

Patterns of French Colonial Trade and the Seven Years' War

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In its colonial aspects, the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) looms as the most crucial moment in what some have called the Second Hundred Years' War, pitting against each other Great Britain and France since the late seventeenth century in a struggle for mastery of the Atlantic trade. The peace treaty of 1763 virtually eliminated France from North America and sharply reduced its position in Africa and India. Only in the West Indies did French possessions emerge relatively unscathed. The balance of power thus irreversibly shifted in Great Britain's favour and, despite later efforts to reverse the situation, the colonial settlement of 1763 remained on the whole unchanged until well into the nineteenth century.

Given this outcome, some approximation of the relative importance of colonial trade to France's overall economy on the eve of the Seven Years' War ought to be attempted, if only to provide a more accurate gauge of the short-term impact of the war on this economy. It is also well worth identifying what sectors of colonial trade had grown most rapidly and what ports were associated with them. In this fashion, it should be possible to determine as well the long-range prospects for economic recovery offered to France in 1763; in short, to analyse the kind of bargain the peace of Paris, in its colonial clauses, actually turned out to be.

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From the outset, the study of eighteenth-century French colonial commerce is faced with an almost insurmountable difficulty, the lack of genuinely reliable commercial statistics, which dooms to failure any attempt at more than an approximation of the volume of French trade. No set of eighteenth-century statistics is entirely trustworthy. Those tabulated by the chambers of commerce are often doubtful, to say the least, for frequently they were drafted so as to lend support to the repeated appeals which local commercial interests made to the government.¹ The statistics which began to be gathered by governmental agencies in the eighteenth century and especially those of the Bureau of Statistics are

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¹ See the comments of Jean-Auguste BRUTAILS, ed., *Inventaire sommaire des archives départementales antérieures à 1790: Gironde*, III (Bordeaux, 1895), vi-vii.

generally to be preferred,² yet they too cannot be wholly trusted, and this for two reasons. First of all, it must be recognized that the science of statistics was then in its infancy and that its fledgling practitioners were far too inexperienced, at least at first, to be critical of the figures they received and concerned over the extent of the ground they covered. As the century progressed, however, and as the official statisticians gained the necessary critical sense, their work became much more sophisticated. A far more serious source of inaccuracy lay in the origin of the figures tabulated by that bureau. Based on the declarations of the tax farmers concerning the amount of trade on which they had levied duties in each *généralité*, these figures may have reflected certain willful inaccuracies in the farmers' declarations or in those of the merchants reporting to them. At least, they did not take into account what was smuggled into the realm, a sizeable amount at a time when duties were high and prohibitive regulations many.³ Yet a picture emerges and, if its details are not accurate, it is at least suggestive of the scope and patterns of colonial trade, and the latter's relationship to France's external commerce as a whole.

It is unfortunately impossible to make a rigorous comparison between external and internal commerce, nor is it within our means to statistically analyse the links between the two. Partly because of mercantilist preconceptions, comprehensive figures on French domestic trade do not seem to have been gathered and, indeed, such a programme was far beyond the meager facilities of the eighteenth-century statisticians. External commerce must therefore be looked at by itself. Certain indications concerning internal trade are nonetheless available. These suggest that the overwhelming volume of French commerce was domestic (one source places it between three-quarters and four-fifths of the total trade).⁴ Furthermore, even though the bulk of these exchanges remained local and regulated by traditional practices, a growing sector was becoming linked to

² Created in 1713 by an order in Council, the *Bureau des statistiques* was a government office whose purpose was to provide the crown with an exact picture of France's balance of commodity trade through the gathering of import and export figures. At the time of the Revolution, Amboise Marie Arnould, the bureau's director, published a recapitulation of eighteenth century statistics from figures taken from his files and from other sources when the information of his office was incomplete. This work, *De la balance du commerce et des relations commerciales extérieures de la France, dans toutes les parties du globe, particulièrement à la fin du règne de Louis XIV et au moment de la Révolution* (2nd ed.; 3 vols.; Paris, Year III), first published in 1791, is regarded by most historians as the most reliable collection of general French commercial statistics for the period.

³ For an evaluation of eighteenth century statistics and for the origins of the *Bureau des statistiques* and its work, see Emile LEVASSEUR, *Histoire du commerce de la France avant 1789* (Paris, 1911), pp. 509-11; Henri SÉE, *L'Évolution commerciale et industrielle de la France sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1925), pp. 45-46; Pierre DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises dans les ports de Rouen et du Havre au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1963), pp. 7-8, 15-16 and 19-21. See also the comments of Pierre LÉON in Fernand BRAUDEL and Ernest LABROUSSE, eds., *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, *Des derniers temps de l'âge seigneurial aux préludes de l'âge industriel, 1660-1789* (Paris, 1970), pp. 499-503.

⁴ Pierre LÉON and Charles CARRIÈRE, in *ibid.*, p. 180.

external commerce. The *négociants* engaged in this sector carried to it the practices developed in international commerce. Though, therefore, a division between internal and external trade is somewhat arbitrary, one can distinguish between a traditional sector and a more modern one. The latter, in which external trade played the key role, affected a considerable part of the French economic life. It reached all areas of France and influenced directly or indirectly all classes.⁵

The eighteenth century witnessed a tremendous growth of France's external commerce. Of course, the phenomenon was European-wide, but it was remarkable enough for France, whose commerce grew more rapidly than Britain's until the Seven Years' War.⁶ The figures in Table I below indicate that French trade was unchecked by war until then, and that it continued to rise in subsequent periods, the peace years more than making up the deficits occasioned by wartime reverses. Total external trade reached five times its 1715 value at the outbreak of the French Revolution and colonial commerce, though it fluctuated more widely than other types of trade, made even better strides, growing nearly ten times in the same period.⁷ Within the century, it was in the years immediately preceding the

Table I: Average Yearly Value of the External Trade of France, 1715-1788
(in millions of *livres*)

Period	AMERICA & WEST AFRICA			COMPAGNIE DES INDES			TOTAL COLONIAL TRAFFIC			EUROPE			OTTOMAN EMPIRE LEVANT & N.AFR.			TOTAL FRENCH EXTERNAL TRADE		
	Imp.	Exp.	Total	Imp.	Exp.	Total	Imp.	Exp.	Total	Imp.	Exp.	Total	Imp.	Exp.	Total	Imp.	Exp.	Total
1715-20	16.3	9.3	25.6	6.0	3.6	9.6	22.3	12.9	35.2	61.5	100.3	161.8	3.5	2.6	6.1	87.3	115.8	203.1
1721-32	17.1	15.1	32.2	12.2	8.7	20.9	29.3	23.8	53.1	75.7	110.2	185.9	4.4	6.1	10.5	109.4	140.5	249.9
1733-35	20.6	15.0	35.6	18.9	9.5	28.4	39.5	24.5	64.0	72.3	117.6	189.9	4.7	13.4	18.1	116.5	155.5	272.0
1736-39	35.4	20.6	56.0	19.0	15.1	34.1	54.4	35.7	90.1	96.4	135.5	231.9	7.5	12.9	20.4	158.3	184.1	342.4
1740-48	36.9	25.2	62.1	13.0	9.5	22.5	49.9	34.7	84.6	107.2	181.6	288.8	16.0	18.4	34.4	173.1	234.7	407.8
1749-55	65.2	35.2	100.4	20.2	17.3	37.5	85.4	52.5	137.9	146.9	242.9	389.8	27.9	26.9	54.8	260.2	322.3	582.5
1756-63	15.5	12.2	27.7	5.4	4.3	9.7	20.9	16.5	37.4	126.3	199.2	325.5	17.8	19.5	37.3	185.9	251.7	437.6
1764-76	110.1	37.0	147.1	18.0	12.2	30.2	128.1	49.2	177.3	156.0	292.1	448.1	30.7	28.5	59.2	314.8	369.8	684.6
1777-83	102.7	47.8	150.5	.8	9.9	10.7	103.5	57.7	161.2	196.0	245.3	441.3	26.9	16.0	42.9	326.4	319.0	645.4
1784-89	182.5	87.9	270.4	31.9	25.3	57.2	214.4	113.2	327.6	285.0	334.7	619.7	36.8	18.5	55.3	536.2	466.4	1002.6

Source: Figures taken from Arnould, *Balance du commerce*, III, tables 10-13. For the purpose of easy comparison, all figures have been reduced to the same ratio — 51 livres per silver marc, the value of the French currency between 1733 and 1763.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-65. See also the following works for examples of *négociants* who participated in both external and internal sectors of trade: Jean CAVIGNAC, *Jean Pellet, commerçant en gros, 1694-1772; contribution à l'étude du négoce bordelais au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1967), and Pierre LÉON, *Marchands et spéculateurs dauphinois dans le monde antillais du XVIII^e siècle. Les Dolle et les Raby* (Paris, 1963).

⁶ LÉON, in BRAUDEL and LABROUSSE, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, 503-05.

⁷ Pierre Léon's figures (Figs. 52-54, in *ibid.*, pp. 502, 504 and 506), based on a much more sophisticated computing of various eighteenth century sources than Arnould's (*ibid.*, p. 500n), vary somewhat from those given in Table I, taken from Arnould. In particular, Léon seems to have taken into account more effectively than the Bureau of Statistic's director the price rise which affected France in the latter part of the century, so that his curve, while sharper than Arnould's in the first half of the century, flattens out in the second half in a manner not clearly identifiable in Table I (cf. *ibid.*, p. 500 and the

official outbreak of the Seven Years' War, between 1749 and 1755, that the rate of increase was most marked. The progress made during these seven years of unimpeded sea trade, if not of genuine peace, matched that of the previous thirty-two.

Quite naturally, France's major ties were with the rest of Europe. During the period 1749-1755, this trade counted for over two-thirds of her entire external commerce. The rest was shared unequally between three non-European areas. The most important was the area which included the colonies proper — the West Indies and North America — and their supporting stations, the slave trading factories of West Africa. In the years preceding the Seven Years' War, this segment represented over half of the French trade outside Europe (17.2% of the total external trade). Far below it stood the commerce with the Near East and North Africa, carried out principally by Marseilles (9.4%), and that which the *Compagnie des Indes* practiced in the Far East (6.4%).

Such figures, however, are somewhat misleading, for they tend to minimize the importance of the trade outside Europe. Although this commerce was always inferior in volume to European traffic, it was, nevertheless, responsible for much of the growth described above. A comparison of the two makes this fact evident. Whereas the non-European commerce had reached by the early 1750's four-and-a-half times its 1715 value, its European counterpart increased in the same period by only two-and-a-half times. These figures become even more significant when one notes that much of what France shipped to the rest of Europe consisted of colonial re-exports.⁸

Furthermore, it must be remembered that French commerce and industry had been oriented outward by Colbert and that colonial goods played an important role in the mercantilist design. Colonial foodstuffs (especially West Indian sugars), Indian textiles and French luxury items, the latter often manufactured from such colonial raw materials as cotton and beaver skins, kept the trade of Spain, her colonies, and the rest of the Mediterranean world in French hands, maintained open communications with Scandinavia and the Baltic area, and made heavy inroads into the areas of Germany normally dominated by the Dutch and the English. Small as it was in comparison to its European counterpart, the colonial

percentages given on pp. 503-04). While Arnould's statistics are no doubt less accurate and while they have the secondary disadvantage of being averaged over a number of years, they have been preferred here, for several reasons: Neither provides more than an approximation of the actual traffic and the discrepancies are not sufficiently large to invalidate the earlier work. Furthermore, unlike Arnould's figures, which are expressed in numbers, those of Léon have been published in graph form and are thus extremely difficult to use for statistical calculations.

⁸ George HARDY, *Histoire sociale de la colonisation française* (Paris, 1953), p. 83; LÉON, in BRAUDEL and LABROUSSE, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, 507.

trade was therefore in the eighteenth century the cornerstone of France's commerce. Furthermore, not only sailors and colonial merchants but store-keepers, workers, artisans, farmers, bankers and even *rentiers* lived off that trade, either directly or indirectly. Indeed, few were those, however deep inland they lived, who could find no relationship between their livelihood and the welfare of the French colonies. This was true many times over for the coastal areas, whose wealth and whose towns had grown because of the boom in colonial commerce.⁹

It can be understood, then, that the economic crisis caused by the Seven Years' War was severe. For the first time in the reign of Louis XV, a war not only slowed down the rate of increase in commerce but actually reversed the pattern and caused commercial figures to drop, according to Arnould, by some 25 percent. Significantly, it was the colonial traffic which took the most dramatic tumble, a decline of over 70 percent. Indeed, it seems likely that the critical condition of French commerce during the Seven Years' War was caused by that sharp drop in colonial trade. All other types of commerce remained more stable, perhaps because so much of the non-colonial trade was habitually carried on foreign vessels which as neutrals were usually protected from capture in wartime.¹⁰ The Mediterranean trade, a maritime trade as well, dropped by only 32 percent. More significant, whereas the French imports from the rest of Europe dropped by only 14 percent, the exports, directly related to the arrival of colonial goods, fell by almost one-third more. In fact, if the colonial goods which were re-exported — an amount conservatively estimated at one-half of the total colonial imports — are subtracted from France's exports to the rest of Europe, it emerges that the European market of that country may have been reduced by only 5.2 percent.

None of this, however, can give an adequate idea of the risks involved in carrying out colonial commerce during the Seven Years' War and the consequent losses suffered by the merchants of the French seaports. Great Britain captured 300 French ships before the war even started. Two-thirds of these were taken while carrying on colonial trade and the tonnage relationship must have been even more unbalanced since the West Indian and African trades, accounting for 105 of the losses, employed some of the

⁹ The fact was recognized by the Bordeaux chamber of commerce, which stated in 1777: "C'est au commerce des colonies que nos quais doivent leurs embellissements par les édifices qui les bordent." Quoted by François CROUZET in François-George PARISET, ed., *Bordeaux au XVIII^e siècle* [Charles HIGOUNET, gen. ed., *Histoire de Bordeaux*, V] (Bordeaux, 1968), p. 198. Walter L. DORN, *Competition for Empire, 1740-63* (New York and London, 1940), pp. 252-53; Louis-Philippe MAY, "La France, puissance des Antilles," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, XVIII (1930), 464; Pierre LAFUE, *Histoire du peuple français; de la Régence aux trois révolutions, 1715-1848* (Paris, 1952), p. 112.

¹⁰ CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 288.

French merchant fleet's largest ships.¹¹ By July 1758, the French merchant marine was even more depleted. Excluding the Newfoundland Banks fishing vessels, none of which returned safely to port, and the small ships on which coastal trade was carried, Bordeaux had lost by then 200 ships and Nantes 90; Le Havre's prewar colonial fleet of 70 vessels had dwindled to 14, and La Rochelle had seen only six ships return from the 70 it had sent across the ocean.¹²

Sailors became scarce. In a country where the supply of seamen was far from unlimited, the tremendous losses in shipping meant less manpower for the general need.¹³ The merchant marine, the navy and the privateers competed for this limited supply. The navy could use the full force of the government to fill its rolls and the privateers had little difficulty, because they could offer a share of the prize money to their recruits; but the merchant marine was forced to increase the wages it offered. Even when thus cutting his margin of profit to attract reluctant sailors, a merchant had to consider himself lucky if he was able to muster a full crew; more often than not, the enterprise had to be abandoned altogether.¹⁴

Furthermore, the frequency of French losses caused the insurance rates to rise to an almost prohibitive level. In times of peace, maritime insurance for a transatlantic journey cost as little as three percent of the declared value. By 1756, the rates were at least ten times that, and they were to go as high as 60 percent and more before the war was over. It was not worth sending a ship to the colonies at such rates, and more and more merchants were obliged to insure their ships only partially, or only the ship and not the cargo, or even to forego insurance altogether and rely on speed and luck to protect their investment.¹⁵

¹¹ Figures from Mouffle D'ANGERVILLE, *Vie privée de Louis XV, ou Principaux événements, particularités et anecdotes de son règne* (2nd ed.; 4 vols.; Paris, 1788), III, 252-53. See the list of Nantes vessels captured by the British in Jean MEYER, *L'Armement nantais dans la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1969), pp. 378-83, where the tonnage differential is confirmed for Nantes.

¹² Émile GARNULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e siècle d'après les documents composant les anciennes archives de la Chambre de commerce de La Rochelle* (5 vols.; Paris and La Rochelle, 1887-1900), IV, 262.

¹³ Even before the war was declared, about 12,000 French seamen had been captured by the British. A.-E. BORÉLY, *Histoire de la ville du Havre et de son ancien gouvernement* (5 vols.; Le Havre, 1880-1885), III, 341.

¹⁴ Jean DE MAUPASSANT, "Les Armateurs bordelais au dix-huitième siècle; Abraham Gradis et l'approvisionnement des colonies (1756-1763)," *Revue historique de Bordeaux*, II (1909), 178-79; Jean DE MAUPASSANT, *Un Grand armateur de Bordeaux, Abraham Gradis, 1699?-1780* (Bordeaux, 1917), pp. 59-60; Théophile MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux, depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, III, XVIII^e siècle (Bordeaux, 1892), p. 198; Richard PARES, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Oxford, 1936), p. 327.

¹⁵ On the whole matter of insurance, see Henri SÉE, "Notes sur les assurances maritimes en France et particulièrement à Nantes au XVIII^e siècle," *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 4th ser., VI (1927), 287-311. The rates before and during the Seven Years' War, and the effect of such increases, principally in Bordeaux, are discussed

The Seven Years' War was indeed a period of severe crisis for French commerce. The merchant who sent his vessels to the colonies during these years was risking bankruptcy at each crossing. Even if his ships were not captured, costs were such that profits were by no means guaranteed. Under the circumstances, the few dramatic bankruptcies and, more generally, the retirement of many active *armateurs* from the rolls of a number of ports are less surprising than the number of houses which were able to survive the war.¹⁶ Nor did the economic crisis stop with the ruin of seagoing commerce. As colonial raw materials stopped arriving, much of the French industry which the trade serviced eventually ceased operations for the duration of the war.¹⁷ The effect was cumulative: more and more people were put out of work as the colonial trade, which acted as a catalyst for the whole French economic life, came to a halt.

Thus, the trade which France carried on with its colonies and the products which were exchanged, particularly the colonial goods received by France, played a role of primary importance in the general welfare of the French economy. It remains to establish which sectors of the colonial trade were particularly crucial to that economy.

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Statistics are difficult to collect for a comparison between the various sectors of the French colonial trade in the 1750's. In Arnould's work, the only tables which cover the period lump together all colonial sectors, so that the only comparison they permit is one between colonial trade in general and other types of commerce. Arnould goes into more details for 1716 and 1787, but, even in the tables covering these years, the breakdown is made by continents, so that West Indian and North

in Henri SÉE, "Le Trafic d'un négociant-armateur de Bordeaux aux Antilles (1751-1758)," in Julien HAYEM, ed., *Mémoires et documents pour servir à l'histoire du commerce et de l'industrie en France*, XII (Paris, 1929), 284; Alfred DONEAUD DU PLAN, "Histoire de la Compagnie française des Indes," *Revue maritime et coloniale*, CII (1889), 20-21; MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux*, XVIII^e, p. 47; CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 296; and MAUPASSANT, *Abraham Gradis*, p. 76. The Nantes situation seems to have been different, owing to the ability of that port's merchants to insure their vessels abroad and especially in London. MEYER, *L'Armement nantais*, pp. 149-50.

¹⁶ See the table of *armateurs* in *ibid.*, pp. 265-67, according to which 25 percent of Nantes' slave traders dropped out of the traffic between 1755 and 1769, not all of them, however, for reasons indicated above. For an even more marked pattern in Marseilles, see Gaston RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, IV: 2, *La vie commerciale de 1660 à 1789* (Paris, 1954), p. 211. For Bordeaux, where many colonial traders interrupted their traffic before losses could permanently affect them, see CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 300.

¹⁷ The cause and effect relationship is easily seen in the case of the numerous sugar refineries studied in Paul-M. BONDOIS, "Les Centres sucriers français au XVIII^e siècle," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, XIX (1931), 27-77, especially p. 36. Other industries which were affected were the textile and fashion industries.

American trades are lumped together, and the slave trade, the commerce with Senegal and that with the Mascareignes are put together as African commerce.¹⁸ Figures such as these are not particularly useful; yet they remain practically the only easily accessible general statistics on French colonial commerce.

More to the point is another group of statistics, found scattered throughout various archives, particularly those of the ports, and often reproduced in the works of local historians. These figures are more limited in scope than those which were gathered by the Bureau of Statistics; they deal with specific goods, or with the trade of the local port, or with that of a given colony. A few cover extended periods of time; most deal only with a few years. More important, the commerce which they represent is expressed in all sorts of ways (various units of weight, volume or currency) which cannot always be reconciled. By their very nature such statistics offer only a series of fragmentary pictures of French colonial commerce. Consequently, the summaries which can be constructed from them are neither complete nor entirely reliable. Yet they cannot be replaced.

In the case of the French export statistics presented in Table II below, some confidence can be taken from the fact that they were compiled by a central agency, the Ministry of Marine. They may be inaccurate, but, unlike the figures compiled by different local agencies, they were probably tabulated everywhere according to the same method and with the same preconceptions. Consequently, they are likely to be equally inaccurate for each of the ports covered.¹⁹ Furthermore, they are almost complete, since they include figures for the five major ports through which most colonial commerce passed. The only difficulty is that they are expressed in a unit of volume, the *tonneau de mer*.²⁰ Since the price of a commodity does not usually depend on its bulk, volume is without a doubt the least reliable method of estimating the worth of commerce. In the case of exports, it may nevertheless be possible to use these figures to make comparisons, since goods of a similar nature were generally exported by the French ports to the various colonies.²¹

¹⁸ *Balance du commerce*, III, tables 2 and 6-9.

¹⁹ For an evaluation of different statistical sources, see Gaston RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, VI, *De 1660 à 1789, les colonies* (Paris, 1959), pp. 304-05.

²⁰ The standard eighteenth-century French *tonneau* was equal to 42 cubic *pieds*; it is approximately equivalent to 50 cubic feet, or 1.25 English freight tons. When referring to the tonnage of a vessel and not to its cargo (as it does here), the *tonneau* is equal to 1.43 tons. For a detailed study of eighteenth-century maritime measurements, see Paul GILLE, "Jauge et tonnage des navires," *Le navire et l'économie maritime du XV^e au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Michel MOLLAT (Paris, 1957), pp. 85-100, and Michel MORINEAU, *Jauges et méthodes de jauge anciennes et modernes* (Paris, 1966), especially pp. 13-29.

²¹ The major articles exported to the colonies by each of the maritime *généralités* in 1787 are listed in ARNOULD, *Balance du commerce*, III, table 6.

Imports, however, are a different matter altogether. Eighteenth century colonies tended to specialize in certain products, some bulky and some not, and each with a different value. Consequently, import figures would be of little use if they were expressed in *tonneaux*. In spite of the fragmentary nature of the material, the only significant measure possible is the measure of worth, expressing commerce in terms of its monetary value. Table III below attempts to do this. It is doomed to inaccuracy by the excessive number of interpolations with which it has to be constructed and is incomplete. It is thus offered here with some hesitations. But it should at least serve as a rough gauge for comparing the commerce of France with various colonial areas.

Table II: Average Yearly Freight Exported to the Colonies from Various French Ports, 1750-55 (in thousands of *tonneaux*)

PORTS	Saint-Domingue	Martinique	Guadeloupe	Guiana	Trinité	Canada	Louisbourg	Louisiana	WEST INDIES	NORTH AMERICA	WEST AFRICA	TOTAL EXPORTS
Bordeaux	14.52	13.16	.50	.14	.01	3.13	1.07	.23	28.33	4.47	.75	33.55
Nantes	14.11	3.19	.07	.04	.01	.03	.32	.02	17.42	.37	4.42	22.21
Le Havre	3.07	5.15	.13	—	.01	.03	—	—	8.36	.03	.61	9.00
La Rochelle	3.02	.52	—	.07	—	1.27	1.57	.78	3.61	3.62	1.17	8.40
Marseilles	2.51	5.62	.05	.10	—	.03	—	.03	8.28	.06	—	8.34
Bayonne	.32	.98	.04	.07	—	.18	.65	.13	1.41	.96	—	2.37
Honfleur	.22	.31	.12	—	—	.19	—	—	.65	.19	.04	.88
TOTAL	37.77	28.93	.91	.42	.03	4.86	3.61	1.23	68.06	9.70	6.99	84.75

Source: Figures tabulated from the "TABLEAU de départ des Navires marchands de divers ports, Pour les Colonies de l'Amérique," AN, Colonies, F²B.2.

In the period immediately preceding the Seven Years' War, France was engaged in five types of colonial commerce, three of which—the West Indian trade, the slave trade and the commerce with North America—were connected with the American continent and governed by a single body of regulations, stemming from the *lettres-patentes* of April 1717 and giving to certain ports the exclusive right to trade there.²² The

²² To improve the control of the trade with the American colonies, and especially to simplify the collection of duties, the *lettres-patentes* of April 1717 required ships to leave for the colonies from fourteen ports and to return directly to their point of departure. These ports were Dunkirk, Calais, Dieppe, Le Havre, Rouen, Honfleur, St. Malo, Morlaix, Brest, Nantes, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Bayonne and Cette. Prior to the Seven Years' War, Brest was removed from the list (1749) because commercial shipping was deemed to conflict with the status of the port as a naval base, and six more were added: Marseilles (1719), Vannes (1728), St. Valéry-sur-Somme (1750), and Cherbourg, Libourne and Caen (1756). Following the war, the process of liberalization was speeded up, with Fécamp and Granville admitted in 1763, Les Sables d'Olonnes in 1764, Rochefort, despite its role as a military port, in 1775, and St. Brieuc, Binie and Pontrioux in 1776. In the meantime, the slave trade, permitted in Rouen, St. Malo, Nantes, La Rochelle and Bordeaux since 1716, was opened 25 years later to all ports permitted to

Newfoundlands Banks codfish industry was an American trade as well, but it was not regulated like the others. The fifth category consisted of the monopolies still retained by the *Compagnie des Indes*, mostly the trade with territories east of the Cape of Good Hope, but also the commerce of Senegal and the beaver trade of Canada.

It was not only geography and the legal system under which they functioned which differentiated these five categories of trade. Each furnished vastly different products to France and each presented to those concerned a different set of problems. In short, each category was a speciality all its own.

French commercial patterns reflected this fact. Specialization in colonial commerce went beyond the basic legal splits existing between the *Compagnie des Indes*, concerned with Far Eastern trade, the ports enjoying the privilege of American trade, and the others which could concern themselves with the colonial world only indirectly or through fishing. Not only were the firms engaged in colonial trade generally found to specialize in one type of commerce, but the "privileged" ports themselves tended to emphasize one category among those in which they were permitted to participate. Although these patterns were not rigorous, specialization was nevertheless more typical of the period than diversification, so that few

Table III: Average Yearly Value of French Colonial Commerce, 1750-1755
(in millions of *livres*)

PORTS	SLAVE TRADE	IMPORTS						EXPORTS				TOTAL	
		American Fishing	Indies	West Africa	America & West	Far East	Total Colonial Imports	Indies	West Africa	West	Far East		Total Colonial Exports
FRANCE	12.2	(8.5)		65.2	20.2	94.0					17.3	52.5	146.5
Bordeaux	1.4	(0.6)	(18.8)			19.0	(6.5)	0.2			7.7		26.7
Nantes	6.5	(0.7)	16.5			(17.2)	5.5	2.4			7.9		(25.1)
Marseille		3.1		9.2		(12.3)	5.2				(5.2)		(17.5)
Le Havre & Rouen		(2.0)	12.2			(14.2)							
La Rochelle	1.7	0.05				7.8					4.6		12.4
Bayonne		0.3	1.2			1.5	0.3				0.3		1.8
<i>Compagnie des Indes</i>					20.2	20.2					17.3	17.3	37.5

Source: See Appendix.

Parentheses indicate particularly unreliable approximations.

engage in American commerce. Finally, by an *arrêt* of October 31, 1784, the entire trade was opened to all harbors able to accommodate colonial shipping and the prohibition from returning to another port lifted. A monopoly shared by some 14 to 26 participants is not much of a monopoly. Yet, it was a much envied privilege and one which the merchants of each port defended vehemently.

similarities can be found between the five above-mentioned categories of colonial trade beyond the fact that they were all connected with the French empire and seriously disrupted by the Seven Years' War.

Of course, it was the Far Eastern trade which was the most specialized. The *Compagnie des Indes* jealously guarded its monopoly, thereby earning many enemies in the eighteenth century, especially in the 1760's, when the advocates of free trade were spurred on by the arguments of the Physiocratic School. This propaganda, and the fact that the company's shares had yielded generally declining dividends since 1745,²³ convinced contemporaries that the Far Eastern sector was an insignificant part of the French colonial revenues; it led in 1769 to the abolition of the company, accused of hindering the growth of commerce with this valuable area.

In fact, the company's commercial activities were far more important than its critics let on. During 1749-1755, Far Eastern trade amounted to 37.5 million *livres* a year, or approximately 27 percent of the entire colonial commerce of France. Only the West Indies yielded more. It is true that its rate of increase had not matched that of other colonial sectors, but the company was not entirely to blame for this. As an older commerce, the trade with the Far East was bound to grow less quickly than American trade. Furthermore, growth was hindered by the peculiar financial system under which the company operated, a system which required it to pay its shareholders dividends not always warranted by its revenues.²⁴ Such an obligation placed it permanently in a weak financial situation and encouraged it to be cautious. Nonetheless, the volume of trade with the Far East was large enough. Furthermore, Arnould's figures indicate that, although the commerce of the company was drastically reduced in the Seven Years' War, the decline was not significantly larger than the one caused by the war in other colonial sectors, and this in spite of the significantly greater risks which Far Eastern trade always incurred.²⁵

The *Compagnie des Indes* was a national company in which all Frenchmen could invest. Nevertheless, it was those whose business depended on Far Eastern imports who were most directly affected by the company's commerce. One such group was the textile manufacturers, particularly those of Lyons, for whom the company was at one and the same

²³ Henry WEBER, *La Compagnie française des Indes, 1604-1875* (Paris, 1904), pp. 562-65.

²⁴ As a result of the failure of John Law's schemes early in the century, the *Compagnie des Indes* had been saddled with a huge debt on which inordinate interests had to be paid. Part of these dividends had to be made up through the company's commercial profits. Consequently, the company, whose character was no longer exclusively commercial, was more dependent for survival on a continued commercial success than the usual trading venture. On the details of the company's dividend payments, see *ibid.*, pp. 330-31, 549-52, 561 and 685-86.

²⁵ See Table I.

time a useful ally and a dangerous competitor. On the one hand, these manufacturers welcomed raw material, such as silk, which the company provided for their looms. On the other hand, they fought the importation of cheap Indian cottons, a threat to their own markets.²⁶ The merchants of Nantes were even more closely connected with the company's business. It was in Nantes that, earlier in the century, the company had conducted its annual sales; a significant part of the port's wealth still came from these sales, conducted since 1733 in Lorient, the harbor of the company. Not only did Nantes merchants still work as the company's brokers, but two of the port's principal businesses depended in large part on goods purchased from the company. A sizeable amount of colonial goods, coffee in particular, which Nantes exported to the rest of Europe, came not from the West Indies but from Lorient. More importantly, Nantes owed its predominance in the slave trade in great part to its connection with the company, from which it had gained the necessary experience and a significant amount of the Indian textiles which in the eighteenth century formed one of the main articles of any cargo to West Africa. No-one in fact knew better than the merchants of Nantes how lucrative the Far Eastern trade was. It is not surprising, therefore, that the eighteenth century campaign against the company was initiated by certain merchants of Nantes, who hoped to be the main beneficiaries of the abolition of its Far Eastern monopoly.²⁷

There may have been some debate over the value of the *Compagnie des Indes*' commerce; there never was any over the worth of the West Indian trade. "[It]... has become," a contemporary justly noted, "an inexhaustible source of wealth for this kingdom."²⁸ In the period immediately preceding the Seven Years' War, it had outdistanced by far all other colonial trades and nearly every port licensed to trade with the American continent was participating in it. For certain of these ports, Caribbean commerce was practically the only colonial trade and even La Rochelle, best known as the major outlet for Canadian goods, had nearly half of its colonial fleet, carrying over 50 percent of its exports to the colonies, engaged in the West Indian sector.²⁹

²⁶ Ernest PARISET, *La Chambre de commerce de Lyon, I, Dix-huitième siècle, 1702-1791* (Lyons, 1886), pp. 78-80.

²⁷ Pierre H. BOULLE, "Slave Trade, Commercial Organization and Industrial Growth in Eighteenth-Century Nantes," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, LIX (1972), 78-79 and 103; Paul JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes; organisation et trafic depuis les origines* (Paris, 1929), pp. 157 and 270-71.

²⁸ [Auguste CHAMBON], *Le Commerce de l'Amérique par Marseille* (2 vols.; Avignon, 1764). I, 1.

²⁹ The West Indies are here taken to include Louisiana and Guiana. La Rochelle's exports to that area amount to 50.2 percent of its colonial tonnage carried on 47.1 percent of its colonial vessels. "PABLEAU de départ des Navires marchands de divers ports, Pour les Colonies de l'Amérique," Archives Nationales, Fonds des Colonies [hereafter: AN, Colonies, F^{2B}2], summarized in Table II.

Although almost every “privileged” port participated in West Indian trade, they did not all do so equally. Not only did Bordeaux and Nantes own a much larger share of the traffic than any other port (Bordeaux in particular held the first rank in all three of the main West Indian islands), but there was also a significant division of labor among the ports. The main Atlantic ports — Bordeaux, Nantes and La Rochelle — had been in Caribbean commerce since early in the seventeenth century and had had ample time to consolidate their position there. Consequently, although this was much less marked for Bordeaux than for the other two,³⁰ all three of these ports tended to favor St. Domingue, the most developed of the islands, and to ignore the Lesser Antilles. Their combined shipments amounted to a staggering 83 percent of the tonnage to St. Domingue as compared to 48 percent of that to Martinique. The pattern was reversed for the ports which had entered the trade more recently. These newcomers, the most important of which were Marseilles and Le Havre, made greater efforts toward Martinique, presumably because they found less competition there. The same thing occurred for Guadeloupe, the undeveloped and overlooked dependency of Martinique, and for Guiana, the stepchild of West Indian commerce. The first received more cargo from Le Havre and Honfleur than from any other port while the second had almost as frequent ties with Marseilles and Bayonne as with Bordeaux and Nantes.³¹

The differences which characterized the French ports in their relations with the West Indies did not extend to the kinds of goods they imported from the Caribbean islands, each of which yielded more or less the same products. Sugar, of course, was at the top of the list. Though in Bordeaux the ratio of that article to other colonial products steadily declined in the eighteenth century, in value though not in weight, it still represented in the early 1750's 61 percent of West Indian imports. Bordeaux was the most important client of the area, and the ratio was not much different for other ports. Below sugar stood coffee, indigo and cotton, which varied in rank from port to port, and much below these, cocoa

³⁰ The sources used by François Crouzet, reflecting shipping rather than tonnage, indicate that Bordeaux still exported in 1749-1755 slightly more to Martinique and to the other Lesser Antilles (51%) than to St. Domingue (49%). The statistics of Table II above give the exact opposite percentages. The discrepancy is insignificant, and it is clear that in Bordeaux's case the balance was finally tipped only after 1763. On the other hand, return figures indicate that the shift had already begun in the previous period, when according to Crouzet St. Domingue accounted for 58 percent of West Indian shipping to Bordeaux. CROUZET, in *PARISSET, Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 222.

³¹ All the comparisons presented above are taken from Table II and, to a lesser extent, from Table III. See also Paul MASSON, *Marseille et la colonisation française; essai d'histoire coloniale* (Marseilles, 1906), pp. 180-81; RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 306; and DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, p. 150.

and tobacco.³² It is on these products, and particularly sugar, that the wealth of French ports rested. This commerce permitted French merchants to compete favourably with the British on many European markets and even to corner some, as Marseilles did in Italy and the Levant.³³ It also changed the physiognomy of these ports, whose proud citizens utilized a part of their newly acquired wealth to construct new streets, buildings and monuments — in short, to give their cities a new look worthy of their success, a look which some of them (Bordeaux and Nantes in particular) still retain today.

It remains to mention one more aspect of West Indian commerce, evident when colonial exports and imports are compared. It was normal, of course, that vessels returned from the Caribbean with a more valuable cargo than the one they had brought to the area. Such a difference represented the profits of the merchants involved; without it, the trade would hardly have been worth entering. A more significant difference, however, emerged in the commerce of certain ports, the Atlantic ones especially. These ports imported proportionately more from the West Indies than they exported to the area. Bordeaux, for instance, received over 95 percent of its colonial goods from the West Indies, while it exported to the area barely 80 percent of the articles it sent to the colonies.³⁴ This disproportion was probably as marked, if not more, for other "privileged" ports which traded with more than one colonial area.³⁵ One might at first be led to assume that the difference was made by the value of West Indian products, generally higher than those of other regions. This may explain in part the large percentage of Caribbean imports; no doubt it explains also the preference shown by merchants for the sugar islands. However, the discrepancy between Caribbean exports and imports had other causes as well. One reason was that the merchants of certain ports carried gold and other specie to the West Indies in order to make up a

³² For Bordeaux figures, see CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 229n. See also MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux, XVIII^e*, pp. 302-07, tables I and II. Unfortunately, figures for other ports are expressed in weight. If, however, the value of each article is taken into consideration, the percentages seem to be roughly parallel to those of Bordeaux. For these statistics, see MASSON, *Marseille et la colonisation française*, p. 163n; Gaston MARTIN, *Nantes au XVIII^e siècle, II, L'Ère des Négriers, 1714-1774* (Paris, 1931), p. 264n; JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes*, pp. 238-39, table III, and 272-73, table V; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 222-23.

³³ Louis-Philippe MAY, *Histoire économique de la Martinique, 1635-1763* (Paris, 1930), p. 147; Hubert Jules DESCHAMPS, *Les Méthodes et les doctrines coloniales de la France du XVI^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 1953), p. 66; MASSON, *Marseille et la colonisation française*, pp. 162-63.

³⁴ MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux, XVIII^e*, pp. 204 and 302-07, tables I and II.

³⁵ Nantes, for instance, seems to have taken from the West Indies some 90 percent of its colonial imports while sending there only 69 percent of the articles it exported to the colonies. JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes*, pp. 224-27, tables I and I bis.

somewhat deficient balance of trade.³⁶ This specie was not included in the import-export statistics and, consequently, vitiated to a certain degree the balance established between the two. A more important reason was that the profits of certain other trades were sent back to France in the form of West Indian products.

One of these was the slave trade, which existed solely to supply the plantation colonies with the necessary manpower. Vessels engaged in this commerce left France loaded with brandies and *pacotilles* (inexpensive textiles, baubles, beads and other petty manufactured articles) which they exchanged for slaves on the West African coast.³⁷ They then brought these slaves to the West Indies and returned to France loaded with sugar, coffee and other Caribbean products. Profits were accumulated at each step of what became known as the triangular trade, but it was only when the expedition was liquidated in France that they were paid.

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the slave trade was, above all, the specialty of Nantes which developed quite early the most rational and economic means of exploiting it. We noted earlier the benefits which the proximity of the *Compagnie des Indes*' sales had provided the Atlantic port. What articles of trade the company could not supply were brought by the Dutch, with whom Nantes had especially close relations, thanks in part to the religious affinities which had developed between the two prior to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They also carried colonial goods, sugar especially, from Nantes to the important North European markets. Nantes had thus created for itself a handy organization for its commerce, based on the African-West Indian triangular trade. Furthermore, owing to the capital generated by the slave trade, a transformation industry directed at the needs of the slave trade had been started in Nantes. Imitation of Indian textiles, inferior manufactured goods and other essentials of African commerce were beginning to be produced in Nantes and its vicinity and provided the slave traders with needed products at a much lower cost than that required for the genuine articles. Nantes also supplied the Loire refining centers with large quan-

³⁶ The case of Marseilles, whose merchants shipped to the West Indies practically all the currency they earned through their sizeable commerce with Spain, is particularly notable, for it explains in part Marseilles' success in breaking into the West Indian market, but even Bordeaux was in the habit of including gold in its cargoes to that area. Masson, *Marseille et la colonisation française*, p. 164; Deliberations of the Chamber of Commerce [hereafter: CC] of Bordeaux, July 22, 1751, Archives départementales [hereafter: AD] de la Gironde, C4255, fol. 152.

³⁷ For the types of goods brought by slave traders to West Africa, see Abbé Jean-Joseph EXPILLY, *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et politique des Gaules et de la France* (6 vols.; Paris, 1762-1770), V, 58 (art. "Nantes"), and Jacques SAVARY DES BRUSLONS, *Dictionnaire universel de Commerce, d'histoire naturelle et des arts et métiers*, ed. Philémon-Louis SAVARY (rev. ed.; 5 vols.; Copenhague, 1759-1762), V, 1084-85 (art. "Commerce du Sénégal").

tities of raw sugar, thanks to which the latter were beginning to dominate the French market. In this fashion, the Loire region functioned as though it had its own mercantilist policy, purchasing raw material and selling finished products whenever possible. The focus of this vertical monopoly was Nantes and its control was in the hands of the city's merchants, the slave traders in particular.³⁸

The profits Nantes received were in proportion to these efforts, though they never even remotely approximated the staggering 500 percent theoretically computed by some contemporaries.³⁹ For one thing, expeditions to the African coast were fraught with dangers; for another, the trade was subject to frequent fluctuations, the price of slaves in the sugar islands depending less on the supply and demand than on the economic conditions the traders found upon their arrival, so that crop failures and wars always tended to lower sale prices.⁴⁰ Still, it was not unusual for investors in Nantes' slave trade to obtain 50 to 100 percent returns on their capital and profits, in extreme cases, could reach double that figure.⁴¹ Such percentages, however, were whittled down by the length of the voyages and the even longer time it took for payments to reach Nantes from the West Indies, so that annual returns were not as disproportionate as appears at first from other sea trades or indeed from land investments.⁴² The principal advantage of the slave trade was in the marshalling of large amounts of capital which could be reinvested more rapidly than those placed in more traditional ventures. Such a pyramid effect, however, meant that each new venture placed in jeopardy the profits and even the capital of previous voyages.⁴³

³⁸ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," *passim*.

³⁹ MEYER, *L'Armement nantais*, p. 226.

⁴⁰ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 83-84; André DUCASSE, *Les Négriers ou le trafic des esclaves* (Paris, 1948), p. 137. In general, however, the price of slaves in the West Indies was rising. See some representative figures for the island of St. Domingue in Gabriel DEBIEN, *Une plantation de Saint-Domingue; la sucrerie Galbaud du Fort, 1690-1802* (Cairo, 1941), pp. 57 and 87.

⁴¹ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," p. 82.

⁴² Such is the conclusion of Jean Meyer in his chapter on maritime profits (*L'Armement nantais*, pp. 205-48), the first serious attempt at more than an approximation of this crucial problem. See also Perry VILES, "The Slaving Interest in the Atlantic Ports, 1763-1792," *French Historical Studies*, VII (1972), 533. Although Meyer's logic is applicable to the entire eighteenth century, his calculations and those of Viles refer to the post-Seven Years' War period, when profits are thought to have dwindled, and Meyer admits that such low rates of interest do not adequately explain the fortunes made in Nantes prior to the war. *L'Armement nantais*, pp. 248 and 250. The methods of certain recent works on the profitability of the English slave trade may well be worth applying to the French. See Stanley L. ENGERMAN, "The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: A Comment on the Williams Thesis," *Business History Review*, XLVI (1972), 430-43.

⁴³ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 82-83; MEYER, *L'Armement nantais*, pp. 215-22 and 244.

Only the most solid merchant houses could afford to take such risks. Not even Nantes was immune from bankruptcies, despite the vast experience of its *armateurs*. The failure of the Company of Angola, a large cooperative effort of Nantes slaves, occurring in 1753 right in the middle of the best period of the century, demonstrates this.⁴⁴ It is little wonder, therefore, that other less experienced ports steered clear from the slave trade until the latter part of the eighteenth century. Even the great port of Bordeaux hesitated. Indeed, although allowed to trade with West Africa since 1716, Bordeaux was not of much importance in the slave trade until after the Seven Years' War; it did not, in fact, really begin this commerce until the 1740's.⁴⁵

What Bordeaux hesitated to undertake, others were even less eager to join. Bayonne made some attempts after the War of the Austrian Succession, but its first two expeditions resulted in such severe losses that, thereafter, its merchants declared themselves "*dégoûtés*" of the traffic.⁴⁶ Bayonne, of course, was not only a beginner in the slave trade; it was also a port in difficulty, a port on the decline which could not afford to take as many risks as the leaders. This last factor may also explain the reduction of the slave trade in the port of La Rochelle, which dropped from second place and the sole genuine rival of Nantes in the first half of the century to seventh place immediately after the Seven Years' War.⁴⁷ This same factor might also explain why St. Malo, another important early eighteenth-century participant in the slave trade, though it still sent some expeditions to West Africa after 1750, was now obliged to rely heavily on capital foreign to the city in order to continue its participation in this expensive commerce.⁴⁸ No port with such handicaps could hope to compete with Nantes.

In short, the ports which managed to become important slave trading centers after the Seven Years' War were those which offered a healthy outlook for commerce in general, and they elbowed their way into this lucrative trade by imitating the methods of their chief rival. Bordeaux was

⁴⁴ DUCASSE, *Les Négriers*, p. 137. For a list of Nantes bankruptcies between 1729 and 1740, some of them in the slave trade, see AD Loire-Atl., C645, no. 3.

⁴⁵ CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, pp. 237-39. One other reason given by this author for Bordeaux's reluctance was that the port, unlike Nantes, did not need the slave trade to support its direct West Indian traffic, adequately supplied by the region's agricultural products. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ [CC Bayonne], "Mémoire sur la traite des nègres," August 9, 1762, Archives de la Chambre de commerce [hereafter: ACC] de Bayonne, B40. See also CC Bayonne to Dulivier, March 29, 1749, *ibid.*, B24, p. 214.

⁴⁷ Lucien Pierre PEYTRAUD, *L'Esclavage aux Antilles françaises avant 1789* (Paris, 1897), p. 138; MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux. XVIII^e*, p. 209.

⁴⁸ Henri SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne au XVIII^e siècle," in Julien HAYEM, ed., *Mémoires et documents pour servir à l'histoire du commerce et de l'industrie en France*, IX (Paris, 1925), 78.

such a port, with extensive colonial ties and a well-developed refining industry. For this city, the slave trade was only a natural extension of its previous activities, undertaken when its merchants felt themselves strong enough to expand their commerce in this direction.⁴⁹ But the most spectacular example was Le Havre, which had dabbled in the trade with little success since the 1730's. A new process by which Indian textiles could be imitated was developed in Rouen in 1756; Le Havre could now compete favourably with Nantes in West Africa. Starting immediately after the war, it did so. By the end of the decade, it was well established and it was to become the second most important French centre for the slave trade before the outbreak of the French Revolution.⁵⁰ The availability for sufficient capital and reliable sources of inexpensive *pacotilles* were, indeed, the crucial requirements for success.

The commerce of Canada was also connected with the West Indian trade, although only partially and in a less direct manner. For La Rochelle, through which most Canadian commerce passed, there was little connection between the two. Every year on the average this port sent to the banks of the St. Lawrence some 15 vessels, loaded with manufactured goods and other articles to be sold in the North American colony, from where most of them returned directly to France, with a cargo of furs and other Canadian products.⁵¹ At best, however, Canadian production was small, and the colony's agriculture in the last decades of the French regime was plagued by numerous crop failures, as military preparations cut into the manpower available for farming.⁵² Not even the vessels of La Rochelle, therefore, despite the long-standing relations of the port with the St. Lawrence valley, could always obtain sufficient cargo for the return trip.⁵³ When this occurred, they made a detour to the sugar islands, where they collected the necessary freight.

⁴⁹ Robert BOUTRUCHE, *Bordeaux et le commerce des Antilles au XVIII^e siècle* (Orleans, [1935]), p. 20.

⁵⁰ DUCASSE, *Les Négriers*, pp. 155-56; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, p. 140. On the beginnings of the printed textile industry in Rouen, see André RÉMOND, *John Holker, manufacturier et grand fonctionnaire en France au XVIII^e siècle*, chs. I and II, especially pp. 26-33 and 53-63; Charles SCHMIDT, "Les Débuts de l'industrie cotonnière en France, 1760-1806," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, VI (1913), 263.

⁵¹ See the figures for this traffic in Emile GARNAULT, *Le Commerce rochelais; les rochelais et le Canada* (La Rochelle, 1893), p. 45. See also "TABLEAU de départ des Navires marchands de divers ports, Pour les Colonies de l'Amérique," AN, Colonies, F^{2B}2. Despite its importance, La Rochelle's Canadian traffic did not amount to much more than 15 percent of the port's total navigation. Figures for the latter can be found in GARNAULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, II, 111 and 127.

⁵² Jean E. LUNN, "Agriculture and War in Canada (1740-1760)," *Canadian Historical Review*, XVI (1935), 123-26.

⁵³ Léon VIGNOLS, "La Mise en valeur du Canada à l'époque française," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, XVI (1928), 720-95.

There was, of course, even less cargo to be picked up on the shores of the St. Lawrence by the ships of other ports. Almost inevitably, these ships would have to seek a return cargo in the West Indies. The government, realizing that Canada needed to import more than its exports could ever be worth, made some efforts to encourage a one-way traffic, but with little success, as few merchants showed themselves willing to follow La Rochelle's example and import goods to Canada on their own account without the guarantee of a return cargo.⁵⁴

It was another matter entirely when the cargo to be brought to Canada was freight carried for the crown, *par économie* as the system was called. In the years immediately preceding and even more so during the Seven Years' War, a great demand for such cargoes arose as a result of the military build-up in North America.⁵⁵ Such a traffic needed no encouragement, for the profits it offered more than made up for the slight detour which ships were required to make in order to collect a return cargo in the Caribbean. In exchange for buying the supplies needed by the crown, hopefully at a lesser price than would have been paid by official agents of the king, and for carrying them to America, the merchants thus employed were given substantial advantages. In the first place, the articles bought in this manner were considered at all times to be the property of the king, who bore the risks of the voyage. The contractor's responsibility for the goods ended as soon as he loaded them on his own vessel, legally viewed as leased by the king for the duration of the voyage. Unlike his colleagues who sold their own merchandise in the colonies, the king's contractor was, therefore, saved the necessity of carrying insurance on his cargo, a substantial saving in wartime. If his ship was sunk, he would not be paid for carrying the king's freight across the Atlantic, but he would still be reimbursed for and receive his commission on the purchase of the goods his ship had carried. Since his ship was chartered by the king, the contractor could also draw at times on the royal stores to fit it out; more important, he was given first choice of sailors after the royal navy. Finally, since his role was essential for the well-being of the colonial troops, he could at least hope to be paid more promptly than the average creditor of the king. Naturally, these were important advantages at all times. In wartime, when the risks of an Atlantic crossing became almost prohibitive, when naval stores and sailors were scarce and when the crown was particularly slow in paying its debts, these factors became signal advantages, well worth seeking.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Maurepas to Chavigny, January 10, 1748, AN, Colonies, B88, fol. 42v.

⁵⁵ LUNN, "Agriculture and War in Canada," p. 126.

⁵⁶ For information on this subject, see MAUPASSANT, *Abraham Gradis, passim.*, an excellent biography of the man who was perhaps the most famous of the *armateurs pour le roi*. The system was adopted for other colonies also, but only in the Canadian trade did it comprise such an important segment of the traffic.

This carrying trade was mostly in the hands of ports other than La Rochelle, Bordeaux was especially active, probably because large quantities of food and spirits, particularly the flour and wines which formed the bulk of any shipment to the American colonies, were available in the surrounding region.⁵⁷ In the interwar years (1749-1755), it sent each year to New France some 27 vessels, bearing some 4,200 *tonneaux*, as compared to La Rochelle's 15 vessels and 2,800 *tonneaux*. Through its chartered trade, Bordeaux thus managed to ship a significantly larger volume of goods to the valley of the St. Lawrence than the region's traditional supplier (49.7% of the total imports as compared to La Rochelle's 32.3%).⁵⁸ Other ports imitated Bordeaux. Bayonne, in particular, had rather active ties with Louisbourg, where it annually sent an average of five vessels, in addition to the one or two destined to Quebec (800 *tonneaux* a year, or 9.8% of the total imports of New France).⁵⁹ Almost all commerce with Canada, however, went through either La Rochelle or Bordeaux. There is no better demonstration of their preponderance than the fact that the manufacturers of French cities, even when they had easier communications with other ports, preferred to use these two as their middlemen for Canada. Thus, for instance, the textiles manufactured in Rouen, which were in good demand at Quebec, were sent through Bordeaux and not Le Havre.⁶⁰ Still more significant, Canadian furs for the Basque tanneries came through La Rochelle, even though the nearby port of Bayonne maintained regular ties with the colony.⁶¹

One more type of commerce can be directly associated with the colonies, the fishing for cod done by French vessels in the St. Lawrence estuary, around Newfoundland and on the banks immediately east of this island. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this industry in the eighteenth century, when fish was the most important source of

⁵⁷ CANIELLE JULIAN, *Histoire de Bordeaux depuis les origines jusqu'en 1895* (Bordeaux, 1895), p. 529; BOUTRUCHE, *Bordeaux et le commerce des Antilles*, pp. 18-20; Richard PARES, *Yankees and Creoles: The Trade between North America and the West Indies before the American Revolution* (London, New York and Toronto, 1956), p. 86.

⁵⁸ "TABLEAU de départ des Navires marchands de divers ports, Pour les Colonies de l'Amérique," AN, Colonies, F^{2B}2. See Table II. Figures in Crouzet vary somewhat, but his percentages coincide with the ones given here. CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, pp. 236-37.

⁵⁹ "TABLEAU de départ des Navires marchands de divers ports, Pour les Colonies de l'Amérique," AN, Colonies, F^{2B}2. The other ports which had some trade with Canada were Nantes (2 ships a year), Honfleur, Le Havre, Marseilles and perhaps also Dunkirk, each of them averaging less than one vessel a year. *Ibid.*: Raymond de BERTRAND, "Le Port et le commerce maritime de Dunkerque au XVIII^e siècle," *Mémoires de la société dunkerquoise*, IX (1863-1864), 282.

⁶⁰ DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 152 and 154.

⁶¹ "Convention faite entre Messieurs du Corps de ville et chambre de commerce de Bayonne et les Fermiers généraux touchant le commerce et fabrique des peaux du canada," April 14, 1731, ACC Bayonne, H36, No. 9; CC Bayonne to Merchants of St. Jean-de-Luz, July 21, 1751, *ibid.*, B24, p. 357.

protein for Europe. At the beginning of the century, the French fishing industry owed less than a quarter of its revenues to Newfoundland cod; by 1787, while the industry as a whole had grown sixfold, Newfoundland accounted for 52.4 percent of the total, thus replacing the very coast of Europe as the main source of fish for France. Newfoundland cod was the fastest-growing type of fishing in which the French were engaged in the eighteenth century. During that period, it grew to 15 times its original value, or at almost four times the rate of its nearest rival.⁶²

The most important fishing harbours were the ports of Granville, in Normandy, and St. Malo, its Breton neighbor. In the period immediately preceding the Seven Years' War, some 90 Newfoundlanders were armed each year by the first, while the second maintained a fleet of some 80.⁶³ It was these two cities, and particularly Granville, which served as semi-official spokesmen for the whole industry, and they were consulted whenever important questions concerning the fishing trade arose.⁶⁴ Immediately below stood Honfleur, the sister port of Le Havre, which sent 61 vessels to the Great Banks in 1751.⁶⁵ Significantly inferior to these but nevertheless important were the harbours of St. Brieuc and Nantes in Brittany, Les Sables d'Olonnes in Vendée, St. Martin-de-Ré and Marennes in Poitou, and the Basque ports of Bayonne and St. Jean-de-Luz.⁶⁶ Below these was a whole series of minor ports found most particularly on the English Channel coast and in Brittany, where almost all fishing villages sent a number of vessels to fish in American waters.⁶⁷

It is worth noting that, save for Nantes, whose fishing fleet was in sharp decline,⁶⁸ the major ports engaged in colonial commerce did not figure among those participating actively in Newfoundland codfishing. Marseilles did not at all and Bordeaux only slightly.⁶⁹ La Rochelle had

⁶² Figures taken from ARNOULD, *Balance du commerce*, III, table 2E.

⁶³ Charles DE LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française de la morue dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (3 vols.; Paris, 1962-1966), II, 551 and 567.

⁶⁴ See "Précis des négociations de M. le Comte de Guerchy Ambassadeur du Roy à Londres auprès de qui les sieurs Magon et Bretel furent députés pour le commerce au mois de decembre 1763. par permission de M. le Duc de Choiseul à l'occasion des affaires de l'isle de Terre neuve," AN, Colonies, C¹¹F1, fol. 96. Bretel was from Granville; Magon (or Magnon?) may have been a member of the important Delalande-Magnon family, which dominated St. Malo trade at the time. The registers C¹¹F1, 3 and 5 contain memoirs concerning Newfoundland. Most of them are from Granville.

⁶⁵ LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 538.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 572, 580, 589, 592 and 603.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 525-42 and 574-76. See also DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, p. 427, where a list is given of the French harbours which brought cod to Le Havre. See also *ibid.*, p. 304.

⁶⁸ LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 580-81; JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes*, p. 174.

⁶⁹ MASSON, *Marseille et la colonisation française*, p. 187; CC Bordeaux to CC Dunkirk, April 15, 1758, AD Gironde, C4264, fol. 9.

barely begun to send vessels to the Great Banks when the Seven Years' War interrupted its armaments.⁷⁰ As for Le Havre, which had been one of the major participants in the seventeenth century and would become one again toward the end of the eighteenth, it had for the moment abandoned this industry almost entirely and busied itself with other activities, including the colonial carrying trade.⁷¹ It is true that St. Malo and Bayonne were active in both West Indian commerce and codfishing, but neither of them was any longer a great colonial harbor in the 1750's. In fact, a rule emerges which, although invalid for the seventeenth century, applies in almost all cases in the middle of the eighteenth: the more activity a port showed in colonial commerce, the more it neglected the fishing trade.⁷²

The fact that the great ports engaged in colonial trade generally disdained during the middle of the eighteenth century to maintain their own fishing fleets did not intimate a lack of interest in cod. On the contrary, codfish was one of the important colonial commodities which they re-exported to the rest of Europe and even to the West Indies.⁷³ The fact of the matter was that the fishing trade was not regulated as strictly as the colonial one. Unlike the ships engaged in the latter, fishing vessels were encouraged by the government to unload their cargo in ports other than their own.⁷⁴ Therefore, the great colonial ports were supplied with fish by the vessels of smaller harbours, unloading there without first returning to their home ports. Thus, Marseilles, without a fleet of its own, received 40 shiploads of cod a year, mostly from St. Malo; and the merchants of Le Havre, who sent a maximum of 12 vessels to Newfoundland on their own account, received up to three times this number in return.⁷⁵ Nantes and Bordeaux also did a brisk trade in fish, most of which came from other

⁷⁰ GARNULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, IV, 332.

⁷¹ DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 156, 426, 431-32.

⁷² LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 595. CROUZET, in PARISSET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, 234-35, gives as a reason the higher salaries prevalent in colonial ports.

⁷³ In the middle of the eighteenth century, Marseilles was the major supplier of fish to the Mediterranean world — Spain, Italy and particularly the Levant. MASSON, *Marseille et la colonisation française*, p. 187; RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 491; LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 609. Soon after the Seven Years' War, the Mediterranean market would drop significantly, but it would be replaced and even surpassed by that of nearby provinces. *Ibid.* For the fish re-exported to the West Indies, see RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 507, and CLEMENT, "Memoire des Côtes de l'isle de Terre-neuve où le françois fait la pêche d'Été de moutie [*sic*] seche, de la Grande Bâye nommée la Brador tenant au Continent appartenant au François seul, de la Côte de Gaspée, de l'isle Royale et de leur produit," October 7, 1761, AN, Colonies, C11^F5, fol. 16v.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, Rouillé to CC Marseilles, November 14, 1751, ACC Marseille, H115.

⁷⁵ RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 502; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 426 and 431. LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 535, gives figures for Le Havre which are significantly smaller than those found in Dardel.

French ports.⁷⁶ In this manner, although the great ports of colonial commerce did not participate directly in the trade, Newfoundland cod (considered here as a colonial product) played an important role in their economy.

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The impact of the colonies on France went beyond the trade patterns which the empire generated. More or less directly, a large segment of French industry was affected as well. The links were most direct, of course, with those industries which had been specifically created to transform colonial products. The most important of these was sugar refining, located in or near certain "privileged" ports.⁷⁷ By the middle of the eighteenth century, this industry had assumed large proportions and, thanks to a sizeable labour force, had overtaken its English and Dutch rivals to become the major supplier of sugar to the Europeans.⁷⁸ The largest centres of sugar refining were also the largest colonial ports. Bordeaux led the industry with twenty refineries in 1750, and La Rochelle and Marseilles were not far behind. Even though, after the War of the Austrian Succession, Nantes no longer refined its own sugar, it remained an important supply centre for the refineries established along the Loire valley, especially in Angers and Orleans. Finally, lesser centres existed in Rouen, Dieppe and Dunkirk, and at Lille, in back of Dunkirk.⁷⁹

Other colonial goods were processed in France. The tanneries of St. Jean-de-Luz, which processed Canadian furs, and the silk manufactories of Lyons have already been mentioned. Others were the hat manufactures of Le Havre and Rouen. They too used Canadian furs, and also arabic gum, imported from Senegal as well as the Levant.⁸⁰ Tobacco, some of which came from the West Indies and Louisiana, was processed in Dieppe, Morlaix and Bayonne.⁸¹ Worth a special mention are the textile mills of

⁷⁶ JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes*, p. 251, table IV; CROUZET, in PARISSET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 235; LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 580-81 and 597-600.

⁷⁷ Père Dieudonné RINCHON, *Les Armements négriers au XVIII^e siècle d'après la correspondance et la comptabilité des armateurs et des capitaines négriers* (Brussels, 1956), p. 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*; MAY, "La France, puissance des Antilles," pp. 459-60.

⁷⁹ A description of all these centers can be found in BONDOIS, "Les Centres sucriers français au XVIII^e," pp. 28-68. See also MAY, "La France, puissance des Antilles," p. 459.

⁸⁰ DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, p. 184; BORÉLY, *Histoire de la ville du Havre*, III, 357.

⁸¹ On Dieppe, see Abbé Michel Claude GUILBERT, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la ville de Dieppe*, ed. Michel HARDY (2 vols.: Paris and Rouen, 1878), I, 224-25. On Morlaix, see Joseph DAUMESNIL and Adolphe ALLER, *Histoire de Morlaix*. (Morlaix, 1879), P. 484, and Rouillé to La Borde, December 9, 1752, AN, Colonies, B96, fol. 221v. On

Nantes, Rennes and especially Rouen, which significantly increased their production in the 1750's because of the demands of the slave trade and the introduction of new processes for the cheap imitation of Indian textiles.⁸² The increased amount of cotton required came mostly from America.⁸³ Similarly, as the century advanced and production increased, Lyons came to rely more heavily on Far Eastern and West Indian raw materials, particularly for its dyes.⁸⁴ However, not one of these industries, at least in its colonial sector, had the importance of sugar refining.

Along with the industries which depended on the colonies for at least some of their raw materials, there existed some which relied in part on the empire for a market. This was the case for the home products of the provinces immediately surrounding major "privileged" ports; these products found their way to the colonies as well as to other markets. Thus, the colonies served the Bordeaux region as an outlet for its inferior wines, not disposed of on the European market as easily as the good clarets.⁸⁵ As for industry proper, as distinguished from agriculture, it too was in part dependent on the colonies for outlets. The industry which immediately comes to mind is the manufacture of *pacotilles* in Nantes. Others, however, were connected to imperial markets, though perhaps less directly. The textile industry was one of these.

Lyons, the greatest textile center of France during the *ancien régime*, worked mostly for exportation. Some two-thirds of the silks, gold brocades and other luxury textiles which it manufactured were sold abroad.⁸⁶ Its colonial exports were almost insignificant in comparison to the European ones, for they never reached more than four million *livres* a year, or one-tenth of what the city's production of silk alone was worth. Nevertheless, the West Indies, the only colonies which could afford to buy luxury textiles in sufficient quantity, seem to have functioned as a safety valve for Lyons' production, especially plagued in the eighteenth century by the

Bayonne, see same to CC Bayonne, April 14, 1751, *ibid.*, fol. 81v; Deliberations of CC Bayonne, April 15, 1750, and December 1, 1751, ACC Bayonne, B6, pp. 152-53 and 233. The establishment of tobacco manufactures in declining ports might have had something to do with the low wages paid there.

⁸² On these textile centers and Indian imitations, see BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 93-102, and the works cited therein.

⁸³ A. LE CORBEILLER, *Histoire du port de Rouen et de son commerce depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours* (Rouen, 1902), p. 115; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, p. 212.

⁸⁴ PARISET, *La Chambre de commerce de Lyon, XVIII^e*, pp. 78-80.

⁸⁵ BOUTRUCHE, *Bordeaux et le commerce des Antilles*, p. 20; CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 253. The same held true of the wines of Provence, exported through Marseilles and preferred in the West Indies to those of Bordeaux because cheaper. MASSON, *Marseille et la colonisation française*, p. 162.

⁸⁶ Ernest PARISET, *Histoire de la fabrique lyonnaise. Étude sur le régime social et l'industrie de la soie à Lyon, depuis le XVI^e siècle* (Lyon, 1901), p. 209.

serious market fluctuations generally associated with the luxury trade.⁸⁷ Thanks to this secondary outlet, the more than 60,000 workers of Lyons found some work in times of crisis.⁸⁸

But luxury textiles could find only a limited market in the colonies. Just as for the wines of the Bordeaux region, it was the inexpensive brands which were in greatest demand. In fact, a significant portion of the cheapest textiles produced in France was sold to the colonies, where they served among other things to clothe the West Indian slaves.⁸⁹ This was the function which was assigned, for instance, to the declining woollen industry around Agen and Montauban, on the upper Garonne, shipped through Bordeaux.⁹⁰ Indeed, Bordeaux seems to have monopolized this trade. From St. Malo for re-export to the West Indies it received the bulk of the products of Brittany's cottage industry and from Rouen for Canada some of the coarser articles made by Normandy's rural weavers.⁹¹

Shipbuilding may also be considered to have been directly affected by the colonial empire. Shipyards did not exist only in the military ports (Toulon, Rochefort, Brest) but also in the "privileged" ones, most of which supplied their own demands and more. The most important private yards seem to have been in Bordeaux which built 15 vessels, or 3700 *tonneaux* (5300 tons) of shipping, a year during the interwar period and would double that tonnage figure following the Seven Years' War.⁹² Almost as important and perhaps even more interesting were the shipyards of St. Malo. In the twenty years preceding the Seven Years' War, this port lost a great deal of its trade to Nantes and to other rivals. St. Malo's relative inactivity was reflected in employment figures and in labor prices. In the long run, the problem was solved by a gradual emigration of workers to more fortunate regions. In the short run, however, the deflated wages paid labour encouraged the activity of the shipyards.⁹³

⁸⁷ For the fluctuation in textile manufacturing in Lyons and for its causes, see PARISET, *La Chambre de commerce de Lyon, XVIII^e*, pp. 26 and 68-71; for their effects on the silk workers, see Maurice GARDEN, *Lyons et les lyonnais au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1970), pp. 298-309, especially pp. 302-03. For the efforts to open new markets, including the West Indies, see also *ibid.*, pp. 377-79.

⁸⁸ GARNAUT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, IV, 80; MAY, "La France, puissance des Antilles," p. 475. Figures for the silk production of Lyons are available in PARISET, *Histoire de la fabrique lyonnaise*, p. 209.

⁸⁹ PARISET, *La Chambre de commerce de Lyon, XVIII^e*, p. 105.

⁹⁰ CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 274.

⁹¹ SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," p. 77; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 152 and 154.

⁹² CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, pp. 278-80. On a typical shipbuilding complex near Nantes, see R. ORCEAU, "Les Chantiers de constructions navales de Chézine et l'île Mabou," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique et historique de Nantes et de la Loire-Inférieure*, LXXXVI (1947), 57-67.

⁹³ SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," pp. 85-86.

Finally, one should mention privateering, in which most French ports traditionally participated in wartime. It is not essentially because privateers were particularly active in colonial waters, though they were, that they need be mentioned in a discussion of the colonial commerce of France. More important, the ports which had the privilege of trade with the colonies were among the most active in preparing "the little war," as privateering was sometimes called. The reasons for this relationship between colonial privilege and privateering are clear. The Atlantic sea lanes were familiar to the captains engaged in colonial commerce. Furthermore, among the ships engaged in the cross-Atlantic trade were armed merchantmen, solid wooden hulls capable of speed and thus ideally suited for privateering.

It would be useless to list the ports which fitted out privateers during the Seven Years' War; practically all of them did.⁹⁴ Not all of them, however, took part in this activity with equal enthusiasm. The most eager were the traditional leaders — St. Malo, which abandoned all other traffic for the duration of the war, and Dunkirk, the city of the famous seventeenth-century corsair, Jean Bart, which demonstrated its continued ability by capturing at least 600 vessels worth around fifteen million *livres*.⁹⁵

The most revealing activities, however, were those of other ports. One of these was Rouen, whose chamber of commerce, after the government announced its decision not to renew the convoy system, proposed that all the French privateers be organized into large armadas, meant to supplement the deficient French navy in its struggle against the British and, more specifically, to protect the merchant marine in its colonial activities.⁹⁶ Rouen's privateers were not very active during the Seven Years' War,⁹⁷ but the proposal of the chamber indicated more desire and energy for this type of navigation than the port had demonstrated for other maritime activities in the preceding years.

A similar attitude could be found in Bayonne, which after years of claiming itself disinterested in maritime operations, appeared almost bloodthirsty in its eagerness for the outbreak of war and the consequent

⁹⁴ See E. DUCÉRE, *Histoire maritime de Bayonne; les corsaires sous l'ancien régime* (Bayonne, 1895), pp. 254-55, for a list (maybe partial) of the ports which participated in this activity.

⁹⁵ SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," p. 90; Henri MALO, *Les Derniers corsaires. Dunkerque, 1715-1815* (Paris, 1925), pp. 103-04, who speaks of these figures as a "premier bilan."

⁹⁶ CC Bayonne to CC Rouen, July 24, 1756, ACC Bayonne, B25, pp. 487-88.

⁹⁷ Some of the activities catalogued under Le Havre may have been owed to Rouen capital. Rouen privateers would not have bothered going upstream and would remain attached at Le Havre. On the activities of Le Havre, see BORELY, *Histoire de la ville du Havre*, III, 343.

opening of the seas to privateers. From the very first inquiries of the Minister of Marine, Jean-Baptiste de Machault, regarding possible preparations for the arming of privateers, in the fall of 1755, Bayonne prided itself with being one of the few harbours genuinely responsive to the minister's suggestions.⁹⁸ Bayonne, along with its neighbour, St. Jean-de-Luz, was among the first French harbours to let its privateers loose.⁹⁹ Encouraged by some early successes, the two ports abandoned all other activities to devote themselves to the little war.¹⁰⁰

Bayonne's eager anticipation and warlike activities were not really surprising. The port was a traditional center of privateering and it had participated in this type of navigation with marked success during the War of the Austrian Succession.¹⁰¹ After the wartime hustle, the peaceful years which followed were disappointingly unfruitful. Many of the port's ships stood idle on the banks of the Adour and a number of them were sold.¹⁰² A new war might finish the ruin of Bayonne's normal commerce; in the short run, however, war would give Bayonne the opportunity of recovering some of its peacetime losses through a series of vigorous privateering campaigns.¹⁰³

The interest of Bayonne's story is that it suggests a relationship between the decline of a port's commerce (its colonial trade in particular) and its eager participation in the war of privateering. Not only Bayonne but St. Malo and Dunkirk were older ports, pioneers of the colonial trade, which had seen their best days in the seventeenth century. Similarly, Rouen was in the process of transforming itself into an industrial center and its sea trade, though not its capital investments in international and colonial commerce, was losing its earlier predominance. The interest of these ports in privateering also dated from the seventeenth century, when

⁹⁸ Deliberations of CC Bayonne, meeting in extraordinary session, September 8 and 18, 1755; CC Bayonne to Dulivier, November 25, 1755. ACC Bayonne, B6, pp. 437 and 438; B25, p. 426.

⁹⁹ The freeing of the privateers dates from late May 1756. The first Bayonne privateer left in early July and there were eight at sea by the middle of August. The privateers of St. Jean-de-Luz were not far behind. CC Bayonne to CC Rouen, July 24, 1756; same to Machault, August 19, 1756. *Ibid.*, B25, pp. 488 and 495.

¹⁰⁰ CC Bayonne to Machault, October 2, 1756, AN, Colonies, F^{2B}. See also MAUPASSANT, "Abraham Gradis et l'approvisionnement des colonies," p. 180.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of a report to the Minister, February 1756, AN, Colonies, F^{2C5}, fol. 173.

¹⁰² CC Bayonne to Partyet, January 18, 1752; same to Rouillé, January 12, 1754. ACC Bayonne, B24, p. 391; B25, pp. 264-65. Numerous other references to this depletion of the city's merchant fleet through the sale of its components are found in the archives for this period. See, among others, Deliberations of CC Bayonne, June 30, 1751, ACC Bayonne B6, p. 211; and "Etat du produit de la Recette faite au Bureau de la Coutume de Bayonne... [du] premier octobre 1752 [au]... 30 septembre 1753," *ibid.*, B25, p. 272.

¹⁰³ Minutes of a report to the Minister, February 1756, AN, Colonies, F^{2C5}, fol. 173.

privateers had been in their heyday and their activities a normal part of a port's business. It is striking to note that, despite certain efforts in this direction, none of the ports which were on the ascendency in the eighteenth century became a significant privateer harbour.¹⁰⁴ Even in wartime, they had better things to do.

No doubt, one of the reasons for which St. Malo, Bayonne and Dunkirk took up privateering with such eagerness during the Seven Years' War was that this type of navigation had proven a success for them in all the preceding wars. However, the eager continuation of this tradition in the eighteenth century, like the participation in codfishing, was now an indication of a declining economic life. As the case of Bayonne indicates, it was the failure of peaceful activities and the resulting ready availability of vessels for privateering which provided the major impetus.

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In the preceding discussion, it was made increasingly obvious that the ports of Bordeaux, Nantes, Marseilles and Le Havre had become or were becoming in the middle of the century the most important ports of France. At the same time, it emerged that certain other ports were in decline. Bayonne, St. Malo and Dunkirk were among those mentioned in this context. Rouen too had seen its best years as a commercial armament center in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries.¹⁰⁵ As for La Rochelle, through which still passed in the 1750's more goods than through Le Havre, its commerce remained stable while that of others grew. In short, the patterns which had prevailed in the seventeenth century, when such ports as Dunkirk, Dieppe, Rouen, St. Malo and La Rochelle dominated the Atlantic trade, were in the process of changing, to be replaced by the pattern which still determines today the structure of French navigation.

A number of causes have been given for this momentous change. One theory has it that the doom of seventeenth century ports was sealed by their lack of adequate hinterlands. Seventeenth century commerce, it is

¹⁰⁴ Marseilles may be the only exception. In 1756-1763 it captured some 150 vessels, most of them in the Mediterranean and along the coast of West Africa. This activity, however, was principally due to Georges Roux, who armed a veritable armada. The activities of one man, even when his example was followed by a few others, could not make for a really solid center of privateering activity. RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, la vie commerciale*, p. 602; RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 323.

¹⁰⁵ Statistics for Rouen's volume of trade are significant here. In the seventeenth century, Rouen's direct trade grew by some 80 percent (1614-1699); in the following fifty years (1699-1750), it dropped almost the same amount (72%). Pierre DARDEL, *Le Trafic maritime de Rouen aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles; essai de statistiques* (Rouen, 1946), pp. 22-32.

argued, was relatively small and somewhat akin to the carrying trade of the Netherlands; the lack of a hinterland thus proved not to be a significant factor then. But, when commerce grew in the eighteenth, the absence of adequate local markets and sources of supplies became a major hindrance to trade, and the leadership passed on to better situated ports, especially those at or near the mouths of the major French rivers. The theory is convincingly argued by the French economic historian Henri Sée for the Breton harbors, especially St. Malo and Morlaix.¹⁰⁶ The inadequacy of their back country no doubt contributed also to the decline of such ports as La Rochelle and Bayonne, as contemporaries of the events noted.¹⁰⁷ By the same token, the cereal and wine production of Bordeaux's hinterland clearly contributed to that port's West Indian commerce.¹⁰⁸ Even in the case of Bordeaux, however, the hinterland thesis must not be over-emphasized, for the Garonne did not offer access to the major inland centers of production. It is equally conjectural for other ports.¹⁰⁹ Nantes' success was won in spite, rather than because of its location on the Loire.¹¹⁰ The Rhone, too rapid for effective upstream navigation and separated from Marseilles by hills too steep for animal traction, was less important as a factor of that port's growth than the latter's stranglehold on Mediterranean commerce.¹¹¹ As for Rouen and Le Havre, which in the Seine possessed the best avenue to the heart of France, their traffic with the interior was carried by land rather than by river transportation.¹¹²

The significant growth of tonnage characterizing the eighteenth century may also have contributed to the shift,¹¹³ for many harbours dated

¹⁰⁶ See his "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," especially pp. 125-27.

¹⁰⁷ CC La Rochelle to Maurepas. April 1, 1749, AN, Colonies, F^{2B}: "Memoire a M. le Con[trol]leur général pour que les v[aisse]aux de Bayonne destinez p[our] les colonies soient dispensez de faire leur retour dans le port de leur armement et qu'il leur soit permis d'aller dans quelqu'un de France pour y faire leur déchargement & rearmement indistinctement." April 22, 1749, ACC Bayonne, B41, p. 364; "Courtes Notes a Etendre sur le Commerce de Bayonne," [ca. 1752], *ibid.*, G5, no. 30; CC Bayonne to Rouillé, Septembre 16, 1752, AN, Colonies, F^{2B2}.

¹⁰⁸ CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 211.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-07.

¹¹⁰ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," p. 75.

¹¹¹ Louis BERGASSE, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, gen. ed. Gaston RAMBERT IV: 1, *La Vie commerciale de 1599 à 1660* (Paris, 1954), pp. 128-31 and 135-36; MASSON *Marseille et la colonisation française*, p. 161.

¹¹² Philippe-Augustin BARREY, "Le Havre maritime; la batellerie et les transports par terre du XVI^e au XIX^e siècle," in Julien HAYEM, ed., *Mémoires et documents pour servir à l'histoire du commerce et de l'industrie en France*, VI (Paris, 1921), 67-126, and especially the schedule of prices and times, on pp. 118-19. See also LÉON and CARRIÈRE, in BRAUDEL and LABROUSSE, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, 199-201, where the whole cause issue is discussed and the predominance of land travel in the eighteenth century noted.

¹¹³ The crucial turn seems to have been the generalization of vessels over 100 tonneaux (143 tons), which occurred sometimes in the early eighteenth century. DARDEL, *Le Trafic maritime de Rouen*, pp. 122-24; Paul Jacques CHARLIAT, *Trois siècles d'économie maritime française* (Paris, 1931), pp. 56-57.

from a time when technology had dictated that they be placed deep inland, on rivers or estuaries, where land and water communications first crossed. The tonnage which they could accommodate was bound to be limited. This was the case for Rouen, located some 100 miles from the sea, for various ports on the English Channel and in Brittany, and for Bayonne, situated some distance up the Adour, the mouth of which was obstructed by a particularly troublesome sandbar and the wreck of a corsair dating from the War of the Austrian Succession. La Rochelle was also in difficulty, despite its direct access to the sea, for it was situated on an area of the French coast where the land was gaining on the sea and the silting was made worse by the remnants of the dike built by Richelieu during the seventeenth-century siege of the city.¹¹⁴ It should however be noted that Bordeaux and Nantes were not much better placed. This was especially true for Nantes which, like Rouen, needed to transfer cargo from vessels over 100 *tonneaux* to tenders some distance downstream.¹¹⁵ Indeed, only Marseilles was blessed with a deep, easily accessible harbour, a fact attested to by the tonnage of its vessels, which awed its rivals.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ An eighteenth century description of nearly every Atlantic and English Channel harbour is found in CHAZELLES, "Memoire sur les Costes Occidentales de France, Pour servir a la Navigation," AN, M1031. On Rouen, see also Philippe-Augustin BARREY, "Le Havre et la navigation aux Antilles sous l'ancien régime; la question coloniale en 1789-1791," in Julien HAYEM, ed., *Mémoires et documents pour servir à l'histoire du commerce et de l'industrie en France*, V (Paris, 1917), p. 80; Michel DESMONTS, *Le Port de Rouen et son commerce avec l'Amérique* (Rouen, 1912), p. 6; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 241-42 and 297-98. The situation of Breton ports is discussed in SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," pp. 173-200. On Bayonne, see also CC Bayonne to Rouillé, October 2, 1751, ACC Bayonne, B24, p. 373; DUBEZIN, "Observations Faites par le Sousigné sur la Lettre Ecrite par Monsieur Derouville [Hérouville de Claye]... a Messieurs... de notre Chambre," [September 1755], *ibid.*, E5, no. 37. The general condition of the coast between Loire and Gironde is discussed in Pierre VIDAL DE LA BLACHE, *Tableau de la géographie de la France* [Ernest LAVISSE, ed., *Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à la Révolution*, 1: 1] (Paris, 1903), pp. 371-72. On the position of La Rochelle, see GARNAULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, II, 115-17 and 134.

¹¹⁵ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," p. 75; CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 207.

¹¹⁶ See the comments of Bordeaux in CC Bordeaux to Carton, June 17, 1749, AD Gironde, C4263, fol. 103v. A look at the "TABLEAU de départ des Navires marchands de divers ports, Pour les Colonies de l'Amérique," AN, Colonies, F2B2, shows clearly Marseilles' advantage between 1749 and 1755:

PORT	AVERAGE FREIGHT PER SHIP	VESSELS INVOLVED
Marseilles	342 <i>tonneaux</i>	146
Honfleur	249 "	14
Le Havre	222 "	238
Bordeaux	219 "	1151
Nantes	217 "	737
La Rochelle	215 "	289
Bayonne	164 "	71
General Average	220 "	2646

The nearby availability of industries allied to the port's commerce may also have had an impact. Bordeaux's thriving sugar refineries and to a lesser extent those of the Loire valley for Nantes contributed no doubt to those ports' colonial economy. Similarly, Le Havre would not have experienced the growth it did in the second half of the eighteenth century without Rouen's textile manufactures and capital. Bayonne put the matter concisely: Its slave trading ventures had failed and its West Indian traffic was languishing, it said, because the port, on the one hand, "... is obliged to draw from other regions almost everything which forms its [outgoing] cargoes..." and, on the other, because "we do not have refineries nearby." Under such conditions, Bayonne "... can hardly sustain the competition of the other ports of the Realm."¹¹⁷ On the other hand, the reverse argument, that a port's traffic supported the nearby industries, is equally convincing. The latter was clearly the case for Nantes' *pacotille* manufactures.¹¹⁸

Not all explanations have to do with the strategic situation of the ports. The loss of capital, as merchants invested in land and offices in an effort to climb the social ladder, has often been argued and it was probably more heavily felt in the older ports, where the bourgeoisie had been longer established, than in the recent ones.¹¹⁹ But the discrepancy between old and new ports in this respect should not be exaggerated. Every commercial centre in France had its share of ennobled, land- or office-holding merchants; those of the most successful ports merely continued to invest and, indeed, at times to participate in the city's commercial activities.¹²⁰ The social mores of the time, with their ideal of living nobly, thus no doubt contributed to the older ports' decline, by permanently removing capital and skilled personnel from them, but it was not an initial cause. Declining traffic and reduced profits simply rendered non-commercial activities or even commercial investments elsewhere increasingly attractive.¹²¹ Similarly, legal and especially fiscal advantages, except perhaps accidentally,¹²² were not a key factor, although the revoking of St. Malo's

The largest French merchant vessel of the period seems to have been *Le Splendide* of Marseilles. It measured 580 *tonneaux*, or some 830 tons. Gaston RAMBERT, "De l'aisance à la fortune, de la fortune à la pauvreté: George Roux de Corse fut l'un des Français les plus riches et les plus puissants du XVIII^e siècle," *Transmondia*, No. 78 (March 1961), p. 23.

¹¹⁷ CC Bayonne to Rouillé, February 1754, AN, Colonies, F²B²; same to Choiseul, November 30, 1762, ACC Bayonne, B26, p. 258.

¹¹⁸ BOULLE, "Slave Trade," *passim*.

¹¹⁹ SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," pp. 126 and 169.

¹²⁰ For examples of this, see BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 85-89; RAMBERT, "George Roux," *passim*.

¹²¹ See the comments of a St. Malo notable, Delalande-Magnon, according to whom St. Malo merchants "... achètent des terres pour conserver quelque chose du debris de leur fortune." Letter to Machault, May 9, 1755, AN, Colonies, F²B².

¹²² BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 76-77.

freeport status in 1667, by drastically cutting into its carrying trade, probably contributed to its decline, and Marseilles' monopoly of the Levant trade immensely helped the latter.¹²³

It remains to note that the decline and rise of certain ports in the eighteenth century is associated with a shift in the importance of particular colonial trades. In sum, the most successful colonial investments of the seventeenth century were in fish, furs and privateers; those of the eighteenth, in sugar and slaves. It happens that the declining ports were associated with the former, while the successful centers placed their emphasis on the latter. To say this, however, is merely to note that the ports which declined did not shift traffic in time and thus remained tied to declining trades. Colonial commerce is no more a primary cause of the shift in trade which the ports experienced in the eighteenth century than other explanations, although it is a remarkably accurate barometer of that shift. We are thus left with the conclusion of a recent analysis of these factors: "No doubt, the number of men, their capital as well as their daring were the fruit of a long past, requiring the support of the explanations given above. But this is the rich complexity of history: Each buttress insufficient; their union is the necessary combination."¹²⁴

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Not only did the years 1749-1755 witness the greatest French commercial expansion of the century, but it now seems apparent that this period was also the turning point for a great many ports. These were the years during which pressures obliged the declining ports to abandon some of their trade relations and permanently limit their ambitions. Such ports as St. Malo, La Rochelle and Bayonne noted with increasing alarm the exodus of their labourers and the decline in number of their merchants.¹²⁵ These same few years also saw the rising ports gain the final edge.¹²⁶ It is clear then that, despite the destructiveness of the Seven Years' War, the very tenuous balance which had existed between the various French ports was being unhinged before its outbreak. Yet, it is undeniable that this war

¹²³ See the comments of CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, pp. 205-06.

¹²⁴ LÉON and CARRIÈRE, in BRAUDEL and LABROUSSE, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, 201.

¹²⁵ Delalande-Magnon to Machault, May 9, 1755, AN, Colonies, F²B²; CC La Rochelle to Rouillé, March 3, 1752, *ibid.*; CC Bayonne to Partyet, January 18, 1752, ACC Bayonne, B24, p. 391; "Memoire sur les faillites," 1754, *ibid.*, G70, no. 16; CC Bayonne to Rouillé, February 1754, AN, Colonies, F²B².

¹²⁶ The declining ports noted this phenomenon, which made their recovery even more problematic. It was not only that they were experiencing a depression; they were experiencing it while their rivals were enjoying an economic boom. CC Bayonne to Dulivier, April 18, 1752, ACC Bayonne, B24, p. 433; CC La Rochelle to Maurepas, April 1, 1749, AN, Colonies, F²B².

accentuated the existing trend. It will be remembered that it began with an extremely costly undeclared war on the French merchant marine and continued with great thoroughness on the part of the British navy. Few were the ports which could afford the losses they experienced in that war. In fact, except for Marseilles and Bordeaux, most French ports had, by 1759, interrupted colonial commerce, the most vulnerable sector of their activities.¹²⁷ Some of them replaced it with privateering, but even this activity was greatly reduced after the first few years of the war.¹²⁸

The Seven Years' War, whose economic impact was particularly severe on France's colonial trade, completed the change begun in this branch by the developments of the previous twenty years. Colonial commerce, requiring a large concentration of capital, was already becoming before the war the domain of a relatively small number of individuals in each "privileged" port.¹²⁹ By eating up the reserves of the smaller *entrepreneurs* in colonial commerce and, thereby, impeding their power of recuperation, the war helped to eliminate a great number of them from the running.¹³⁰

The reshuffling which took place among individuals within each port also happened among the French harbours themselves. In particular, when peace came again, some of the "privileged" ports — those which had already been in some difficulty before the war — found themselves without the capital needed to take up again such expensive ventures as the colonial trade. In consequence, while these ports limited themselves to European

¹²⁷ Save for the crown charters, Bordeaux almost stopped trafficking. CROUZET, in *PARISSET, Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, pp. 299-300. As for Marseilles, its losses were staggering. In 1757 alone, the insurance claims from that port reached 241, the largest number for any year during the eighteenth century. "Registres des déclarations des pertes et prises," 1688-1793, ACC Marseilles, E97-104. And not all vessels were insured. The traffic continued after this, but only at a very reduced rate. RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 327.

¹²⁸ Bayonne totally gave up in 1758. CC Bayonne to Dulivier, April 8, 1758, ACC Bayonne, B26, p. 95. Only Dunkirk and St. Malo continued to send their corsairs out in significant numbers through the years of the war. In the case of the latter, however, the traffic was interrupted for some time as a result of the British attack of 1758. BERTRAND, "Le Port de Dunkerque," p. 349; SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," p. 90. On the effects of the British raid of June 1758, see André DUCASSE, *Études sur la guerre de Sept ans. Le ministère de Belle-Isle: Kreferd et Lütterberg, 1758* (Paris, 1914), pp. 403-04.

¹²⁹ The social and economic differences between international and especially colonial merchants and those involved in the more local, traditional trades were reflected in the names given each in the eighteenth century. Although the frontiers between the two groups were never entirely watertight, the first were called *armateurs* or *négociants*, the second *marchands*. In each port, the first formed an oligarchy, dominating the economy and represented by the chamber of commerce or its local counterpart. For Nantes, see BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 87-88 and especially the description by Francis Lefeuvre, quoted therein: for Bordeaux, see J.-P. POUSSOU, in *PARISSET, Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, pp. 346-57, especially pp. 351-53. See also LÉON, in BRAUDEL and LABROUSSE, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, 610-17.

¹³⁰ See above, footnote 16.

commerce, the more ambitious traffics were left in the hands of a small number of places whose merchants had found sufficient reserves in 1762-1763 to make up quickly the losses which the war had caused.

At the top of the new hierarchy were the ports of Marseilles, Bordeaux and Le Havre, the latter entering into its most rapid period of growth after 1763. These three ports had never entirely lost their activity during the war and answered the news of peace with large colonial expeditions meant to capitalize on the seller's market which wartime shortages had created in America. Within a few years—a few months even in some branches of colonial trade—the commerce of these ports was back to its prewar level. Nantes also recovered quickly, its total tonnage reaching prewar levels as early as 1764 and averaging in the postwar period (1763-1776) 36 percent more than in the previous period of peace (1749-1754).¹³¹ Yet the West Indian and African branches of its trade, which in prewar years had been responsible for growth, were the last to recover. The average figures reached by direct West Indian trade were not achieved again until the end of the decade, save for the exceptional year 1764, the result of a short-run all-out effort immediately after peace was announced. Even worse, the prewar slave trade tonnages were not matched until 1783, and the more crucial statistics for slaves imported into the West Indies never again. Similar declines were experienced in certain types of West Indian imports. The deficits in these trade were made up by increased figures for European commerce. Indeed, although the port's volume of trade continued to grow until the French Revolution, its rate of increase declined constantly, both in relationship to the contemporary achievements of the three pace-setters and in relationship to Nantes' own prewar statistics. Despite the volume of its trade, which still placed Nantes among the leaders, the port was no longer one of the innovators, especially in its colonial traffics.¹³²

The case of La Rochelle is even more striking; in a sense, it is also more tragic. It will be remembered that, even before the war, La Rochelle's position among the great French harbors was shaky, and the loss in the war of Canada, a colony which was more important for La Rochelle than for any other port, severely affected it. Under the circumstances, it would not have surprised anyone to see La Rochelle aban-

¹³¹ On Marseilles, see the figures found in RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 654; on Bordeaux, see those in MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux, XVIII^e*, pp. 306-07 and 310-17; on Le Havre, see those in DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 222-23, 415 and 611.

¹³² Statistics from MEYER, *L'Armement nantais*, pp. 83-85; JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes*, pp. 224-27 and 256; and MARTIN, *L'Ère des négriers*, plate VII. Meyer, who notes these changes (*L'Armement nantais*, pp. 82 and 88), terms them "incidences mineures" (*ibid.*, p. 250). For my comments on Meyer's views, see BOULLE, "Slave Trade," pp. 105-06.

don its colonial ambitions. The contrary occurred. Perhaps because they were driven by desperation, its merchants showed an unmatched spirit of daring and adventure in the 1760's. Needing to increase the other colonial branches of their commerce to make up their lost Canadian ties, they were among the first in France to think of copying Nantes' triangular trade.¹³³ More important, they ventured into the less developed regions of the French American empire. They were realistic enough to know that they had little chance in a competition with their colleagues of Bordeaux, Nantes and Marseilles for a larger share of commerce on the main West Indian islands; while therefore they continued what commerce they had with Martinique and St. Domingue, it is on their ties with Louisiana that they placed the heaviest emphasis. From this colony, they hoped to receive some of the goods which Canada had previously furnished to them.¹³⁴ Perhaps their ambitions were above their means; no doubt, the geographical factors which had placed their port at a disadvantage before the war continued to play against them; it was, however, most unfortunate that, through no fault of their own, they were deprived of the area where they had made their greatest efforts. For, unbeknownst to them, the French government had given away Louisiana to the Spanish. The laws regulating foreign commerce were applied after 1772 to the products of the ex-colony and La Rochelle's trade with the Mississippi valley fell to nothing.¹³⁵ Despite some new efforts to reorient their activities once again, this time toward India,¹³⁶ La Rochelle did not really recover from the blow. Well before the end of the century, it was reduced to the level of a subsidiary port.¹³⁷

Nantes and La Rochelle had been among the prewar leaders. If they were forced by the war to reduce their ambitions, so were the lesser ports. Except for some international trade, the latter settled into supporting roles, those of supplying their more fortunate colleagues with local products and of retailing along the coast the colonial and international goods brought to France by the great harbors. Such a role had been that of Marseilles' client harbors in Languedoc and Provence even before the war.¹³⁸ The ports of Brittany began to take on that function for their major

¹³³ "Memoire" of CC La Rochelle to Rouillé d'Orfeuil, November 1762, AN, Colonies, F²B².

¹³⁴ GARNAULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, V, 364-65. By 1768, La Rochelle had become a major supplier of Louisiana and one of its most important exporters. Pierre H. BOULLE, "French Reactions to the Louisiana Revolution of 1768," in John F. MCDERMOTT, ed., *The French in the Mississippi Valley* (Urbana, Ill., 1965), p. 154.

¹³⁵ GARNAULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, V, 365-66.

¹³⁶ The Company's monopoly had just been abolished. *Ibid.*, pp. 299-305, 326 and 334-36.

¹³⁷ SÉE, *L'Évolution commerciale*, p. 243.

¹³⁸ RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, la vie commerciale*, pp. 333-39 and 392-408; Gaston RAMBERT, "Toulon et l'exportation des vins provençaux par Marseille au XVIII^e siècle," *Provence historique*, XII (1962), 20-26.

Atlantic colleagues after the Seven Years' War.¹³⁹ A somewhat similar transformation took place in the Seine River basin, where Rouen merchants relinquished most of their direct sea trade to take on a supporting role to their partners in Le Havre. They supplied the latter with capital and served as their middlemen with inland suppliers and clients, whether from Rouen or from further up the Seine. Unlike St. Malo or Bayonne, however, Rouen thus entered into a new career in which it would reap new benefits.¹⁴⁰

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Lack of sufficient reserves, the bounds of tradition, the limiting factors of geography or even ill fortune, which have served as explanations for the reshuffle following the Seven Years' War, are not entirely responsible for the difference from port to port in the speed and completeness of their recovery from the effects of the war, the first major indication of the above-mentioned reshuffle. No doubt, these factors explain the lowering sights with which such ports as St. Malo met the postwar world; they explain also the degradation of Bayonne's commercial activities, already begun well before the war; they may even be the cause of La Rochelle's disappointed postwar expectations. They do not fully explain the declining growth of such a port as Nantes, which remained one of the great harbors of the period, endowed with very advanced commercial methods, and which emerged from the war with sufficient reserves to carry through to its conclusion an already-begun program of municipal construction equalled in France only by the better-known campaign in Bordeaux.

Paradoxically, it may be the modernity of Nantes' commercial methods which was at the root of the port's difficulties. What made the methods of Nantes modern was the port's specialization, not only in the slave trade, but in a slave trade based on advanced industrial processes foreshadowing the mass-production techniques of a later century. Nantes may have been over-specialized for the period.

It is striking to note that the ports which recovered most quickly from the Seven Years' War were those with the most varied trade relations. Though playing a crucial role in Marseilles' commerce, the colonial traffic of that port was greatly overshadowed by its Mediterranean

¹³⁹ SÉE, "Le Commerce maritime de la Bretagne," pp. 175-200; René DURAND, "Le Commerce de la Bretagne au XVIII^e siècle," *Annales de Bretagne*, XXXII (1917), 447-69.

¹⁴⁰ Pierre DARDEL, *Commerce, industrie et navigation à Rouen et au Havre au XVIII^e siècle* (Rouen, 1966), pp. 231 and 260; DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, pp. 246-47. The interdependence of Rouen and Le Havre (as well as Honfleur) was not new; it existed as early as 1717, when a governmental decree recognized the three ports as a single unit for the purpose of collecting duties. *Arrêt* of August 28, 1717, cited in DARDEL, *Commerce, industrie et navigation*, pp. 351-53. What was new was the reversal of roles between Rouen and Le Havre, at least in maritime affairs.

connections, particularly those with the Levant, with Spain and with Italy. Bordeaux's colonial commerce was more important, ranging from 34 to 50 percent of its total traffic in the eighteenth century,¹⁴¹ but it was so widespread that a reverse in one branch was likely to be accompanied by a success in another. As for Le Havre and its partners on the Seine, their interest were probably the farthest ranging in France. On the other hand, Nantes and La Rochelle were committed to one or two major lines. Commercial reverses were difficult for them to repair. They and also Bayonne, which relied so heavily on Spanish commerce, suffered from an unbalance similar to that of Lyons, the economic welfare of which, mainly connected with textile manufacturing, was at the mercy of any disturbance, whether national or international, whether climatic or political.¹⁴² Over-specialization was not the sole cause of a city's decline; the case of Lyons is proof of this, for the city survived the Seven Years' War and numerous other crises to retain its position as the major French industrial city for another century or so. When, however, specialization was combined with other factors, it tended to trigger a prolonged period of decadence, such as befell the port of La Rochelle, or at least hinder growth, as in Nantes.

Thus, the Seven Years' War seems to have been more easily borne by the ports where commerce was not yet fully specialized. However, it created the conditions for a new drive toward rationalization, the outcome of which was a commercial distribution system in which some ports carried the brunt of the international trade while others served as their retailers. In a sense, therefore, the Seven Years' War had a beneficial effect, as all crises tend to have. The Peace of Paris, by retaining for France the crucial regions of colonial trade — the West Indies and a base in Africa — at the expense of nearly all else and especially Canada, served to rationalize colonial trade. Ports which had once been great fell by the wayside as a result of this rationalization. Nantes and La Rochelle too, despite the vision and imagination of their merchants, were the victims of this process of adaptation. Still entrapped in the earlier system, by which each port worked independently of the others, they declined before the interdependence of all French ports had been created and had, in the process, developed sufficient new markets to insure the success of the methods Nantes had initiated and La Rochelle followed.

¹⁴¹ CROUZET, in PARISET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 198n.

¹⁴² PARISET, *La Chambre de commerce de Lyon*, I, 26 and 68-71.

APPENDIX

Table III is constructed from a variety of sources, generally of local origins. These sources are not equally reliable, nor do they all cover exactly the same years. As a result, they are not entirely consistent with each other. Furthermore, monetary values are not available for all areas of French colonial trade. In some cases, it was nevertheless possible to remedy the deficiency by reaching an estimate through a more or less complicated process of interpolation. However, the more complicated the process, the larger the margin of error and, consequently, the less reliable the answer. Such results are placed in parentheses to indicate that they are particularly unreliable approximations.

The process through which such evaluations have been reached, as well as the specific source for and years covered by each of the various statistics of the table, is described below. When missing in the Appendix, first references to works cited therein are found in footnotes 1-21 of the text.

FRANCE: The figure for the slave trade refers to the worth of this commerce during the period 1750-1756. It was tabulated from the numbers given in "Mémoire [sur la] Traite des Nègres." 1762 (AN, Colonies, M1024), and from the average value of 1,000 *livres* per slave sold in the West Indies during the period (Théophile MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux, depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, III. XVIII^e siècle [Bordeaux, 1892], p. 208). It may be noted here that the price cited by Malvezin may be too moderate for the period 1750-1756. Another scholar quotes the price of 1,300 *livres* as an average for the year 1753, and for adult males sold in St. Domingue between 1750 and 1755 prices ranging from 1,160 to 1,400 *livres*. Lucien Pierre PEYTRAUD, *L'Esclavage aux Antilles françaises avant 1789* (Paris, 1897), p. 126. The value of the cod fishing (1750-1755) was tabulated through a lengthy and complicated process of interpolation from the figures given for each port of France in Charles DE LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française de la morue dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (3 vols.; Paris, 1962-1966), II, 525-612. The number of fishing vessels sent by each port to North America in the period was recorded (this number at times represents a yearly average based on a number of years; more frequently, it is the number given for a single year; sometimes, it is a mere estimation). Whenever a number of vessels and a value for their cargo was given, an average per ship was recorded and applied to the vessel number for the years 1749-1756. In most cases, however, figures available for the value of the catch were found only for the post-1763 period. When no value could be found, the average worth for all the other ports was utilized. The figure arrived at does not differ significantly from that reached through the interpolation of the statistics found in ARNOULD, *Balance du commerce*, III, table 2E. This table provides figures only for the years 1716 and 1787. Assuming that the cod fishing industry grew evenly throughout the century, one reaches an annual figure of 8.6 million *livres* for the years 1750-1756. Nor does the number of vessels tabulated in the manner described above (366) vary very much from La Morandière's final estimate of approximately 390 vessels for the year 1754, "l'une des meilleures pour le commerce morutier français" (*Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 635). All other figures come from ARNOULD, *Balance du commerce*, III, tables 10-13. The years to which they refer are 1749-1755. A look at these years on Léon's graph, in BRAUDEL and LABROUSSE, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, II, 502, gives somewhat smaller averages for the total colonial trade (imports: ca. 87 million *livres*; exports: ca. 43 million *livres*). However, the graph probably does not include the cod fisheries.

BORDEAUX: The slave statistics are deducted from CROUZET, in PARISSET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 238, according to which 37 slaving vessels left Bordeaux between 1749 and 1755. The value of this trade was reached by prorating the number of slaves per ship from available statistics for Nantes and taking the average cash value of each slave from above. The fishing statistics refer to the year 1767, during which 41 vessels unloaded their cargo in Bordeaux (LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 599). Approximately the same number of vessels is given by the same source for the year 1742 (*ibid.*, II, 598) and it was assumed that the trade did not vary significantly between these two dates. All other statistics refer to the period 1750-1755. They stem from tables 3, 5 and 6 in MALVEZIN, *Histoire du commerce de Bordeaux, XVIII^e*, pp. 306-07 and 310-17. West Indian imports are given in Robert BOUTRUCHE, *Bordeaux et le commerce des Antilles au XVIII^e siècle* (Orléans, [1935]), p. 14n, as equal to two-thirds of the total imports of Bordeaux. The figures for West Indian exports are prorated from tonnage figures in my Table II.

NANTES: Slave trade statistics (1750-1755) are taken from Gaston MARTIN, *Nantes au XVIII^e siècle*, II. *L'Ère des négriers, 1714-1774* (Paris, 1931), plate VII. The value is the same as for FRANCE. Fishing statistics are prorated from the number of vessels in 1738 and 1763, assuming an even decline

of the traffic during the intermediate years. The value is that given for the year 1763 (LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 581). Figures for West Indian imports and all export statistics (1752) are from Paul JEULIN, *L'Évolution du port de Nantes; organisation et trafic depuis les origines* (Paris, 1929), tables I and I bis, pp. 224-27.

MARSEILLES: The figure of 3.1 million *livres* for fishing imports is for codfish imported in the year 1754 (RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 502), identified as "la plus favorable de l'Ancien Régime" by this author as well. The figure stands well within the ones found in LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 608, none of which apply to the years 1750-1755. The figure for American and West African imports (1750-1755) is taken from RAMBERT, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille, les colonies*, p. 654. It includes West Indian imports, which made up the bulk of the trade, and all other American imports. It does not include African commerce, since only one vessel was recorded in the period to have gone from Marseilles to West Africa (*ibid.*, p. 160). Exports to the West Indies (1750-1755) come from *ibid.*, p. 654.

LE HAVRE AND ROUËN: Fishing statistics (ca. 1750) are an average of conflicting figures given for the number of fishing vessels entering Le Havre in BORELY, *Histoire de la ville du Havre*, III, 328, and DARDEL, *Navires et marchandises*, table XXXIX, pp. 614-15. The value of the cargo is prorated from figures for Marseilles. West Indian imports (1753) are taken from *ibid.*, table I, pp. 548-49.

LA ROCHELLE: The value of the slave trade is tabulated in the same manner as that of BORDEAUX and based on the figure of 45 vessels sent to West Africa between 1749 and 1755 (CROUZET, in PARISSET, *Bordeaux au XVIII^e*, p. 238). Fishing statistics are based on the estimated number of vessels entering La Rochelle between 1749 and 1755 and the value of cargoes unloaded in 1764 and 1765 (LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 595-96). All other statistics apply to the years 1750-1754 and are taken from GARNAULT, *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e*, IV, 331.

BAYONNE: Fishing statistics apply to both Bayonne and its neighbor, St. Jean-de-Luz. They are tabulated from the number of vessels sent by these two ports in 1750 and the value of the catch for 1765 (LA MORANDIÈRE, *Histoire de la pêche française*, II, 603-04). West Indian imports and all export figures are taken from the yearly *Récapitulations* of imports and exports for the years 1753-1756, in ACC Bayonne, C31.

COMPAGNIE DES INDES: Same source as for FRANCE. The figures apply to the years 1749-1755.