

CfP “The Naval Shipworm *Teredo navalis*. A Global Player and its Entangled Histories”

Online-Workshop, 21.-22.1.2021

Mareike Vennen, Humboldt University of Berlin (BMBF-research project “Animals as Objects”),
Ruth Schilling, German Maritime Museum/ Leibniz-Institute for Maritime History

„When it comes to the achievements in sinking ships, world-famous naval heroes such as Drake, Nelson, Count Luckner, as well as the German submarine fleet of World War II, are nothing compared to a small group of sea pests, which lead a systematic campaign of destruction against all man's work, since the first day man began to sail the seas.”¹

A two-day online-workshop aims at bringing together multiple perspectives on the history of the naval shipworm *Teredo navalis* from various disciplines. We want to reach out to and connect scholars working on *T. navalis* from different perspectives and fields: history, environmental and cultural history, history of science, history of knowledge as well as Science and Technology Studies.

The history of *Teredo navalis* spans various geographical regions, time periods, nations, industries, and disciplines. Of unknown origins, the naval shipworm has been a reoccurring protagonist in reports since ships sailed the seas. The eight-inch animal became so prominent not because of its appeal, but because of the damage and destruction it caused to wooden ships and port infrastructure: boring through the wood, it sinks wooden vessels; tunneling into underwater piers and pilings it collapses ports and harbours. The wood on which it feeds serves as habitat and as means of transportation – *T. navalis* has spread around the whole world on debris and the hulls of sailing vessels.

Just as one cannot detach the animal from its wooden environment, the natural history of *T. navalis* cannot be detached from the material, scientific and commercial history of wood and of ships and maritime infrastructures. Thus, the history of *T. navalis* is not only a global history, but a history of globalization, deeply rooted in colonialism, imperial trade and the history of maritime logistics. Reconstructing the natural history of *T. navalis* means reconstructing the entanglements between science, politics and economy and the percurrent global mobilities and entanglements in these fields. It means exploring the connections between imperial trade, sailing ships, the military-industrial complex around “wood” as a material and its ecological effects: when and where were mass occurrences of *T. navalis* recorded? To what extent did the damages lead to the use of new materials and techniques in ship building. And what were the ecological and economic effects of these developments (like deforestation; water pollution)?

T. navalis thus allows us to revise the heroic narratives that constitute the maritime history of the so-called “Age of Discoveries”. It further enables us to investigate the relationships between shipbuilding, shipping and maritime infrastructure on the one hand and the ecological effects and changes in marine biodiversity on the other. The organism also points to the intersection of the

¹ Regierungsbaudirektor Adolf Hahn: Die Bekämpfung der Bohrmuschel, in: Die Küste. Archiv für Forschung und Technik an der Nord- und Ostsee 5 (1956), p. 49-71: 51.

history of scientific classification and its moral economies, pitching “beneficial” animals against pests and “invasive species”.

We invite theoretical perspectives and case studies from different time periods and geographic regions in order to trace a global history of the species. At the same time, we wish to investigate a history of globalization through the history of *T. navalis* – from the Atlantic slave trade routes of the 16th century to the Dutch coast in the 1730s, from San Francisco Bay in the 1920s and German coasts in the 1930s and 50s. With the example of *T. navalis*, we thus aim for broader interdisciplinary questions in the framework of a critical history of “invasive species”, of “biogeography” and “migration”.

To animate our workshop, we encourage inputs which engage with these concerns and the three overarching and interconnected themes they address, while also being open to hearing about projects which approach *T. navalis* in other ways:

What are the **natural histories of *Teredo navalis*** we can trace through time and space?

- How has the distribution of *T. navalis* changed over time? What have been particular episodes of massive or otherwise significant occurrences? Where have they occurred, and what political and ecological geographies do they rely on?
- How do we know about these histories of distribution across in the world’s oceans? What apparatuses and practices of knowledge production do they depend on (e.g. surveys, monitoring, tracking, wood samples, taxonomical studies)? What sort of knowledge do they produce, what concerns do they address, and how do these epistemic histories relate and shape natural histories?
- Is the description of the *T. navalis* connected to general patterns of decline, crisis and change in natural systems?

What **histories of globalization** does *Teredo navalis* allow us to unearth?

- How do natural histories of *T. navalis* relate to the development and transformations of imperial trade and transportation? What can these relations mean for our understanding of colonial history and the development of technosciences?
- What can we learn, along the political ecology of this invertebrate, about a material and cultural history of wood (as a resource, as a material, as an industry, but also as a craft and a global ecology itself)?
- How can we trace the relationships between shipbuilding, shipping and maritime infrastructure on the one hand, and biological invasions and shifts in marine biodiversity on the other? How do the histories of globalization told with *T. navalis* articulate colonial, economic, and environmental history, taking also into account the non-European actors, practices and knowledge in these fields?

What **epistemic regimes and governing practices** unfold alongside the histories of *Teredo navalis* we explore?

- How is *T. navalis* known, and how did this change through time, and with what concerns in mind? What disciplines, local or global actors and institutions got involved in producing knowledge about this organism and its distribution? And how did this research lead back to the material culture of wood and its economic and ecological history?

- What techniques were developed to manage this invertebrate as a widespread pest? And how did they take place in changing global contexts? Did they engender international collaboration and knowledge transfer across locations and disciplines? And if so, what does this history of pest management look like?
- In turn, how did laws and regulations, but also indigenous knowledge handle these organisms and their threats and possibilities? And how did these shape and adjust to the moral economies of science?
- Connected to that: which implicit or explicit values and evaluations were and are attached to *T. navalis* (as either a sign of God's wrath or of human behavior)?

The two-day workshop will take place on January 21 and 22, 2021 in an online format. It is planned to present the respective research interest or project, to discuss materials and methods and to exchange ideas for further steps of cooperation. The workshop is thus intended as a first step to realize a larger cooperation.

Please send extended abstracts (maximum 500 words) and short biographies to Mareike Vennen (mareike.vennen@hu-berlin.de) by **15st November 2020**.

The workshop draws from the research project "Animals as Objects: Zoological Gardens and the Natural History Museum Berlin, 1810 to 2020", funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the research areas Environmental History and History of Science at the German Maritime Museum/ Leibniz-Institute for Maritime History.