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ACCOUNTING REPRESENTATION AND THE SLAVE TRADE: THE *GUIDE DU COMMERCE* OF GAINAT DE L'AULNAIS

Abstract: The *Guide du commerce* occupies a distinctive place in the French-language literature on accounting. Passed over by most specialists in the history of maritime trade and the slave trade, the manual has never been the subject of a documented historical study. The apparent realism of the examples, the luxury of details and their precision, all bear witness to a deep concern to go beyond a simple apprenticeship in bookkeeping. Promoting itself essentially as “*un guide du commerce*,” the volume offers strategic examples for small local businesses, as well as for those engaged in international trade. Yet, the realism also demonstrated the expertise of the author in the eyes of potential purchasers. Inspired by the work of Bottin [2001], we investigate the extent to which the manual reflects real-world practices and provides a faithful glimpse into the socio-economic context of the period. Two additional questions are discussed briefly in our conclusion. First, can the work of Gaignat constitute a source document for the history of *la traite négrière*? The second entails our early deliberations about the place of this volume in the history of the slave trade itself.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of its very general title which undoubtedly explains its passing mention in the history of accounting, the 1771 *Guide du commerce* of Gaignat de l’Aulnais is likely one of the very first specialized manuals on accounting. Aside from a few paragraphs dedicated to traditional commercial matters (e.g.,

Acknowledgments: Special thanks to our colleagues who have provided encouragement for and appreciated our ongoing interest in this work. The lead author assumes full responsibility for translations from the original French.

exchange transactions, weights and measures, bills of exchange) and a somewhat classical presentation of single- and double-entry bookkeeping, the work deals essentially with the shipping trade and, more specifically, one of its most dramatic aspects – the slave trade.

Over and above this early specialization which, as will be explained later, is not an entirely isolated example, the manual, by the distinctive nature of the trade it describes, occupies a distinctive place in the French-language literature on accounting. In fact, with the exception of Affleck's [1854] *The Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book*, which Heier [1988] and Fleischman [2003] have studied, the *Guide du commerce* probably plays a unique role in all of the accounting literature.

Research into the accounting for slavery and the slave trade has been limited. Possible reasons for this lack of attention have been outlined by Fleischman [2003] and Fleischman and Tyson [2003]. Heier [1988] examined accounting's role in slavery with the focus on Thomas Affleck's volume. This study, as those of Fleischman and Tyson [2000, 2003], examines slavery in terms of the management of plantations and estates in Hawaii and the ante-bellum U.S. Vollmers [2003] has examined industrial slavery in the U.S., specifically the role of slave labor in the turpentine industry of the 19th century. We have only found, as a study of the slave trade itself, the article by Donoso Anes [2002], which examines the trade undertaken by the English South Sea Company on behalf of Spain in the 18th century. However, it is focused more on the conflict between the principal and his subcontractor than with the actual accounting for the trade.

To our knowledge, the *Guide du commerce* is the only work to present in a detailed manner the specialized accounting treatment for slave-trade operations, specifically the diverse transactions related to the "human cargo" (*la cargaison*), undertaken during the course of the voyage. Seemingly passed over by most specialists in the history of maritime trade and the slave trade, with brief mentions by Rinchon [1955, 1964] and Boulle [1972], the manual has never been, as far as we can determine, the subject of a documented historical study. Yet, the book is neither unknown nor extremely rare; it is listed in Reymondin's [1909] and Hausdorfer's [1986] accounting bibliographies, and the *Catalogue collectif de France*¹ indicates that it is part of the holdings

¹<http://www.ccf.fr/bnf.fr> This electronic catalogue lists the holdings of the Bibliothèque Nationale and university and municipal libraries of the major cities of France.

of several libraries in France, including the Bibliothèque Nationale, as well as the municipal libraries in Nantes, Rouen, La Rochelle, and Versailles. This list is without a doubt incomplete.²

Within the context of our broader research program dealing with maritime commerce and the slave trade specifically, all signs prompted us to devote particular attention to this volume. A quick first reading indicated that the work's importance greatly surpassed that of a number of classic accounting treatises, independent of its theme. In effect, the apparent realism of the examples outlined, as much from the point of view of the products as the locations or even the people implicated (the names of established *armateurs*³ in Nantes are readily recognized), the luxury of details and their precision, all bear witness to a deep concern to go beyond a simple apprenticeship in bookkeeping. Promoting itself essentially as "*un guide du commerce*," the volume provides much more than copied examples of account books; it offers to its readers, as it were, strategic examples for small local businesses, as well as for those engaged in international trade. Yet the realism had in all likelihood another purpose, to demonstrate the expertise of the author in the eyes of potential purchasers.

This type of argument has been made earlier by Jean Bottin [2001], historian of the merchant world and commercial practices of France, subsequent to his in-depth analysis of a number of French accounting manuals. We have taken our inspiration from his approach. Thus, our primary question inverts the argument of Gaignat, who uses his commercial experience to sing the praises of his manual. Our premise, rather, is to investigate the extent to which the manual reflects real-world practices and provides a faithful glimpse into the socio-economic context of the period. Answering this question definitively is a long and exacting task. Nevertheless, initial research allows us to provide a preliminary and positive response for some limited yet significant aspects.

Two additional questions are raised and discussed briefly in our conclusion. The first is in keeping with the logic of Bottin's

²It is reasonable to believe that some of these libraries have not yet completed the computerization of the catalogues listing their older holdings.

³Some terms have been retained in French due to their lack of equivalent in English: *l'armateur* – a ship owner, specifically one who engaged in the maritime trade and operated a diversified business; *le négociant* – merchant, but distinct in the sense of one who was engaged in wholesale trade and did not have a retail establishment; *un négrier* – a vessel engaged in *la traite des Noirs* or *la traite négrière* – the slave trade.

[2001] approach, which considers that certain bookkeeping manuals can be considered as sources of commercial history and can compensate for the absence of archival sources. Can the work of Gagnat constitute a source document for the history of *la traite négrière*? The second entails our early deliberations about the place of this volume in the history of the slave trade itself.

The originality of our research stems, therefore, as much from the theme of the work studied as from the questions which drive it. It utilizes a relatively new approach to the study of accounting treatises that in all likelihood could be adopted for other works and in other countries. In our view, this approach could reinvigorate the history of accounting literature, a history which has been somewhat abandoned and has become rather dusty.

The paper proceeds in four sections. First, we bring together a few biographical elements in order to situate Gagnat in the business universe of Nantes, without relying only on his own indications. The second section reinserts the manual in the output of French accounting and explains its originality by a comparison with the commercial context of Nantes. The third section provides a quick exposé of the technical content of the manual, detailing more particularly the passages devoted to the slave trade. The fourth section raises the question of the realism of the work, not only in terms of accounting practice, but also the commercial environment and the characters represented therein.

GAIGNAT DE L'AULNAIS: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In his *Guide du commerce*, dedicated to “Son Altesse Sérénissime Monseigneur le Duc de Penthièvre, gouverneur de Bretagne,” Gagnat introduces himself at the outset as an “ancien négociant de Nantes, ci-devant professeur de la grande école du Commerce à Paris, et actuellement bourgeois à Sceaux-du-Maine, et procureur fiscal de S.A.S. Monseigneur le Comte d’Eu en sa Baronnie de Sceaux et dépendances.”⁴ In his three published works, Gagnat provided a bit of information about his life. We have tried to combine these details with others furnished by our research into a diverse array of primary and secondary sources.

⁴“former négociant of Nantes, previously professor of the “grande école du Commerce” at Paris, and currently bourgeois at Sceaux-du-Maine and fiscal procurator for the Count d’Eu...”

Born April 11, 1719 in Angers [Archives départementales du Maine et Loire], where he was a student of the Oratorian Fathers [Port, 1965], Claude Gaignot (the particle “de” later added to his name) was married to Françoise Saulnier on August 16, 1740. Baptismal and marriage registers record Gaignot broadly speaking as a merchant, while on the tax rolls (*les rôles de capitation*), his position was variously as a shopkeeper [Archives Municipales de Nantes, CC 458, 1743], grocer [Archives Municipales de Nantes, CC 460, fo. 109, 1762], and bookkeeper [Archives Municipales de Nantes, CC 459, fo. 68, 1754]. Another document refers to him as a *maître écrivain*.⁵ These details are the only bits of information that we possess at this point about his activities in Nantes. However, more details are known about the last years of his life at Sceaux, a borough south of Paris, where he had settled in the late 1760s and where he died on February 24, 1791.

His traces are indeed revealed in Sceaux in 1778, where he authored an anonymous work entitled *Promenade de Sceaux-Penthièvre, de ses dépendances et de ses environs* in which he indicates his position and duties at Sceaux [Gaignat de l’Aulnais, 1778a]. The book’s authorship is not in doubt⁶; not only does the author reveal in his preface that he also penned *Guide du commerce* and *l’Arithmétique démontrée, opérée et expliquée*,⁷ published in 1770, but a manuscript document signed by de l’Aulnais [Gaignat de l’Aulnais, 1778b] and dedicated to the Princesse de Lamballe⁸ is held by the Musée de l’Île de France [Château de Sceaux, INV 73-4-1, CAT 1195], a museum located in the Château de Sceaux itself. His home was arguably one of the

⁵“writing master” [Archives Municipales de Nantes, FF 184, 1751]. See note 12 for further details.

⁶The general catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale attributes the book to Gaignat de l’Aulnais. Furthermore, his name is inscribed in pencil on the back of the half-title page, spelled as Gaignat de l’Aulnays. The society of the friends of Sceaux (la société des amis de Sceaux) reissued the work in 1939 [Gaignat de l’Aulnais, 1939].

⁷The three volumes in rough translation are “*A Walk in Sceaux-Penthièvre, its Surroundings and Outskirts*,” “*Handbook of Trade and Commerce*,” and “*Arithmetic: Its Demonstration, Process and Explanation*.”

⁸Born in Turin in 1749, Marie Thérèse Louise de Savoie-Carignan became Princess of Lamballe when she married Louis Alexandre Stanislas of Bourbon-Penthièvre, prince of Lamballe, son of the duke of Penthièvre. A favorite of and confidant to Queen Marie-Antoinette, the Princess of Lamballe was decapitated by the guards of the prison of Grande Force. Her head was paraded in Paris on the end of a pike during the revolutionary days of September 1792, sparked by the announcement of the invasion of France by the Prussians.

most beautiful patrician homes in Sceaux. It served, after a long period as the notary office, as the city hall following the marriage in 1772 of Denise-Rose Le Rémois, Gagnat de l'Aulnais' daughter-in-law, to François Desgranges, future notary and mayor of Sceaux and founder of a dynasty of leading citizens of the city [Advielle, 1883, pp. 477-482].

The notarial records of the department of Hauts-de-Seine confirm that on March 9, 1771, Gagnat became fiscal procurator for HSH His Grace the count of Eu in the barony of Sceaux and dependencies [Archives départementales de Hauts-de-Seine, 3 E 49]. Following the death of the count of Eu on July 13, 1775, the estate was transferred to his cousin, the duke of Penthièvre, a legitimized bastard of Louis XIV and the marchioness of Montespan. Lord High Admiral of France and governor of Brittany, the duke of Penthièvre, to whom Gagnat had dedicated his *Guide du commerce* a few years before, possessed one of the greatest, if not the greatest, fortunes of the realm [Duma, 1995].⁹

The fiscal procurator was one of the two key people in administration and seigniorial justice. The other, the seneschal, was principal judge, chief of police, and administrative head, making him the most important person on the seigniority after the lord. The fiscal procurator had a dual role – to uphold the public interest and to collect seigniorial rents. Furthermore, he frequently fulfilled the role of collector and superintendent of the seigniority, making him essentially the steward of the estate. Given that the passage from merchant to paid officer of the state was a relatively frequent occurrence in France during the *ancien régime*, Gagnat's career path is not surprising. However, although his office did not necessarily make him a high ranking public figure, its importance was undeniable and buying it must certainly have necessitated a substantial investment. Aside from the aforementioned house, the notarial records indicate that he and his wife owned other assets. According to Advielle [1883, p. 406], he was the first and primary purchaser of national property (*les biens nationaux*)¹⁰ in his city. His marriage in 1768 to Denise Buisson,¹¹ widow of François le Rémois and descendant of Jean Bruslé, second fiscal procurator in Sceaux and notary,

⁹In particular, he owned a vast estate in land comprising the châteaux of Anet, Amboise, Bizy, Blois, Chanteloup, Châteauneuf, Eu, Rambouillet, and the Hôtel de Toulouse in Paris.

¹⁰properties nationalized during the French Revolution of 1789. Confiscated from the clergy and the nobility who had left France, these assets were then sold to the bourgeoisie to replenish the state coffers.

¹¹Two sons were born of this union.

likely helped him to acquire his office as fiscal procurator. Nonetheless, he still would have had to amass a certain personal fortune in order for the marriage to take place. This sum could not have come from his first marriage to Françoise Saulnier in 1764. Since she declared at the time of her marriage that she did not know how to write or sign her name, it was apparent that she came from a modest household, re-affirmed by her initial status as shopkeeper. We can conclude, therefore, that his fortune resulted from his previous professional activities unless he had inherited it from his parents.

However that may be, after his departure from Nantes at the beginning of the 1760s, Gaignat de l'Aulnais [1771] presents himself as a “*professeur d'une grande école du commerce à Paris,*” probably one of the private pensions endowed at the end of the 18th century, some of which were available specifically for the children of traders [Julia, 1995]. However, it is doubtful that the exercise of this profession could have provided Gaignat with substantial professional fees, especially since his courses apparently were free of charge. He was not a member of the Parisian corporation of writing masters,¹² and his disputes with the Academy of master writers, arithmeticians, mathematicians, and bookkeepers led to the discontinuation of “*son cours gratuit de démonstration sur toutes les parties du Commerce*”¹³ [Gaignat de l'Aulnais, 1770, p. 17].

We also learn from the *Guide du commerce* that in 1766, Gaignat had tried his hand at another endeavor, the establishment and management of a pawnshop [Gaignat de l'Aulnais, 1771]. However, the “*Comptoirs royaux pour les dépôts de confiance des effets du public ou prêt sur gages,*”¹⁴ for which Gaignat intended to be the bookkeeper, never materialized when the King refused to grant the 30-year exclusive privilege demanded by the business promoters.

¹²In the 17th and 18th centuries, those who taught bookkeeping in Paris usually belonged to the community of writing masters which was organized into a “*métier juré*” by letters patent by Charles IX in October 1570 [Hébrard, 1995] and held the monopoly over the teaching of calligraphy and the verification of accounts. Letters patent dated January 30, 1727 gave its members the title of “*juré écrivain expéditionnaire et arithméticien, teneur de livres de comptes, établi pour les vérifications, comptes et calculs contestés en justice*” – sworn writer and mathematician, bookkeeper, established for the audit, accounts, and calculations contested in legal proceedings.

¹³“free lessons in all aspects of commerce”

¹⁴in effect, a public warehouse and pawnshop established under the auspices of the Crown

In *l'Arithmétique démontrée et expliquée*,¹⁵ Gagnat de l'Aulnais [1770] announced two other works – a book on agriculture, an undertaking he claimed to practice on his Parisian properties after having done the same in Brittany, and an enigmatically titled autobiography *l'Abandonné parvenu par le fruit défendu*.¹⁶ A quick interpretation of the title refutes the hypothesis of an inheritance, yet corroborates that of a happy alliance. This last undertaking no doubt would have shed much light on the author's merchant past, but, to this day, no trace of either book has been found. It is likely that neither one progressed beyond the planning stage.

While Gagnat affirms having worked in Nantes for 25 years in the largest commercial businesses, as well as in several other cities [Gagnat de l'Aulnais, 1770], the question remains as to the capacity in which he did so. Our lengthy presentation of the possible origins of his fortune is a response to that query. Was he really a trader in the sense of one who operated a commercial (wholesale) enterprise of significant scale? Alternatively, was he a simple retail merchant or was his claim nothing more than a marketing ploy? While certain documents of the period note that he was a merchant, we have not yet found any trace that would allow us to verify his membership in the circles of *le grand négoce*.¹⁷ Even an examination of tax ledgers yielded no information on this matter [Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, C 870], and the amount of poll tax that he paid was quite meager. However, that he taught accounting and played the role of a qualified bookkeeper on the account of one or more merchants in Nantes is eminently probable since these functions were tightly linked during the 18th century [Lemarchand, 2001]. He himself declared in the preface to his *Guide* that he had overseen “the business affairs” and “the maintenance of account books” for various merchants. Moreover, as we will later illustrate, the very content of his work attests to his knowledge of the triangular trade and of certain key actors in Nantes in the first half of the 18th century.

These few biographical details allow us equally to reduce the uncertainty that continues about the volume's publication

¹⁵The work is dedicated to “*Mgr Louis Paul de Brancas, gouverneur des ville et château de Nantes.*”

¹⁶The title has been roughly translated as “The forsaken one who succeeded through forbidden fruit.” As in English, “*parvenu*” also means “upstart.” Thus, a play on words was intended here.

¹⁷major trade enterprises or “big business”

date. In 1752, Gaignat received initial confirmation regarding royal approval for the *Guide du commerce* and *l'Arithmétique démontrée, opérée et expliquée*; an approval reiterated in 1764. A copy of both titles appears in the text. Relying on this later date, a number of accounting biographies and library catalogues indicate that the book was edited in 1764. In reality, its publication occurred later as attested to by the book's description of events occurring in Paris in 1766 and 1767. Moreover, in a notice to readers, Gaignat states that he had launched the volume on a subscription basis in 1764, but that the number of subscribers had fallen short of his expectations. He had reimbursed them through various bookshops and had decided to publish the volume at his own expense. Further proof is provided by the fact that Gaignat explains on his title page that he is fiscal procurator to the count of Eu [Archives départementales des Hauts de Seine, 3 E 49], an occupation he took up only on March 9, 1771. This event furnishes therefore the *terminus ad quo* and the death of the comte d'Eu in 1775, the *terminus ad quem* of the publication date. This view is confirmed by a prospectus inserted in *l'Arithmétique démontrée* [Gaignat de l'Aulnais, 1770, p. 5] which proposed two volumes via subscription: the *Guide du commerce* to be distributed in 1771 and *des Mappemondes, pour trouver la correspondance des poids, des aunages et des mesures de contenance, qui sont en usage dans l'Europe, l'Asie, l'Afrique et l'Amérique*.¹⁸ It is this later date that we have adopted, although we do not possess all the necessary details to confirm it with complete certainty. According to Kerviler [1904, tome VIII, p. 97], the volume would have been re-printed in Paris in 1791, the year of the author's death, but we have not found any trace of this second edition.

The project evolved between 1752 and 1771, with the result that the *Guide du commerce* is presented as a series of juxtaposed pieces written at different periods. The 1752 approval mentioned a work entitled *La manière d'apprendre à tenir, en peu de temps, les livres de comptes à partie double et simple* (*The Manner in Which to Learn Quickly How to Keep Accounts by Single and Double Entry*). It disappeared from the 1754 approval as by then it had simply become the second section of the *Guide du commerce*. The examples in this section are dated between 1754 and 1755, while those in the fourth section, which deals with the slave trade and which were not included in the initial approval,

¹⁸translated as "Maps of the world, to determine the correspondence of weights, volumes, and measures used in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America"

are dated 1761. The complete work represents a training tool intended to respond to the educational needs of *les négociants* in the major port cities and of their bookkeepers.

A SPECIALIZED MANUAL À LA NANTAISE

The Work and the Market for Accounting Training in 18th Century France: During the last third of the 17th century in France, an abundance of works and, more specifically, manuals on book-keeping were written with merchants in mind [Lemarchand, 2001]. This movement accompanied the initial stages of a growth in commercial activity, which would elevate 18th century France to the ranks of one of the primary trading nations of Europe. It took into account the need for specific training and reflected the establishment of a truly specialized market. Indeed, the training of traders and their bookkeepers could not have consisted only of the oral transfer of knowledge at the trading house; certain techniques, such as accounting, required other means of transmission. Manuals and lessons from a specialized master contributed an indispensable complement to learning.

The authors of the manuals found themselves in direct competition. One way to attract the clientele was to widen and diversify the contents of their works so that they responded to specific needs. It is thus that Boyer, Savonne, and Thomas, authors from Lyon, wrote about the international aspects of trade in their city and evoked certain “*spécialités lyonnaises*,” such as the *carnets* (notebooks) and other *bilans* (balance sheets) used in the course of the *payements* of the four big annual fairs during which commercial debts between merchants from all over Europe were offset. The application of double entry for transactions involving state funds was a recurring theme. Long after Simon Stevin, this idea was taken up by Irson [1678], who suggested a double-entry journal and ledger model for salt-tax collector, and later by Barrême [1721] in his *Plan d’une recette générale des finances tenue en parties doubles*.¹⁹ Conversely, Bernard d’Hénouville [1709] recommended a simple revenue-and-expenses accounting procedure in his *Guide des comptables*. Although the work is essentially about public finance accounting, the author applied this method to the presentation of the accounts for the outfitting and laying up (*l’armement et le désarmement*) of a ship.

With the exception of Gentil [1777], the theme of maritime

¹⁹“outline of a general framework for finances to be kept in double entry”

trade is comparatively absent in manuals from Paris and Lyon. Alternatively, it is present in most of the 18th century works written by authors living in port cities, such as Gobain [1717], Desgranges in Bordeaux, or Giraudeau [1764] in Marseille. However, the work of Gaignat de l'Aulnais clearly sets itself apart from the others, both by its quantity and by the precision and distinctiveness of its themes. Half of his work (216 of 444 pages; the third and fourth sections) deals exclusively with maritime trade. Of this portion, 120 pages relate to the slave trade. Importantly, in the remainder of his work, maritime commercial activities occupy an important place, both in the models of commercial documents and the examples of accounting entries.

Aside from a few pages dealing with the slave trade in Savary's [1675] *Le parfait négociant* and the *Dictionnaire du commerce* by his sons [Savary des Bruslons, 1748], of which certain pages re-appear in *l'Encyclopédie*, the *Traité général du commerce de l'Amérique* of Chambon [1783] is, to our knowledge, the only French work that can be likened to that of Gaignat de l'Aulnais. Published a dozen years later than that of Gaignat, the contents differ significantly from those of the *Guide du commerce*. In addition to a compilation of all texts that regulated trade in America, including the slave trade, Chambon's work consists of information and prescriptions concerning: "*Les mœurs des nègres et des esclaves, l'état des marchandises propres à ce commerce, les précautions à prendre dans l'achat des esclaves avec les moyens de les conduire en santé en Amérique.*"²⁰ It provides, in particular, models of an invoice for return goods as well as a summary slip (*le bordereau*) for the sales revenue of slaves and of its use to recapitulate *les retours*²¹ in accordance with statutory regulations. A copy of the summary had to be provided to the *fermiers généraux* (government farmers general) who collected indirect taxes. The documents that Gaignat de l'Aulnais presents are of a very similar form. For the rest, the prescriptions concerning the choice of goods, the purchase of slaves, and their conveyance to America, especially in terms of hygiene and general care, are mostly based on the advice given by *armateurs* to their captains. Debien [1972] and Esnoul le Sénéchal [1932] provide examples

²⁰the customs of Negroes and slaves, the types of merchandise suitable for this trade, precautions to take in the purchase of slaves, and the means to ensure their healthy arrival in America"

²¹*Les retours* or returning merchandise refers to the merchandise that was brought back to France as a result of sales of the outbound goods. The ultimate sale of this merchandise determined the final profit or return earned by the investors.

of such recommendations. This volume, therefore, belongs to a category quite distinct from that of Gaignat.

A Specialized (Accounting) Response to a Specialized Need: It was certainly no accident that the *Guide du commerce* had been written in Nantes between the beginning of the 1750s and the middle of the 1760s. The economic and political context of maritime activity, along with the particular place of the city in the slave trade, contributed to its appearance.

The historical links between Nantes and maritime trade are centuries old. Already an established center for commerce and trade, the 18th century brought a series of economic forces that motivated the merchants of Nantes to seek out new markets and ventures. The city had been affected significantly by the series of wars in Europe. Moreover, periods of famine and the decline in textile production and the salt trade upon which much commerce had depended meant a decline in the city's fortunes. New trading ventures were being investigated, and given the experience with and links to other parts of Europe, commerce quickly expanded to take advantage of the trade in colonial commodities. Under the mercantilist system, the colonies existed to support the political and economic interests of the metropolis.

Furthermore, tensions in the labor market led to the replacement in the colonies of engaged labor from France with *les captifs* (captives). Still few in number at the beginning of the century, slave expeditions took off during the 1740s to be interrupted totally during the Seven Years' War (1757-1763). After the Treaty of Paris, which marked the end of the conflict, the trade recommenced quickly and experienced strong growth, along with maritime trade in general.²² Early ventures into *la traite des Noirs* grew in the 1740s. During the period that immediately preceded this resurgence, the writing of the fourth part of the *Guide de commerce*, devoted to the slave trade and its accounting treatment, took place.²³

²²During the period of the Seven Years' War, slave-trade voyages were few and risky. According to Pêtré-Grenouilleau [1998, p. 50], the percentage of vessels from Nantes engaged in the French trade was 66.6% and the average number of vessels sent per year from Nantes only 0.28. This percentage dropped to 40.5 for the period after the war [1763-1778], but the average number of vessels rose to 22 per year. As noted by Gaston-Martin [1931, p. 23], the percentage of the trade undertaken by *les armateurs nantais* declined after 1762; yet, Nantes remained the dominant trade center.

²³The examples that are developed here are dated in the years 1761 and 1762.

Nevertheless, even if the city of Nantes alone carried out 42% of French slave-trade expeditions (1,427 of a total of 3,341) [Daget, 1990, p. 109], this activity did not dominate maritime trade. On average *les négociants* of Nantes devoted approximately only one-fifth of their shipping to these ventures. Yet, it did increase demand for other maritime shipping, such as trips to and from the colonies to transport colonial merchandise. The slave trade also facilitated the development of a broad business network to provide shipping resources for the trade and links with agents in Africa and the colonies.²⁴

Yet, if the Seven Years' War had brought a provisional end to the traffic in slaves, the *armateurs* of Nantes, having anticipated the war's end, easily determined that they could earn large profits after such a lengthy interruption. The *négociants* of the city did not hesitate to underscore their commitment to the trade [Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, C 882, fo 37, April 5, 1764]:

*...Cependant, on ne saurait dissimuler que malgré ces pertes, malgré ces obstructions, les négociants, et principalement ceux de Nantes, tant pour répondre aux vœux du Gouvernement, que pour se procurer la rentrée de leurs créances et tâcher de faire quelques profits, ont fait usage de ce qui leur restait de fonds et de tout leur crédit, pour armer avec ardeur pour la traite des Noirs et pour les colonies...*²⁵

Written at the end of a period in which the drop in trade activity undoubtedly provided Gaignat some forced leisure, the *Guide de commerce* appears to be a logical and anticipated response to the growth in maritime trade and the slave trade. The resurgence of the slave trade was accompanied by a renewal of shipping activity, increasing the volume's market potential [Goddard, 1993, p. 290]:

L'étude des armateurs durant la reprise nous permet de remarquer deux nouveautés: le commerce négrier n'est plus dominé par une ou deux familles comme les Mon-

²⁴Further information on Nantes and its role in the slave trade is developed in other manuscripts that are part of our broader research program.

²⁵"...Nonetheless, one cannot deny that despite the losses, despite the obstructions, the *négociants*, and principally those of Nantes, as much to respond to the wishes of the Government, as to obtain the return of their receivables and to try to make some profits, have made use of what remained of their funds and of all of their credit, to outfit ships zealously, for the *traite des Noirs* and for the colonies..."

*taudouin ou les Grou avant la guerre. En outre, il tend à se "démocratiser", un grand nombre de débutants plus modestes se lancent dans l'aventure et entre 1763 et 1766, des nouveaux négriers viennent sans cesse grossir le rang des armateurs.*²⁶

Besides, Gagnat already had provided ample coverage of maritime trade in the first three parts of his work; thus, he could hardly ignore devoting part of his treatise to *la traite négrière*, given that its management required specific processes and procedures. Everything at Nantes at that moment in time pointed him in this direction.

It is known that the practice of the slave trade and slavery, framed within *le Code Noir* and justified by the Church, hardly seemed to cause the *armateurs* of Nantes any pangs of conscience. Nonetheless, while providing the public with a tool intended to undertake in the most rational manner possible something which others had claimed to be an odious crime (and which the Chevalier de Joncourt earlier had condemned in the *Encyclopédie*), Gagnat could not prevent himself from slipping into various points of the text some elements that revealed his own uneasiness. However, if in the section on American commerce (p. 20), he speaks of "*pauvres esclaves, tristes et chagrins de quitter leur pays*"²⁷ who must be well treated and amused to avoid their attempting suicide or dying from sadness, it was hardly more than gratuitous compassion. One also finds such commentary mixed with similar recommendations in the *Dictionnaire du commerce* [Savary des Bruslons, 1748], where one also finds a discourse at times clearly racist, which is not the case with Gagnat.

Later, a notice (*avis*), inserted between pages 232 and 233 and probably composed at the time of the volume's publication, included a discourse totally humanist in tone, which Gagnat tempered thereafter with an argument that reveals what Pétré-Grenouilleau [2004, p. 261] calls the principle of the "coagulation of interests." In the end, he dodges the debate by introducing the illicit export of grain, a cause of scarcity, as a term of comparison:

²⁶"The study of *les armateurs* during the resumption [of trade] allows us to note two innovations: the slave trade was no longer dominated by one or two families, such as *les Montaudouin* or *les Grou* as before the war. Moreover, it tended to be "democratized"; a large number of newcomers, more modest in means launched out into the adventure between 1763 and 1766, new *négriers* [vessels] began to expand the ranks of *les armateurs*."

²⁷"poor slaves, sad and morose at having to leave their country"

*Je conviendrais comme beaucoup d'autres, qu'il n'est pas bien de faire le commerce des nègres ou noirs, pour les faire travailler aux terres, comme des bœufs, sans les récompenser, ou plutôt sans les instruire sur la religion, et je dirais qu'on devrait plutôt les enlever de leurs pays, afin de les instruire des lois, pour qu'après instruction desdites lois et de quelque art ou métier, ils retournassent dans leurs pays pour instruire toute la nation, laquelle se rendrait utile à l'État par les règlements qu'on y mettrait ; mais ce commerce ayant toujours été toléré, pour le bien même des colonies et l'avantage de tous les commerçants, je dis qu'il est plus qu'inhumain de faire le commerce illicite des grains, c'est-à-dire, illicite, sans l'autorité souveraine, que de faire le commerce de nègres en Afrique et en Amérique.*²⁸

Gaignat returns one last time to this topic by inserting a new notice right between the documents related to the purchase of captives and those dealing with sales (p. 339). The page, curiously composed, begins with a brief text, extracted and adapted from the *Dictionnaire du commerce*, dealing with the profit that could be realized on the “*marchandise de nègres*,” then continues with an eminent critique entitled “*Extrait de la dureté de l'esclavage*.”²⁹ This text of roughly 50 lines delivers a condemnation without recourse of slavery and the slave trade. Its author to date remains unknown but various fragments of the text are found in the work of another author [Henrion de Pansey, 1770]. The text ends as follows: “*Un pareil commerce d'acheter et de vendre des nègres fera-t-il enfin rougir le négociant qui fait le commerce d'esclavage aussi cruel que peu nécessaire*.”³⁰ Thus, in less than one page, Gaignat reminds the reader that this activity could be quite lucrative, but that it is also immoral, all the while teaching everything

²⁸“I admit, like many others, that the trade in *les nègres* or *noirs* is not a good thing, to make them work on the land, like cattle, without compensation or more so without instructing them in religion. Rather, I would say that instead one should remove them from their country in order to instruct them in laws, such that after receiving this instruction in such laws and in some art or trade, they would return to their country to instruct all of the nation, which would prove useful to the State by the regulations that would then be put in place. Yet, given that this trade has always been tolerated for the good of the colonies and for the advantage of all merchants, I state that it is more inhumane to undertake the illicit trade of grains – that is to say, illicit, without sovereign authority – than to undertake the trade in *nègres* in Africa and America.”

²⁹translated as “Extract from the Severity of Slavery”

³⁰“Such trade to buy and sell Negroes, will it finally embarrass the merchant who undertakes the trade in slaves as cruel as it is unnecessary?”

that one needs to know to practice it. Is this sheer cynicism, the indication of a real crisis of conscience, or, more simply, a cheap way to soothe his uneasiness? It is difficult to say; yet, remember that the work was edited between 1771 and 1775, and that it was precisely at the beginning of the 1770s that the French fight for abolition took flight. Having departed Nantes for Paris, Gaignat perhaps encountered a different atmosphere; yet, this alone did not dissuade him from publishing his text, the contents of which are the focus of the next section.

THE TECHNICAL CONTENT OF THE WORK

The subtitle of the *Guide du commerce* sets out in detail the different sections which we now examine:

*La première comprend le commerce de la Chine, celui du Pérou, celui de l'Amérique, avec des modèles d'achat et de vente [...] La seconde est la manière de tenir les livres de compte en parties simples et en parties doubles [...] La troisième contient la gestion d'une cargaison de navire à l'Amérique [...] La quatrième est la manière de traiter, de troquer ou d'acheter les Noirs en Afrique [...] et d'acheter les retours en Amérique [...] avec des tableaux de traite de nègres et d'achat en retour.*³¹

Section One: Trade in China, Peru, and America (pp. 1-26): Comprising 26 of the book's 450 pages, this very short section deals with trade in China and Peru, mainly in terms of the value of the currencies, weights, and measures. It also examines trade in America (the West Indies and Canada), this time mainly in terms of the merchandise being traded. The instructions deal with diverse points; for example, the author indicates the more favorable trading periods in terms of climate. Various models of commercial documents are presented: damage reports, charter-parties, invoices for merchandise loaded on ships, and sales reports for Martinique. While the slave trade is simply mentioned, the author does provide a model of a "*procès verbal d'un nègre*

³¹"The first section covers trade in China, Peru, and America, with models of purchases and sales...The second presents the manner in which to keep account books in single and double entry...The third contains the management of a ship's cargo destined for America...The fourth is the manner to trade, exchange or buy Blacks in Africa...and to buy merchandise in America...with tables for the trade in Negroes and the return purchases."

mort.”³² This type of occurrence report was no doubt filed frequently enough to warrant a standardized form (p. 23):

*Nous officiers, major et mariniers du navire l'Aventurier, certifions à qui il appartiendra, que cejourd'hui 28 mars 1754, faisant notre visite ordinaire à l'infirmerie, avons trouvé un nègre mort de la marque T, que nous avons reconnu appartenir à la cargaison, et nous l'avons fait jeter à la mer en notre présence. En foi de quoi nous avons signé le présent, pour servir ce que de raison.*³³

Section Two: Single- and Double-Entry Bookkeeping (pp. 27-212): This section begins with the presentation of models of general commercial documents such as bills of exchange, the transfer of ownership shares, protests, and bills of lading. More specific documents follow: loans “à la grosse aventure,”³⁴ insurance contracts for ships and shipments, maritime bills of lading, etc. The author then moves quickly into accounting and presents single-then double-entry bookkeeping. In this introductory schema, initially presented in France by Mathieu de La Porte [1704] and replicated in several French textbooks until the beginning of the 20th century, the single-entry method is interpreted simultaneously as an educational introduction to keeping debit and credit accounts (thus, by double entry),³⁵ and as a model to be used by “les marchands qui vendent en détail et ceux qui font des affaires peu considérables”³⁶ [La Porte, 1704, p. 6]. Gaignat reiterates this notion of single-entry bookkeeping for small merchants when

³²“statement regarding the death of a negro”

³³“We, being major officers and mariners on the ship, *l'Aventurier*, certify to whomever it may concern that today the 28th of March 1754 in the course of our regular visit to the infirmary, found a dead Negro with the mark “T” who we recognized as belonging to the cargo, and that we had him put overboard in our presence. In witness to this we have signed the foregoing as an explanation.”

³⁴Loans “à la grosse aventure” financed maritime expeditions at very high interest rates. If the ship was lost, however, the lender forfeited both the principal and the interest.

³⁵Incidentally, the 1673 *Ordonnance [titre I, article 4]* sets out that, “*l'aspirant à la maîtrise sera interrogé sur les livres et registres à partie double et à partie simple, sur les lettres et billets de change, sur les règles d'arithmétique, sur la partie de l'aune, sur la livre et poids de marc, sur les mesures et les qualités de la marchandise, autant qu'il conviendra pour le commerce dont il entend se mêler.*” (The aspiring master will be examined on the books and registers in double entry and single entry, on letters and bills of exchange, on the rules of arithmetic, on the division of an ounce, pound, and the weight of a mark, on the measurement and quality of merchandise, as such as it is necessary for the business in which he intends to get involved) [La Porte, 1704, p. 6].

³⁶“retail merchants and those operating relatively small businesses”

he states: “*Je n’établis dans cette teneur de livres à parties simples qu’un petit commerce*” (p. 44).³⁷

Single entry (pp. 43-86): As was customary in accounting treatises, after a brief exposé of the principal aspects of single entry with an enumeration of the books to be maintained, the author opens the journal of a hypothetical merchant. After the recording of a series of various transactions, he next presents the corresponding general ledger. This commercial venture is located in Nantes and is centered on port activity. Those commercial enterprises with which business relationships are established are either ports accessible by coastal shipping (Lorient, Rouen, Saint-Valéry, or, further along, Amsterdam, Hamburg) or cities linked by the river (downstream: Paimbeuf, and upstream: especially Angers, Saumur, Tours, Blois, or Orléans). The colorful names of some of the people involved add to the realism of the situation; for example, merchandise is transported on the boats of a Brignon (also known as Bras-de-Fer), or those of La Gaudine of Angers, both inland shippers. Very few of the goods exchanged are manufactured products (handkerchiefs and soap); most are food products, spices (oil, butter, Chinese rhubarb, cheese from Holland and Gruyère, coffee, liquorice, sugar, pepper, and saffron), beverages (wine from Bordeaux and *eau-de-vie*), raw materials from animals (wool from Bayonne), dyes (indigo and madder), and materials (fir planks, tar, and resin). No specific comments are provided as to the actual technical aspects of the affair.

Double entry (pp. 87-212): This case deals with an *armateur*, and the author begins with the presentation of an inventory illustrating the scope of his commercial activities. Among the assets listed, we notice four bills of exchange drawn on some of the biggest traders in Nantes who owed their fortune to the slave trade: Michel, Jean-Baptiste Le Masne, Veuve Montaudouin, Augustin de Luines. Other assets include 100% ownership of the *Saint-Louis* and 50% ownership of another ship outfitted by Augustin de Luines and bound for Martinique. Furthermore, the trader in question owns annuities on the l’Hôtel de ville in Paris, a house in la Fosse, the *armateurs’* district, and a house in Haute-Goulaine, located in the Nantes countryside.

The entries reflect the entire scope of the trader’s activities.

³⁷“I am only establishing with this single-entry bookkeeping a small business affair.”

In reading the document, we notice his loading of merchandise destined for Saint Domingue and Martinique; lending money *à la grosse*³⁸ at 30% interest to ships headed for Guinée and Saint Domingue; insuring ships leaving for the West Indies; outfitting a ship destined for Martinique, etc. The wide range of documents provides insight into the scale of the commercial endeavors undertaken by this trader from Nantes and allow for glimpses into the workings of various specific accounts relating to maritime trade: insurance accounts, accounts involving "*la grosse aventure*," accounts for private cargo,³⁹ and accounts for ships, as well as records of outfitting and laying up of ships.⁴⁰ Silk goods, cloth from Laval, cloth from Morlaix, cut slate, flour, beaver pelt hats, Spanish oil, codfish, beef, and butter were destined for these islands, in exchange for sugar, coffee, indigo, and cotton.

Following the logic inherent to the workings of venture accounts, the year-end entries aim to reconcile the completed transactions accounts with the loss and gain account and to transfer the balances of the other accounts to the closing balance account. Following this operation, the author provides a brief example of bookkeeping for a company with three partners in which he includes himself as an associate named Delaulnais.

In his general presentation of bookkeeping, Gaignat quotes, without references, a maxim by Savary [1675]: "*l'ordre est l'âme du commerce*."⁴¹ In addition to the need, so often reiterated, to be just unto oneself and to know one's affairs well, he stresses the implicit role accounting plays in the supervision of subordinates. Indeed, well-kept ledgers are a source of concern to all ill-intentioned clerks who worry that one day their deceit will be brought to light by "*un négociant vigilant et régulier dans la connaissance de ses marchandises et de sa caisse*."⁴² This interpretation of accounting's role in controlling subordinates, by pas-

³⁸See footnote 34.

³⁹Private cargo (*pacotille* or *port-permis*) referred to items that the officers and some members of the crew were allowed to transport for their own use, over and above the ship's normal cargo. Private parties could finance their purchases and receive part of the profits. This arrangement represents a variant on the former commission contract. This practice provided a direct incentive to the crew and also motivated them to ensure cargo arrived safely at its destination port.

⁴⁰See Lemarchand [1995] for further details regarding ship accounts, their outfitting and laying up (*l'armement* and *le désarmement*).

⁴¹"Order is the soul of commerce."

⁴²"a *négociant* vigilant and consistent in the knowledge of his merchandise and his cash on hand"

sively and indirectly deterring dishonesty, will be transformed in the last two sections of the book where this role will become one of accounting's explicit functions.

Section Three: Bookkeeping⁴³ for Navigators (pp. 213-308): This section leaves the merchant house so to speak and addresses accounting as it is undertaken by the manager (agent or representative) of a shipment; in other words, usually the captain of the ship acting for his principal and whose accounting must reflect managerial activity⁴⁴ that is "clear and beyond doubt and suspicion" (p. 213). These activities include the keeping of a blotter/daybook, a journal, a general ledger, and a *livre de récapitulation* in which all the cargo's merchandise is listed in alphabetical order and in which all sales are recorded. This "*livre*" is, in a sense, an ongoing inventory of the cargo, both in terms of its quantity and value, and is a precious source of information. Gaignat states that, thanks to this record, "*d'un coup on voit tout ce que l'on a vendu de quelques espèces de marchandises que ce soit, ce qu'il en reste dans le magasin, et ce que lesdites marchandises ont produit*" (p. 217).⁴⁵

In addition to reflecting the managerial control of the captain, such accounting techniques also provide the *armateur* with strategic information:

Si vos livres sont dans un ordre bien clair et bien régulier, ceux qui vous ont commis, voient d'abord le bon ou mauvais état de leurs affaires, ce qu'ils doivent et ce qui leur est dû, les marchandises sur lesquelles ils ont profité et celles sur lesquelles ils ont perdu; cette connaissance les engage à continuer les bonnes et remédier aux méchantes (p. 220).⁴⁶

⁴³Gaignat uses the expression "*teneur des livres*," which in French could be interpreted as referring to the contents of the ledgers. However, "*teneur*" here refers only to the "keeping" of the books.

⁴⁴The word "management" is to be interpreted here in a more narrow sense than it is used today, and refers to managing or controlling the affairs of others.

⁴⁵"in a glance one sees everything that has been sold in every type of merchandise whatsoever, what remains in the stores, and what yield this merchandise has produced"

⁴⁶"If your books are clearly and regularly maintained, those who are entrusted with your affairs can see the good or bad state of their business, what they owe and what is owed to them, the merchandise from which they have profited and that on which they have lost; this knowledge will motivate them to continue their good efforts and to remedy the bad."

After presenting various models of bills of exchange along with instructions as to their use, the author elaborates on the cargo of a ship leaving Nantes bound for Saint Domingue in April 1754. He begins by presenting the invoice for the cargo's merchandise, followed first by a table which summarizes the cargo in alphabetical order and then by the account book outlining in single-entry form the sales in Saint-Mars and Léoganne, as well as the return purchases.

In a current account between the captain and the *armateur*, the captain lists himself as debtor for the sales carried out and creditor for the expenses relating to the ship during its stay in Saint Domingue, the return merchandise, and the balance on hand. Given that not all of the merchandise has been sold, a portion of it is left with a trader in Léoganne for him to sell and some of it, for lack of a market, is brought back to Nantes.

The general ledger, in which only the clients' and the suppliers' accounts and the cash account appear, ends with the *livre de récapitulation* which lists all of the merchandise items individually. Examination of this document reveals that a comparison of the buying price and the selling price of the merchandise does not immediately yield the net gain, as one is expressed in terms of "*argent de France*" (French currency) and the other in terms of "*argent des Îles*" (colonial currency). Examining the terms of payment laid out in the two bills of exchange drawn on merchants in France by traders in the islands (p. 265), the calculation is fairly simple: the "*argent de France*" or "*livre tournois*" was worth one-third more than the "*argent des Îles*" or "*livre coloniale*" [Rinchon, 1964, p. 19].

More than a technical brief that a few examples of accounting entries would have sufficed to illustrate, this section abounds in information; 96 pages of documents relating to instructions on commercial activities amply justify the wide scope of the work's title. In effect, much like the trade goods that are the subject of the preceding section, the contents of this section represent a model cargo of sorts, composed of 97 different products from assorted categories: construction material, tools, coal, candles, dishes, cloth, clothing and footwear, trimming material, food products, jewelry, clocks and watches, etc. While the books kept by the captain served as a means of controlling his managerial activities, nothing is said of possible incentives or profit-sharing mechanisms put in place to encourage him to sell his cargo at the best possible price. The terms of his salary are never discussed.

Section Four: The Slave Trade (pp. 309-444): This trade involves the following accounts and documents: a journal outlining the trade, an invoice book, a journal on the sale of the slaves and return purchases, and a general ledger.

Trade Operations and the Journal: The trade journal begins with an invoice for the cargo's merchandise, in terms of both its quantity and its value. It is followed by the items used by the captain to carry out business (gifts and fees paid to local authorities), procurement expenses, and purchases of captives, gold, or ivory during his stops along the African coast from March to August 1761. As all the payments are made in kind, the quantity and value of the merchandise provided in return are indicated for each transaction. The journal also records the death of captives that occur in the course of trading activities.

Here again, the author's commitment to realism leads him to make provisions for more than 20 types of trading goods (Chambon [1783] lists 16) and to record entries corresponding to over 80 transactions carried out in 16 different locations. The trade goods are similar to those proposed by Chambon and those used during the expeditions from La Rochelle that Deveau studied [1990, pp. 71-75].

The exchange of captives for merchandise did not result from simple barter since buyers and slave merchants utilized a money of account to express the price of *les captifs*. At the trade locations visited by the ship in the example presented, this unit of account was an ounce of gold (subdivided into *l'écu*, one-sixteenth of an ounce, and as a multiplier, *le marc*, eight ounces). However in other places, it was *la pièce*⁴⁷ (a piece of fabric) or even *la barre* (bar of iron). Once the price of a captive had been established, at the close of an initial discussion, it remained to discharge the obligation in merchandise. The journal entry in Table 1 provides an example of the assorted merchandise given in exchange for a captive for whom the price had been fixed at 7 ounces and 9 *écus*.

⁴⁷The expression "*pièce d'Inde*," signifying at its origin a piece of Indian fabric, was used equally in certain countries to represent a sort of standard measure of "*un captif*," namely a black of 15 to 30 years of age, healthy, robust, well-built, and with all his teeth ("*un noir de 15 à 30 ans, sain, robuste, bien fait et qui a toutes ses dents*") Chambon [1783, p. 399].

TABLE 1
Journal Entry, April 17, 1761

Du 17 avril 1761		
AVOIR de l'Éveillé, un Nègre, pour 7 onces 9 écus, en les marchandises suivantes, savoir :		
1. once 0. écu	1. Ancre d'eau de vie	£ 12. 0. 0.
	2. Barils de poudre de 8 lb 1/4 à 14 sols la lb	11. 11. 0.
1. 6.	1. Pièce de Néganepaux	28. 0. 0.
	1. Pièce de Batujapaux	28. 0. 0.
1. 0.	2. Fusils, à 6 livres pièce	12. 0. 0.
	30. Pierres à Fusil, à 6 livres le cent	3. 0. 0.
	2. Barils de suif, pesant 50 lb à 35 livres le cent	17. 10. 0.
3. 2.	4. Plattes, à 6 livres pièce	24. 0. 0.
	1. Coffre de Pipes de 25 grosses, à 4 livres la grosse	100. 0. 0.
1. 1.	2. Chapeaux communs, à 50 sols pièce	5. 0. 0.
	12. Couteaux Flamands	1. 16. 0.
	1. Salempouris blanc	19. 0. 0.
	2. Barres de Fer plates, et 2 carrées	15. 0. 0.
7. onces 9. écus		£ 276. 17. 0.

Source: Gaignat [1771, p. 319]. Note that one *livre* was divided into 20 *sols* and the *sol* into 12 *deniers*.

Gaignat points out that as soon as the trade journal is completed, a copy of it can be sent to the *armateur* on the first boat bound for France. In effect, it contains information vital to a trader interested in fitting out ships in the near future. Depending upon the scale of personal preferences of the courtiers and the relative fluctuation in market conditions, the lots of merchandise given in payment, at the close of a second discussion, varied from one location to another and from one courtier to another.

A table entitled “*récapitulation en total de la traite de la cargaison du navire le Sénaut à la Côte d’Or*”⁴⁸ lists the total number of captives exchanged and classifies them according to sex and age using the terms “*nègres, négresses, négrillons, et négrittes.*”⁴⁹ The table is designed to record the number of deaths occurring in the course of the trading activities, the ocean crossing, and the sale itself. In the example provided, the total is 20 people out of 358. Details are also provided as to the quantity of merchandise exchanged in kind, the amount remaining, in theory,

⁴⁸“final recapitulation of the trade of the cargo from the vessel *le Sénaut* on the Gold Coast”

⁴⁹“men, women, boys, girls”

of stock merchandise, and the shortages and surpluses resulting from a verification of the actual stock on hand.

An *“état des esclaves embarqués à bord du navire,”* outlining the number of captives onboard, was once again classified using the above nomenclature and distinguished between those belonging to the cargo per se, bearing a mark on their right breast and those termed *“pacotilles,”* personal property of the officers who bought them and bearing a mark on other parts of their body. This document indicates that in this case, the captain has merchandise listed as *pacotilles* consisting of 16 captives (10 men, 3 women, 2 boys, and 1 young girl, each bearing a mark on his/her left breast) that he can sell on his own account. The *“pacotille”* or *“port permis”* of the officers was typically used as an incentive by the captain or other officers. Practiced independently of the triangular trade, it applied solely to merchandise. Premiums were often paid for every captive brought to the islands; profit-sharing incentives, whereby a share of the ship was granted in direct relation to the gains, were likewise commonplace. These two strategies were assuredly more efficient than the *“port permis”* applied to captives in the sense that, if the latter can be considered a type of guarantee that the captives would receive relatively good treatment, it can be surmised that the officers would tend to keep for themselves the captives representing the most advantageous quality-to-price ratio.

The Sale of “les Captifs”: An invoice for the *“vente de 338 têtes d’esclaves appartenant à la cargaison du navire le Sénaut faite à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique”* (sale of 338 slaves from the cargo of *le Sénaut* undertaken at Saint-Pierre de la Martinique) outlines, for each of the 39 buyers, the name, the number of captives bought, the method of payment, the terms, and the price. For example:

*Dumont-Flamet, pour 14 nègres et 10 négresses, en sucre terré et en café payables en mai et juin, 22 000 livres (pp. 341-342)*⁵⁰

This summary invoice is followed by a detailed invoice of the merchandise received in exchange as payment – sugar, coffee, and cotton (only 6.5% of payments involved cash) – and loaded on board the ship itself to be brought to Nantes or on other ships that departed earlier. The wealth of detail provided is exemplified by the fact that numbers and weights are given

⁵⁰*Dumont-Flamet, for 14 Negroes and ten Negresses, in dried sugar and coffee payable in May and June, 22,000 livres”*

for 883 hogsheads of sugar. It is important to note, however, that in this respect, Gaignat is only following the instructions of the July 6, 1743 *Ordonnance* [cf. Chambon, 1783, p. 353], and that once he has decided to provide a complete sample, he does so thoroughly.

The journal on the sales of captives and the return purchases provides details on the sales and outlines selling prices per head. It is thus that we learn that Dumont-Flamet paid one thousand *livres* per man and 800 *livres* per woman, with the prices fluctuating between 800 and 1,100 *livres* for the men and 780 and 860 *livres* for the women. The section pertaining to the sale of captives has four columns on the left which correspond to the four categories of captives and allows for the quantifying of sales for the purpose of verification. This journal also outlines the sale of certain ship accessories no longer needed for the return voyage, such as the *chaudière à noirs* in which the slaves' meals were prepared. The costs related to the stay in Martinique are also recorded, from October 1761 to June 1762, as are the return purchases made possible by the cash sales.

The general ledger does not demand specific comments; it is preceded by a trial balance resulting from the trade. The profit recorded as of the end of the captain's tenure in Martinique equals 286,749 *livres* for the parties involved. This sum is in no way a net gain; rather, it implies that all the cargoes reached their destinations safely and were sold in their entirety by the *armateur* from Nantes. The operating result can only be obtained by deducting from the aggregate the total of *la mise-hors*⁵¹ and all applicable expenses of *le désarmement* [Lemarchand, 1995]. Such matters, however, did not concern Gaignat, who aimed only to provide a model of books pertaining to the managerial activities of the captain. He did not tackle at this juncture the transactions of *l'armement* and *le désarmement* of *Le Sénaut*, undoubtedly considering that the succinct examples of the second section were sufficient.

⁵¹*La mise-hors* refers to the total of all expenditures to equip the ship for the voyage. All costs were recorded in detail in the *armateur's Comptes d'armement*. An individual copy of *la mise-hors* was provided to the investors for their records to ensure accountability and stewardship of the *armateur* for all expenses incurred on their behalf. The expenditures began with the vessel itself, all costs to prepare it for sail, provisions, etc. The wages and advances paid to the vessel crew, all taxes, fees, and commissions were listed. All of these items were outlined down to the smallest item and purchase. The most significant portion of *la mise-hors* was the cost of merchandise with which to undertake trading activities.

REALISM AND LEGITIMATION OF THE ACCOUNTING DISCOURSE

Bottin [2001] has examined the representations of commercial activity in the accounting manuals of Savonne [1567], Van Damme [1606], and Irson [1678]. Beyond the pedagogical dimension, he has studied how these texts give evidence of the functioning and modalities of business and commerce at this time. We have examined the work of Gaignat from this perspective. More precisely, if the latter presents in detail the diverse managerial and accounting aspects of maritime trade and, more specifically, the slave trade, it reveals equally a multitude of detail about the business milieu as a whole. Several reasons explain this feature, but they can be summarized in two points:

1. The author wishes to affirm his expertise and knowledge of this business through the choice of examples "*inspirés du réel*" (inspired from reality) [Bottin, p.132]. These examples illustrate the knowledge that he had acquired of commercial affairs from his own experience. This "marketing angle" would attract a clientele and following for his work.
2. The validity of the information is implied and reinforced by drawing from the actual social and geographic context, conferring a certain authority on the author. We recognize within the examples the individuals themselves, along with the technical procedures and operations of the period. The latter conform to the actual methods used, but also are linked importantly to the contemporary environment and known individuals.

We have undertaken the production of a dual series of comparisons. Our intent is to determine the degree of realism of the examples, first from the point of view of techniques and markets, followed by that of the characters introduced in the text. Our research is still under way and the results presented here are partial. Nonetheless, in our view, their significance is sufficient to be presented such as they are. For the realism of the examples, we have limited our study to the various elements of the *journal de traite*; for the characters, we have enlarged our landscape to include the entire work.

Realism of the Examples – the Case of the Journal de Traite: This journal furnishes a mass of very precise details of which the degree of realism can be estimated, either from the indications provided in a number of historical studies dedicated to the slave

trade or through direct comparisons with documents contained in the archival collections of various *armateurs négriers* or published by historians. We have proceeded with several comparisons which by no means exhaust the totality of available documents.

Thanks to the *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIII^e siècle* of Jean Mettas [1984], it was relatively straightforward to verify that the vessel's itinerary along the coast of Africa corresponded clearly with those frequently taken by slave-trade ships. With a stop at Mesurade (Monrovia, Libéria), followed by calls at Tabou (Côte d'Ivoire), Anamabou, Petit-Popo (Aneho, Togo), Judas (Ouidah, Bénin), then a rest break at l'Île du Prince (Príncipe) prior to the departure for Martinique, one has in this example the classic itinerary. Moreover, without an in-depth search, we have been able to establish that the assortment of trade merchandise was relatively similar to the one that had been recommended by Chambon, as well as to those from trade expeditions from Rochefort studied by Deveau [1990, pp. 71-75].

However, the work offered data that allowed us to go further and to tackle the question of the realism of the terms of exchange. In the entries for the purchase of captives, Gaignat takes great care to note systematically the price of merchandise in *livres*, *sols*, and *deniers*. By recapitulating the details of the slave purchases as a whole and by adding up on one side, the price of captives in ounces and, on the other, the price of their equivalent merchandise in *livres*, *sols*, and *deniers*, it is possible to calculate the average value of an ounce (in this example, 40 *livres*, 5 *sols*, and 10 *deniers*). Taken in isolation, this figure is of limited interest, but it is quite different if we compare this result with another calculation. A document preserved at the Musée du Château des Ducs de Bretagne of Nantes, reproduced in Renault and Daget [1985, p. 88], provides the conversion of trade merchandise from *La Musette*, a *négrier* from Nantes departed September 6, 1788 for Juda. This "*réduction de la cargaison en onces de traite*"⁵² allowed the vessel captain to obtain the equivalence of one gold ounce, being 41 *livres*, 16 *sols*, and 3 *deniers*.

The two results are quite close, and if one accepts the realism of Gaignat's example, which at this point needs to be supported by other comparisons, the calculation above provides another lesson. In effect, even if Gaignat wrote the fourth part in 1761 or 1762, as he dated his examples in these years, he must

⁵²"reduction of the trade cargo into ounces"

have taken his inspiration from data of a much earlier date as only two expeditions left Nantes between 1756 and 1762. With a gap of 30 years, we note a remarkable stability in the cost of trade merchandise and the preference scales of African courtiers.

This example demonstrates as well the usefulness of the *journal de traite* as an information source for the *armateur*. The preparation of a table, such as that of *La Musette*, suggests a prior collection of data since the value of each piece of trade merchandise is expressed therein in its equivalence in ounces before, it seems, the smallest purchase had taken place. It was only through an experience on the African coast transcribed in the written register that a piece of velour from Utrecht could be evaluated at four ounces or that one could consider that four baskets of anisette or 28 pounds of cannon powder were needed to make one ounce.

We have also examined in the example by Gaignat the price expressed in ounces of the 370 captives purchased on the account of the vessel *Le Sénaut*. The price varied with changes in the trade locations, but Gaignat did not proceed to any calculation of averages. The details in the *journal de traite* are adequate to make this calculation. The results appear in the comparative Table 2, which incorporates as well the details provided by three *journaux de traite* of three vessels from Nantes: *La Reine des Anges* [Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, 16 J 9], *La Jeannette* [Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, B 5006] (examined earlier by Boulanger [1970]), and *Le Roy Guinguin* [Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, 16 J 1]. We have added the information provided by Chambon [1783, p. 399] about the ratios of the price of a man and that of a woman, of a young boy, and a young girl. We also have calculated these ratios for each of the vessels.

TABLE 2
Comparative Exchange Prices

	<i>Le Sénaut</i> (Gaignat)		Cham- bon	<i>La Reine des</i> <i>Anges</i> 1741-1742		<i>La Jeannette</i> 1743-1744		<i>Le Roy</i> <i>Guinguin</i> 1764-1766	
	Ounces	Ratio	Ratio	Ounces	Ratio	Ounces	Ratio	Ounces	Ratio
Nègre	7.8	1	1	7.14	1	5.12	1	8.8	1
Négresse	5.2	0.68	0.66	5.12	0.73	4.9	0.79	6.8	0.76
Négrillon	3.6	0.44	0.50*	5.1	0.64	4.0	0.70		
Négritte	3.3	0.43	0.50*	4.1	0.52				

* 0.50 between five and ten years; 0.66 between ten and 15 years

The average prices in Gaignat's example are closely related to those of the other vessels, at least for adult captives. They are especially very close to those of the captives of *La Reine des Anges*, a ship that covered a similar itinerary to that of Gaignat's fictitious *négrier*.

The Reality of the Characters and Faithfulness to the Commerical Context: We offer here only early results of a long-term research project whose intent is to analyze in detail the commercial practices and networks presented in Gaignat's examples in order to estimate the understanding that he possessed of them. More than 450 different characters appear in the examples. In our endeavors to identify them, we have had recourse to multiple primary and secondary sources. The results presented have been obtained either from various historical works or from the industry tax rolls (*les rôles d'imposition du vingtième d'industrie*) of the city of Nantes [Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique, C 870], which furnish for each taxed merchant his street, parish, and the amount of tax.

From the very beginning, when Gaignat presents various models of commercial documents, he does not fail to include individuals easily recognizable by their contemporaries. One finds, for example, the name Sengstack, a merchant family long established in Nantes, mentioned in relation to the drawing of a bill of exchange, then later as a partner in a loan contract *à la grosse aventure*. Also present are Augustin de Luines (Luynes), an important *armateur* in the city [Saupin, 2004], and the Veuve Montaudouin, who had taken on the business of her late husband during the 1730s and who had managed, in association with her sons, one of the largest commercial fortunes of the city [Gaston-Martin, 1931, p. 211].

Additionally in the first part, various insurance contracts are presented in detail, and one finds in the examples a number of this activity's most important players, intimately linked to that of *l'armement*. Appearing here in particular are the families Michel, the Laurencin, and once again, the Veuve Montaudouin. Beyond the individuals, the commercial examples also reflect the spheres of activity of the merchants of Nantes. Insurance and credit were often obtained in foreign cities, such as Rotterdam and London; merchandise came from various regions of France, but also from other European countries.

In the second part of the work, Gaignat presents first single-entry and then double-entry bookkeeping. The single-entry system is illustrated through the example of a small business

established in Nantes. The picturesque nature of the names of certain characters who appear in the entries has the effect of strengthening the realism of the situations described. We have merchandise aboard the boats of a certain Brignon dit Bras-de-Fer, a inland shipper, or on those of La Gaudine, a shipper from Angers. If Bras-de-Fer remains unknown, even though this type of surname was common in these surroundings [Godelaine, 1999], it is completely reasonable that La Gaudine was the wife or the daughter of Germain Gaudin, a shipper from Angers.⁵³ In effect, this manner of signifying the wife or daughter of an individual, which seems today particularly pejorative, was very common in the 18th century and remained so until recently in the rural areas of west France and likely also in other regions.

The degree of realism can be grasped through a brief analysis of the alphabetical index of the single-entry general ledger. Forty-seven names of individuals are listed, 31 of whom are from Nantes. The others were located, we assume, in various French or European cities. To date, 12 individuals from Nantes have been identified, by name and by occupation. Take, for example, a purchase of merchandise acquired from a certain Durax on March 1, 1754. We have found his business and its location in the poll-tax rolls (*les rôles d'imposition*) and even have an approximate idea of the size of his commercial activity from the amount of tax paid. In the same manner, we have identified several other merchants and *négociants* (e.g., Arthur Wittemberg, a *négociant*; Peyroux, a druggist; Garreau, a grocer; and Julien Leroux, a cooper and personal friend of Gagnat who was a witness at his marriage). All of these names appear next to those of known *armateurs*, such as Luker, Thiercelin, and, once again, Pierre Sengstack. In each case, we have been able to verify that their activities corresponded with those that were mentioned in the accounting entries.

While we are far from having traced all the names appearing in this index, particularly those that are not from Nantes, the majority of the individuals identified originate from the world of small business. In contrast, the shift in the accounting model to double entry is accompanied by an enlargement of the transaction base undertaken and the business network mobilized. The analysis of the entries reveals investments in a number of

⁵³On November 12, 1751, Marguerite Gaudin, daughter of Germain Gaudin, inland shipper, married René Legros, a shipper as well. The Legros family was part of one of the best-off shipping families at the end of the 18th century [Godelaine, 1999, pp. 71-74].

vessels, the purchase and sale of merchandise in Europe and in the colonies, and the inclusion in the general ledger of accounts open for diverse correspondents in the context of commission operations or in association. The commercial partners are further and further away, and the surnames and the place names evoke a network that is a great deal more expansive than the earlier one. Again, we have used the alphabetical index of the general ledger as an initial means to grasp its contents.

Of the 40 individuals listed in the general ledger, 14 of them undertook their activities in Nantes. Some were prestigious *négociants*, such as Perré de la Villestreux, Trochon de Lorieère, Lemasne de Chermont, and Christophe Drouin. Of the 14 non-local partners, only four have been identified. These include the Maupassant family, *négociants* who specialized in grains and who delivered flour as it happens, and Levassor, a major sugar refiner of the city of Orléans.

Besides the general ledger, we also have catalogued the various names of partners with whom a nominal account was not necessarily opened, either directly or indirectly. As such, certain individuals appear simply from having been implicated in the settling of a bill of exchange or from having intervened in an insurance contract. In our view, one example seems to be of particular significance among those that we have identified as it brings together two rather exceptional characters, a vessel and its captain. One finds listed in an entry related to a loan “à la grosse aventure,” the “navire *La Badine*, capitaine Lissarague, allant en Guinée.” In reality, on March 5, 1742, the vessel *La Badine*, equipped by the Lemasne brothers, had set sail from Nantes for Guinée under the command of Capitain Lissarague [Mettas, 1984, p. 261; see also, Archives départementales de la Loire-Atlantique, 120 J 364, 375, 382].

In the same manner, several individuals introduced in the third and fourth parts of the volume have been identified, and we conclude with a single example that bears witness, if it is still necessary, to the degree of realism and richness of the cases developed by Gaignat. One finds the details of a transaction implicating a certain Lussy and the *société* Testard frères. Lussy was a well-known sugar producer from Martinique [Butel, 2002, p. 110], while François and Abraham Testard were *négociants*, whose family originated in Bordeaux but was also established in Martinique [Butel, 2002, p. 187]. We also know, thanks again to Butel [2002, p. 110], that François Testard married Élizabeth Lussy in 1744. The two families find themselves linked in another entry wherein 34 slaves from the cargo of *Le Sénaut*, sold to

Lussy, are settled by 88 barrels of sugar and by a bill of exchange drawn on the Testard brothers.

CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated that a non-negligible number of individuals intervening in diverse transactions described in the *Guide du commerce* were very real, and that Gaignat provided a version equally realistic of the conditions and practices of the slave trade in terms of the price of captives and the value of an ounce. Even if this aspect remains limited in relation to the trade itself, we could have equally examined the amount of customs or the sales price of slaves in relation to the entire field of activity covered in the volume. Either approach confirms the fact that Gaignat possessed an intimate knowledge of this type of business and, more generally, of commerce in Nantes and its foreign partners.

Evidently, several of the entries presented by Gaignat have been taken more or less directly from the account books that he kept, either on behalf of *négociants* in Nantes or on his own account. One could almost imagine that the books for the voyage of *Le Sénaut* had simply been copied from those of an actual expedition. A laborious comparison with the catalogue of Mettas [1984], which covers the itinerary, the season of the voyage, the number of captives, the final destination, and varied incidents noted by Mettas has led us to reject this hypothesis. The voyage of *Le Sénaut* is therefore a construction by Gaignat, a construction made from a pedagogical calling, yet one certainly enriched by real cases.

Thus, could it constitute a source document for the history of the slave trade? If we had been able to establish that the voyage of *Le Sénaut* corresponded to a real expedition, the answer would have been simple, all the more so since entire sets of *les journaux de traite et journaux de vente* (trade journals and sales journals) are rare. Our response is more nuanced. Again one might ask if the work offers in the slightest any new information about the mechanisms of the slave trade, a question about which abundant documentation already exists. This question is one that only specialists would be in a position to answer. Bottin [2001] insists on the role that accounting manuals that he studied can play as source documents for commercial history since they relate to a period for which the archival collections of French merchants are very rare. However, this is not the case for the 18th century in general or the slave trade in particular, even

if a plethora of archival sources is not available.

However that may be, we believe that the mere existence of the work by Gaignat should be considered as an element of slave-trade history, one almost neglected to this point. It is not that we consider that he could have had in reality any effect on practice; it would be necessary for that question to be resolved by examining the work's contributions and diffusion. While an innovator in terms of the field covered, nothing suggests that he was equally so on the technical plane. Further in-depth investigation would shed light on this question. It is rather in what Gaignat reveals about the rationalization process of "*l'infâme traffic*" that he inserts into his story. A rationalization, which manifests itself equally in other domains during this period, included the construction of vessels better adapted to the trade, the use of bellows for aeration [Chambon, 1783], or the concern over concentration of trade operations in order to shorten the stay on the African coast.

In effect, the use of *les journaux de traite* designed to record several elements of the same transaction in specific columns (the price in ounces, then the price in trade merchandise in *livres tournois*, the preparation of various recapitulative tables, or, even more, the use of formulaic phrases for death notifications) are as much signs of a stage of perfection and of a systematization of procedures. Such systematization was part of the concern to affect the finest possible control over the captain's activities, but was related more generally to the desire to master an activity of eminent risk as much as possible.

Examined from this angle, the work of Gaignat could constitute one element of a possible response to one of the more recent questions examined by historians of the slave trade – that of its "technical contributions to capitalism" [Pétre-Grenouilleau, 2004, p. 352]. However, our research has not advanced sufficiently to go further than a simple prognostication. We conclude with a quote from Olivier Pétre-Grenouilleau [2004, p. 356] which summarizes perfectly the debate touched upon and which translates in equally perfect terms the sentiments felt throughout our recurring conversation with the work of Gaignat de l'Aulnais:

À la fois violente inhumaine et réglée, on serait tenté de l'interpréter [la traite] comme la rationalisation et l'institutionnalisation, en temps de paix, d'un type d'économie dont le but initial était d'accélérer de manière expéditive l'acquisition des richesses. Elle constituerait ainsi l'une des nombreuses buttes témoins de la progressive

sophistication du commerce, et témoignerait d'une phase plus barbare que les autres dans le long processus de civilisation des mœurs décrit par Norbert Elias [1973].⁵⁴

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⁵⁴At the same time violently inhumane and regulated, one could be tempted to interpret [the slave trade] as a rationalization and institutionalization, in peace time, of an economic system whose initial objective was to accelerate in an expedient way the acquisition of riches. It would constitute thereby one of the numerous outliers in the progressive sophistication of commerce, and it would bear witness to a more barbaric phase than the others seen in the long process of the "civilization of morals" described by Elias [1973].

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