

Chapter 13

Sweden and the Atlantic: The Dynamism of Sweden's Colonial Projects in the Eighteenth Century

Eric Schnakenbourg

Introduction

The earliest projects for establishing a Swedish presence in the Americas date from the early seventeenth century. They were designed by the Dutch, seeking Gustavus Adolphus' protection and approval in order to attack Spanish possessions and to be involved in the lucrative smuggling trade (Hildebrand 1899:72; Roberts 1953:271). It was not until 1638, with the founding of the colony of New Sweden, that the Swedes were first established on the American side of the Atlantic. This experience was short-lived, however, because in 1655 the Dutch seized the colony. In 1785, a treaty signed the previous year in Paris enabled the Swedish flag to fly once again over a territory in the Americas, as a result of the transfer of the Caribbean island of St. Barthélemy to King Gustaf III (Fig. 13.1). This 130-year absence from the Americas should not lead us to believe that the Scandinavian kingdom turned its back on the Atlantic region. On the contrary, during this long period, Sweden's interest in the American world continued unabated, as evidenced by several plans to found colonies in the Caribbean or on the South American continent. At the same time, economic ties, both direct and indirect, were growing between Sweden and the Americas. It is in this long-term perspective that we must consider the acquisition of St. Barthélemy, which made Sweden the last European country to establish itself in the Americas. The late arrival of the Swedes and the small size of their colony explain the fact that their aspirations in the New World have long been neglected by historians outside Sweden, especially by the French who have never asked themselves why

E. Schnakenbourg (✉)
Centre de Recherches en Histoire Internationale et Atlantique,
Université de Nantes, Institut Universitaire de France,
6E avenue du Clos du Cens, 44300 Nantes, France
e-mail: eric.schnakenbourg@univ-nantes.fr

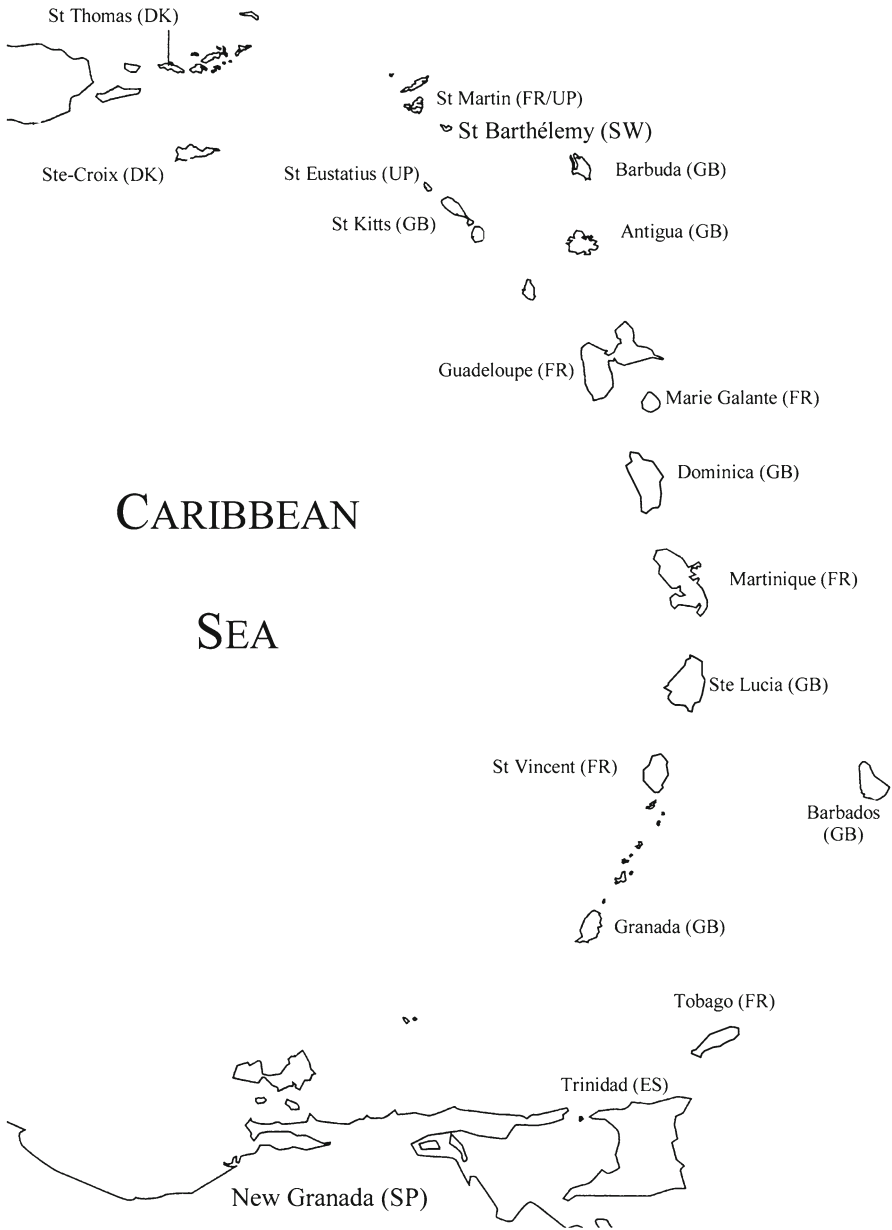


Fig. 13.1 The Caribbean in 1784. European colonies: *DK* Denmark; *FR* France; *GB* Great Britain; *SP* Spain; *SW* Sweden; *UP* United Provinces (drawing by the author)

Louis XVI gave one of his islands to Gustaf III. The Swedes have been relegated not only to the shadows of the great European colonial powers, but also behind other actors who were by then considered secondary, such as the Dutch and the

Danes. Adopting an historical approach to the Atlantic world that is not limited merely to its shores enables us to reconsider the appearance of Sweden in the Caribbean within a global perspective. Hildebrand's classic study on the first years of Swedish rule in St. Barthélemy does not take into account that this settlement was, in fact, the end result of a long process (Hildebrand 1951). He does not consider that long before obtaining the island, Sweden had already been active on the colonial stage and was involved in the Atlantic world through its foreign exchanges, even though it did not possess a territory in the Caribbean. This chapter seeks to show that, despite the late acquisition of the small island of St. Barthélemy, Sweden developed important connections with the Atlantic throughout the eighteenth century, which encouraged its ambitions in the Americas.

Sweden's Early Interest in the Atlantic World

The acquisition of the island of Tobago was a recurrent objective for the Swedes from the second half of the seventeenth century. This territory belonged to the Duke of Courland, who did not develop it due to a lack of resources. The island was known in Sweden through accounts of the sailors serving on Courland's ships, which occasionally travelled to the island from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. In the 1690s, a former governor of Tobago, Otto Schmoll, pointed out the value of this virtually deserted island to the King of Sweden, Charles XI. Although the project eventually came to naught, the idea of acquiring territory in the American tropics was thus firmly planted in Stockholm (Macau 1974:3–5; Weiss 2010:46). The Tobago project would resurface several times over the eighteenth century, primarily promoted by Jonas Alströmer, the pioneer of Swedish agricultural modernisation and manufacturing. In the acquisition of this fertile island, Alströmer saw the advantages that could be gained by importing raw materials from the colonies (sugar and tobacco), which could then be processed and sold in the North. His economic analysis was also supported by the King of Sweden Frederick I's claims to the island, as the King was the nephew of Duke Ferdinand of Courland, who had no direct descendants. At Ferdinand's death in 1737, Sweden organised a first expedition of 25 families, not enough settlers to found a colony, but sufficient to arouse the hostility of England and Spain (Anderson 1961:135–140). The project resurfaced again in 1745, thanks to Stockholm merchants Abraham and Jacob Arfwedson. They obtained the privilege for their future West India Company to trade in the Americas, and they were to colonise Tobago and Barima; yet they abandoned the project the following year due to Spanish protest (*Ihro Königl. Maj:t gnädiges ...*, 1745; Müller 2002:101). During the Seven Years' War, the French promised to give Tobago to Sweden in return for its help invading Scotland (Dull 2009:202). However, in 1763, Tobago was officially recognised as a British possession by the peace treaty of Paris. Nevertheless, the Swedes did not

give up and still hoped to acquire the island when a new conflict broke out between France and Great Britain in 1776.

The other major objective in the Americas was Barima, a territory of undetermined sovereignty located on a branch of the Orinoco River delta between Dutch and Spanish possessions. During the 1730s, as part of an overall policy to develop long-distance trade, the Swedes planned a settlement at Barima. The frigate *Fortuna* was even sent there to evaluate the area. Once again, however, the project did not come to fruition but did arouse the concern of the Dutch and Spanish, who were very hostile to the idea of the Swedes settling in their vicinity (Hildebrand 1899:77–80; Paulin 1951; Anderson 1961:141–145). The incident in Porto Novo in 1733, in which a Swedish warehouse on the Coromandel Coast in India was jointly destroyed by the British and the French, was a reminder to the Swedes that they had arrived on the colonial scene after more powerful countries had already established themselves (Gill 1958:47–65). That was why, in the diet of 1738, the Board of Trade (*Kommerskollegium*) advocated diplomacy and negotiation with other powers, such as Spain, in order to obtain unoccupied territories in the Americas. In 1755, merchants from Stockholm asked the Swedish ambassador in Madrid to negotiate with the Spanish government to purchase one of its undeveloped islands. In particular, they hoped to obtain Crab Island (today the island of Vieques), located southeast of Puerto Rico (A.N. B3/418; RA, Gallica, 446, Creutz to Gustaf III, 3 and 13 January, 28 February 1782). In 1774, two British adventurers, Andrew Orr and James Monsell, offered King Gustaf III the opportunity to obtain the island of Puerto Rico from the Spaniards in exchange for trading privileges. The King of Sweden was enthusiastic about this project and ordered his ambassador in Madrid to enter into negotiations (Essén 1928:226–229; Müller 2002:173). Yet, the Spanish firmly refused to cede one of their possessions for fear of creating a new channel for smuggling in their colonies.

These repeated attempts to obtain a colony in the Americas are indicative of Sweden's continued interest in the Atlantic trade. Since the seventeenth century, they had developed several business ventures in this region. The first market they sought to invest in was that of the gold and slave trade from their ports on the Gold Coast. The *Afrikakompaniet* was the first lucrative Swedish company in the Atlantic world. In 1650, it gained the right to supply slaves to the Portuguese colony of São Tomé and to bring back sugar. Seven years later, it was authorised to supply slaves to the Dutch island of Curacao. In the end, over fourteen years of activity, this Swedish company transported between 1,500 and 2,000 slaves (Nováky 1990; Weiss 2010:52). The Dutch conquest of Swedish forts in Guinea in 1663 put an end to this trade. However, the memory of this venture and seeing the profits that the Danes made from the slave trade explain why continuing in this business remained a goal for the Swedes. This was part of an overall colonial development strategy which tended to emphasise the production of raw goods that could only come from plantations using slave labour. Without a tropical territory that would enable them to have their own means of production, the Swedes sought instead to obtain permission to trade through other powerful countries, as exemplified by negotiations with the Spanish in the early 1670s (Storrs 2006:345).

Sweden's Increasing Integration into Atlantic Trade

The building of sugar refineries in Stockholm in the second half of the seventeenth century clearly shows that this product arrived in the Swedish capital in raw form (Rönnbäck 2010:112). This business, managed by the Dutch, connected Sweden to the Atlantic economy with its rivalling powers. Thus, at the turn of the eighteenth century, French agents travelling to Sweden were told to learn about the refinery in Stockholm and to convince Sweden to use raw sugar from the French colonies instead of Portuguese Brazil (A.N., Marine, B7/222, fol. 279; A.N., Affaires étrangères, B1/1071, fol. 337). The construction of new sugar refineries in Stockholm and Gothenburg during the eighteenth century also attests to Sweden's growing participation in Atlantic trade, which was strengthened even further by the role that Scandinavian iron played in Britain's expansion westward. Starting in the 1670s, London and later Bristol became key markets for the Swedish iron industry. Iron of ordinary quality was one of the goods traded for slaves in the Gulf of Guinea. Better-quality iron served as the basis for hardware, part of which was exported to Britain's American colonies. In return, British merchants brought colonial products to the North (Evans and Rydén 2007 and this volume). These indirect Swedish connections established by the iron trade are reminiscent of those from the herring trade. In fact, the British West Indies were important export markets for herring from the region of Bohuslän, on the west coast of Sweden. A small portion (3–4 % in 1766–1770) of fish was shipped directly to the West Indies from Gothenburg and Marstrand. Yet, most of the goods passed through intermediary hubs such as Amsterdam or, more often, through the Irish port of Cork where they were redirected to the British colonies to feed slaves. Part of the Swedish herring trade was also intended for slaves on the Portuguese island of Madeira (Högberg 1969:175–177). The lack of territory in the Atlantic, therefore, did not prevent Sweden from being involved directly or indirectly in trade in the Americas.

These mercantile exchanges were built on trade networks that were composed of European, Caribbean and American merchants. Since the seventeenth century, the Dutch had been the primary middlemen between Sweden and the colonial ports, but in the eighteenth century, it was the British who played the most important role. The businesses of Irish and Scottish entrepreneurs, often Jacobite refugees who had settled in Gothenburg, allowed Sweden to become part of the Atlantic economy through those entrepreneurs' international trade networks, which extended to the British Isles and cities on the Atlantic coast (Müller 2007:147–174). However, recourse to intermediaries cut into the profits of Swedish merchants, who wanted to trade directly with the colonial markets. Their determination was ignited and encouraged by the high profits that the Danes made from their three Caribbean islands during the Anglo-French wars of the eighteenth century (Felbæk 1997:46–47). The Swedes also took advantage of these periods to profit from their neutrality. From the beginning of the War of Austrian Succession, Swedish merchants sought to experiment how to take advantage of the situation to benefit their transatlantic commerce, as did, for example, the captain of the *Ulrika Eleonora* who, in 1745, went from

Stockholm to St. Thomas via Dublin (AN, Affaires étrangères, B3/419, 29 November 1744). Ten years later, when Anglo-French tensions no longer left any doubt that war would soon break out, a man named Derbet, a French merchant in Stockholm associated with the Swedes, told Havrincourt, Louis XV's ambassador, that he offered to organise an expedition to bring provisions to Martinique (A.A.E., C.P., Suède, vol. 229, fol. 479 and vol. 230, fol. 255). The diplomat Havrincourt was also solicited by other Swedish merchants interested in transporting slaves to the French islands (A.A.E., C.P., Suède, vol. 230, fol. 301). In 1756, he met with merchants from the Swedish capital, and he sought to persuade them to load their boats with goods for the colonies, insinuating that on their return they could take goods from France and bring them to the North. Thus, the integration of Sweden into Atlantic trade was simply considered to be a continuation of business conducted under the pretence of neutrality (AAE, MD, France, vol. 2021, fol. 291). These documents reveal Swedish merchants' interest in trading directly with the Caribbean, as well as French provisions to encourage them by distributing passports, at least in times of conflict (RA, Diplomatica, Gallica, vol. 403, September 4, 1757). During the Seven Years' War, despite the risk of capture by the English navy, there were Swedish expeditions to the French Antilles, although they pretended to navigate for the free port of Oranjestad on the Dutch island of St. Eustatius (Pares 1975:204).

The American War of Independence allowed the Swedes to become further involved in Atlantic trade. In 1779, Chanceauline, a merchant from Nantes, France, suggested to Vergennes, the French minister, that a trading house be established in Gothenburg with his Swedish counterparts in order to ensure trade with the colonies (A.A.E., C.P., Suède, vol. 270, fol. 174). Yet, the project was unworkable because, as Vergennes reminded him, it would be impossible to justify the sailing of Swedish ships to the Americas "where the King of Sweden has not an inch of land" (A.A.E., C.P., Suède, vol. 270, fol. 214). The French navy's commissioner in Gothenburg, Jacques Delisle, also met with several of the city's merchants who offered to supply the French colonies in the Americas and to bring back local products. Delisle told his government that it would be a good idea to use the Swedes as intermediaries since they had experience in Atlantic shipping, as shown by an expedition sent to Grenada in 1781. More generally, Delisle believed that Sweden could be very useful, provided it had "some possession in the Americas that it could quietly use in peacetime and, during war, could be used as an excuse in order to make expeditions" (A.N., Marine, B3/418, *Remarques pour servir d'éclaircissement* ...). The situation became particularly favourable to Swedish merchants after the start of the Anglo-Dutch War in December 1780, which destroyed the entrepôt of St. Eustatius. Sweden's direct trade with the West Indies increased dramatically; it is clear that such an increase was due to warring countries flying Sweden's flag (Hildebrand 1951:316). The Swedish ambassador to Versailles, Gustaf Creutz, served as an intermediary, trying to find out under what conditions Swedish captains could travel to the French colonies (A.A.E., C.P., Suède, vol. 273, fol. 78). At the same time as their attempts to increase their trade in goods, Swedish merchants also sought to take advantage of the situation to get involved in the slave trade. In 1782, the trading house Arfwidsson & Söner planned to deliver slaves from Mozambique to the French Antilles. Christian

Arfwidsson, followed by his son, Niclas, had made a fortune in salt herring and its export to Ireland and the Caribbean. They associated themselves with another merchant, Niclas von Jacobsson, owner of the main sugar refinery in Gothenburg, who had already invested in the slave trade during the 1770s (Schibbye 2007:12). During this period, thus, there was certainly an active merchant milieu in Sweden, well versed in the realities of colonial trade and who sought to expand their businesses by investing in the lucrative slave trade (Hildebrand 1951:140).

The Swedes also took advantage of the circumstances of the 1770s to increase their trade with the revolutionary American colonies. As early as 1775, the government in London was informed that an Irish ship had loaded gunpowder and saltpetre destined for the Americans in Gothenburg, pretending to be from the trading house Arfwidsson & Söner (Chance 1928:232). Subsequently, the increase in complaints from the British envoy in Stockholm reveals the intensity of relations between Sweden and the 13 American colonies. The status of free port granted to Marstrand in 1776 provided a base for developing trade with the American rebels, which did not fail to create tensions with the government in London (Roslund Mercurio 1974:475–489). Swedish neutrality thus provided cover for American trade and the establishment of transatlantic commercial networks. John Holker, the French consul in Philadelphia, noted that, despite a Swedish flag, many ships' captains and crews were actually American. However, there were also genuine, profitable business relationships that were established between the Scandinavian kingdom and the rebellious colonies (C.A.D.N., Philadelphie 31, fol. 3 and 12). Interest for this new market explains why, between 1782 and 1784, the Board of Mines (*Bergskollegium*) sent an agent to the USA to estimate the market potential of the country, especially for iron.

Atlantic Trade and Political Economy in the 1780s

The development of Atlantic trade was not only due to the initiative of individual merchants. It was also a reflection of political economics whose purpose was to determine the best ways to enrich the State. This kind of consideration was one of the reasons that had prompted Europeans to develop world trade in the sixteenth century onwards. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the growing influence of the Physiocrats,¹ the example of other countries starting with the neighbouring Danes, and the profits recorded by the Swedish East India Company (*Svenska Ostindiska Companiet*) fuelled the Swedes' imagination about what additional profits Swedish trade in the Atlantic might generate. Atlantic trade could continue to develop in the New World in three ways that overlapped: smuggling with the

¹ Physiocracy is an economic doctrine which appeared in France at the end of the 1750s. Physiocrats promoted a kind of economic liberalism in order to encourage the growth of farming and trade.

French and especially Spanish colonies, the direct sale of Swedish products (herring, iron) as well as bringing colonial products back to the North, and allowing vessels to fly the neutral Swedish flag during the Anglo-French wars. It was in this general climate that, in 1776, the first Swedish book specifically devoted to colonial trade was published in Stockholm: *Afhandling om nyttan för Sverige af handel och nybyggen i Indierna och på Africa* (Essay on the benefits for Sweden of trade and colonies in the West Indies and Africa). Taking the example of the Danes, its author, Ulric Nordenskiöld, argued that the Swedes were just as capable of founding colonies to supply themselves with sugar and coffee. According to him, Sweden should try to obtain one of the Caribbean islands forsaken by the major powers. Such an island would, without great expense, enable Sweden to produce sugar, coffee and indigo, as well as engage in the slave trade (Nordenskiöld 1776:44).

His thoughts were published just as the American Revolution began. As they had done during the previous conflict, the French suspended their Exclusive System, which forbade foreign countries from shipping to their colonies, and they granted passage to neutral ships from the start of the conflict. In 1778, the Comte de Vergennes, chief minister of Louis XVI, repeatedly pointed out to the Swedish ambassador, Gustaf Creutz, the benefits that his countrymen could gain from trading with the French territories in the Americas. They would undertake a doubly profitable sea voyage by supplying the French islands with European goods and by bringing back colonial products that could be resold at a profit in France and in the North. Caribbean navigation would be all the more lucrative during the war, since the British islands suffered from shortages because they were no longer supplied with cod from Newfoundland. There was a new market for salted herring and hardware items. Yet not having their own territory in the region, the Swedes had to go through the free port of Oranjestad, at St. Eustatius, the great hub of American commerce in the late 1770s (RA Diplomatica, Gallica, vol. 443, 10 January 1779).

The Swedes intensified their efforts to obtain a territory in the Americas. Axel von Fersen, who left to serve in the United States in 1780, was to use his visit to inquire whether the young republic might cede one of its islands to Sweden. The Spanish option also regularly resurfaced, and Creutz raised the possibility of obtaining an island at the mouth of the Orinoco (RA, Diplomatica, Gallica, vol. 443, 10 June 1779). In 1780 and again in 1782, the Swedes tried to negotiate with Madrid one more time, but had no more success than in the previous attempts (Hildebrand 1951:21–22). The most serious negotiations, however, took place in Versailles. As during the Seven Years' War, the French renewed their promise to cede Sweden one of the islands that they would take from Britain once the peace was signed (RA, Diplomatica, Gallica, vol. 443, 16 May 1779). That was why Creutz became a very careful observer of the military situation in the Caribbean. He received part of his information from Swedes serving in the French navy during Caribbean campaigns (Elovson 1928a; Barton 2009). Creutz's objective was not simply to justify the presence of Swedish ships in the Caribbean, nor to provide a hub for smuggling and a warehouse to ensure trade under Swedish neutrality in wartime. He wanted a real colony for Gustaf III in order to be able to produce tropical goods for supplying

Sweden and the northern Europe market as well. In the long run, this colony would integrate the kingdom into the great world trade. That was why the ambassador regularly sent King Gustaf III his observations on the various islands that might be transferred to Sweden: Dominica, St. Kitts, St. Vincent, Barbados and especially Tobago (RA, *Diplomatica, Gallica*, vol. 443, 10 June and 16 September 1779). When Tobago was conquered by Admiral de Grasse in June 1781, Creutz entertained great hope and insisted upon the benefits that would be gained from its acquisition. It seemed to be the ideal colony: a topography that made it easy to defend, good anchorage spots and, above all, highly fertile soil enabling the cultivation of sugar, indigo, cotton and coffee, all the while being close to the continent which could make it a good base for smuggling with the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. All these benefits would result in “an infinite advantage [enabling] extremely lucrative profits” (RA, *Diplomatica, Gallica*, vol. 445, 25 and 29 November 1781). Gustaf III was wholly convinced and made this clear to his new ambassador to France, Erik Magnus Staël von Holstein: “It’s Tobago that I want” (Geffroy 1867:377). The King of Sweden’s determination was all the more great because he was unable to come to terms with Russian Empress Catherine II during their meeting in Fredrikshamn in June 1783. Johan Liljencrantz, Gustaf III’s Finance Minister, who had hoped to make Sweden a trade intermediary between Russia and the rest of Europe, decided instead to reorient the country’s trade policy (Essén 1928:237; Müller 2011:156–157). He now sought to build on the recent momentum of Swedish trade with the West Indies, which, according to statistics from the Board of Trade, had increased nineteen-fold in value between 1777 and 1783, clearly reflecting the ability of Gustaf III’s subjects to participate in Atlantic commerce (Hildebrand 1951:315). To achieve his goal, Liljencrantz adopted a two-pronged strategy: one was the signing of a trade agreement with the United States, on April 3, 1783, shortly after the end of the war. This would maintain Swedish—American trade, which had taken off in previous years, thanks to the free port of Marstrand. The second part concerned the acquisition of an island in the Caribbean.

The Acquisition of St. Barthélemy

Since his educational voyage throughout Western Europe in the 1750s, Liljencrantz had remained convinced of the importance for a State to develop trade in the Americas. Founding a colony would be a decisive advantage that would not only justify the presence of Swedish vessels in the Americas, but would also provide a base for transferring goods onto Swedish ships and thus take full advantage of the country’s neutrality during future conflicts between France and England. This conviction was strengthened by the Danish example of the island of St. Thomas which became, after the 1781 destruction of St. Eustatius, a very important commercial hub for West Indies trade, as shown by the fourteen-fold increase in port revenue between 1776 and 1782 (Nathanson 1836: 483; Feldbæk 1971:116). Over the longer term, the goal was to move beyond the circumstances of any one particular war

and to fully integrate Sweden into world-trade networks. Proof of this can be found in a paper published in 1784 in *Nya Handelsbibliotheket* entitled, *Förslag till Nybyggens anläggande i Indien och på Africanska Kusten* (Project for the founding of colonies in India and the African coast). It was authored by the renowned poet Johan Henrik Kellgren, who was close to King Gustaf III. Kellgren echoed the arguments already developed in 1776 by Ulric Nordenskiöld, detailing the various possibilities for acquiring a Caribbean island and highlighting the benefits that Sweden would derive (Elovson 1928b:208–209). The similarities between the two authors reveal the considerable reflection about colonial trade that was occurring in Sweden during the American War of Independence. It was in this context that, after the return to peace, Franco-Swedish negotiations began about the transfer of a Caribbean island.

At that time, it seems that there was no unanimity within the French government on the relevance of a Swedish presence in the West Indies. For the supporters, having an island meant that the Swedes would be able to supply the French navy during its West Indian campaigns and would legitimise Sweden's transatlantic shipping. Like the Dutch or the Danes, the Swedes could also use their island as a hub for exchanges between France and her colonies in wartime. Yet, the transfer of an island to Gustaf III had also its opponents within the French government. They noted that inevitably, the Swedes would also supply the English navy, and consequently France would not gain any real advantage from a Swedish presence. Furthermore, in peacetime, like their Dutch and Danish counterparts, the Swedes would encourage the smuggling of sugar and coffee from the French colonies (A.N., Marine, B3/419, *Un établissement suédois dans les Antilles ...*). From his first talks with the French, Ambassador Staël von Holstein understood that he was not facing an easy task. When he suggested the transfer of Tobago to Vergennes, the French minister replied, "So do you want to take the sole benefit of the war from us? This is impossible" (RA, Diplomatica, Gallica, vol. 465, May 25, 1783).

Finally, after difficult negotiations conducted by Louis XVI's ministers with Staël von Holstein, the French King agreed to give St. Barthélemy to King Gustaf III. It is a small mountainous island, difficult to defend and lacking a source of fresh water, which had no prospects for agricultural development, but offered good mooring (A.A.E., C.P., Suède, vol. 276, fol. 62–63). This choice did not correspond to Sweden's hopes. Thus, Staël von Holstein tried to exchange St. Barthélemy for the island Marie-Galante. This small island had much greater agricultural potential (it already produced sugar) and a more advantageous location that would facilitate trade especially with neighbouring Guadeloupe as well as with Martinique. Staël's insistence contrasts with his predecessor Creutz's opinion of Marie-Galante, communicated to King Gustaf III 2 years previously, "so small and so insignificant that it is not worth talking about. You need a much bigger island" (RA, Diplomatica, Gallica, vol. 446, 3 January 1782). The contrast between them reveals the level of Sweden's disappointment, which was even greater if we take into account the other islands that had been mentioned: Dominica, St. Vincent and especially Tobago. In these conditions, it is not surprising that after 1784, the Swedes tried once again, still in vain, to obtain an island from the Spanish (Hildebrand 1951:107–108).

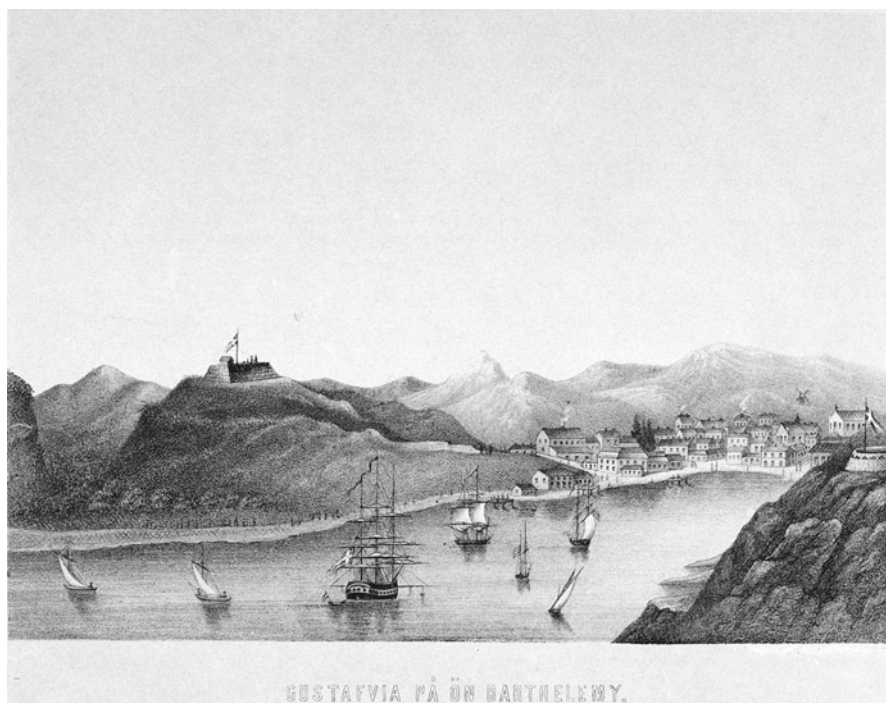


Fig. 13.2 View of Gustavia, St. Barthélemy (unknown artist) (Courtesy of National Maritime Museums, Sweden)

However, St. Barthélemy was not entirely useless. In a report dated August 1784, the Swedish consul in Lorient, France, Simon Berard, noted that, although the island could not be cultivated, it could still become a lucrative entrepôt for the slave trade to the French colonies, either as contraband or through an agreement with Versailles (RA, Rådsprotokoll, Handels och finansärenden, 1784–1788; *Observations sur les avantages ...*). It was for this reason that he advised obtaining other islands, even insignificant ones, that could act as bases for exchanging American, Caribbean and European goods and as supply centres for slaves. This model of colonisation, already practised by the Dutch and the Danes, was based on service and not on production. It enabled them to balance the financial and demographic requirements of colonialism with the limited resources of a second-tier power.

On March 7, 1785, Baron von Rayalin officially took possession of St. Barthélemy (RA, S:t Barthélemysamlingen, n°1/6). He confirmed to Stockholm the weak agricultural potential of the island and the quality of its port (Fig. 13.2). Everything pointed to the island becoming a transit port, styled after the Dutch model of St. Eustatius or the Danish model of St. Thomas (Essén 1928:204–242). In September 1785, Carenage, later called Gustavia, became a free port attracting foreign vessels. St. Barthélemy rapidly rose to be one of the main centres in the region for the

contraband trade in sugar (A.N., Marine, B7/447, Staël von Holstein to Castries, 9 October 1784; Tarrade 1972:618). Lacking a sufficient local market, the trade in goods between St. Barthélemy and Sweden stagnated. However, the island was a centre for the distribution of slaves who were transported by the *Svenska Västindiska Kompaniet* (Swedish West India Company) founded in 1786 (Weiss 2010:56–61). Its investors were merchants who were already experts in Atlantic trade, since they had helped develop relations between Sweden and Africa and had made the Scandinavian kingdom part of the Atlantic economy, even though at a modest level. In the eighteenth-century Sweden, there was a real colonial ambition and a dynamism that linked the country to the main currents of trade in the Atlantic region, whether indirectly or directly. We see this ambition again in 1813, when Sweden obtained Guadeloupe from England in exchange for their support against Napoleon. A Swedish commissioner was dispatched to assess the island's potential, but at the end of the war the island was restored to France (Lacour 1860:218; Carlsson and Höjer 1954:173).

Sweden's colonial projects enable us to bring to light the interconnections between diplomacy, the stakes involved in commercial trade, the networks of merchants and political economy in international relations. Although the acquisition of St. Barthélemy may well be considered as the accomplishment of a long quest, it is nevertheless clear that the model of Swedish colonialism is that of a minor player and raises the question of what colonial rule really meant. While, for great powers such as Britain, France and Spain, colonisation meant the exploitation of natural resources in order to serve the home country, thanks to the considerable use of slave labour, colonisation was different for smaller powers with unproductive islands. This was especially true in the case of St. Barthélemy. Indeed, although Sweden finally had a colony, it cannot be considered as a colonial power in the full sense. On St. Barthélemy, the Swedish population, strictly speaking, had always been a minority and never exceeded 130 individuals (Tigbrand 2002:68). Sweden's limited trade activity, the need to attract foreigners to the island and the competition with other similar islands (in particular the Danish possession of St. Thomas) all prohibited the establishment of mechanisms for capturing wealth that instead simply passed through the free port of Gustavia (Essén 1928:245–246). Thus, Sweden did not really benefit from St. Barthélemy's most prosperous decades.

During the French Revolutionary Wars, thanks to Swedish neutrality the island became a hub for West Indies coastal shipping and for trade between Europe, the United States and the Caribbean. Its population reached 5,000 people in 1,800, and more than a thousand ships per year came to Gustavia during the best years (Müller 2002:169). St. Barthélemy also benefited from the wars of independence in Latin America between 1810 and 1830, when it served as a relay point for the various warring parties (Vidales 1993). Yet, once peace had returned, trade then collapsed as Gustavia became less attractive and the colony had to rely on its own meagre resources. In 1878, Sweden returned the island to France, with a population level equivalent to that of 1784. Thus, Sweden's adventure as a colonial power definitively came to an end, but not the country's connections with the Atlantic World.

Translated from the French by Cynthia J. Johnson.

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