

# Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20151]

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## **Proposed title of the session**

Entrepreneurs at sea: sailors' trading practices and legal opportunities in the first globalization (15th-19th centuries)

## **Abstract**

The role of international trade in bringing about early modern globalization is generally recognized, although scholars tend to focus on activities by merchants. Seamen were also involved in forms of commerce, an involvement facilitated by the fact that they, unlike traders, always travelled with their merchandise. Hardly any research is done on this topic, so we do not have a good idea about the functioning of this aspect of international commerce or the way in which bodies of law tried to regulate it. Something that is all the more remarkable considering the crucial role these seamen played in early modern transnational economic development.

Historians of globalization have become very interested in considering the changes this historical process brought about in more localized legal systems. But instead of looking at ways in which law developed itself to function on a more global scale, we will focus on the issue of how a landscape of different legal systems offered entrepreneurial activities for many transnational actors. Rather than looking at the usual suspects, we will discuss the economic role played by seamen as traders. To this purpose, we will rely mainly on legal source material, in which many sailors can be found. It was exactly the uncertain nature of the reach of local law internationally that provided these seamen with a framework within which they could conduct small-scale trading. More than a testing ground for nations to each develop their own laws, the movement of people and goods in an international space was a partial result of a varied legal infrastructure. It is through this diversity that development occurred. We want to foster the idea that the absence of a completed legal globalization proved to be a fruitful foundation for an early modern commercial globalization, not brought about from the top down, but rather installed through the economic actions of a large number of individuals and groups from the bottom up.

Although this session takes up a comparative perspective, the core of our panel focuses on the Mediterranean basin, because this was the first area in which different European models clashed, with implications for global developments. This clash must be considered a crucial element in the maritime navigation which concurrently took off to conquer the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, giving rise to early modern globalization.

This session has arisen out of the ERC-funded project 'Sailing into Modernity', in which we aim to provide a new analysis of the economic transition in early modern Europe employing tools from legal, economic and social history. The core of our project consists of a comparative analysis of the legal position and the economic treatment of sailors active in the Mediterranean.

In this panel, we want to present our main results, but we also want to foster a dialogue that will further open up the topic. This is why we will also launch an open call for participants and recruit speakers with expertise on other regions to enable a truly global comparison of sailors' economic practices.

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## **I. Corresponding Session Organiser**

Dr. Maria Fusaro (University of Exeter [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])

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## **II. Co-Organiser(s)**

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Dr. Richard Blakemore (Oxford University (from October onwards) [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
3. Dr. Bernard Allaire (University of Exeter [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
4. Dr. Tjil Vanneste (University of Exeter [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])

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## **III. Expected Participant(s)**

1. same as correspondent.
2. Yoshihiko Okabe (Kobe Gakuin University [Japan])
3. Bernard Allaire (University of Exeter [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
4. Richard Blakemore (Oxford University (from October onwards) [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
5. Tjil Vanneste (University of Exeter [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])