



Universiteit
Leiden

Highway to Globalization

Suez and the Transformation of Transoceanic Shipping, 1869-1956

Applicants

Supervisor Name	Institute
Dr. Anita M.C. van Dissel Senior Lecturer Maritime History	Institute for History
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Project description

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 transformed existing shipping routes, providing new opportunities for transoceanic business, travel, and migration. The Suez Canal connected seas and continents, and bridged the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The emergence of steam power and, later, the adoption of motor vessels, reduced the time and costs of travel, facilitating wider access to the long-distance transfer of commodities, people, and ideas. The Suez Canal's commercial and strategic links formed a global maritime web that reflected the development of European colonial empires and the rise of Arab and Asian powers. The transit point rebalanced the power held by actors within, especially, the Indian Ocean world.

Highway to Globalization explores the role of the Suez Canal as a maritime gateway in the Age of Imperialism from 1869 to 1956, when the Suez Crisis accelerated the incipient process of decolonization. It intends to create an elementary database with information about international shipping between Europe and Asia (vice versa) in the reference years 1885 and 1910 (Project 1), and 1925 and 1950 (Project 2).

The research tool for the traineeship is provided by the 'Suez Transits' - serial records of the canal passage of every ship from every nationality from 1869 to 1956. Recently a copy of all records of goods and passengers surfaced in a regional French archive. The accounts of the toll which the Suez Canal Company levied on passing ships are important, innovative sources for information about the ship's name, flag, shipping company, ports of departure and destination, composition of the cargo, and number of passengers.¹ The two projects will provide a good foundation for any systematic study into voyages between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and will be an important future source for research into international trade and human trafficking.

¹ The *Archives nationales du monde de travail*, Roubaix, France, has provided a free copy of the digital views of the records of transit of the Suez Canal.

Research Trainee Profile

Given the sources, the research trainees have to be (Res)MA students in Colonial and Global History or (Res)MA students in Middle East Studies. The research trainees need to have affinity with digital humanities and nineteenth/twentieth-century maritime/economic history, and preferably prior experience with handwritten primary sources. They will have to analyse accounts of the Suez Canal toll and will (help to) build a suitable database as a pilot study for what we hope will become a database of all Suez Transits between 1869 and 1956 (see below). Candidates need to state their preference for either Project 1, which studies shipping in 1885 and 1910, or Project 2, which focuses on transits through the Suez Canal in 1925 and 1950. The two projects enable a comparative study of global shipping, enhancing our understanding of newly emerging global itineraries at a crucial period in maritime and global history, when previously remote continents and cultures became more closely connected.

Collaboration

This interdisciplinary project will be the driving force of innovative research. *Highway to Globalization* opts for a comparative approach with a sensitivity for local and imperial perspectives. Collectively, this pilot study explores the human dimensions and implications of transnational processes such as empire-building, globalization, and decolonization. It also examines the meaning of this transit point and passenger traffic through the Suez Canal for Middle Eastern nations (including colonies, protectorates, states, and empires themselves).

Leiden University's long tradition in the field of Colonial and Global History (including Maritime History) and Middle Eastern and Asian Studies, together with new initiatives like the Leiden Political Economy Group and Leiden University Centre for Digital Humanities provides an interdisciplinary and innovative grounding for the project. This facilitates the development of innovative research projects that take full advantage of digital resources and methods guaranteeing a firm basis for interaction, collaboration, and cross-pollination. Moreover, Huygens-ING KNAW will provide support in the digitization of the Suez Transits and are committed to hosting the database of all Suez Transits on its Data Huygens-ING infrastructure. This *Euro-Asiatic Shipping* Virtual Research Environment (VRE) will allow the researchers to store, edit, annotate, interlink, query, and analyze all data gathered during the course of the project, and hence to mutually share their materials and insights. To this end, the Leiden's Institute for History and Huygens-ING have already submitted a *NWO Vrije Competitie 2017 (SGW)*-application. The VRE resembles the *Dutch Asiatic Shipping*-database constructed by researchers from Leiden's Institute for History and the (then) Institute for Dutch History (ING) in the 1980s.

Deliverables

The two research trainees have to cooperate to present a paper about their respective projects. Together with the two applicants, the research trainees will participate in a workshop, to be hosted by Leiden University, in collaboration with Huygens-ING, in September 2018. The workshop will aim to discuss the preliminary results of the pilot study and discuss future directions for research of the Suez Transits, such as the development of the *Euro-Asiatic Shipping* VRE. The trainees will be encouraged to integrate their research into a (Res)MA-thesis on a related subject.

Planning

Both research trainees will be appointed on 1 January 2018, and will be employed (0,15 fte) for a period of eight months.

- January-March 2018:
 - Reading secondary literature on Europe and the maritime world, the Suez Canal, international shipping and globalization;
 - Reading secondary literature on the Middle East, connectivity across Mediterranean and Indian Ocean economies, and forms of imperial activity and resistance in Egypt;
 - Building an elementary database (in cooperation with Huygens-ING KNAW);

Humanities Research Traineeship Programme 2018

- April -June 2018:
 - Entering information in the database;
- July-August 2018:
 - Examining the records of the transits of the Suez Canal and finalizing research;
 - Writing a paper;
 - Preparing and organising workshop.

Student Application

Applications should be sent to: a.m.c.van.dissel@hum.leidenuniv.nl and c.a.ennis@hum.leidenuniv.nl, include a cv and a motivation letter (max. 500 words) reflecting on the relevance of quantitative and qualitative research in maritime history in general and shipping in particular or the political economy of shipping in the global era. Applicants should state their preference for Project 1 or Project 2.