

French Shipping at the end of the Old Regime. The Navigocorpus database

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Navigocorpus is a data-base on shipping and maritime trade, containing at present data for the 18th and the 19th centuries. The data-base has been created within a four-year program financed by the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche and it can be consulted online (<http://navigocorpus.org/>). Our team promoted, among other, the transcription into the data-base of all available registers of clearances for French ports in 1787, and the entries of the Health Office in Marseille for the same year.

Each ship, including small 2-ton boats clearing from a French port in the 18th century, had to pay a duty called *droit de congé*. The duty was due at each clearance, with a few exceptions: coastal fishermen could apply for a six-month clearance, the *caravane* traders in the Mediterranean obtained a two-year clearance which allowed them eventually to travel back and forth, and no clearance was required to return to the home port within the same admiralty.

The duty was collected in over a hundred Admiralty offices. As its income provided the Admiral of France with substantial revenues, the admiralty offices in the French metropolitan and colonial ports were compelled to keep a detailed register of the *congés* they delivered. We were able to collect detailed data for over 31,000 clearances, out of a total of 45,000 delivered clearances that year. We added to Navigocorpus also 3,600 entrances in Marseille, the main French port for which data on clearances were missing. When preserved, the registers contain the date, the name of the ship, her burthen, the name of the captain, the destination, the amount of the duty, and the nature of the *congé* (French, foreigner, for fishing, and a few other local variants). Additional information on the rig, the port of register, the origin of the captain, the nature of the cargo depended on the habits of the officer who was in charge of collecting the duty.

From the beginning, Navigocorpus was conceived as something else as a simple storage of transcribed raw data. While being attentive at preserving *all* information provided by the sources as close as possible as they appear in them, we also wanted to facilitate the query and exploitation of the data-base for all conceivable kinds of research goals. These tools make it possible to present a unique view of the different kinds of shipping in France before the French Revolution, from local coastal trade to international ventures.