedish counterparts, German late cameralists also took foreign trade seriously.

Schlözer's views in favour of combining international trade with domestic development to increase the wealth of the nation places him among the Swedish cameralists or late cameralists rather than orthodox cameralists like Linnaeus or Justus Christoph Dithmar (1678–1737). His comments on the preconditions for economic success featured prominently in the works of late cameralists like von Justi or Johann Friedrich von Pfeiffer (1718–1787) who were of the conviction that the goal of the state was to bring about happiness. Late cameralists defined happiness in different ways, but most commonly believed it involved wealth and security. Their writings recognised three major paths to wealth and thereby to the happiness of the state: the establishment of foreign trade, the pursuit of mining, manufacturing and forestry, and the promotion of demographic growth. As we can see, Schlözer's *General History* championed all three: it was in favour of foreign trade, its author's admiration of Phoenicia's mines and manufactures was beyond doubt, and his support for a large population was equally firm.

The special emphasis that Schlözer placed on economic populationism was not exceptional at the time. As Justus Nipperdey has shown, in the 1750s the cameral sciences were characterised by *Hoch-Populationismus*, which argued that increasing the population ought to be the principal concern animating all the mechanisms of state.⁷⁰ In this context it is worth bearing in mind that cameralism had developed in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), which had caused the Holy Roman Empire to lose about a third of its population. The success of cameralist practices and thought in Sweden and their prominent role in the *General History of Trade* can therefore be explained by similar worries in the Nordic country, where officials were concerned about severe underpopulation that had its roots in the Great Northern War (1700–1721). The Swedish Office of Tables (*Tabellverket*) was established in 1749 to provide reliable population figures. Its responsibility was to collect and compare statistics,⁷¹ these being the key surveying instruments with which to support populationism. Schlözer's knowledge about numerical data in Sweden later had a major impact on him as a statistician. In short, there is no denying that his early economic and political thought was influenced by elements of cameralism, and that his views were very much in line with the leading cameralists of his time.

To understand the relationship between natural history, wealth, and commerce in Schlözer's *General History of Trade* more fully it is useful to compare the book's main points with the aims of the Royal Danish Arabian Expedition (1761–1767). The fact that the two were so in step with each other invites us to reflect on the motives for the journey and the relationship between nature and human sciences. Both Michaelis and Schlözer wanted to pursue natural historical and philological

⁶⁸ Ere Nokkala, "A Transnational German: JHG von Justi on International Trade," in: *Cameralism and the Enlightenment: Happiness, Governance and Reform in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ere Nokkala and Nicholas B. Miller (New York: Routledge, 2020), 80–98; Ere Nokkala, *From Natural Law to Political Economy: J.H.G von Justi on State, Commerce and International Order* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2019); Ere Nokkala, "From Fatherly Government to an Economic State: Late Cameralists on Natural Rights, Freedom and the Pursuit of Happiness," *History of Political Economy* 53 (2021): 479–495.

⁶⁹ Marco Cavarzere, "The Rise of a Trading Nation: Prussia and the Convention Preliminaire de commerce with France (1753)," in *The Politics of Commercial Treatise in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Antonella Alimento and Koen Stapelbroek (Chaim: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 295–320; Florian Schui, "Prussia's 'Tran-Oceanic Moment': The Creation of the Prussian Asiatic Trade Company in 1750," *Historical Journal* 49 (2006): 143–160; Ulrich Adam, *The Political Economy of J.H.G Justi* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006).

⁷⁰ Justus Nipperdey, *Die Erfindung der Bevölkerungspolitik: Staat, politische Theorie und Population in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 421–429.

⁷¹ See Lars Magnusson's commentary on the Anders Chydenius Prize Essay "Causes of Emigration" (1765) <https://chydenius.kootutteokset.fi/en/commentary-on-the-causes-of-emigration/>.

studies in the Orient and recent research on the expedition has shown that almost all of its activities were aimed at the elucidation of the Old Testament, which the participants saw as a historical source. Natural history was called upon to support biblical philology, the clarification of the Old Testament's references to plants, animals, customs and miracles in order to yield insights into the origins of ancient language and law. The primary point of interest was therefore biblical and sacred philology.⁷² Schlözer had all of this in mind when writing his book and shared this aspiration for the expedition. Another, more controversial point raised in more recent research on the Arabian expedition has been the claim that it was unique in so far as it had no colonial, commercial or political interests.⁷³ It has been argued that the observations on trade, land cultivation and uses of coffee and qat recorded by members of the expedition were academically neutral and as such the whole Arabian journey itself was purely scientific.⁷⁴ According to this line of interpretation, Peter Forsskål's (1732–1763) and Carsten Niebuhr's (1733–1815) observations on the Arabian coffee trade did not amount to espionage on behalf of European coffee traders. They observed the local population and kept records as neutral and objective observers, but never suggested that the Europeans should take over the coffee trade, and their views mainly reflected those of the local producers and consumers.⁷⁵

As I see it, the Arabian journey, as well as the *General History of Trade*, had commercial and political interests, and both even supported colonial interests in the sense of an attempt to find India in the nations of the participants by uncovering knowledge about plants that might acclimatise to northern Europe. It is not possible to find a neat separation between purely scientific observations and economic observations aimed at enhancing trade when the interest in nature is economically motivated from the beginning. The aim of the expedition to the Orient, as framed by Michaelis and by Schlözer's vision, was not to enable Europeans to take over the coffee trade, nor was it the pursuit of an ideological exercise in dominion. Instead, for eighteenth-century political economists—cameralists included—nature was a cornerstone in the formation of wealth, and thus understanding how nature worked was important to the aims of maximising the state's resources.⁷⁶ A key consideration was how to make natural history profitable. As argued earlier, Linnaeus's plant innovations and “economic botany” were motivated by economic utility. Taking all this into account, it is difficult to imagine that when drinking coffee and chewing qat during the Arabian expedition, its members did not also have economic applications in mind. The aim of the expedition was to make as many scientific discoveries as possible, including discoveries in economy, which was considered the most useful science. This was all the more true because, for Michaelis, Linnaeus and Schlözer, separating science (natural history/natural philosophy) from economic considerations made no sense.

Political institutions and the history of trade: Schlözer's early critique of oligarchy

The *General History of Trade* ends with two appendices containing translations of Isaiah, chapter 23, and Ezekiel, chapter 27. Schlözer's introduction to them contains ideas similar to those of Michaelis, since in it he underscored his belief that the Old Testament was historically accurate and could be used as a source. The appendices firstly served to show how, when writing his history of trade, he used the Scriptures as examples of the use of the historical critical method he had developed under

⁷² Baack, *Undying Curiosity*, 7.

⁷³ Han F. Vermeulen, *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 266.

⁷⁴ Ib Friis, “Coffee and qat on the Royal Danish expedition to Arabia – botanical, ethnobotanical and commercial observations made in Yemen 1762–1763,” *Archives of Natural History* 42 (2015):101–112, 101–102.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 108–109.

⁷⁶ Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, “Introduction,” in *Mercantilism Reimagined Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and its Empire*, ed. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3–22: 11.

the inspiration of Michaelis.⁷⁷ Secondly, Schlözer considered Isaiah 23 to be an early critique of oligarchy, and his selection of this text can thus be interpreted as a comment on the political situation in Sweden in 1758. As I have contended, the *General History of Trade* is a political essay arguing that unlimited governments are an obstacle to the success of trade.

The years that Schlözer spent in Sweden were politically turbulent. Some interpretations have hinted that he was either sympathetic towards the royalist coup that was attempted in 1756 while he was in the country, or that he took a neutral stance on the political happenings in the country,⁷⁸ but neither of these claims bears examination. Schlözer clearly favoured the party of the opposition, the Cap Party, and disapproved of the rule of the Hat Party and its aristocratic members.

During the so-called Age of Liberty (1719–1772) the Swedish realm was ruled by the Estates—the nobility, burghers, clergy and peasants—which met at the Diet (*riksdagar*) triennially. The Council of the Realm functioned as the government of the country, and while King Adolf Fredrick was a member of the council, he only had two votes out of the eighteen. The other sixteen members of the council were members of the Noble Estate and power was therefore concentrated in their hands: they had the privilege of holding all the high offices, and the freedom of the Age of Freedom was generally understood to mean freedom from the sovereignty of the monarch, whose power had been stripped to the minimum. An attempt to reinstitute the King Adolf Fredrick's authority resulted in a failed coup in 1756, a pivotal moment in Schlözer's life that informed his political convictions until his death.⁷⁹

Schlözer's clearly recognised that the Noble Estate was pulling the strings when he lived in Sweden. His political thought has been subject to different interpretations in previous research, which has seen him as a liberal, democratic or conservative thinker,⁸⁰ although he is usually thought of as a proponent of a moderate constitutional monarchy open to gradual reforms.⁸¹ Other somewhat contradictory interpretations have considered him to be a supporter of the Prussian administration, of the confessional tolerance associated with Alsace, of the freedom of the press, and of Russian reforms under Catherine II. His views were well known throughout Europe,⁸² and a recurring theme in his political and economic writings is his critique of aristocratic forms of rule.⁸³ Espenhorst has argued that Schlözer's convictions were forged in the Sweden of his youth: on 23 July 1756, when he was aged twenty-one, he witnessed the public execution of Erik Brahe (1722–1756), one of the main conspirators in the royal coup attempt, and Espenhorst and Persson have argued that this experience had a lasting impact on his political thought and activities, showing him how cruel an aristocratic constitutional reality could be. After this episode he remained consistently critical of aristocratic and democratic forms of government,⁸⁴ something that was in keeping with his choice of appendices to

⁷⁷ Schlözer, *Försök til en allmän historia om handel*, 235–236.

⁷⁸ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 43, 51; Mathias Persson, "Transferring Propaganda: Gustavian Politics in Two Göttingen Journals," in: *Eighteenth-Century Periodicals as Agents of Change: Perspectives on Northern Enlightenment*, ed. Ellen Krefting, Aina Nøding and Mona Ringvej (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 93–109: 109; Böning, "Vom Umgang mit Zeitungen," 141.

⁷⁹ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 43, 51; Mathias Persson, "Transferring Propaganda," 109.

⁸⁰ Espenhorst, "Der 'mobile' Europäer," 199; Wolfgang Burgdorf, "Schlözers Vorstellungen von der Verfassung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation," in *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Martin Espenhorst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 111–129: 112.

⁸¹ Merio Scattola, "Schlözer und die Staatswissenschaften des 18. Jahrhunderts," in *August Ludwig (von) Schlözer in Europa*, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Martin Espenhorst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 87–110; David F. Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 44.

⁸² Wolfgang Burgdorf, "Schlözers Vorstellungen," 112; Böning, "Vom Umgang mit Zeitungen," 141; Martin Espenhorst, "Der 'mobile' Europäer," 199.

⁸³ Burgdorf, "Schlözers Vorstellungen von der Verfassung," 112.

⁸⁴ Peters, *Altes Reich und Europa*, 43, 51; Mathias Persson, "Transferring Propaganda: Gustavian Politics in Two Göttingen Journals," in *Eighteenth-Century Periodicals as Agents of Change: Perspectives on Northern Enlightenment*, ed. Ellen Krefting, Aina Nøding and Mona Ringvej (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 93–109: 109.

the *General History of Trade*, as his choice of Bible passages testify to his early criticism of oligarchy and the misuse of aristocratic power.

Schlözer covered the political events of 1756 for *Altonaer Reichs-Post-Reiter*, and Holger Böning has argued that his reporting was neutral.⁸⁵ They have cast doubt on interpretations of Schlözer as an anti-aristocratic commentator of Swedish political events and pointed out that there is no direct evidence that he ever criticised the rule of the estates in Sweden. However, this observation is based on a misunderstanding, since in fact Schlözer did not oppose estate rule as a whole, but only rule by the Noble Estate. It was therefore possible for him to defend the Swedish constitution (1719/1720), while simultaneously criticising the dominant role of the nobility. In fact, Schlözer condemned the coup attempt on the basis that it undermined the constitution of the realm, or in other words did not approve of the actions of the royalists nor find Erik Brahe's actions defensible. Moreover, he believed that a kingdom should not be subject to the arbitrary will of a monarch, a view he developed in reaction to King Adolf Fredrick's attempts to expand his prerogatives on the grounds that he could not in all conscience ratify decisions of which he disapproved.⁸⁶ Schlözer clearly opposed the king's attempts to gain more power, since he considered living under arbitrary rule to be a state of unfreedom. He sided neither with the aristocratic Hat Party nor with the royalists, and in his political thought never went so far as to advocate overthrowing the existing regime.⁸⁷ Sweden was no exception. He did not question the constitution of the country, but rather its lived political reality. He told his son that his favourite pastime in Sweden was observing the political world in public houses,⁸⁸ and he was acutely aware of what was happening in Sweden politically.

In my opinion it was not only the execution of Erik Brahe that sowed the seeds of aversion to the aristocracy in Schlözer's political thought. Rather it was the overall experience in the circles he frequented while in Sweden. His personal contacts were closely associated with the Cap Party, which explains his dislike of the oligarchic and aristocratic rule of the competing Hat Party and his opposition to the rule of the Noble Estate. Schlözer's friend from Göttingen and from Uppsala, Peter Forsskål, argued that Sweden was turning into an aristocratic oligarchy in the hands of the Hats. Johan Ihre, Schlözer's supervisor, was a known Cap who had had troubles with the Hats and who in 1750 was fined a year's salary for having supervised dissertations expressing dangerous opinions, that is to say theories that did not correspond to the Hats' interpretation of freedom and the constitution.⁸⁹

Schlözer's experience of the Swedish Hat Party made him an eager opponent of all aristocratic regimes. Publishing a critique of oligarchy as an appendix to the *General History of Trade* was a way of denouncing the political situation in Sweden, which his Swedish academic mentor also decried, as did Schlözer's other major academic influence, Linnaeus.⁹⁰ Furthermore, as Schlözer argued in the *General History of Trade*, an unlimited government was detrimental to trade and contrary to the

⁸⁵ Böning, "Vom Umgang mit Zeitungen," 141, footnote. Friederike Fürst had already suggested that Schlözer's anti-aristocratic sentiment had its roots in Sweden, Friederike Fürst, *August Ludwig von Schlözer, ein deutscher Aufklärer im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1928), 28.

⁸⁶ Böning, "Vom Umgang mit Zeitungen," 143; Charlotta Wolff, *Noble Conceptions of Politics in Eighteenth Century Sweden (ca 1740–1790)* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2008), 60.

⁸⁷ Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination*, 44. An exemplary case is Schlözer's view on the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783). In a debate with Jakob Mauvillon (1743–1794) Schlözer argued with Isaac Pinto (1717–1787) that the English government had rightfully raised taxes in the colonies, and he believed that the revolution was unjustified. Schlözer had adopted the views of the English government, while Mauvillon demanded the freedom and independence of the colonies. Peters, *Altes Reich*, 286. See also Jacob Mauvillon, "Anmerkungen über der Herren Pinto und Schlözer sophistische Vertheidigung des englischen Ministeriums gegen die Kolonien, im ersten Heft des neuen Schlözerschen Briefwechsel," in Jacob Mauvillon: *Sammlung von Aufsätzen über Gegenstände aus der Staatskunst, Staatswirthschaft und neuesten Geschichte* (Leipzig: Erster Theil, 1776), 141–188.

⁸⁸ Christian von Schlözer, *Schlözers öffentliches und Privatleben*, vol. 1, 40.

⁸⁹ Ere Nokkala, Peter Forsskål: "The Freedom to Write and the Principle of Public Access to Official Documents," in *Press Freedom 250 Years: Freedom of the Press and Public Access to Official Documents in Sweden and Finland*, ed. Kristina Örtengren and Bertil Wennberg (Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag, 2017), 61–76: 69.

⁹⁰ Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, 104

progress of civilisation. With his appendices Schlözer sought to situate the present in his historical account in order to discredit the prevailing political circumstances. It is fair to say that he did so quite subtly, but this was necessary if he did not wish to jeopardise his chance of obtaining the censor's *imprimatur* to publish his first book, particularly since the censor, Niclas Oelreich (1699–1770), was known for his close connections to the Hat Party.⁹¹

Conclusion

August Ludwig Schlözer wrote a panegyric of trade as a *primus* motor of civilisation in the middle of the Seven Years' War, which was basically caused by a clash of commercial interests. Although he recognised the benefits to civilisation and progress that trade brought, he was also aware of its potential dangers. The rising influence of commerce in politics was evident to him, and in many ways his *General History of Trade* was his answer to the question of how Sweden could best survive in the a world of increasing international commercial competitiveness. His political and societal thought is best characterised by his search for unity through connection. For him, trade bound people together, and it led to peace. Indeed, it was the concept of peaceful trade that was often used in the Enlightenment as an answer to the bellicosity of the absolute rulers. Thus Schlözer was not in favour of Linnaean autarchy as a future prospect for Sweden. Instead, echoing Swedish cameralists such as Berch and German late cameralists such as Justi, he emphasised the importance of the domestic development of the country in terms of population and cultivation. He was not ready to cut commercial ties with other nations because they were an important source of wealth and the motor of the progress of civilisation towards the unity of humankind. However, Schlözer's focus was on internal development, and not on conquests. As we can see from his case, ideas did not travel as blocks, but discourses circulated via the literary genre of histories of trade which were rather porous. And perhaps more importantly, people as well as ideas, travelled, as indeed did Schlözer. His economic and political thought was informed by his transnational networks, by the political and academic milieux he frequented, and by his personal experiences and aims. His history of trade understood as a history of civilisation in Sweden was inspired by French, German and Swedish forerunners and written in the entangled contexts of Göttingen and Uppsala. Schlözer wrote a book that promoted a cameralism influenced by natural history and in favour of foreign trade.

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⁹¹ Marie-Christine Skuncke, "Press Freedom in the Riksdag 1760–1762 and 1765–1766," in Örtenhed and Wennberg, *Press Freedom 250 Years*, 109–144: 111–112.