2022

Tracing Moravian Manufacture, Material Objects and Religious Mission: Transatlantic Textile Journeys

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Internationaler Pietismus-Kongress, Halle 2022

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Introduction

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On July 15, 1749, the Moravian Brother Christian Rauch recorded in the Shamokin mission diary a gift of some blankets and "ein paar Koussen" (a couple of woollen stockings) to the family of the recently deceased Shikellamy. The occasion of this gift was a dispute with local white traders who were trying to trick the recently deceased Oneida chief's grandson out of his horse and recruit the Moravian missionaries to help them in this deceit. Brothers Christian Rauch and David Zeisberger refused to be drawn into the dispute but rather defended the young man's ownership of the stallion. In the mission diary they recorded their presents to him and commented that the last time Brother Martin Mack had been in Shamokin and had distributed gifts to Shikellamy's family, the grandson had been absent, implying that this gift of trade cloth and stockings was to make up for that earlier omission.

> On July 15 (1749)
> Two traders arrived here.[i] Shikellamy's grandchild had a young stallion, which they wanted because they said it belonged to them, that's why the traders wanted it. David was supposed to translate for them and help them strengthen their case, so that the Indian believed them. But David said he understood nothing of such things and did not want to get involved. The Indian understood Delaware, he could speak to him himself.

> He gave the Indian a blanket and a pair of stockings so that he should be content. Because we really needed salt and a few other things and we would really have liked to borrow a horse from the Indian, we spoke to Shikellamy's daughter's husband about it. He was immediately willing and gave us his horse so that we could go to Tulpehocken to fetch some things.[1]

This paper begins with this small detail in a mission diary written in Pennsylvania to investigate what the exchange of textiles might signify within the larger context of material movement across the Atlantic.[2] Was this merely a kind gesture by sympathetic European missionaries towards the family of a close Haudenosaunee ally? Or could it signify a much more nuanced and gendered journey of textile goods from the Moravian manufactories in Yorkshire, England to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and then on to the blacksmith's shop on the Susquehanna River? The paper will trace how cloth woven by Moravian brethren in the West Riding of Yorkshire ended up at the confluence of the Susquehanna River and ask whether its journey reveals the gendered networks of patronage, manufacture, and mission that crisscrossed the Moravian Atlantic in the mid-18th century.

The mission impulse of Zinzendorf and the resultant global reach of the Moravians has been well-researched and documented, and interrogated from feminist, post-colonial and Marxist perspectives. The impetus within Moravian ethnographic collections to recontextualise and re-

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[1] Shamokin Diary, July 15, 1749, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem.

[2] Johnson, Laura E. ""Goods to clothe themselves"." *Winterthur Portfolio 43*, no. 1 (2009): 115-140. Accessed March 21, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1086/597283. Nederveen Meerkerk, Elise van. "Threads of Imperialism: Colonial Institutions and Gendered Labour Relations in the Textile Industry in the Dutch Empire." In *Colonialism, Institutional Change and Shifts in Global Labour Relations*, edited by Karin Hofmeester and Pim de Zwart, 135–72. Amsterdam University Press, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv62hdhw.8. Also Daniel Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonialism,* Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1992 75-84 and Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2001.

present the objects that were collected on those mission trips is well underway. However, the object of this paper is not to examine the removal and decontextualization of indigenous cultural objects to Europe but rather to follow the transfer of Moravian wares in the other direction, from the West Riding of Yorkshire to North America. How might the journey of these material objects lead to a re-examination of assumptions about race, gender and work in the spaces traversed by 18th-century Moravian missionaries?

To aid me in this enquiry I start by referring to the recent book, *Black Bodies, White Gold*, by Princeton art historian Anna Arabindan-Kesson which examines the semiotic function of cotton in 19th-century art in her analysis of the racialized discourses of transatlantic production and representation of cotton. Thinking of cotton as currency allows us to recognize how the material was tightly bound to commerce in enslaved peoples and the commodification of raced bodies. She writes, ”Seeing how commodities moved and physically connected different places gave nineteenth--century audiences a way to understand their relationship to the market and to visualize their relationship to, and their place in, an ever-- changing world. These descriptions of cotton shaped a global imaginary. (p. 5)

I would like to argue that in perhaps parallel fashion, Moravian woollen production of specifically trade cloth and the representation of that cloth in artistic renderings and mission reports that were distributed also connect financially and aesthetically the commodity of cloth and the commodification of Native American bodies, not in enslavement as is the argument in the cotton trade, but in the expansion of the Moravian mission world. The Moravian Atlantic trade moved specific cloth types that had been woven to be exchanged and gifted to Native Americans and this trade bore fruit in the “profit” of access and protection for the missionaries in Native American territories.

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As an example of this semiotics of woollen trade cloth within the Moravian imaginary, we see in this undated painting by Valentin Haidt, which was proudly hung in Zinzendorf's Chelsea home, and depicts the 1742 diplomatic agreement between the chiefs of the Haudenosaunee and Zinzendorf where the focal point is the donation of trade or stroud cloth to Shikellamy. How might this moment fit within the context of missions and the movement of textiles?

Material in the Mission Space

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In her detailed investigation of her archaeological finds of fragments of fabric at Otstonwakin, on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, anthropologist Dr Mary Ann Levine explains their significance by arguing that "Cloth played a crucial role in shaping the fur trade and constructing colonial identities throughout the Eastern Woodlands." (Levine 53) In fact, she argues that the term "fur trade" should instead be referred to as the "cloth trade" as Native Americans were highly discerning consumers who had a strong demand for cloth as well as for scissors, needles, and thread with which to create clothing. (Levine 53) Some kinds of cloth (stroud) was produced specifically for the Native American market by weavers in Stroud, Gloucestershire where it was dyed deep red or blue and then traded in the British colonies. Because cloth however does not fare well in soil and disintegrates, much of the material evidence of clothing from the North Eastern Indians has been the better preservable fragments of fur, leading to the assumption that furs and not cloth were more prevalent in the trading cultures of the North East. However, both the archival record and from pictorial evidence (portrait of Shikellamy and Sa Ga Yeath Qua

Pieth Tow (Brandt) in Levine article we can see that cloth was a powerful tool of diplomacy, communication, and cultural mediation. (Levine 61)

In the records in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, PA and Fulneck, Yorkshire we find evidence that not only stroud from Gloucestershire was part of this transatlantic material trade but also that the Moravian weavers of West Yorkshire were producing cloth for the mission field of the Moravians in Pennsylvania and New York and that they were spurred on to weave for this market by the mission reports that came from Zinzendorf and Anna Nitschmann on their return from America to England in 1743. In fact, Anna Nitschmann's and Zinzendorf's accounts of the work in the nascent mission field in Pennsylvania and New York bore many types of fruit, some literally material. Specifically, on her return to London from America, Anna Nitschmann travelled immediately with Zinzendorf and his daughter, Benigna, north to Yorkshire, where Spangenberg and his first wife Eva Maria had been organizing the awakened societies of Benjamin Ingham.

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In what was to become Fulneck, Anna began her work among the single sisters, conducting Speakings and preaching to the local population. In one of the few letters that survived the purging of the archives after her and Zinzendorf's deaths in 1760, Anna writes that the Yorkshire congregations (sometimes in crowds of over 1000) were like "hungry bees," eager to hear her speaking about her experiences in Pennsylvania, and especially her stories of the Lenape women she met while working in the fields around Nazareth. Once back in London, her work continued where she met with and preached (in English) to a group of thirty young women in the Fetter Lane Chapel. The force of her speaking was palpable. Anna writes: "On Sunday I held a Qr of an Hour with 30 young women together with 3 Bands. I with 10 Laborers and the 2

others with each 10 Sisters. I can make use of my little English here very well." And, she tells these English women, perhaps as a form of challenge, "Don't you know, my Dr. Br. that the Bethlehem Brethren and Sisters are remarkable above all others?"

Women and Mission Reports

According to the archivist of the Fulneck congregation, Sister Hilary Smith, woollen goods began to be donated to the Pennsylvania missions almost as soon as Anna Nitschmann and Zinzendorf left Yorkshire and London. For example, the London Diary records that Brother Thomas Moore (25.12.1705 - 22.2.1769) from Beeston in Leeds who had been working with James Hutton in London during the visit of Ingham and John Toeltschig, returned to Leeds to work as a dealer in wool and cloth. In 1743, on Valentine's Day, the London Diary records that he donated £55 to the SFG and also intended to send forty pounds worth of woollen goods to Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, while Anna and Zinzendorf had been in America, Spangenberg and his first wife, Eva Maria, had been sent to Yorkshire to organize and lead the societies that Benjamin Ingham had founded. Indeed, the presence of Brother and Sister Spangenberg in Yorkshire is key to tracing the material movement of goods and mission reports between Yorkshire and Pennsylvania. Reverend Abraham Reincke, the Single Brethren's Labourer in Yorkshire writes: "So actively did Spangenberg and his fellow-labourers in the Gospel prosecute the work, entrusted to them by Ingham in the summer of 1742, that within less than two years there were forty-seven points in the West Riding, at which they statedly met inspiring souls for prayer, for exhortation and for reading of the scriptures. Most of these were the clothing towns and hamlets that clustered about the boroughs and market towns of Leeds, Halifax, Huddersfield, Wakefield,

Bradford and Dewsbury." And it was these forty seven points from which material goods were sent to Pennsylvania.

The chief purveyor of cloth and notions from Yorkshire to Pennsylvania was the fledgling Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel.[3] Inspired by the accounts of work with the Native Americans that were given by Anna Nitschmann and Count Zinzendorf on their return from America in 1743 to the congregations in Yorkshire who had been awakened by the itinerant preaching of Benjamin Ingham, the Society was eager to send whatever might be useful to the missions in Pennsylvania. In 1745, for example, the wife of Benjamin Ingham, Lady Margaret Hastings, donated a large amount of cloth and notions to the SFG to be sent to Pennsylvania, including fifty blankets for the Indians or their "Labourers", forty eight yards of coarse blue cloth for the stockings or for other clothing for the Indians and 40 yards of strong flaxen linen for shirts for the Indian messengers."

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The Yorkshire Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel was very careful to record the value of the goods destined for Pennsylvania.

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The gifts were accompanied by an invoice that enumerated the monetary value of the commodities being transported across the Atlantic. Of particular significance here are the fifty blankets for the Indians. The value of each blanket was approximately 15/- (shillings) therefore just the blankets are worth £37 10/-. Subsequent letters from the Yorkshire society repeatedly ask Spangenberg, who is now in Bethlehem, whether the goods have arrived, are they useful,

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[3] Jensz, Felicity. "Overcoming Objections to Print: The Moravian *Periodical Accounts* and the Pressure of Publishing in Eighteenth-Century Britain." *Journal of Moravian History* 15, no. 1 (2015): 1–28. https://doi.org/10.5325/jmorahist.15.1.0001.

what else is needed. The Yorkshire Society also expected that the carriage costs should be covered by their Bethlehem counterparts which they did.

Receiving no response to their request for confirmation of receipt or payment of passage in 1746, a letter is sent to Bethlehem from Yorkshire in which the Society asks for news from the mission field so that more goods can be sent. Then in July 20th 1746 another letter is sent in which the request for news is a little more pointed, "*We desire that you would from time to time send us over some short Accounts (which we shall thankfully receive) how you go on and how it is with you. Please also to let us know what Sorts of Things will be most useful to you. We have herewith sent you some cloth, serge, and checks for shirts and cloths, the particulars hereafter mentioned which we desire may be acceptable to you. We pray let us have a Line from some of you to inform us and mention the particulars; because we have never yet heard whether you have received those already sent."* There have been no letters recorded in the archives in Fulneck from Bethlehem to confirm either receipt, or give details of the distribution of the goods.

However, the account books of the SFG in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, contain an entry for the freight of sundry goods from London in May 1746 from the SPG in Yorkshire in the amount of £1 17/4. These same account books of the SFG in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem also reveal the lively movement of materials and goods both to and from the mission site at Shamokin and Gnadenhütten in Pennsylvania, and Shekomeko in Dutchess County New York.

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For example, on February 26, 1749 there is a record of paying Sr. Martha Powell (who had worked as a missionary in Shamokin with her husband Joseph Powell from 1747-1748) £1 for a silver chain she had given to Shikellamy. In 1750, the mission receives from Bethlehem

sugar, coffee, chocolate, tea, soap, spices, harnesses for the horses, as well as shot, lead, wire, and powder. In return Shamokin sends deer, fox, bobcat, otter and racoon skins, that are received as payment from Native Americans for work done at the blacksmith's shop. In 1751 the SFG pays for ¾ yard of stroud to be given to a Brother to go to Shamokin (5 /7 ½) and then in return a month later £5 12/10 worth of skins are brought back from there (deer skins, beaver, wolf, raccoon).

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In June 1755, shortly before the mission is abandoned in October due to the outbreak of hostilities associated with the Seven Years War, over £18 worth of animal skins are delivered from Shamokin (50 deer skins, 2 beaver pelts, 21 raccoon pelts, fox, cat and muskrat). Given that these were received in payment for the repair of weapons it seems that business on the Susquehanna was brisk. Indeed in the Shamokin Diary a few months later, Brother Roesler records that the job of repairing the blood covered weapons of their customers was very worrying but what were they "poor Brethren" to do.

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Thus trade cloth was clearly being transported to Shamokin in return for the animal skins that the Six Nations used to pay for blacksmoth's services. But trade cloth and goods from Yorkshire were also vital to diplomatic missions deeper into Iroquoia. When Brothers Cammerhof and Zeisberger travel into Onondago territory in May 1750 (as per the agreement made with the Six Nations in 1749 so that the latter could learn the Iroquois language) they take with then £50 worth of presents for the Onondago nation: almost £30 of silver chains, medals, rings; 20lbs of tobacco, stroud cloth, stockings, linen, blankets, and the usual coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, flints, powder, lead, pipe shanks, biscuit and soap. By far the single most valuable

item is however the wampum used to signify the keeping of ones word at a conference–worth £9 5/-.

The Role of Gender or who profits in the Journey of Material Goods

In her groundbreaking study of the economic structures of the Bethlehem settlement in the 18th century, Kate Carté calls the exchange of goods with Native Americans, Bethlehem's third economic system (alongside transatlantic and local trade) (Religion and Profit, 123) Although the motive of profit was, according to Carté, never the driving factor in trade with the missions, exchanges were still recorded in economic terms. That is, as we have seen with the gifts from Yorkshire and those items intended for Onondago, all goods were given a monetary value and recorded. Losses were also recorded; skins did not fetch the recorded value on the market; goods were spoiled or lost in transit. Also profit was not the goal of the investment in the blacksmith's shop at Shamokin, for example. However, diplomatic benefit was calculated in terms of good relations with the Six Nations and subsequent permission for Zeisberger and Cammerhof to travel into their territories to learn the languages of the Haudenosaunee. Thus the movement of goods from the weavers of Yorkshire and the silversmiths of New York and Lancaster into the territories of the Haudenosaunee bore a different fruit.

But, as is found repeatedly in the mission diaries of Shamokin and Gnadenhütten, this trade between the Moravians and Native populations (Lenape and Haudenosaunee) did not profit the latter either. At the confluence of the Susquehanna River the Native Americans were frequently described as hungry, unable to find food, or grow it, or hunt for it. Displaced from the environments that grew the foodstuffs of their culture, the peoples around Shamokin starved.

Able to only receive goods (usually liquor) in return for skins they had hunted, the Native Americans could not enter into the trading markets of the settler colonists.

The role of the Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel was, as Carté has pointed out, to ensure the movement of goods between the missions and the home societies in Yorkshire or London. And within that movement of goods, the Native Americans are usually accounted for as costs (for example, questions are repeatedly asked in their ledgers about who is going to pay for the upkeep of the Indianerkinder). Given the repeated requests for accounts, stories of the missions, it could be said however that not only were the Native Americans considered to be costs, they also were the desired objects of a different sort of consumption.

Slide 16 (network)

The role of women in these networks of textile exchange is vital; whether as spinners of wool and worsted fiber, wives of weavers, benefactors, patrons, mission reporters (Anna Nitschmann) or missionaries (see my work on women's networks). And these gendered activities were amplified by powerful representations (verbal and pictorial) of signs of both material manufacture and the "fruits" of its trade in the promotion of the project of Christianization. As Thomas Dorfner has shown in his work on the financing of the Moravian mission activities in Labrador (https://www.epoch-magazine.com/dorfnermammonformissionarywork) where "raising donations was clearly one of the primary tasks of the organisation (SFG), which had been set up in 1741" and where fundraising events included for maximum effect '"Br. & Sr Beck" appeared "with their Daughter […] in the Esquimaux habit"." the demonstration of the placement of stroud/trade cloth in the mission, represented symbolically the spiritual "profit" of donations.