

**Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, Sarah Lentz (ed.), Beyond Exceptionalism. Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850, Berlin, Boston (De Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2021, XIII–311 S., col. fig., ISBN 978-3-11-074869-7, EUR 89,95.**

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**Rebecca Anne Goetz, New York, NY**

In 1528, the Augsburg-based Welser Company won a contract to transport 4,000 enslaved Africans from the West coast of Africa to the Spanish Caribbean. The Welsers stood to gain a profit from this trade of about 200,000 ducados. Though the Welsers' now infamous foray into the early transatlantic slave trade was largely a failure, they soon realized they could profit from other forms of slavery, mainly the capture and sale of Indigenous enslaved people from their Venezuelan settlement at Coro. Between 1529 and 1538, the Welsers sold over 1,000 enslaved Indigenous people, earning a profit of 8,800 ducados<sup>1</sup>. The Welsers' participation in Atlantic slaving and slave trading is the starting point for German involvement in and understandings of the Atlantic slave trades. Yet while Latin Americanists and slavery scholars have generally acknowledged German connections with the slave trade, early modern Europeanists have been slow to take note of these links.

In this informative and wide-ranging volume, editors and contributors effectively dismantle the historiographical orthodoxy that Germany had little to do with Atlantic slaveries. Over the last twenty years, some scholars have begun to recognize that Germans participated in slaving; as the editors note in the introduction, the research presented in this book should help scholars »gain the ability to see just how deeply and variedly Europe was affected by slavery despite the fact that it imagined and idealized itself as a slave-free society« (p. 19). The volume explores the historical reality of German participation in the slave trade, ownership of enslaved people, and consumption of products produced by them.

Enslaved people lived and labored in Germany. In her groundbreaking contribution, Rebekka von Mallinckrodt shows that »slavery was regarded as a lawful form of unfreedom in early modern Germany until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century« (p. 156). Engaging an older debate about the difficulties faced by enslaved and free Blacks, Arne Spohr uses the ruthless beating of the Black trumpeter

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<sup>1</sup> Spencer Tyce, The Hispano-German Caribbean: South German Merchants and the Realities of European Consolidation, 1500–1540, in: Ida Altman, David Wheat (ed.), The Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century, Lincoln 2019, p. 235–256.



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Christian Real in Württemberg in 1669 to show that there was no seamless social integration for putatively free Blacks. Real himself had been enslaved as a child in West Africa around 1643 and his enslavement continued when when he was first brought to Germany. Though likely free at the time of the attack, Spohr points out that Real's baptism and freedom did not protect him from violence.

In what was a pleasant surprise for the reviewer, the volume does not neglect the German histories of Indigenous and South Asian enslaved people. Ocktscha Rinscha (possibly Choctaw) and Tuski Stannaki (possibly Muscogee) were enslaved in Carolina and arrived in Breslau in 1722. Their captor exploited them by charging people to view their bodies, and especially their tattoos, before selling them to Augustus II of Poland. Craig Koslofsky's informative piece on these enslaved Indigenous men highlights their enslavement as an important aspect of Atlantic slavery and entanglement with race. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the free Blacks and free people from the Indian Ocean region Hamburg formed »a visible segment« of Hamburg's labor force. As Annika Bärwald shows, these formerly enslaved workers »made strategic employment decisions« that supported their own autonomy and mobility, even as they struggled with »inequalities and unfavorable conditions« (p. 210).

The economy of the early modern German states was also thoroughly enmeshed in the slave trade and in the consumption of goods produced by enslaved people. Klaus Weber is well known for his examinations of the connections between the slave trade and economic growth in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He outlines what he terms the »linen-slavery nexus« in northern German cities such as Bremen and Hamburg (p. 37), concluding that North German economic and population growth was intimately connected to linen production for export into the transatlantic slave trade. Jutta Wimmeler's study of 18<sup>th</sup>-century German encyclopedias shows an understanding of the connections between plantation products, especially sugar, and slavery. In this sense, most Germans encountered slavery not through the presence of enslaved people, but through producing and consuming goods that connected them with the slave trade.

Germans encountered enslaved people around the Atlantic World too, especially as missionaries. Jessica Cronshagen thoughtfully draws on German Moravian children's letters to enslaved Moravian children in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to show that within the Moravian community, even children had a deep awareness of slavery in German lands. Indeed, as Josef Köstlbauer shows, Moravians struggled with slavery even as they owned, worked with, and lived beside enslaved people who were also their co-religionists. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German missionaries became an important conduit for »child redemption« trafficking to Germany. Walter Sauer shows how even as slavery became illegal in German and Austrian states, a practice of »redeeming« African children prevailed, so that they might live as prestige objects in elite and middle-class households.



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These »souvenirs«, mostly underage boys, were technically not enslaved but exploited in ways reminiscent of slavery (p. 179).

The last few contributions in the volume show how Germans interacted with growing international calls to abolish the slave trade and slavery itself. Mark Häberlein argues that Augsburg pastor Gottlieb Tobias Wilhelm's »Conversations about Man« (1804–1806) showed that elite Germans were engaging with these Atlantic debates. Wilhelm was aware, too, of the North American enslaved poet Phyllis Wheatley. Häberlein notes that Wilhelm »considered the Atlantic slave trade and plantations slavery among the grossest crimes against humanity; and even though African traders and rulers bore some responsibility, Wilhelm entertained no doubt that Europeans were the main culprits« (p. 260). And yet in this acknowledgement of German abolitionism lie the beginnings of the historical mythology of German innocence about slavery that have prompted this volume. Editor Sarah Lentz concludes the book with a fascinating essay that shows how »most German abolitionists likewise adhered to the notion of a German special status or exceptionalism in regard to the Atlantic slavery system ...« (p. 307)

Scholars of the Atlantic World must pay attention to the arguments and evidence in this book. For too long Germany and central Europe more generally have not been included in scholarly conversations about the extent and impact of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. At its very heart, this book shows that we cannot ignore the experiences of enslaved people in Germany, nor Germany's connections with slavery and the slave trade.



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