

Imperial Connections: Ports, Power, People
New York University

Ireland House, 1 Washington Mews

March 7-9, 2019

Organizers: Jane Burbank and Fred Cooper

This conference is co-sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation, and NYU's Center for Global Asia, African History Initiative, Ottoman and Turkish Studies Initiative (OTS-NYU), Department of Russian and Slavic Studies, and Department of History. It is hosted by the Glucksman Ireland House at NYU.

The conference will explore the relationship of imperial rule, which is usually seen as the projection of power over territory and people, to connections that cross lines of imperial control. Connections are often envisioned as lines of networks and nodes. These can intersect in particular places, port cities prominent among them. Examining whether networking and imperial structures of administration and control reinforced each other or operated at cross purposes opens up possibilities for considering a wide range of political, cultural and economic intersections across time and space. Empires – e.g. the Mongols in the 13th century, the Portuguese in the 16th – exercised power over great distances, but very unevenly. They could provide security for trade and pathways for cultural diffusion, but their very spatial extent made them vulnerable to interlopers or agents whose activities were not confined to a single imperial power structure. What are the circumstances in which political power and node-network relations reinforced each other and what are those which potentially undercut imperial authority? Rather than assume long-term trends toward more territorial conceptions of power or other endpoints of political change, we want to leave open the question of how empires worked over a long period of time and in different spacial settings. The conference will incorporate a wide range of empires, whose connections worked through seaports and inland communications nodes, within and across continents, with special consideration for Asia but involving other continents as well. The conference is linked to a graduate course with the same title, offered in spring term 2019.

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Conference Program

Thursday, March 7:

5:00 - 6:30 pm Introductory talks by Jane Burbank and Fred Cooper

Friday, March 8:

9:30 Opening Remarks: David Ludden, Jane Burbank, Fred Cooper

10: 00 - 12:00 Panel 1: Indian Ocean Connections over Time and Space
Central idea: connections across the Indian Ocean (East Africa, Gulf, South Asia, Southeast Asia), covering an extended period of time, informing discussion of long-term patterns and changes.
Papers:
Duane Corbis (NYU Shanghai): "Protestant Missions and Trans-Imperial Connections in the Eighteenth-Century Indian Ocean and Beyond"
Kenneth Hall (Ball State University): "Identity and Spatiality in Indian Ocean Ports of Trade c1400-1800"
Hollian Wint (Wagner College): "Contractual Conversions, Commensurability and the Limits of Trust and Intimacy in the Nineteenth Century Indian Ocean"
Prita Meier (NYU): "East Africa and the Indian Ocean: Notes on the Aesthetics of Difference"
Commentator: Kerry Ward (Rice University)

1:30 - 3:30 Panel 2: Ports and Politics
Central idea: each paper examines a port city in relation to an imperial polity and considers the importance of ports to the development of empires
Papers:
Susanah Shaw Romney (NYU): "Why Build Batavia? Port Cities, Empires, and Early Modern Oceans"
Trina Hogg (Oregon State University): "Abolition and Apprenticeship in Nineteenth-Century Freetown, Sierra Leone"
Ian Collier (University of California Irvine): "Port/e City: Marseille as a Hinge of Empire"
Commentator: Edyta Bojanowska (Yale)

4:00 - 6:00

Panel 3: Continental Connections

Central idea: papers explore long distance connections, over both land and sea, including the formation of regional structures and concepts such as Eurasia and EurAfrica

Papers:

Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer (NYU): "The Notions of Border and Border Formation in the Early Modern Ottoman-Safavid Relations"

Thomas Kuehn (Simon Fraser): "Government contractors, tax lords, and supply lines: Non-territorial forms of imperial governance in Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1914"

Tatiana Linkhøeva (NYU): "Five Races Living in Harmony: Japan and Eurasia"

Miriam Davis (UC Santa Cruz): "EurAfrica and the Postwar Reinvention of the Mediterranean"

Commentator: Zvi Ben-Dor (NYU)

Saturday, March 9:

9:00 -11:00

Panel 4: Ports and Hinterlands

Central idea: exploration of the regional connections of port cities (including desert-edge as well as maritime ports)

Papers:

Karl Appuhn (NYU): "How Wide Was My Hinterland? The Spatial Dynamics of Mediterranean Commercial Centers in the Early Modern Period"

Ademide Adelusi-Adeluyi (University of California Riverside): "Who Broke Lagos?: Mapping the Politics of a West African Lagoon Complex"

Lale Can (City College of New York): "Crossing the Bosphorus: Central Asian Hajjis in Ottoman Istanbul, 1869-1914"

Commentator: Norman Underwood (NYU)

11:15-1:15

Panel 5: Oceans

Central idea: to explore and compare relations within and across different bodies of water and how they affect lands within and adjacent to them

Papers:

Ravi Ahuja (Göttingen): "Indian seafarers, 'racial management' and the British Empire" Seamen, 19th and 20th centuries"

Lisa Lindsay (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill): "Transatlantic Itineraries and Imperial Echoes in the Nineteenth Century"

David Rainbow (University of Houston): "New York to Paris by Rail: Pacific Empires and the Bering Strait, 1898-1907"

Nadin Heé (Freie Universität Berlin): "How Tuna became a Global Commons. Migrating Species, People and Knowledge across Oceans and Empires"

Commentator: Rebecca Scott (University of Michigan)

1:30 - 2:30

Closing remarks