



The Network of Research Centres in Human Sciences on the Mediterranean Area RAMSES2 has as objective to enhance the scientific impact of research concerning the Mediterranean area in Europe. The Institute for Neohellenic Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation participates in the Network of Excellence RAMSES2 right from the beginning of its formation in 2006, has already organized two seminars and has participated in several administrative and scientific activities of the Network.

This Athens seminar (4-5 april) is part of a work package that was set up by the

“Istituto di Studi sulle Società del Mediterraneo del Consiglio Nazionale delle

Ricerche in Naples” under the title:

*Organisation, Institutions et Techniques de Commerce de Mer dans la Méditerranéen  
de l'Antiquité à la Croissance Moderne .*

Organizing partners:

Institute for Neohellenic Research / National Hellenic Research Foundation

Istituto di Studi Sulle Società Mediterranee/CNR – Napoli

Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Europei e Mediterranei / Università di Trieste

Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche/ Università di Bari

MMSH, TELEMME, Université de Provence (Aix-Marseille)

**Thematic Unit: Exchanges**  
**Athens workshop (4-5 April 2008)**

**Social Groups and Practices of Trading in the Mediterranean**  
**(17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

The Mediterranean constitutes a transnational site that links groups, networks and cultures; it is also small enough to connect these same individuals, and cultures. In this area and throughout recorded history, specific kinds of knowledge have been produced and circulated through travellers, conquerors, pirates, refugees, merchants, scholars, and slaves from all the shores and islands. The networks and connections in the Mediterranean have been the main theme of multifarious research projects and historical interpretations.

The subject to be explored in the Athens workshop is the open economic world of merchants. A world that was developed through utilizing the business organization and the networks beyond the limits of sovereign national boundaries. From early modern times and up to the industrial era, a “unified economic world”(?) had been created in Europe through commercial transactions, currencies and the ethics of the business transactions. This international trade was halted in many cases in the 19th century due to the creation of new national states and the slow dissolution of great empires, like the Ottoman and the Hapsburg Empire.

The development of the “merchant’s class” can be studied in relation to the economic crises and the shifts of the centre of world trade and regional markets. Private enterprises, ethnic groups and religious minorities were “living organisms” that created adaptations, differentiations and geographic shifts the centre of market growth.

Recent research on business culture draws a distinction between “pre-modern” period (17<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> century), during which business practices such as piracy/corsairing, itinerant coastal trade and small-scale business in the Mediterranean prevailed, and a modern period during which trade became specialized and was assisted by institutionalized financial services (banking and insurance), and which at the same time offered new opportunities to merchant entrepreneurs. The decline of the old hegemonies and the creation of new are particularly evident in the Mediterranean

of that period. For a long period of time old and new merchant practices co-existed. However, which were the determinant factors that altered long time micro- structures that were thriving in various Mediterranean regions? Did modern trade practices dominate in the Mediterranean in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

Extensive networks in the Mediterranean developed during the “pre-modern” and modern period and were also characterized by a significant reduction of transportation and information costs brought by the coming on of new technology. It has been suggested in several essays up to now that an understanding of commercial networks based on economic rationality alone is not enough; equally important were considered cultural ties, circulation of culturally determined sources of trust, reputation and family strategies.

Furthermore the trade axes that determined the exchanges in the Mediterranean were crucial for the exchange of technical and scientific ideas. They constituted a reciprocal relation between trade and technical and scientific knowledge. For example, the maritime commerce in the Mediterranean was conditioned by the technological evolution of shipping while, at the same time, it contributed to the development and communication of technical knowledge. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century major technological advances involving steamships, electricity, telegraph affected or even altered trade. Were manuals of commerce updated or did they constitute an element of a self promoted world?

Thematic units:

1. Merchants under foreign dominion and as foreign dominion. The role of merchants that acted in places that had different ethnic, national, political structure than their own, e.g. the world of commerce under the Ottoman, Venetian, Genoese and Hapsburg dominance (16<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> c.). Foreign merchants as a dominant trading elite in various markets of the Mediterranean. For example Genoese in Constantinople, Venetians in the Morea, Greeks in Smyrna, Jews and others religious minorities in Trieste etc. The scope of this workshop will be to investigate the transformations and adaptations of common mercantile characteristics of the firm, of ethnic-religious networks through individual strategies and collective economic behaviour.
2. Merchants as social agents in a comparative perspective creating or simply affecting institutional and network hierarchies. Networking as a systematic

organization pattern for exchanging information. Forms of collaboration and competition between various religious and ethnic minorities and groups.

3. Crises (economic, natural) as a decisive factor of trade in the Mediterranean: causes and effects. Investigating entrepreneurship through individual or collective reactions and adaptations to crises.
4. Maritime trade in the Mediterranean was conditioned by the technological evolution of shipping while, at the same time, contributed to the development and communication of technical knowledge. Finally, the diffusion of technology through commercial networks is a poorly researched subject up to now.