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Katerina Galani, University of Oxford

Following British ships across the Mediterranean, 1770-1815: From “shuttle voyages” to intra-Mediterranean shipping

It is common ground that the British were long familiar with the Mediterranean trade. However British shipping at the turn of the 18th century is a rather obscure topic. The existing literature argues that the trade was disrupted by the intermittent warfare, urging the British to seek alternative, more viable markets. On the other hand the shipping activity remains to the present day understudied. My paper focuses on the study of British shipping in order to acquire both a qualitative and quantitative sense of the industry, under conditions of war and peace for the period between 1770 and 1815. I argue that although trade might have suffered from the commercial embargoes and warfare, shipping emerged as a profitable business to cater for naval and mercantile needs as well.

A decisive step towards the understanding of the engagement of British ships in the Mediterranean is a detail map of the sea routes beyond Gibraltar and across the Mediterranean Sea. There have been similar attempts for the British colonial trade depicting the flow of ships and commodities but there is no precedent for shipping across the Mediterranean. One of the aims of the paper is to question the traditional conception of British shipping in the form of shuttle voyages. The preliminary results from the archival evidence demonstrate an extensive participation in intra-Mediterranean trade for the British vessels before their homeward journey. The most frequented ports in the Mediterranean and their fluctuation within a period of 40 crucial years at the turn of the 18th century will be one of the contributions of this paper. At the same time, light will be shed on the British ports of provenance in order to examine which of them retained close shipping and commercial links with the Mediterranean throughout the period under study.
Short Bio
Katerina Galani obtained her Bachelor in History and Archaeology from the University of Athens. She continued her graduate studies in the University of Oxford where she submitted her M.Sc on the entrepreneurial organization of the Levant trade in the 18th century. Currently she is completing her PhD on the British shipping and trade in the Mediterranean during the French Wars at the University of Oxford under the supervision of Knick Harley. Her research touches upon topics such as the Levant Company and free trade, network and agency theory, institutional changes in shipping et al.