The book "*Free Trade and Free Ports in the Mediterranean*" delves into the emergence of free trade in early-modern times, its institutional genealogy and the evolution in the time.

As regard the historical context, the book investigates how the Mediterranean region, with its distinct characteristics, produced a situation suitable for the development of free ports, contrasting this region with the others to analyses and explain for how and why free trade arose in this geographical area.

While originating in the Mediterranean, the influence of free ports extended far beyond, became a global phenomenon. The book traces their diffusion beyond the region and the related modalities, staying focused on the Mediterranean's unique experience as regard the impact on trade, commerce, and economic interactions.

In deepening the geopolitical aspects, the book explores considers how free ports contributed to the balance of power among states and their commercial competition for hegemony during the eighteenth century, and how economic and political dynamics intersect.

The contributions in the volume also address questions about the institutional genealogy of free ports, the evolution over time, the factors that influenced their development. The role of consuls, governors, fiscal techniques, architectural aspects, and administrative practices is also explored in understanding the position of free ports.

The interplay of trade, culture, and institutions in the Mediterranean all this makes this volume of particular interest for the scholars across various disciplines (modern history, Mediterranean studies, global economics, political studies, etc.) and for their knowledge of the Mediterranean and its global interconnections as regard the free trade and free ports.

The contributions to this volume provides a thought-provoking journey on this topics, from different point of views, highlighting the Mediterranean's pivotal role in shaping global commerce.

In their introductory article "**The history of Mediterranean free ports as the invention of free trade?**", *Koen Stapelbroek* and *Antonio Trampus* trace the development of political and economic functions performed by free ports in the Mediterranean from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The chapter discusses the 'primitive' function of the free port to attract goods and create markets in barren and depopulated territories and brings together hitherto separate historiographies into a general perspective and genealogical narrative of the 'invention' of free trade.
If "free trade" became the vehicle for the European colonisation of the world, its institutional and geographical ancestry remains uncertain. The Mediterranean Sea in the early-modern age arguably was what the world's oceans became in later times, a laboratory for what would produce the reality of global commercial and political competition. By the eighteenth century, this comparison was already made by political writers who looked into the future and saw a further mixing of private and public interests and the greed and ambition of European nations giving rise to exploitation and the submission of other territories.

Historians often locate the origins of the free port in late Renaissance Italy, largely because that is where the discourse about free ports as an object of political economy first developed. Yet all port cities, by virtue of being open to some extent to goods and merchants, may potentially be classed as free ports, since ports by definition must be open to the outside world. The chapter "**Ports and free ports in the Old World. Political economy in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (1500–1750)**" of *Corey Tazzara*, mediates between a historical and anthropological approach to free ports by comparing the trading environment of the early-modern Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. It provides preliminary answers to two questions: one empirical (to what extent did ports and their host states resemble one another in these two geographic contexts?) and the other theoretical (to what extent should the historical context of a term such as 'free port' govern inquiry into a topic?).

Giuglia Delogu in the chapter "**What is a free port? 'It is a maritime city that**

grants duty-free status on all goods it imports, whatever their origin" discusses the nearly five centuries of history leading up to apparently sterile definitions and highlights how free ports have been at the centre not only of economic debates but also of political and moral ones. By analysing both legal-administrative and intellectual sources, this chapter highlights the communicative nature of the media as they shaped positive and negative images of the free port. From the very first edicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, formal declarations also had a promotional role. To ensure the success of a free port, it was not enough to build new infrastructure or to reduce duties. It was also necessary to project an image of security and prosperity. The free port, from the beginning, was as much a tangible political-economic institution as it was a powerful intangible symbol.

In the next chapter, *Giulio Ongaro* analyses the role played by "**Free ports in a controlled market. Ancona, Livorno, Genoa, and Trieste in the eighteenth-century Italian grain trade**". Trade in grain was strictly controlled by the public authorities in the pre-unitary Italian states, to guarantee the provisioning of the citizenry and the earnings of landowners. However, this apparently 'closed' system could survive only thanks to the presence of 'exceptional' areas that were instruments for regulating the in- and outflow of essential goods. In times of food scarcity, it was imperative that the urban Annone be supplied through the free ports, whose privileges enabled them to attract huge amounts of grain. These dynamics between free ports and public subsistence provision inspired further debate on free grain trade in which supporters of 'deregulation' claimed that favourable excise policies and a degree of commercial freedom could guarantee continuous food provisioning from areas with surplus production, and at the same time preserve the earnings of merchants and landowners.

In the chapter "**Territorial control, economic provision, and republican order. The free port of Genoa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century**", the author *Paolo Calcagno* reconstructs the history of the free port of the Republic of Genoa, from the edict of 1590 – the first one issued in the Mediterranean area – until the end of the ancien regime. The Genoese policy changed constantly in order for custom revenues to cover public-debt payments and maintain fiscal balance. Acceptance of foreign merchants and other religions was sporadic, limited to situations when the city needed to recover from supply or health crises or the damage of warfare. The dilemma of the Genovese elites was

between promoting imports and maximising revenues, within the limited territory of the port. Another restraining element was that the local merchant class was disinclined to share economic opportunities. From around the mid-eighteenth century, it became more generally accepted that liberalising trade was necessary for participation in global trade.

The history of the free ports of Genoa and Livorno has often been written as dominated by mutual hostility and rivalry. Yet, the two ports, precisely due to their proximity, developed not only as competitors but also formed a naturally integrated commercial system which allowed them to coexist and survive alongside one another. To better understand the different appeals that the two ports had for Great Britain, as the dominant economic power in the Mediterranean, *Danilo Pedemonte* compares the commercial practices of English communities in Genoa and Livorno in the eighteenth century, in the chapter "**English perspectives on Genova and Livorno. Rivalry and complementarity between two eighteenth-century free ports**". In Livorno, with its openness to transnational trade and its policy of hospitality to rich foreign merchant communities, the British Factory created a closed community that was properly interconnected within the boundaries of the equally enclosed city. In Genoa, the capital of a trade republic with widespread maritime knowledge, seafaring history, and skill resources, the big merchant houses stepped back to allow shipping companies, small ship-owners, and sailors to mix with local society.

The history of the free port of Nice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is a striking example of the political use of the institution of the free port. Unlike other known cases in the Mediterranean, the port of Nice was an 'interstitial' port-emporium, geographically located in the middle of one of the world's busiest maritime routes which connected the southern Tyrrhenian and therefore the Levant with the western Mediterranean. While the prominent ports of Genoa and Marseille became French ports in the same period, Nice was the outlet of the small Italian state of Savoy which had had no maritime history until then. During the seventeenth century, in the wake of what the Medici had already done with Livorno with the famous Livornina of 1593, the Duke of Savoy entered the political fray through strengthening the Nice-Villefranche port, hoping to turn it into a rival to Genoa or Marseille. In the chapter "**The free port of Nice-Villefranche and Savoy maritime politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries**", *Luca Lo Basso* reconstructs the various attempts to shape the maritime policy of the

Savoy dynasty between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the institution of the free port.

Francesca Savoldi charts the establishment and transformation of the free ports of Tangier and Gibraltar during seventeenth- to eighteenth-century British rule, outlining the particular social and economic junctures that prevented their prosperity. The colony of Tangier was proclaimed a free port by the Crown of England in 1662. Taking inspiration from the models of Livorno and Genoa, it was intended to be an international free-trade environment for all merchants. However, Tangier was never successful as a Mediterranean free port, with the colonial project abandoned in 1684. The lack of a safe port in the strait led the British to occupy Gibraltar in 1704. This marked the beginning of its conversion into a free port and an international commercial enclave, integrated into the British economy, and providing it with a base for its navy. These two cases are compared in the chapter "**'Dire straits'. The free ports of Tangier and Gibraltar in the English Mediterranean**" to illustrate how neither designated free-port status nor strategic location was sufficient for generating prosperity. Instead, their incompatibility with the political economy of the emerging British Empire, orientation towards defensive and expansionistic goals, and local resistance prevented the enclaves from flourishing as Mediterranean free ports.

Focusing on Gibraltar, a white colony which was neither rich in raw materials nor had sufficient land to attract settlers, *Antonella Alimento* in the chapter "**The British debate on Mediterranean free ports. Livorno, Gibraltar, and Port Mahon (1712–1783)**" analyses the Mediterranean's central role in England's imperial strategy. After having played an eminently political role by preventing the union of the French and Spanish Fleets, in the 1730s the English planned to use Gibraltar as a warehouse from which the entire Mediterranean could stock up with sugar, tobacco, and rice produced in their Atlantic colonies. A central role in reconsidering Gibraltar as a free port was played by the Quaker merchant Joshua Gee, who wanted to turn Gibraltar into a new Livorno and thus rejected the idea of endowing it with a civil government with members chosen on the basis of their Protestant affiliation. Although he did not share the vision of a 'self-consciously Protestant British Empire', he did help to outline the contours of the 'predatory' empire that underpinned the creation of free ports in the British Antilles. In effect, the decision to establish these ports was taken in the late 1760s in response to similar initiatives implemented by the French government to render its colonies

increasingly dependent on the motherland.

The debates about establishment of a Neapolitan free port from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries are reconstructed by *Antonio Iodice* in the chapter "**A 'source of gold and prosperity'? The Neapolitan free-port debate from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century**". The city was a 'free port of call' already from 1633, following the requests made by the local parliament to the Spanish sovereign. However, not even contemporaries understood clearly the difference between a 'free port of call' and proper 'free port', and which privileged administrative and fiscal status was effectively in place. Alongside intermittent attempts to establish a proper Neapolitan free port, a heated theoretical debate took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both culminating in Napoleon's decision to reintroduce the 'free port of call' in 1809. Neapolitan economists and politicians discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages of free ports, using various European, American, and Asian ports as their models. According to some of authors, the city of Naples, placed in the centre of the Mediterranean, had been naturally destined to become an international emporium, and failure to seize this opportunity was emblematic of the state of Neapolitan political history.

In the early-modern age the free port of Messina, established in Sicily in 1695 under the Spanish Viceroyalty, and then reformed over the next 120 years under Savoy, Habsburg, and Bourbon rule, was the only free port of the Italian peninsula south of Civitavecchia. The chapter "**The free port of Messina in the ancien régime. Spaces, institutions, and practices**" focuses on the spaces of the free port. The authors *Ida Fazio* and *Rita Foti* reflects on the customs regime between the two kingdoms of Sicily and Naples, subject to the same crown while maintaining separated fiscal systems in order to safeguard incomes of private tax contractors and protect local manufacturers; on the ensuing contraband of goods, like oil and silk; on procedures relating to mobility, the status of foreigners, and the conditions and limits of civil and religious tolerance and the concept of citizenship; and on the justice system, the status of foreigners before the courts, summary procedure, and mercantile law. Along with the administrative reforms of the post-Napoleonic Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and especially the customs law of 1826, the age of free trade superseded the early-modern free port, based on privileges and exemptions, foreshadowing its abolition after the unification of Italy.

The response on the Spanish Crown's to the emergence of free ports in early-modern Europe appears clear in the chapter "**Free trade and the ghost story of the Bourbon alliance. Spain, free ports, and the Mediterranean Sea (1648–1765)**" by *Edward Jones Corredera*. In the seventeenth century, rival European powers capitalised on and gradually replaced Spain's careful balancing act of dynastic and commercial interests in the Mediterranean Sea. Following the Peace of Utrecht, Spanish officials sought to harness novel ideas of perpetual peace to improve the Crown's standing in Europe. This chapter focuses on how eighteenth-century inter-imperial disputes over free ports in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans informed Anglo-Spanish negotiations on neutrality and arbitration. The start of the Seven Years' War disrupted diplomatic efforts to reconcile Anglo-Spanish commercial interests and led to the reaffirmation of the Bourbon alliance. French expansionist ambitions, however, soon encouraged Spanish ministers to establish free ports throughout the empire. By drawing attention to the proposals of the Spanish prime minister Ricardo Wall and his network of officials, this chapter suggests that the growth of free ports in the Spanish Empire responded to debates about the prospect of an Anglo-Spanish balance of power in Europe and sought to undermine the establishment of an equilibrium that would turn Spain into a French province.

Marcella Aglietti discusses a manuscript by the Spanish economist Manuel Maria Gutiérrez (1775–1850), which provides a comparative overview of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century free ports. The purpose of the manuscript was to filter through the existing models to select the appropriate foundations for the establishment of Cádiz as a free port and amplify its positions as an international trading hub. Intriguingly, in his voluminous manuscript, Gutiérrez attempted to turn the different manifestations of free-port policies, regulations, and characteristics into a 'system of free ports', a methodical framework in which the multitude of European free ports and the specificities of the functioning of different free ports within different states could be reduced to 'one law'. In addition to reconstructing the overall picture offered by the manuscript, the chapter "***The evils of 'beguiling Liberty'. A comparative perspective on free ports in a manuscript by Manuel María Gutiérrez (1830)***" focuses on some critical observations about paradigmatic free ports and Gutiérrez's conclusions for the role that Cádiz could develop in its relationship with trade networks in Asia and America. Gutiérrez was inspired by the classical political economy of his time and developed his manuscript

in response to the predicament of Spain conditioned by its history in global trade.

David Do Paço challenges local historiographical perspectives and the self-centred focus of the history of Mediterranean free ports. It offers a decentralised history of the Habsburg Empire and introduces the concept of 'portchain' as a dynamic polynuclear and asymmetrical system. Based on local initiatives, the Habsburg portchain connected the polynuclear interfaces in the Low Countries, Adriatic, western Mediterranean, and the Danube. It articulated state-related and private trade companies and exemplified a synergy between public and private interests. 'Oracles' contributed to the circulation of information and skills. They strengthened the interdependence of the different Habsburg interfaces and their connection to other economic systems worldwide. This chapter "**The Habsburg portchain. A decentralised empire in the eighteenth century**" advances a global history of the Habsburg Empire. It highlights its Mediterranean dimension and delivers a way to go beyond the trade diaspora history, especially focusing on informal trades and traders. It also advocates for a Habsburg history free from national and ethnic obsessions and a decentralised history of free ports in the Mediterranean and beyond. The argument puts the recent development of the blockchain-based digital economy in a historical perspective.

For a long time, the construction of the Trieste free port was considered the result of a modernisation programme by Emperor Charles VI of Habsburg. This original myth has often been used to explain the subsequent history of the port of Trieste. Instead, it is more accurate to tone down the idea of personal vision and initiative and to recognise the complex interplay between many actors and interests. In this way, through the interaction between local figures and the larger Imperial constellation, one can explain the material constitution, political significance, and the commercial functioning of the Trieste free port. In this chapter on "**The evolution of the free port of Trieste from 1717 to the present**", the author *Daniele Andreozzi* analyses the history and role of the free port of Trieste from its inception until the twenty-first century, highlighting changes in the spatial context and functions in relation to global economic and geopolitical changes. It focuses on some fundamental aspects, such as the construction of Imperial Trieste and its transformation at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the crisis of 1830–1840, the competition between the different poles of the Habsburg Empire, and the abolition of the free port and creation of free points at the end of the nineteenth century.

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