

Travellers of the Sea – Conference on Maritime History, Marine Archaeology and Ethnology

Keynote speakers

KEYNOTE 1

Moving matter. Dislocated objects and transformative sea experiences

Topics related to movement are currently in vogue. Under the concept of “mobilities”, researchers are examining the spatial movement of people, from tourism to forced migration, and closely related terms such as transportation and traffic. Within this broad range of research, Material Mobility has emerged as a new focus area that raises a set of questions about how artefacts and technologies that facilitate and afford mobilities are designed, constructed, and instituted. Maritime archaeology has a rich tradition of exploring many of these objects, primarily focusing on shipwrecks, sea trades, and goods. They are moving objects – travellers of the sea – yet the focus rarely falls on the broader implications of this oceanic experience.

What I intend to foreground in this talk is not the movement of artefacts between continents or shores, but rather their transition from sea to land. Drawing from examples of Baltic escape boats, seawater-drenched wreck wood, and naval mines, I aim to address the multifaceted ways in which the sea reshapes artefacts and transforms them into meaningful objects on land. I will demonstrate how these travellers of the sea carry the essence of the ocean with them, connecting us to it even when far from the shore.



Dr. Mirja Arnshav is an archaeologist who specialises in blue heritage and human relationships with the sea. In 2020, she defended her thesis on Baltic refugee boat remains in Sweden. Currently, she works as a research coordinator at the Maritime Museum in Stockholm.

KEYNOTE 2

Floating Fables: Nonhuman Animals as Shipborne Travellers

Fables and ships have more in common than we might at first think. Both have historically travelled widely, carrying nonhuman animals within them. At the same time, both are structured in ways that suppress nonhuman stories. Fables, for instance, use animal characters to convey human lessons, reducing animals' stories to allegories of human life; this echoes the fact that ships are built to transport humans and their cargo and, accordingly, maritime history tends to elide or marginalise nonhumans. Starting with the question of whether and how to narrate 'the life of rats on board ship', this talk explores the stories of nonhuman seafarers as 'fables'. By reading fictional accounts of animals at sea alongside maritime animal episodes in archival records, it offers an alternative to the familiar fable of Noah's Ark, in which humans are placed in charge of animal cargoes, sanctioned by God to do with them as they please. Instead, our floating fable ship emerges as a site of multispecies encounter and more-than-human sociality: nonhuman animals shape human maritime life, even as their stories are entangled with human ones. Ultimately, the talk aims to acknowledge nonhuman animals as travellers in their own right: fellow voyagers with whom we share the dangers and experiences of the sea.



Dr. Kaori Nagai is a Senior Lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Kent, and the author of two monographs, *Empire of Analogies: Kipling, India and Ireland* (Cork UP, 2006) and *Imperial Beast Fables: Animals, Cosmopolitanism, and the British Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). She has worked on the topic of seafaring rats at the National Maritime Museum, London, and is the editor of 'Animals at Sea', a special issue of *Journal for Maritime Research* (vol.22, nos. 1-2, 2020) and *Maritime Animals: Ships, Species, Stories* (Penn State University Press, 2023).

KEYNOTE 3

Beyond the Oceans: The Wider Mediterranean and Mass Maritime Mobility in the Age of Steam

This lecture examines the development of mass maritime mobility in the Wider Mediterranean -embracing the Black Sea and the Red Sea - during the age of steam, challenging the dominant historiographical focus on transoceanic migrations. By repositioning this maritime region as a central arena of large-scale mobility, it highlights the density and diversity of expanding, intertwining flows of low-cost passengers, including migrants, pilgrims, refugees, soldiers, and workers. In doing so, it explores how such mobilities were often shaped by the interplay of private steam shipping companies, state policies, technological innovation, and international competition, presenting the Mediterranean as a laboratory of new mobility practices and regimes.

Finally, the lecture addresses the steamship itself as a critical unit of analysis, examining its role as a shared yet stratified social and material environment. It considers how heterogeneous passenger groups were brought together within enclosed spaces shaped by processes of commodification, spatial organisation, and varying degrees of control and coercion, ultimately redefining the experience of maritime travel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Dr. Matteo Barbano earned his PhD in History from the University of Genoa in 2016. From 2018 to 2023, he was a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Mediterranean Studies in Rethymno, contributing to two ERC Starting Grant projects (*SeaLiT* and *JaNeT*). His research primarily focuses on the economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of the transition from sail to steam navigation in the Mediterranean.

Since January 2024, he was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the University of Genoa, where he carried out *Mediterranean Mass Mobilities and Displacements in the Age of Steam* (MedMaD), a project that examines the development of maritime mass mobilities across the "wider Mediterranean," including the Black Sea and the Red Sea, between 1869 and 1914. Now, he has started as a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Mediterranean Studies (IMS/FORTH) in Rethymno.