



Call for Papers

A Global History of Free Ports: The Development of European Political Economy in the Atlantic and Asia

University of Helsinki, Centre for Intellectual History, 6-7 June 2019

The free port is a curious phenomenon. It developed historically in Italy during the waning years of the Renaissance, when competition to attract trade from the burgeoning Atlantic sphere prompted some states to open their ports to foreign merchants and their goods. In time, the free port came to be defined as a territorial exclave endowed with its own economic policies, often of a liberal (or even libertine) cast; that is, as a place where merchants could do business with minimal interference from state authorities. From Italy, the free port spread to the rest of Europe; in the eighteenth century to the Caribbean; and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the rest of the world. But though the free port is a curious institution, it is not a marginal one. Many of the most famous ports in history—from Genoa and Hamburg to Singapore and Hong Kong—were free ports. Such ports were central to the trading systems in which they were situated, whether in brokering commerce between distant localities, plugging a host state into the circuits of international exchange, or servicing a network of more regional ports. And ultimately, the free port is one of the ancestors of the modern special economic zone, of which there are more than six thousand in the world today. The history of the free port is global and deserves to be told as such.

This conference aims to explore **the history of political economy between Europe, the Atlantic and Asia. How did European geopolitical schemes and visions of commercial competition and peace spill over to the Atlantic and Asia between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? How did European states model their national interests by establishing free entrepôts or free ports? How was the reform of European commercial competition theorised by statesmen and political writers, and how was it operationalised through fiscal mechanisms, legal constructions, trading institutions, and merchant networks?**

We invite scholars to propose papers dealing with these subjects. Rather than focus on one single aspect or context, we prefer broadly thematic or comparative analyses that are of interest to a wider academic audience.

Abstracts (of ca. 500 words) and titles may be sent by email to koen.stapelbroek@helsinki.fi and ctazzara@scrippscollege.edu by **31 October 2018**. Invited speakers are subsequently requested to provide short papers that will be pre-circulated among participants. A selection of revised papers will be included in a book publication, based on this and related academic conferences.