

Migration Trajectories of Seafarers during the Transition From Sail to Steam

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Published in:
International Journal of Maritime History

DOI:
[10.1177/0843871420956488](https://doi.org/10.1177/0843871420956488)

Publication date:
2020

License:
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Document Version:
Accepted author manuscript

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Loockx, K. (2020). Migration Trajectories of Seafarers during the Transition From Sail to Steam: Change and Continuity in Belgium, 1850-1900. *International Journal of Maritime History*, 32(3), 616-635.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0843871420956488>

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Published as: Kristof Looockx, 'Migration trajectories of seafarers during the transition from sail to steam: Change and continuity in Antwerp, 1850-1900', *The International Journal of Maritime History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 616-635.

DOI: 10.1177/0843871420956488

This is the last version submitted before copy-editing. See the published version for the final, edited version.

Abstract

This article examines the migration trajectories of seafarers who worked on Belgian merchant vessels departing from the port of Antwerp during the second half of the nineteenth century. Based on the Antwerp seamen's registry, which recorded information on voyages of seafarers on Belgian merchant vessels departing from Belgium's main commercial port, this article shows that Antwerp's maritime recruitment area vastly expanded with the advent of steam. The proportion of low-skilled seafarers who originated from inland areas increased as a result of the creation of new departments aboard ship and the emergence of ocean liners. However, established migration fields remained important for the supply of skilled labour in deck departments, which indicates that there was also continuity. The findings suggest that each department had its own dynamics and therefore old and new patterns co-evolved during a period of transition.

Keywords

Belgium, from sail to steam, maritime labour market, migration, port of Antwerp

Introduction

In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, the growth of trade went hand in hand with important innovations, such as the breakthrough of steam power, the standardisation of regular shipping lines and the introduction of new business models.¹ In turn, the expansion of shipping and ever-growing steamships required more men, which stimulated national and international migration to maritime commercial nodes. However, migration trajectories of maritime workers during the era of steam have received less attention than their counterparts on sailing ships, which explains why we do not fully understand how

¹ On changes in the nineteenth-century maritime industry, see, for example: David M. Williams and John Armstrong, 'An Appraisal of the Progress of the Steamship in the Nineteenth Century', in Gelina Harlaftis, Stig Tenold and Jesús M. Valdaliso, eds., *The World's Key Industry: History and Economics of International Shipping* (Basingstoke, 2012), 43-63; Torsten Feys, *The Battle for the Migrants: The Introduction of Steamshipping on the North Atlantic and Its Impact on the European Exodus* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 2013).

the increased demand for labour was met. Moreover, there is a growing consensus among scholars to study migration trajectories of transient populations, but the maritime workforce has not yet been explored thoroughly, especially because seafarers usually resided in port cities on a transitory basis and hence left a small footprint. And although maritime historians have highlighted, among other things, the importance of maritime networks on migration, they do not tend to use migration as a concept.² According to Leo Lucassen and Aniek Smit, “these studies have trouble becoming incorporated into mainstream migration history, thus leaving the splendid isolation of the two fields intact”.³

At the crossroads of maritime and migration history, this article argues that the rise of steamships affected migration trajectories of seafarers as new departments required different types of seafarers. It also demonstrates that the emergence of large ocean liners had an impact on migration trajectories of seafarers. Belgium serves as a case study. The fact that the Belgian merchant fleet consisted almost exclusively of sailing vessels in the middle of the nineteenth century, while the opposite was the case at the end of the century, allows me to study how recruitment areas evolved during a period of transition. Moreover, the Belgian fleet became an important player in transatlantic passenger transport and therefore this study integrates the often neglected victualling department.

The structure is as follows. I will first discuss the main source and will then analyse migration trajectories of seafarers who worked on Belgian vessels departing from the port of Antwerp in the middle and at the end of the nineteenth century. In the next section, geographical origins of seafarers will be studied in relation to the qualification of their labour based on the typology of high-, medium-, and low-skilled labour. The aim is to examine whether changes in the composition and quality of the maritime workforce affected migration trajectories of various types of seafarers in different departments. Finally, I will confront the findings with the changing nature of Belgian shipping with the advent of steam and the increased importance of passenger transport in the Atlantic.

² Stéphane Hoste and Lewis R. Fischer, ‘Migration and Maritime Networks in the Atlantic Economy: An Introduction’, in Torsten Feys, Lewis R. Fischer, Stéphane Hoste and Stephan Vanfraechem, eds., *Maritime Transport and Migration: The Connections Between Maritime and Migration Networks* (St. John’s, Newfoundland, 2007), 1-3; M. Elisabetta Tonizzi, ‘Maritime History and History of Migration: Combined Perspectives’, in Francesca Fauri, ed., *The History of Migration in Europe: Perspectives from Economics, Politics and Sociology* (London, 2015), 61-62.

³ Leo Lucassen and Aniek X. Smit, ‘The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants’, *Journal of World History*, 25, no. 4 (2014), 10-11.

Context and sources

The development of the Belgian merchant marine did not run parallel with the port of Antwerp's expansion during the second half of the nineteenth century. Antwerp became an important continental port during the 1840s and by the mid-1870s it was one of the major commercial ports in the world, along with London, New York, Liverpool and Hamburg.⁴ German transit trade and railways have been depicted as important factors that contributed to Antwerp's rise.⁵ However, the Belgian government's aim to create a strong national fleet concerned a slow process before 1870. Several initiatives were taken to stimulate Belgian shipping, such as providing subsidies and loans, but a general maritime policy was not implemented effectively. Moreover, being the first country on the continent to industrialise, Belgium had developed an early interest in steam navigation in order to extend its railway network overseas and consolidate political independence of 1830, but Belgium did not pass the experimental phase. Well aware of the strategic geographical location of Antwerp and the realisation that domestic capital was insufficient to build a strong national fleet, the Belgian government overhauled its strategy by granting subsidies to foreign shipping companies if they sailed under the Belgian flag. This strategy led to a fast and drastic transition from sail to steam during the 1870s, which increased levels of tonnages and stimulated trade and passenger transport.⁶ While total tonnage solidly anchored at around 30,000 tons between 1850 and 1870, this was more than 108,000 tons in 1900.⁷ How did Antwerp's overall recruitment area evolve during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Belgian fleet made the transition from sail to steam and new types of labourers were required?

An exceptional source to study migration trajectories of seafarers who worked on Belgian merchant vessels is the Antwerp seamen's registry.⁸ The registration of individual seafarers

⁴ On the economic development of the port of Antwerp during the nineteenth century, see: Karel Veraghtert, 'From Inland Port to International Port, 1790-1914', in Fernand Suykens, Gustaaf Asaert and Alex De Vos, eds., *Antwerp: A Port for All Seasons* (Antwerp, 1986), 279-422.

⁵ Veraghtert, 'From Inland Port to International Port', 373; Michael Miller, *Europe and the Maritime World: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, 2012), 47.

⁶ Karel Veraghtert, 'The Slow Growth of Steam Navigation: The Case of Antwerp, 1816-1865', in Christian Koninckx, ed., *Proceedings of the International Colloquium Industrial Revolutions and the Sea* (Brussels, 1991), 207-215; Yves Segers, 'Op zoek naar afzetmarkten: de uitbouw van de Belgische koopvaardijvloot, 1830-1870', in Jan Parmentier and Sander Spanoghe, eds., *Orbis in orbem: liber amicorum John Everaert* (Ghent, 2001), 424-428.

⁷ Belgian shipping represented only a part of incoming tonnage in Antwerp. Especially British ships dominated arrivals in Belgium's main commercial port during the second half of the nineteenth century. Between a quarter and a third of all incoming tonnage was transported by British-flagged vessels. German ships also became numerous from 1880 onwards, while American vessels almost completely disappeared after the Civil War. Veraghtert, 'De havenbeweging te Antwerpen tijdens de negentiende eeuw', annex XCI.

⁸ For a more elaborate discussion on the source and database, see: Kristof Looockx, 'From Sail to Steam: Two Generations of Seafarers and the Maritime Labour Market in Antwerp, 1850-1900' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Antwerp and Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2020).

was part of a series of measures taken by the Belgian government and closely related to the introduction of a mandatory insurance for merchant mariners in 1845.⁹ The *Hulp- en Voorzorgskas voor Zeevarenden* was a benevolent and welfare fund that provided support for all seamen who sailed under the Belgian flag in times of illness, injury, disability and old age. By introducing the insurance system, the Belgian government attempted to stimulate the decaying national fleet and attract more seafarers.¹⁰ While in other nations, such as Britain and Sweden, merchant seafarers were also registered to help the navy in times of conflict,¹¹ it seems that in the case of Belgium the merchant marine was not a resource for the navy, because the country had a neutral status.¹² The Antwerp seamen's registry contains identity details, such as the seafarer's name and date and place of birth; and career information per voyage, such as the ship's name and master, occupation on board, port of destination and monthly wages. The maritime commissioner entered the names in chronological order from the first appearance on a Belgian merchant vessel. Information on subsequent voyages was then later added to the seafarer's original entry.¹³ Unfortunately, the Antwerp seamen's registry did not provide additional information on vessels, such as tonnage and type of cargo, because its aim was to keep track of contributions to the benevolent and welfare fund. This also explains why the seamen's registry did not systematically record seafarers who worked on foreign vessels departing from the port of Antwerp. As such, this research focuses on seafarers who worked on Belgian-flagged merchant vessels.

I selected a sample consisting of all seafarers of Belgian and foreign origin whose first entry –and hence their first voyage on a Belgian ship– was in 1850 and 1890, respectively. For reasons of illegibility and missing data, it was not possible to identify birthplaces of seafarers in 5 per cent of the cases in 1850 and 1 per cent in 1890. Hence, the empirical analysis includes 1,384 individual seafarers (310 men in 1850 and 1,074 men in 1890). The

⁹ Royaume Belgique, *Discussion de la loi des droits différentiels du 21 Juillet 1844* (Brussels, 1844), 15; Beheer van het Zeewezen, *Wet en reglementen betreffende den arbeid op zeeschepen* (Brussels, 1926), 1-2.

¹⁰ Greta Devos, 'De oprichting van de Hulp- en Voorzorgskas voor Zeevarenden onder Belgische vlag', in Gerd De Baets and Alex De Vos, eds., *Van wieg tot zeemansgraf: Hulp- en Voorzorgskas voor Zeevarenden, 1845-1995* (Antwerp, 1995), 10-21.

¹¹ See, for example: Kelvin Smith, Christopher T. Watts and Michael J. Watts, *Records of Merchant Shipping and Seamen* (Kew, 1998), 19-20; Jari Ojala, Jaakko Pehkonen and Jari Eloranta, 'Deskilling and Decline in Skill Premium During the Age of Sail: Swedish and Finnish Seamen, 1751-1913', *Explorations in Economic History*, 61 (2016), 87.

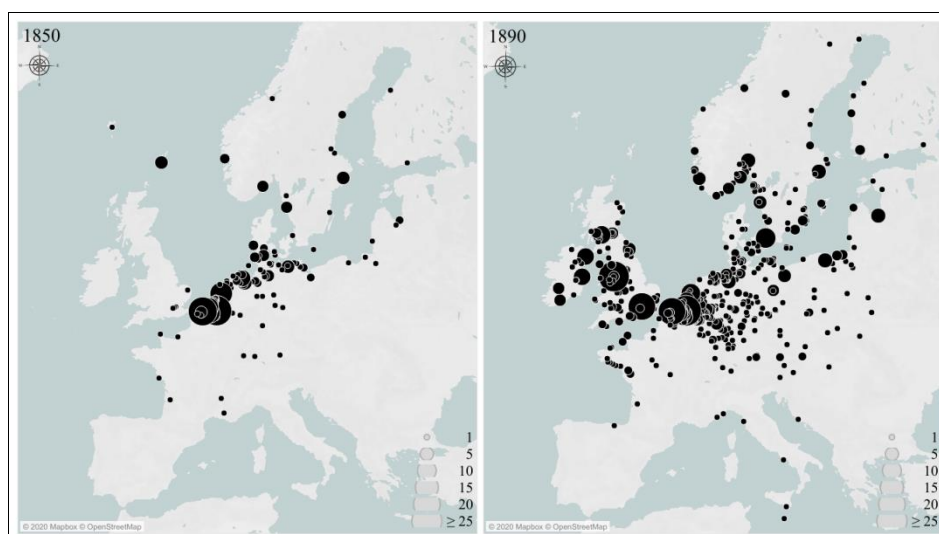
¹² Belgium had a neutral status since 1839. The decline of the Belgian fleet at the end of the 1850s even abolished the Belgian navy in 1862, because there were barely ships to defend. Reginald Loyer, *Haven in de branding: de economische ontwikkeling van de Antwerpse haven vanaf 1900* (Leuven, 2008), 120.

¹³ The seamen's registry was maintained from 1845 until 1930, including a name index, after which the registration of seafarers was recorded on file cards. Rijksarchief Antwerpen (State Archives Antwerp), Registratie van zeelieden in het stamboek, Stamboeken van de zeelieden van de Belgische koopvaardij, 1845-1930. See also: Bart Willems, *Inventaris van het archief van de Dienst Schepenbeheer Antwerpen en rechtsvoorgangers, 1845-2008* (Brussels, 2012), 6-21.

sample years were deliberately chosen to compare migration trajectories of seafarers who worked on Belgian sailing ships and steamships. The dataset contains 108 sailing vessels and 2 steamships in 1850 and 2 sailing vessels and 42 steamships in 1890. Most Belgian merchant vessels were engaged in liner shipping during the second half of the nineteenth century. As such, the myriad of Belgian vessels did not directly sail to wherever freight was offered, but operated regular services and had fixed port rotation. In the middle of the century, Belgian ships operated mainly on shipping routes to Britain and the Americas. With the changeover to steam, sailings in the Atlantic increased in importance, especially as a result of Belgian mail contracts and passenger transport. For example, the dataset shows that in 1850, 40.5 per cent of all newly recruited seafarers were hired for sailings to the Americas, while this was 77.5 per cent in 1890.

To illustrate the geographical spread of the database, Map 1 shows the birthplaces of seafarers who embarked on a Belgian merchant vessel in the port of Antwerp for the first time. In the middle of the nineteenth century, most maritime workers were born in the North Sea region, while the pattern became more widespread at the end of the century. The number of newly recruited seafarers clearly increased and more seafarers originated from places further away from Antwerp in 1890. Moreover, the Belgian fleet already relied heavily on foreign labour in 1850, especially because the Belgian supply was generally insufficient to meet the demand. In 1890, the total number of newcomers more than tripled and the ratio of Belgian to foreign seafarers rose from 1:2.0 in 1850 to 1:2.8 in 1890.

Map1. Origins of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet, 1850 and 1890.



Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Belgium's maritime recruitment area

In this section the origins of seafarers who worked on Belgian merchant vessels in 1850 and 1890 are studied in more detail. Following suggestions in recent migration literature, this study examines migration fields. This approach has the advantage that origins are not reduced to a simple analysis of nationalities, because a deeper examination is required to unearth certain trends that otherwise remain invisible. Map 1 already showed the added value of this approach. While the Belgian fleet relied heavily on maritime workers from nearby countries and Northern Europe in both periods under scrutiny, Belgium's maritime recruitment area vastly expanded in 1890, which highlights there was more change than at first glance. The expansion of the recruitment area was especially emphasised by a growth in seafarers who were born in more distant places from Antwerp. For example, while 48.1 per cent of newly recruited seafarers were born in places exceeding a 200 kilometre range from Antwerp in 1850, their share increased to 63.6 per cent in 1890. In addition, focusing on origins does not only gain insights into different migration fields but also allows us to determine if regions had a maritime character or not. And by investigating places of birth it is possible to distinguish between rural- and urban-born seafarers. Based on these parameters, three trends stand out. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Antwerp's maritime recruitment area expanded, the share of inland maritime migration increased and there were more rural-born seafarers in the Belgian fleet. I will discuss them in that order.

In order to detect change and continuity in Belgium's maritime recruitment area, particular migration fields in different geographical units are highlighted in Table 1. In 1850, most seafarers were born in places along the North Sea coastline. As such, the Belgian fleet relied heavily on migration fields that were already established before the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The majority of newly recruited seafarers came from Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Belgians came particularly from the city of Antwerp and its regional area (15.5%) and the harbour region of Ostend on the Belgian coast (11%). The Dutch were often born in the border province of Zeeland (7.7%), such as the maritime towns of Flushing and Zierikzee, and the port city and surrounding area of Amsterdam in Noord-Holland (4.8%). German seafarers came mostly from traditional northern regions, particularly Niedersachsen and Bremen (12.9%) and, to a lesser degree, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg (5.5%) and Mecklenburg-

¹⁴ See, for example: Jelle van Lottum, 'Some Thoughts About Migration of Maritime Workers in the Eighteenth-Century North Sea Region', *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 27, no. 4 (November 2015), 649-651.

Vorpommern (4.2%). Scandinavian seafarers made up another 11 per cent. Seafarers born in France (2.6%), Britain (2.9%) or other countries (2.6%) were negligible.

Table 1. Migration fields of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet, 1850 and 1890 (in percentages).

<i>Migration field</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1890</i>
City of Antwerp and Antwerp region	15.5	15.6
Ostend region	11.0	3.1
Belgium other (inland regions)	7.1	7.9
Zeeland	7.7	0.7
Noord-Holland	4.8	1.2
The Netherlands other	7.7	3.6
Northern Germany	24.5	10.4
Germany other (inland regions)	2.6	10.7
France	2.6	3.1
Greater London, North West England and Scotland	2.3	12.1
Britain other	0.6	6.0
Ireland	0.0	3.4
Scandinavia	11.0	14.2
Europe other	1.6	5.2
Other continents	1.0	2.7
<i>Total</i>	100	100
<i>N</i>	310	1,074

Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: Antwerp and Ostend regions: all places within a range of 25 kilometres from the cities of Antwerp and Ostend; Zeeland and Noord-Holland: present-day Dutch provinces; Northern Germany: present-day *Länder* of Niedersachsen and Bremen, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and former Prussian states along the Baltic Sea; Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden and Denmark; Europe other: Austria, Finland, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal, Russia, Spain and Switzerland; Other continents: Australia, Canada, Egypt, New Zealand, Ottoman Empire and the United States of America.

In 1890, the dataset contains 1074 new seafarers (+246%). The countries that in 1850 supplied 81 per cent came to represent only half (53.4%) of the seafarers recorded in 1890. This was due to a marked decrease in Dutch seafarers, and, to a lesser extent, Belgians and Germans, although both Belgian (from 104 men in 1850 to 286 in 1890) and German seafarers (from 84 men in 1850 to 227 in 1890) increased their presence considerably on Belgian merchant ships in absolute terms. The city of Antwerp and its surrounding area (from 15.5% in 1850 to 15.6% in 1890) remained stable suppliers. In contrast, recruitment in the harbour region of Ostend decreased (from 11% to 3.1%), which followed the decline of Ostend as a commercial port.¹⁵ The number of Dutch seafarers (from 20.2% to 5.6%) also

¹⁵ During the nineteenth century, Ostend shifted from a commercial port to a resort on the Belgian coast, while the port of Antwerp developed into an international hub that connected Belgium with Europe and the world. Veraghtert, 'From Inland Port to International Port', 279-422; Michael-W. Serruys, 'The Belgians: A Bi-Maritime People. Belgian Maritime Identity and Its Representation in Everyday Life', in Harald Hamre, Wouter

declined, most likely as a result of the rise of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Likewise, the relative share of seafarers from Northern Germany (from 24.5% to 10.4%) decreased as well, while migration from inland German regions (from 2.6% to 10.7%) increased significantly. Especially British maritime workers increased their presence on Belgian steamships. Most British seafarers were born in North West England (6.6%), Scotland (3.1%) and Greater London (2.4%). Especially Liverpool and, to a lesser extent, Glasgow and London and their surrounding area were large suppliers of British seafarers. Scandinavians (from 11% to 14.2%) remained numerous on Belgian ships, especially seamen from Sweden and Norway. The birthplaces of Scandinavians were mainly scattered along the coast, although quite some came from the port cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Copenhagen. Irishmen (3.4%) and seafarers from countries further away (from 2.6% to 7.9% in total), such as Austria and Russia, were also hired in increased numbers, although Belgium continued to rely heavily on seafarers from nearby countries and Scandinavia in 1890.

Closely related to the expansion of Antwerp's recruitment area in 1890 was the increased number of seafarers who did not have a connection with the sea coast by birth (Table 2). Defining a coastal region as an area not extending twenty kilometres from the coast, I assigned both cities and villages to a coastal or an inland region. I also created a category for maritime workers who were born in large port cities that were closely connected with Antwerp.¹⁶ This category includes seafarers from Amsterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Liverpool, London, Rotterdam and Antwerp itself. These port cities were important suppliers of labour (a total of about 20% in both years under study). The findings demonstrate that far more seafarers were born in inland regions in 1890 (from 30.3% in 1850 to 47.6% in 1890), which indicates that coastal areas (from 50% to 32.5%) declined in importance. The rise of inland regions was mainly a result of seafarers who originated from Belgium and Germany, whereas men from Scandinavia and Britain were often born in coastal areas. We have to be careful to characterise coastal regions as mere maritime areas and inland regions as their opposites, but the findings suggest that traditional migration fields, which were often coastal areas, were no longer the sole suppliers of labour for the Belgian fleet in 1890.

Heijveld and David J. Starkey, eds., *Maritime People: 9th North Sea History Conference* (Stavanger, 2011), 122-125.

¹⁶ In total, 688 unique birthplaces were divided into three categories based on latitude and longitude coordinates. Inland regions are defined as places extending 20 kilometres from the coastline, excluding major port cities (Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bremen, Hamburg, Liverpool, London and Rotterdam). All other places were categorised as coastal areas. The definition of a coastal region is based on: van Lottum, 'Some Thoughts About Migration of Maritime Workers', 658.

Table 2. Regions of birth of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet, 1850 and 1890 (in percentages).

<i>Regions of birth</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1890</i>
Coastal regions	50.0	32.5
Inland regions	30.3	47.6
Port cities (*)	19.7	19.9
<i>Total</i>	100	100
<i>N</i>	310	1,052

Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: Coastal regions are places not extending 20 kilometres from the coastline. See: van Lottum, 'Some Thoughts About Migration of Maritime Workers', 658. (*) Port cities concern Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bremen, Hamburg, Liverpool, London and Rotterdam (surrounding municipalities not included). The total number in 1890 differs from Table 1 because, in some cases, the seamen's registry recorded only countries of birth.

As the share of inland regions of birth increased, the number of rural-born seafarers also rose (Table 3). Taking population size in 1850 as a benchmark to distinguish between rural-born (less than 5,000 inhabitants) and urban-born (more than 5,000 inhabitants) seafarers, there was a ruralisation of migration over time (from 39% in 1850 to 45.3% in 1890), although the trend was less pronounced compared to foreign migration to Antwerp.¹⁷ In both periods, most Belgian and British seafarers were born in cities, while Scandinavians and Germans more originated from villages. Other nationalities displayed more or less a balance between rural and urban areas. The findings demonstrate that long-distance migration was not directly connected with an increase of urban-born seafarers, as was the case for overall migration patterns.¹⁸

Table 3. Population size of birthplaces of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet, 1850 and 1890 (in percentages).

<i>Population size</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1890</i>
Rural	39.0	45.3
Urban	61.0	54.7
Total	100	100
<i>N</i>	310	1,052

Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: Urban places have more than 5,000 inhabitants in 1850, according to P. Bairoch, J. Batou and P. Chèvre, *La population des villes européennes: banque de données et analyse sommaire des résultats, 800-1850* (Genève: Droz, 1988).

¹⁷ Hilde Greefs and Anne Winter calculated that 40% of male foreign newcomers to Antwerp were rural-born migrants in 1850, while this share increased to 54% in 1880. Hilde Greefs and Anne Winter, 'Alone and Far From Home: Gender and Migration Trajectories of Single Foreign Newcomers to Antwerp, 1850-1880', *Journal of Urban History*, 42, no. 1 (2016), 67.

¹⁸ Greefs and Winter, 'Alone and Far From Home', 67.

In sum, migration trajectories of seafarers in the Belgian fleet suggest that Antwerp's recruitment area vastly expanded during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1850, the Belgian fleet relied mainly on its national and international maritime connections for the supply of labour, which explains why the majority of the maritime workforce originated from established maritime areas that were connected to Antwerp. In 1890, the pattern became more widespread. Especially seafarers who originated from inland regions in Belgium and Germany increased their presence on Belgian merchant ships. It is assumable that a substantial part was pulled by the economic growth of Antwerp and took advantage of Belgium's dense transportation network. However, the Belgian fleet still relied on its maritime connections as well, demonstrated by the continued importance of migration fields in Scandinavia and Northern Germany, while British seafarers increased their presence significantly. Hence, in the overall evolution of Antwerp's maritime recruitment area between 1850 and 1890, there was change but also continuity.

New departments and the quality of labour

What do these findings on change and continuity regarding migration trajectories of seafarers in the Belgian fleet mean in the context of the transition from sail to steam? To answer this question, it is important to take into account that the emergence of steamships had an impact on the quality of labour, especially because new departments were created. The changing dynamics in the distribution of labour with the advent of steam have been connected to processes of deskilling and skill-enhancement. It has been argued that steamships increasingly demanded occupations that were rather easy to acquire, while, at the same time, they also required men who were capable of managing these complex machines.¹⁹ In general, sailing ships hired skilled workers who worked on deck. With the introduction of steam, there was an overall decline in the quality requirements of the labour force. In particular, the emergence of the engine room department created a completely new workforce: low-skilled trimmers and firemen but also high-skilled engineers were required.²⁰ Moreover, passenger trade in the Atlantic contributed considerably to the growth of shipping during the second half of the

¹⁹ Sanna-Mari Hynninen, Jari Ojala and Jaakko Pehkonen, 'Technological Change and Wage Premiums: Historical Evidence from Linked Employer-Employee Data', *Labour Economics*, 24 (2013), 1-11; Suresh Bhardwaj, 'Technology, and the Up-Skilling or Deskilling Conundrum', *WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs*, 12, no. 2 (October 2013), 245-253.

²⁰ David M. Williams, 'The Quality, Skill and Supply of Maritime Labour: Causes of Concern in Britain, 1850-1914', in Lewis R. Fischer, Harald Hamre and Poul Holm, eds., *The North Sea: Twelve Essays on Social History of Maritime Labour* (Stavanger, 1992), 43; Alston Kennerley, 'Stoking the Boilers: Firemen and Trimmers in British Merchant Ships, 1850-1950', *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 20, no. 1 (June 2008), 191-192.

nineteenth century and therefore the demand for low-skilled labour in victualling departments increased as well.²¹

To gain a better understanding of the expansion of Antwerp's recruitment area, it is useful to divide seafarers on the basis of the typology of high-, medium- and low-skilled maritime labour.²² Assigning seafarers to a particular skill group is challenging and debatable, but on the basis of hierarchy, skills and wage levels as they appeared in the seamen's registry, I assigned occupational groups to a specific skill group. The hypothesis is that a relationship existed between skill sets and geographical background. The skills and tasks of high-skilled labourers demanded education, problem-solving, creativity and management. This group consisted of masters, mates, surgeons, engineers and supervisory victuallers, such as chief stewards. Medium-skilled workers were by and large artisans who were experienced and carried out specialised tasks. It concerned deck specialists, such as carpenters and sailmakers, leading seamen, such as boatswains and quartermasters, able-bodied-seamen, engine room technicians, such as boilermakers and greasers, and leading victuallers, such as restaurant managers, chefs, storekeepers, bakers and butchers. The job descriptions of low-skilled seafarers involved skills and tasks that were rather easy to acquire. This category was composed of cabin boys, apprentices, hospital stewards, engine room operators, such as trimmers and firemen, cooks, stewards and waiters.²³

Map 2 shows the geographical spread of the origins of the three skill groups. Two particular trends stand out: traditional recruitment areas remained important for the supply of medium-skilled labour in 1890 and the rise of inland migration was mostly a result of the increased demand for low-skilled labour. In 1850, the Belgian merchant fleet recruited particularly seafarers from places along the North Sea coastline, while medium-skilled labourers were overall born in places further away. Low-skilled workers, for their part, were recruited mainly from Antwerp's local and regional migration circuits. At the end of the nineteenth century, migration patterns altered, although there was also continuity. In general, high-skilled labourers now most likely came from regions to the west of Antwerp, but medium-skilled seafarers were still particularly born in places to the north of the Belgian port city. Antwerp's local and regional migration circuits remained important for the supply of

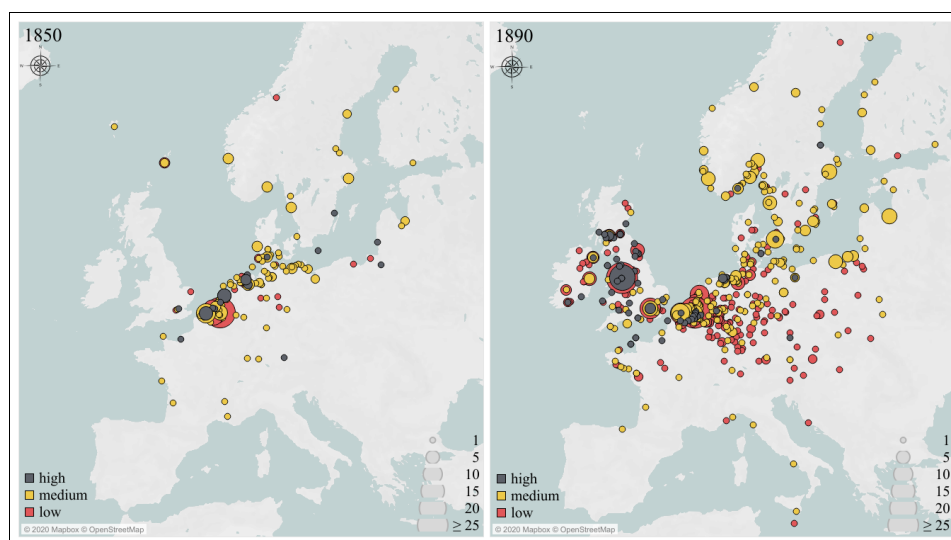
²¹ Sari Mäenpää, 'New Maritime Labour? Catering personnel on British Passenger Liners, 1860-1938' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2002), 1-4; Feys, *The Battle for the Migrants*, 315.

²² On the typology high-, medium- and low-skilled labour, see, for example: Ojala, Pehkonen and Eloranta, 'Deskilling and decline in skill premium', 85-94.

²³ For a further discussion on skill groups, see: Looockx, 'From Sail to Steam', 146-159.

low-skilled workers in 1890, although more lower-ranked workers came from regions to the east of Belgium.

Map2. Origins of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet by skill-group, 1850 and 1890.



Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: high-skilled comprises masters, mates, surgeons, engineers and chief stewards; medium-skilled comprises carpenters, sailmakers, boatswains, quartermasters, able-bodied seamen, boilermakers, greasers, restaurant managers, chefs, storekeepers, bakers and butchers; low-skilled comprises boys, apprentices, hospital stewards, trimmers, firemen, cooks and stewards.

The fact that traditional migration fields remained important for the supply of labour in the Belgian fleet was mainly a result of the demand for medium-skilled labour in deck departments. Particularly able-bodied seamen remained the largest recruited group in 1890. For instance, 31.8 per cent of all newly recruited seafarers concerned able-bodied seamen, which was considerably more than firemen (14.4%) or stewards (19.6%).²⁴ As noted by Lewis Fischer, who studied seafarers on British vessels departing from Antwerp, the able-bodied seaman indeed was the principle type of worker not only on sailing vessels but also on steamships during the nineteenth century.²⁵ They might have been less involved in propulsion with the advent of steam, except for steering, but there were able-bodied seamen required for permanent watches and maintenance work. Moreover, Belgian-flagged steamers in 1890 were equipped with auxiliary sails. These vessels were fully-fledged steamships, but in case of

²⁴ The most recruited occupational groups in 1850 were able-bodied seamen (46.0%), apprentices (14.7%), boys (14.1%) and cooks (8.3%). In 1890, especially able-bodied seamen (31.8%), stewards (19.6%), firemen (14.4%), trimmers (9.6%) and engineers (4.9%) were hired.

²⁵ Lewis R. Fischer, 'Seamen in the Industrial Revolution: Maritime Wages in Antwerp During the Shipping Transition, 1863-1900', in Christian Koninckx, ed., *Proceedings of the International Colloquium Industrial Revolutions and the Sea* (Brussels, 1991), 335.

emergency, it was essential to dispose of labourers who were familiar with navigation.²⁶ Therefore, the Belgian fleet relied heavily on skilled men from established migration fields in Scandinavia (26.1%) and Northern Germany (13.7%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Migration fields of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet by department, 1890 (in percentages).

<i>Migration field</i>	<i>DD</i>	<i>ERD</i>	<i>VD</i>
Antwerp and Antwerp region	11.1	24.3	13.3
Ostend region	2.8	2.8	3.8
Belgium other (inland regions)	8.1	6.5	9.1
Zeeland	1.3	-	0.7
Noord-Holland	0.6	0.9	2.4
The Netherlands other	4.3	1.9	4.5
Northern Germany	13.7	5.9	10.1
Germany other (inland regions)	6.6	10.0	18.2
France	2.8	4.0	2.4
Greater London, North West England and Scotland	6.9	17.4	14.7
Britain other	5.1	7.5	5.6
Ireland	1.9	6.2	2.8
Scandinavia	26.1	7.2	2.4
Europe other	6.0	3.1	6.3
Other continents	2.6	2.2	3.5
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	467	321	286

Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: deck department (DD): masters, mates, surgeons, deck engineers, carpenters, sailmakers, boatswains, quartermasters, able-bodied seamen, hospital stewards, apprentices and boys; engine room department (ERD): engineers, boilermakers, greasers, firemen and trimmers; victualling department (VD): chief stewards, restaurant managers, chefs, storekeepers, bakers, butchers, cooks, stewards and waiters. Migration fields as for Table 1.

In general, German and Scandinavian seafarers had a good overall reputation in terms of navigation.²⁷ Moreover, Germans, Norwegians and Swedes all found a community of their own on arrival in Antwerp, or at least a boarding house that was specifically aimed at their culture.²⁸ For instance, according to the 1890 census, about 25 per cent of all foreigners in Antwerp were born in Germany.²⁹ In addition, German ships were numerous in the Belgian port. In 1890, about 13 per cent of all vessels arriving in Antwerp were German, coming

²⁶ André Kint and Robert Vervoort, *De Red Star Line: Antwerpens vergane glorie!* (Antwerp, 1990), 79-91.

²⁷ Lars Tangeraas, 'Norwegian Sailors in American Waters, 1850-1914', *Scandinavian Studies*, 54, no. 2 (1982), 140-141.

²⁸ Christiaan Engberts, 'The Rise of Associational Activity: Early Twentieth Century German Sailors' Homes and Schools in Antwerp and Rotterdam', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 32, no. 3 (2014), 297-301; Virginia Hoel, *Faith, Fatherland and the Norwegian Seamen: The Work of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission in Antwerp and the Dutch Ports (1864-1920)* (Hilversum, 2016), 83-94.

²⁹ Greta Devos, 'Inwijking en integratie van Duitse kooplieden te Antwerpen in de 19^{de} eeuw', in Hugo Soly and Alfons K.L. Thijs, eds., *Minderheden in Westeuropese steden (16^{de}-20^{ste} eeuw)* (Brussels, 1995), 137.

mostly from Hamburg and Bremen in Northern Germany.³⁰ Scandinavians also found a community of their own in Antwerp. For example, the Belgian port city was an important hub for the Norwegian Seamen's Mission, an attempt to create a home in order to contain immorality and exploitation. Antwerp was one of the first European port cities that established a Norwegian church.³¹ The city of Antwerp and its surrounding area also remained an import supplier of deckhands in 1890. Although apprenticeship was in decline with the advent of steam, the majority of these men were lower-ranked boys.³²

New departments depended mainly on seafarers who did not originate from established migration fields. This explains why the pattern of migration became more widespread with the advent of steam. Engine room and victualling departments demanded different types of labourers and introduced new methods of supervision. In general, large crews were supervised by a small number of officers and a mid-level was almost inexistent in these departments.³³ As such, engine room and victualling departments demanded especially low-skilled labourers. For example, 80.7% of all newly recruited seafarers in Belgian engine room departments were low-skilled labourers, such as trimmers and firemen, while this was 94.5% in victualling departments, particularly stewards. Engine room departments recruited mostly local and regional seafarers (24.3%), men from specific areas in Britain (17.4%) and inland German regions (10%). However, there were significant differences in the positions on board. Engineers came mainly from Britain, while Irishmen were often employed as engine room operators. These findings correspond with general trends on British steamers during the period under consideration. As noted by Valerie Burton, Scotsmen were often recruited for their experience in steam technology, while Irishmen worked as low-skilled labourers below deck.³⁴ The group of engine room operators was supplemented with Germans and Belgians, the latter being almost exclusively hired as trimmers or the lowest positions in engine room departments.

In general, victualling departments demanded low-skilled labourers who served passengers or worked in catering and restaurant staffs on ocean liners. These men were often born inland

³⁰ Veraghtert, 'De havenbeweging te Antwerpen', annex XCI; Greta Devos, 'German Ocean Shipping and the Port of Antwerp, 1875-1914: An Introduction', in Christian Koninckx, ed., *Proceedings of the International Colloquium Industrial Revolutions and the Sea* (Brussels, 1991), 283.

³¹ Hoel, *Faith, Fatherland and the Norwegian Seamen*, 95-126.

³² The share of newly recruited apprentices in the Belgian merchant fleet decreased from 14.7% in 1850 to 1% in 1890, while, in the case of boys, this was 14.1% to 5%.

³³ For example, 2.8% of all newly recruited seafarers in 1890 concerned medium-skilled labourers who were hired to work in engine room departments, such as greasers and boilermakers, while this was 5.5% in the case of victualling departments, such as restaurant managers, chefs, bakers and butchers.

³⁴ Valerie Burton, 'Counting Seafarers: The Published Records of the Registry of Merchant Seamen, 1849-1913', *Mariner's Mirror*, 71, no. 3 (1985), 316-317.

German areas (18.2%), the city of Antwerp and its surrounding area (13.3%), inland Belgian regions (9.1%) and specific British regions (14.7%), such as London and Liverpool. Thus, many Belgians and Germans who started to work in victualling departments were born in inland regions, such as Wallonia in Belgium, North Rhine-Westphalia and more distant inland areas in Germany. Most of these areas concerned industrialized regions, which might explain why these men were pushed to commercial nodes, such as Antwerp, where they found employment opportunities in the hospitality sector. However, Table 4 also indicates that 10.1% of newly recruited victuallers were men from established maritime regions in Northern Germany, which suggests that the relationship between departments and geographical background was not always straightforward, as was the case for other geographical units. Anyway, many Germans worked in hotels and catering businesses that were scattered across Antwerp, as was the case for other major port cities in Europe, such as London.³⁵ Moreover, language was most likely an important factor as well. English was the preferred language in the front office of Belgian ocean liners because of the international character of passengers.³⁶ Thus, it is not surprising that these liners employed many British workers in victualling departments. In addition, the few newly recruited women in the steward's department (0.5%) were also born in Britain. Belgian-flagged passenger liners most likely preferred British women to serve female passengers and their children on board, while other occupations in victualling departments were predominantly male, as was the case for British ocean liners.³⁷

The changing nature of Belgian shipping

In this final section, the focus is on shipping companies and how the changing nature of Belgian shipping affected migration trajectories of seafarers. According to Drew Keeling, “the largest international shipping market in the nineteenth century was the North Atlantic” which “was dominated by large shipping lines whose principal business was not freight but passengers”. In addition, Keeling stressed that “the steamers’ takeover of the migrant trade from sailing ships was not gradual”.³⁸ Indeed, the Belgian subsidiary Société Anonyme de Navigation Belge-Américaine of the American International Navigation Company –better

³⁵ Frans Lauwers, *Uitbundig Antwerpen: Horeca en Uitgaansleven in Vervlogen Tijden* (Ljubljana, 1997), 80; Panikos Panayi and Stefan Manz, ‘The Rise and Fall of Germans in the British Hospitality Industry, c.1880-1920’, *Food & History*, 1, no. 2 (2013), 243-244.

³⁶ Torsten Feys, ‘Trans-Atlantic Migration at Full Steam Ahead: A Flourishing and Well-Oiled Multinational Enterprise’, in Bram Beelaert, ed., *Red Star Line Antwerp, 1873-1914* (Leuven, 2013), 38-41.

³⁷ Sari Mäenpää, ‘Galley News: Catering Personnel on British Passenger Liners, 1860-1938’, *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 12, no. 1 (June 2000), 632.

³⁸ Drew Keeling, ‘The Transportation Revolution and Transatlantic Migration, 1850-1914’, in Alexander J. Field, ed., *Research in Economic History* (Stamford, 1999), 40.

known under the trademark Red Star Line— was an illustration of the unprecedented rise of passenger transport in the North Atlantic, which, in turn, contributed significantly to the changing nature of Belgian shipping and Belgium's fast transition from sail to steam from the 1870s onwards.³⁹ This also applied to the Société de Navigation Royale Belge Sud-Américaine, the Belgian subsidiary of Lamport and Holt Line, the British shipping company that operated the Belgian mail contract to South America.⁴⁰ After several failures to establish regular steamship lines and the realisation that domestic capital was insufficient to build a strong fleet, the Belgian government had opted to artificially inflate the national fleet by granting subsidies to foreign shipping companies if they sailed under the Belgian flag. While American and British investors could benefit from Antwerp's strategic location in the heart of Western Europe, the Belgian strategy strengthened the economic position of Antwerp as envisaged by the government, although most profits went abroad.⁴¹

Together Red Star Line and Lamport and Holt hired 71.3 per cent of all newly recruited seafarers in 1890. In order to gain a better understanding of change and continuity in migration trajectories of seafarers, it is interesting to analyse these shipping companies' recruitment strategies separate from other Belgian shipping companies. The seamen's registry did not record information about vessels, such as tonnages, type of trade and shipping companies, but on the basis of ship's names it is possible to compare Belgian-flagged shipping companies. Indirectly, this also provides insights into differences between transatlantic ocean liners and cargo vessels since passenger transport was Red Star Line's core business, while other Belgian-flagged shipping companies were mainly involved in cargo trade. Map 3 shows the number of newcomers on Belgian-flagged vessels of Red Star Line, Lamport and Holt and other Belgian-flagged shipping companies by department in 1890. In general, the share of newly recruited seafarers in deck and engine room departments displayed more or less a balance between different shipping companies, but the increased demand for labour in victualling departments was primarily a result of Red Star Line's involvement in passenger transport, which contributed to rise of seafarers from inland regions in Belgium and Germany.⁴²

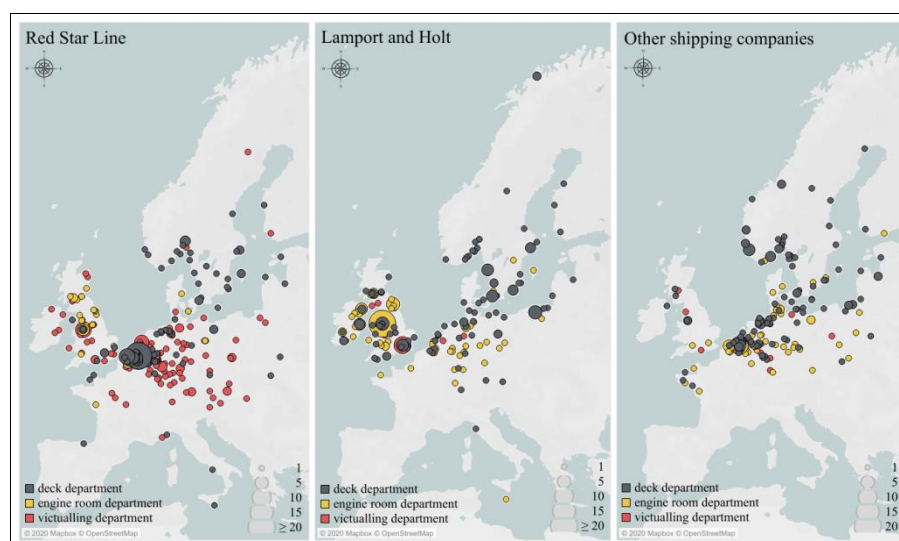
³⁹ Vernon E.W. Finch, *The Red Star Line and International Mercantile Marine Company* (Antwerp, 1988), 22-29.

⁴⁰ Paul Heaton, *Lamport & Holt Line* (Abergavenny, 2004), 29-37.

⁴¹ Segers, 'Op zoek naar afzetmarkten', 427.

⁴² The distribution was as follows: deck departments: 34.7% (Red Star Line), 27.9% (Lamport and Holt) and 37.4% (other shipping companies); engine room departments: 32.0% (Red Star Line), 37.9% (Lamport and Holt) and 30.1% (other shipping companies); victualling departments: 71.4% (Red Star Line), 15.2% (Lamport and Holt) and 13.4% (other shipping companies).

Map3. Origins of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian fleet by shipping company and department, 1890.



Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: As for Table 4.

In 1890, Table 5 demonstrates that Belgian-flagged shipping companies (excluding Red Star Line and Lampport and Holt) recruited mainly Belgians (27.9%), Germans (27.9%) and Scandinavians (21.4%). Compared to Red Star Line and Lampport and Holt, British seafarers (4.2%) were almost absent on other Belgian-flagged vessels. Belgians were especially hired to work in lower positions in engine room departments. Seafarers from Scandinavia and Northern Germany were often employed as able-bodied seamen, although Belgian and Dutch able-bodied seamen were also present, albeit more modestly. As a rule, high-skilled positions were reserved to foreigners, indicating that it was difficult for Belgian masters, mates and engineers to find employment in deck and engine room departments, respectively.

Table 5. Countries of birth of newly recruited seafarers in the Belgian merchant fleet by shipping company, 1890 (in percentages).

<i>Country</i>	<i>RSL</i>	<i>L&H</i>	<i>Other</i>
Belgium	40.7	2.7	27.9
The Netherlands	6.4	3.4	6.5
Germany	19.3	17.0	27.9
France	3.0	1.0	5.2
Britain	13.1	44.6	4.2
Ireland	0.4	7.8	-
Scandinavia	7.8	16.7	21.4
Europe other	6.1	3.1	5.8
Other continents	3.2	3.7	1.0
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	472	294	308

Source: Database Seamen's Registry.

Note: (RSL) Red Star Line Company; (L&H) Lampport and Holt; (Other) other Belgian shipping companies. Scandinavia, Europe other and other continents as for Table 1.

Red Star Line (1873-1934) transported thousands of migrants to the United States and was the largest shipping company that sailed under the Belgian flag with a fleet of nine ocean liners in 1890.⁴³ The company organised several monthly departures from Antwerp to New York and Philadelphia, while its sister company, the American Line, provided services between Philadelphia and Liverpool during the period under study.⁴⁴ The vast majority of new seafarers were hired to work as stewards in victualling departments, which highlights how Red Star Line had an impact on the demand for new types of labourers and the quality of labour. The company preferred Belgian seafarers (40.7%), as was the case for German (19.3%) and British workers (13.1%). Especially seafarers from inland German and Belgian regions and the surroundings of London and Liverpool were present in victualling departments of Red Star Line vessels. Antwerp's local and regional migration field was mainly important for the supply of engine room operators and boys, which highlights that Belgians were often employed in lower-ranked positions. If Red Star Line hired Belgians in high-skilled positions, it concerned surgeons. Most of these men were new graduates who used the opportunity to gain experience after completing their studies at Belgian universities.⁴⁵ For the supply of engineers, Red Star Line relied mainly on British labour, while able-bodied seamen often originated from established regions in Scandinavia and Northern Germany.

As mentioned, the subsidiary of the Liverpool-based Lamport and Holt Line (1876-1908) operated the Belgian mail contract to South America with a dozen steamers.⁴⁶ Recruitment strategies of Lamport and Holt's Belgian subsidiary clearly differed from Red Star Line and other Belgian-flagged shipping companies. The findings show that Lamport and Holt contributed to the numerous presences of British seafarers (44.6%) in the Belgian merchant fleet, while Belgians were almost absent (2.7%). Apart from Britons, the company recruited German (17%) and Scandinavian (16.7%) seafarers, while the presence of Irishmen (7.8%) in the Belgian fleet was almost exclusively attributable to the fact that Lamport and Holt sailed under the Belgian flag. Moreover, while specific migration fields were important for particular types of labourers in general, the British case was exceptional. Lamport and Holt's

⁴³ Ship's names of Red Star Line vessels consistently ended in the suffix -land. In 1890, it concerned the following ships: *Belgenland*, *Friesland*, *Nederland*, *Noordland*, *Pennland*, *Rhijnland*, *Switzerland*, *Waesland* and *Westernland*.

⁴⁴ William Henry Flayhart, *The American Line (1871-1902)* (New York, 2000), 79-85; Feys, 'Trans-Atlantic Migration at Full Steam Ahead', 33-34.

⁴⁵ Looockx, 'From Sail to Steam', 268.

⁴⁶ It concerned the following ships: *Coleridge*, *Galileo*, *Hevelius*, *Hipparchus*, *Kepler*, *Leibniz*, *Maskelyne*, *Teniers*, *Tycho Brahe* and *Wordsworth*. For a general overview of Lamport and Holt vessels, see: Heaton, *Lamport and Holt Line*.

Belgian subsidiary employed British high-, medium- and low-skilled labourers who worked in all three departments. How can this be explained? In contrast to other Belgian-flagged shipping companies, there are strong indications that Lamport and Holt barely recruited seafarers in Antwerp. It seems that the company relied on the Belgian subsidiary's sister company, the Liverpool, Brazil and River Plate Steam Navigation Company, for the supply of labour. For example, in June 1895, the Brazilian newspaper *Rio News* published an advertisement of the British-flagged steamship *Wordsworth* under the command of Captain Hairby. The vessel returned in February 1896 to Liverpool, but a month before the advertisement, the same ship and master (and probably the same crew) had sailed from Antwerp to Rio de Janeiro under the Belgian flag.⁴⁷ Thus, it seems that steamers of Lamport and Holt simply changed flags, which might explain the high share of British and Irish seafarers and the low share of Belgian workers compared to other Belgian-flagged shipping companies.

Although Belgium already relied heavily on foreign labour in the middle of the century, the Lamport and Holt case demonstrates that the shipping company's recruitment methods had an impact on the increased number of foreign seafarers in the Belgian fleet. This was also the case for Red Star Line, which particularly preferred foreign officers. As mentioned, the ratio of Belgian to foreign seafarers rose from 1:2.0 in 1850 to 1:2.8 in 1890. However, this contrasted with Belgian legislation. A Belgian law of 1844 stipulated that to be appointed as ship's master, first or second mate in the Belgian fleet, one needed to pass an exam. In 1889, a royal decree even required shipping companies that sailed under the Belgian flag to employ only Belgians as officers on their vessels, although in 1904, another royal decree allowed for exemptions.⁴⁸ Clearly, Belgian laws were not rigorously implemented, notwithstanding the increase of foreign officers was challenged by contemporary lobbies.⁴⁹ It seems that the importance of Red Star Line and Lamport and Holt for the development of the Belgian fleet gave these shipping companies a privileged position in terms of recruitment. Eventually, the Belgian government put more emphasis on the establishment of regular steamship lines and the economic position of the Antwerp port instead of protecting employment opportunities for

⁴⁷ *The Rio News* (Rio de Janeiro), 18 June 1895.

⁴⁸ Lodewijk De Raet, *Vlaanderen's Economische Ontwikkeling* (Antwerp, 1905), 291.

⁴⁹ For example, the establishment of a board of Belgian masters in 1857, the Koninklijk Belgisch Zeemanscollege, defended the interests of Belgian ship's masters. It remains uncertain why the board was founded, but the initiative was likely fuelled by the fact that a substantial number of Belgian certified masters were unemployed. Particularly with the advent of steam and the entry of foreign capital in the Belgian fleet, the board regularly addressed letters to relevant authorities in order to enforce the laws, but with little success. Koninklijk Belgisch Zeemanscollege, *100 jaar historiek van het Koninklijk Belgische Zeemanscollege* (Antwerp, 1957), 19-52.

domestic seafarers. As a pendant to the large share of foreigners in the Belgian fleet, a substantial number of Belgian officers worked on foreign vessels at the end of the nineteenth century, while others worked as able-bodied seamen, dockworkers or remained unemployed.⁵⁰ However, the findings illustrate that Belgians were not excluded from the maritime labour market since the majority of Belgian-flagged shipping companies hired national seafarers, albeit in lower-ranked occupations in general.

Conclusion

The central aim of this article was to examine how migration trajectories of seafarers evolved during a period of transition. Whereas the Belgian merchant fleet relied mainly on its maritime connections for the supply of labour in mid-century, Belgium's recruitment area vastly expanded with the advent of steam. The creation of new departments and the emergence of ocean liners increased the demand for low-skilled labour in engine room and victualling departments, which, in turn, stimulated inland migration from areas which had not a maritime character and were rather easily accessible from Antwerp. Moreover, the entry of foreign capital in the Belgian fleet also had impact on employment and stimulated the movement of especially foreign officers, which had adverse effects on domestic recruitment at this level. The Belgian state showed little interest in the situation, because it paid more attention to the economic position of Antwerp. However, despite significant changes in migration trajectories of seafarers in the Belgian fleet, the findings also point in the direction of continuity. Indeed, the changeover to steam concerned a fast and drastic process, but traditional workers did not suddenly disappear in the Belgian fleet, which explains why established migration fields in the northern parts of Europe remained important for the supply of skilled labour in deck departments. Thus, it seems that old and new patterns co-evolved during the period under study. In order to compare results, future research would benefit from integrating ocean liners and studying departments as worlds on their own. A ship was a labour entity, but this article highlights that each department had its own characteristics and dynamics in terms of job duties and recruitment.

Acknowledgements

This paper is part of the IMMIBEL-project 'Outcast or Embraced? Clusters of Migrants in Belgium, c.1840-1914', which investigates the scale, chronology and nature of nineteenth-

⁵⁰ Alex De Vos, *Mercator: geschiedenis van de Belgische schoolschepen* (Antwerp, 1993), 13.

century migration to Belgium. The project is funded by BELSPO, the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the European Social Science History Conference in Belfast in April 2018. I am grateful to Hilde Greefs (University of Antwerp), Anne Winter (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Torsten Feys (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) and Thomas Verbruggen (University of Antwerp and Vrije Universiteit Brussel) for their constructive suggestions.

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