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The Materiality of the Prize Papers

A Photography Exhibition at the German Historical Institute London

12 September - 4 November 2022

Monday - Friday, 9.30 am - 5 pm

GHIL, 17 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NJ

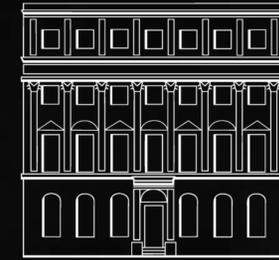
Images and videos: Maria Cardamone

Portraits: Mustapha Ousellam

Texts: Lucas Haasis



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The Materiality of the Prize Papers

A Photography Exhibition at the German Historical Institute London

Opening and Vernissage

Friday, 9 September 2022, 5 pm, at the GHI London

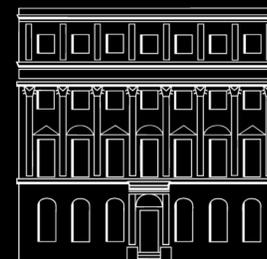
17 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NJ

Maria Cardamone & Lucas Haasis will be hosting the evening.

Invited guests only, please register via email (k.koenig@ghil.ac.uk)



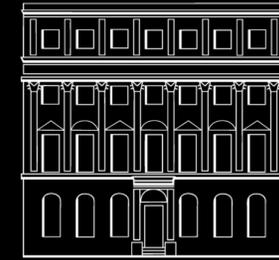
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The Materiality of the Prize Papers

The Prize Papers collection at The National Archives, UK still holds thousands of documents and various objects that have not been seen or touched for centuries. As a result, the records and artefacts belonging to the High Court of Admiralty's collections HCA 30 and HCA 32 have survived in a condition rarely found in archives across the globe, with many records preserved exactly as they were archived during the Early Modern period.

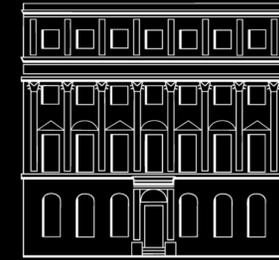
Artefacts from life onboard ships, ranging from playing cards to keys, sailors' notebooks containing fragile chalk writing, court bundles that were once stitched together by clerks and hundreds of letters that either have never been opened or have been preserved still folded, can be found in the collection. Some of these letters also contain their original enclosures, such as coffee beans, glass beads or fabric samples.

The collection's remarkable condition can be explained by considering the special historical circumstances that formed the collection. The Prize Papers are records and objects that were confiscated by British privateers and naval vessels between 1652 and 1817 – a period of time in which the seizure of ships was still a legitimate form of tactical warfare, known as 'prize-taking'. In order to prove that captured ships belonged to the enemy, the documents as well as various objects from aboard – including the seafarers' personal belongings and mail-in-transit – were confiscated by the captor and examined by the High Court of Admiralty, who used them as evidence to rule on whether a ship had been legally captured or not. Upon the conclusion of the court's proceedings, the confiscated records were transferred to the court's registry, then to the Tower of London, the Public Record Office and finally The National Archives, UK. While in these repositories, they lay virtually forgotten for centuries.

Today, the collection forms part of the records of the High Court of Admiralty kept at the National Archives in Kew. Since 2018, the Prize Papers Project has been digitising the entire collection, with a special emphasis on capturing, documenting, and presenting the unique materiality of the HCA collection online. Featuring its unique material condition is not only one of our goals, but also our responsibility as a digitisation project.



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The Exhibition

This photography exhibition presents a curated selection of pieces from the Prize Papers collection. It features our approach, which has been developed in collaboration with archivists, conservators, imaging operators, historians, and IT-specialists.

We are also showcasing the unique imaging formats that we use to document the collection's materiality and cover the research potential of the collection.

Images and videos focusing on the materiality of the collection have been captured by our photographer Maria Cardamone and are displayed alongside portrait shots of the Prize Papers team at work, taken by Mustapha Ousellam. The corresponding texts have been written by Lucas Haasis.

The objects, papers and document bundles shown in the pictures, demonstrate the global interconnectedness of Europe and the wider world during the age of sail, as their places of origin range from Europe to the Caribbean and East Asia. They also represent an era of European colonial expansion and resistance.

The exhibition is part of the conference “Things on the move: Materiality of Objects in Global and Imperial Trajectories, 1700–1900”, organised by the German Historical Institute London in collaboration with the Prize Papers Project.





My photographic approach aims at paying tribute to and representing the outstanding items found in the Prize Papers collection in such a way that their material features become apparent and are preserved on camera. One of the main goals of the materiality approach we developed as part of the project is to give the reader a sense of the history of the documents and artefacts themselves, and hopefully, a pleasurable visual surrogate for the physical touch, too.

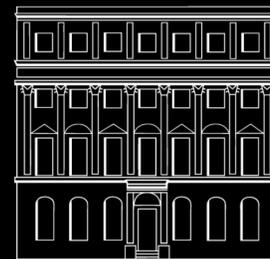
Maria Cardamone, Senior Photographer
Prize Papers Project

The Prize Papers Project is part of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Germany. It is based at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany, and The National Archives, UK. The project works in close cooperation with the German Historical Institute London (GHIL), as well as the VZG (the headquarters of the Common Library Network) in Göttingen, who provide their IT expertise. As of 2018, the project has been part of the Academies Programme of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. Thus, it is being funded by the German state as well as the state of Lower Saxony, with a prospective funding period from 2018 to 2037.

The German Historical Institute in London acts as a bridge connecting the project's British and German fields of work. It employs the project's photographers, Maria Cardamone and Mustapha Ousellam, whose task is to capture the unique HCA collection. The German Historical Institute London, founded in 1976, is part of the Max Weber Foundation and dedicated to the promotion of historical research in the United Kingdom and Germany. It focuses on the comparative history of Britain and Germany, the global and colonial history of the British Empire and Commonwealth, and the history of British-German relations and transfers. Since 2013, the GHIL has also built close links with humanities scholars in South Asia, setting up its own India Research Programme. The Institute runs academic lectures and conferences, supports international networks, provides research training, awards prizes to outstanding scholars, and offers advice to collaborative projects involving German and British researchers.



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For further information visit:

Materiality Homepage Prize Papers: <https://materiality.prizepapers.de>
International Conference: <https://www.ghil.ac.uk/events/conferences-and-workshops/things-on-the-move>
German Historical Institute London: <https://www.ghil.ac.uk>
Prize Papers Project: <https://www.prizepapers.de>
Maria Cardamone: <http://www.mariacardamone.com>

Or contact us directly:

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