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Overseas Trade and War. Reconstructing a Late Eighteenth-Century East India Company Voyage to Asia Between Routine and Unpredictability

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Abstract

The role played by the East India Company in European expansion in early modern Asia is of such importance that it has generated a large body of scholarly literature. However, the logbooks of the East Indiamen, compiled by their captains, are largely overlooked as a primary source for the history of navigation, despite the wealth of information such firsthand, “from below” documents could provide about those voyages. As part of the Global Sea Routes (GSR) project, this essay analyses the voyage of the *Nassau* (1781–85) along four main themes: the peculiarities of navigation during the Age of Sail, when the duration of a voyage was difficult to predict and subject to a range of possible accidents; the concrete reality of life on board, oscillating between the various activities of the crew and the episodes of desertion and insubordination that broke its daily routine; her military deployment, as the *Nassau* was directly involved in operations related to the Second Anglo-Mysore War; and, finally, her commercial activities, from the port cities of India to the seas of China.

Keywords: Global history; history of navigation; East India Company; globalization; digital humanities

The *Nassau* and Her Voyage in Trade and War (1781–85)

This essay, which focuses on the voyage of the East Indiaman *Nassau* from England to India and China in the late eighteenth century, is informed by an innovative methodology developed within the Global Sea Routes (GSR) project. This method of analysis uses a source—the logbooks—that is relatively under-exploited given the potential it offers, and applies it in an original way to construct a geodatabase of European ships of various nationalities engaged in ocean trade routes between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. As explained in more detail in the introduction to this special issue of *Itinerario*, the logbooks are analysed in order to obtain—through the processing of nautical data, such as the coordinates calculated and transcribed on a daily basis by the captains—the georeferencing of the routes actually followed, and to display them interactively through data visualisation tools. At the same time, the GSR project aims to extract a variety of “qualitative” data from the logbooks that can be used to develop narrative reconstructions.

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The first phase of development of the GSR project was largely dedicated to the expeditions of the East India Company (henceforth EIC) fleet between the seventeenth and early nineteenth century. Among these, the voyage of the East Indiaman *Nassau*, which took place in 1781–85, is marked by a series of events that make it worthy of particular attention.¹ The *Nassau*, launched on 7 November 1771, was a three-decker sailing ship with a capacity of 723 tons that made four voyages, the last of which is the subject of this essay.² She was built in the vast shipyards owned by the Perry family in Blackwall, one of the main centres of British shipbuilding from the early seventeenth century.³ The first owner of the *Nassau* was Sir Charles Raymond (1713–88). Like some of his colleagues, he had risen to the position of managing owner after a short but highly successful career at sea as a captain for the EIC.⁴ By the time our voyage took place, control had passed to another influential figure, Robert Williams (1735–1814), a shipbuilder, banker, and MP who owned no fewer than fourteen EIC ships, including the *Hindostan*, used for Lord Macartney's famous embassy to China in 1792–93.⁵

The voyage of the *Nassau* began on 7 February 1782, after an initial attempt to depart the previous year had been foiled by an accident. The outbound voyage ended with her arrival in Bombay on 6 September 1782. Over the next two and a half years, the *Nassau* performed various tasks on behalf of both the EIC and the Royal Army in a theatre of operations ranging from Africa to China. The *Nassau* departed from China on 14 February 1785, passed through the Sunda Strait and the Cape of Good Hope, and, after a stopover at Saint Helena, she arrived at the Downs on 20 August of the same year. The voyage lasted a total of 1,535 days (including the 243 that elapsed between the first attempt and effective departure), of which 702 days were spent actually sailing.

At first glance the *Nassau*'s voyage follows the tripartite pattern typical of every EIC voyage: outbound route to the main overseas destination; commercial navigation along the inter-Asian routes; inbound route to England. This pattern, as the *Nassau*'s voyage will show us, was frequently affected by variations and contingencies; but it nevertheless reflects the structure on which shipping practices were based. The *Nassau*'s voyage is distinguished by the variety of events that occurred at sea and in the ports of call, by the more extensive routes and longer overall duration,⁶ and by the unusual problems faced and changes of schedule. As we shall see, the commercial nature of the voyage had to bow in part to military demands. The Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–84) was underway, so several EIC ships participated in military operations either directly or by transporting troops, or, like the *Nassau*, by doing both. The commercial activity of this ship, however, was no less important. While most of the earlier expeditions had been limited to ports in India such as Bombay, Tellicherry (today Thalassery), Madras, or Kedgeree in Bengal, and

¹ Filippo Chiochetti, "Nassau (3) 09-06-1781 21-08-1785," in *Global Sea Routes* (GSR), Guido Abbattista, principal investigator, 2021, <https://globalsearoutes.net/geodatabase/> (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

² Anthony Farrington, *Catalogue of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs: 1600–1834* (London: The British Library, 1999), 468; Rowan Hackman, *Ships of the East India Company* (Gravesend: World Ship Society, 2001), 161.

³ See "Blackwall Yard: Development, to c.1819," in *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse (London: London County Council, 1994), 553–65, British History Online, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols43-4/pp553-565>.

⁴ See Georgina Green, *Sir Charles Raymond of Valentines and the East India Company* (Hainault: Hainault Press, 2015).

⁵ See Lawrence Taylor, "WILLIAMS, Robert II (1735–1814), of Bridehead, nr. Dorchester, Dorset and Moor Park, Herts," in *History of Parliament Online*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/williams-robert-ii-1735-1814>. About the *Hindostan*, see Giulia Iannuzzi, "Hindostan 01-10-1792 07-09-1794," in GSR, 2021, <https://globalsearoutes.net/geodatabase/>.

⁶ The duration of outbound and homeward journeys of three East Indiamen from the same period in the GSR geodatabase—*Europa* (1782–85), *Lord Camden* (1784–86), and *Winterton* (1788–90)—was 218 and 170, 125 and 163, and 129 and 155 days respectively, compared to 212 and 189 days for the *Nassau*.

sometimes in Persian Gulf ports such as Gombroon and Basra, or in Red Sea ports such as Mocha or Jeddah, the *Nassau* was one of a growing number of EIC ships that, once they reached India, extended their voyages as far as China (Whampoa). The first EIC voyage bound for China was in 1682; however, it was not until after the mid-eighteenth century that the number of annual voyages exceeded ten, reaching peaks of more than thirty in 1786, 1814, and 1826, due to the huge domestic demand for Chinese tea.⁷

As on the *Nassau*'s three previous voyages, the command had been assigned to Arthur Gore, one of the most seasoned captains in the service of the EIC, with over twenty years' experience at sea. Having embarked as fourth mate on the *Streatham* in 1757, Gore gained his first command on the *Neptune* in 1768. He made his next four voyages as captain of the *Nassau*. This was the last voyage for both the captain and the vessel, which was broken up on its return home.⁸ The chief mate was 25-year-old John Pascall Larkins. A comparison of the logbooks compiled by each of the two officers shows how Larkins's text follows the commander's rather closely, both in the calculations and in the textual comments.⁹ The overabundance of sources therefore does not reveal an additional voice, nor does it provide us with a means of gaining insight into the personality of an officer, like Larkins, who would end his career in the EIC brilliantly as captain and managing owner.¹⁰

Both logbooks are therefore representative of this type of source, whose authors generally tend to express what they record in an aseptic tone. At the same time, they are notable for the care taken in calculating sea position, especially longitude. As is well known, the determination of longitude represented an arduous challenge until the end of the eighteenth century and beyond, due to the ineffectiveness of available measuring tools.¹¹ The frequent and serious mistakes made in the calculation of longitude on the *Nassau* confirm that, even in the early 1780s, the use of marine chronometers—absent on board the *Nassau*—was by no means widespread. Likewise, the need to adapt the choice of routes to the actual sailing conditions posed a constant challenge to the entire crew. For this reason, it was particularly important to scrupulously collect and interpret data, using not only the available instruments but also the so-called wetware, a term recently taken up by cognitive science and IT to be applied to “the embodied skills, abilities, judgements and goals, of sailors, officers, hydrographers and their masters,” in other

⁷ These figures are based on data extracted from Farrington, *Catalogue*.

⁸ Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers, 1600-1834* (London: The British Library, 1999), 313.

⁹ Arthur Gore, *Nassau: Journal*, British Library, India Office Records, London, IOR/L/MAR/B/544-I, in Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000179.0x00005d; John Pascall Larkins, *Nassau: Journal*, British Library, India Office Records, London, IOR/L/MAR/B/544K-L, in Qatar Digital Library, https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000179.0x00005f. While the commander's logbook is complete, that of the chief mate covers only the concluding phase of the voyage, from 4 October 1784 to 17 June 1785. The notation system we adopt in this essay gives, instead of a footnoted reference, the number of the sheet in brackets that corresponds to the quoted text, followed by the abbreviated indication for recto or verso. References are to Captain Gore's logbook, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁰ Farrington, *Biographical Index*, 459; Farrington, *Catalogue*, 772. John Pascall Larkins (1756–1818) had been the second mate of the *Nassau* on her previous voyage, 1777–80. In 1786 he became captain of the *Warren Hastings* (a ship that had been owned by his father, William Larkins, also a captain and managing owner, and commanded by his elder brother Thomas) and in the course of time came to manage seven ships for the EIC. The role of three generations of the Larkins family in the history of the EIC is recounted in Jean Sutton, *The East India Company's Maritime Service, 1746-1834: Masters of the Eastern Seas* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2010).

¹¹ See Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (London: Walker & Company, 1995). For a more in-depth look at these issues, see the articles by Erica Grossi, Phillip Reid, and Clive Wilkinson in this special issue.

words, the sum total of personal experiences and the decision-making abilities of those engaged in interoceanic navigation.¹²

The Changing Habits of Navigation

The EIC voyages were strictly seasonal: in most cases they departed between February and May, but there were also numerous departures in the second half of the year, between August and December. The *Nassau's* logbook opens on 25 January 1781 when the ship was still in the Blackwall shipyard. The first few days were spent loading water and coal, as well as “kentledge” (pig-iron scraps) to be used as ballast; then loading the EIC goods: lead and iron. Later there were further cargoes of “bales” of unspecified content, probably provisions and materials, as can be seen from Captain Gore’s annotation dated 29 July 1782: “open’d a bale of the Hon.ble Company’s canvas [. . .] for the ship’s use” (f. 73v).

On 13 February 1781 the *Nassau* moved to Gravesend. Supplies of “stockfish” were taken on board on 5 March, bread on 25 March and “some live stock” on 20 April. Between 8 and 24 March the ship received “some private trade.” Although the logbook lacks further details about this, it does inform us about a widespread practice: the presence on board of goods other than those owned by the EIC and belonging largely to the captain and officers.¹³ On 6 April, still at Gravesend, part of the EIC cargo was unloaded to make room for troops and their provisions, to be taken on board later. In the meantime, eleven “recruits,” that is soldiers hired by the EIC, had also been taken on board; of these, three were discharged when the paying officer, a certain Mr. King, came on board on 14 April.¹⁴ After requesting and obtaining written permission from the EIC Shipping Committee, the captain unloaded part of the “cordage” on 25 April in order to load additional provisions for which there had been no room.

On 5 May the *Nassau* reached Deal, in the Downs, where the crew sighted some ships of the line. Here a convoy was formed, which left on 9 May and, after two days, reached the Spithead, a stretch of sea between the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth where the Grand Fleet—the Royal Navy’s main fleet—was stationed. On 26 and 30 May, inspections by two members of the EIC Court of Directors, “Mr. Moffatt” and “Mr. Darrell,” took place on board the *Nassau*. James Moffatt belonged to a wealthy family of bankers, merchants, and ship insurers with strong ties to the EIC,¹⁵ while Lionel Darrell, a former official of the EIC who had made a fortune in India, became an MP in 1790. On 1 June, the *Nassau* arrived in Portsmouth, where the purser, the person responsible for keeping the books and paying the wages, came on board.¹⁶ On the same day, a company of the British Army’s 78th Regiment came on board: after the lengthy preparations recorded from the very first pages of the logbook, this fact was the first in a chain of events that

¹² David Miller, “Longitude Networks on Land and Sea: The East India Company and Longitude Measurement ‘in the Wild,’ 1770–1840,” in *Navigational Enterprises in Europe and Its Empires, 1730–1850*, eds. Richard Dunn and Rebekah Higgitt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 223–47, 224.

¹³ For the private trade regulations in existence at the end of the eighteenth century, see Charles Hardy, Appendix, in *Register of Ships Employed in the Service of the East India Company 1700–1819 and to the End of Commercial Charter (1835)* (London: Parbury, Allen, & Co., 1799), 58–72, 116–8.

¹⁴ See Arthur Gilbert, “Recruitment and Reform in the East India Company Army, 1760–1800,” *Journal of British Studies* 15:1 (1975), 89–111. See also “The Recruitment of Private Soldiers,” British Library, India Office Records, London, IOR/L/MIL/9/1–106, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/4f3b19a5-4dca-4e41-a965-3f951af74538>.

¹⁵ See B. R. Tomlinson, “From Campsie to Kedgerree: Scottish Enterprise, Asian Trade and the Company Raj,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36:4 (2002), 769–91.

¹⁶ The captain does not specify in this note who the purser was. His name, William Dalling, together with the names of the officers and the surgeon, can be inferred from Hardy, *Register of Ships*, 91.

would characterise the *Nassau*'s voyage in its dual role as a commercial and at the same time military expedition.

On 9 June 1781 the *Nassau* finally departed. The convoy consisted of four East Indiamen under the escort of the ship of the line *Magnanime*. Although all the EIC ships were armed, the convoy was needed for protection from both pirates and privateers. The *Nassau* was anchored at Torbay from 14 to 19 June and at "Cawson Bay" (Cawsand Bay, near Plymouth) from 22 to 23 June, before passing Lizard Point on 28 June. By 2 July she was already sailing in the open sea. On 3 July, however, weather conditions, "with a great sea which made her labour extremely," rendered the ship unfit to sail. The captain, having heard the unanimous opinion of the officers, decided "that we had better get her head the other way." He therefore decided to separate from the fleet and return to Plymouth. On 6 July, while manoeuvring to enter Plymouth harbour, the *Nassau* struck a rock known as Winter Rock, west of Drake Island.¹⁷ On 13 July, an initial inspection was carried out on behalf of the EIC and the owners by three people, one of whom was Captain William Larkins, father of the chief mate. However, it was only on 8 September, after a dock was finally granted thanks to a letter from "Commissioner Curry,"¹⁸ that the commander realised how badly the ship had been damaged. Although the repairs only took a few days, the ship remained in Plymouth harbour until the beginning of the following year (ff. 19r–26v).

On 15 January 1782, Captain Gore received orders to join a convoy led by Sir Richard Bickerton.¹⁹ The *Nassau* eventually left Plymouth on 7 February 1782: almost a year had passed since the ship had left Blackwall. The first few days of navigation were again marred by adverse weather conditions, but this did not result in the same fate as the previous departure: the carpenters, who set to work making new crosstrees for the main top mast, avoided more serious trouble. In early March, after passing Santa Maria in the Canary Islands, five ships of the line—*Alexander*, *Agamennon*, *Magnificent*, *Assistance*, and *Renown*—left the convoy. The remaining fleet consisted of seventeen EIC ships, including the *Nassau*, and two ships of the line, the *Cumberland* and the *Gibraltar*, which was in command.

On 21 March, approaching the line of the Equator, the fleet entered an area of the Atlantic Ocean characterised by the absence of winds, which is typical of latitudes between approximately three degrees north and three degrees south, the so-called doldrums. On this as on another earlier occasion, the order "to set up the rigging" was carried out following the signal given by Commodore Bickerton, who was thus not merely providing military protection (f. 40r). On 2 April, the logbook records the minimum daily distance travelled during the entire voyage: only 6 miles. Under favourable conditions, a ship like the *Nassau* could easily exceed 100 miles, even reaching 170 miles in one day. Within a week the *Nassau* was travelling at high speeds again. On 9 April she covered 110 miles, but over the next three weeks she kept a far from constant pace, between 30 and 142 miles a day, as she steered a southwesterly course towards the coast of Brazil. Rio de Janeiro—a location frequented only sporadically by EIC vessels—was to be the convoy's first port of call on its voyage to India, a destination that is not apparent in advance

¹⁷ See *The Seaman's Guide and New Coaster's Companion. To which is Added, an Improved and Corrected Tide-table*. By John Chandler, John Diston, John Adams, and Many Other Experienced Masters and Pilots (London: D. Steel, 1795, 10th ed.), 81.

¹⁸ He may have been Sir William Currie (1721–81), a London banker of Scottish origin. Two of his descendants, Mark John Currie (1795–1874) and Frederick Currie (1799–1875), served with considerable success in the Royal Navy and EIC respectively.

¹⁹ Sir Richard Bickerton (1727–92)—the Royal Navy officer who in 1782 was in command, with the rank of commodore, of a convoy of East Indiamen bound for India—was destined to have a brilliant career, which ended with his promotion to commander-in-chief.

from the logbook, whose headings in the top margin of each page usually contained information about subsequent destinations. Nevertheless, this stop must have been planned in advance, as any changes to the itinerary would certainly have been reported by Captain Gore in his notes. The convoy arrived in Rio on 29 April and stayed there for just over a month. The sick were disembarked and remained ashore until 27 May. The crew took care of the maintenance and repairs needed after the long crossing. The sails were dried, and the ship was replenished with water and other provisions in the meantime.

On 2 June, the commodore gave the signal to depart; after a few days of smooth sailing, a storm split the fleet on 21 June. The *Nassau* remained in sight of only eight ships plus the store ship *Minerva*. By the following day, the group had been whittled down to six ships; Captain Gore, due to his seniority, found himself leading the small fleet as senior commander and presiding over the periodic captains' meetings. For unexplained reasons, the *Minerva* "parted the Company and made sail" on 16 July; thus four ships remained with the *Nassau*: *Dutton*, *Royal Bishop*, *Hawke*, and *Talbot* (f. 70r). On the same day, this fleet rounded the Cape of Good Hope and then tackled the Inner Passage, that is, the route towards India via the Mozambique Channel, keeping westwards of the island of Madagascar (as opposed to the Outer Passage, eastwards of the great African island, which had to be sailed at a different time of the year, when the winds were more favourable). On 25 July it reached Cape Corrientes, a promontory located in Mozambique that, as its name given by the Portuguese suggests, was much feared by sailors. After a few days of sailing near the shore to avoid currents and reefs that made crossing the channel treacherous, on 8 August 1782 the *Nassau* arrived with the remainder of the fleet at Mozambique Island—a fortified port city belonging to Portugal, which was the capital of the Portuguese colony of East Africa until 1898. A delegate boarded the *Nassau* to get information on where the fleet had come from, then the captains followed Gore ashore to meet the governor.

Once they had departed for India, a further meeting of the captains determined the route, which followed that established through the long-standing practice of the East Indiamen. The subsequent entries in the logbook do not provide any particularly interesting information. Only once they reached Bombay did they meet the rest of the convoy led by Sir Richard Bickerton, who had evidently preceded them.

Life (and Death) Aboard the *Nassau*

Although the *Nassau's* voyage features several unusual aspects, her logbook illustrates in an exemplary manner a series of routine activities that allow us to better understand certain aspects of the life of the crews embarked on the EIC ships. It provides us with data such as the composition of the crew, recruitments and discharges, daily occupations, but also illnesses and deaths, disciplinary incidents, and actual episodes of insubordination. Life on board was usually described in the logbooks using standardised terminology, characterised by minimal variations. The continuation of ongoing activities from one day to the next was summarised by formulas such as the following: "People and tradesmen usefully employ'd as yesterday." In the eyes of a commander, the "people" of his ship were only the sailors. The others, such as the tradesmen, were craftsmen who were entrusted with the maintenance tasks constantly carried out on board. Among the most important of these skilled craftsmen were the carpenters, who were responsible for repairing whatever was damaged or suffering from wear and tear.

There were many routine tasks that were performed on an almost daily basis: caulking; cleaning the decks, sometimes washed with vinegar and occasionally "smoked with tarr"; and painting. The latter was a task curiously reserved for the gunners, who would otherwise have been among the least employed. Other activities were carried out by

“sailmakers repairing sails, coopers setting up butts and casks,” and by the “armourer at his forge.” “Picking up oakham” (oakum) was one of the most menial and undesirable activities due to its mind-numbing repetitiveness (often reserved for prisoners and convicts, and later employed for a long time in Victorian workhouses). However, sailors were exempt from it and in general tradesmen too: it was a task entrusted to soldiers recruited by the EIC, and sometimes to “lascars,” that is, sailors of non-European origin (ff. 87r, 160r).

The relative flexibility of the crew’s hierarchy reflected the needs of the ship. Sometimes promotion took place within the fleet: for instance, in Rio de Janeiro the “Boatswain’s Mate” Robert Deveraux left the *Nassau* to embark on another vessel of the fleet as boatswain. When they arrived in Bombay, the captain recorded the recruitment of a new crew member, a certain Samuel Lammie, enrolled in the lowest maritime rank, that is, “landsman.” This term was used sarcastically to refer to seamen with little or no sailing experience. After the *Nassau*’s arrival in India, lascars were named in the logbook for the first time. In Bombay on 17 September 1781, twenty-two lascars joined the crew under the command of their “Serang,” a native officer with functions comparable to those of a boatswain. Twenty more embarked on 21 November: among them was the “Tindall,” that is the Serang’s mate. Others joined in Bengal: fourteen on 7 December 1783 and as many again on 20 February 1784. The following 12 June, when the *Nassau* returned to Bombay from Bengal, those men were discharged and replaced with twenty more lascars.²⁰

Infringements of the rules can frequently be found in the logbook’s entries. On 3 April 1781, the first case of theft was documented while the ship was still in Gravesend: it concerned a certain Richard Donnegan “to be confined in irons” (f. 7v). On 15 April he drowned in an attempt to escape. For the same crime, three other sailors were punished with three different penalties in the following months, probably according to the extent of their misconduct. Captain Gore “punished J[oh]n Christmas with 1 doz.n lashes for theft,” then later noted that “W[illia]m Capick was confin’d in irons for theft” and that William Cassidy was punished for the same crime “by running the guantlet [sic]” (ff. 66v, 86r, 87r). Quartermaster William Needham, on the other hand, “was found guilty of theft and turn’d before the mast,” meaning that he was punished simply with demotion (f. 100r).²¹

At times, unruly behaviour resulted in acts of violence committed outside the confined space of the vessel. On 27 January 1783, during a brief stopover at Tellicherry on the Malabar Coast, three sailors were placed under arrest “in the Guard house on shore” for assaulting some locals. Before departing, the captain sent an officer “to endeavour to get the three men released [. . .] but the inhabitants, insisting on prosecuting them; they were discharged, and a certificate given them for their wages” (ff. 97r–97v). Consequently, the fates of the three sailors and that of their ship were permanently severed.

It may be less obvious that acts of insubordination and violence also involved the officers. In the case of the *Nassau* this happened with unusual frequency. On 12 August 1781, in Plymouth, “Mess’rs Hunter, Hicks, and James, run—3rd, 4th, and 5th, Mates,” but on 28 August the commander, “in consequence of a letter from Mr. Williams [the managing

²⁰ See Aaron Jaffer, “‘Lord of the Forecastle’: Serangs, Tindals, and Lascar Mutiny, c.1780–1860,” *International Review of Social History* 58: 21 (2013), 153–75.

²¹ See the logbook of the coeval voyage of the *Lord Camden* (1784–86) for an even more detailed account of disciplinary infractions and their punishments: Filippo Chiocchetti, “Lord Camden (2) 18-03-1784 21-05-1786,” in GSR, 2021, <https://globalsearoutes.net/geodatabase/>, ff. 13r, 16r, 16v, 17v, 24r, 28r, 35v.

owner] restored M'r Hunter to his station" (ff. 23r, 24v).²² On 28 February 1782, a few days after leaving Plymouth, Captain Gore wrote: "Order'd Mr Hunter 3rd Mate from his duty for striking a soldier of the 78 regm.t." The following day there was a full-scale rebellion by Hunter. Two days later the commander threatened to replace him with another officer on loan from another ship of the convoy, the *Africa*. The third mate yielded and the "borrowed" ("spared," in the original) officer was returned (ff. 41r–44r). Hunter later died of fever in Bengal.

After Hunter, an even higher-ranking officer was reported on disciplinary grounds: the commander "suspended Mr Bye the 2.d mate from his duty for disobedience of orders" on 19 September 1783, during the voyage to Bengal. George Bye, who embarked as a simple seaman at the age of twelve in 1767, became an officer on board the *Nassau* in 1781. The episode was settled with his readmission after disciplinary proceedings in Calcutta and the officer's public apology to his captain, delivered on the ship's quarterdeck before the entire crew. However, the quarrel had by no means been resolved: on 15 April 1784, after reaching Tellicherry, Bye was again suspended "for disobedience of orders and insolent behaviour." But even this time he was put back on duty on 24 July in Bombay, "having been reprimanded by the Governor and the council" (ff. 135v, 149r, 165r, 180r). These numerous and serious disciplinary infractions did not, however, result in the end of his career; indeed, he was promoted to chief mate on his next voyage aboard the *Rockingham* in 1785.²³ It must be said, however, that the relationship between Gore and his officers, despite strong tensions, proved to be solid when it came to key decisions, with the commander always emphasising collegiality and unanimity.

If the officers rebelled, the sailors deserted. The first attempt, on 15 April 1782, ended with the drowning of the seaman Richard Donnegan, the same one who had been arrested a few days earlier for theft. Others followed, with greater success, shortly afterwards: one before arriving at the Downs, another at Portsmouth, and three on 20 June at Torbay. In Rio, four deserters were captured by the Portuguese and returned. Due to the risk of being caught and punished, or lack of opportunity, or lack of valid reasons, once they left Brazil no one else attempted to leave the ship for a long time. The first was Rocus de Cogs, the carpenter's mate who had joined during the previous stopover in Bombay, who escaped ("run") on 11 January 1784 in Bengal.

The greatest tensions occurred when the *Nassau*, returning from Bengal, stopped at Tellicherry on 15 April 1784, where she took on board 271 men belonging to two companies of the 42nd Army Regiment to transport them to Bombay. Water had already been rationed for the crew before arriving in Tellicherry, reduced to "5 pints a man." Despite the replenishment, the much greater number of men on board prompted the captain to ration it again more severely on 26 April, only two days after departure, bringing the daily ration down to 4 pints. On 30 May, the ration was further reduced to 3 pints. Two days later, being in the vicinity of Goa, Captain Gore discussed with army officers whether to stop for supplies as the soldiers were complaining about the lack of water. Due to the dangerous sea conditions, Gore considered it more prudent to avoid approaching the harbour. The voyage continued until the arrival in Bombay on 3 June 1784, but only "with the greatest difficulty" did the officers persuade their men to accept the commander's decision. Evidently, it was easier to get the sailors to comply with the stricter regulations than it was the army soldiers (ff. 175v–176r).

Conditions on the voyage led on several occasions to severe health risks for the people on board, resulting in a significant number of losses. The first recorded case, involving a

²² According to Sutton, Robert Hunter, along with the fourth mate Francis Hicks, was punished with the lash when he returned on board: Sutton, *The East India Company's Maritime Service*, 139. It should be noted that the logbook does not provide any evidence of this punishment, and Sutton's book does not indicate the source of this assertion.

²³ Farrington, *Biographical Index*, 66.

sailor named Jacob Nickelson, dates back to 25 February 1782. He was followed by five others in Bombay, including “Henry Brookes [who] died at sick quarters on shore.” In Bengal, fevers claimed further lives, including that of third mate Robert Hunter, on 23 November 1783. Two other sailors, John Michels and a Frenchman named Le Courtance, died within the next few days, while the *Nassau* received water and “several refreshments for the people, who are very sickly.” On 6 December 1783, the commander noted that there were twenty-four people on the “sick list,” more than twenty of whom would remain there for at least a week. On the same day, as new fatalities were added to the tally, Captain Gore wrote: “buried the Corps upon Kedgeree green” (ff. 88v, 148r). Being buried on land was relatively rare: during navigation, the bodies of the deceased were committed to the sea after a ceremony. However, there were exceptions, as witnessed in our logbook with the case of a Scottish soldier, Peter Cousts, who died on 24 April 1784 on the return voyage from Bengal to Bombay: “at 7 he was buried by the soldiers, Highland fashion, no Ceremony, but thrown over board” (f. 173v).

The Military Role of the EIC and the British Expansion in Asia

The most insightful historiography “locates the EIC as a political governing body (as opposed to a merely economic organisation) from its very inception.”²⁴ The presence of soldiers on board trading ships was therefore far from unusual in that age and geographical scope. The EIC had its own army stationed in India, composed partly of natives and partly of Europeans. In a particularly difficult scenario such as that of the 1780s, in which the British were confronted with other powers like the French and the Indian rulers, the interdependence between the EIC—to be interpreted as a company-state, according to Philip Stern’s view²⁵—and the state proper could only increase.

In the case of the *Nassau*, during her outbound voyage she was used to transport army units—a company of the 78th Regiment—that were to be engaged in the second war against Mysore, France’s main Indian ally, then ruled by Hyder Ali. Once the troops arrived in Bombay on 6 September 1782, they were transferred, with provisions for six weeks, aboard another EIC ship, the *Latham*. The deployment of the *Nassau* in support of the British army was, however, just beginning (see Figure 1). On 16 November Captain Gore noted: “received on b[oar]d 4500 round shots & 300 shells for Tellicherry.” In the following days the loading of military supplies continued, namely “Gun Powder,” “Ammunition,” and “Artillary [sic] stores” (ff. 88–89).

On 9 December, more soldiers came on board; this time they were EIC recruits. On 12 December, the *Nassau* left Bombay together with other vessels, under the command of General Richard Matthews, who was in charge of the military operations against Tipu Sultan, the eldest son of Hyder Ali who had succeeded his father a few days earlier. On 18 December, they reached Rajah Mondroog, a locality south of Goa at the mouth of the Merjee River (today, Aghanashini, in Karnataka). Once landed, the troops occupied a fortified position on the coast. According to our interpretation, which is based on the coordinates and the description of events, Rajah Mondroog corresponds to the place that is referred to as the Kagal Fort on today’s maps. It served as an outpost for the Mirjan Fort, a more important stronghold located on the upper reaches of the Merjee River. As for the toponym, “droogs” are the steep rocks typical of the landscapes of Mysore and Tamil Nadu, which historically provided ideal sites on which to build forts.²⁶

²⁴ Julia Schleck and Amrita Sen, “Introduction: Alternatives Histories of the East India Company,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 17:3 (2017), 1–9, 1.

²⁵ Philip Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁶ See Tim Willasey-Wilsey, “In Search of Gopal Drooge and the Murder of Captain William Richardson,” *The Victorian Web* (2014), <https://victorianweb.org/history/empire/india/70.html>.

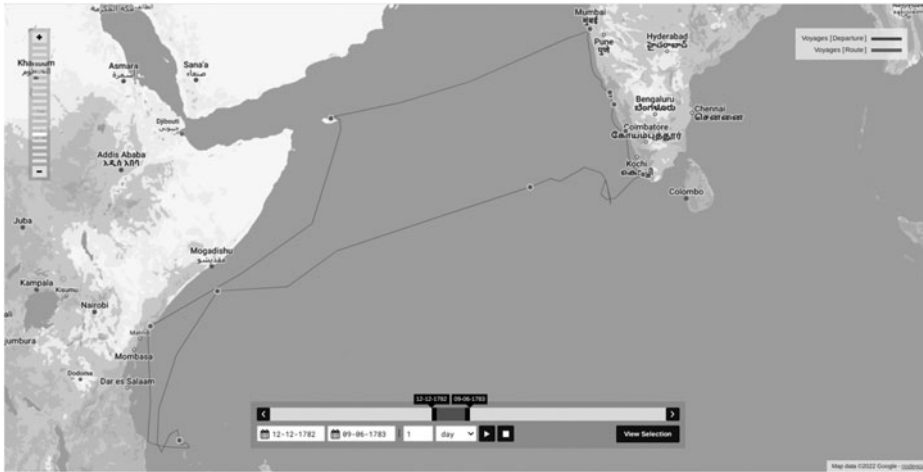


Figure 1. Georeferenced visualisation of the *Nassau*'s military deployment from Bombay to the Malabar Coast and then to the Comoro Islands, before returning to Bombay (12 December 1782 to 9 June 1783). Source: Filippo Chiocchetti, "Nassau (3) 09-06-1781 21-08-1785," in GSR, Guido Abbattista, principal investigator, 2021. Map data ©2021 Google.

On 25 December 1782, Captain Gore was ordered to sail to Onore (today Honavar). This was a strategic location, protected by an important fortress. During the brief siege, the guns of the *Nassau* were landed to add to the army's batteries. The logbook reports that a "very good firing" of "Great Guns, small arms, and rockets" was maintained on both sides for a week, until 5 January 1783 when the British troops "mounted the breach and had possession of Onore" (f. 93v). On 10 January, the convoy left for Cundapore (today Kundapur, on the Karnataka coast), where between 13 and 16 January it took part in further military operations, which ended with the capture of some coastal forts. Under these circumstances, the *Nassau* also served as a place of detention for Indian prisoners: Captain Gore wrote that he "received the Killadar [garrison's commander] of Onore, with 18 inferior officers and attendants" (f. 95v). They joined fifteen French prisoners, taken on board in Bombay, who were to remain on the *Nassau* until June of the following year.

On 17 January the EIC vessels were authorised to depart by General Matthews. Shortly afterwards Captain Gore crossed paths once more with some of the men he had fought with. On 28 January, while stopping at Tellicherry, he noted the arrival of the *Royal Bishop*, with which he had shared the outbound voyage. On board that vessel were two officers, "Coll. Jackson and M[ajo]r Disney in their way upon an Embassy to the King of Travancore" (f. 97v). The first of these two EIC army officers was Lieutenant Colonel Robert Jackson (1738–86), at that time in command of the Bombay European Regiment.²⁷ The second was Lieutenant Arthur Disney, who served in the EIC from 1780 to 1813. Disney had led the assault on Onore's fort as commander of the Grenadier company of the Bombay European Regiment; a few days later he was sent as an envoy to the king of Travancore, with whom a military alliance had been forged.²⁸

However, the British ships were not the only ones whose presence was noted in Tellicherry. Captain Gore wrote: "The Success Galley came in from Bombay—a ship

²⁷ See Arthur Edward Mainwaring, *Crown and Company: The Historical Records of the 2nd Batt. Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Formerly the 1st Bombay European Regiment, 1662–1911* (London: A. L. Humphreys, 1911).

²⁸ John Philippart, *The East India Military Calendar: Containing the Services of General and Field Officers of the Indian Army* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1823), 240–4.

belonging to the Nabob of Arcott” (f. 97r). The nawab he referred to was Muhammad Ali Khan Wallajah (1717–95), sultan of the Carnatic whose capital was Arcot, and a close ally of the EIC. The *Success* was a very fast and robust ship, well known to the British. According to an account published in the *Philadelphia Weekly Magazine* in 1798, the *Success*—which in 1781 had contributed to the defeat of French Admiral Suffren’s fleet at Porto Novo (today Parangipettai, on the southeast coast of India, south of Madras)—was built of teak wood.²⁹ A few years later, British politicians such as Henry Dundas (1742–1811) would advocate planting teak forests in India to allow the EIC ships to be built directly on site.³⁰

The *Nassau* left Tellicherry on 2 February 1783 for Calicut and then Anjango, where she arrived on 7 February. On 11 February she sailed for Johanna (today Anjouan), the largest of the Comoro Islands. Commercial activity had not yet begun, so why did she head for Africa? The captain gave no explanation for this in the logbook, at least at first. Navigation was very difficult: the chart of the route, which we have reconstructed from the records of the daily coordinates, highlights these troubles. After sighting the island of Comoro on 28 March, the *Nassau* was only able to cover very short distances over the next few days, first due to the absence of wind and then to rough seas. With water supplies dangerously low, on 19 April Captain Gore recognised “that it was utterly impossible to beat up for Joanna w[ith]out recruiting our water” (f. 116v). He therefore headed for the coast of Africa but, being unable to find a “watering place” there, decided to go back to Bombay: along the way, rum and rainwater compensated for the lack of water supplies. However, the meagre provisions on board prompted a stopover on the island of Socotra, where the *Nassau* anchored from 23 to 28 May. As soon as they arrived, Gore “sent Mr Hunter on shore for intelligence.” The third mate reported “that the Hanoverian troops with the Officers and People of the Brilliant had been here, and sail’d the 11th of May in a moor vessel for Bombay.” It was not until 30 May that the captain, reporting in the logbook a discussion with the officers, provided the information that was still missing: that “[his] orders from Bombay were to sail to Joanna for the Hanoverian troops and carry them to Bengal” (ff. 125r–126v).

The employment of troops from continental Europe, mainly Swiss and Germans, is an integral part of the history of the EIC. In the eighteenth century, dynastic ties between the United Kingdom and Hanover facilitated the recruitment of soldiers from that German region. In 1782, around two thousand men were sent to India to support British troops, mainly with garrison duties. Some of them had set out on board the *Brilliant*, an East Indiaman that sailed from Portsmouth on 5 May 1782 under the command of Captain Charles Mears. The *Brilliant* actually sank off the island of Johanna—which was a crucial port of call on the East India route³¹—on 28 August 1782, as other sources confirm.³² Since they were able to depart for India again, as we learn from the *Nassau*’s logbook, those soldiers perhaps joined their comrades in the Battle of Cuddalore on 13 June 1783.

From a strictly military point of view, the shipwreck of a few companies of auxiliary troops and the vicissitudes of the ship sent to rescue them is certainly a marginal occurrence. It nevertheless sheds light on the diverse perspectives held by men who shared

²⁹ Anthony F. M. Willich, *The Domestic Encyclopaedia: Or, A Dictionary of Facts and Useful Knowledge, Comprehending a Concise View of the Latest Discoveries, Inventions, and Improvements, Chiefly Applicable to Rural and Domestic Economy*. American edition, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: W. Y. Birch and A. Small, 1804), 5: 135.

³⁰ See Lucas Sérougne, “Teak Conquest: Wars, Forest Imperialism and Shipbuilding in India (1793–1815),” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 399:1 (2020), 123–52.

³¹ See Huw V. Bowen, “The East India Company and the Island of Johanna (Anjouan) during the Long Eighteenth Century,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 30 (2018), 218–33.

³² Hardy, *Register of Ships*, 95; Farrington, *Catalogue*, 77–8. The use of the *Nassau*’s logbook allows us to correct Sutton’s partially inaccurate account of this episode: Sutton, *The East India Company’s Maritime Service*, 144–5.

common experiences. The publication of letters and memoirs by some officers of the Hanoverian regiments, which appeared between 1782 and 1807, triggered a debate in Germany that was part of the broader European reflection of the time on colonialism, civilisation, and the relationship with the “other.”³³

The Asian Trade Routes between India and China

More than nine months after her arrival in Bombay from England, the *Nassau* reached Bombay for the second time on 9 June 1783, this time from Socotra, and, having completed her military deployment, began to prepare for the commercial part of the expedition. This stage is divided into two chronologically distinct phases: the voyage to Bengal and return to Bombay, and the voyage from Bombay to China. The departure for Bengal was delayed due to problems with the hull, which required the keel to be sheathed where the ship had suffered a blow during the fighting at Cundapore the previous January. In addition, in the first half of July 1783, a number of vessels that had set off for Bengal had had to return to Bombay due to prohibitive weather conditions, thus frustrating Captain Gore’s plans. Having finally set sail on 18 September, the voyage did not feature any particularly significant events. Upon their arrival in Kedgerree on 31 October, Gore reported the presence of thirteen East Indiamen and a Danish ship in the port.³⁴ After receiving an onboard inspection by EIC officials on 9 November, the loading of “500 bags of Salt petre” was carried out on 23 December 1783, proceeding over the following days to a total of 3,786 “bags” of saltpetre.³⁵

The *Nassau* returned to Bombay from Bengal on 3 June 1784. She remained there for two months, preparing for the voyage that would complete her trade mission. On 25 June, the delivery of saltpetre began and was completed by 5 July. The delivery of one commodity was followed by the loading of another: on 9 July, the first batch of cotton, of an unspecified amount, was loaded. From 14 to 26 July, she received cargoes of cotton on an almost daily basis. The *Nassau* finally left Bombay on 4 August, bound for China, together with another East Indiaman, the *Chesterfield*. Travelling in convoy, even without military escort, was a strict requirement of the EIC. Having lost contact almost immediately after their departure from Bombay, the two ships only resumed travelling together on 5 September, near the Strait of Malacca.

After sighting Ceylon on 12 August 1784, the *Nassau* continued to sail the open sea for a week, until 19 August when she came within sight of Pulo Zunda, a little island today known as Pulau Breueh, just over a kilometre north of Sumatra. Captain Gore’s ship then continued over the next few days, steering an average of about 9 leagues off the east coast of Sumatra, before heading farther east towards the Malaysian shores. On 14 September the *Nassau* entered the Dutch port of Malacca. The commander went ashore “to wait on the Governor and ask for supply’s [sic]”: an unavoidable formality, despite

³³ See Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, “The Outsider’s Perspective on Colonial Conflict: A Hanoverian Officer’s Narrative of the Second Anglo-Mysore War, 1783–1784,” in *A Great War in South India: German Accounts of the Anglo-Mysore Wars, 1766–1799*, eds. Ravi Ahuja and Martin Christof-Füchsle (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 319–44.

³⁴ The Danish East India Company had a settlement in Serampore, on the banks of the Hooghly north of Calcutta, and a factory in Canton. The Danish presence in India, which was relatively insignificant from a commercial or political-diplomatic point of view, was linked to the more relevant affair of the so-called “Danish-Halle Mission”: see Joseph Gnanaseelam Muthuraj, *We Began at Tranquebar*, Vol. 1: *SPCK, the Danish-Halle Mission and Anglican Episcopacy in India 1708–1843* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010).

³⁵ For a brief overview of the saltpetre trade, see K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 336–41. The hazardous nature of this kind of transport is proven by the case of the *Montagu*, which sank on 6 December 1785 due to an explosion, see Hackman, *Ships of the East India Company*, 160.

the disrespect shown by the garrison who had not responded to the nine blank gun shots with which the British ship had saluted the Dutch flag (f. 191r). Having completed the restocking, she resumed her voyage to China on 19 September. On 28 September, in the stretch of sea that we now call the Singapore Strait, the *Nassau* encountered a small vessel from Bengal: the jolly boat carried an EIC supercargo, a certain Mr. Parkin, “who stay’d on board to take his passage to China” (f. 194r). As we shall see, it was he who was to manage the *Nassau*’s commercial activities in China, although his presence on board seemed at first to be the result of chance.

On 29 September, the *Nassau* sighted the granite islet of Pedra Branca, belonging to the Johor Sultanate and later to the British colony of Singapore, which at the time was clearly marked on all nautical charts and signalled the exit from the strait.³⁶ Sailing northwards, on 30 September the *Nassau* sighted two much larger islands, Pulo Auro and Pulo Tioman: the latter became the new reference for calculating longitude. Resuming navigation on the open sea—and thus abandoning the coastal navigation that had characterised the previous four weeks, during which longitude had not been taken into account—this reference became necessary.

The following days of navigation in the South China Sea were rendered difficult by the weather conditions, indicated in the logbook with expressions like “a confused sea” and “sea increasing” (ff. 200r–200v), until the sighting of the Chinese coast on 24 October. Due to the bad weather, the *Nassau* stayed away from the port of Macao for a few weeks, moving between the islands south of the bay. The main concern at this stage was the maintenance of the ship and the supply of provisions. In his notes, the commander reported in detail about the provisions procured for the ship. For example, on 26 October he wrote: “sent Mr Brooker on shore, who landed at a small Town and purchased 2 large hogs.” The compradores—Chinese merchants in charge of supplying foreign ships—frequently appear in these pages. The first note is dated 31 October: “A boat came from Macoa with a person recommended as Compradore—dispatch’d him back for provisions” (ff. 201r, 202v).

On 1 November 1784, due to the still adverse weather conditions, the ship had to move farther away from the bay: “Finding the sea to increase [. . .] we were unable to reach where we came from” (f. 10r, Larkins’s logbook). They found safe harbour at St. John Island (today Shangchuan), southwest of Macao. From the first sighting of the Chinese coast, navigation in these unfamiliar waters, dotted with islets and reefs, had been conducted with the help of local pilots. Even the latter, however, proved to be only partially useful. On 2 November, the commander had to take note of this and act accordingly: “The pilots confessing that they were utterly unfit to pilot the ship discharged them and took two others from St. John’s” (f. 203r). In all, five pilots took turns in those first few days. Once a stable base had been established, the supercargo, Mr. Parkin, finally travelled to Macao.

St. John was also known for holding a large and well-stocked market, so it represented an ideal base for the anchoring of the *Nassau*. For instance, the supply on 3 November consisted of “six hogs and some vegetables, having found a very large Town and a very plentiful market” (f. 10v, Larkins’s logbook). The account of the commander, who personally went ashore to handle the purchases, is even more detailed and specifies the price paid for the provisions, “50 Spanish dollars,” but it also remarks on the spectacle of

³⁶ See, for example, “A New and Accurate Chart of the Straits of Malacca and Sincapore, by Senhor Pedro de Nova, an Experienced Portuguese Pilot who carried the Camden through these Straits in June 1770,” in *The Country Trade East India Pilot, for the Navigation of the East-Indies and Oriental Seas, within the Limits of the East-India Company, etc.* (London: Robert Laurie and James Whittle, 1799), <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-368781110/view?partId=nla.obj-373089725#page/n51/mode/1up>.

St. John's Bay with "an innumerable sight of boats some very large," including many "Sampans" (f. 203r).

After about a month of arduous navigation between the islands of the bay—during which the jolly boat shuttled to St. John's market and the compradores continued to bring provisions, including rice and firewood—the *Nassau* finally entered Macao on 30 November 1784. Although nothing is known about the tasks performed there by Mr. Parkin, it should be remembered that the arrival in Macao was not the start of negotiations but only a stage towards the actual destination: Whampoa. On that same date the captain wrote: "went on shore to get a Pilot for the river, and to procure a Chop [the pass issued by the Chinese authorities] to pass the Boca Tigris" (f. 207r). The following day the *Nassau* set sail again without delay, and on 3 December arrived at the Pearl River estuary, which the Portuguese had named Boca Tigris. On 6 December she arrived at Whampoa. This island, which is now called Pazhou and whose name is derived from the Chinese Huangpu, was the docking point for Western ships sailing up the Pearl River. Once there, ships had to stop and transfer their cargoes to smaller boats at the Thirteen Factories in Canton.³⁷

Captain Gore listed the more than twenty ships present at Whampoa on his arrival: "7 English ships [East Indiamen], 5 English country ships, 3 Dutch, 2 Danes, 3 French and one American [sic]" (f. 208r). The latter is the *Empress of China*, the first American ship to reach a Chinese port, staying in Whampoa from August to December 1784.³⁸ In addition to saluting those ships by firing nine blank gun shots, the captain of the *Nassau* "hoisted a broad pendant as Eldest Commander" (f. 14r, Larkins's logbook).

On 16 December, the Hoppo, who was the imperial official that supervised customs, came on board, and only once this ceremony was completed, which included measuring the ship, could trade begin. He too received the usual welcome, but the gun shots were only five, a smaller number than the salvos fired to greet the Europeans. These were well-established ceremonial procedures, which we certainly cannot attribute to the tensions over the *Lady Hughes's* episode, tragically resolved a few days earlier,³⁹ and yet these tensions must have been tangible, even if nothing about it appears in the logbook's account.

The cargo consisted of Indian cotton, to be exchanged in Canton not for silver but for other goods destined for England. The loading of these goods began in the early days of 1785. First on board was the porcelain, "The Hon.ble Company's China ware," loaded on 4 January, while on the 10th "a chop of Tea came alongside on Account of the Hon.ble Company." Meanwhile, ballast was offloaded and supplies stocked for the homeward voyage: on 13 January they "began salting our Provisions" (ff. 209v–210r). The last cargo of tea, together with a cargo consisting of "private trade," of which the logbook gives no details, was loaded on 5 February. In this case, the lack of data is remedied by the papers of the EIC Council in Canton (see Figures 2 and 3). The first is a table summarising the type and quantity of goods belonging to each of the officers, the purser, and the surgeon of the *Nassau*, with their initials used as cyphers to mark the chests. The second is a note, referring to the "usual letters upon the arrival of a ship" sent by the Council to Captain Gore, also containing some instructions regarding private trade. The members of the EIC

³⁷ See *The European Canton Trade 1723: Competition and Cooperation*, eds. Marlene Kessler, Kristin Lee, and Daniel Menning (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016).

³⁸ See Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, *The Empress of China* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 1984). For further details on the *Empress of China's* itinerary, see Erica Grossi, "Empress of China 22-02-1784 11-05-1785," in GSR, 2021, <https://globalsearoutes.net/geodatabase/>.

³⁹ See Li Chen, *Chinese Law in Imperial Eyes: Sovereignty, Justice, and Transcultural Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Jessica Hanser, *Mr. Smith Goes to China: Three Scots in the Making of Britain's Global Empire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2019), 103–19.

Ship Nassau's Manifest of Private Trade Canton 7th February 1785

<i>For whose Account</i>	<i>Keypen of Goods</i>	<i>Marks & Numbers</i>	<i>Parasich Bags</i>	<i>Marks</i>	<i>China in Chests</i>	<i>Marks & Numbers</i>	<i>Opium</i>	<i>Wanghs</i>
<i>Arthur Gore Commander</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>A A</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>A G T</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>A G Mark</i>		
<i>John Larkins 1st Mate</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>E 1-24</i>			<i>12</i>	<i>E N 1-12</i>	<i>6000</i>	<i>1 Chest</i>
<i>Geo Boyd 2^d B^o</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>DB 1-10</i>			<i>6</i>	<i>DB 1-6</i>		
<i>John Brooker 3^d B^o</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>EB 1-12</i>						
<i>W^m Dalling Currier</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>WD 1-12</i>			<i>6</i>	<i>WD 1-6</i>		
<i>Joseph Wild Surgeon</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>JW 1-12</i>						
<i>John Wilson 5th Mate</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>JW 1-4</i>						

*By leaving Items as usual
Canton 7th February 1785
Signed in the presence of the Council
(Signed) Arthur Gore*

Figure 2. “Ship Nassau’s Manifest of Private Trade Canton 7th February 1785.” Source: British Library, India Office Records, London, IOR/G/12/80, in Adam Matthew Digital: East India Company (2020), folio 112.

Made to Capt: Gore the usual letter upon the arrival of a ship likewise gave him orders not to take any slaves from Malacca, to register the private trade of Nassau properly with us, & to take care to have it marked with the initials of himself & Officers. I endorsed the resolution of the Court of Directors held the 24th January 1783 respecting the Quantity of Tea allowed to be taken by the Captains & Officers.

*W^m Henry Pigou
Mr. Roebuck
O Henry Browne*

Figure 3. Note concerning the letter sent to the captain of the Nassau on his arrival in Whampoa, signed by three members of the EIC Council in Canton: Henry Pigou, Abraham Roebuck, and Henry Browne. Source: British Library, India Office Records, London, IOR/G/12/80, in Adam Matthew Digital: East India Company (2020), folio 107.

Council in Canton also used this arrangement. For instance, David Lance, William Henry Pigou, and Charles Edward Pigou all used the Nassau, as well as other ships, to load some chests of tea to send home.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ “China and Japan: Canton Diary, 21 Feb 1784–8 Feb 1785,” British Library, India Office Records, London, IOR/G/12/80.

Having completed the ship's repairs, which had continued uninterruptedly throughout her time at Whampoa, and loaded the last supplies of salt and livestock, the *Nassau* departed on 11 February 1785. The following day she sailed past Boca Tigris, and on the 13th she supplemented her crew with local sailors. As we read in the logbook, "22 Chinese enter'd to go to Europe" (f. 212v).

During the *Nassau's* stopover in Whampoa, some of the ships that had been present on her arrival had set sail for home. Among these was one that we shall meet again in a moment, the *Pallas*, leaving on 15 January 1785, which earned this annotation from Captain Gore: "A ship sail'd under Americain Colours; she came in under English" (f. 210v).

Encounters at Sea: Two "American" Ships Encounter the *Nassau*

Although she had left almost a month earlier, the *Pallas* arrived at Cape Agulhas in South Africa only a few days before the *Nassau*. On 30 April 1785, the two vessels made contact and the two commanders were able to communicate with each other.⁴¹ Captain Gore—who had not yet sighted land—received valuable information that enabled him to establish his position more accurately. The occasional encounter between the *Nassau* and the *Pallas* off the coast of South Africa provides food for thought on other aspects of late eighteenth-century commercial shipping. The *Pallas* had also come from Whampoa, and was thus one of the first American ships to open the trade route between the Middle Kingdom and the young nation of the New World. In fact, she was the second American ship: first place was held by a much more famous vessel, the *Empress of China*. When Samuel Shaw—the expedition manager who had led the American trade mission to Canton—returned to New York with the *Empress of China*, his right-hand man Thomas Randall decided to remain a few months longer in Asia: he chartered the *Pallas*—a ship owned by John O'Donnell, an Irish commander previously in the service of the EIC, who intended to abandon the country trade and retire—and raised the American flag, as Captain Gore had noted. The *Pallas* arrived in Baltimore in August 1785, some three months after the return of the *Empress of China*. She too carried valuable Chinese goods to America, particularly tea and porcelain, and she too had among the buyers of her cargo the future president of the United States, George Washington. Unlike the *Empress of China*, however, the *Pallas* can boast a unique distinction: she was the first ship to bring Chinese people to American soil, specifically some sailors hired to complete the crew.⁴²

The *Nassau's* second chance encounter took place on 6 August 1785 in the North Atlantic, when the return voyage was well underway. The ship in question was the *Congress*, a vessel of some 600 tons that had set sail from the Irish port of Londonderry and was destined for Philadelphia. It was therefore a ship sailing "to the Land of Liberty," as stated in the advertisement published in the *Londonderry Journal* of 11 May 1784 in reference to the previous year's voyage:

THE remarkable fine SHIP CONGRESS [. . .] Will be clear to sail from this Port the 1st of June next.—Passengers, Redemptioners, and Servants, who wish to embrace this favourable Opportunity of sailing in the finest ship that ever carried Passengers to the Land of

⁴¹ For an account of the good relations established between the British and the Americans very soon after the end of the Revolutionary War, see *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton, with a Life of the Author*, ed. Josiah Quincy (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1847), 181.

⁴² See Robert L. Brunhouse, "Lascars in Pennsylvania, a Sidelight on the China Trade," *Pennsylvania History* 7:1 (1940), 20–30. For a broader context, see Marco Sioli, "Opening American Commerce with Canton: From the *Empress of China* to the *Columbia Rediviva* (1784–1793)," *XVII-XVIII* 77 (2020), <http://journals.openedition.org/1718/5747>.

Liberty, will meet with proper Encouragement by applying to Wm. Moore, Merchant, who will be particular in laying in plenty of the best provisions and Water, so as to make the Passage comfortable and pleasant. Capt. Knox, is a Derry man, and served his Apprenticeship in the City in the Passenger Trade. He will be found on board the Ship, and will treat with Passengers on the most moderate terms.⁴³

It is well known that, after the Peace of Paris had diplomatically sanctioned the independence of the United States, a ship sailed almost weekly for several years from Irish ports to America with large numbers of passengers on board. The *Congress* first made the crossing in 1783, under the command of Captain William Chevers, and again in 1784, with Captain Francis Knox.⁴⁴ The *Congress's* third voyage in 1785, one not otherwise known about, was recorded in the *Nassau's* logbook. Was the *Congress* flying the American flag? Captain Gore did not specify, but noted that there were “330 People on board” (f. 253r).

Thanks to the abovementioned source, the *Londonderry Journal*, we also know that the owner of the ship, one Blair McLenaghan, “native of Ireland, twenty-five years a citizen of America, invited the people of Derry to breakfast and a dance on his ship, the *Congress*.”⁴⁵ This treat took place in early June 1784, two months before the departure for her second voyage. It is possible that the ship-owner was the same person who actively supported the cause of the revolutionaries and was in contact with the political writer Thomas Paine (1737–1809). In one of his volumes of writings on economics and politics, Paine recalled that McLenaghan, himself a citizen of Philadelphia, worked to raise funds for the army led by George Washington, at Paine’s own initiative.⁴⁶

The *Congress*, like the *Pallas* a few months earlier, provided the *Nassau* with a reliable report of her position, thanks to which it was possible to correct a calculation that, after the last stopover at Saint Helena, had resulted in an error of approximately 1,000 km and 10° 26’ longitude eastwards (f. 253r). From that moment until entering the English Channel, the captain and his chief mate compiled their logbooks with a double indication of longitude, one calculated with reference to their own assessments and the other with the data provided by the *Congress*.

Conclusions

The *Nassau's* voyage was a commercial venture. Iron and lead, cotton and saltpetre, tea and porcelain were the goods transported on behalf of the EIC but also for the benefit of the ship’s officers. This obvious mercantile component should not, however, eclipse its parallel status as a military voyage. Events such as the sieges of the fortresses of Mysore and the search for the shipwrecked Hanoverian troops add a dimension to the tale of the voyage that sheds light on the complex nature of the operations of the EIC, the “company-state” that drove British expansion in India.

The interesting elements that emerge from the analysis of the logbook as a qualitative source do not reside solely in these isolated episodes, but rather in the unexpected perspectives that open up unexplored dimensions and allow new narratives to be pursued. These results demonstrate the ability this source, hitherto scarcely used for this purpose,

⁴³ Irish Emigration Database, Ship Congress, Londonderry to Philadelphia; *Londonderry Journal*, Tuesday, 11 May, 1784, Vol XII No. 1087, CMSIED 9910036, <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/ied/records/42604.transcript>.

⁴⁴ Donald M. Schlegel, *Irish Genealogical Abstracts from the “Londonderry Journal,” 1772–1784* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001), 119, 129.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁶ Thomas Paine, *Dissertations on Government, the Affairs of the Bank, and Paper Money* (London: W. T. Sherwin, 1817), 21.

has to trigger research paths in multiple directions. The relevance of such results adds further depth to the study of navigational practices, which indeed remain the cornerstone on which the GSR project—of which this essay is a component—is building its research into the voyages of European ships on oceanic routes in the early and late modern periods.

The various encounters reported in the *Nassau's* logbook—either actually planned, sought but missed, or happened by chance—testify to the great variability involved in the unfolding of this as well as many other EIC voyages. This unpredictability was balanced by the crew's strict adherence to the codified norms of a routine that provided the necessary support to ensure the success of the expedition. Awareness of the existence of “unknown unknowns” and the practical ability to deal with them were the prerequisites that underpinned every voyage throughout the entire history of the EIC, which overlaps with much of that of the Age of Sail. In this context, the logbook should (also) be seen as the tool through which experiences gained and solutions found became the common heritage of figures as diverse as directors, hydrographers, commanders, officers, sailors, tradesmen, and soldiers—in short, of the entire EIC world.

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