

“Gateway to the World”:
Hamburg and the Global German Empire, 1881-1914

by

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Class of 2018

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors from the College of Letters
and with Departmental Honors in History and German Studies

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Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the kindness, patience, and brilliance of far more people than I could ever name here. If at any time in the last year I spoke to you about Hamburg, then know that you have my thanks. I am especially grateful for my family's support, even as this project interrupted several holidays. I could not have finished this project without it.

A senior thesis really begins during the summer after junior year, and because of that I must thank my coworkers and supervisors at the National Endowment for the Humanities. Their enthusiasm for my work helped me get underway. My Smith in Hamburg professors and instructors were similarly important even before the project's early stages. Jutta Gutzeit traveled across the Atlantic to hear me talk about my thesis, and she continues to be a truly invaluable contact in Hamburg. I must also thank the staff at the *Staatsarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* for its assistance and for tolerating my poor pronunciation of my own German last name.

Turning to Wesleyan, I would first like to thank my College of Letters professors and cohort. More than anything else, that intellectual community is the reason I will remember Wesleyan fondly. In my case, having three departments has meant having three times the encouragement. I would therefore also like to thank my friends and teachers in the History and German Studies Departments. The latter provided crucial financial support, through the Helmut and Erika Reihlen Fund, for archival research in Hamburg. Finally, to many I am known for my identifiable gait, but to my housemates—Mattzky, Gabriel, and Joel—I am known for my loud feet on the stairs at five in the morning. Thank you, gentlemen.

There are two duos whose curiosity, effort, and insight have defined both this thesis and, in fact, my entire Wesleyan experience. Erik Grimmer-Solem was the first professor I met at Wesleyan and my first advisor. His suggestion that I take German was one of many key pieces of advice during my time here. He generously shared with me a manuscript chapter from his upcoming book, which provided inspiration for chapter two of this thesis. Iris Bork-Goldfield taught that very first German class and has been a constant guide ever since. She is the reason I studied abroad in Hamburg, and any love I have for the city is because of her. I must note my respect for her patience with being the non-specialist in our tutorials, a role that I am certain was difficult to perform. Any errors contained within this work are entirely my own, but any successes belong in large part to these two.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the second duo: Jack Donald Guenther and the late Margaret Ada Beltz Guenther, my paternal grandparents. Any talent I have owes itself to their genes, any work ethic to their example. The gratitude I have for their presence in my life is beyond words, be they in English or in German, which both spoke. Since I entered St. Albans in the C Form, these two have exerted the single largest influence over my academic life. Thank you.

A Note on Languages

Much of the original research for this project was conducted in German, which presents certain problems when writing for a general audience. All quotations have been translated into English—by myself unless otherwise indicated. The original German quotations can be found in corresponding footnotes. Wherever possible, terms have been translated into English; for example, “Foreign Office” instead of the German “*Auswärtiges Amt*.” German is notorious among English speakers for its flexibility with compound nouns, and in some cases an English translation would be unwieldy or would not capture the meaning of the original. This is the case for several of my more commonly used terms, including:

Kolonialpolitik: “colonial policy” or “colonialism,”

Primat der Innenpolitik: “the primacy of domestic politics,”

Sammlungspolitik: “the politics of rallying together” or “coalition politics,”

Sonderweg: “special path,”

Welthandelsplatz: “place of world commerce,”

Weltpolitik: “world policy,” “world politics,” or sometimes even “imperialism,”

Weltwirtschaft: “world economy” or “economic globalization,”

Zollanschluss: “customs annexation.”

I ask that my readers indulge my insistence on keeping this handful of terms in German.

The names of persons have been kept in their original form, except where titular translations are possible. For example, “*Graf*” becomes “Count,” “*Freiherr*” becomes “Baron.” However, as is convention among historians of Germany, I maintain the title “*Kaiser*” for the German emperor. A number of the figures in this thesis gained new titles and assumed new positions over the period of time covered within. As best as possible, I have titled these figures after the fashion by which they would have been titled in the moment of time under discussion. Bernhard von Bülow in 1898, for example, is Foreign Secretary, not Chancellor; likewise, Tirpitz is Alfred Tirpitz until 1900, when he was ennobled and became Alfred von Tirpitz.

Place names have proven more difficult to negotiate, and I will admit a strong personal bias against using accepted English versions of German place names. Instead of a general rule, I have simply tried my best to make it abundantly clear what towns, countries, and cities are under discussion. Throughout this thesis, footnotes will offer clarification wherever I have deemed it necessary.

Introduction: Making the German Empire Global

Nineteenth-century visitors to the north German city of Hamburg could not help but notice its global orientation. “I can find next to nothing that is German in Hamburg, apart from the language,” commented one Bavarian diplomat in 1845. “There can be no question of any German blood here.” Hamburgers, it was said, “knew every town on the Mississippi” and had been “twenty times in London,” but never once to Berlin.¹ The city’s residents, too, were proud to live in a *Welthandelsplatz*—a “place of world trade.”² From its perch on the Elbe river about 60 miles from the North Sea, Hamburg was the chief port city among the German states well before German political unification in 1871. After 1871, Hamburg’s role in the development of the German Empire produced its most famous nickname: the city was Imperial Germany’s “Gateway to the World.”³ Hamburg made the German Empire global.

It is almost a requirement that contemporary global histories begin with the observation that globalization is “the leitmotif of our age.”⁴ That this claim, or one much like it, appears so often betrays two qualities of global history. First, global histories recount the development of what feels like the most important feature of

¹ Quoted in Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years* (London: Penguin Books, 2005 [1987]), 4.

² Sta HH 314-6 A2, Verein für Handelsfreiheit, “Jahresbericht des Vorstandes,” (1864): 9-10.

³ I first encountered this phrase (or rather, a variant of it) through a *Ringvorlesung* lecture series held during summer semester 2016 at the University of Hamburg, “Hamburg: Deutschlands Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Über den Umgang mit einem schwierigen Erbe.” <https://www.kolonialismus.uni-hamburg.de/ringvorlesung-hamburg-deutschlands-tor-zur-kolonialen-welt-ueber-den-umgang-mit-einem-schwierigen-erbe-20-4-2016-13-7-2016/>.

⁴ Cornelius Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization*, trans. Alex Skinner (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 1.

twenty-first century life, globalism.⁵ Second, despite this sense of importance, global history is not new. The last twenty years have seen an explosion of global histories.⁶ In this case, lack of novelty is a mark of success. There is an infinity of ways to do global history, but the most successful seem to fall into one of two categories.

First, there are those like Fernand Braudel's *Civilization and Capitalism*, William H. McNeill's *The Rise of the West*, or more recently John Darwin's *After Tamerlane* and Robert Allen's *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*, which rally massive global sources to answer—in some fashion or another—the question at the root of almost all global history: how did the process of globalization create the state of globalization in which we live, and what does that have to do with the so-called “rise of the West”? Included in this group are global histories like Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* and Prasanna Parthasarathi's *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not* that also come to bear on what is called the divergence debate, the question of how in the span of two or three centuries Europe's quality of life, economic power, and military prowess so surpassed that of the rest of the world, especially China.

Second, there are those global histories that hinge upon the fact that global history is by definition transnational. These include studies of diaspora and human mobility, but also of the movement of goods and ideas around the world. The best

⁵ This is an oddness of “globalization” that John Darwin points out: the word really should describe a process but in typical usage refers to a state. See John Darwin, *After Tamerlane* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008) 6-8.

⁶ Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice around the World* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1.

example of the latter is Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, which manages also to ask the overarching questions addressed by the first group.⁷

In spite of all this precedent for doing global history, Lynn Hunt observed in her 2014 defense of the approach that “historians have only recently discovered globalization.”⁸ That is to say, historians have only recently realized that they can tell national histories from a global perspective. This is where global histories often turn to investigating nineteenth century empires. Eric Hobsbawm famously designated the period between 1875 and 1914 the “Age of Empire,” but he may well have called it “the first age of globalization.”⁹ Revolutions in technology and communication, including steamships, underwater telegraph cables, and transcontinental railways, made the world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries truly global, even by modern standards. The Age of Empire affords the opportunity to tell the history of one state (or nation-state) through its global interactions.

Such studies are becoming increasingly common. Two examples are the very recent *American Empire*, by A.G. Hopkins, and *The Challenges of Globalization*, by Cornelius Torp. Imperial history of this sort takes one empire and places its history within a global context. As Torp's book argues, “German tariff and trade policy before the First World War [was] part of an *international* response to a wave of global economic integration that was increasing at a furious pace.”¹⁰ Such histories—whether they focus on true empires or not—answer Hunt's call for global approaches

⁷ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

⁸ Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2014), 44.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London: Weidefeld and Nicholson, 1987).

¹⁰ Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization*, 3.

that fill the void left by the decline of national political history. They show how global, international interactions permeated imperial and national borders.

This thesis lies within that general vein of scholarship, but it also departs from both traditional global histories and national or imperial histories from a global perspective. It achieves that departure by focusing on the small community of merchant and shipping firms that operated out of the German port city of Hamburg. This obviously constitutes German history from a global perspective, and the ultimate conclusions will come to bear on the history of the German Empire. That the focus is on private individuals and firms, however, is the key difference.

This thesis advances one unified argument: the overseas commerce of Hamburg's merchant and shipping firms guided Imperial Germany's overseas policies from 1881 to 1914. Within this argument, a great deal of emphasis is placed on imperfect continuity. Every chapter is the story of how Hamburg's overseas commerce played such a role without being the single determining factor—and, in fact, how Hamburg's objectives never aligned exactly with Germany's. This is in part because the real past could never have been as neat as our explanations of it need to be. From an interpretive standpoint, it is also because this thesis holds that the tension between private expansion and political expansion is a fundamental quality of the process of globalization and a definitional quality of modern empires. In the late nineteenth century, this tension was of crucial importance for one European empire more than any other: the global German Empire.

In the historiography of the German Empire, the need for a global approach is especially pressing. The German Empire officially existed from 1871 to 1918; it first claimed colonial possessions in the years between 1883 and 1885. Those possessions, which included parts of modern-day Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, China, and Samoa, were limited and unprofitable by contemporary imperial standards. Due in small part to the lateness of Germany's colonial empire and in large part to the shocking magnitude of National Socialism, the Holocaust, and the Second World War, the historiography of the German Empire often becomes a debate over whether Germany's internal political and social structure from 1871 onwards somehow predicted or inexorably led to the genocidal Nazi regime.

Our scope does not extend beyond November 1918, but the *Sonderweg* (special path) thesis that the German Empire led directly and causally to the Nazi regime retains relevance, in that this *Sonderweg* has drawn extensively on the history of the German Empire. Specifically, the *Sonderweg* thesis intersects with an historiographical approach to understanding Germany between 1871 and 1918 called *Primat der Innenpolitik* (the primacy of domestic politics). *Primat der Innenpolitik* was most significantly deployed during the 1960s by a professor at the University of Hamburg, Fritz Fischer. Fischer's *Sonderweg* linked German aggression before and during World War One with its 1939 counterpart, and he argued that understanding the former should be rooted in Germany's domestic political situation before 1914.¹¹

¹¹ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914-18* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2004 [1961]). See, for example, 10-11: "Darüber hinaus hat das Buch *Griff nach der Weltmacht*... die Frage unausweichlich gemacht... ob nicht vom Kaiserlichen Deutschland in den gesellschaftlichen Formationen und den ideellen Traditionen Linien oder doch Elemente der Kontinuität festzustellen hin zum "Dritten Reich," die erst begreiflich machen, wieso diese möglich war und kein "Betriebsunfall" der Geschichte, wie so viele es sehen wollen." Idem. *War*

As the name suggests, *Primat der Innenpolitik* holds that the German Empire's foreign policy and overseas activities are best explained by their effect—or intended effect—on the social and political structures of the fatherland. Thus, the German Empire's forays into the world become complicated efforts to stabilize a backward political system that was under threat from both the national-liberal bourgeoisie and the Social Democratic proletariat. Those forays included rivalries with other empires, overseas expansion, and what Fischer identified as Germany's war program. Advocates of the *Primat der Innenpolitik* approach, including Fritz Fischer, are chiefly indebted to the interwar historian Eckart Kehr.¹²

In a study of Germany's naval armament between 1894 and 1901, Kehr argued that the fledgling German naval program stemmed in the first instance from the desire to establish a conservative coalition that would ward off unwanted domestic political change. The catch-all term for these efforts is *Sammlungspolitik* (the politics or rallying together). Originally, this term “is to be identified with the political position developed by the Prussian Finance Minister, Johannes von Miquel, in the summer of 1897.”¹³ Miquel and his associates planned a renewal of the Bismarckian compromise between agriculture and industry that would potentially stave off any democratic challenge to the Prussian-German monarchy. In Kehr's words, “for industry the fleet, *Weltpolitik* and expansion; for the agrarians the tariffs and the upholding of the social supremacy of the Conservatives; and as a

of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914, trans. Marian Jackson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975).

¹² Eckart Kehr, *Battleship Building and Party Politics: A Cross-Section of the Political, Social and Ideological Preconditions of German Imperialism*, ed. Pauline R. Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), see the Introduction, especially xxxvii – xxxviii, and 464-7.

¹³ Geoff Eley, *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 111.

consequence of this social and economic compromise, for the Center [Party] the political hegemony.”¹⁴

Several decades later, Hans-Ulrich Wehler offered perhaps the most concise summary Kehr’s formula: “The navy was to help undermine the political ambitions of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, thus stabilizing the existing power structure.” The fleet would be a distraction for the nationalist middle classes; it would make money for the industrialists; and it would retain power for the agrarians.¹⁵ Wehler’s summary owes much to the work of Volker Berghahn, with whom Wehler closely collaborated. Berghahn brought Kehr’s original claims to their apogee by adopting the Sammlungspolitik approach and crediting its inception not to Miquel, but to the architect of naval armament, Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. In Berghahn’s analysis, naval armament became not a component part of Miquel’s plan, but instead the centerpiece of an effort to build an even larger coalition in defense of the authoritarian status quo.¹⁶ Indeed, Berghahn argued “that in this case domestic and foreign policy were not simply closely entangled, but rather that Tirpitz wanted to build a fleet, which would hinder a parliamentarization and democratization of Prussian-German constitutionalism.”¹⁷ Sammlungspolitik was thus applied to

¹⁴ Quoted in Eley, *From Unification to Nazism*, 114.

¹⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Leamington Spa, Hamburg, and New York: Berg Publishers, 1985), 164-5.

¹⁶ Volker Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan: Genesis und Verfall einer innenpolitischen Krisenstrategie unter Wilhelm II* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1971), 151 see footnote 162: “Dem Preußischen Finanzminister (Miquel) ist in der bisherigen Literatur nämlich allzuviel Kredit für die Sammlung von 1897-98 zugesprochen worden... Hingegen war es, wie wir sahen, der Vorteil von der Tirpitz und Bülow propagierten Sammlung, die sich (neben der Revolutionsfurcht) der Flotte als positivem Integrationsfaktor bediente.” Cf. Eley, *From Unification to Nazism*, 117-119.

¹⁷ Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, 13; 15-16; 592-3. “Es wird sich dabei zeigen, dass Innen- und Außenpolitik in diesem Falle nicht nur eng miteinander verwoben sind, sondern dass Tirpitz eine Flotte bauen wollte, die eine Parlamentarisierung und Demokratisierung des preußisch-deutsch Konstitutionalismus verhindern würde” (13). Berghahn also assigns to the fleet a distinctly anti-English character, which will be discussed further below.

encompass—and indeed to focus on—the period of German naval armament during the first two Navy Laws and the inauguration of the Empire’s *Weltpolitik* (world policy).

Jonathan Steinberg has proposed one of the most coherent explanations of German naval armament, which differs from Berghahn and Wehler by taking into account the importance of foreign policy and Germany’s place in the world. Four decades on, Steinberg’s study of the relationship between the battle fleet, Germany’s desire for improved global standing, and Britain’s reaction to the both appears endowed with especial foresight. In opposition to the *Sammlungspolitik* theory, Steinberg argued that “the Navy was middle class, liberal, nationalist and commercial”—an argument validated by the present state of research.¹⁸ In this same vein, in 1972 Ekkehard Böhm published an innovative study of the relationship between German naval armament and Hanseatic—but mostly Hamburg-based—commerce. Böhm convincingly argued for the link between Hanseatic commercial interests in the world and the new naval policy taking shape in Berlin.¹⁹ Recent scholarship by Patrick Kelly, which has shown that Tirpitz planned the fleet neither to stabilize a backward Prussian-German monarchical system nor to be used aggressively against Britain, puts Böhm’s work into an even more favorable light.²⁰

This thesis draws heavily from Böhm’s insights. For Germany especially, which was an Empire with a weak federal state structure that had only unified

¹⁸ Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday’s Deterrent: Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 28.

¹⁹ Ekkehard Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau: Hanseatische Kaufmannschaft und deutsche Seerüstung, 1879-1914* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1972).

²⁰ Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2011).

politically in 1871, looking to the metropole—and within the metropole only to Berlin—cannot give a full picture of imperial policies and activities. In effect, this is what *Primat der Innenpolitik*, and Wehler’s notion of “social imperialism,” does.²¹ The focus on *Sammlungspolitik* and domestic system-stabilization overlooks the importance of Germans abroad and Germany’s place in the world. Surpassing these limits requires a reinterpretation of the German Empire, one that emphasizes these two overlooked factors. This reinterpretation must begin with the development of Germany’s overseas commerce during the Wilhelmine period and the city that pioneered that development, Hamburg.

As a free city-state, Hamburg had played home to global commercial networks since the end of the eighteenth century. Upon their political unification and economic integration with Germany, Hamburg and its leading merchants and firms attempted to sway imperial policy in the favor of these overseas interests. Berlin, though never fully aligned with Hanseatic desires, was typically keen to oblige. Germany’s acquisition of colonial possessions in the 1880s followed from this new relationship. There followed also a conscious *Weltpolitik* that was demonstrably concerned, however abstractly, with Germany’s place as a world empire. Indeed, to turn away from the *Primat der Innenpolitik* and understand the German Empire we must turn to Hamburg—and in so doing, turn to look globally.

With Cornelius Torp, another historian who has made this turn in German history is Sebastian Conrad. There is a theoretical sophistication to Conrad’s work,

²¹ Wehler *The German Empire*, 173.

which leads to his chief insight, captured in the aphorism, ‘globalization made the nation.’²² However, Conrad’s actual analysis suffers from its overreliance on the idea of the nation and the discourses surrounding it. By focusing on national ideas proliferated after 1871, Conrad’s argument forgets the long history of real economic globalization led by Hamburg’s merchant community. Thus, though his argument is convincing, Conrad does not bring it to bear on Germany’s economic and political history. In part, this is because Conrad aims to escape from an approach he considers overly focused on economic globalization. As we will see, however, the overseas commerce emanating from Hamburg during the long nineteenth century should not be conflated with abstract global capitalism. A study of the firms that pioneered this commerce may not tell us how globalization made the idea of the nation, but it does allow concrete conclusions about how the realities of economic globalization helped shape political decision-making. It also allows us to address the similarities between Germany and the so-called “liberal empires” by showing that Germany’s imperial policies after 1881 existed neither simply to “stabilize” a conservative domestic political system nor simply to bait Great Britain into war.²³ Globalization is still taken as crucial to internal development, but this thesis will seek to show that link in a real, material way—in the relationship between Hamburg’s global commerce and Germany’s political decisions after 1881.

²² Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, trans. Sorcha O’Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²³ See here Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), which fleshes out Steinberg’s earlier point that the separation of liberalism and imperialism as objects of analysis is very much a product of the post-World War II West, in which the prevailing political teleology regards imperialism as a dead end that had to give way to liberal democracy. Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday’s Deterrent*, 36: “For the British or American historian, it is hardly pleasant to recognize that reaction and aggression are not always quite as synonymous as liberals in the West like to imagine.”

One reason historians have shied away from a global approach to German political and economic history is Germany's fairly complex, often ambiguous, sometimes contradictory, typically ill-defined *Weltpolitik*. Earlier historians committed to telling Germany's history in the world were known to dismiss *Weltpolitik* as something purely ideological or imaginary.²⁴ Another argument is that *Weltpolitik* is not a concept useful to the historian.²⁵ *Weltpolitik* was not the only overseas policy in which the German Empire engaged; there was also colonial policy (*Kolonialpolitik*) and traditional foreign diplomacy. The history of all three can be illuminated by the history of a single city: the *Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg). When Germany began to pursue a world empire, what it found was a pre-existing global commercial network based in Hamburg. That network—and the private firms behind it—guided Germany's imperial policies in the world. It guided them through colonial acquisition, naval armament, early *Weltpolitik*, and even after 1907, when *Weltpolitik* had clearly failed.

Historians have long recognized Hamburg's uniqueness. Largely, however, historiographical concern with Hamburg has grown up under the influence of *Primat der Innenpolitik* and *Sonderweg*. Percy Ernst Schramm first argued that Hamburg was a “special case in the history of Germany.”²⁶ Being a special case on the *Sonderweg*

²⁴ Holger Herwig tends toward this position, even as he catalogs the many real, material connections between Germany and Venezuela. Even if, as Herwig claims, “Neither ‘formal’ nor ‘informal’ empire in South America was within the realm of the attainable,” both aspirations still rested on the changing economic circumstances precipitated by overseas commerce and the development of *Weltwirtschaft*. See Holger Herwig, *Germany's Vision of Empire in Venezuela, 1871-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 240.

²⁵ See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 151.

²⁶ Percy Ernst Schramm, *Hamburg. Ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands* (Hamburg: Christians Verlag, 1964).

supposedly made Hamburg normal in terms of its internal politics and social structure. Thusly did the historiography of Hamburg initially explain the city's history: It was a free republic and had been for centuries; its ruling class comprised a collection of bourgeois merchant elites whose close interfamilial relations resulted in a firm grip on political power; its citizens identified more with their English neighbors across the North Sea than with their fellow Germans.²⁷ For historians, Hamburg existed to demonstrate the backwardness that obtained across the rest of Germany.

Against this interpretation, Richard J. Evans published a masterful study of Hamburg that is nominally about cholera but is clearly intended to register on the Sonderweg thesis and Hamburg's place in it. Evans adopts the typical account of Hamburg's uniqueness and pivots to argue that Hamburg's liberal, bourgeois, republican system of government did not make the city fundamentally less authoritarian than the rest of Germany, simply differently so. Evans thus refutes earlier arguments that Hamburg's anglophilia and liberalism made it a "special case" on the "special path," and therefore "normal." Following closely on Evans' footsteps, a number of studies have been published that investigate the triangular relationship among Hamburg's liberalism, its domestic politics, and its commercial middle class.²⁸ Like this thesis, Niall Ferguson's study of Hamburg also argues that the city's commercial-financial prominence made it a special case, but only as a device through

²⁷ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 4.

²⁸ See, for example, Mary Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers: Hamburg, 1712-1830* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Jennifer Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-siècle Hamburg* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

which to discuss German monetary policy after 1897 and through the founding of the Weimar Republic.²⁹

Though of clear value to historians, these studies do not sufficiently address the real conditions that made Hamburg demonstrably “special.” That is, the city’s overseas commercial and shipping interests. Along with Ekkehard Böhm, Helmut Washausen has also foregrounded Hamburg’s overseas commercial interests, showing how Hamburg’s private footholds in Africa and the South Pacific directly influenced Germany’s rush to acquire colonies in the 1880s and ‘90s. Böhm’s and Washausen’s work shows unequivocally the importance of Hamburg’s overseas commerce to German imperial policy from 1879 to 1902.³⁰

This thesis draws from Washausen and Böhm, while expanding their insights in two ways. First, this thesis couples Washausen’s work on German colonial acquisition with Böhm’s on naval armament to show a larger connection between Hamburg’s overseas commerce and Germany’s imperial policy. Second, this thesis takes more seriously the importance of Weltpolitik and Germany’s standing as a world empire. This means showing the link not only between Hanseatic commerce and concrete naval armament, but also between Hanseatic commerce and the complex of desires and plans that were to catapult Germany into global importance. To emphasize this link, this thesis moves chronologically beyond both Washausen and Böhm to show how Hamburg’s overseas commerce interacted with Germany’s imperial policies even after the first two navy laws and toward World War One.

²⁹ Niall Ferguson, *Paper and Iron: Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897-1927* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁰ Helmut Washausen, *Hamburg und die Kolonialpolitik des Deutschen Reiches* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1968); Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*.

This thesis argues that the overseas economic activity developed and proliferated by Hamburg's merchants, banking houses, and shipping firms guided Germany's overseas policy from 1881 to 1914. Here, "overseas policy" is taken to mean colonial policy, imperial policy, foreign policy, and Weltpolitik. In other words, Germany's economic engagement with the world helped determine its political interactions with colonies, non-European states, and rival empires. All the while, there obtained an imperfect continuity between Hamburg's global commerce and Germany's overseas policy. The former was one of many decisive factors, and the political consequences it produced were often distortions of what Hamburg's commercial community desired.

The argument proceeds in three thematically related, and basically chronological, chapters. Chapter one argues that Hamburg's status as a Welthandelsplatz persisted across incorporation into the German Empire's Customs Union (*Zollanschluss*) and shows how Hamburg's closer ties to Berlin influenced Germany's acquisition of colonial possessions in the 1880s. Here, I ground my work in the public debates over incorporation that animated Hamburg around 1881. Contrary to the historians who have examined Hamburg for its unique domestic politics, I show that what mattered most to contemporary Hamburgers was the city's commercial success. When a closer relationship to the German hinterland, better capital markets, and Germany's new colonial policy increased that success, Hamburg's merchants and firms quickly fell into line. That did not mean, however, that the union between Hamburg's overseas commerce and German colonial acquisition was a perfect one.

Chapter two moves beyond the immediate aftermath of *Zollanschluss* to trace Hamburg's role in the development of late-nineteenth century economic globalization (*Weltwirtschaft*). Using the city Senate's debates through the 1890s, I show the new concerns inherent in this increasingly global economic activity. Thereafter, I turn to show how the development of *Weltwirtschaft* became an argument in favor of *Weltpolitik*, and especially naval armament. *Weltwirtschaft*—and the specific requests made by Hamburg's merchants for a more robust German navy—was rallied to the cause of increasing Germany's position within the global imperial balance of power, thus leaving many of those specific requests behind.

Finally, Chapter three looks at the international success of Hamburg's largest shipping firm, the *Hamburg-Amerikanische-Packetfahrt-Aktien-Gesellschaft* (HAPAG, or Hamburg-America Line). The first half of the chapter is a business history of the HAPAG that demonstrates just how self-consciously global the firm had become. It does so using HAPAG publications for its North American clientele, along with the plans agreed between the firm and the city of Hamburg for the former's 1904 emigrant halls (*Auswandererhallen*). Thereafter, the chapter uses German Foreign Office letters concerning the Berlin-Baghdad Railway to show how deeply economic expansion and imperial expansion had become entangled. As opportunities for the latter grew more difficult following the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, and the fate of the Railway looked in question, the German Foreign Office considered recruiting the Hamburg-America Line as a means by which to expand Germany's sphere of influence in the Middle East.

Taken together, these chapters show how Hamburg-based overseas commerce guided the overseas policies of the German Empire from its early colonial acquisition, its naval armament and Weltpolitik, and its diplomatic maneuverings after traditional imperial expansion became geopolitically unviable. This is not to say that there was perfect overlap between Hamburg's commercial interests and the political interests of the German Empire. Nevertheless, to understand the latter one must look to the former. Only by studying Hamburg can we see how global concerns shaped the development of the global German Empire.

1: *Welthandelsplatz*

On January 3, 1881, the official publication of the Hamburg Stock Exchange, the *Börsenhalle Tagesbericht*, charged one of its reporters with a peculiar assignment. He was to take an evening stroll through Hamburg, stopping at as many of the 36 meetings of the Zollanschluss Party as possible. According to its detractors, the Zollanschluss Party had been “agitating” since at least December, and in this particular instance the party planned its 36 meetings, which would be held at different locations across the city, to encourage public debate over the question, as they put it, “*Zollanschluss oder Freihafen?*” That is, should Hamburg join the Customs Union of the German Empire or remain a free port?³¹

The Zollanschluss Party, as its name suggests, favored incorporation, or *Anschluss*. Their meetings on the night of January 3, however, were advertised as affairs in which the public could debate not only the central question of incorporation, but also subsidiary questions about the relationship between Hamburg’s merchants and the rest of its people, the effect Zollanschluss would have on business with colonies, and the autonomy of this North German city on the Elbe. The next day, January 4, our *Börsenhalle Tagesbericht* reporter had little to say about the debates themselves. Rather, his article alleged that the poorly attended meetings attempted to distort the reality of public opinion in Hamburg, and he warned that this distortion might make its way to Berlin. “Never,” read the article, “had so laughable a comedy played” in Hamburg.³²

³¹ Staatsarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg (Sta HH) 314-6 A 10, *Börsenhalle Tagesbericht* January 3, 1881.

³² *Ibid.*, *Börsenhalle Tagesbericht* January 4, 1881. “Nun eine lächerliche Cömodie ist wohl noch niemals gespielt worden.”

An investigation into Hamburg's nineteenth century commercial connections must begin with the Hamburger Zollanschluss. Helmut Washausen has called the Zollanschluss the most significant caesura in the history of the city, and Richard Evans also emphasizes the existential challenge that incorporation into the German Imperial Customs Union appeared to pose to Hamburg's merchant elites and their economic way of life.³³ Certainly, a number of the questions central to Hamburg's identity and existence found themselves bundled into the topic of debate that cold January night, and more than a few Hamburgers perceived "*Zollanschluss oder Freihafen*" as a question of life or death.³⁴

Hamburg's global commercial networks made the city a "special case," and they continued to do so after Unification and incorporation in the German Empire. Important changes certainly occurred, especially after the Zollanschluss, but the city's role as a Welthandelsplatz remained—and even grew—after 1888. It was this question of Welthandelsplatz, more than the question of political autonomy or cultural uniqueness, that troubled contemporary Hamburgers. The latter were at best ancillary concerns, both of which lived under the free trade umbrella. Indeed, insofar as political autonomy mattered to those who opposed the Zollanschluss, it did so as the primary guarantor of Hamburg's free trade practices. The same can be said for cultural uniqueness, which when argued boiled down to a unique political culture that encouraged free trade.

After the Hamburger Zollanschluss, structural changes in the city and in its interactions with the rest of Germany created improved conditions for global

³³ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 4-12; Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*.

³⁴ Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*, 22-25.

commerce. National and imperial relations began to assume new dynamics, as Hamburg's overseas connections became a foundation for Germany's colonial policies (*Kolonialpolitik*), but that did not disrupt the continuity of Hamburg's role as a Welthandelsplatz. Emphasizing this continuity allows a break with the previous historiography of Hamburg, one that focuses on the real interactions and exchanges that made Hamburg "special." It also situates the history of Hamburg within the history of the global German Empire. Hamburg's global commerce mattered most to those merchants and politicians that opposed the Hamburger Zollanschluss; that commerce, too, is what differentiated Hamburg from the rest of Germany. Zollanschluss did not, however, engulf Hamburg and dilute its past unique identity. Instead, it took up existing continuities and led to three decades of tremendous growth for Hamburg's trade. At the same time, Hamburg's merchants, firms, and banks came to form the vanguard of Germany's new Kolonialpolitik.

Business and Politics in Hamburg

The Napoleonic Wars brought the first modern infringement upon Hamburg's autonomy, and the city's anti-Zollanschluss factions often cited that experience in their arguments against incorporation. Although the regular threat of annexation lay to the east in Prussia, the city endured Danish, French, Spanish, and Russian occupations between 1801 and 1815.³⁵ The final French occupation was particularly stringent, but it played no more of a role than Napoleon's Continental System in disrupting Hamburg's way of life. Hamburg had long resisted close ties with any of

³⁵ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 3.

the European great powers, for the exact reason that they might restrict the city's trade—especially trade with Britain—as the Berlin and Milan decrees had done.³⁶

Although Hamburg's merchant bourgeoisie maintained a neutered degree of control, incorporation into the French Empire in 1811 placed the city under the *Code Napoléon* and a French Prefect.³⁷ The Continental System, however, most shackled the previously free city. By targeting Britain, Napoleon's trade war cut Hamburg off from its most reliable commercial partner. Britain's riposte—a blockade of the Elbe—did little to help Hamburg's situation. Three hundred ships fell out of use, and unemployment in the city steadily rose. Rioting in February 1813 signaled Hamburg's commercial nadir. A collection of patriots emerged to oppose French occupation, but Hamburg's economic elite remained largely complicit, hoping to preserve what order and property they could and to minimize negative effects on the city's economy.³⁸ The Continental System had severely constrained Hamburg's economic networks and prosperity, and the city's leading merchants responded by choosing those networks over unlikely attempts to recover political autonomy.

As such, after the successful Wars of Liberation Hamburg's response was not to hew toward Prussia or any other European power, but rather to turn to the city's 1712 constitution (*Hauptrezess*) and free trade commerce.³⁹ “What they wanted, was the freedom to run their own affairs.”⁴⁰ Political autonomy guaranteed that freedom,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Katherine Aaslestad, “Remembering and Forgetting: The Local and the Nation in Hamburg's Commemorations of the Wars of Liberation,” *Central European History* 38, no. 3 (2005): 384-416, here 389; Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 4.

³⁸ Aaslestad, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 389-91.

³⁹ On the changes to Hamburg after the Napoleon Wars and the shift toward laissez faire government see Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*.

⁴⁰ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 4; Aaslestad, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 394.

but it was the affairs that mattered. After the Wars of Liberation, Hamburg's political and economic elite happily returned to enjoying the principles and benefits of free trade.⁴¹

In keeping with the *Hauptrezess*, the two main organs of government in Hamburg were the Senate and the *Rat* (Council). The Senate wielded especial power and acted as the city's executive.⁴² This system changed in 1860, after the city endured its Great Fire of 1842, the Revolution of 1848, and the American economic downturn in 1857.⁴³ The *Rat* disappeared with the old constitution, and power became shared between the Senate and the new *Bürgerschaft* (Citizens' Assembly). Despite this reform and others to come, the Senate preserved a great deal of executive power, even as parliamentary representation grew stronger. It exercised that power with Hamburg's commercial standing in mind.

The substantive features of Hamburg's government—and especially its Senate—lay, however, in the “informal state structures” that surrounded it. These structures rested on the close personal and business relationships that developed among Hamburg's leading merchant families during the nineteenth century. These families grew oligarchical, as their scions regularly ascended to the directorships of Hamburg's great businesses or to the position of Senator.⁴⁴ Four related senators actually served together from 1876 to 1879, and in 1912 two-thirds of Hamburg's senators featured in Rudolf Martin's *Yearbook of Hanseatic Millionaires*.⁴⁵ Indeed,

⁴¹ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 4; Aaslestad, “Remembering and Forgetting,” 388.

⁴² Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 12.

⁴³ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 67.

⁴⁴ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 14. The comparison Evans draws with Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* is an obvious one that invariably rears its head in many histories of the city.

⁴⁵ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 14-15.

throughout the nineteenth century Hamburg's leading families and their deep entanglements represented a similar entanglement between commerce and politics.

After 1860, however, the new constitution required a certain number of lawyers to sit on the Senate, and only they could hold the body's two leading roles, President and *Burgomaster*.⁴⁶ The most successful of merchants also rarely left their day jobs, and when they did it was not to push through a long policy agenda.⁴⁷ And yet, the presence of these lawyers was not a counterweight to heavy mercantile interests. While the lawyers on the Senate did exercise much direct power, the merchant senators—connected as they were to Hamburg's commercial networks—far more strongly influenced the body's decisions and standing. Even the lawyers on the *Senat* regularly stemmed from one great merchant family or another.⁴⁸

“The government of Hamburg,” wrote senator Johann Georg Mönckeberg, “should reflect... the general point of view of the ordinary citizen, the standpoint of so-called common sense... and it reflects all this through the merchant senators.”⁴⁹ Whether this “common sense” actually emanated from ordinary denizens is arguable, but the merchant senators nonetheless considered themselves its guardians. Of course, in Hamburg's case, common sense meant free trade.⁵⁰ Ruling parties in the city, formal or informal, saw commerce as key to Hamburg's prosperity and often held that free trade was the guarantor of lucrative commerce. Especially after Parliament repealed the last of Britain's protectionist Navigation Acts in 1849, Hamburg's

⁴⁶ Ibid, 12. Evans uses the term “*Burgomaster*” instead of the more common “*Bürgermeister*,” and I will do the same. The former is much closer to the English “Lord Mayor” than to “Mayor,” which is the common translation of *Bürgermeister*. For a free city-state, this distinction matters.

⁴⁷ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 15-16. Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*.

⁴⁸ On law and the legal practice in Hamburg, see especially Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 18-22.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Ibid., 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15-17.

merchants leveraged their Anglophilia to enjoy the full benefits of Britain’s new “free trade imperialism.”⁵¹ As political autonomy and Hamburg’s brand of republicanism were in turn the guarantors of free trade, it followed that the Senate and *Bürgerschaft* should take so seriously the relationship between commerce and politics in the city.

Hamburg’s political system before the Zollanschluss is often key evidence in the argument that the city was a “special case” among German states. Autonomy and republicanism certainly set Hamburg apart, but what made Hamburg so special—what allowed autonomy and republicanism to become operational—was this close relationship between commerce and politics. Another way of putting this argument is to adopt Geoff Eley’s distinction between liberalism as a program by which the capitalist mode of production could become dominant and liberalism as a political movement consonant with bourgeois class consciousness. The former obtained in Hamburg during the nineteenth century, but the latter did not.⁵² Hamburg was ruled not by a class-conscious bourgeoisie, but by a corporative bourgeois elite.⁵³ This elite jealously guarded Hamburg’s franchise and oversaw a great deal of material inequality within the city.⁵⁴ Yet, it quite frequently claimed to have interests in near total alignment with the interests of the remainder of the city’s population. Those interests were free trade and the city’s place as a Welthandelsplatz. Understanding Hamburg’s social and political organization before the Zollanschluss requires an investigation into its overseas networks. Understanding its relationship with Imperial

⁵¹ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 33-45.

⁵² David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 75-80.

⁵³ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 48; 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 67. Lindemann, *Patriots and Paupers*, 3-12; Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity*, 12-38.

Germany after the Zollanschluss, therefore, requires not a narrative of political “Prussianization” or “feudalization,” but rather an investigation into how Hamburg’s overseas networks persisted and strengthened across the Zollanschluss.⁵⁵

Hamburg’s Overseas Commerce in the 19th Century

Hamburg emerged at the end of the eighteenth century as the main port among the German states. Though it did experience cyclical downturns, Hamburg’s commerce continued to grow during the first half of the century. Hamburg’s chief commercial partner was Britain. Its firms and merchants also traded with other empires’ colonial possessions, as well as in regions not yet formally claimed by European powers. From 1816 to 1860, tonnage in the city’s harbor increased fivefold. Being such an entrepôt, Hamburg had no choice but to rely on a host of factors outside the city’s control to guarantee its continued prosperity. These included economic downturns, American nativism, and any number of other threats to trade.⁵⁶ The city so strictly adhered to its liberal trade policies largely because of the diversity and vulnerability of these overseas connections. These merchants and firms were what Niall Ferguson has called the “foot-soldiers of free trade and informal imperialism.”⁵⁷ The nineteenth-century *Pax Britannica* allowed them to participate in a type of free trade imperialism that, for many whom it touched, was not free at all. Hamburg’s global connections made the city a Welthandelsplatz, and it was these

⁵⁵ Ibid., 78-80; Dolores Augustine, “Business Elites of Hamburg & Berlin,” *Central European History*, 24, no. 2 (1991): 132-146.

⁵⁶ Lamar Cecil, *Albert Ballin: Business & Politics in Imperial Germany, 1888-1918* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3-7.

⁵⁷ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 33-45.

connections—especially those with other empires—that were the object of such worry before the Hamburger Zollanschluss.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Hamburg merchants and planters were significant traders in coffee and other goods from Venezuela.⁵⁸ That trade grew during the nineteenth century, as Hanseatic businessmen developed a reputation for effectively assimilating into Latin American communities in order to open up new markets. In fact, in 1845 a full seventy percent of German firms with business in South America had Hanseatic roots, and Holger Herwig has argued that before 1880 “it would be more accurate... to speak of Hamburg’s trade with Venezuela,” than of Germany’s. In 1837, to counter treaties signed with Venezuela by both Britain and the United States, Hamburg negotiated its own trade agreement, after which total imports grew by 130 percent.⁵⁹

Connections in Brazil were similarly important and would become more so at the end of the century. Hamburg’s Colonial Society, for example, received support from the 1848 Frankfurt Parliament to request land concessions from the Brazilian government. This request followed an increase in both commerce and migration between Brazil and the German states.⁶⁰

Karl Sieveking supported close connections with Brazil, much as he also led a colonization project in the Chatham Islands in the South Pacific. In both cases, a primary aim was to direct emigration from the German states toward some type of Germanophone overseas settlement, and Sieveking actually proposed a German

⁵⁸ Herwig, *Germany’s Vision of Empire in Venezuela*, 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-24.

⁶⁰ Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*, 12-22.

colonial project under the aegis of the Hanseatic cities. Sieveking's efforts made him a favorite of early German colonial theorists, such as the economist Friedrich List. A recurring theme in the history of German colonial policy, in fact, is the frequency with which it followed early Hanseatic footholds. That Sieveking was a Hamburger is no coincidence. His proposal, however, met with much opposition from Hamburg's larger firms, whose business remained predicated on the free trade privileges it enjoyed.⁶¹

The Huguenot family firm Godeffroy was another that by the end of the eighteenth century had significant interests in Latin America, with branches in Havana, Montevideo, Venezuela, and the continent's Pacific Coast. The firm quickly spread into the South Sea. Based on the island of Samoa, Godeffroy effectively ruled several south Pacific archipelagos.⁶²

Part of that rule entailed sponsoring European geographers, or "*Überseeforscher*," who formed another type of global connection that emanated from Hamburg. Hamburg's two most famous *Überseeforscher* were Ludwig Friederichsen and Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, the latter of whom was an important colonial theorist after unification.⁶³ Adolph Woermann, co-founder of the Central Organization for Commercial Geography and German Interests Abroad (*Central-Verein für Handelsgeographie und deutsche Interessen im Ausland*), was another

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 55-57.

⁶³ Ibid., 12-22; 35.

patron of the geographic research whose byproduct was often to open up new markets for Hamburg's firms.⁶⁴

Hamburgers also had commercial interests on both coasts of Africa and in East Asia. Of the thousand or so member-firms of the Hamburg Bourse, a small cohort dominated each regional market. Even the larger firms, like Woermann, O'Swald, and Schubak & Söhne, employed little over one hundred people, had a narrow capital base, and typically made their money at the margins.⁶⁵ They were small, private operations, run by the collection of families that ruled Hamburg. Business was their aim, and the political autonomy of their *Vaterstadt* was for a time the best means of protecting it.

Hamburg's merchants traded abroad well before German Unification, and in many cases before German political nationalism crystallized in the mid-nineteenth century. These global connections, as in Sieveking's case, did however raise questions of unified German efforts. The relationship between German nationalism and globalization will be explored further in chapter two, but it suffices to say that Hamburg's overseas connections complicate any straightforward formula linking these two phenomena.⁶⁶ In fact, for every German state unification required a negotiation between particularism and political nationalism. The larger the state, the more important that negotiation; middling kingdoms like Hannover and Saxony could

⁶⁴ Woodruff D. Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 20-21. See also George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa and Southwest Africa* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 36.

⁶⁶ Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation*, especially the Introduction. Conrad offers insights useful to the history of the German Empire proper, but he does not adequately account for the century of German "globalization" that pre-dated 1871. Cf. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism*.

reasonably expect to influence German national politics.⁶⁷ For Hamburg, however, the negotiation was not simply between nationalism and particularism, but rather nationalism, particularism, and cosmopolitanism. As such, essentially federal questions like the closing of states' unique diplomatic offices, the standardization of currency, and the integration of the German economy had to account for Hamburg's global connections.

Particularism, Nationalism, and Cosmopolitanism

Political nationalism in Hamburg arrived relatively slowly. The city's major concern in 1848 was the Schleswig-Holstein issue, and only that because of the implications held for Hamburg's trading interests.⁶⁸ There were other sparks of national feeling, for example the 1859 Schiller Festival.⁶⁹ In the merchant community, however, notions of national unity were overshadowed by a growing mistrust of Prussia. From 1866 to 1871, Hamburg's government made a number of concessions to Prussia in order to maintain the city's political and economic autonomy, and Unification itself was the city's so-called "contract with Prussia."⁷⁰ Not unlike during the French occupations at the beginning of the century, Hamburg's elite prioritized preserving the city's status as a Welthandelsplatz above all else.

Unsurprisingly, Hamburg's representatives to the German Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) voiced some of the strongest opposition to Otto von Bismarck's unifying

⁶⁷ Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4-15.

⁶⁸ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 4-5.

⁶⁹ On the Schiller Festival and the balancing act between regional and national heritages see Aaslestad, "Remembering and Forgetting"; Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 6.

⁷⁰ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 5.

policies. At times, even representatives from Bremen and Lübeck conceded, where Gustav Kirchenpauer and Carl Merck remained steadfastly particularist. Bismarck, for his part, found these Hamburgers extremely irritating, and the German Ambassador in London referred to them as “the worst Germans we have.”⁷¹ Their opposition resounded most strongly on issues pertaining to Hamburg’s global commerce. On unrelated issues, like Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, it was not nearly so powerful. Such selective opposition to Prussia stemmed from the certain elements of German Unification that assumed outsize importance in the city, and chief among these was the question of Zollanschluss.

The Prussian-German customs union (*Zollverein*) came into effect on January 1, 1834, and by 1841 almost 90% of the German population lived within its borders. Hamburg would remain outside those borders for nearly fifty years.⁷² The majority of Hamburg’s merchants felt as Thomas Mann’s Herr Köppen did, and the city clung to its economic autonomy and global connections.⁷³ The *Zollverein* did not, however, lead to political unification, and even Prussia’s desire for economic union was lukewarm.⁷⁴ The latter changed in 1879, when the Bismarck government proposed a standardized tariff wall be erected across Germany. This was no covert attempt at furthering political unification. Especially in Hamburg’s case, Prussia had every recourse to enforce political unification if it so desired.⁷⁵ The resulting negotiation, then, between Hamburg and the Reich occurred because both sides recognized the

⁷¹ Ibid., 6-7.

⁷² Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Allen Lane Penguin: London, 2006), 388-394.

⁷³ Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 30-31.

⁷⁴ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 388-394.

⁷⁵ On Bismarck and the Tariff Bill see Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, vol. 2, *The Period of Consolidation, 1871-1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 469-489.

importance of Hamburg's overseas commerce to the entire German Empire. In other words, the particularist-nationalist dynamics of the Hamburger Zollanschluss had to account for Hamburg's cosmopolitanism—its status as a Welthandelsplatz.

The Hamburger Zollanschluss

Opposition to the Hamburger Zollanschluss rested primarily on a fear of losing that status. Concerns for political autonomy and cultural identity were certainly bundled into this fear, but even they expressed themselves with a notably commercial and economic character. Hamburg, according to the Old Particularists, must not accede to Zollanschluss because doing so would dissolve the global connections and standing that the city had long enjoyed. In fact, Hamburg's history of resistance to incorporation into the German Zollverein culminated in resistance to the Zollanschluss. Nothing better indicates the importance of this history than Johannes Versmann's notes on the topic of Zollanschluss.⁷⁶ Versmann, who led the pro-Prussia party in Hamburg's *Senat* and was the main advocate of Zollanschluss in the city, prepared for his work by studying Hamburg's history of opposition to economic integration with the rest of the German states.⁷⁷ The argument against joining the Zollverein—and later against Zollanschluss—was quite clear. Doing so would threaten Hamburg's unique position as a Welthandelsplatz.

⁷⁶ The first, and only, biographer of Versmann was the Hamburger Adolf Wohlwill. See Adolf Wohlwill, "Jenaer Studentenbriefe von Johannes Versmann," *ZHG* 13 (1908): 33-67; and Idem, "Johannes Versmann. Zur Geschichte seiner Jugendjahre und seiner späteren Wirksamkeit," *ZHG* 15 (1910): 166-252.

⁷⁷ Sta HH 314-8 A 1; 314-8 A 3.

The Hamburg Free Trade Association, along with several newspapers and the *Handelskammer Hamburg*, was a chief supporter of Hamburg's free economic position. In 1864, the Association published a response to the renewal of Zollverein treaties, in which it argued that this renewal through 1877 threatened Hamburg's long history of free trade. This extension by 1864 was all but certain and, in the view of whom it threatened, a "massive win for Prussia."⁷⁸ More detrimental than Prussia's involvement, however, were the predicted economic consequences of the *Zollverein* extension. It would result in the "same stagnation" seen from 1854 to 1866. By allowing—in fact demanding—the conditions that would lead to this stagnation, Prussia threatened the "commercial-political life of 32 million."⁷⁹

Both the Hamburg Free Trade Association and the three chief free trade publications, the *Börsenhalle Tagesbericht*, the *Hamburgischer Correspondent*, and the *Hamburger Nachrichten*, frequently expressed fears of Prussian machinations around the problem of economic integration. Hamburg's fellow Hanseatic cities, Bremen and Lübeck, were other supposed targets of Prussian expansionism. For the advocates of free trade, however, economic integration threatened not only the traditional port cities, but also the rest of the German states. Free trade had so helped Hamburg and its two Hanseatic sister cities, that it had by extension also helped the other German states. It was, in fact, "in the interest of the entire fatherland" to preserve free trade in Hamburg.⁸⁰ In this way opposition to incorporation into the

⁷⁸ Sta HH 314-6 A 2, *Verein für Handelsfreiheit, Jahresbericht des Vorstandes*, 4. "Die Erneuerung des Zollvereins bis 1877 ist somit eine vollende Tatsache... ein großer Sieg Preußens."

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* "...der neue Zollverein wird bis 1877 in derselben Stagnation beharren wie der alte Zollverein von 1854 bis 1866 beharrt hat." "... handelspolitisches Leben von 32 Millionen."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 "...Interessen des gesamten Vaterlandes."

Zollverein was not merely an expression of Hamburg's enduring political particularism, but rather of genuine anxiety that Hamburg—and by extension Germany—would lose its “connections to all parts of the world.” Instead, Hamburg must “in all relationships employ the principle of free trade, which will better equip Hamburg to face eventualities from the outside and to maintain its position as a Welthandelsplatz.”⁸¹

The *Börsenhalle Tagesbericht* echoed these fears in a June 1867 article. The article situated itself within the context of the potential “*Befreiung Deutschlands*.” Given the prospect of this *Befreiung*—that is, an answer to the question of Germany's political unification—the article reminded its readers of “Prussia's former support for free harbors and rational commercial politics.”⁸² This reminder was necessary because alongside Germany's political question lay a question of similar importance: the “material life of the nation.”⁸³ Thus, the article directed itself toward Prussia. It propounded the benefits of free trade, but more importantly it argued that other parts of the German nation could enjoy those benefits.

Publications from Hamburg made similar arguments about other parts of Germany. In response to the prospect of Schleswig-Holstein's entry into the Zollverein, for example, it was argued that because the province traded more with the North Sea states than with the German hinterland, economic integration with the

⁸¹ Ibid. “Je consequenter wir in allen unseren Verhältnissen das Prinzip der [Handelsfreiheit] zur Durchführung bringen, um so besser wird Hamburg besähigt und gerüstet sein, allen Eventualitäten von Außen zu begegnen, und seine unabhängige Stellung als Welthandelsplatz zu wahren.”

⁸² Sta 314-6 A 3, *Hamburg Börsenhalle*, 25 June, 1867. “Eine altpreußische Stimme für Freihafen und rationelle Handels-Politik.”

⁸³ Ibid. “...Materielle[s] Leben der Nation.”

latter would be detrimental. Bremen and Lübeck, of course, frequently acted as comparisons or—especially in Bremen’s case—fellow advocates of free trade.⁸⁴

In fact, by 1880 one argument against Zollanschluss was the divergent economic trajectories of Hamburg and Lübeck. During the period of rising tension in early January 1881, the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* published a series of articles refuting the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (NAZ)’s claim that what was good for Lübeck would be good for Hamburg. On the contrary, the *Fremdenblatt* argued, Hamburg’s commerce was still growing and Lübeck’s certainly was not. Moreover, all of Germany knew of the “pro-Zollanschluss fiasco,” but the NAZ—the primary pro-Prussian paper in the city—“knows nothing.”⁸⁵

As important as Hamburg’s fellow Hanseatic cities were, so too was the potential incorporation of its suburb, Altona, into the Imperial German Customs Union a topic of fervent discussion in early 1881. On February 3, 1881, the *Hamburgischer Correspondent* reported from Berlin that Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had been overheard at a dinner party, allegedly reaffirming his desire to expand Imperial jurisdiction over trade and commerce in Germany.⁸⁶ This report, accurate or not, was in keeping with a January 26 measure passed by the *Bundesrat* that incorporated Altona and the Lower Elbe into the Customs Union. One paper claimed that Hamburgers spoke of nothing but this momentous—and perhaps threatening—event for the two weeks that followed.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Sta HH 314-6 A 2, *Verein für Handelsfreiheit, Jahresbericht des Vorstandes*, 7; Sta HH 314-6 A 3, “*Bericht der Deputation, die Freihafenstellung Bremens*.”

⁸⁵ Sta HH 314-6 A 10, *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, 6 January 1881, 7 January 1881. “Fiasco der Zollanschlüssler”; “... weiß nichts von der Sache.”

⁸⁶ Sta HH 314-6 A 10, *Hamburgischer Correspondent*, 3 February, 1881.

⁸⁷ Sta HH 314-6 A 10, *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, 26 February, 1881.

Opponents of the Zollanschluss had already perceived that threat in May and July of 1880, when the Bundesrat formally proposed investigating an *Altonaer Zollanschluss*. In response, a group of Hamburg's merchants petitioned the city Senate. The Handelskammer, too, expressed its position through a survey circulated among Hamburg's firms.⁸⁸ Other forms of propaganda, covert and overt, became common in the city.⁸⁹ By December 1880, the Zollanschluss Party had begun to hold public demonstrations and gatherings.⁹⁰ By January 1881 the public discussion of the Zollanschluss had neared its fever pitch. And by January 26 this pitch was reached with the incorporation of Altona and the Lower Elbe. Read a headline in the *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, "Prussia Requests the Bundesrat for a Customs Annexation of Altona and the Lower Elbe!" Two weeks later, the same paper ended a summary of recent Zollanschluss events with a poignant, likely rhetorical, question: "Does the Bundesrat not have the constitutional right to do the exact same to Hamburg?"⁹¹

That this question was posed rhetorically betrays the paucity of options Hamburg's opponents of Zollanschluss had at their disposal. The city's Senate had been drifting closer to Berlin since 1871, led by Senator Versmann.⁹² Versmann's path to office, which included joining a militia in 1848, set him apart from his fellow senators. So, too, did his politics, which were substantially more nationally inclined than was the norm.⁹³ More important than any nationalist sentiments Johannes

⁸⁸ Ibid.; Sta HH 314-8 A 3.

⁸⁹ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 11; on colonial propaganda see Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*, 34-42.

⁹⁰ See especially the articles in Ibid., 3-12.

⁹¹ Sta HH 314-6 A 10, *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, 26 February, 1881. "Preußen beantragt beim Bundesrat Anschluss Altonas und Unterelbe." "Ob der Bundesrat laut dem Recht, welches Artikel 33 der Verfassung ihm gibt, Hamburg nicht gleichhinzukommen?"

⁹² Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 7.

⁹³ Ibid., 8-9.

Versmann held, however, was his dogged realism. This was especially the case when it came to the Hamburger Zollanschluss. Conceding certain privileges to Prussian authority was the only way to preserve the global connections Hamburg so valued. As much as Hamburg's Particularists complained of "imperialism in all directions," even Otto von Bismarck pronounced no desire to hamstring Germany's first commercial city.⁹⁴ The problem was how to craft a favorable deal.

Preserving some element of free trade was critical to many of the city's businesses, and the 1881 Zollanschluss agreement did just that. Hamburg entered the German Customs Union, but it also created a duty-free area where goods not entering the German hinterland could remain untaxed. Moreover, Hamburg received remarkable power to oversee implementation of the deal and of new customs posts. Finally, the Berlin government subsidized new construction in the harbor, which was completed in 1888 and augmented by an initiative between the city Senate and the *Norddeutsche Bank* to build a new warehouse district, or *Speicherstadt*.⁹⁵ Symbolizing the importance of this agreement, Kaiser Wilhelm II laid the new port's foundation stone in October 1888.⁹⁶

The Hamburger Zollanschluss brought a number of structural changes within the city, all of which strengthened Hamburg's position as a Welthandelsplatz. The construction of the new free port and Speicherstadt were vital moments, which reverberated in the city's trade, capital markets, industry, housing, and politics. Along

⁹⁴ Ibid., 10; Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*, 24.

⁹⁵ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 10-11; see also Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*, 22-26.

⁹⁶ Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs: The Twentieth Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 35.

with increasing Hamburg's global trade, the Hamburger Zollanschluss coincided with a significant innovation to that trade: the advent of Germany's Kolonialpolitik. The post-Zollanschluss changes were structural, in that they occurred independent of the devices of certain firms and their principals. That said, the decades following ushered into prominence a group of nationally important Hamburg businessmen, such as Albert Ballin, Max Warburg, and Adolph Woermann. By improving economic relationships with the German hinterland, catalyzing industrial growth, increasing access to capital, and fostering a closer relationship with the Imperial government, the Hamburger Zollanschluss fundamentally changed Hamburg's identity as a Welthandelsplatz. It did not, however, eliminate that identity.

Shipping was the sector of Hamburg's economy that most skyrocketed after integration into the Customs Union.⁹⁷ Indeed, from the conclusion of the Zollanschluss treaties to the outbreak of war in the summer of 1914, shipping volume in Hamburg grew by a factor of four. The single largest driver of this growth was emigration. German emigration peaked in the 1880s, but 5.8 million non-Germans also moved through Bremen and Hamburg on their way to the Americas.⁹⁸ Improved port facilities made this massive shipping operation possible (emigration was, after all, a business), and agreements with the Prussian government systematized the process by which Austrian, Polish, and Russian emigrants crossed German borders and made their way to Hamburg. In fact, a ticket on a Hamburg-American Line (HAPAG) or *Norddeutscher Lloyd* (NDL) ship was one of the most effective ways to

⁹⁷ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 37.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-40. For an overview of emigration and mobility, see David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 145-156.

secure passage over the German Empire's eastern border.⁹⁹ This increase in shipping meant also an increase in the percentage of German hulls in Hamburg's harbor. It was accompanied by a decrease in the percentage of British-owned ships, down from over 50% to 29% in 1913.¹⁰⁰ The changes to shipping firms exemplified other changes occurring within the city. Whereas a number of small family firms had long dominated in Hamburg, "the future lay with more complex forms of economic organization." Family firms grew obsolete, replaced by a small group of elites, none more important than shipping giant HAPAG, which under the direction of Albert Ballin was the world's largest shipping firm by 1913. In that year, Hamburg featured 160 different overseas services, which oversaw more than 600 departures per month.¹⁰¹

As Niall Ferguson has put it, "In Hamburg, industry was the dependent of commerce." The partnership between large shipping and shipbuilding firms demonstrates this relationship. The new harbor was a boon for Hamburg's shipbuilding industry, which expanded at an annual rate of 9% between 1885 and 1914.¹⁰² Blohm & Voss, the city's leading shipbuilders, grew from a small wood-and-sail operation into one of the largest businesses in Hamburg, with upwards of 10,000 employees. Vulkan shipyard, originally based in Stettin, soon established a satellite yard in Hamburg because of the buoyant activity present there. It was with these two firms that the HAPAG, and later the German Navy Office, built their megaships.

⁹⁹ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 8-14; 39-42. See especially for the international implications of Hamburg's emigration business.

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 37.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 37-40.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 42.

Banking, too, was bound up in the changes after the Zollanschluss. The *Norddeutsche Bank*, along with Hamburg's other large joint-stock banks, financed both the construction of the new port and Speicherstadt, as well as shipbuilding operations throughout the city.¹⁰³ In general, after the 1880s, Hamburg saw a delayed shift away from small, family-run banks that led to more accessible capital for the city's largest firms.

The new warehouse district and the towering cranes in Hamburg's harbor were not the only visual reminders of the changes occurring in the city. Hamburg's urban geography, too, altered after 1880. The HAPAG, M.M. Warburg & Co., and other firms moved into elaborate new office buildings along the Inner Alster. The latter, in particular, constructed a Florentine-inspired house that surely symbolized the position Hamburg now held within the world of European capitalism.¹⁰⁴ Away from the wealthy enclaves surrounding the Alster, other Hamburgers underwent less voluntary moves. The construction of the Speicherstadt required the forced relocation of several thousand working-class inhabitants of the areas near the Elbe.

Hamburg and German Kolonialpolitik

Along with changing the magnitude of Hamburg's overseas connections, the Hamburger Zollanschluss gave to those connections a new, though not entirely unprecedented, valence. As Germany's colonial policy, or Kolonialpolitik, developed in the early 1880s, it almost invariably followed pre-existing private connections established by Hamburg's firms and merchants much earlier in the century.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 32-48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 77; see also Chernow, *The Warburgs*.

Much has been made of Germany's being a "colonial late-comer."¹⁰⁵

Germany's colonial empire was doubtless shorter-lived and smaller than those of Great Britain and France, but it deserves attention all the same. The ethnocidal warfare perpetrated by German colonizers from 1904 to 1907 against the Herero and Nama peoples of modern-day Namibia and the relationship between German overseas colonialism and German settlement aspirations in eastern Europe are well known.¹⁰⁶ More relevant to our purposes, following the history of Hamburg's role in German overseas colonization demonstrates the continuities between Kolonialpolitik and the practices that would follow it.

Washausen calls the effect Hamburg's overseas firms had on German colonialism "private colonization."¹⁰⁷ Recently, George Steinmetz has investigated another type of "private colonization"—the precolonial discourses created by overseas researchers and travelers. Both activities demonstrate the importance of technically private citizens and firms to Germany's rush for colonies. We should not, however, take that importance as a strict typology. Steinmetz has also convincingly argued that drawing these links between private enterprise and colonialism does not mean colonies were administered—even when administered by chartered companies—in accord with economic and commercial success. In fact, the

¹⁰⁵ Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History*, trans. Sorchá O'Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

¹⁰⁶ On colonialism and *Lebensraum*, see Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism*; on the ethnocide in German South West Africa, see Horst Drechsler, "*Let us Die Fighting*": *The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)*, trans. Bernd Zöllner (London: Zed Press, 1980).

¹⁰⁷ Literature on the relationship between colonies and private activity is one of the most interesting present approaches to the history of colonialism. See, for example, Stephen Press, *Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europe's Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017) and Shellen Xiao Wu, *Empires of Coal: Fueling China's Entry Into the Modern World Order, 1860-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

heterogeneity of German colonialism is such that we should shy away from any typologies.¹⁰⁸ With that being said, Hamburg's firms pioneered the connections between "metropole" and "periphery" that German colonialism eventually followed.

Though ultimately unsuccessful, the 1880 *Samoa-Vorlage* was the first attempt to involve the German Imperial government in overseas activities, and therefore the first attempt at an operational German colonial policy. The Hamburg merchant house of J.C. Godeffroy, which had held interests in Samoa for decades and now operated on the name German Trade and Plantation Society for the South Sea Islands in Hamburg (DHPG), appealed to the German government for a guarantee on their now-bankrupt interests. Largely, DHPG operated a type of plantation economy that was not uncommon in German colonies.¹⁰⁹ On April 15, the Bundesrat voted in favor of the appeal, only for the Reichstag to vote against twelve days later. Certainly, many of Hamburg's merchants saw this type of government intervention as a blow against the principle of free trade. Opponents worried, furthermore, that the presence of German navy ships abroad could cause Britain to restrict the access Hamburg's merchants had to British colonies.¹¹⁰ Eventually, Hamburg's overseas commerce and German Kolonialpolitik began truly to grow together. In 1899, the German Empire purchased several islands from Spain, secured treaties with Britain and the United States, and in 1900 ruled the archipelago's western islands. Godeffroy's "private colonization" had undoubtedly laid the foundation for this move.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 13; 19ff.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹¹⁰ On the *Samoa-Vorlage* see Washausen, *Kolonialpolitik*, 22-53.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55-67.

The firm C. Woermann, which as we have seen held interests in what are now Cameroon and Gabon on the West African coast, was similarly important for drawing German interests to the region. Through its director, Adolph Woermann, the firm and others operating in Cameroon petitioned the Imperial government in 1884 for security. By this time, the Woermann shipping line was already an important element of German overseas presence in West Africa, providing regular service between the West African coast and Hamburg. Woermann, who with Albert Ballin was likely the most important Hanseatic merchant of his day, disagreed with the overly protectionist approach that the German government eventually took toward its colony in Cameroon. He was, regardless, the most important figure—along with Imperial consul Gustav Nachtigal—in encouraging an actual German colonial policy in West Africa.¹¹² Hamburg-based firms in East Africa were similarly influential for Germany's coming *Kolonialpolitik*.¹¹³

Like all great comedies, the Hamburger Zollanschluss ended in happy, albeit complicated, union. As Woermann's example demonstrates, the relationship between Hamburgers and *Kolonialpolitik* was not exclusively harmonious. A majority of Hamburg's merchants continued to oppose directed emigration as a tenet of Germany's overseas policies, and Hamburg's own firms traded more with non-German colonies than with the Reich's protected area (*Schutzgebiet*).¹¹⁴ Hamburgers did form the vanguard of German *Kolonialpolitik*, but their influence extended beyond even that. As improved structural conditions for global commerce developed

¹¹² Ibid., 70-74.

¹¹³ On German firms in East Africa see *ibid.*, 83-111.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., *Kolonialpolitik*, 188ff.

after the *Zollanschluss*, Hamburg's overseas networks insinuated themselves with ever more importance into all corners of the globe, not just German colonies. They entered into a *Weltwirtschaft*, a literal "global economy." Exemplified by now truly international firms like the HAPAG, Hamburg's global commerce continued to guide German overseas policies after the colonial efforts of the 1880s and into the period of *Weltpolitik* that preceded World War One.

2: Ein Reich der Kaufleute?¹¹⁵

In the summer of 1902, over a decade after the completion of Hamburg's Zollanschluss negotiations, the German Empire hosted the Ninth International Shipping Congress in Düsseldorf. The Berlin-based *Centralblatt der Bauverwaltung*, a periodical dealing with architecture and construction, noted that representatives from almost every developed country attended the congress; these included delegations from Argentina, Austria, Chile, China, France, Paraguay, Russia, and Spain. The German states alone sent 125 delegates.

Ceremonially opened by the German Crown Prince and attended by Admiral Tirpitz, the Congress took as its motto two of Kaiser Wilhelm II's recent utterances, "Ours is the age of transportation" and "our future lies on the water."¹¹⁶ Crown Prince Wilhelm's address echoed his father:

You, gentlemen, have come running from the farthest reaches of the earth to unite here, in order to standardize the goals of international transport and the means of its development. I see in the gathering of this Congress not only an important milestone on the path of this development, but also a point of contact, at which all nations can reach out their hands in friendship and recognize each other's respective merits without jealousy, and in view of a common whole.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Or, "An Empire of Merchants?" I am especially grateful to Professor Grimmer-Solem for letting me reading chapter four of his current book manuscript, which influenced the arguments in this chapter. See Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

¹¹⁶ Otto Sarrazin and Friedrich Schultze, eds., *Centralblatt der Bauverwaltung*, XXII Jahrgang (Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1902), 329. Accessed April 1, 2018. "Wir Stehen im Zeichen des Verkehrs" and "Unsere Zukunft liegt auf dem Wasser." Professor Krishna Winston in Wesleyan's German Studies Department helped with these translations.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 329-331. "Herbeigeeilt aus allen Gegenden des Erdkreises, haben Sie sich, meine Herren, hier vereinigt, um die Ziele des Internationalen Verkehrs und die Mittel zu ihrer Verwirklichung zu normieren. Ich erblicke jedoch in dieser Versammlung des Congresses nicht nur einen wichtigen Meilenstein auf dem Wege seiner Entwicklung, sondern vielmehr einen jener Berührungspunkte, wo sich alle Nationen in Freundschaft die Hände reichen und neidlos ihre gegenseitigen Vorzüge anerkennen in Hinblick auf das gemeinsame Große."

Over 1200 attendees listened to similar speeches in German, English, and French extolling maritime developments in Germany and across the world. They participated in expert panels and debated the future of overseas commerce, and they examined models and photographs of the newest shipping and harbor technology.

Both the *Centralblatt* and the congress-goers praised Düsseldorf for its hospitality, but the city was an odd choice for such a conference. Düsseldorf lies on the Rhine but compared to Bremen or Hamburg was of negligible importance to German shipping and trade. By 1902, however, the entire German Empire had adopted Hanseatic overseas commerce as its own, mirroring those Hamburgers who, before the Zollanschluss, stressed that Hamburg's status as a Welthandelsplatz benefited all of Germany. Indeed, the central topic of discussion on the final day of the conference was Hamburg, "the continent's leading commercial port."¹¹⁸

As we have seen, following the structural changes that accompanied the Hamburger Zollanschluss, by the early 1890s the city had cemented its place as Germany's leading commercial port. In the years after 1888, Hamburg was a city in transition. Yet that transition featured more continuity than disruption. Despite the fears of its more ardent free-traders, Hamburg's status as a Welthandelsplatz had emerged from the Zollanschluss unscathed. Even Germany's protectionist colonial policies worked more to the city's favor than against it. Therefore, the Hamburger Zollanschluss was not so much a caesura, as Washausen terms it, but rather a critical point of departure in the city's history as Germany's gateway to the world. More intimate economic ties with the German hinterland and closer political relationships

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 341-348. "Haupthandelshafen des Festlandes."

with Berlin encouraged the majority of Hamburg's merchant houses and banks to embrace the city's new, more fully integrated, situation. There followed increased development of industry in the city's suburbs, better financial relationships with Germany's largest banks, and heightened trade—namely heightened German trade—within the city's harbor. These developments in Hamburg were part and parcel of rapid growth for German industry, trade, and population. Only the United States was growing more quickly.

This growth undergirded a strain of German imperial policy, symbolized by the events at the Ninth International Shipping Congress, known as Weltpolitik. Weltpolitik is notoriously difficult to define, and at times even its practitioners did not know exactly what it entailed.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, two elements of Weltpolitik have stood out to both contemporaries and historians: Weltpolitik took German economic expansion as a founding premise, and it set German imperial expansion as an end goal. Weltpolitik, including above all naval armament, would bridge Germany from economic globalization to global imperial power.¹²⁰

On two different levels, Hamburg's overseas commerce led to the development of Weltpolitik. First, the city and its firms were not equipped to deal with their growing commerce alone. Hamburg's merchant houses and shipping firms voiced the loudest calls for concrete imperial policies—chief among them naval armament—that would protect German commerce abroad. Second, the reality of Hamburg's global economic activity provided a justification for Weltpolitik's ardent

¹¹⁹ Holger H. Herwig, *"Luxury Fleet": The Imperial German Navy 1888-1918* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 20.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 3, 18-19; Konrad Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik: Deutsche Außenpolitik 1890 bis 1902* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 223-5, 232.

supporters, among them Secretary of the Navy Alfred von Tirpitz, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and Secretary of State (later Chancellor) Bernhard von Bülow, to pursue a stronger position for Germany within the global imperial balance of power. Ultimately, the inauguration of German Weltpolitik further fueled Hamburg's economic development, even though its final shape deviated from that which Hamburg's merchants and firms had desired.

Growth in Hamburg

Despite the continuity of the city's role as a Welthandelsplatz, significant challenges faced Hamburg as the post-Zollanschluss changes took effect. Increased movement of both people and ships through the city, not to mention the overcrowding that resulted from those people who moved to Hamburg for work, strained its limited resources and political operations. Merchant houses and shipping firms benefitted mightily from the Hamburger Zollanschluss, but the city itself was not prepared to navigate these changes on its own.

If it was not already, Hamburg's underpreparedness to meet the challenges of increased globalization became clear in the summer of 1892. Hamburg had always been one of the favored ports of departure for Eastern Europeans on their way to the Americas. From 1885 to 1888, that preference sharply increased, peaking in 1891-2 in response to famine and the expulsion of Moscow's Jewish population. At the same time, 1892 saw an outbreak of cholera travel by rail from Afghanistan to Russia and Central Europe in a matter of months. In July and August of 1892, "the civil and

medical authorities in Hamburg were well aware that a new epidemic was threatening their city.”¹²¹

This foreknowledge proved useless. In just over six weeks, 10,000 people died in Hamburg. Despite the network of rail lines spread across Europe, Hamburg was the only Western European city to suffer from the 1892 cholera epidemic. Richard J. Evans, in his extensive study of the epidemic’s causes, has shown that it stemmed from the city government’s amateur policies and procedures, neither of which were suited to the industrialization and increased movement of people and goods that followed the Hamburger Zollanschluss.¹²²

On August 24, eight days after doctors at the Eppendorf Hospital confirmed the presence of the cholera bacillus in one of their patients, the Senat met to coordinate a response. Hamburg’s Deputation for Commerce and Shipping (*Deputation für Handel und Schifffahrt*) was responsible for order and organization in matters related to overseas commerce, and like the rest of the city its efforts were too little, too late. On August 30, now two weeks after the first confirmed case, the Deputation imposed a quarantine on ships entering Cuxhaven and medical inspections before debarkation at the city.¹²³ Hamburg eventually recovered from the epidemic, but its specter lingered over official discussions well into the twentieth century.¹²⁴ In hindsight, it was clear that Hamburg’s government had not been ready to grapple with

¹²¹ Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 279-285.

¹²² Ibid, vii-ix. Linking the cholera epidemic to the *Zollanschluss* is my own take, but Evans’ suggestion that August 1892 represented some fundamental change or departure for life in Hamburg, while primarily concerned with Hamburg’s governance, does capture the rapid economic growth in the city, its harbor, and its environs.

¹²³ Ibid, 290; *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Lütke & Wulff, 1892), 651. Accessed April 1, 2018.

¹²⁴ See, for example, the construction of the HAPAG emigrant halls (*Auswandererhallen*) in Chapter 3.

the challenges that accompanied the explosion of the city's trade, industry, and global connections.

More mundane difficulties also plagued the city. In January of 1891, for example, the Deputation for Commerce and Shipping implemented a directive from the Imperial Government that Hamburg's denizens must stop inadvertently damaging the telegraph cables that ran through the city.¹²⁵ New instructions to prevent the collision of ships on the Elbe appeared repeatedly from 1891 to 1897.¹²⁶ After 1897, these regulations dwindled in an indirect relationship with the increasing construction underway in the city's harbor. There can be little doubt that Hamburg's internal organization better suited 1860 than 1890.¹²⁷ Immediately after the Hamburger Zollanschluss, the city struggled to adjust to the developments that had so benefitted its global merchant houses and shipping firms. That would change after 1898, but not before those firms, themselves, encountered the new concerns that accompanied their dynamic growth.

Hamburg in the World

Just as Hamburg's commercial success manifested itself within the city, so too did it begin to alter relationships abroad. In fact, the changes to Hamburg's overseas commerce in the 1890s are representative—even paradigmatic—of a shift in Germany's overseas economic concerns away from colonial possessions and toward

¹²⁵ *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Lütke & Wulff, 1891), 19-20. Accessed April 1, 2018.

¹²⁶ *Amtsblatt 1892*, 835; *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Lütke & Wulff, 1894), 141; *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Lütke & Wulff, 1897), 241. Accessed April 1, 2018.

¹²⁷ Werner Jochmann and Hans-Dieter Loose, eds., *Hamburg: Geschichte der Stadt und ihrer Bewohner*, vol. 2, *Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1986), 79.

spheres of influence, global trade, capital investment, and business relationships with Latin America, China, and Ottoman Turkey.¹²⁸ The contemporary term for this new complex of overseas relationships was “Weltwirtschaft.” Germany, quite literally, was participating in “world economics,” and Hamburg’s merchants were in the van. Weltpolitik, particularly naval armament, adopted Weltwirtschaft as a justification; in Conrad Kanis’ words, Weltwirtschaft was a “driving force” (*Triebkraft*) behind the development of Weltpolitik.¹²⁹

Hamburg had particular commercial and capital concerns in Latin America, specifically Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela. German economic interests in Latin America developed without supervision from the imperial government, and in many instances this was the case because those interests had begun as Hanseatic trading outposts.¹³⁰ Only after 1880 did German merchant houses and shipping firms from Hamburg, and to a lesser degree Bremen, start to ask the Reich for its support.

The first, and later to become the most oft-cited, challenge to Weltwirtschaft came in 1891 in Chile. Though in the past relatively politically stable, Chile broke into civil war in 1891, with the country split north-south between Chile’s congress and President José Manuel Balmaceda. Balmaceda, whose attempted *coup d’état* was in part a reaction against Chile’s ruling oligarchy, sought more national control over Chile’s abundant natural resources. Chief among those resources was Chile saltpeter, a source of sodium nitrate that could be used as an organic fertilizer. Although Britain

¹²⁸ It was a shift toward what some historians of the British Empire have called “informal imperialism.” See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *The Economic History Review* New Series 6, no. 1 (1953): 1-15. This is especially relevant for the German Empire in Latin America. Ian L. Forbes, “German Informal Imperialism in South America before 1914,” *The Economic History Review* New Series 31, no. 3 (August 1978): 384-98.

¹²⁹ Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik*, 223-256.

¹³⁰ Forbes, “German Informal Imperialism in South America,” 387.

enjoyed the lion's share of European interests in Chile, several Hamburg firms, Vorwerk & Co., Fölsch & Martin, and Sloman, controlled about 18% of saltpeter production. Hamburg-based shipping lines, including Laeisz and the Kosmos-Linie, transported that saltpeter to Europe. Another two dozen Hamburg houses, based largely in Valparaiso, oversaw the balance of trade between Chile and Germany. Balmaceda's revolutionary program rejected such foreign interests, whether British or German, and—as was the case in Brazil and Venezuela years later—that meant erstwhile European competitors saw their interests align.¹³¹

On the basis of its overwhelming economic dominance in Chile, and at the behest of a cohort of saltpeter, telegraph, railroad, and shipping firms, Britain dispatched seven ships to the Chilean coast. The German government's response was not to send ships, but rather to ask that Britain protect German commercial concerns as well. German ships, most of them owned by Hamburg-based firms, had been blockaded by the congress' fleet, forced to give up their cargo, and in the case of the *Romulus* impounded in a harbor controlled by Balmaceda's forces.

The vulnerability of German trade in Chile soon became a topic of fervent discussion in both Hamburg and Berlin. In the former, the need for naval security was clear, and a petition was sent to the Foreign Office that argued against relying on Britain's protection. Over 100 firms signed this first Hamburg "fleet petition" (*Flottenpetition*). In Berlin, however, Kaiser Wilhelm instructed Chancellor Leo von Caprivi not to send any ships; the only available squadron was to remain in China. Wilhelm's plan was even more exaggeratedly to demonstrate Germany's lack of sea

¹³¹ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 38-9.

power, and to force the Reichstag into funding further naval armament. By March, German cruisers remained unused in China, and British forces proved insufficient to protect even their own interests. Moreover, Hamburg's press began to blame the Reichstag for the absence of German ships off the Chilean coast. In this sense, the Kaiser's ploy had worked. Adolph Woermann himself likely dictated one of the more popular articles. It argued that the German fleet was too weak to protect the recent growth of German overseas trade; overseas commerce and naval power went together.¹³²

Such was the legacy of the Chilean Civil War among Hamburg's merchant houses and shipping firms. Eventually, after an intervention by the Kaiser during "*Kieler Woche*" of 1891, German cruisers steamed to the South American coast and cooperated with the British in blockading Chile (likely illegally, as the European powers had formally recognized neither the Chilean Congress nor its fleet).¹³³ Hamburg's overseas commerce recovered from the events in Chile, but its champions did not forget the experience. On contrary, the Chilean Civil War and the vulnerability of German trade that accompanied it became the ur-example in a decade-long debate over German naval armament.¹³⁴

That debate often included two further South American examples, which followed close on the heels of the Chilean Civil War. Hamburg enjoyed especially lucrative business with all of Latin America, dating to the rash of independence

¹³² Ibid, 38-41.

¹³³ *Kieler Woche* (Kiel Week) was, and still is, a summer regatta held in the city of Kiel on Schleswig-Holstein's Baltic coast. Kaiser Wilhelm II first attended in 1889.

¹³⁴ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 42-46.

movements that swept the region in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹³⁵ That these examples came from a continent on which Germany had no formal possessions demonstrated the move away from overseas commerce defined by colonial protected areas and toward the notion of a *Weltwirtschaft* as discussed above.

The first of these two examples came in the summer of 1892 and dealt explicitly with the possibility of German intervention to protect overseas commerce. Where once Hamburg had sealed its own trade agreements with other states, in 1881 the city gave up this diplomatic privilege as part of the Zollanschluss agreement. In 1892, then, the Foreign Office drafted a new treaty with Colombia, the commercial consequences of which would be felt most keenly by the disproportionately large number of Hamburg-based firms at work there. Article 20 of the treaty expressly stated that Germany would not hold the Colombian government responsible for damages to German trade. Unsurprisingly, the Handelskammer, the Senate, and 159 Hamburg firms objected to this perceived abdication of responsibility and capitulation to a weaker state. A large proportion of Hamburg's merchant community mobilized—in memos to the Reichstag, newspaper articles, and public speeches—to oppose the treaty. They considered it a threat not only to security in Colombia, but also in neighboring Venezuela, where work on the massively expensive Great Venezuelan Railway (*Große-Venezuela-Eisenbahn*) was well underway.¹³⁶

The second example, which would become quite frequently cited in later years, came from Brazil, where Germans had held business and settlement interests

¹³⁵ Forbes, "German Informal Imperialism in South America," 386.

¹³⁶ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 46-51; on the Great Venezuelan Railroad see Herwig, *Germany's Vision of Empire*, 17-46.

for decades.¹³⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, Hamburgers had been involved in this exchange with Brazil, and especially the southernmost state Rio Grande do Sul, for half a century. In 1893, monarchist elements in Rio Grande do Sul rose up against Brazil's four-year-old republican government. Britain, no doubt influenced by the Brazilian navy's quick action against the monarchists, sent two ships of war to Rio de Janeiro. Presumably recalling failures in Chile two years earlier, the German cruisers *SMS Arcona* and *SMS Alexandrine* joined their British counterparts on September 19.¹³⁸

There, however, German and British commercial interests briefly diverged. At the urgings of Lord Rothschild—who for business reasons of his own feared the bombardment of Rio—the British Foreign Office drew up plans for the major European powers and the U.S.A. to intervene in Brazil, in the event of an emergency. Hamburg's merchant community, however much they desired a show of German naval force, contended that actual European military intervention could only hinder trade. Indeed, Britain's gradual interventions in the Brazilian conflict damaged its standing with both sides. Meanwhile, German ships continued only to protect German shipping, much to the satisfaction of Hamburg's Brazilian firms, who began regularly to praise the Imperial Navy for its much-needed support. From October 1893 to February 1894, that support protected all 95 German ships that called at Rio de Janeiro. It was put into stark relief by the British, as a cohort of merchants and shipping lines in both Rio and London began actively to protest the Foreign Office's more engaged Brazilian policy. The German navy became an example of preferable

¹³⁷ Forbes, "German Informal Imperialism in South America," 387-90.

¹³⁸ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 51-55.

European intervention—credible but limited to neutrality. Ships owned by Edward Johnston & Co., an English firm in Rio with strong ties to Hamburg, even attempted to sail under a German flag in order to secure safe passage. By the end of winter 1894, the danger to foreign shipping ended, and in March the monarchist uprising came to a close.¹³⁹

Perhaps most importantly, the dispatch of German ships of war to Brazil in 1893-4 taught both Hamburg's merchants and the Imperial Navy Office that security for overseas commerce could be guaranteed quite successfully—and without genuine military intervention at that. All that remained, of course, was to decide whether Germany's naval forces were in adequate condition to defend its overseas trade. In fact, on the last day of 1893 the German Colonial Society, no doubt influenced by the successes off the coast of Brazil, formally requested that the Reichstag fund six new cruisers.¹⁴⁰

To some, there existed no better evidence that the Germany cruiser fleet was spread too thin than the fact that both *Arcona* and *Alexandrine* soon left South American waters and made the several-thousand nautical mile journey to China. At the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War, only two gunboats represented the German Navy in the region, despite increasing commercial and missionary interests there.¹⁴¹

On August 1, 1894, the Handelskammer submitted to the Senate a request for a larger naval presence in East Asia. Interestingly, the request—which was backed by

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 55.

Hamburg's firms with business in China and Japan—added a new valence to the benefits of Germany's navy for trade. It maintained the argument, consistent since the Chilean Civil War, that “Germany's commercial standing in these countries” would “sink” without naval support. However, not only would Germany's actual commercial standing sink, but also the perception of Germany abroad. This argument follows naturally from the position that German ships protected trade not by direct intervention—as contrasted with the British in Brazil—but by demonstrating Berlin's support for its agents, however private and wide-spread, abroad. It would also become increasingly important after 1896, as Germany moved fully into its pursuit of Weltpolitik.¹⁴² Beyond specific business in East Asia, Hamburg-based firms like H. Mandle & Co. wanted protection in order to lower the cost of insuring ships that carried goods to China and Japan. Hamburg's merchants and shipping lines had quite literally located the price of naval security, and they wanted the German government—much as it had in Chile and Brazil—to foot the bill.

Hamburg's press used the First Sino-Japanese War as another excuse to publish articles in favor of naval armament. To be sure, some newspapers were not pro-fleet, but the sentiment was overwhelmingly common among the merchant community and its organs. Indeed, Hamburg's merchants led the clamor for naval armament and a stronger imperial overseas presence that began to crystallize around the year 1896. Commercial experiences abroad, such as those in Chile and Brazil,

¹⁴² Ibid, 56. “Unzureichende Vertretung durch äußere Machtmittel werde das Sinken des Ansehens und damit zusammenhängend auch der Handelsstellung Deutschlands in jenen Ländern zur Folge haben.” The notion of “perception” (*Ansehen*) is reminiscent of Nipperdey's argument that Weltpolitik was concerned with Germany's world-validity (*Weltgeltung*). See Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1992), 630.

informed the position of Hamburg's prodigious merchant houses and shipping firms. As will be discussed below, other elements in Germany soon took up Hamburg's argument, but it was these merchants who first sought concrete solutions to the vulnerability of Weltwirtschaft and in whose interest German naval armament most sharply lay.¹⁴³

The question remained, however, what form that armament would take. Thus far, the German Navy had simply dispatched existing ships from one station to another whenever shipping and trade were threatened, but a contest for new naval funding was brewing in Berlin. In this contest, Hamburg's merchant community overwhelmingly supported the development of a larger cruiser fleet, as opposed to the creation of a battleship fleet. Central to the theory of an imperial cruiser fleet was the notion that naval power existed largely to offer direct protection to overseas commercial interests. Faster and lighter than battleships, cruisers could provide escorts to merchant shipping. For Hamburg's firms and merchants, experiences in Latin America and East Asia served as proof of a powerful cruiser fleet's efficacy. As Carl Ferdinand Laeisz argued to the Reichstag in 1893:

I therefore consider it necessary to develop the Navy properly, in order to be able to secure our relationships in foreign countries. The Reichstag should not bargain with the granting of funds for cruisers, even if it wants to hold back colossal funds for battle ships.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 55-6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 64. "Deshalb halte ich es für notwendig, die Marine sachgemäß zu entwickeln, um die Beziehungen in allen fremden Ländern aufrechterhalten und sichern zu können. Der Reichstag sollte mit Bewilligung der Mittel für die dazu erforderlichen Kreuzer nicht kargen, wenn er sich auch kolossalen Summen für Panzerschiffe gegenüber zurückhalte."

The Navy Office took Laeisz's point quite well, requesting one large cruiser and three small cruisers in its 1895-6 yearly report. The Foreign Office, too, made official note of the lack of cruisers abroad—especially in Latin America.

The absence of German ships abroad had not previously been a threat to Hamburg's prosperity. Since the Congress of Vienna, Hamburg's firms in Latin America and Africa had counted on the proverbial *Pax Britannica* to guarantee their safety. This is what Ferguson means when he calls Hamburg's merchants the "foot soldiers of free trade and informal imperialism."¹⁴⁵ Britain's liberal trade policy, backed by naval force of arms, served Hamburg quite well. In 1850 Parliament struck down the last of Britain's protectionist Navigation Acts, and for three decades commercial interests in Hamburg and London grew increasingly intimate. As chapter one also illustrates, before the year 1881 the majority of ships and goods in Hamburg's harbor were British. Hamburg's merchant community therefore insisted on a good political relationship with Britain, to accompany their existing economic and cultural interconnection.

After 1881, the relationship between Hamburg and London grew increasingly strained, but little explicitly anti-English sentiment developed within Hamburg's merchant community. The years after the Zollanschluss agreement coincided with the proliferation of the "commercial envy" (*Handelsneid*) thesis in Germany. The thesis resurfaced during the Transvaal Crisis, 1894-98. It argued that Britain had come to see Germany's industrial expansion, overseas commerce, and colonial aspirations with fear and envy. It found supporters in luminaries of Hamburg's merchant

¹⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 37.

community like Bürgermeister Mönckeberg and shipping magnate Robert Sloman, Jr.¹⁴⁶

Britain was especially wary of German commerce in Latin America, which grew by a factor of nine between 1873 and 1913. Germany's relative share of economic activity drew closer to Britain's, and German merchants and firms in the region relied more on German banks and less on their counterparts in the City of London.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Hamburg's commercial community did not want to antagonize their North Sea neighbors, who still represented a crucial trading partner, in spite of Germany's economic growth.

The winter of 1895-6 ushered in one such antagonism, at least from Hamburg's perspective. On December 29, Dr. Leander Starr Jameson led 800 men from the British Cape Colony into the Boer Transvaal Republic in the hopes of supporting an uprising of British nationals living in the region. On January 3, 1896, Wilhelm II sent a telegram to Paul Kruger, in which he congratulated the Boer president for defending his country "without appealing to the help of friendly powers."¹⁴⁸

The indignation with which Britain greeted the Kaiser's perceived implication, namely that Germany might be a "friendly power" to which Kruger could have appealed for support, came initially as a surprise. Hamburg's merchants approved of the telegram at first, but that approval soured as Britain's response

¹⁴⁶ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 70. "Dies deutet darauf hin, daß die Kombination von politisch-militärischer Macht und wirtschaftlicher Expansion den Briten den deutschen Aufstieg so gefährlich erscheinen ließ."

¹⁴⁷ Forbes, "German Informal Imperialism in South America," 391-3.

¹⁴⁸ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 146; quoted in Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz*, 110.

became known in the city. In southern Africa, especially, Hamburg's merchants and firms had long enjoyed close business relations with the British. That included Hamburgers working out of joint Anglo-German merchant houses and cooperative capital investment.¹⁴⁹ As such, angering the British—who naturally dominated trade in the region—was to most Hamburgers a serious strategic blunder. As Bürgermeister Mönckeberg wrote to his son Georg, “One must say, if one could have foreseen this result, it would have been better if the [telegram] had never happened... I do not believe it will come to war with England yet. That would be absolute nonsense!”¹⁵⁰ Mönckeberg, who publicly accepted the commercial envy thesis, represented a general desire in Hamburg to stress the commercial and cultural ties to their neighbors across the North Sea. Even as Germany and Britain began to grow apart, anti-English sentiment could not develop where commercial cooperation remained so obviously necessary.

In Hamburg, notions of Anglo-German estrangement remained largely economic and commercial. As an 1896 report from the Handelskammer put it, the root causes of any strain between Hamburg and London were the increasing success of German commerce, the rapid growth of the German population, and the reality that Germany had earned its place in a world market previously dominated by Great Britain.¹⁵¹ At first, only the Pan-German League (*All-Deutscher Verband*) articulated this Anglo-German rivalry as anything other than economic competition. The Pan-

¹⁴⁹ Richard Voeltz, *German Colonialism and the South West Africa Company, 1894-1914* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1988).

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 72. “So sehr man sich allgemein und mit Recht über das Telegramm des Kaisers an Krüger freute, muß man doch sagen, daß, wenn man dies Resultat hätte ahnen können, die Gratulation besser unterblieben wäre... Nun vorläufig glaube ich noch nicht, daß es zum Kriege mit England kommt. Es wäre ein zu großer Unsinn!”

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 71.

Germans received little support in Hamburg, with only one of their 63 founders, the geographer Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, coming from the city. Where Hamburg's merchant community saw an almost inevitable breakdown of Britain's naval and commercial dominance precipitated by Germany's economic growth, the Pan-Germans saw a coming clash in which Germany would forcibly wrest that dominance away from Britain.¹⁵² Compared to the Pan-German League, Hamburg's merchants espoused a worldly patriotism whose overseas experiences and commercial success must have repudiated the Pan-German insistence upon the *Volk* as an internally contained economic unit that existed to combat other such *Völker*.¹⁵³ Nor was Weltpolitik the political implementation of these Pan-German ideals, but even as they were concerned with Hamburg's overseas commerce, Weltpolitik's supporters sought global political power of the type held by Britain, France, Russia, and other empires for over a century.

Hamburg's Overseas Commerce and Navalist Weltpolitik

Hamburg's reliance on Britain in southern Africa captured the difference between the city's desire for a stronger German presence overseas and popular notions of Weltpolitik that were beginning to take hold. It is beyond our scope to interrogate the entirety of German Weltpolitik. Looking through Hamburg's overseas commerce, however, it becomes easy to see that Germany's participation in Weltwirtschaft justified the complex of policies and ideas that were meant to increase

¹⁵² Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League 1886-1914* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984), 74.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 74-79.

German standing—both abstract and geopolitical—in the world. This standing in the world was a crucial component of Weltpolitik over and above the immediate protection of economic interests requested by Hamburg’s merchants and firms in Latin America and East Asia. Germany’s naval armament, one of Weltpolitik’s concrete policies for which Hamburg’s commerce was so crucial, illustrates this point. For Tirpitz, Wilhelm, Bülow, and the zeitgeist in which they participated, Weltpolitik based itself on the proliferation of German overseas commerce but aimed itself, in the end, at an increase in the empire’s position as a world power.

Alfred Tirpitz (ennobled in 1900 to Alfred von Tirpitz) was not the social imperialist that some historians have suggested, but he was the primary architect of Germany’s naval armament from 1897 onwards. His brand of Weltpolitik and arguments for the navy program both rested on Germany’s participation in Weltwirtschaft and deviated from the interests of Hamburg’s overseas commerce. In fact, the city’s relationship with Britain in southern Africa was exactly the type of arrangement Tirpitz’s Weltpolitik sought to avoid. Hamburg’s merchants had long depended on British cooperation, and Germany depended on “foreign ports, coal, and repair facilities for the navy, and the merchant marine. This dependency had meant that Germany lived what Tirpitz called a ‘parasitic existence’ abroad.”¹⁵⁴

In fact, through his naval theorizing during the early 1890s, his time spent abroad in 1896-7, and his attempts to finalize Germany’s First Navy Law, Alfred Tirpitz drew on Weltwirtschaft—and its effect on global imperial competition—as a significant reason in support of German naval armament. Instead of a fleet to be used

¹⁵⁴ Kelly, *Tirpitz*, 111.

aggressively against Britain, Tirpitz conceived of a German navy that could protect the empire's overseas commerce and improve its position within an increasingly global imperial balance of power.

Connecting global commerce, imperial competition, and sea power was not an idea original to Alfred Tirpitz. On the contrary, both his plans for Germany's navy and Hamburg's calls for an increased German naval presence occurred against the backdrop of what is known as "navalism." A handful of prominent naval thinkers lent their ideas to this navalist vogue, but the American Alfred Thayer Mahan first articulated the direct relationship between sea power and imperial success.¹⁵⁵

Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* developed the connection between commerce and the navy in both peace and war. According to *Influence*, an extensive overseas network of coaling stations and colonies, combined with a powerful navy, was in fact part and parcel of economic expansion and overseas commerce.¹⁵⁶ Mahan, who styled himself an historian and naval strategist, was at heart a naval propagandist and "imperialist pundit who urged the United States to prepare for the age of global politics by rebuilding its strength at sea."¹⁵⁷ Readers of Mahan, however, needed not come from the United States to see themselves in his work. His focus on production, shipping, and colonies, coupled with a lack of

¹⁵⁵ Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea: Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power, and the Tirpitz Plan, 1875-1914* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002), 154-5.

¹⁵⁶ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, 12th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1918 [1890]), 25-27.

¹⁵⁷ Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea*, 154; 158-9. As Hobson points out, there was a more rigorously historical element to Mahan's work. His disciples, however, took up almost exclusively the preface, introduction, and first chapter, which elaborated the importance of navalist "sea power."

distinction between economic maritime might in peace and naval power in war, resonated in Germany with particular volume.¹⁵⁸

Tirpitz's memos from the early 1890s actually suggest that he was as yet unfamiliar with Mahan's work.¹⁵⁹ His influential 1894 Memorandum IX, however, connected overseas commerce, naval armament, and geopolitical importance, and Rolf Hobson has shown that Tirpitz read Mahan by February of 1894—before publishing *Dienstschrift IX*.

“A state that has maritime interests, which amounts to the same thing as world interests, must represent them and make its power tangible beyond territorial waters. The worldwide projection of national trade and industry, and, to a certain degree, of high seas fisheries, world commerce, and colonies, are impossible without a fleet capable of the offensive. The conflict of national interests, and a lack of confidence in capital and the business world would, over time, wither away the economic life of the state if there is no power on the seas... Therein lies the most important purpose of the fleet.”¹⁶⁰

Mahan's navalist imperialism permeated the document, as did his assertion of a “direct link between seapower and national, political, and economic development in peacetime.”¹⁶¹ Tirpitz could have been writing about the development of *Weltwirtschaft* and Hamburg's calls for an increased German naval presence. His views certainly differed from those most common among the city's merchants, especially on the question of cruisers or battleships. When invoking German global commerce and trade, however, Tirpitz was for all intents and purposes invoking Hamburg.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 159-67.

¹⁵⁹ Kelly, *Tirpitz*, 78

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Ibid, 93.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 93-8.

In late January of 1896, Tirpitz and Wilhelm began to plan for the coming Reichstag contest over naval armament. Wilhelm had supported a stronger navy for some time, but he had grown attached to the French *jeune école*, which preferred light, speedy cruisers to larger men-of-war.¹⁶² Cutting-edge navalism had replaced the *jeune école*, in favor of heavily-armed battleships. Tirpitz proposed after the Transvaal crisis an armaments bill reflecting this new paradigm.¹⁶³ During their January meeting, Wilhelm did not object. That same winter, in celebration of 25 years since the Reich's founding, Kaiser Wilhelm II gave a speech that is typically taken as the symbolic beginning of Weltpolitik. It began, "The German Empire has become a world empire" and emphasized among other things the "German goods" that could be found "everywhere in distant parts of the earth."¹⁶⁴

Naval armament is one area in which Wilhelm's characteristic bluster and contradiction were accompanied by "decisive influence."¹⁶⁵ In fact, Wilhelm's January 1896 speech was hardly a departure from his earlier notions. The Kaiser had, since his youth, held a fascination for the navy. His connections to Britain—especially through his mother, Empress Consort Victoria—encouraged that fascination. It found an outlet in the appointment of a naval officer as personal adjutant, a preference for the company of navy men, a number of honorary

¹⁶² Herwig, "Luxury" Fleet, 20.

¹⁶³ Kelly, Tirpitz, 112.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 80. "Aus dem Deutschern Reiche ist ein Weltreich geworden. Überall in fernen Teilen der Erde wohnen Tausende unserer Landsleute. Deutscher Güter, deutsches Wissen, deutsche Betriebsamkeit gehen über den Ozean. Nach Tausende von Millionen beziffern sich die Werte, die Deutschland auf der See fahren hat. An Sie, meine Herren, tritt die ernste Pflicht heran, mir zu helfen, dieses größere deutsches Reich fest an unser heimisches zu gliedern." See also J.C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888-1900*, trans. Sheila de Bellaigue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 924.

¹⁶⁵ Christopher Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II* (Hallow, Essex: Longman), 130.

admiralships, and an interest in reading naval history and strategy, including Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power Upon History*.¹⁶⁶

The stamp of Mahan's navalism lies squarely on Wilhelm's Weltpolitik speech, and in the aftermath of the Transvaal Crisis the Kaiser's conviction that naval power would improve Germany's standing and his own legacy only grew.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the Kaiser's Weltpolitik makes the most sense if viewed through the lens of Mahanian navalism. The idea that a strong navy could preserve peace and improve an empire geopolitically was particularly attractive to the Kaiser. He said of Mahan's work: "I am just now not reading but devouring Captain Mahan's book and am trying to learn it by heart. It is a first-class book and classical on all points."¹⁶⁸

Hamburg's merchant houses and shipping firms greeted Wilhelm's speech as an acknowledgment of their important role in developing Weltwirtschaft and a pivot toward an "empire of merchants." In the words of the *Börsenhalle Jahrbuch*, the majority of Germans abroad to whom Wilhelm referred were merchants.¹⁶⁹ The importance of overseas commerce certainly made up one element of Weltpolitik, but the "empire of merchants" was wishful thinking on Hamburg's part. Like Tirpitz, Wilhelm recognized German economic expansion, but also like Tirpitz he assigned greater importance to Germany's geopolitical situation—a situation Weltpolitik would hopefully strengthen.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Herwig, "Luxury" Fleet, 19-20.

¹⁶⁷ Clark, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 132-5.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Röhl, *The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy*, 1003.

¹⁶⁹ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 81. "Reich der Kaufleute."

In addition to his navalist planning during the mid-1890s, Tirpitz soon came to see the importance of this imperial balance of power up close. The fervor in early 1896—that which produced Wilhelm’s *Weltpolitik* speech and Tirpitz’s proposed armaments bill—ended with a Reichstag defeat for the latter. In March 1896, Alfred Tirpitz accepted a reassignment to command the East Asian Cruiser Division. This experience, which included a brief tour of North America and a visit to the Russian naval harbor at Vladivostok, confirmed for Tirpitz that the future lay with several world empires and their expansionist drives.¹⁷⁰

Since the First Sino-Japanese War, in which Hamburg’s firms called for an increased German presence in East Asia, the so-called “outpost question” (*Stützpunktfrage*) dominated imperial discussion of China. China represented the most attractive region of the world in which to expand German political and economic spheres of influence, and the “outpost question” asked where Germany should acquire its imperial foothold.¹⁷¹ Tirpitz’s main assignment in China was to answer this question. Betraying an understanding of the relationship between *Weltwirtschaft* and German expansionism, Tirpitz claimed to have demanded of the outpost a “capacity for economic development” over and above its military utility.¹⁷² Global commerce and naval strength were the two qualities that would make Germany a world power. As Dirk Bönker has shown, by the time he took over as State Secretary of the Navy in 1897, Tirpitz’s overseas assignment confirmed his

¹⁷⁰ Dirk Bönker, “Global Politics and Germany’s Destiny ‘from an East Asian Perspective’: Alfred von Tirpitz and the Making of Wilhelmine Navalism,” *Central European History* 46, no. 1 (March 2013): 61-96. See also Kelly, *Tirpitz*, 117-128.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 64-5.

¹⁷² Alfred von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst & Blackett), 70-1.

earlier thinking and “propelled [it] forward, giving his vision of inter-imperial competition new specificity and urgency.”¹⁷³

Tirpitz returned from East Asia with the sense that German public opinion favored naval armament.¹⁷⁴ He attempted to capitalize on this sentiment through a concerted propaganda campaign. The campaign entailed the founding of a new Section for News and General Parliamentary Affairs (*Nachrichtenabteilung*) headed by former colleague August von Heeringen. Under Heeringen’s direction, the Section translated Mahan’s work and established a scholarly publication, *Nauticus*, directed by the Hamburg political economist Ernst von Halle.¹⁷⁵ Tirpitz’s feeling about the German zeitgeist proved correct. Germany’s professional and commercial classes, Germany’s industrialists, and a significant cohort of so-called “fleet professors” had begun to favor naval armament as an element of Weltpolitik that would build on German commerce in pursuit of geopolitical goals.¹⁷⁶ Despite public support, there was a great deal of work still required to see the naval bill through the Reichstag.

During the same summer of 1897 in which Tirpitz assumed his duties as Secretary for the Navy, Bernhard von Bülow was appointed acting Foreign Office Secretary. He would shortly occupy the role officially, and from 1900 to 1909 was Chancellor of the German Empire. The appointment did not coincide with Tirpitz’s

¹⁷³ Bönker, “Tirpitz and the Making of Wilhelmine Navalism,” 73-4.

¹⁷⁴ Kelly, *Tirpitz*, 130.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 136-7. For thorough assessment of Halle’s work see EGS.

¹⁷⁶ Harold James, *Krupp: A History of the Legendary German Firm* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 111-113; Cornelius Torp, “The ‘Coalition of Rye and Iron’ under the Pressure of Globalization: A Reinterpretation of Germany’s Political Economy before 1914,” *Central European History* 43, no. 3 (September 2010): 401-27; Herwig, “Luxury” Fleet, 40. Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik*, 225-6.

return by chance. Bülow favored fleet expansion, and the Kaiser intended for him to help the naval cause.

From August 18 to 21, 1897, Bülow met with Tirpitz and Wilhelm at *Schloss Wilhelmshöhe* in Kassel. Writing of the *Wilhelmshöhe* talks in his memoirs, Bülow claimed to have recognized the importance of Weltwirtschaft before meeting with Tirpitz: “I had always been of the opinion that we must be anxious for an extensive protection of our interests at sea once we had been forced onto that element by the natural economic expansion of the German nation.”¹⁷⁷ He attributed the same motivation to both Wilhelm and Tirpitz. The navy had to be “strong enough to represent the Empire’s interests at sea effectively.”¹⁷⁸

Bülow’s first Reichstag speech as acting Foreign Secretary demonstrated the importance he placed on Germany’s economic expansion, but it also contained an end goal that surpassed the mere protection of Hanseatic ships in foreign waters. Similar to Tirpitz’s realizations while on assignment in China, Bülow’s agenda for Weltpolitik concerned, first and foremost, Germany’s place in a global imperial balance of power. “We [Germans],” said Bülow, “do not want to push anyone into the shade, but we, too, long for our place in the sun.”¹⁷⁹ This meant, as Bülow outlined, acquiring an overseas presence to rival the world’s other great powers—a presence that would protect “the German businessman, German goods, the German flag, and

¹⁷⁷ Bernhard, Prince von Bülow, *From Secretary of State to Chancellor, 1897-1903*, trans. F.A. Voight (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931), 131.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁷⁹ “... wir wollen niemand in den Schatten stellen, aber wir verlangen auch unseren Platz in der Sonne.” Quoted in Rüdiger vom Bruch and Björn Hofmeister, eds., *Kaiserreich und Erster Weltkrieg, 1871-1918*, vol. 8 of *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2013), 268-70.

the German ship.”¹⁸⁰ The speech captured the relationship among Weltwirtschaft, overseas naval might, and inter-imperial competition.

Bülow’s “Place in the Sun” speech occurred against the backdrop of an intensifying debate over Tirpitz’s proposed Naval Bill. On November 27, the Bundesrat approved a draft of the bill. As Tirpitz, Bülow, and Wilhelm prepared to address the Reichstag, the Navy Office published “*Die Seeinteressen des deutschen Reiches*.” The document, written by Ernst von Halle, demonstrated statistically and historically the recent growth of Weltwirtschaft. It then argued that Germany’s naval strength was not consonant with its role as the empire with the second-most global commercial interests.¹⁸¹ Tirpitz’s opening Reichstag speech in defense of the bill, on December 6, 1897, made the same argument. Germany’s place in the world, and its overseas economic expansion, required naval armament.¹⁸² Finally, after some clever political maneuvering by Tirpitz, the bill passed through the Reichstag in April 1898. The Tirpitz-plan had been realized.

At the time of its signing, the First Navy Law received precious little mention across the North Sea. The German Navy had no plan for war with Britain, nor would it have been capable of putting such a plan into practice. A credible German naval threat would not make its appearance until the 1900 Second Navy Law. This was the first public statement of Tirpitz’s crucial “risk theory.” As he had for almost a decade, Tirpitz held that German overseas interests could no longer rely on “British good will” and must be guaranteed by force. That force would deter a British attack. Once

¹⁸⁰ “...der deutsche Unternehmer, die deutschen Waaren, die deutsche Flagge und das deutsche Schiff.” Quoted in *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁸¹ Kelly, *Tirpitz*, 145-6.

¹⁸² Herwig, “*Luxury*” *Fleet*, 35.

Germany's fleet had reached maturity, it would still likely prove second-best to the Royal Navy, but it would be strong enough to cripple the British Navy and render it vulnerable to Russia or France. Britain, therefore, would choose not to fight. This theory was not part of some larger planned offensive against Great Britain.¹⁸³

Risk theory was fraught with contradictions. For our purposes, three of its specific qualities bear mention. First, it explicitly referenced protecting Germany's overseas economic interests. Second, if properly applied, naval armament via the risk theory would gain Germany leverage over Britain. Third, that leverage would make Russia and France more willing to ally with Germany against Britain. Tirpitz's insistence on the Mahanian link between commerce and naval power rendered the risk theory a geopolitical tactic that took expanding overseas commerce as one of its justifications. This insistence also probably clouded the judgment of both Tirpitz's actual strategy toward Britain and his risk theory in general, leaving both failures.¹⁸⁴

Simply put, Weltpolitik—including naval armament and the risk theory—was following a course that, though not symptomatic of outsize aggression or backwardness, required an almost impossible balance between securing overseas economic interest and improving Germany's standing as a world empire. The Second Boer War, 1899-1902, tested that balance almost immediately after Germany began to pursue its Weltpolitik.

During the war, Hamburg's merchant community emphasized its commercial ties with the British in Southern Africa, much as it had during the Transvaal Crisis several years earlier. This included helping the movement of British materiel and a

¹⁸³ Ibid, 195-201.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

proposal from Hamburg-America Line Director Albert Ballin to offer Britain ships as troop transports. Public opinion in the rest of the German Empire had a less England-friendly character—something with which the majority of Hamburg’s newspapers explicitly disagreed. After all, when they had been “under the protection of the Union Jack, when there was not yet a German Empire, nor a German fleet, [Hamburg’s commerce] was allowed to bloom.”¹⁸⁵

In March of 1900, while Hamburg’s merchants straddled the line between neutrality and support of Britain, Germany listened to a French “plan for a continental league against Britain.”¹⁸⁶ At the same time, Britain worried about Russian maneuverings in India and Central Asia.¹⁸⁷ Outside the confines of Hamburg’s economic interests, then, the Boer War was an imperial event that could potentially have geopolitical ramifications. In keeping with the designs of *Weltpolitik*, these ramifications were of primary concern to the German Imperial government, which had to balance the pro-British sentiment of its Hanseatic merchants and the pro-Boer support from its nationalist communities. Hamburg’s overseas commerce mattered, but in this instance the stakes were far higher. An agreement with Britain, for example, was simply unfeasible; it would likely push France and Russia closer together, leaving Germany more vulnerable on the continent, where Britain’s help would not come easily. Moreover, especially in Ottoman Turkey, Germany’s pursuit

¹⁸⁵ Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau*, 160-1. “...unter dem Schutz des Union Jack emporblühen durfte, als es noch kein Deutsches Reich und keine Deutsche Flotte gab.”

¹⁸⁶ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 134.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 138.

of increasing political and economic influence outside Europe regularly incurred British ire.¹⁸⁸

Hanseatic Policy or Imperial Policy?

This is not to say that Weltpolitik failed Hamburg's commercial interests. On the contrary, as much as economic activity in Hamburg had grown from 1888 to 1898, the city experienced even more marked success after the passage of the First Navy Law. This particular version of German imperial policy clearly suited Hanseatic merchants and firms. Through shipbuilding, Germany's new naval armament policy also directly benefitted industry in Hamburg.

At the turn of the century, Hamburg was Germany's second most industrial city, and the number of industry workers in and around the city grew by half from 1890 to 1900. Unsurprisingly, shipbuilding stood out above other industries.¹⁸⁹ As Niall Ferguson has argued, the sharp uptick in naval shipbuilding from 1898-1913 helped expand Hamburg's shipbuilding firms and tied them more closely to the Imperial government. From 1892 to 1914, Blohm and Voss, for example, devoted one fifth of its activity to the construction of navy ships.¹⁹⁰

Like industry, Hamburg's banking houses capitalized on Weltpolitik's emphasis on capital export as a lead-in to political influence. Max Warburg involved himself in a number of such loans in China, Morocco, and Portuguese Angola. He did so in conjunction with the Foreign Office, though with relatively "little return" for

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 144-5.

¹⁸⁹ Jochmann and Loose, eds., *Hamburg: Geschichte der Stadt und Ihrer Bewohner*, vol. 2, 24-5.

¹⁹⁰ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 84.

M.M. Warburg & Co.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, “The economic benefits of *Reich* membership for Hamburg seemed unquestionable in 1914.”¹⁹²

The evidence of this can be seen in the harbor construction finally carried out within the city. Compared to the early 1890s, construction in the harbor significantly increased after 1898. Explicit reference to construction projects made by the Deputation for Commerce and Shipping, for example, increased from one in 1897 to six each in 1898 and 1901.¹⁹³ More concretely, Hamburg’s free harbor area increased from 426 hectares to 1000 hectares in 1910. Hamburg’s commercial success after 1900 blew past even optimistic projections.¹⁹⁴ An abundance of evidence also exists to show the compounding economic increases experienced by Hamburg’s shipping firms through the turn of the century. Between 1893 and 1897, the number of newly registered ships (or ships whose registration had to be changed) in Hamburg fluctuated around 250. In 1902, that number stood at 615, compared to 545 in 1901.

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From the early 1890s, Hamburg’s merchant houses and shipping firms began to guide the German imperial policies that would become *Weltpolitik* and naval armament. Their calls for a more robust German presence abroad, coupled with their involvement in Germany’s dynamic economic globalization, provided the justification for the Berlin government to seek imperial expansion. Perhaps fittingly,

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 85.

¹⁹² Ibid, 91.

¹⁹³ *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg 1897*, 464; *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Lütke & Wulff, 1898), 166, 182, 471, 595, 674, 718; *Amtsblatt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg* (Lütke & Wulff, 1901), 153, 242, 301, 357, 389, 475.

¹⁹⁴ Jochmann and Loose, eds., *Hamburg: Geschichte der Stadt und Ihrer Bewohner*, vol. 2, 21.

¹⁹⁵ *Jahresberichte der Verwaltungsbehörden der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, 1894*, II.1; *Jahresberichte der Verwaltungsbehörden der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, 1897*, II.1; *Jahresberichte der Verwaltungsbehörden der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, 1902*, VI.1.

then, it was Hamburg's merchants and shipping firms who had guided Weltpolitik that most benefitted from it. From Berlin's perspective, neither of Weltpolitik's two concrete successes—naval armament and the Kiautschou Bay concession, a German outpost on the Shandong Peninsula forcibly taken from China in 1898—realized the grand designs outlined, for example, in Bülow's "Place in the Sun" speech.¹⁹⁶ Instead, Germany fell into further geopolitical isolation, especially after the British-French-Russian Triple Entente took shape in 1907. With little diplomatic room to maneuver, the German Empire turned away from encouraging the concrete, formal policies inspired by private overseas commerce and back to relying on private enterprise itself as a way to expand imperial power. This was especially the case with the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, a private commercial undertaking that represented Germany's last hope for a place in the sun. When the fate of the railway came into question, the German Foreign Office turned back to Hamburg—and to Albert Ballin's Hamburg-America Line—to save it.

¹⁹⁶ Canis, *Von Bismarck zur Weltpolitik*, 256-77.

3: *Mein Feld ist die Welt*

Albert Ballin was not a man inclined toward rest. In late June of 1900, however, he traveled from Hamburg to the Kiel for a holiday. For two decades, luminaries of German politics and business—especially those with a passion for the sea—had flocked to Kiel every summer for the city’s famous regatta, its “Kiel Week.” The stands overlooking Kiel’s harbor held a who’s who of German political life, often including the Kaiser in its ranks. True to form, however, Ballin was not in Kiel to relax—at least, not entirely.

Count Paul Wolff Metternich, a German diplomat who would become ambassador to Britain in 1901, was also in Kiel that week. Even at these holidays, Ballin was pondering the latest method he had devised to expand his shipping empire. He shared those ponderings with Metternich, who saw in Ballin’s plans a method to expand the political empire of which he was a key officer. “Today,” wrote Metternich to his supervisor at the Foreign Office, Secretary Bernhard von Bülow, “Ballin shared an interesting plan with me. After making the necessary inquiries, he plans to establish a line to the Persian Gulf. It will chiefly be for passenger service, which for the English ships in the Gulf (there are only English ships there) is going quite badly.” There, Metternich saw his opening:

This seems to me an exceptional means, one to which no other power could rightfully object, to bring German commerce into the Gulf and to prepare for the time when our Middle Eastern railway has reached its goal. It is better to show our commercial flag in the Persian Gulf than our war flag. The latter would solve nothing. It would only arouse

English and Russian mistrust for no apparent purpose. But if our enterprising commercial flag can pave the way in the Persian Gulf, then it will be easier to achieve the important connection to the endpoint of our railway.¹⁹⁷

Hamburg's overseas commerce and the century-old tradition of its merchant houses and shipping firms reached their apogee in Albert Ballin and the HAPAG. Economic globalization had developed to such a degree that it had catapulted Hamburg's leading shipping firm beyond its local importance and into national and global arenas. In that sense, then, the HAPAG represented a drastic departure from Hamburg's merchant aristocracy, with their family firms, free trade, and relatively parochial concerns. After the turn of the century, the HAPAG was not only the most important firm in Hamburg. It was the largest shipping company in the world, whose decisions reverberated in Berlin, London, and New York.

The HAPAG's ascendancy began in 1888, when Ballin's mark came to define the firm. Shipping freight became how the HAPAG made its money, but passenger

¹⁹⁷ Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Friedrich Thimme, eds., *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1918. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*, vol. 17 (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte: 1922-1927), 8-14. Metternich to Bülow. "Generaldirektor Ballin teilte mir dieser Tage mündlich einen interessanten Plan mit. Er beabsichtigt, nachdem er vorbereitende Erkundigungen eingezogen haben wird einen Dampferverkehr im Persischen Golf, zunächst hauptsächlich für die Personenbeförderung, welche auf den dortigen englischen Schiffen (andere gibt es nicht) sehr schlecht ist, herzustellen. Es erscheint mir dies als ein vorzügliches Mittel, gegen welches keine andere Macht berechtigten Einspruch erheben kann, um den deutschen Handel nach dem Persischen Golf zu bringen, und um dort vorzuarbeiten für die Zeit, wenn unsere kleinasiatische Bahn ihr Ziel erreicht haben wird. Es ist besser, unsere Handelsflagge zeigt sich im Persischen Golf als unsere Kriegsflagge. Für diese ist noch keine Aufgabe dort zu lösen. Sie würde nur fremdes Misstrauen, englisches sowohl wie russisches, erwecken, und das ohne ersichtlichen Nutzen. Wenn aber unsere rührige Handelsflagge greifbare Vorbedingungen im Persischen Golf schafft, so wird sich die wichtige Verbindung vom Endpunkte unserer Bahn nach Indien dereinst um so leichter bewerkstelligen lassen."

service was how the firm grew its global brand. Within its passenger department, the HAPAG had two basic types of customers: Americans visiting the Old World, and Europeans emigrating to the Americas. In both cases, the HAPAG demonstrated a self-awareness of the line's role as an international agent of globalization. For the former, this meant celebrating the new age of transatlantic travel and global integration. For the latter, it meant shuffling undesired migrants through Hamburg as quickly as possible, taking every precaution that these foreigners never entered the city.

At the same time, the German Empire was doing its best to increase its own international standing. As we have seen, Weltpolitik began these attempts to elevate Germany within an imperial balance of power that favored Britain, France, and Russia. One such attempt was the Berlin-Baghdad Railway (*die Bagdadbahn*), a private initiative officially led by Deutsche Bank that the Foreign Office hoped would help bring Ottoman Turkey into Germany's sphere of influence. As early as 1900, the idea that the HAPAG would offer a maritime connection to the railroad passed from Metternich to Bülow. The firm worked closely with the German Navy Office on several occasions, and in 1908, as the window of opportunity for building an actual rail line to the Persian Gulf looked all but shut, Metternich and Bülow again mooted the possibility of instrumentalizing HAPAG success to the German Empire's gain. The Berlin-Bagdad Railway, and the HAPAG's relationship to it, represents how in Germany and in an increasingly germanophobic Britain economic globalization and imperial geopolitics became entangled to the point of conflation. Albert Ballin's line

was as international as any firm in the world, but it was to the HAPAG that Germany turned to salvage its global ambitions.

Ballin and the HAPAG: The Early Years

The *Hamburg-Amerikanische-Packetfahrt-Aktien-Gesellschaft* was founded in 1857 to establish a “regular connection between Hamburg and North America by means of sailing ships under the Hamburg flag.”¹⁹⁸ The firm grew up during Hamburg’s era of free trade, before German Unification and Zollanschluss incorporation. In those days, little differentiated the HAPAG from its fellow Hamburg shipping companies, such as Woermann and O’Swald. Among Hamburg-based firms, the HAPAG led North Atlantic trade, although that was not the case relative to the great British and French lines. In 1886, the HAPAG was the twenty-second largest shipping company in the world.¹⁹⁹

A fellow Hanseatic firm, *Norddeutscher Lloyd* of Bremen (NDL), levied the greatest challenge against the HAPAG. In the early 1880s, however, the HAPAG faced fierce competition from a Hamburg-based upstart, the Carr Line. Carr had been established by Edward Carr, the nephew of Hamburg magnate Robert M. Sloman, Jr. It began as a transatlantic freight service but soon outfitted a small fleet with passenger accommodations. Emigrants to North America constituted the majority of Carr’s passengers—as they did for the HAPAG. Specifically, Carr contracted with what was called an “independent emigrant agency” to provide it with enough emigrants to fill its ships. Such agencies had originally played the middleman

¹⁹⁸ Quoted in Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 20.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

between prospective travelers and shipping lines. Individuals and families paid the independent agency, and it in turn secured them passage aboard a ship bound for North America. By 1850, German firms had begun to avoid independent agents, and for some time emigrants who purchased from independent agents traveled via Britain, in a process called “indirect emigration.”²⁰⁰

Indirect emigration was hardly the most lucrative business Hamburg had to offer. Even its leading independent agency, Morris & Company, wanted out. Commissions for English associates, relatively fewer passengers, and general logistical complications made indirect emigration a substantially less attractive venture than direct service to North America. As such, in 1881 Morris & Company agreed with the Carr Line to inaugurate a direct passenger service.²⁰¹

External factors buoyed the new partners’ success. Even as German emigration began to decline, political difficulties in eastern Europe—chiefly a series of pogroms from 1881 to 1884 against Imperial Russia’s Jewish populations in Ukraine and Poland—pushed a new wave of emigrants to the United States, and above all to New York City. In just a year, Carr increased its fleet by a factor of three and saw its emigration business grow from 4,000 heads in year one to 11,000 in year two. The firm did not offer the most luxurious of accommodations, but its fares were competitive even against Hamburg’s longer-established lines. Leading those lines, of course, was the HAPAG, and in May of 1882 the HAPAG began a rate war against Carr. Both firms drastically lowered prices, and the HAPAG’s entire directorate resigned so that a total reorganization could better outfit the company to drive Carr

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 12-13.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 17-18.

out of business. For the HAPAG, the only alternative to a rate war was to purchase its competitor outright. It did so in 1886, reaching an agreement in which Carr (since 1885 formally called the Union Line) “remained corporately independent” but fell under HAPAG management. A separate, though equally important, agreement established a man named Albert Ballin—previously the owner of Morris & Company and architect of its partnership with Carr—as director of the HAPAG’s passenger division.²⁰²

Albert Ballin was born on August 15, 1857, to Samuel Joel Ballin and his wife Amalia (née Meyer). Young Albert grew up practically in the middle of Hamburg’s harbor; the family houses in Stubbenhuk and, later, Baumwall lay less than one hundred feet from the Elbe waterfront. Indeed, Samuel Ballin—a Jew who had emigrated from Denmark around 1830—established an independent emigration agency in 1852, five years before Albert’s birth. This concern, founded with business partner Samuel Hirsch, was called Morris & Company. By the age of fifteen, which was not unusually young by Hamburg’s standards, Albert is said to have joined his father in the family business.²⁰³

The elder Ballin and Hirsch were hardly gifted businessmen, and the global economic downturn that began around 1873 suggested a bleak outlook for the shipping business. That this depression originated in America made emigration look all the bleaker. Albert considered abandoning Morris & Company, but in 1877 he bought out Wilhelm Wolffsohn and assumed sole ownership of the firm. Thereafter,

²⁰² Ibid, 19-20.

²⁰³ Ibid, 15-16.

Albert orchestrated the partnership with Carr and in June 1886 Albert Ballin, aged twenty-nine, began to work for the HAPAG.²⁰⁴

Transatlantic Crossings: Tourists and Emigrants

Under Ballin's direction, the HAPAG began to shape itself into an ever more international firm. After 1888, he became the guiding force behind the firm's international expansion.²⁰⁵ Of course, 1888 was an auspicious year in the *Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg*. As we have seen, the finalization of the Zollanschluss treaties and the completion of Hamburg's new harbor—not to mention the accession of the navally-inclined Wilhelm II to Germany's Emperorship—officially marked Hamburg's entry into the economic globalization of the late nineteenth century. Beyond the sheer volume of people and goods in question, two prominent features distinguished this globalization from what had come before. First was the proliferation of Hamburg's trade in all parts of the earth, especially those not claimed by Germany as colonial possessions. Second were the revolutionary advancements in transportation and communication that made world trade—and global businesses—possible.²⁰⁶

If the steam engine symbolized the technological revolutions of several decades earlier, its counterpart at the end of the nineteenth century was the ocean-going ship. Norddeutscher Lloyd, in fact, introduced in 1881 the definitive type of

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 20.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 22.

²⁰⁶ William McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 223-7; 256-8.

modern ocean liner, the *Schnelldampfer*, which translates literally as “fast steamer.”²⁰⁷

Among shipping firms, innovations in transatlantic travel had been the marker of prestige since the 1830s, and relative to the ships that had come before, NDL’s new steamers were large, fast, and luxurious.²⁰⁸ In 1889, the HAPAG’s first two *Schnelldampfer*, *Auguste Victoria* and *Columbia*, set a speed record for one transatlantic voyage, and over 30,000 curious Americans greeted the former for its first arrival in the United States.²⁰⁹

In fact, as the HAPAG’s ships appeared ever more frequently at the firm’s quay in Hoboken, New Jersey, it began consciously to market itself toward American audiences. Particularly crucial were the HAPAG’s travelers’ guides and brochures, which were printed in New York and Chicago and presented the firm as modern, industrial, and transatlantic. These guides prepared an American clientele to connect physically, culturally, and financially with the entirety of Europe and much of the world. From the reach of the lines themselves to the sheer extent of the advice they offered, it is clear that the HAPAG was self-conscious about its ability to globalize. The HAPAG branded itself as a genuinely international corporation, though it never hid—nor did it want to—its identity as a German firm.

The earliest such publications were simply “transatlantic travelers’ guides.” The HAPAG guide from 1886, for example, purported to provide prospective travelers with anything they might need on their trip. These guides were published

²⁰⁷ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 22.

²⁰⁸ McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power*, 225.

²⁰⁹ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 23.

monthly, with each featuring English, German, and French side-by-side; writers in New York, London, Paris, and Berlin collaborated to ensure trilingual accuracy.²¹⁰ Copies could be purchased from HAPAG associates in New York, but every ticket bearer aboard a HAPAG ship received a guide free of charge. Thus, the HAPAG could “fill a want that [had] been frequently felt by those who [were] constantly crossing the Atlantic.”²¹¹ Indeed, as the 1886 guide itself claimed, “the number of transatlantic tourists [increased] from year to year, the incentive to cross the ocean not being confined to those who go on business, or in search of health and pleasure, but extending to that steadily increasing class of native-born Americans who know Europe only from description, and have an ardent desire to visit that fount of art and science.”²¹²

The first need the HAPAG’s travelers’ guides sought to fill was to bring the revolution in travel to its customers’ fingertips. Globalization rested upon this revolution, and the HAPAG especially succeeded through close integration and partnership with European rail lines. The 1886 guide had maps of Hamburg, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Brussels, Amsterdam, Geneva, Rome, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, San Francisco, New Orleans, Montreal, and Quebec, as well as timetables for the major European railway companies.²¹³ Most importantly, the guide advised travelers of the HAPAG’s available return voyages, and of its yearly itinerary in general. A number of agents—

²¹⁰ LOC Hamburg-America Line: October 1886 Transatlantic Travelers’ Guide, front cover; v.

²¹¹ Ibid, iii.

²¹² Ibid, 27.

²¹³ Ibid, front cover, v.

in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, London, Plymouth, Paris, and le Havre could be contacted if one wanted to purchase a ticket.²¹⁴

A HAPAG ticket held in New York City could be used to board direct voyages that left every Thursday and Saturday, via Cherbourg and le Havre, for Hamburg. A ticket held in Hamburg, in turn, could be used for direct travel every Wednesday and Saturday, via le Havre, for New York. Passengers disembarking at Cherbourg and le Havre received pre-arranged, reduced rate rail fair to Paris. The same was true of passengers disembarking at Plymouth and Southampton for London.²¹⁵ The firm's newly opened Baltic Line meant that American passengers could also reach Gothenburg, Copenhagen, and Stettin.²¹⁶ As the guide made clear, "Regular lines of steamers run from Hamburg to all parts of the world; so that travelers, whichever port they may be bound for, will always find excellent accommodation and close connection to their destination."²¹⁷

The 1886 guide thus stressed the degree to which the HAPAG's modern service was fully integrated into a global network of passenger transit. Moreover, the use of English, French, and German side-by-side demonstrated its desire to reach an international clientele. As the guide claimed, transatlantic travel increased through the 1880s and 90s. The HAPAG facilitated that travel. It even lauded "the success of transatlantic excursions which this company has founded."²¹⁸ The firm was not

²¹⁴ Ibid, 6-11.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 11.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 11.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 28; 46. As the guide made clear, "all parts of the world" also meant South America and Asia. Through-tickets could be acquired in Hamburg for travel to either continent.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 27.

reactive; at least, it did not want to be viewed that way. It had an active role in increasing transatlantic, international travel.

In the United States, the HAPAG soon became known for its accommodations, which included all the amenities necessary for luxury and information of interest—including banks, hotels, attractions, and stores, along with the information of U.S. consuls and embassies and a conversion table for continental weights and measures—for a number of European destinations.²¹⁹ The firm began to advertise itself in the U.S. as a luxury line suited for the American upper crust. This increasing emphasis on luxury, comfort, and diversion coincided with Albert Ballin's 1891 brainchild, the pleasure cruise.²²⁰

The Hamburg-America Line's 1893 "Travelers' Memorandum Book" furthered the firm's North American branding. While the 1893 publication maintained a stress on physical interconnectivity, the HAPAG also began to market itself as a luxury experience. That much is reflected in several new elements found in 1893 Memorandum Book, including historical and statistical introductions to the firm, technical information about the inner workings of a twin-screw express steamer, and a short encyclopedic account of Europe at the time.²²¹ In keeping with the 1886 guide, this publication cited the HAPAG's regular and renowned service, along with advancements made by the firm in speed.²²² "The great regularity" of HAPAG

²¹⁹ LOC Hamburg-America Line: October 1888 Transatlantic Travelers' Guide, front cover, 33-8, 51-68.

²²⁰ That will likely endure as Albert Ballin's longest-lasting legacy. In 1891, hoping to use HAPAG ships that could not brave the North Sea in winter, he invented the modern pleasure cruise. A 2017 HAPAG-Lloyd (now the name of the firm, since its merger with Norddeutscher Lloyd) advertisement campaign, "*Die Geschichte beginnt hier*," ("History begins here") was in part focused on this innovation.

²²¹ LOC Hamburg-America Line: 1893 European Travelers' Memorandum Book.

²²² *Ibid*, 5-6.

service, so the brochure claimed, “[was] indicated by the fact that almost all trips were made within a margin of a few hours. The arrival... can therefore be easily forecast.”²²³ After Ballin’s introduction of the cruise, the line ran winter service to Gibraltar, Naples, and Genoa, along with the regular service to Hamburg, which, according to the 1893 booklet, was the “principal commercial emporium of the continent of Europe, and one of its most beautiful towns.”²²⁴ First-class passengers in Hamburg now received special attention, including access to a train and luggage service that carried them from the central Dammtor train station to the Cuxhaven harbor at the mouth of the Elbe. Passengers of the regular service embarked at Großer Grasbrook in the central harbor.²²⁵ The system by which passengers boarded HAPAG ships reflected the two-tiered nature of the firm’s entire Atlantic passenger activity. On the one hand were the international connections provided to North American customers. That was to be celebrated. On the other hand were similar, if directionally opposite, international connections offered to emigrants leaving Europe. Though a key part of the HAPAG’s business, it was not view through such a laudatory lens.

The HAPAG Emigrant Halls of 1904

Despite convincing Hamburg to carry out a massive harbor renovation in 1901, the HAPAG needed to expand its facilities within the city again three years later. The year 1904 saw the firm working with the city to build new emigrant halls (*Auswandererhallen*), in which to accommodate the traffic that continued to flow

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid, 23.

²²⁵ Ibid.

through Hamburg toward North America. Though this traffic constituted a financially important part of the HAPAG's passenger service, the firm described it in tones quite different from the laudatory ones on offer for wealthy North Americans. The HAPAG still benefitted from this form of globalization, but it did so with almost frightened disdain for the actual people its ships carried.

The key mechanism by which HAPAG passenger service operated was called the entry-exit (*eintreffen-abreisen*) system. As the chief of HAPAG's Passenger Service Department explained in a December 15, 1904 message to city officials, the majority of migrants came to Hamburg from Eastern Europe, stayed for a very brief period time, and then proceeded on to the Americas. For example, on December 14, 125 passengers had left for North America and 103 for South America. During their stay in Hamburg, these emigrants to the Americas did not the city proper, and instead stayed in HAPAG-constructed emigrant halls. Despite this frequent turnover, at the end of 1904, "The halls were extraordinarily occupied."²²⁶

A conference in early 1905 set about to correct this problem, with conference Chairman Senator Stamann noting in his opening remarks that the number of emigrants "will not sink."²²⁷ Two HAPAG directors and the Hamburg Chief of Police also attended the meeting. Consistent with the letter of 15 December, the firm's representatives tried to convince the city that new emigrant halls were a dire necessity. Not that the city seemed to need much convincing. On the contrary, Hamburg and the HAPAG recognized the need to work in concert with one another.

²²⁶ Sta HH 373-7 I II E III 3: Auswanderungsamt I: Zur Hamburg-Amerika Linie, Die Behörde für das Auswandererwesen Hamburgs: Akte, die Vergrößerung der Auswandererhalle der Hamburg-Amerika Linie, 5-6. "Die Auswandererhallen ausserordentlich stark belegt sind."

²²⁷ Ibid, 19. "...nicht sinken werde."

As Senator Stamann further noted, the overflowing halls were a medical issue and an infection hazard. The fear—however misguided it may have been—of a second cholera outbreak clearly inflected these negotiations.²²⁸

Indeed, the HAPAG delegation agreed to do whatever they could afford to mitigate these sanitation and overcrowding problems. The alternative was a “general ban” on emigration through the city.²²⁹ That would have been almost entirely unfeasible, and for the HAPAG especially it would have been incredibly costly. Discussions of such a ban came after both sides agreed on the necessity of expanding the current halls, and it most likely was never a serious option. That having been said, the mere discussion of such a drastic measure highlighted the extreme overcrowding at hand. The original emigrant halls had been built to house 1200 people at once. At times in December of 1904, their occupants totaled as many as 2400.²³⁰ The conference concluded with an obvious consensus; all that remained was to hash out the details.

That the majority of emigrants were foreign was clearly one such detail that concerned the planners of the new halls. The people who traveled to the Americas aboard HAPAG ships represented a remarkable diversity. Thus, “Plans [would] be undertaken, to separate the nationalities, confessions, and sects” included among the emigrants.²³¹ Reports on the state of the present halls contained few comments on particular groups, aside from the allegation that Russian emigrants required more disinfection than others. The specter of 1892’s cholera outbreak continued to haunt

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid, 20. “...Einen generellen Verbot.”

²³⁰ Ibid, 5; 20.

²³¹ Ibid, 34. “Plane verfahren werden, um die Nationalitäten, Konfessionen und Sekten zu trennen.”

Hamburg's idea of emigrants. These people were HAPAG customers, just like the North Americans departing from New York, albeit at a lower price point, but from the perspective of the HAPAG and the city of Hamburg, they represented the uglier reality of the globalization that buoyed the city's overseas commerce. The service HAPAG offered may have been to connect these emigrants with another part of the world, but every effort was taken to keep them disconnected from Hamburg.

Two concerns governed the eventual decision to construct the halls on the island of Veddel, which lies between Hamburg's Old City and the lower Elbe. First, the halls had to be accessible directly by train. As we have seen, a hallmark of the HAPAG's success was the firm's consistent collaboration with European railroads, and this case was no different. A rail line connection at Veddel, easily approached from the north via Hamburg's main train station, meant that emigrants could bypass the station and would not disrupt Hamburg's typical public transport routines. In fact, Veddel lay near enough to the Elbe's southern banks that it could also be accessed from the central station in Harburg, the city directly opposite Hamburg on the other side of the Elbe, if the HAPAG so desired.²³² By the 1880s, the majority of emigrants were delivered to Hamburg by train and never actually entered the city.²³³

The second advantage Veddel offered both the HAPAG and the city officials was the ease with which it could be quarantined. Disease was perhaps the dominant concern expressed during planning, and the HAPAG and city officials wanted to be able to seal the halls off in the event of an outbreak. Similarly important was that the

²³² Ibid, 52. Emigrants could go through Hamburg and to their final destinations "ohne das Gebiet der Stadt oder die städtischen Bahnhöfe zu berühren."

²³³ Ibid, 37; Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 42-4.

island have easy access to running water, which would make a sustained quarantine easier. The compound also housed a watch tower, from which city officials and doctors could conduct their operations. What they watched over, exactly, was planned down to the very finest of details. In total, the HAPAG spent two million Marks to build the halls, with the help of a land grant from the city Senate.

The site on Veddel measured 60,000 square meters, including the necessary overflow room. All told, the space could hold 4,000 people—a far cry more than the 1,500 allowable occupants in the old halls.²³⁴ There were two standard room sizes, of 22 and 40 people each. Every emigrant paid two Marks per day, and every emigrant—man, woman, and child—received one-half pound of meat each day. Finally, plans for the halls divided the entire compound into two sections: “Pure and Impure.” “Only those emigrants who had been found clean by a doctor could take a place in the pure section.”²³⁵

It is perhaps no surprise that residents of a city like Hamburg, which played port of departure to thousands of outsiders every year, would be wary of such numbers disrupting the city’s internal equilibrium.²³⁶ That being said, it is hard to ignore the racial-national dynamics present in this preoccupation with keeping the “sanitarily uncertain” Russians or Poles out of the city—especially when compared with the HAPAG’s attitude toward its North American customers.²³⁷ The distinction

²³⁴ Ibid, 36.

²³⁵ Ibid, 52v. “Reine und Unreine.” “Nur die vom Arzt gesund befundenen Auswanderer finden Aufnahme in der reinen Seite.”

²³⁶ Ibid, 23. In 1904 57,337 people left through Hamburg for North America; 1,321 left for South America; 13,437 left for England; and 352 left for Africa.

²³⁷ Sta HH 373-7 I II E III 3: Auswanderungsamt I: Zur Hamburg-Amerika Linie, Die Behörde für das Auswandererwesen Hamburgs: Akte, die Vergrößerung der Auswandererhalle der Hamburg-Amerika Linie, 38. “...sanitär unsicher.”

between cabin and between-decks passengers embodies what was effectively a tiered globalization being carried out by the HAPAG. The firm had an international reach, international concerns, and an international clientele; of this—and of its role in the material integration of the world—the HAPAG was fully aware. The firm’s imposing steamships may have been the symbol of a world more connected than ever before, but there was no nobility to the HAPAG’s globalism, just business. North American customers were courted with the promise of experiencing the Old World via the luxuries of modernity, but customers fleeing famine, poverty, and religious persecution in Europe were quickly shuffled through the HAPAG’s home city, cordoned off from the rest of the population and sent on to America as quickly as possible.

Though opposite in many ways, these two examples show how firmly international the HAPAG had become. More than firmly international—the HAPAG was aware of its role facilitating global mobility and integration. However, the HAPAG globalized within a complex system of imperial relationships, in which overseas commerce often became entangled with political expansion. As during Germany’s pursuit of a colonial empire and its early naval armament, overseas interests guided Germany’s imperial expansion. From its very early stages, the Berlin-Baghdad Railway was one such interest.

From Hamburg to Basra

As the name suggests, the Berlin-Baghdad Railway would have connected Germany to the Middle East by rail, thus eliminating the need to traverse either the

British-controlled Suez Canal or even Aden, another critical stop en route to Asia that was administrated by Great Britain. Indeed, bringing German goods from Hamburg to Ottoman Turkey and the Far East without relying on the British was one of the railway's goals.²³⁸ More important was the hope that a German-led railway through the Ottoman Empire could expand German imperial influence. On its face, that hope would have been perfectly typical of other European empires, but a perceived infringement upon their spheres of influence prejudiced both Russia and Britain against the railway.²³⁹ France, too, was wary that official activity might follow this private enterprise. In the words Clinton E. Dawkins, a would-be English investor in the project, for global empires before the First World War "business [had] become involved in politics."²⁴⁰

In April of 1898, German Ambassador to Constantinople Baron Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein wrote to Chancellor Prince Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst that the time had come to build a German railway through Ottoman Turkey to Baghdad.²⁴¹ German firms had been considering the project for almost a decade, and the Sultan was disposed toward seeing them carried out. Concessions for the actual project would be granted to a German-led private group called the Anatolian Railway Company, which was owned by Deutsche Bank and led by Deutsche Director Georg von Siemens.²⁴² From the start, however, the project assumed geopolitical importance.

²³⁸ Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 46.

²³⁹ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 334-8.

²⁴⁰ *Die Große Politik*, vol. 17, 442.

²⁴¹ *Die Große Politik*, vol. 14.2, 464-6.

²⁴² McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 35-42.

This was especially the case for the Sultan, who wanted the rail built through Armenia to bolster Turkish rule there. It was also the case for Russia, which viewed the project as a dangerous intrusion on its own sphere of influence; not only might German railway construction in the Ottoman Empire pull yet another European power into the conflict over Central Asia, but also it gave the Sultan a new ally. The same Turkish soldiers who could use the railroad to suppress uprisings in Armenia, could also travel to the Caucasus by train if deployed against Russia.²⁴³ Thus, the railway increased Russia's fear that Germany might try to shoehorn itself into Central Asia.

In Berlin, as well, it was imagined from the outset that German influence could follow the rail tracks into the Middle East.²⁴⁴ The Anatolian Railway Company—and German investment in the Ottoman Empire in general—was not an international anomaly.²⁴⁵ It was to be the centerpiece of this officially private project to expand Germany's sphere of influence, but such projects were in no way unique to Germany. Nevertheless, Germany's geopolitical isolation and Britain's increasing germanophobia would prove a challenge for the Berlin-Baghdad Railway.

As early as 1900 the German Foreign Office had discussed a maritime connection to the rail project: the HAPAG. At the time Ballin met Metternich in Kiel and proposed a HAPAG line run to the Persian Gulf, Britain exerted almost complete control over shipping in the region, including along the Tigris and Euphrates, with the negligible exception of a handful of Hamburg-based firms who had done business there since 1895.²⁴⁶ The British were far from the Berlin-Baghdad Railway's only

²⁴³ Ibid, 36.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 40; *Die Große Politik*, vol. 14.2, 464-6, 468-72.

²⁴⁵ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 337.

²⁴⁶ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 75-8.

opponents, but the Foreign Office knew that German maritime influence in the Red Sea and Persia could aggravate Westminster more than German economic insinuations by land.

One of the touchier subjects in the Berlin-Baghdad Railway conversation was what German diplomats euphemistically referred to as the “Kuwait question.” As early as 1899, it was pointed out that Kuwait would be a better terminus for the railway than either Baghdad or Basra, because it had a preexisting deep-water harbor where freight ships could load and unload cargo for the railway. However, if extending German commerce into the Middle East was going to pique Britain’s interest, doing so by sea was going to put it on high alert.²⁴⁷ Then Foreign Secretary Bernhard von Bülow endorsed the plan, and his ambassador in Constantinople advised that Britain would not present serious opposition.²⁴⁸ After all, the British were also preoccupied with Russia.²⁴⁹

Nevertheless, there was an acute sense within the German Foreign Office that Britain would be even more protective of its interests at sea than on land. In 1899, Ambassador to Britain Count Paul von Hatzfeld reminded Chancellor Hohenlohe that establishing a consulate in Muscat, which lies on the Gulf of Oman and past which any ship entering the Persian Gulf would have to travel, would make it prudent to establish a coaling station in the region. But, according to Hatzfeld, a coaling station “would fall into the category of such things, which undoubtedly would arouse English

²⁴⁷ *Die Große Politik*, vol. 17, 465-6.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 467-8.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 477-9.

mistrust.”²⁵⁰ Germany had acquiring a coaling station—or even a fleet station—on the mind, but the Foreign Office instructed its diplomats to tiptoe around the subject.²⁵¹

In August 1901, Metternich wrote to the Foreign Office that he would assuage British fears: the Kuwait question was commercial; there was no plan to take political control in the region.²⁵² There is no doubt that Britain felt protective of its control in the Gulf, but between 1900 and 1903 the British were not particularly more concerned with the railway than were the Russians and the French. In fact, it was the French who first raised the loudest objections to a potential maritime accompaniment for the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, one which “for German shipping and also German commerce would be of great importance.”²⁵³

Through 1902 and 1903, however, Britain’s stance toward Germany took a markedly negative turn. In large part, this turn followed another of Weltpolitik’s chief areas of investment: Venezuela. On December 20, 1902, Britain and Germany, along with Italy, announced a blockade of Venezuela in order to pressure President Cipriano Castro into paying foreign debts and damages to—among others—Germany’s Hanseatic merchant community there. In Britain’s view, Germany prosecuted the blockade rashly by scuttling two Venezuelan ships. The British press, especially, questioned the wisdom of taking joint action with the Germans. By January 19, 1903, what had begun as an international partnership had gone so poorly that Ambassador Metternich remarked: “As long as I have ever known England, I

²⁵⁰ *Die Große Politik*, vol. 14.2, 516-19. “...würde aber in der Kategorie derjenigen Tatsachen fallen, welche das englische Mißtrauen gegen unsere Absichten in Maskat und die englische Empfindlichkeit über unsere Einmischung unzweifelhaft erregen würden.”

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 526-7.

²⁵² *Die Große Politik*, vol. 17, 481-2.

²⁵³ *Die Große Politik*, vol. 14.2, 472-4. “...für den deutschen Handel und auch für die deutsche Schifffahrt von großer Bedeutung.”

have never observed such bitterness toward any other nation as now [exists] against us.”²⁵⁴ As we have seen, this disconnect was not part of an errant or aggressive German policy; it was merely a reversal of the stances taken toward Brazil in 1893. Andreas Rose has in fact shown the Britain led the negotiations with Berlin and the latter pursued, if anything, a policy that was not aggressive enough. That is was the Germans who had taken the first Venezuelan ships was actually a quirk: the British commanding officer instructed his German subordinate, who had more experience in the Caribbean, to take the lead.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in both Whitehall and the British Press, the damage had been done.²⁵⁶

In March 1903, Dawkins and his associates—including Sir Ernest Cassel—promised to persuade Westminster “to arrange all necessary terminal facilities at Kuwait.”²⁵⁷ They were unsuccessful. Clinton E. Dawkins got another thing right when he wrote to his would-be business partner, Arthur von Gwinner, in April of 1903. Britain, and above all its Foreign Office, was slowly coming to view Germany with increasing hostility. As Dawkins wrote Gwinner, the President of Deutsche Bank, Gwinner’s grievance should lie “not against [Dawkins’] British group, but against the British Foreign Office.”²⁵⁸

After 1903, there was no chance of British cooperation on the Baghdad Railway project. Indeed, as Britain moved diplomatically closer to France through their 1904 Entente and the 1906 Algeciras Conference, Germany’s influence in the

²⁵⁴ Quoted in Herwig, *Germany’s Vision of Empire*, 231.

²⁵⁵ Andreas Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent: Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), 279-300.

²⁵⁶ Herwig, *Germany’s Vision of Empire*, 209-35.

²⁵⁷ *Die Große Politik*, vol. 14.2, 435.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Ottoman Empire took on ever more importance, symbolized by Karl Helfferich's appointment to Second Director of the Anatolian Railway Company. Helfferich was a former Colonial Office employee who believed in the commercial side of Weltpolitik. It was Bülow who had encouraged him to take up the post at the ARC. By 1906, however, the Berlin-Baghdad Railway reached only the foot of the Taurus mountains, and there was no money to extend it. Recruiting financial assistance from Britain and France—as Gwinner had attempted earlier—was now unlikely. Britain, in fact, pressured the Ottomans to divert money elsewhere, thus keeping the railway on the back burner.²⁵⁹

At the same time, the 1906 “Liberal landslide” victory in Parliament ushered in a two-pronged change of course for British foreign policy. The first, led by former Ambassador to Russia Charles Hardinge and Liberal Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey, was the pursuit of rapprochement with Russia.²⁶⁰ In fact, British foreign policy before 1905 had chiefly responded to the Russian problem. To guard against Russia, Britain had pursued two diplomatic policies: rapprochement with France—Russia's closest European partner—and alliance with Japan—Russia's fiercest Asian competitor. The former policy ended in the 1904 Entente Cordiale between Britain and France. The latter policy led to an Anglo-Japanese naval defense pact signed in January 1902.²⁶¹ In 1906, the new liberal government took this policy toward Russia directly to St. Petersburg.

²⁵⁹ John Williamson, *Karl Helfferich 1872-1924: Economist, Financier, Politician* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971), 79-87.

²⁶⁰ Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent*, 362-369.

²⁶¹ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 137-40.

The former foes in Central Asia achieved their rapprochement at the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. The goals of Britain's newly Russian-friendly policy had much more to do with neutralizing an imperial rival and securing Central Asia than with encircling Germany.²⁶² In fact, as imperial rivals went, Russia was the more threatening. Thus, it was with Russia that Britain should seek better relations.²⁶³ Nevertheless, the 1907 Convention threatened both Germany's diplomatic situation in general and the Baghdad Railway in particular. Along with addressing Russian access to the Turkish Straits, the Convention separated Persia into two distinct zones, with Russia in the North and Britain in the South. If German political influence was going to reach Basra, it would have to do so alone.²⁶⁴

Moreover, the easing of tensions abroad redirected British concern toward Germany.²⁶⁵ The latter found no reprieve through Russia, as domestic pressures discouraged the Tsar from pursuing a German-friendly policy. Nor was France a viable option, after the German political blunders during the 1906 Algeciras Conference.²⁶⁶ Although diplomatic events before 1907 were not designed to isolate Germany within a new global balance of imperial power, that was their effect. As Christopher Clark has put it, "The once widely held view that Germany caused its own isolation through its egregious international behavior is not borne out by a broader analysis of the processes by which the realignments of [1914] were brought

²⁶² Ibid, 429-448; see especially 429-433.

²⁶³ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 158-9.

²⁶⁴ McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 50-53.

²⁶⁵ Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 153.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 135-7.

about.” On the contrary, the new system did not rest on antagonism toward Germany, but rather encouraged it.²⁶⁷

That encouragement fueled the second change within Britain’s Foreign Office: a distinct germanophobia that reached levels unseen even in the aftermath of the Second Venezuelan Crisis. Keith Wilson has called this germanophobia “the invention of Germany”; more recently, Clark has referred to it as the British “painting the [German] devil on the wall.”²⁶⁸ Simply put, in terms both of naval power and continental diplomatic maneuverings, Germany’s actual activity in no way corresponded to the menace ascribed it by the British.²⁶⁹ As Wilson has argued, this German menace became “a more respectable *raison d’être*” that held the Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian ententes together.²⁷⁰ These agreements may have been formed to protect the newly vulnerable British Empire, but their effect was to isolate the German Empire, substantially limiting any room it had for further imperial expansion through traditional diplomacy.

The 1908 London Conferences

It is into this world that, in 1906, the HAPAG dispatched its first ship to Persia. The firm did not make a profit there, but in anticipation of the railway connection Ballin expected to hold out against smaller British firms, which were themselves struggling. There is no evidence of collusion between

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 159.

²⁶⁸ Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*; both are chapter headings.

²⁶⁹ Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente*, 100-20; see especially 106-7.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 115.

the HAPAG and the Imperial government before this first voyage, and Ballin did not even inform Berlin before dispatching the *Canadia* to the Gulf. Nevertheless, the news went over well in the capital. “Ja,” noted Chancellor Bülow, “I’m very pleased. This can only hurt the British.”²⁷¹ The British, for their part, felt much the same way.

In fact, as Matthew Seligmann has shown, the British Naval Intelligence Department (NID) had been monitoring the development of Germany’s transatlantic steamers since 1901.²⁷² Indeed, although Tirpitz’s plan for naval armament rested on the construction of a battle fleet, the German Navy Office took extensive steps to ensure that German merchant marine liners could be outfitted as auxiliary cruisers if war came. The logic to these steps was not simply that it made up for Germany’s relative lack of cruisers. More important were the qualities of those merchant liners themselves. As we have seen, the HAPAG and NDL occupied the pinnacle of German industrial prowess. Simply put, after 1897 no ship afloat—naval or otherwise—could outrun their transatlantic liners. By 1906, concrete plans existed, by which German auxiliary cruisers would raid British commerce in the Americas.²⁷³ Both the subsidies awarded to Cunard and the development of Britain’s battle cruiser class ship responded to this perceived threat.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Quoted in Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 80-1.

²⁷² Matthew Seligmann, “Germany’s Ocean Greyhounds and the Royal Navy’s First Battle Cruisers: An Historiographical Problem,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 27, no. 1 (2016): 162-82. Seligmann probably overweights the degree to which the Royal Navy was concerned with Germany, but their war games did include the possibility of German auxiliary cruisers leaving the mouth of the Elbe to disrupt British shipping.

²⁷³ Matthew Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat, 1901–1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War against Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11-17.

²⁷⁴ Seligmann, “Germany’s Ocean Greyhounds, 168-174.

With regard to the Persian Gulf, no fewer than three different sources warned the Foreign Office of the HAPAG's new business. Sir Frank Lascelles, the British Ambassador in Berlin, passed the information along to the Foreign Office, as did the British consulate in Hamburg.²⁷⁵ The British Embassy in Constantinople reported the same several months later, as the firm's first ship entered the Gulf. The Acting Consul General in Baghdad, one Major Ramsay, drew particular attention to the commercial dangers HAPAG posed to British lines.²⁷⁶ The British Ambassador to Turkey, Sir Nicholas O'Connor, wrote Sir Edward Grey in April of 1906 to warn him of German maneuvers that might foreshadow a more involved policy toward Persia. "Another symptom of Germany's interest in Persian affairs," he wrote, "which would seem to be part and parcel of some policy for a definite end, is the recent establishment by the Hamburg-American Company of a service of steamers to the Persian Gulf."²⁷⁷ In fact, the HAPAG's new service to Persia produced such concern in Britain that Ballin, typically regarded so highly by the British, became a target of anti-German propaganda.²⁷⁸

Against this backdrop, in 1908 Albert Ballin traveled to London for a series of negotiations with British passenger lines that eventually realized his goal of a combination agreement for first- and second-class prices.²⁷⁹ These

²⁷⁵ BNA FO 368/24/25, "German shipping extension to Persian Gulf"; FO 371/108/61, "Projected new steamer service of Hamburg-American Line to Persian Gulf."

²⁷⁶ BNA FO 371/154/86, "Despatch from Major J. Ramsay for the week ended 6 August 1906"; FO 371/155/22, "Despatch from Major J. Ramsay for the week ended 27 August 1906."

²⁷⁷ G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds. *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. 4 (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1929), 381.

²⁷⁸ Cecil, *Ballin*, 84-5.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 58-62.

conferences presented an opportunity to the German Foreign Office. Facing dashed hopes of a Berlin-Baghdad Railway and the extension of German political influence along its tracks, the German Foreign Office sought the HAPAG as a means by which to gain back-door political access to the Persian Gulf and its littoral.

As we have seen, Ambassador Metternich proposed this plan as early as 1900, and with the *Canadia* having successfully begun the HAPAG's service to the Persian Gulf two years earlier, it now looked like a genuine possibility. Moreover, Metternich believed that Britain, given its stance toward Germany after 1907, would fight to keep Germany from extending its sphere of influence into the Ottoman Empire. Over the course of the conferences, which left Ballin so drained that he required a vacation in the seaside town of Bournemouth shortly thereafter, the ambassador received daily—and often twice-daily—reports from the HAPAG managing director.²⁸⁰ Metternich forwarded these reports, with his personal assessment, to Chancellor Bülow. This game of high political telephone, in which Ballin's reports were closely scrutinized by Germany's most important ambassador and its leading politician, demonstrates the important role the HAPAG played in Anglo-German relations and the close attention paid by the German Foreign Office to the possibility of capitalizing on the HAPAG's success. Further insinuations of German business into the Persian Gulf would give Germany an opening by which to further political insinuations as well. With these insinuations stemming from an agreement between German and English shipping lines, the German Empire would also protect itself from British political backlash.

²⁸⁰ Sta HH 132-1 I 2243 Metternich to Bülow [Quoting Ballin], February 6, 1908.

On February 6, 1908, Metternich sent the first of several letters to Chancellor Bülow. The Ambassador quoted Ballin, who reportedly had been “occupied (leading the conferences) from dawn until dusk,” and therefore reported to Metternich by post instead of in person.²⁸¹ After a paragraph of typical pleasantries, Ballin’s report launched into details. Most interesting is what Ballin clearly considered the meetings’ biggest success: a combination agreement that “included all eligible north Atlantic passenger lines, especially the Cunard Line, which in previous years had mounted the sharpest opposition to German lines.”²⁸² Indeed, “with the support of its government and the feeling that it would no longer face national (that is, British) opposition for doing so, [the Cunard Line] acceded to the association.”²⁸³ Ballin attributed Cunard’s reversal to the “manifold successes” of Kaiser Wilhelm’s recent visit to England.²⁸⁴

That much should best be considered a moment of flattery, but it is not clear why Cunard would have benefitted from a relaxed British stance. Very possibly, British worry about HAPAG ships had been partly assuaged by the agreements of the 1907 Hague Convention which, among other things, would have made a covert German military operation on board HAPAG ships politically impossible.²⁸⁵ Metternich had the Hague Convention on his mind that February, quoting to Bülow a

²⁸¹ Sta HH 132-1 I 2243 Metternich to Bülow [Quoting Ballin], February 6, 1908, “...von früh bis spat in Anspruch genommen haben.”

²⁸² Ibid, “Sie umschließt alle in Betracht kommenden nordatlantischen Passagierlinien besonders auch die Cunard-Linie, die während der letzten vier Jahre in schärfste Opposition gegen die deutschen Linien sich gestellt hat.”

²⁸³ Ibid, “...dass die Cunard-Linie ebenfalls mit Genehmigung ihrer Regierung und in dem Gefühl, dass sie nicht mehr dadurch einer nationalen Opposition sich aussetzt, der Interessengemeinschaft beigetreten ist.”

²⁸⁴ Ibid, “mannigfachen Erfolge.”

²⁸⁵ Hague Convention of 1907 VI, Status of Enemy Merchant Ships at the Outbreak of Hostilities & Hague Convention of 1907 VII, Conversion of Merchant Ships into War-Ships. Yale Avalon Project. Accessed April 15, 2018.

speech given by Sir Edward Grey in which Grey claimed that Britain had no right to hinder other empires' attempts to protect maritime trade.²⁸⁶

One week later, Metternich sent a second letter to Chancellor Bülow—this time betraying far more explicit geopolitical implications. “Director General Ballin shared with me,” Metternich wrote:

The English lines involved with shipping in the Persian Gulf are also ready to negotiate with him... but he has no great confidence in an agreement. He fears that with regard to the Persian Gulf, not only economic, but also political influences will be decisive. I offered him my help, which he refused, because he did not want negotiations to take on a political character. On this I agreed... However, I asked him to do everything possible to reach an agreement with the English lines about the Persian Gulf. In political terms, this would be of the greatest importance.

Until now, traffic to the Persian Gulf is associated with large losses for the Hamburg-America Line. In Persia itself, our commercial interests are vanishingly small. Russia and England seek to keep us out of there. England watches jealously over the Persian Gulf, where for one hundred years it has ruled unopposed. [England] fears that with German trade, German political influence will also enter the region... On this are [England's] liberal and conservative factions agreed. On this also rests the main source of resistance to the Berlin-Baghdad railway. For supremacy in the Persian Gulf and influence over the adjacent coasts, [England] would potentially fight to keep out another European power.

An amicable agreement between German and English merchant shipping in the Persian Gulf would be of far-reaching importance.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ *Die Große Politik*, Vol. 24, 28-32.

²⁸⁷ Sta HH 132-1 I 2243 Metternich to Bülow, February 13, 1908. “Generaldirektor Ballin teilte mir heute mit, dass die erzielten Vereinbarungen im nordatlantischen Schiffsverkehr anregend auf die südatlantischen Schiffslinien gewirkt haben. Er stehe jetzt in Verhandlungen sowohl mit den nach Südamerika als auch mit den nach Afrika fahrenden Linien und er hoffe, am nächsten Sonnabend zum Abschluss zu gelangen.

“Auch die drei an dem Schiffsverkehr im Persischen Golf beteiligten englischen Linien seien zu Verhandlungen mit ihm bereit, um den Konkurrenzkampf zu beendigen, jedoch habe er kein grosses Vertrauen zu einem Vergleich. Er fürchtet, dass mit Bezug auf den Persischen Golf nicht nur wirtschaftliche, sondern auch politische Einflüsse mitbestimmend sein werden. Ich bot ihm meine Hilfe an, die er aber ablehnte, weil er nicht wünsche, dass die Verhandlungen einen politischen Charakter annähmen. Ich gab ihm hierin Recht und bemerkte, dass lebenskräftige Unterstützung in der Regel auf die staatliche oder amtliche Unterstützung verzichteten. Dagegen ersuchte ich ihn, sein Möglichstes zu tun, um gerade im Persischen Golf zu einer Vereinbarung mit den englischen Linien zu gelangen. Es würde dies auch in politischer Beziehung von der größten Bedeutung sein.

Ballin did not keep his friend Metternich waiting for long. He sent a short note to the German Embassy on the morning of February 14th, promising to send Metternich news after the Persian Gulf meeting—that day at 4:30 in the afternoon—concluded.²⁸⁸ The British firms seemed politically capable of making such an agreement, and although one of the firms involved on the British side, the Hartlepool Steamship Company, attempted to sink the deal, it was confirmed by February 18.²⁸⁹

Unfortunately, the extent to which Ballin and the German Foreign Office collaborated on the Persian service is unclear. Cecil viewed the agreement between the HAPAG and the major British lines with skepticism and chose not to mention Metternich's enthusiasm at the prospect of such an agreement, despite using his February 13 letter as a source.²⁹⁰ It is true that the German Imperial government worked with the HAPAG to ensure its ships were outfitted for auxiliary cruiser conversion, and it is also true that both HAPAG and NDL received modest subsidies from Berlin to inaugurate mail lines to East Asia. There is, however, no evidence that the HAPAG received any subsidies for shipbuilding of the kind given to Cunard by

“Der Verkehr nach dem Persischen Golf ist für die Hamburg-Amerika-Linie bis jetzt mit grossen Verlusten verknüpft. In Persien selbst sind unsere Handelsinteressen vorläufig verschwindend klein. Russland und England suchen uns dort herauszuhalten. England wacht eifersüchtig über den Persischen Golf, wo es seit hundert Jahren allein herrschte. Es fürchtet, dass mit dem deutschen Handel auch der deutsche politische Einfluss dort einzieht. Fremden politischen Einfluss wird es Indiens wegen im Persischen Golf unter allen Umständen zu verhindern suchen. Hierin sind sich die liberale und conservative Regierung gleich. Hierauf beruht auch hauptsächlich der Widerstand gegen die Bagdadbahn. Für die Vorherrschaft im Persischen Golf und den tatsächlichen Einfluss auf die angrenzenden Küsten unter Ausschluss einer anderen europäischen Macht wird es unter Umständen auch kämpfen.

“Eine gütliche Vereinbarung zwischen der deutschen und englischen Handelsschifffahrt im Persischen Golfe würde von weittragender Bedeutung sein.“

²⁸⁸ Sta HH 132-1 I 2243 Ballin to Metternich, February 14, 1908 [1]. Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 86.

²⁸⁹ Sta HH 132-1 I 2243 Ballin to Metternich, February 14, 1908 [2].

²⁹⁰ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 86.

Parliament, nor that any type of reward was offered Ballin and his firm for playing emissary in the Middle East.

Complicating matters even further, on February 14, 1908—the very same day that Ballin held his meeting about Persia—the Hamburg-America Line forwarded a letter from the Imperial Navy Office to a group of employees in 39 harbors around the world, instructing them to assist the German Navy in the event of war. These agents were expected to do everything within their legal power to ensure the continuation of German naval activity; furthermore, they were to do so as quickly as possible, “free of charge, and without asking questions.”²⁹¹ As the HAPAG said in its preamble to the letter, “The great importance,” that this “could have for German interests” should be quite clear.²⁹² Finally, the entire communiqué was to be kept top secret, especially from foreigners.

It is out of the question that this correspondence might have happened without Albert Ballin’s knowledge. Ballin’s close relationship with the Kaiser and constant trips to Berlin, as well as previous cooperation with the Navy Office and a preference for personally overseeing as much of the HAPAG’s business as he could, would have made that practically impossible.²⁹³ The same must be said of the Navy’s plans to outfit HAPAG ocean liners as auxiliary cruisers, which actually required certain logistical specifications be met by the firm as they built their ships.²⁹⁴ There is no evidence that this closeness with Berlin benefitted the HAPAG financially, but

²⁹¹ Sta HH 621-1/60 L 7/10, “...kostenfrei und ohne vorherige Rückfrage.”

²⁹² Ibid. “Die große Bedeutung... für die deutschen Interessen haben kann.”

²⁹³ See, for example, Cecil, *Ballin*, 152. In 1898 Ballin and the HAPAG “became involved in a plan whereby [the HAPAG] would serve as the agent through which Germany would obtain a naval base in the Virgin Islands.”

²⁹⁴ Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat*, 11-15.

neither is there evidence that it was hidden from Ballin or that he was coerced into acquiescence. Cecil does not mention this secret dispatch from Berlin, and in general he downplays the concrete relationship between the HAPAG and the German Navy. In light of this prior cooperation, the best guess regarding the 1908 London Conferences is that Albert Ballin knew of their importance to Berlin, knew that German entry into the Persian Gulf might exacerbate Anglo-German tension, and hoped—much as Metternich did—that such an entry would be best received if it resulted from an international shipping agreement. Certainly, Ballin would not have acted to knowingly worsen the relationship across the North Sea. Indeed, between 1908 and 1914, Ballin regularly pursued Anglo-German rapprochement, and there can be no doubt that he was sincere in trying to stave off conflict between the two rivals.²⁹⁵

Albert Ballin nevertheless felt uneasy about his line's role in the Anglo-German maritime rivalry.²⁹⁶ Much like Clinton E. Dawkins, Ballin knew that by 1908 business had become very much involved in politics. In fact, for the German Empire, business had been involved in politics from the start. Specifically, overseas commerce based in Hamburg had guided German imperial expansion through its *Kolonialpolitik* and its *Weltpolitik*. By 1908, with its diplomatic options limited by the Triple Entente and a germanophobic British Foreign Office, the German Empire considered turning back to Hamburg's overseas commerce—in the form of Ballin's Hamburg-America Line—to pursue further imperial influence.

²⁹⁵ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 167-174.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 165.

Conclusion: Private Commerce, Globalization, and Empire

By all accounts, Albert Ballin was at a loss for words when, on August 1, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. Three days later, on August 4, Great Britain declared war on Germany. Ballin was devastated.²⁹⁷ Hamburg's overseas commerce—that of which Ballin represented the best and most successful—had guided Germany's imperial policies through its colonial acquisition, its Weltpolitik and naval armament, and even its chafing against the constraints of the new Anglo-French-Russian Triple Entente. Ballin knew that, for all he respected England and enjoyed his visits there, the Hamburg-America Line had contributed to Britain's image of an expansionist, aggressive Germany. Had it also guided Germany into war?

The outbreak of World War One belongs to a curious set of historical events whose classic explanations, in their fundamentals, hold up over time. In this case, that explanation is so broad as to almost be banal. Europe went to war in 1914 because its empires and emergent states were part of a global political system, the complexity of which no single actor could grasp and about which most actors were not honest and clear with one another. For this reason, the most interesting current scholarship on the outbreak of the Great War asks not “why,” but “how.” What was that complexity, under whose trance Europe sleepwalked into catastrophe?²⁹⁸

Exclusively political explanations of this political complexity often look past how thoroughly economic globalization was integrated into it. To be sure, contemporary accounts of the Age of Empire rarely fail to mention the economic benefits from and motivations for imperialism. The economic explanation, however,

²⁹⁷ Cecil, *Albert Ballin*, 210-13.

²⁹⁸ See Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*.

begins before there is even an imperialism. It begins with private individuals and corporations, who in fact occupied the vanguard of both globalization and empire since the fifteenth century. These groups had their own internal organizations, motivations, and interests, which sometimes aligned with imperial policy, sometimes could be made to align with imperial policy, but sometimes did not align with it at all. To leave out these private groups is to skip over an entire step in the development of both modern European empires and globalization.

Above all, this thesis has endeavored to say something about the German Empire, and it is in the German case that the intersection of private economic globalization and global empire is most illuminating. There is a movement in the historiography of Germany to follow up our rejection of the term “special” (as in, “special path”) with a rejection of the term “peculiar,” which also connotes some difference from a norm. But at the end of the nineteenth century, Germany was peculiar. It was an imperial power with no overseas empire that had only achieved political unification in 1871—and a weak federal unification at that. Like so many other Western empires since the Renaissance, Germany solved this problem by following preexisting private commercial networks. The most important of those networks emanated from the formerly free city, and now federal state, Hamburg.

Tragically, to borrow from Jonathan Steinberg, Germany’s attempt at empire suffered from its tardiness. This is why, especially given the past century of political development, it is so easy for modern western commentators to see Germany’s imperial forays into the world as attempts to disrupt a peaceful political order. In fact, as we have seen, this was a self-serving narrative used to justify the Triple Entente

and the so-called *Pax Britannica*. In this way, realizing how Hamburg's overseas commerce guided Germany's imperial policies helps us to a larger conclusion about empires in general. If the German Empire was not exceptionally aggressive and expansionist, perhaps it was much more like British "liberal empire" than has previously been thought. It is after all neither original nor surprising to remark that the *Pax Britannica* featured every bit as much violence as it did peace.

Realizing how Hamburg's overseas commerce guided Germany's imperial policies also suggests certain conclusions about the subject of all global history, globalization. Emphasizing private interests, we see that globalization is too complex to be understood through perfect continuity and neat causation. Like in July of 1914, there is just too much going on, too much historians cannot know, to be able to make clean judgments about so complex a topic. The same can be said for imperial history, which must negotiate the fact that by definition empires are composed of powerful competing forces, many of which are spread out across the globe and were often not explicitly associated with the imperial state, but rather were private. To paraphrase one of my father's favorite adages, when dealing with imperial history we must remember that often "the sea is vast, and the Emperor is far, far away."

This thesis, therefore, has approached the history of globalization and of the global German Empire through the tension symbolized by that sea. Thus, the focus on Hamburg. The history of Hamburg from 1881 to 1914 is one of massive private economic growth that ran at times parallel to, at times askew from, and at times directly perpendicular to German imperial expansion. Hamburg's private firms prospered greatly from the city's Zollanschluss, just as they pioneered Germany's

pursuit of colonial possessions. In seeking to protect that prosperity, the city's merchants and shipping firms called on the Reich to adopt a more robust imperial policy; it did so, but not exactly in the manner Hamburg's commercial community desired. As global geopolitics grew more strained and Hamburg's firms grew more international, the imperial government in Berlin attempted to instrumentalize the Hamburg-America Line for a last-ditch pursuit of influence in the Middle East.

The implications for these findings are threefold. First, in the historiography of Germany we cannot accept the primacy of domestic politics without also considering the importance of Germans in the world and Germany's place in the world. Nor can we dismiss Germany's Kolonialpolitik and Weltpolitik just because they failed to achieve their goals. Overseas commerce guided the German Empire through its short existence.

Second, in the historiography of the Age of Empire and the outbreak of World War One, it follows from focusing on Germany's overseas commerce that we begin to break down distinctions between "liberal empire" and reactionary or authoritarian empire. This is not to equate Germany and Britain and the United States, but rather to suggest that differentiating them *a priori* clouds our understanding.

Third and finally, in the historiography of Germany, of the Age of Empire, and of globalization in general we must not lose sight of the private merchant and firm. Histories of empire are wont to offer conclusions about the subject that are attractive but almost impossible to prove beyond any doubt, and here is mine: The history of imperial expansion and globalization is primarily a history of Empires being guided by private commerce. First come commercial footholds, which empires

seek to co-opt, to protect, or to direct. So, no, the HAPAG did not guide Germany into war, but without the HAPAG the relationship between Britain and Germany would have been quite different. To be sure, it is not that private firms were noble profit-seekers that turned sour when they came into contact with government; this is not the story of who is noble and who is not. It is the story of globalization, which in its present telling all too often leaves out the *globalizers*. This is especially relevant for the Germany. Only through its “Gateway to the World” could the German Empire be made global.

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