

The place of sailors in port cities, through the example of 19th century Le Havre

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A recent article by Robert Lee, lamenting the lack of attention paid to the study of sailors on land, invites us to reflect on the aims of the historical studies devoted to seafarers. According to Lee, the “deconstruction” of the common perception of sailors, maintained by literature, is yet to be perfected. Our knowledge of the integration of sailors into society at times of great technological change remains limited and clichés sometimes prevail. Through examples of British and Scandinavian spaces, Lee states that the study of sailors offers great historical perspectives, evoking in turn the pre-established links between sailors, alcohol, prostitution, and violence as well as the preconceptions relating to irresponsibility, the innate and definitive attachment of a sailor to the sea and his frequentation of urban spaces restricted to the quays. In his opinion, in order to understand the maritime populations subject to the influence of the technological evolutions of the 19th century, research into families, social networks, the place of women and new cultural sensitivities and customs is needed¹. Lee invites us to construct a history of sailors that reassesses our existing knowledge, taking account of this particular context. Concerning the French coasts in the late modern period, the theme of the integration of sailors into society remains little explored to date. On the whole, the history of sailors is still “under construction”², particularly regarding commercial sailors in the late modern period. In fact, certain major works of French historiography have made it possible to lay the foundations for research into the life of sailors on land, but the early modern period largely dominates. The work of Alain Cabantous, undoubtedly pioneering and inspiring, favours a global approach to maritime populations³. Reading Cabantous’ work provides important leads for those wishing to study sailors, on land and at sea, as it “opens up the coastal stage to sailors”, to use Gerard Le Bouédec’s words⁴. Nevertheless, about thirty years after a groundbreaking conference held in Bucharest, not much has been made of the sociocultural and identification approach to studying sailors, in particular for the late modern period⁵.

¹ Robert Lee, “The seafarers urban world: a critical review”, *International Journal of Maritime History*, XXV, n°1, June 2013, p. 23-64.

² “en chantier” - Jean-Louis Lenhof, “Travail des équipages et spécificités sociales des gens de mer en France à l’époque contemporaine : une histoire en chantier”, *Revue d’histoire Maritime*, n° 10-11, PUPS, May 2010, p. 159-174.

³ Alain Cabantous, *Dix mille marins face à l’Océan : les populations maritimes de Dunkerque au Havre aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles, vers 1660-1794 : étude sociale*, Paris, Publisud, 1991. CABANTOUS A., *Les citoyens du large. Les identités maritimes en France (XVII^e-XIX^e siècle)*, Paris, Aubier, 1995.

⁴ “ouvrent la scène littorale aux gens de mer”. Gérard Le Bouédec, *Activités maritimes et sociétés littorales de l’Europe atlantique (1690-1790)*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1997, p. 3.

⁵ P. Adam (ed.), *Seamen in society*, from the international colloquium on maritime history, Bucharest, 1980.

Our work, therefore, considers the maritime population on land, in a large port mainly engaged in commercial activities at the time of the transition from sail to steam: the port of Le Havre. Our main aim is to cement the idea that in the late modern period, “the coastal societies living on this contact zone, this region of rupture, on this boundary, this open and innovative space, offer historians new avenues for research.”⁶ This article summarizes to some extent the major conclusions of a recently completed doctoral research project⁷. The adopted approach provides a study on sailors within urban society by examining their relationships with others. Le Havre, our observation laboratory, is the large commercial and progressively industrial port city that concerns us here. Taking account of this specific context, we will examine how sailors integrated into the urban society of this large port on the English Channel. In short, we will provide a brief response to the following question: what place did sailors occupy in large port cities in the 19th century?

After revisiting our chosen spatio-temporal context, our response will be based around two general themes. We will firstly examine the profile of the sailors of Le Havre, through their origins and their family life, in order to, secondly, address their role as major social actors in urban society. However, we should point out an important aspect of our methodology: indeed, when sailors in the city are studied, it is necessary to distinguish between the sailors registered administratively in the maritime district of Le Havre and the sailors on shore leave. For the former, the institution *Inscription Maritime* that registered the maritime professions, provides invaluable archival sources making it possible to follow personal journeys to then deduce common dynamics. Sailors on shore leave, however, are more difficult to find, but a critical and impartial look at more qualitative sources offers interesting insights that allow us to determine the presence of these sailors in the city⁸.

Sailors at the heart of a booming port city in the 19th century

In order to grasp local idiosyncrasies and understand the society in which the sailors whom we focus on evolved, it is necessary to mention some major aspects of the history of Le Havre in the 19th century, marked by a boom that was as badly prepared as it was fast. Indeed, in one century, the number of Le Havre inhabitants multiplied by a factor of 6.8. In France, only the industrial towns of Roubaix and Saint-Etienne, with the coefficients of 8.3 and eight respectively, experienced comparable,

⁶ “les sociétés littorales qui vivent sur cette zone de contact, de rupture, sur cette frontière, cet espace ouvert et d’innovation, offrent aux historiens de nouvelles perspectives de recherche”. Gérard Le Bouède, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷ Nicolas Cochar, *Les marins dans la ville, gens de mer et société urbaine au Havre 1830-1914*, Doctoral thesis from the University of Caen under the supervision of professors André Zysberg and John Barzman, 2013.

⁸ Note that the quantitative observations come from a study based on following 450 sailors throughout the 19th century, from their registration kept and maintained throughout their careers by *Inscription Maritime*, French legal framework and human resources management systems that ran until the middle of the 20th century.

though higher, growth. However, the periods of economic crisis during the period 1862-1866, and in particular the great depression of 1888-1896, slowed down this remarkable increase. With 136,159 inhabitants in the 1911 census, Le Havre exceeded Rouen, neighbour and rival with its 124,987 individuals. Le Havre, confronted with high demographic pressure, was characterized by its small size⁹. Consequently, the individuals who came to Le Havre to benefit from the commercial boom did not enjoy good living conditions. It was only after several decades that Le Havre became a large city, but this urban growth was accompanied by the disadvantages of a space badly adapted to these changes. There were up to 548 inhabitants per hectare in 1846 in this city, enclosed by its walls, and, in spite of a strong birth rate, (62.6% in Le Havre compared to sixty-four per cent in Paris in 1848), it was largely positive net migration that accounted for the urban explosion. The 1885 census records an agglomerated municipal population of 105,867 inhabitants for Le Havre. In 1888, an additional floating population of 2,875 can be counted, comprised of sailors, merchants, migrants, with all the issues of reception and housing that this entailed¹⁰. Edouard Corbière, Le Havre inhabitant, expected from 15,000 to 20,000 additional people in the city in the summer of 1832 because of an imminent departure for America¹¹. Immigration in Le Havre remained increasingly high when the general economy was in good shape, requiring more labour. For this reason, the port cities “represent good observation laboratories for those who want to study the history of these foreign communities.”¹² Indeed, migratory flows clearly reveal the economic situation. The crisis years are characterized by departures, as in 1860-1865, for example, and prosperity by arrivals, as seen in 1875-1880. Therefore, the presence of sailors and other external individuals can vary quantitatively according to the dynamism of commercial activities. Nonetheless, overall, the development of Le Havre gradually transformed the urban space. At the beginning of our period of study, port and city were adjacent, but as 1914 approached, the increase in port surface area moved the port infrastructure to the East. Alain Cabantous reflects on the consequences of this spatial division:

“The port city always has a scandalous reputation and there are few books that do not mention music halls featuring women of questionable virtue and brothels. However, it seems that it is owing to the change in maritime transport and the separation of the port from the city that the seedy working class district becomes known for its wild night life [...].”¹³

⁹ A. Corvisier, (ed.), *Histoire du Havre et de l'estuaire de la Seine*, Toulouse, Privat, 1987, p. 109.

¹⁰ Philippe Barrey, “Note sur la population du Havre”, *Recueil des publications de la Société havraise d'études diverses*, années 1887-1888, p. 97.

¹¹ *Journal du Havre*, 2 April 1832.

¹² “représentent de bons laboratoires d'observation pour qui veut se pencher sur l'histoire de ces communautés étrangères” M. Augeron and P. Even (eds.), *Les étrangers dans les villes portuaires*, from the colloquium of La Rochelle-Brouage from 7 to 9 December 2006, Paris, Les Indes Savantes, 2010, p. 8.

¹³ “La ville-port a toujours une réputation sulfureuse et rares sont les livres qui ne mentionnent pas ces cabarets à filles de petite vertu et ces maisons de prostitution. Pourtant, il semble que c'est à la faveur de la mutation des transports maritimes

Consequently, the port that was formerly part of the everyday lives of the Le Havre population moved away. Gradually, only the presence of sailing ships in the old docks and, above all, of sailors in the city, were a reminder of its port nature, as the transatlantic ships moored far from the centre, in specific docks in the east of the city¹⁴. Transoceanic business activity strongly contributed to the rise of Le Havre and, in 1897, 32 companies used shipping lanes starting from Le Havre, including 17 French and 20 firms of other nationalities. For comparison, there were 40 such companies in Bordeaux, of which 21 were French and seven in Nantes, of which five were French. The transportation of passengers was an activity characteristic of Le Havre, probably that which is most deeply inscribed in the collective memory. One of the results of Napoleon III's ambitions can be seen therein: in a speech on 9 October 1852, the ruler declared that "we have all our large ports of the West to bring the American continent closer [...]".¹⁵ In 1896, 243,428 people left the Norman port, while 478,918 arrived¹⁶. However, it would be short-sighted to compare Le Havre only to ocean-going ports, since short sea shipping also flourished as the port city specialized in the redistribution of imported tropical food goods, as this testimony from the end of the 19th century attests:

"Steam-powered cabotage is represented by many coastal shipping companies going from Cherbourg, Granville, Saint Malo, Saint Brieux, Nantes, Bayonne, Boulogne sur Mer, Dunkirk... Some are very important, such as: the *Compagnie Anonyme des Paquebots à vapeur* between Le Havre, Caen, Trouville, Honfleur and the ports of Normandy, the *Compagnie du Havre* in Morlaix and Brest, the *Compagnie Anonyme des Paquebots à Vapeur* in Finistère."¹⁷

With the arrival of the railways in the middle of the century, the port of Le Havre could supply Paris with various goods more easily and became a "world class warehouse"¹⁸. If ports are "the reflection of Europe stepping into the industrial era"¹⁹, the port of Le Havre is indeed a good example. With this brief review of the history of Le Havre, we aim to better understand the groups that interest us. On the one hand, between ocean-going, short sea shipping and even offshore fishing, it is indeed the heterogeneity of the environment that characterizes the sailors' universe. We are, therefore, concerned with the cosmopolitan groups that enlivened the port city and, in this sense, understanding sailors in

et du décrochage entre le port et la ville que le quartier populaire louche s'affirme avec une vie nocturne débridée [...]". A. Cabantous, A. Léspagnol and F Péron (eds.), *op. cit.* p. 554.

¹⁴ Alain Leménorel, "Le patrimoine maritime havrais et ses acteurs", *Etudes normandes*, n°1, 2001, Association d'Etudes normandes, p. 79-96.

¹⁵ "nous avons tous nos grands ports de l'Ouest à rapprocher du continent américain [...]" quoted in Bruno Marnot, *Les grands ports de commerce français et la mondialisation au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, PUPS, 2011, p. 345.

¹⁶ L. Vallée, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ "Le cabotage à vapeur est représenté par de nombreuses lignes côtières allant de Cherbourg, Granville, Saint Malo, Saint Brieux, Nantes, Bayonne, Boulogne sur Mer, Dunkerque... Certaines sont très importantes, comme : La Compagnie Anonyme des Paquebots à vapeur entre le Havre, Caen, Trouville, Honfleur et les ports de Normandie, la Compagnie du Havre à Morlaix et à Brest, la Compagnie Anonyme des Paquebots à Vapeur du Finistère" *Ibid.* p. 10.

¹⁸ "entrepôt de niveau mondial" Olivier Chaline, *La Normandie. Un destin entre terre et mer*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010, p. 72.

¹⁹ "le reflet de l'entrée de l'Europe dans l'ère industrielle" A. Cabantous, A. Léspagnol et F. Péron (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 454.

society becomes more complex. On the other hand, the population of Le Havre was principally constructed in the 19th century, under the influence of the changes cited above and the sailors, like many other individuals, came to take part in the rise of the city. The main focus of our research consists in discerning the participation of sailors in this urban society under construction.

The geographical origins of Le Havre sailors and their integration into the urban space

The first line of investigation logically concerns the origins of sailors registered in Le Havre. Studying birthplaces makes it possible to unearth several components that are essential to understanding the composition of the maritime population of the city in the late modern period. Although recruitment pools, such as northern Brittany or the departments of Normandy, stand out due to their primacy, various geographical origins can be observed. Ultimately, a cosmopolitan population of sailors gradually takes shape, which strongly contradicts the remarks of many observers of the time who conceived of only one geographical or social rationale behind the call of the sea. It is, therefore, the traditional definition of the sailor that is to be discussed and nuanced, breaking away from the definition provided in this excerpt from a memoir written in 1794-1795:

“One needs men born in the maritime towns; one must breathe the air of the sea early, play in some way with the marine element as of the cradle ... one man born by the sea is worth at least two men.”²⁰

At the beginning of the 20th century, and although the professional diversification process had already begun, people remained convinced by the idea that competence at sea was partly down to geographical determinism, as Jacques Captier believed:

“As for wanting to regenerate the *Inscription Maritime* by obliging factory workers to register, one should not count on it. That one seeks to deliberately attract them to the service of the fleet, so be it, but one should not think of forcing them, one would realize quickly that their seamanship is lacking. They would be repugnant to service at sea, the distance of their hearth would frighten them and then the undeniable superiority of the professional seafarer would reappear.”²¹

As regards Le Havre, sailors were largely recruited from the north of the country in a line from Le Havre to Brest, but the modernization of sailing and changes to the maritime professions contributed to a

²⁰ “Il faut des hommes nés dans les villes maritimes ; il faut respirer de bonne heure l'air de la mer, badiner en quelques sorte avec l'élément marin dès le berceau...Un homme né sur les bords de la mer en vaut deux au moins” quoted in Michel Mollat, *L'Europe et la mer*, Paris, Seuil, 1993, p.221.

²¹ “Quant à vouloir régénérer l'*Inscription Maritime* en y assujettissant des ouvriers d'usine, il n'y faut pas compter. Qu'on cherche à les attirer volontairement au service de la flotte, soit, mais il ne faut pas songer à les y contraindre, on s'apercevrait vite que le sens marin leur fait défaut. Ils répugneraient au service sur mer, l'éloignement de leur foyer les effraierait et alors réapparaîtrait indéniable la supériorité du matelot de profession” Jacques Captier, *Étude historique et économique sur l'Inscription Maritime*, Paris, Editions Girard et Brière, 1907, p. 346.

renewal of traditional recruitment spaces, more inland and eastwards. The stereotypes of sailors in the large port cities of the 19th century are thus to be re-examined as local maritime populations were characterised by their heterogeneity. Regarding origins, whether on a geographical or social level, and in spite of fairly high proportions of sailors having mixed with the maritime world from a young age through their ancestry or home, many individuals who embraced a maritime career in the large Norman port had only a weak link to the sea. However, questioning maritime determinism is not unique to our space and period since modernists Gilbert Buti and Jacques Péret confirmed this analysis in work focussing on the coastal societies of the early modern period:

“The analysis of the social and geographical origins of the sailors and the phenomena of social reproduction largely corrects the stereotype of a maritime environment that is folded in on itself, the sailor son of a sailor who marries the daughter of a sailor... the world of the sea is, first and foremost, a diverse one.”²²

The expanded recruitment of sailors, at the time of the modernization of sailing, encourages us to examine where sailors lived in order to understand a major component of their integration into the physical space and society. Indeed, the issue of addresses remains essential when exploring the presence of a population in a space. If we believe the information provided by the registers of the *Inscription Maritime*, the large majority of sailors logically chose a residence in Le Havre, in the centre of the city or the immediate surrounding areas, facilitating integration into Le Havre’s urban society. Examining the activities of these individuals, it is clear that it was mainly ocean-going sailors who domiciled in Le Havre in order to set sail from there, but once they completed their career, they frequently returned to their place of origin. Moreover, domiciliation far from the port of departure is a constant during our entire period of study. Nearly twenty per cent of the studied sailors did not live in Le Havre, although they were registered there. Consequently, certain sailors were not, strictly speaking, Le Havre inhabitants. As would be logical, the sailors domiciled somewhere other than in the Seine-Inférieure department were registered in nearby departments, but not always. For example, we have a record that five per cent were from the Paris region. Over all three cohorts that we followed throughout the 19th century, 48.2% of the ex-sailors²³ that domiciled in a department other than Seine-Inférieure were born in that very department, which shows a lasting attachment to their place of origin. The sailors that did not reside in Le Havre, therefore, were the regular clientele of the landlords who rented out furnished rooms in the city centre.

²² “L’analyse des origines sociales et géographiques des gens de mer et des phénomènes de reproduction sociale corrige largement le stéréotype d’un milieu maritime replié sur lui-même et du marin fils de marin qui épouse une fille de marin...Le monde de la mer est d’abord celui de la diversité” Gilbert Buti and Jacques Péret, “Gens de mer et sociétés littorales en France à l’époque moderne”, *Revue d’histoire maritime* n° 10-11, Paris, PUPS, May 2010, p. 154.

²³ “ex-sailors” refers to seamen exempt from service in the Fleet due to their advanced age, illness or a substantial disability.

In general, the new arrivals in Le Havre hardly populated the urban peripheries, instead staying in the old neighbourhoods of the south. Whereas, if we look more closely at the personnel of large transatlantic companies, a slight difference can be seen. In Sanvic, to the north of the city, the 1911 census notes that out of 834 listed individuals, 95 belonged to the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* and 32 to the *Chargeurs Réunis*²⁴, in addition to the 31 individuals who stated they worked in the port. The peripheries of Le Havre were, therefore, socially mixed, including within the maritime professions, with the presence of fishermen, commercial sailors and general workers on the liners.

Over the whole of the 19th century a clear occupation of a southern part of the city can be seen, with a strong presence near the oldest sailing docks. The Saint-François district was the most densely populated by far and the maritime populations strongly left their mark. There was, therefore, a “sailor district” in Le Havre, actually corresponding to two of the city’s districts: Notre-Dame and Saint-François, in the south. Population censuses make it possible to also ascertain “streets of sailors” such as *quai Lamblardie*, *rue Faidherbe* and *rue Dauphine* in the Saint-François district. However, that is not sufficient to claim the existence of maritime communitarianism. On the one hand, the presence of several maritime professions in the same streets attests to an absence of continuity, with observable segregation between the personnel of the deck and the steamship engineering crew. On the other hand, the socio-professional heterogeneity of the residents on the same street confirms that the sailors cohabited with the whole of the city’s small population. The seafarers, in all their diversity, lived with the land dwellers and frequented similar spaces. While districts with a marked maritime identity took shape, that is not sufficient to introduce the concept of a maritime community, since sailors were so open to others, as reflected in *rue des Drapiers*, a street in the middle of the old district of Notre-Dame:

“The *rue des Drapiers* was one of the oldest, and one of the liveliest, like all those streets leading to a waterway. Once it had become a simple commercial street, it maintained a particular picturesque nature in its old houses, accentuated by the circumstances of those who frequented its shops, where the exotic traveller, the humble fisherman of our coasts, the lady of questionable virtue, the honest housewife, the port worker and the bad boy all rubbed shoulders.”²⁵

The proximity of the sailors and Le Havre workers was a central component of the city’s identity in the 19th century. Through examining their geographical and social origins, as well as their integration into the urban environment, it becomes clear that sailors did not evolve cut off from the world, following

²⁴ The two main transoceanic companies based in Le Havre.

²⁵ “La rue des Drapiers était l’une des plus vieilles, une des plus animées, comme toutes celles menant à un passage d’eau. Devenue simple rue marchande, elle gardait de ses vieilles maisons un pittoresque particulier accentué par la condition des gens fréquentant ses boutiques où se coudoyaient aussi bien le navigateur exotique que l’humble pêcheur de nos côtes, la dame de petite vertu que l’honnête ménagère, le travailleur du port que le mauvais garçon” Bernard Esdras-Gosse, *Aspects du Havre que nous ne reverrons plus*, s.d., s.l. (published in the 1950s), p. 62.

a logic of segregation. Conversely, in the context of industrialization, the coming together of sailors and land dwellers characterized the population of the port city. Contrary to other smaller ports, fishing ports in particular, in which the sailors lived more amongst themselves, the large commercial port of Le Havre was distinguished by a maritime and worker duality.

Lastly, we note that sailors adapted to changes in the urban environment. In the course of moving the docks towards the east of the city, due to the need to respond to the size of transoceanic liners, the sailors and other socio-professional groups marked by a working-class identity, populated these new, out-of-town districts. The spatial dynamics of the sailors therefore merged with all the port city's working classes.

The immediate entourage of Le Havre sailors

Following on from the evidence of the collective dynamics of the Le Havre sailors, let us now focus on their immediate entourage. The first index chosen to examine the integration of sailors into urban society is marriage, which offers an overall picture of their degree of openness to others. Firstly, the majority of wives came from coastal spaces. We find that twenty-nine per cent of these wives had no profession. As regards the professionally active women, there is a strong presence of day labourers, indicating both the dynamism of the labour market and also a certain precariousness of circumstances. The port city at its height provided work, in particular in the service industry, namely clothes washing and domestic work. The other professions, found in a minority of cases, were in small-scale urban business. Philippe Ariès emphasised the supplementary nature of the income earned through women's occupations, often resulting from work in homes and this logic also applies to sailors in Le Havre²⁶.

In the large Norman city, as in the majority of cities in the 19th century, the social proximity of spouses was largely the dominant factor. This was also true of sailors, provided that the proximity of the working class and maritime environments are considered, which is appropriate within our context. Among the examined marriage certificates, the absence of marriage contracts reinforces the influence of proximity and thus, the rationale behind the marriages of sailors in Le Havre was clearly similar to that of the population as a whole. Marriage, therefore, represents a means of "reproduction shared by all social systems."²⁷ Nonetheless, for the sailors studied in this case, it is necessary to look beyond the simple rationale of belonging to a group and admit an absence of social strategy. Concerning seamen, as there was no matrimonial strategy, other reasons must be sought out. If we look at where the wives lived before they married, it becomes clear that spatial proximity remained a dominant factor in their

²⁶ Philippe Ariès in G.Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée. De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, p.145.

²⁷ "reproduction commune à tout système social" Danièle Gauvreaud and Sherry Olson, "Mobilité sociale dans une ville industrielle nord-américaine : Montréal (1880-1900)", *Annales de démographie historique*, n°1, 2008, p. 91.

choice of spouse. It is true that some women resided in more peripheral districts but, on the whole, the sailors' future wives often lived in the streets of sailors and, indeed, mixed with these individuals without necessarily being linked to the maritime environment through their own experience or origins. We can, again, question if spatial proximity was a factor for the rest of the Le Havre population. Below are the results provided by Jean Legoy covering two periods and compared with our cohorts of sailors:

Table 1: Spatial proximity of Le Havre couples and sailor couples²⁸

Place of residence of the newly-weds	The entire Le Havre population 1828-1832	Sailors 1828-1832	The entire Le Havre population 1900	Sailors 1900
Both live in the same street	32%	52%	34%	36%
Both live in the same district but not the same street	36%	8%	25%	27%
Both live in Le Havre but in different districts	19%	39%	27%	18%

This table supports our idea: the street and district remain primary meeting places for sailors and the comparison with the rest of the population does not allow us to note an idiosyncrasy on the part of the sailors on this matter. For example, the seaman Yves Cabo, wed on 14 July 1870, married a girl whose parents were neighbours of his parents, all living at the same address on *rue Royale*. Nevertheless, let us point out that the two families originated in Côtes-du-Nord, which indicates a certain form of regional grouping among the sailors from Brittany²⁹. In short, sailors married girls of the city, more or less linked to maritime communities. Thus, a maritime community folded in on itself and maintained by strategic marriages cannot be found, reinforcing the redefinition of the identity of sailors in large port cities of the time. Identifying marriage witnesses brings a new perspective, making it possible to move away from the hypothesis of a “symptom of segregation”³⁰. With more than half of the witnesses from the working classes (day labourers or otherwise) and only twenty per cent sailors, we can put aside the idea of maritime communitarianism in favour of an openness towards this social milieu. In general, the urban sailors created a social network influenced by their environment. The small proportion of witnesses without a profession indicates that this network was comprised of young workers, such as day labourers, handymen, craftsmen and workmen. However, nine per cent had high-ranking or commercial

²⁸ Data from Jean Legoy, *Le peuple du Havre et son histoire, Du négoce à l'industrie, 1800-1914 : le cadre de vie*, Saint-Etienne du Rouvray, EDIP, 1982, p. 116, for all Le Havre inhabitants and a study carried out by us on 113 marriage certificates for the period 1828-1832 and 192 for 1900.

²⁹ Examples from our research.

³⁰ “symptôme de l'entre-soi” Francis Godard, *La ville en mouvement*, Paris, Gallimard, Paris, 2001, p. 84.

occupations, which brings an interesting aspect to reconstructing the social circles of sailors. Regarding the tradesmen, close to two thirds of this category, we find both innkeepers and owners of small businesses, such as grocers. If the sailors maintained friendly relationships with these individuals, it demonstrates their integration into urban society. To summarize, “daily relationships become relations of class,”³¹ a concept proved correct for the maritime populations of a large port city like Le Havre at the time of industrialization, provided that land-based workers and sailors can be assimilated into the same category, which is appropriate in many respects.

The behaviour of sailors: a social issue?

Following our observations primarily based on a quantitative approach, we will now move on to more qualitative aspects. In the literature and the press, many observers emphasised the unique and singular character of sailors in society. The clichés largely prevailed and the drinking, brawling, irresponsible and extravagant sailor became a character fed by its representations. Violence and disorder in public spaces is the principal access point for studying sailors in the city with regards to printed sources. In the eyes of journalists, sailors were the main troublemakers and the accounts of violence between seafarers largely supplied the minor news items in the local press. Furthermore, many articles targeted sailors on shore leave, in particular the Anglo-Saxons:

“Yesterday evening, at half nine, a group of almost 60 American seamen fought each other and then had a brawl with French sailors. The police intervened with the assistance of some soldiers [...] Several soldiers were wounded before making use of their weapons, which were used only at the very end.”³²

Only reading the press is, of course, not sufficient to grasp the reality of violent behaviour as it is clear that editorial choices highlighted it, with a view to publishing popular, saucy anecdotes. From a quantitative point of view, we found that only 3.5% of the 450 sailors studied as part of our research were subject to judicial sentences, of which nearly eighty per cent were served by the commercial maritime court, proof that the misdeeds occurred within the framework of their service and related to misconduct more often than violence. The study of reports from Le Havre police stations allow us to confirm the existence of violence perpetrated by sailors. However, this needs to be qualified, as it seems that in the 1860s, the decade chosen for a survey, only five per cent of the police reports

³¹ “les rapports quotidiens deviennent des relations de classe” Robert Mandrou et Georges Duby, *Histoire de la civilisation française XVII^e-XX^e siècles*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1984, p. 325.

³² “Hier soir, à neuf heures et demie, des matelots américains réunis au nombre de près de soixante, se sont battus entre eux et ont ensuite eu une rixe avec des marins français. La police est intervenue avec l’aide de quelques militaires [...] Plusieurs militaires ont été blessés avant de faire usage de leurs armes dont ils ne se sont servis qu’à la dernière extrémité” *Journal du Havre*, 16 October 1831.

concerned sailors³³. These violent episodes were mainly rows on the street and, secondarily, light physical violence. Furthermore, the punishments were between one and two days of detention. This kind of behaviour equally concerned coastal fishermen and commercial sailors, a sign that responsibility cannot only be attributed to external individuals, in spite of testimonies we may come across:

“When evil alcohol has turned their brains upside down, go and reason with these devils from all the corners of the globe, knowing only the essential French words for the purchase of everyday food and our lamentable and obscene vocabulary.”³⁴

Indeed, alcohol and port remained closely tied and “rituals of consumption contribute to producing the atmosphere of the port.”³⁵ Furthermore, acts of insubordination and desertion could sometimes be related to an insufficient quantity of alcohol. On 19 January 1898, the chief of police warned the mayor that:

“Around half six in the evening, approximately 50 steamer stokers of *La Bretagne* met in the sailors’ union, 57 rue Videcoq, in the presence of Mr Rathier, president of the union. These men decided that they would go on strike if the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique* continued to refuse to provide the six centilitres of brandy which had been granted to them for a long time.”³⁶

The southern districts in which the most sailors gathered, namely Saint-François and Notre-Dame, contained one third of the city’s drinking establishments in 1890. Didier Nourrisson owned 147 taverns in the Saint-François district in 1896, that is, one establishment per 46 inhabitants, structuring the urban landscape:

“Everyone knows them, from the large cafe-restaurant where a mixed clientele dwells until gone one in the morning, to the small cafe-bar where the worst part of these customers moves to when the former closes, to be able to continue drinking two or three hours later.”³⁷

The *rue Faidherbe* in the middle of Saint-François housed 35 bars out of the 63 addresses on the street. The *rue des Drapiers* in the heart of the Notre-Dame district boasted two of the main popular music halls

³³ Archives Municipales du Havre, Fonds Moderne, 2Y 101 Etablissements pénitentiaires. 1863-1864. 200 studied reports.

³⁴ “Lorsque le mauvais alcool a mis toutes les cervelles à l’envers, allez donc raisonner ces diables venus de tous les coins de la terre, ne connaissant du français que les mots essentiels pour l’achat des victuailles de chaque jour et notre vocabulaire poissard et orduier” Edmond Spalikowski., *Le Havre*, Rouen, Editions Defontaine, 1934, p. 167.

³⁵ “rituels de la consommation contribuent à produire l’ambiance portuaire” Jean-Pierre Castelain, *Manières de vivre, manières de boire. Alcool et sociabilité sur le port*, Paris, Editions Imago, 1989, p. 61.

³⁶ “Vers 6 heures et demie du soir, environ 50 chauffeurs du paquebot *La Bretagne* se sont réunis au syndicat des marins, 57 rue Videcoq en présence du sieur Rathier, président du syndicat. Ces hommes ont décidé qu’ils se mettraient en grève si la Compagnie Générale Transatlantique continuait à leur refuser les 6 centilitres d’eau-de-vie qui leur étaient accordés depuis longtemps” Archives municipales du Havre, Fonds Contemporain, I² 10-1, report by police commissioners.

³⁷ “Tout le monde les connaît, du grand café-restaurant où, jusqu’à plus d’une heure du matin, séjourne une clientèle trop mêlée, au petit café-débit où la plus mauvaise partie de cette clientèle émigre à la fermeture du premier, pour pouvoir encore s’abreuver deux ou trois heures plus tard” Charles le Goffic, *À travers le Havre. Effets de soir et de nuit*, Le Havre, Editions Lemale et cie, 1892, p. 21.

of the city, the Star and the *Gaieté*, and the French and foreign sailors left their mark on these revelry hot-spots:

“It is in Saint-François that one finds everything, from the Star Music Hall where the unrestrained sailors dance, where the British Ta-ra-ra Boom-dy-ay was sung for the first time in France, and what a glory for our hometown! Then these Sailors’ Rests, if worthy of their name, where, for a few pennies, the foreign sailors come to drink refreshing liquors and to harden their spirits with the biblical inscriptions on the walls [...].”³⁸

Monitoring and protecting foreign sailors seem to have been priorities for the consuls present at Le Havre and, more generally, for all the port city’s authorities. The Le Havre writer, Edmond Spalikowski, described the places in the Notre-Dame and Saint-François districts where two atmospheres emerged: a pleasant ambiance prevailed in the day, whereas another, more problematic one came out at night³⁹.

An identical testimony can be found attributed to another local author:

“When the trade goes and the sailors disembark, the lights multiply, the crowds emerge at the doors of the dance halls. [...] People of the bourgeois city claim that these districts are dangerous. They have never been there. Of course, one meets drunkards and it is not the time to lecture them. Sometimes, it is also true, brawls break out, a “port brawl”, the newspapers do not miss any of them. I will not put my finger between the anvil and the hammer, the others neither, who watch and leave them to it. It is about women, they say. Perhaps it will finish for one of the two combatants at the bottom of the dock. Unless the police intervene in time. [...] At two o’clock in the morning, everything dies out, and we make babies.”⁴⁰

It emerges that within the port city, the sailors were not more predisposed to violence than other groups. However, it is true that in these singular spaces, the simple fact of their overwhelming presence is enough to identify them as such. Philippe Masson notes that “until very recently, the layovers, the descents on to land were an essential opportunity to let off steam, when men freed themselves from their anguishes and frustrations. This release led to a whole range of excesses, dominated by alcohol and women, and was the origin of a well-established reputation for brutality and licentiousness.”⁴¹

³⁸ “C’est qu’à Saint-François l’on trouve de tout, depuis ce *Star*, Music Hall où se dansent des gagues effrénées, où le *tarara boom dy ay* britannique fut chanté pour la première fois en France, et quelle gloire pour notre ville natale ! Depuis ces *Sailor’s Rest*, si dignes de leur nom, où, pour quelques sous, les marins étrangers viennent boire de rafraîchissantes liqueurs et se raffermir l’esprit aux inscriptions bibliques des murs [...]” *Ibidem* p. 25.

³⁹ Edmond Spalikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁴⁰ “Quand le commerce va et que les marins débarquent, les lumières se multiplient, les attroupements sortent de terre aux portes des dancings. [...] Les gens de la ville bourgeoise prétendent que ces quartiers sont dangereux. Ils n’y sont jamais allés. Certes on rencontre des saoulots et ce n’est pas le moment de les catéchiser. Parfois, c’est vrai aussi, des rixes éclatent, une “rixes de port”, les journaux n’en manquent pas une. Je ne mettrai pas mon doigt entre l’enclume et le marteau, les autres non plus, qui regardent et laissent faire. Histoire de femmes, disent-ils. Ça se terminera peut-être pour l’un des deux combattants au fond du bassin. A moins que la police n’intervienne à temps. [...] A deux heures du matin, tout s’éteint, et on fait des enfants François Berge, *Le Havre*, Paris, Editions Emile-Paul Frères, 1929, p. 69.

⁴¹ “jusqu’à une époque toute récente, les escales, les descentes à terre sont l’occasion d’un indispensable défolement où l’homme se libère de ses angoisses et de ses frustrations. Ce défolement conduit à toute une gamme de débordements, où dominant l’alcool et les femmes, à l’origine d’une réputation bien assise de brutalité et de libertinage” Philippe Masson. *La mort et les marins*, Grenoble, Glénat, 1997, p. 386.

The number of acts of delinquency and violence compared to the number of sailors that passed through Le Havre, however, allows their involvement in the manifestation of these urban afflictions to be put into perspective. Nonetheless, the image of the rough areas of the port city fascinated those who did not live there. Additionally, sailors, rather than being a problem for urban society, were of considerable economic interest for small businesses.

Sailors, actors in the local economy

The substantial presence of sailors in the city is one of the most conclusive signs that the port was in good economic health and many local economic actors benefited from this transient population. Time spent on land was synonymous with expenditure, superfluous or necessary, and many profiteers subsequently gravitated towards the sailors, as naval officer Louis-Charles Leconte de Roujou confirms:

“Ports [...] contain a great number of parasites [...] who live by exploiting carefreeness, idleness, curiosity, the very vices of men. Innkeepers are placed at the top of these of exploiters, but there are others still that one cannot even name and who are the most despicable men. The sailor [...] will have to avoid, with the greatest care, contact with these poor wretches and, in so doing, he will do nothing but fulfil unto himself a small duty of moral preservation.”⁴²

The combination of innkeepers, skimmers⁴³, hostesses and landlords was a necessary entourage for the sailor on land, but sometimes harmful in many respects, as these remarks from the beginning of the 20th century testify:

“In Saint-François, operated (but one takes care not to generalise) the sinister trio, formed by the evil hostess, the skinner without scruples and the shipchandler with rapacious morals. Dressed up to make a good catch, the hostess and her most arousing women were present when the ocean-going sailing ships moored, Bellot dock, and they let the seamen, who had not seen a woman’s face for months, know that happiness awaited them. Trustful, they were led to the busy drinking establishment, and, after some well-served aperitifs, stayed there, sleeping haphazardly on a pallet. Until their wallet was dry, they were fed kindnesses and fiery alcohols, and once they were completely drunk, damages were invented to be added to their account. When there was nothing left to take from them, the hostess sent them to her accomplice, the skinner without scruples, who, for a commission, got them an embarkation on a boat for the Indies, Chile or Australia. From the advances provided by the Navy, he took them to the third thief, their associate shipchandler, who relieved them of money that they could have lost or spent unwisely.”⁴⁴

⁴² “Les ports [...] contiennent un grand nombre de parasites [...] qui vivent en exploitant l'insouciance, le désœuvrement, les curiosités, les vices mêmes des hommes. Au premier rang de ces exploiters il faut placer les cabarettiers, mais il en est d'autres encore qu'on ne peut même pas nommer et qui sont les plus méprisables des hommes. Le marin [...] devra fuir avec le plus grand soin le contact de ces misérables et, en agissant ainsi, il ne fera que remplir envers lui-même un devoir étroit de préservation morale” Louis-Charles Leconte de Roujou, *Éducation morale, patriotique et militaire des équipages de la flotte*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1899, p. 48.

⁴³ Term used at the time in English, “marchand d’hommes” in French.

⁴⁴ “À Saint-François, opérant alors (mais que l'on se garde d'en faire une généralité) le sinistre trio formé par la mauvaise hôtesse, le marchand d'hommes sans scrupule et le *shipchandler* aux mœurs de rapace. Attifées pour faire une bonne

The taverns occupied a central place in the life of sailors since the individuals mentioned above could all be found there. The skimmers were often in charge and their role became important in the landscape of the large ports because many sailors who, faced with tough competition and unable to easily find an embarkation, requested their services. These individuals, whether authorized or not to carry out this activity, subsequently allowed the sailors to benefit from their network, or their address book as we might say today. Captains were responsible for putting together their own crew and had their own network, but, when necessary, they resorted to the skimmers in order to supplement the personnel. Captains did not spend a penny since the skimmer ensured his remuneration from the sailor himself. He, therefore, frequently asked the captain to allow him to be present when the advances were handed over to the sailors so that his commission could be directly assigned to him. At the end of the 19th century, skimmers requested a high share and tough competition allowed rates to rise. The *droit de conduite* was also added, generally fixed at three francs, that is, approximately one day's wages, which functioned as a deposit, used to compensate for sailors failing to turn out for roll call; the sum was then returned to the sailor when he presented himself for boarding. When a sailor did a deal with a placer, the latter took his embarkation permit, issued by the *Inscription Maritime*, so that the sailor could not seek recruitment by other intermediaries. The skimmer thus placed himself in the middle of a system in which an interconnected network oversaw the commercial sailor's expenditure relating to his food, drink, board and placement on a ship. However, it is important to note that changes in maritime trade, with the introduction of regular transoceanic lines in particular, did not signal good times ahead for the placers. Indeed, the large maritime companies tended to seek loyalty in their crews and so the on-board personnel need not have sought an embarkation as the company permanently guaranteed it. In these circumstances, using a skimmer proved useless. According to the Norwegian historian, Erling Eriksen, "the master of the guest house made sure that the sailor found food, housing and a considerable quantity of alcohol in his establishment. Nevertheless, he took precautions to be certain that his guest could obtain a bunk on another ship in order to return to sea once more."⁴⁵ Regular debt forced sailors to find new employment in the immediate future, and so it went on. Thus, many economic actors, from

pêche, l'hôtesse et ses bonnes les plus aguichantes assistaient à l'accostage des grands voiliers long-courriers, bassin Bellot, et à des matelots qui n'avaient pas vu visage de femme depuis des mois, elles faisaient comprendre que le bonheur les attendait. Confiants, ils se laissaient emmener dans le bouiboui meublé, et, après quelques apéritifs bien servis, y prenaient pension, couchant pêle-mêle sur un grabat. Jusqu'à ce que leur portefeuille fût à sec, ils étaient gavés de complaisances et d'alcools incendiaires, mais lorsqu'ils étaient fin saouls on inventait des dégâts à leur mettre sur leur compte. Quand il n'y avait plus rien à tirer d'eux, l'hôtesse les envoyait à son compère le marchand d'hommes sans scrupule, lequel, moyennant commission, leur procurait un embarquement à la voile pour les Indes, le Chili ou l'Australie. Dès les avances touchées à la Marine, il les menait chez le troisième larron, le *shipchandler* associé qui les soulageait d'un argent qu'ils auraient pu perdre ou mal employer" Camille Maze, *Etude sur le langage dans la banlieue du Havre*, Le Havre, Imprimerie Micaux, 1903, p. 201.

⁴⁵ Erling Eriksen, *Vår Gamle Sjøfartskultur*, Oslo, 1968, p.27.

skimmers to innkeepers and landlords, profited from sailors and considering that in the 1880s, more than 95,000 passed through Le Havre each year, we can imagine the financial potential they represented. However, not all landlords and innkeepers engaged unfairly in these activities and we were able to find some innkeepers among the witnesses at the weddings of sailors. Michael Seltzer notes that in certain cases, the absence of a family unit for the sailor on shore leave led to the emergence of an affinity between sailor and innkeeper. According to Seltzer, the tavern staff would then sometimes become a substitute family unit and some affection would develop⁴⁶. Paul Gilje studied sailors in American ports and was able to ascertain the social role of certain innkeepers, who could truly help sailors by providing credit, housing or assisting with the negotiation of wages⁴⁷.

In Le Havre, throughout the 19th century, the authorities continually denounced and sanctioned the establishments practising illegal recruitment. Thus, the by-laws of the city of Le Havre tried to solve the problems linked to the misdemeanours that victimised the sailors and, with this intention, the recommendations were intended for both the profiteers and the deceived⁴⁸. The illegal recruiters tended to poach sailors on shore leave by proposing more advantageous appointments, in other words, they encouraged desertion. This recurrent problem was the subject of intensive correspondence between the various authorities responsible for inspecting and regulating the port. In 1853, the Consul of Sweden and Norway Bröstrom demanded from the mayor of Le Havre:

“Increased monitoring of all the houses of lodging and music halls whose masters have the job of employment contractor of foreign sailors and cause desertion from ships. [...] All these people do a great injury to sailing, they are the reason why very often many of these deserters stay on the pavements of Le Havre and become dangerous people.”⁴⁹

The Consul, citing several establishments in the Saint-François district, openly denounced innkeepers that poached foreign sailors, sometimes to serve as interpreters. Hunters, bankrolled by the skimmers and hostesses, roamed the quays in search of sailors eager to embark, going as far as boarding the deck of a ship in order to recruit. Young sailors were easy prey for the profiteers and sanctions were too rare to be a deterrent. A poster put up on the walls of Saint-François in 1887 by sailors indiscriminately denounced the misdemeanours of the skimmers and the exploitation of shipowners, these “parasites

⁴⁶ Michaël Seltzer, “The Sailors’ Tavern in History, Biography, Drama and Ethnography”, in press.

⁴⁷ Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 17.

⁴⁸ *Recueil des règlements municipaux de la ville du Havre*, Le Havre, Imprimerie du Commerce, 1891.

⁴⁹ “Une surveillance accrue de toutes les maisons de logement et cabarets dont les maîtres font le métier d’embaucheurs de marins étrangers et provoquent la désertion des navires. [...] Tous ces gens qui causent un grand préjudice à la navigation, ils sont cause que très souvent nombre de ces déserteurs restent sur la pavé du Havre et deviennent des gens dangereux” Archives Municipales du Havre. Fonds Moderne. Série F2 Carton 10 Liasse 7. Port police force.

which make a fortune with our meagre wages.”⁵⁰ In Le Havre on 10 February 1897, Recke and Ollivers, two authorized foreign skippers, were sentenced to pay fines for fraudulent practice as they were declared guilty for having made sailors sign acknowledgements of debt in English for a sum from which they had not subtracted the advanced payments⁵¹.

In 1904, the national maritime congress held in *Salle Franklin* in Le Havre, discussed this exploitation but it was not until the law of October 1917 that recruitment agencies, managed equally by shipowner-charterers and sailor unions, finally put an end to these mostly illegal practices⁵². Sailors not native to Le Havre, who had come to seek work, were generally obliged to wait several days before finding a ship. During this period, they would spend money in the establishments of the hostesses, landlords and innkeepers, beginning the vicious circle. Charles le Goffic noted that, for the sailor, “the reception he receives from the hostess is rigorously proportioned to the amount of his wages.”⁵³ In another work, the author stated that:

“The canvassers of crews, that the commercial sailors quaintly call the “marchands d’hommes”, almost always have investments in the “hostesses”; it is even possible that the establishment belongs to them. Hence the result that before dealing with them as canvassers, they initially intend to firstly make a profit as a hotel. He who does not pass by the hostess is likely never to have an embarkation. Painful alternative! The hostess is a cut-throat; the sailor leaves his purse with her and sometimes his health. If he balks, it is worse still, since he has no chance of finding an embarkment by himself and the majority of captains go and see the skippers to supply their crew, who free them from all cares.”⁵⁴

Sailors remained coveted, especially ocean-going seafarers whose accumulated profits were mostly collected upon their return to the home port. For this reason, ocean-going sailors enjoyed a special welcome and money was readily lent to them, but with interest that could reach fifty per cent. These rates, which were, at the very least, exaggerated, allowed sailors’ frequent debts to be increased, but, more importantly, raised their substantial repayment capacity. However, these individuals should not be viewed as simple profiteers and Edward Thompson supports the idea that the innkeepers played

⁵⁰ “parasites qui font fortune avec nos maigres salaires” Jean Legoy, *Le peuple du Havre et son histoire, Du négoce à l’industrie, 1800- 1914 : La vie politique et sociale*, Saint-Etienne du Rouvray, EDIP, 1984, p. 295.

⁵¹ Charles le Goffic, *Gens de mer sur la côte*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1897, p. 22ff.

⁵² A. Cabantous, A. Lespagnol and F. Péron (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 604.

⁵³ “l’accueil qu’il reçoit chez l’hôtesse est rigoureusement proportionné au montant de son salaire” Charles le Goffic, *op. cit.* p. 7.

⁵⁴ “Les placiers d’équipages, que les marins du commerce appellent pittoresquement les “marchands d’hommes”, ont presque toujours des intérêts chez les “hôtesse”; il arrive même que l’établissement leur appartient. D’où cette conséquence qu’avant de s’occuper d’eux, comme placiers, ils entendent en avoir fait leur profit d’abord comme hôteliers. Qui ne passe pas par l’hôtesse risque de ne jamais connaître l’embarquement. Douleur alternative ! L’hôtesse est un coupe-gorge ; le marin y laisse sa bourse et quelquefois sa santé. S’il regimbe, c’est pire encore, puisqu’il n’a aucune chance de trouver par lui-même un embarquement et que la plupart des capitaines s’adressent, pour les fournitures d’équipage, aux marchands d’hommes qui les débarrassent gratuitement de tous soins” Charles le Goffic, *La payse*. Cited in Jean Legoy, *op. cit.* p. 201.

an important role in the life of the sailor on land by making things easier for him. Lodging and the access to credit provided by these establishments were an absolute necessity for sailors on land⁵⁵. Regarding English ports, Thompson notes that these establishments offered a safe haven for the sailors, bearing in mind that the majority always went to the same places⁵⁶. During the 19th century, taverns were the focal points of the seafront in many ports throughout Europe, America and elsewhere⁵⁷. In large commercial port cities, the majority of sailors were there temporarily, the duration of shore leave or search for an embarkation and these establishments were, therefore, necessary for their life on land. By way of comparison, a study shows that more than thirty per cent of the sailors who passed through London in the 1880s spent so much time on board that they did not even have a registered address⁵⁸. In Le Havre, some of the sailors we studied declared a ship their place of residence. The life of sailors of no fixed address on land was partly determined by the people who surrounded them⁵⁹. Consequently, many indebted sailors secured an embarkation with the sole intention of paying off their debts. It therefore came down to structured and particularly elaborate double-edged systems. On one hand, sailors may have needed many socio-economic actors in order to ensure their material comfort in the city and also guarantee embarkations. On the other, these services came at a high price. For example, skippers also could be tradesmen who obliged the sailor to buy provisions and sailing equipment from them, or their intermediary, naturally at prices substantially higher than those of the market. Once again, the crew of the large transatlantic companies avoided these financial losses, because, as crossings were frequent and regular, they generally stayed in Le Havre and were, therefore, more autonomous. In addition, their uniform was often specific to the company, limiting possible expenditure on clothing. It is clear that seamen represented a veritable source of financial gain, which breaks away from the sordid image often attributed to them in literature. Nonetheless, other actors with philanthropic tendencies intervened to avoid the sailor being constantly conned.

Philanthropists and sailors

⁵⁵ J-R Bruijn, "Seamen in Dutch Ports, 1700-1914", *Mariner's Mirror*, n° 65, 1979, p. 327-337.

⁵⁶ Edward Palmer Thomson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1963. P. 63.

⁵⁷ Valerie Burton, "Boundaries and Identities in the Nineteenth Century English Port: Sailortown Narratives and Urban Space", in S. Gunn and R. Morris (eds.), *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850*, Aldershot, Ashgate pub, 2001, p. 137-151.

S. Fischer, (ed.), *Lisbon as a Port Town, the British Seaman, and Other Maritime Themes*, Exeter, University of Exeter, 1988.

D. Hilling, "Socio-economic change in the Maritime Quarter: The Demise of Sailortown", in B. Hoyle B., (ed.), *Revitalising the Waterfront: International Dimensions of Waterfront Development*, London, Belhaven Press, 1988, p. 20-37.

G. Jordan (ed.), *Tramp Steamers; Seamen and Sailor Town, Jack Sullivan's Paintings of Old Cardiff Docklands*, Cardiff, Butetown History & Arts Centre, 2002.

⁵⁸ Sarah Palmer, "Seaman Ashore in Late Nineteenth-Century London: Protection from Crimps", in P. Adam (ed.), *Seamen in Society: Proceedings of the International Commission for Maritime History*, Bucharest, 1980, p. 5-67.

⁵⁹ James Healy, *Fo'c's'le and Glory-Hole: A Study of the Merchant Seamen and His Occupation*, New York, Merchant Marine Publishers Association, 1936, p. 53.

Throughout the 19th century, sailors received much attention and we will now review the many social actors who sought to improve the seafarers' lot on land. Paradoxically, the presence of hostesses in taverns could be positive, as they could, for example, get a temporarily needy sailor some housing, without requiring the least guarantee of repayment on his part, as French law prohibited the arrest of sailors over debt. While examples of Sailors' Homes had existed outside of France, in particular in Great Britain, for more than twenty years, they appeared in French ports in the 1860s. They had long been hoped for by individuals in the maritime world, for example, the Le Havre shipowner and writer, Frédéric de Coninck, in 1869:

"It would also be very desirable to see a Sailors' Home created in Le Havre, such as exists in all the ports from England, to Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Bremen, and Hamburg... These establishments provide great services everywhere, and it is painful to think that the French sailors find more concern for their well-being on land in the foreign ports, than they do in their own ports."⁶⁰

In 1886, Félix Faure, member of parliament for Le Havre, tabled a draft bill for the creation of a special fund, financed by a four per cent tax on the premiums allocated to construction and sailing, that is, an estimated contribution of 80,000 francs per year. He wanted to open hotels for sailors, but this initiative was not followed through. However, the first establishments of this type appeared in 1844 in England and the English founded 10 such houses abroad, one of which was in Le Havre. In January 1893, the French Chamber of Deputies approved article 12 of the law on the merchant navy. This article, attributed to Le Havre minister Jules Siegfried, in fact aimed to grant subsidies to the chambers of commerce and other public service institutions that wanted to build such structures. On this topic, the member of parliament for Gironde, David Raynal, expressed the need to assist sailors for political ends:

"It is not only a question of humanity, solidarity, acknowledgement, for sailors; it is about preventing, at all costs, that our maritime population abandons that so challenging profession, the sailor. Do I need to remind the Chamber that it is a matter of national security, of national defence."⁶¹

Nevertheless, for five years and while the subsidies envisaged by the law of 30 January 1893 were released, chambers of commerce were encouraged to find private hotels in order to fulfil the legislative

⁶⁰ "Il serait aussi très désirable de voir créer au Havre un *Sailor's Home*, tel qu'il en existe dans tous les ports de l'Angleterre, à Rotterdam, à Amsterdam, à Bremen, à Hambourg... Ces établissements rendent partout de grands services, et il est pénible de penser que les marins français trouvent dans les ports étrangers plus de sollicitude pour leur bien-être à terre, qu'ils n'en rencontrent dans leurs propres ports" Frédéric de Coninck, *Le Havre, son passé, son présent, son avenir*, Le Havre, Imprimerie Alphonse Lemale, 1869, p. 199.

⁶¹ "Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une question d'humanité, de solidarité, de reconnaissance, pour les marins ; il s'agit d'empêcher à tout prix que notre population maritime délaisse la profession si dure de marin. Ai-je besoin de rappeler à la Chambre qu'il a là une question de sécurité nationale, de défense nationale" in Goerges Hamon, "La prévoyance chez les marins. Amélioration de leur situation matérielle et sociale", report given to the 8th Congrès de Sauvetage held in Saint-Malo in July 1894, Rennes, Imprimerie Marie Simon, 1895, p. 34.

requirements. In this case, the subsidy was given to the hotel in exchange for housing sailors. The Le Havre Sailors' Home was inaugurated on 4 February 1883 at 31 *quai Casimir Delavigne*. It welcomed foreign sailors offering them food and board, in an obvious attempt to try to limit them wandering into the urban environment. This establishment owed its creation to Mrs Bernal, wife of the consul general of England in Le Havre. It was not until 13 December 1898 that the French sailors could benefit from such reception facilities. However, the *Maison du Marin*, located at 5 *quai Notre-Dame*, in the old part of Le Havre, had only about 15 rooms for approximately 40 sailors, so its attempt at keeping sailors from the temptations of the city was somewhat limited in its impact. With a similar aim, the *Hôtel du Bon Mousse* was inaugurated in 1863 at the initiative of Frédéric de Coninck. This establishment was dedicated to protecting young sailors on land, all too often alone, destitute and exposed to the dangers of the port city. While the capacity of these facilities was limited, it signalled a striking change in the protection of sailors on land. The Sailors' Home, *Maison du Marin* and *Hôtel de Mousses* were of course establishments dedicated to providing low-cost housing to seamen and apprentice sailors without any family during their stay on land. However, their remit did not stop there, since leisure activities must also be taken into account: it was necessary to occupy the sailors on land to prevent them from wandering into the city in search of other pastimes. Jules Siegfried understood this well:

“These establishments, for the sailors as well as the apprentices, are so clearly useful that we cannot encourage private individuals enough, or better still the municipalities or the Chambers of Commerce of the sea ports, to found some in the great maritime centres.”⁶²

Solidarity can also be found in Le Havre in other reception facilities not initially intended for sailors. For example, the refuge *Bréville de Sainte Adresse* inaugurated in 1899 took in, among others, old sailors. The *hôtel Saint-Louis* was a care home in which the abbot Arson housed old men and sailors⁶³. In the north of the city, the care home on *rue Saint-Thibault* welcomed needy individuals, as well as physically and mentally ill patients and in 1884, 7,058 people found temporary refuge there, 3,648 men and 1,252 women including 424 soldiers and sailors⁶⁴. Such facilities allow us to measure the precariousness of conditions that were hardly exclusive to maritime populations, far from it. The Le Havre historian, Jean Legoy, notes that from 1854 to 1914, the number of people helped by the social welfare office, *Bureau Municipal de Bienfaisance*, was permanently between six and nine per cent of the population, with, however, a substantial disparity between the districts in the north of the city, which

⁶² “Ces établissements, tant pour les matelots que pour les mousses, sont d'une utilité si évidente qu'on ne saurait trop encourager les particuliers, et mieux encore les municipalités ou les Chambres de Commerce des ports de mer, à en fonder dans les grands centres maritimes” Jules Siegfried, *Quelques mots sur la misère, son histoire, ses causes, ses remèdes*, Le Havre, Poinson, 1877, p. 238.

⁶³ Bernard Esdras-Gosse, *Aspects du Havre que nous ne reverrons plus*, s.d., s.l. 1950s, p. 38.

⁶⁴ Congrès International d'Instituteurs, *Marine, commerce et industrie, instruction et éducation, hygiène et assistance publiques, principales œuvres sociales et philanthropiques*, Le Havre, Imprimerie du Progrès, 1885, p. 58. The exact number of sailors and soldiers is not given.

approached five per cent, the southern districts, eight to ten per cent, and the eastern districts, ten per cent. The highest proportions were thus observable in the working class districts where there were many sailors.

In 1885, in order to assist the *Œuvre Havraise de l'Hospitalité de Nuit*, a charity offering night-time shelter for the homeless, the city council created a night shelter, *Asile de Nuit*, providing 78 beds for men and a dozen for women and children. Similar to the current facilities for homeless people, demand largely exceeded the centre's capacities. Nevertheless, from 1886 to 1913, 454,268 beds and 908,344 meals were offered to 177,151 people, that is, an average of 6,300 people per year. If these figures come to an average of 20 people per day, easily corresponding to the capacity of the centre, the peak winter season appears problematic. The beneficiaries of the night shelter were not only the destitute, they were frequently those who would be described today as "the working poor". For example, in 1900, 80 different professions were recorded: 2,634 day labourers (male and female), 284 diggers, 172 sailors, 157 fitters, 135 carpenters, 130 stokers⁶⁵, 119 masons, 61 commercial workers, 78 bakers and 15 typographers⁶⁶.

With these few observations, we have been able to review the impact of malevolent and benevolent social networks on the life of sailors on land. However, it must be noted that in both cases, these individuals played a major role in port and maritime life. Ultimately, sailors in the city were the focus of much attention.

Conclusion

Our objective was to evaluate the place of sailors in a specific urban setting, the large port city at the time of the modernization of sailing. Clearly, the impact of the overwhelming presence of sailors in the city strongly contributed to the formation the local identity. Judging from the number of different actors who revolved around them, both to profit from and protect them, commercial sailors were at the centre of the economic and social life of the city, which they constantly enlivened. Far from being marginalised, that life at sea would contribute to a separation from land society, in their own way, sailors were part of a composite urban population, a mixture of population and floating population. Of course, the substantial presence of seamen in an urban space produces a certain perpetual tension, but, in spite of derogatory representations deeply rooted in the imagination, it must be noted that they are far from being the only troublemakers. It is important to see, in the tumult they participate in, the release of

⁶⁵ With no further detail on whether they sailed or not.

⁶⁶ Jean Legoy, *Le peuple du Havre et son histoire, Du négoce à l'industrie, 1800- 1914 : La vie politique et sociale*, Saint-Etienne du Rouvray, EDIP, 1984, p. 285-287.

frustrations related to practising a trade in an enclosed environment. Concerning the sailors based in Le Havre, at least professionally, a veritable openness with the rest of the urban population emerged and in this way, sailors distanced themselves from any form of communitarianism. With a notable geographical expansion from a recruitment perspective, the large, commercial port city sometimes attracted individuals with no maritime, even coastal, link whatsoever, and who, once integrated into the local society, formed bonds with the city's entire, small, hard-working population. In this way, by observing the population of the port city, we can see the signs of the modernization of sailing. Le Havre is not a unique case, Valerie Burton and Eric Taplin have also noted the rearrangement of the world of sailors under the influence of modernization⁶⁷ in the cases of Southampton and Liverpool, respectively. Nonetheless, the example of Le Havre allows us to state that in a context of rising industrialization and globalisation, sailors encapsulate, to some extent, the major changes in large port cities.

⁶⁷ Valerie Burton, *The work and homelife of seafarers, with special reference to the port of Southampton, 1871-1821*, unpublished, London University, 1989.
Eric Taplin, *Liverpool dockers and seamen*, Hull, University of Hull Publications, 1974.