

# The Port of La Ciotat and Its Maritime Community towards Industrialisation (1836–1916)

*Kalliopi Vasilaki*

## 1 Introduction

The port of La Ciotat lies between the two dominant ports of Provence: Marseilles, the main commercial hub; and Toulon, the naval base. It was integrated into the seaport system of Provence, which, together with a complex of other secondary ports, engaged in several maritime activities, including fishing, coastal and long-distance trade, and shipbuilding. These activities supplemented the needs of the two main ports.<sup>1</sup> The maritime communities of the secondary ports and coastal towns of Provence constituted main nodes of the seaport networks in the maritime transport system of the region.<sup>2</sup> Even though half of the total amount of sailors in Provence were concentrated in the big ports of Marseilles and Toulon, the smaller ports, all along the coast, formed significant seafaring communities.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the smaller ports

- 
- 1 For the system of ports in Provence see: Bruno Marnot, *Les grands ports du commerce français et la mondialisation du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (1815–1916)* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011); and Laurent Pavlidis, "Construction navale traditionnelle et mutations d'une production littorale en Provence (Fin XVIII<sup>e</sup>–début XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)" (PhD diss., University of Aix-Marseilles, 2012).
  - 2 For an analysis of the role of secondary ports and their maritime communities on seaport systems, see: Gordon Jackson, "The significance of unimportant ports," *International Journal of Maritime History* 13, no. 2 (2001): 1–17; Werner Scheltjens, *Dutch Deltas. Emergence, Functions and Structure of the Low Countries' Maritime Transport System ca. 1300–1850* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015); Margrit Schulte Beerbühl and Jörg Vögele (eds.), *Spinning the Commercial Web. International Trade, Merchant and Commercial Cities, c. 1640–1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 247–376; Amélia Polónia, "European seaports in the early modern age: concepts, methodology and models of analysis," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, no. 80 (2010): 17–39; <http://journals.openedition.org/cdlm/5364>; Gelina Harlaftis, "Greek shipping as a unification factor of markets: the methodology," in *Η ναυτιλία των Ελλήνων, 1700–1821* [Greek Shipping, 1700–1821: The Heyday Before the Greek Revolution], eds. Gelina Harlaftis and Katerina Papanikolaou (Athens: Kedros, 2013), 39–90.
  - 3 In the ports of Saint Tropez, La Seyne, and La Ciotat, almost the two-thirds of men worked at sea during the second half of the eighteenth century. See: Gilbert Buti, "Entre 'fortunes de mer et honnêtes profits'. Marins provençaux au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Los niveles de vida*

around Marseilles and Toulon shaped a strong maritime culture; the sea was at the core of society and seafarers represented an essential part of economic and social life, and depended significantly on the shipping activities of the main ports.

The cultural appropriation of the population of La Ciotat with the sea, through a plethora of maritime activities, formulated a strong maritime identity followed by patterns of behaviours and social norms that defined the character of the city, and its collective memory.<sup>4</sup> From the 1840s onwards, La Ciotat faced a total economic and social transformation by converting to one of the most important industrial shipbuilding centres of the Mediterranean. From the second third of the nineteenth century, several factors, such as the commercial decline of Marseilles at the end of eighteenth century, the emergence of new commercial and political routes, with the conquest of Algiers, and the introduction of new technologies in navigation and shipbuilding, shaped the economic function of the ports of Provence, and subsequently influenced the character of their coastal societies. This chapter on La Ciotat's industrial adjustment, and the subsequent effects on its maritime community during the second half of the nineteenth century, provides a useful insight into the socio-economic evolution in the French Mediterranean, provoked by the advent of industrial capitalism, and the transition from sail to steam navigation.

In French historiography, the social history of maritime populations and their littoral societies has been at the centre of research since the 1980s, through the pioneering works of Alain Cabantous<sup>5</sup> and Gerard le Bouëdec<sup>6</sup> for the Atlantic coast, and of Gilbert Buti for the Mediterranean coast of France.<sup>7</sup> This work focused mainly on the period before the Industrial Revolution. However, the study of maritime communities and their social transition during

---

*en Espana y Francia (siglos XVIII–XX)*, eds. Gérard Chastagnaret, Jean-Claude Daumas, Antonio Escudero, and Olivier Raveux (Alicante: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alican, 2010), 269.

4 Lydia Carol-Dekker, "Maritime culture: A sociological perspective," *The International Journal of Maritime History*, no. 30.2 (2018): 302–314; Madeleine Brocard, John Barzmann, Brigitte Deltombe, and Morel P., "L'identité maritime des villes portuaires," *Géographes associés*, no. 20 (1997): 71–78.

5 Alain Cabantous, *Dix mille marins face à l'Océan: les populations maritimes de Dunkerque au Havre aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, vers 1660–1794: étude sociale* (Paris: Publisud, 1991); Alain Cabantous, *Les citoyens du large. Les identités maritimes en France (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Aubier, 1995).

6 Gérard Le Bouëdec, *Activités maritimes et sociétés littorales de l'Europe atlantique (1690–1790)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997).

7 Gilbert Buti, *Les Chemins de la mer. Un petit port méditerranéen: Saint-Tropez (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010).

industrialisation remains under-explored. In this respect, the work of Nicolas Cochard is an essential step for the study of seafarers within their urban society during the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The fundamental social restructuring present during industrialisation reshaped the maritime culture of the littoral population, and thus, altered the perception of littoral societies. For a focus on the nineteenth century, we need to reformulate the concept of maritime communities. Alain Cabantous questions who is included among seafarers,<sup>9</sup> and observes the differences the contemporary era imposes on this concept, given population growth, immigration, and urbanisation during the nineteenth century. Gérard Le Bouëdec, in his article about the evolution of the perception of the coastal zone during the nineteenth century, underlines the profound transformation of littoral societies and maritime activities, confronted with industrialisation and the reconfiguration of maritime trade.<sup>10</sup> The port-cities often become industrial centres, with decisive social effects that totally transform the maritime population. Nicolas Cochard argues the need to remind ourselves of the particularities of the history of seafarers in the nineteenth century, since generalised mechanisation reshaped the world of the sea in an in-depth manner.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter considers the maritime community of La Ciotat, a well-established part of the coastal economy in Provence. The first part provides an analysis of the emergence of La Ciotat as an important industrial shipbuilding centre of the French Mediterranean, demonstrating the process of economic transformation at the port. The second part examines the social change of La Ciotat from two main perspectives: the demographic transition of the town, focusing on demographic dynamics and occupational structure; and the evolution of sailors' professional trajectories during the process of industrialisation. This study provides evidence on how the restructuring of the economic

8 Nicolas Cochard, *Les marins du Havre. Gens de mer et société urbaine au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016).

9 Alain Cabantous, "Histoire maritime ou histoire sociale ? L'approche des gens de mer," *Drassana: revista del Museu Marítim*, no. 15 (2007): 84–96; "Qui saisir parmi la population dénommée 'gens de mer'?" <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Drassana/article/view/104719> (accessed 15/08/2020).

10 Gérard Le Bouëdec, "L'évolution de la perception des zones côtières du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle", in *Terres Marines. Etudes en hommage à Dominique Guillemet*, eds. Frédéric Chauvaud and Jacques Péret (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 27–37, <http://books.openedition.org/pur/20421> (accessed 07/09/2020).

11 Nicolas Cochard, "L'histoire des populations maritimes à l'époque contemporaine: la géographie au service de l'historien," *EchoGéo*, no. 19 (2012): 1–14, <http://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/12991> (accessed 31/07/2020).

function of the port constitutes an essential component of the social transformation of the town, and the modification of its maritime labour market.

## 2 The Transformation of the Port of La Ciotat towards an Industrial Shipbuilding Centre

As the writer of the *mémoire historique* of La Ciotat (1842) remarked, “[l’industrie] la plus naturelle au pays, celle qui fait surtout l’existence de la Ciotat c’est le métier de la mer”.<sup>12</sup> Since its origins in the fifteenth century, the town was dependant on a plethora of maritime activities, such as fishing coastal and long-distance trade, shipbuilding, and seafaring. Wooden shipbuilding formed a well-established aspect of the local economy from the seventeenth century onwards, and was boosted by the proximity of the port to Marseilles and its *maisons de négoce* (trading houses). With minimum infrastructure, as was the case in most Mediterranean ports during this period, La Ciotat constructed large commercial sailing ships, commissioned mostly by the ship-owners of Marseilles.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, essential ancillary industries, such as rope and sail making, were also established in the port.<sup>14</sup> In addition, La Ciotat was highly dependent on the maritime trade of Marseilles, and the prominent captains and officers of the town were closely connected to some of the most powerful trading houses.<sup>15</sup> During the *ancien régime*, the commercial activity of the port and the fleet was enhanced by active participation in the *caravane maritime*, the practice of chartering western ships by the Ottoman Empire, in order to execute trade in the Levant.<sup>16</sup> In the eighteenth century,

12 Etienne-Michel Masse, *Mémoire historique et statistique sur le Canton de La Ciotat, Département des Bouches du Rhone* (Marseilles: Caranud Fils, 1842), 215.

13 Gilbert Buti, “Activités maritimes et gens de mer de La Ciotat aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *La Ciotat, de Citharista aux chantiers navals. Histoire et archéologie, Activités maritimes et gens de mer de La Ciotat aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Brigitte Vasselin (Valensole: Aurorae Libri, 2017), 118.

14 Marie Perrin, “Métiers et activités à La Ciotat,” in Vasselin, *La Ciotat*, 121.

15 For instance, the Icard and Brunet families regularly led the ships of the house of Roux. See: Gilbert Buti and Alain Cabantous, *Etre marin en Europe occidentale (1550–1850)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016), 26; Paul Masson (ed.), *Encyclopédie départementale des Bouches-du-Rhône*, vol. 9: *Le mouvement économique: le Commerce* (Paris Champion and Marseilles: Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, 1922), 644.

16 P. Perrignon de Troyes, “Le port de La Ciotat,” *Revue de la marine marchande*, no. 22 (Juillet 1917): 383. For the practice of *caravane maritime* see: Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1896); Daniel Panzac, *La caravane maritime. Marins européens et marchands ottomans en Méditerranée*

La Ciotat furnished more sailors and captains to the commerce of Levant than Marseilles. As Gilbert Buti indicates, of the 937 charter contracts signed by the Vice-Chancellor of Alexandria between 1753 and 1768, 36.4% of captains originated from La Ciotat, 21% from Saint Tropez, and 11.5% from Marseilles.<sup>17</sup>

From the end of eighteenth century, the maritime community of La Ciotat faced a significant economic and demographic downturn. The Reign of Terror, the years 1793–94, together with the British blockade, which completely cut off the port of Marseilles from overseas markets, led to the economic failure of the merchant elite of Marseilles.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, all secondary ports of Provence, which relied upon the maritime economy of Marseilles, witnessed a decline of commercial activities. Also, from the last quarter of the eighteenth century onwards, the *caravane maritime* and the commercial routes of the Levant, which La Ciotat was largely dependent upon, decreased significantly. The military defeat of the Ottoman Empire by Russia, which from 1783 opened the Black Sea to European ships, together with the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt, weakened the commercial structure of the Ottoman Empire. The rise of the Ragusan (today Dubrovnik) and Ottoman Greek fleets in the Levant, and conflict associated with the French revolution, led to the decline of the *caravane maritime* and the disappearance of French caravaners in the Mediterranean. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, a series of events, including the Greek War of Independence, the Egyptian rebellion led by Muhammad Ali, and the conquest of Algiers by France, led to the final suspension of maritime and trade relations between France and the Ottoman Empire, which had characterised all of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Given the political and economic circumstances at the beginning of nineteenth century, La Ciotat found itself in a profound economic crisis. Minutes from town council meetings often referred to the “general misery” of La Ciotat due to the absence of port and shipyard activities, and sustained unemployment.<sup>20</sup>

---

(1680–1830) (Paris: CNRS, 2004); Gilbert Buti, “Allez en caravane: le cabotage lointain en Méditerranée, XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue d'Histoire moderne & contemporaine*, no. 52.1 (2005.1): 7–38; Maria Fusaro, Colin Heywood, and Mohamed-Salah Omri (eds.), *Trade and Culture Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean. Braudel's Maritime Legacy* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

17 Buti, “Allez en caravane,” 20.

18 Charles Carrière, *Négociants marseillais au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Contribution à l'étude des économies maritimes* (Marseille: Institut historique de Provence, 1973), 260–63.

19 Daniel Panzac, “International and domestic maritime trade in the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 24 (1992): 202–204.

20 Archives Municipales de La Ciotat (hereafter AMLC), DA.01-06 to DA.01-12, Registres de Délibérations du Conseil Municipal (1802–1833).

From the second third of the nineteenth century onwards, the port of La Ciotat underwent significant restructuring. During this period, La Ciotat commenced a profound transformation with the establishment of important industrial shipbuilding activity at the port. Together with La Seyne-sur-Mer,<sup>21</sup> they became the only secondary ports of the Provence littoral area during the nineteenth century that oriented their maritime activities towards new technologies. For La Ciotat, the first phase of transition began with Louis Benet (1805–77), industrialist, and son of a Marseilles shipowner. In 1836, he founded a standard limited partnership company for the construction and repair of steamships in the Mediterranean, and the manufacture of steam engines. The same year, the first paddle steamer, *Le Phocéen*, was constructed in La Ciotat, with a plan and engine imported from Great Britain.<sup>22</sup> In 1839, the company was integrated into the network for the construction of railways in the south of France, namely the *Compagnie des mines de la Grand-Combe et des chemins de fer du Gard*,<sup>23</sup> and expanded to a new joint-stock company named the *Ateliers de construction de machines à vapeur à La Ciotat*. The company was obliged to construct, apart from steamships, locomotives destined for the railway company. Louis Benet succeeded in integrating the financial means, together with a relevant technological network, mainly from Great Britain, in order to build a powerful industrial establishment in La Ciotat.

Different factors can attest to the beginning of industrialisation at the port. Already in this first phase of transition, shipbuilding production in La Ciotat

21 The shipyards of the American, Eduard Church, founded in 1818 in La Seyne-sur-Mer, focused their activity on fluvial navigation. The British engineer and industrialist, Philip Taylor, bought the site in 1845, which, after serious restructuring in 1853, transformed into *La Compagnie des Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée*, with capital of 4 million francs. It became one of the most important industrial complexes, with more than 3000 workers in the shipyards during the second half of the nineteenth century. See: Xavier Daumalin and Olivier Raveux, "Aux origines de la Société des forges et chantiers de la Méditerranée. L'œuvre de l'industriel anglais Philip Taylor (1846–1853)," *Provence historique*, no. 247 (2012): 25–38.

22 Xavier Daumalin and Olivier Raveux, "Aux origines de l'industrie moderne marseillaise: l'œuvre de Louis Benet et de Philip Taylor (années 1830–1850)," *Rives méditerranéennes*, no. 45 (2013): 22. *Le Phocéen* was 333 tons, with dimensions of 50.75 × 6.89 × 4.25 m.

23 The company was formed in 1837 by Paulin Talabot, and resembled the business of Baron James de Rothschild and the Stephenson (father and son) founders of the locomotive workshop of Robert Stephenson and Co., in Newcastle. The aim of the *Compagnie* was to build a railway linking the region of Beaucaire and the coal-mining enterprise in Grand'Combe on the Rhône River, as well as a railway connecting Marseilles with Avignon. For a further analysis see: Xavier Daumalin, "L'atelier de construction ferroviaire. Louis Benet & Cie à La Ciotat (1839–1848)," *Revue d'histoire des chemins de fer*, no. 28–29 (2003): 27–43.

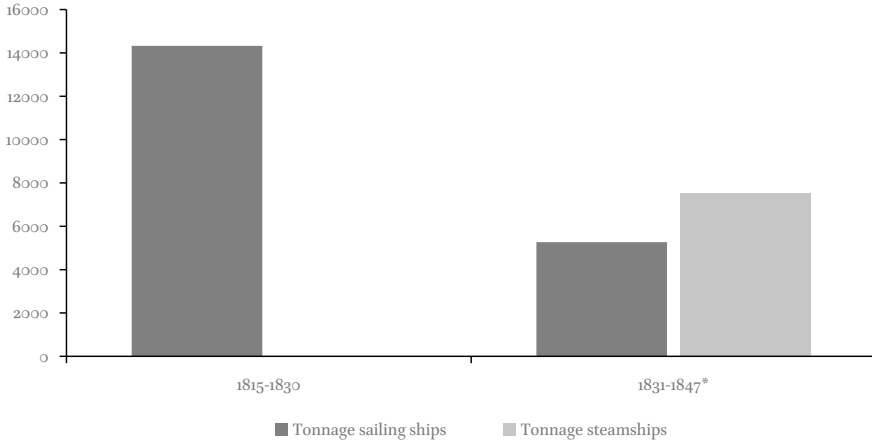


CHART 8.1 Shipbuilding production in La Ciotat (in tonnage) during the years 1815–30 and 1831–47

SOURCES: FOR THE TONNAGE OF SAILING SHIPS: LAURENT PAVLIDIS, “CONSTRUCTION NAVALE TRADITIONNELLE ET MUTATIONS D’UNE PRODUCTION LITTORALE EN PROVENCE (FIN XVIII<sup>e</sup>–DÉBUT XX<sup>e</sup> SIÈCLE)” (PHD DISS., AIX-MARSEILLES UNIVERSITÉ, 2012), 158. FOR THE TONNAGE OF STEAMSHIPS: SERVICE HISTORIQUE DEFENCE (TOULON), 14 P 122, MÉMOIRES STATISTIQUES; PAUL BOIS, *LE GRAND SIÈCLE DES MESSAGERIES MARITIMES* (MARSEILLES: CCIMP, 1992); AND YVES LAGET ET AL., *NOTRE HISTOIRE DE LA CONSTRUCTION NAVALE À LA CIOTAT. DE L’ANTIQUITÉ À NOS JOURS* (LA CIOTAT: ASSOCIATION JOSEPH EDOUARD VENCE, 2011). \*THE TONNAGE OF CERTAIN STEAMSHIPS IS MISSING. THESE ARE THE STEAMERS *LE RHÔNE*, *L’HÉRAULT* (1837), *L’UTILE* (1838), *SALAMANDRE* (1847), *ARIEL* (1847), AND *SAINT-GEORGES* (1847)

reflects the industrial growth of the site. With an industrial unit of 25,000 m<sup>2</sup> displaying remarkable technological progress, during the period 1831 to 1847, the total tonnage of steamship construction in La Ciotat surpassed the total tonnage of sailing ship construction (Chart 8.1). At the end of the 1840s, the company of *Louis Benet & Cie*, by carrying out the production of steamships and locomotives concurrently, became the most important enterprise of this type in the Mediterranean.

The key factors for the development of industrial shipbuilding activity in La Ciotat consist of historical and economic circumstances: the declining economic activity of La Ciotat, together with the ability to provide empty space in the port, offered the possibility of the introduction of new industrial activities. Aside from this, the geographical position of the port and proximity to the commercial port of Marseilles, and the naval base of Toulon, played a pivotal role in the technological shift. In terms of social space, the existence of skilled

human labour, related to wooden shipbuilding expertise acquired in the previous centuries, was also an essential component. On a geopolitical level, the conquest of North Africa, with the expedition to Algiers in 1830, created new commercial (and diplomatic) routes, and demand that was able to activate market forces in the direction of steam propulsion.<sup>24</sup> These circumstances led the entrepreneurs of Marseilles, for the first time, to invest in these new shipping technologies. In the 1830s, Charles and Auguste Bazin opened the first line from Marseilles to Naples.<sup>25</sup> The *Compagnie Gérard*, from Toulon, offered regular routes to Corsica, and the *Compagnie Valery*, from 1833, created a regular connection with North Africa.<sup>26</sup> In 1836, three companies were created, which specialised in coastal navigation within the Languedoc: the *Théophile Périer & Cie*, *Auguste et Guillaume Chanhel frères & Cie*, and *Simon Théron & Cie*.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, in 1835, the *Assemblée Nationale* passed a law for “the establishment of liners designed to transport mail in the Mediterranean, between France and the Levant”, and thus created the first French public postal service for North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean operated by French naval steamships.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, during this period, market demand for steam navigation increased the need for industrial shipbuilding.

However, the shipyards of La Ciotat faced serious decline due to the economic crisis of 1848–51 in France, which drastically affected the shipbuilding sector. From 1848 onwards, Louis Benet did not possess adequate capital to support the needs and demands of the industrial shipbuilding sector. Hereafter, the industrial unit in La Ciotat integrated into the *Service maritime des messageries nationales*. In 1851, the French state, aiming to establish powerful steamship lines in the Mediterranean, such as those of the *Peninsular and Oriental Company (P&O)*, created in 1837 in Great Britain, and *Lloyd Austriaco*, formed in 1836 in the Austrian Empire, ceded all postal services for twenty years to the *Société des Messageries Nationales* (generally known as the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes*), the first large French steam shipping company

24 Marchel Roncayolo, *L'imaginaire de Marseilles. Port, ville, pôle* (Marseilles: Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Marseilles-Provence, 1990), 78.

25 Xavier Daumalin and Marcel Courdurié, *Vapeur et Révolution industrielle à Marseilles (1831–1857)* (Marseilles: Chambre de commerce et d'industries de Marseilles-Provence, 1997), 106.

26 Marie-Françoise Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes. L'essor d'une grande compagnie de navigation française, 1851–1894* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007), 42.

27 Daumalin and Courdurié, *Vapeur et révolution industrielle à Marseilles*, 115.

28 Dominique Brisou, *Accueil, introduction et développement de l'énergie vapeur dans la Marine militaire française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Service historique de la marine, 2003), 612.



subsidised by the state.<sup>29</sup> The company offered scheduled steamer services, firstly from Marseilles to Alexandria, Constantinople, and Syria, and from the 1860s onwards to the South Atlantic, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. By 1869, the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* had 65 ships in service, representing an investment of over 100 million francs, which made the Company one of the largest steamship companies in the world.<sup>30</sup>

The shipyards of La Ciotat reflected the capacity of the expansion of the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes*.<sup>31</sup> Following a policy of vertical integration of production, the company devoted the biggest part of investment directly into La Ciotat for the construction of a new, large, and competitive fleet, and for the maintenance of the old fleet.<sup>32</sup> The industrial site of La Ciotat grew into the main tool of expansion of the Company, following the opening of new lines through state subsidies. Table 8.1 represents the average yearly tonnage of the output of the shipyards (in gross tonnage, GT) following quinquennial periods from 1855 to 1915.<sup>33</sup> The shipbuilding production in La Ciotat was subjected to strong protectionism, reflected in government decisions and state subventions, rather than the freight rate fluctuations of shipping cycles often affected by the dynamics of the international and regional economy.<sup>34</sup> In the years 1857 to 1866, the shipyards of La Ciotat already produced 26% of the total tonnage of steamships connected to the ports of France (both constructed and purchased).<sup>35</sup> By 1910, the percentage of output for steamships

29 It was named the *Compagnie des Services Maritimes de Messageries Nationales* in 1852. In 1853, following the proclamation of the Second Empire, the company's name changed to *Compagnie des Services Maritimes Imperiales*. After the Franco-Prussian War, and the foundation of the Third Republic, the company changed its name again, to the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes*, abbreviated as MM.

30 Michael Stephen Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 90.

31 Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes*, 74.

32 Archives du Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Marseilles-Provence (hereafter ACCIMP), L 19/60/427-1, Assemblé générale des actionnaires, 28 mai 1853.

33 Unfortunately, the absence of documents relating to repairs and maintenance, an important function of the shipyards, does not allow further analysis of the construction site.

34 For the state subsidies of the *Messageries Maritimes*, see the analysis of Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes*. For an analysis of the shipping cycles and their effect on shipbuilding, see Martin Stopford, *Maritime Economics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

35 Archives French Lines (hereafter AFL), 1997-002-4714, Navires construits à La Ciotat pour le compte de la Compagnie des messageries maritimes ; and Jules Peulvé, *Déposition à l'enquête maritime: marine marchande* (Paris: Imprimerie centrale des chemins de fer, 1870).

TABLE 8.1 Quinquennial average yearly output of the shipyards of La Ciotat in gross tonnage, 1852–1915

Period	Average annual tonnage
1852–55	774
1856–60	2,386
1861–65	3,836
1866–70	6,438
1871–75	5,872
1876–80	3,067
1881–85	7,529
1886–90	4,668
1891–95	4,954
1896–1900	8,193
1901–05	5,256
1906–10	2,866
1911–15	5,334

PROCESSED DATA FROM: ARCHIVES FRENCH LINES (HEREAFTER AFL), 1997-002-4714, NAVIRES CONSTRUITS À LA CIOTAT POUR LE COMPTE DES MESSAGERIES MARITIMES AND BERNERON-COUVENHES, LES MESSAGERIES MARITIMES, ANNEXE 14, 789–799

constructed in La Ciotat represented 22% of the total number of steamships within the French merchant marine (in net tonnage).<sup>36</sup>

The Company succeeded in creating a major shipbuilding and ship-repair complex, with a labour force of more than 3,500 workers. From the 1850s onwards, the shipyards experienced a vast spatial expansion and a significant development of their industrial facilities. The site occupied a total area of 93,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with an industrial complex of metal, engine, and tool workshops, together with a dry dock, three construction docks, and one slipway. The technological evolution of the shipyards was immense: the steamships passed 120 m in length and 3000 tons, employing engines of 2,400 to 2,900 hp.

The port traffic of La Ciotat from 1850 to 1913 (Table 8.2) offers a clear insight into the economic function of the port as a shipbuilding centre of the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes*.<sup>37</sup>

36 Statistique Générale de la France, *Annuaire Statistique*, 1911, Tableau I. Effectif de la marine marchande au 31 décembre 1910.

37 Table taken from: Masson, *Encyclopédie départementale*, 647.

TABLE 8.2 Port traffic in La Ciotat, 1850–1913

Year	Ships	Tonnage	Average tonnage
1850	200	15,673	78.4
1860	677	32,579	48.1
1869	608	89,348	147
1880	1,084	233,749	215.6
1890	946	320,655	339
1896	816	425,495	521.4
1900	716	384,07	536.4
1913	338	201,411	595.9

SOURCE: TABLE TAKEN FROM: PAUL MASSON (ED.), *ENCYCLOPÉDIE DÉPARTEMENTALE DES BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE*, VOL. 9: *LE MOUVEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE: LE COMMERCE* (PARIS CHAMPION AND MARSEILLES: ARCHIVES DÉPARTEMENTALES DES BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE, 1922), 647

TABLE 8.3 Traffic of the port of La Ciotat in 1896 based on vessels with cargo, and vessels on ballast

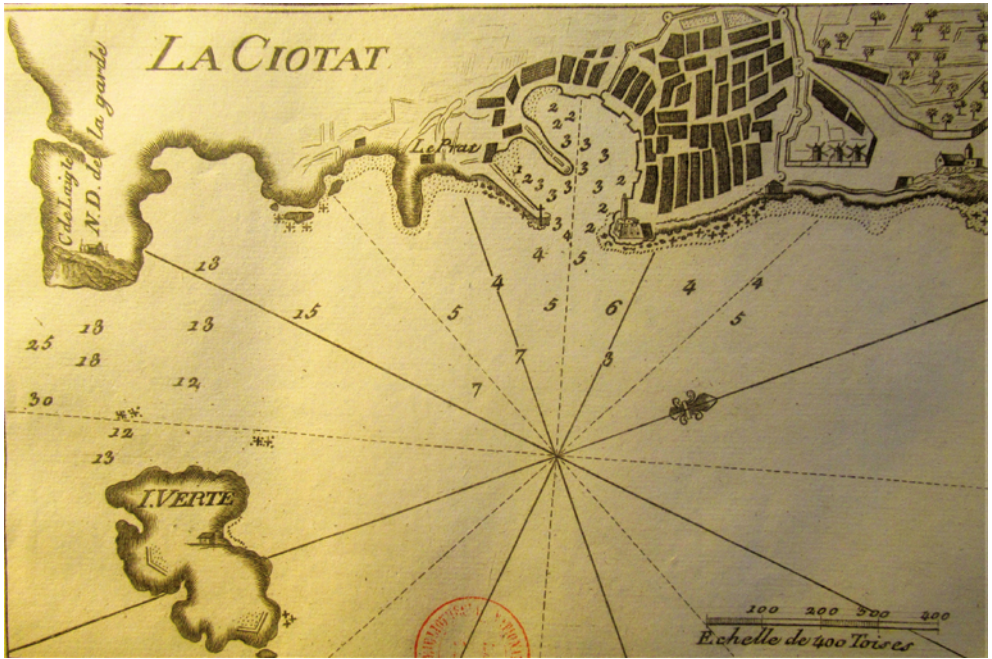
	Number of ships	Tonnage
Vessels with cargo	337	10,446
On ballast	479	415,049

SOURCE: TABLE TAKEN FROM: MASSON, *ENCYCLOPÉDIE DÉPARTEMENTALE*, 647

Even though port traffic increased significantly during this period, it was limited to ships on ballast that visited the port in order to conduct essential maintenance works. This is evident by the data for the number of vessels with cargo and those on ballast that entered the port in 1896 (Table 8.3). Apart from the ships of the Company, the port was mostly frequented by small coastal vessels.<sup>38</sup>

The reduced commercial use of the port is also evident by the choice to build a railway station 5 km north of the town and thus, keep the port separated from an efficient railway system with access to the hinterland. A railway system of short range existed in the port only for the transportation of heavy raw materials and tools, to the shipyards. Therefore, the shipyards of *Messageries*

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 647.



MAP 8.1 Map of La Ciotat, 1800

SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUES NATIONALES DE FRANCE (BNF), IMAGE CARTOGRAPHIQUE, JEAN-JOSEPH ALLEZARD, *NOUVEAU RECUEIL DE PLANS DES PRINCIPAUX PORTS DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE, NOUVELLE ÉDITION, CORRIGÉE ET AUGMENTÉE DE 32 PLANS* (LIVORNO AND MARSEILLES: CHEZ L'ÉDITEUR SR TRABAUD, 1800)

*Maritimes* aligned to La Ciotat's specific characteristics, that is, industrial shipbuilding activity. During this period, the port of La Ciotat functioned as an ancillary industrial hub, an outpost of Marseilles, without commercial activity nor shipping and maritime services.

The spatial changes at the port, as can be seen from two different maps from 1800 (Map 1) and 1891 (Map 2), reflect the socio-economic transformation that occurred in the town during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the economic diversification of the port, related to industrial shipbuilding. The industrial growth of the port, together with the subsequent urbanisation, utterly transformed the spatial dynamics of the town. The map of 1891 reveals the emergence of the industrial character of the port as a centre of shipbuilding production. In the latter map, the south part of the port constitutes a distinctive geographical entity of production, and of a local labour market, where the shipyards, workshops, and workers residences, were based. Hence, La Ciotat was divided into two unique parts: the industrial complex, and the town.



MAP 8.2 Map of La Ciotat, 1891

SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUES NATIONALES FRANCE (BNF), IMAGE CARTOGRAPHIQUE: SANS MÉDIATION (PARIS: IMP. SARAZIN, 1891)

From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the shipbuilding complex of La Ciotat experienced a constant decline. The economic situation of the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* dramatically changed due to the coal crisis, the continuous strikes, which affected the regularity of services, and a new law on the merchant marine.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, private and public interests gradually diverged: the interest of the company was to maintain a high subsidy, for a minimum service, while the interest of the state was to lower the subsidy while requiring more services from the company. In addition, the technological needs of the new fleet could not be facilitated by the La Ciotat shipyards, which demanded extensive infrastructure works. With the beginning of the First World War, the company deficit continued to grow due to serious cash flow problems that arose from government debts.<sup>40</sup> After a period

39 Paul Bois, *Le grand siècle des Messageries Maritimes* (Marseille: CCIMP, 1992), 68.

40 *Ibid.* 77.

of crisis at the site, with widespread worker dismissals followed by momentous strikes in the town, the company leased the ship construction and repair centre to the *Société Provençale de constructions navales*,<sup>41</sup> a subsidiary company of *Schneider Corporation*.<sup>42</sup>

### 3 The Evolution of Social Dynamics in La Ciotat through the Demographic Characteristics of the City

Between 1851 and 1916, La Ciotat witnessed rapid demographic and urban expansion generated by workforce demand in the shipyards. The city went through a demographic transformation with vast population growth maintained mostly by large-scale migration. Within one decade, from 1851 to 1861, La Ciotat became the fastest growing town in Provence. The population increased from 5,129 residents in 1851, to 8,444 in 1861, an annual growth rate of 5.7%. A comparison of annual growth rates of individual port-towns in Provence from 1850 to 1901, attests to the relevant demographic expansion of the town. During this period, the population of La Ciotat registered a 3.2% annual rate of growth; a significant percentage with regards to the overall annual growth of the population in France.<sup>43</sup> During the same period, similar annual growth rates were registered in other ports of Provence that succeeded in industrialising their economies, such as La Seyne-sur-Mer (4.6%), and of course, Marseilles (3.8%).

The main factor for the demographic growth of La Ciotat during the second half of the nineteenth century was a disproportionate dependency on migratory waves, a phenomenon common to many cities in France and Europe during the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> The *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* attracted thousands of working-class residents, originating from two principal areas: the Provence hinterland, and Piedmont, in Italy. The statistical analysis of place of birth for residents via the nominative censuses of La Ciotat, is revealing (Chart 8.2). In 1851, the number of residents without French

41 AFL, 1997 002 5226, Fonds Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, Bail par la Cie des Messageries Maritimes à la Ste Provençale de Constructions Navales.

42 *Schneider-Creusot*, or *Schneider & Cie*, was an iron and steel-mill in Creusot, one of the greatest industrial establishments in the world, which became a major arms manufacturer.

43 The population of France registered a 0.3% annual growth in 1806–21, 0.5% in 1821–51 and 0.2% in 1851–91. See: Magali Talandier, Valérie Jousseume, and Bernard Henri Nicot “Two centuries of economic territorial dynamics: the case of France,” *Regional Studies, Regional Sciences*, no. 3.1 (2016): 72.

44 Robert Lee, “The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of port cities: a typology for comparative analysis?,” *Urban History*, no. 25 (1998): 156.

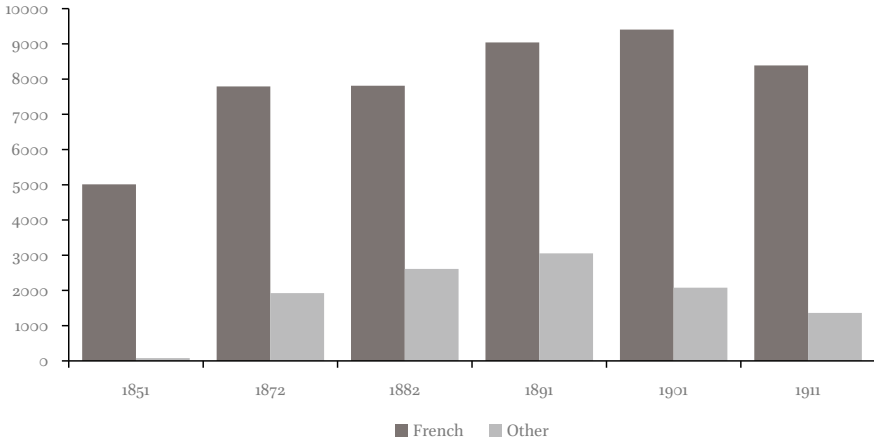


CHART 8.2 Distribution of the population of La Ciotat according to nationality, 1851–1911  
 SOURCE: PROCESSED DATA FROM ARCHIVES MUNICIPALES DE LA CIOTAT (HEREAFTER AMLC), LISTES NOMINATIVES DE RECENSEMENT DE POPULATION DE LA CIOTAT (1851–1911)

nationality in the town was 80. After four decades, in 1891, the number of foreigners amounted to 3,052 individuals. However, the impact of immigration on La Ciotat is more obvious from the recapitulation data of the 1882 nominative census, which includes a statistical analysis of the provenance of residents. In this year, almost half of the population of La Ciotat were not born in the town: 24% were Italian, and 22% originated in other parts of France.<sup>45</sup>

Simultaneously, the city encountered a cumulative urban expansion. As can be seen below (Chart 8.3), from 1851 to 1911, the rural proportion remained stable whereas the proportion residing in the urban area more than doubled.

This rapid increase of migration, together with urban expansion from the 1850s onwards, resulted in a significant demand for housing. Immigration and the subsequent urban expansion created a shortage of housing, which led to the involvement of the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* in the provision of working-class accommodation. Therefore, between 1854 and 1858, the company constructed, in a 21,000 m<sup>2</sup> area, a housing complex of 24 houses (of eight apartments each), with a total capacity for 800 residents, to cover the housing needs for a part of the workforce of the shipyards.<sup>46</sup>

45 AMLC, Liste nominative de recensement de population of La Ciotat, 1882.

46 Archives du Musée Ciotaden, CHAN/41 Construction du quartier Notre Dame des Victoires.

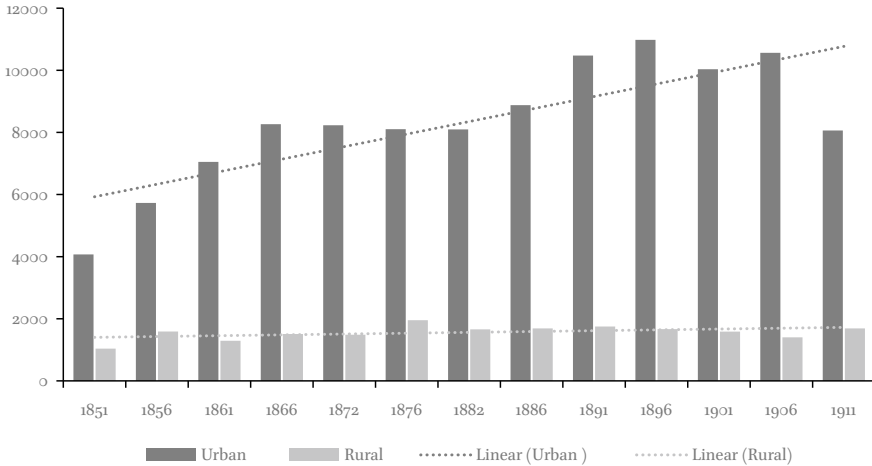


CHART 8.3 Urban section and rural section growth in La Ciotat, 1851–1911  
 SOURCES: PROCESSED DATA FROM AMLC, LISTES NOMINATIVES DE  
 RECENSEMENT DE POPULATION DE LA CIOTAT (1851–1911)

The nature and development of specific port economies was also reflected in the operation of their labour markets.<sup>47</sup> The demographic development of La Ciotat between the middle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century reflects the overall pattern of economic trends in the town. The population growth rate was undoubtedly related to the expanding shipbuilding industry. The employment records in La Ciotat's shipyards, from 1851 to 1912 provide, inter alia, valuable data on the total number of household members of each worker.<sup>48</sup> This data, together with demographic trends, demonstrates the clear correlation between population growth and employment in the shipyards (Chart 8.4).

La Ciotat population fluctuations followed variations of labour force capacity at the shipyards, a phenomenon that was very closely associated with the dependency of the *Messageries Maritimes* on state policies of commercial and imperial expansion. This link with state intervention through subsidies, during the course of this period, had important effects on demand at the shipyards.

47 Lee, "Socio-economic characteristics," 161.

48 Database, Employment records in the shipyards of La Ciotat (1851–1912). Sources: Archives du Musée Ciotaden, Registres entrées, M1–M4 (1851–1873), P1–P9 (1870–1912). The employment records in the shipyards of the *Messageries Maritimes* is a valuable and unexplored source for their history; it is maintained in the archives of the *Musée Ciotaden* in La Ciotat. For the study of this period, there are complete registers for the recruitment of workers from 1851 to 1912 (around 44,000 entries in total).



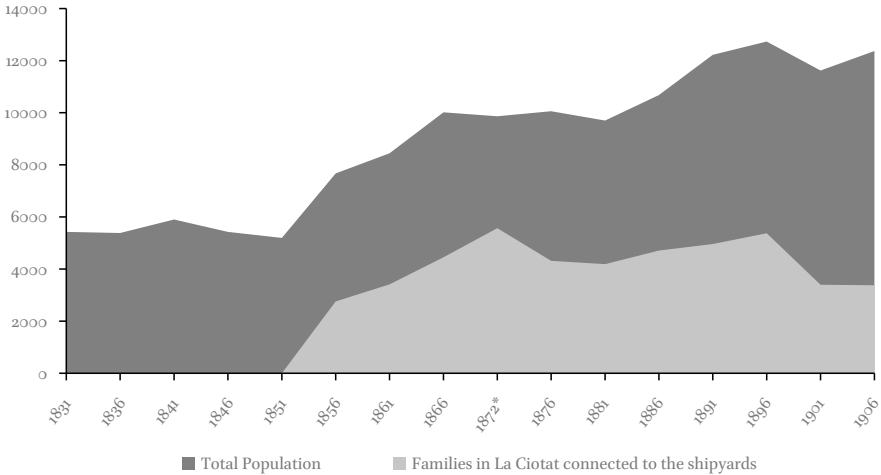


CHART 8.4 Members of household connected to the shipyards in relation to the total population of the city, 1831–1911

SOURCES: PROCESSED DATA FROM: AMLC, LISTES NOMINATIVES DE RECENSEMENT DE POPULATION OF LA CIOTAT (1851–1911) AND ARCHIVES DU MUSÉE CIOTADEN (AMC); EMPLOYMENT RECORDS IN THE SHIPYARDS OF LA CIOTAT (1851–1912). \* FOR THE YEAR 1872, THE RECAPITULATION DATA FROM TWO REGISTERS (M4, REGISTRES EMBAUCHES AND P2, REGISTRES ADMISSIONS PROVISOIRES) HAVE BEEN USED

A lack of orders for the *Compagnie* created high levels of unemployment and a halt to growth, causing widespread dismissals in the workforce.<sup>49</sup>

For instance, the Franco-Prussian war, in 1871, reduced production at the shipyards, and had subsequent decremental effects on both the workforce, and the overall population. In addition, the shipyards of La Ciotat had been requisitioned in order to manufacture artillery equipment. The *Compagnie* was obliged to postpone new constructions, and to concentrate only on the maintenance of the existing fleet.<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, the workforce declined from 3,153 in August 1870 to 1,706 a month later. Likewise, the crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century in the shipyards was evident in the demographic dynamics, as the annual rate of growth between 1906 and 1911 dropped by 3.8%.

The connection between the shipbuilding industry and the town of La Ciotat is clear by remarks made in the general assembly of the *Compagnie* in

49 For the relationship between the *Compagnie* and the state see: Louis Girard, *La politique des travaux publics du Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1952); and Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes*.

50 Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes*, 338–39.

1908 by André Lebon, President of the Executive Board, in the context of a discussion on the future of the shipyards.

“It is always extremely hard, even painful, to carry out staff dismissals, especially in a locality where there are no other possible occupations for the workers than those that we offer them. It is certain that when you fire workers in big cities, they have possibilities for finding work without relocation. In a city like La Ciotat it is their livelihood that you take away and they are forced to emigrate, even when they are landlords”.<sup>51</sup>

The progression towards industrialisation, and changes in the process of shipbuilding production profoundly affected the maritime community of La Ciotat. This can be demonstrated by the professional composition of the population as derived by the database of nominative censuses of La Ciotat for the years 1851 and 1911. It is a challenging process to conduct an analysis of the occupational structure of a French littoral town during the second half of the nineteenth century using such data; the *pluriactivité* of the population, the practice of carrying out various professional activities, was a common phenomenon in both French littoral and agricultural societies.<sup>52</sup> During the nineteenth century, the agricultural-maritime relationship was still strong, especially in towns such as La Ciotat, which were surrounded by a fertile land of vineyards and olive trees. Maritime work was often a seasonal occupation and the use of the land remained important. The interconnection of professions such as sailors, fishermen, farmers, innkeepers, bakers, or even general labourers, is apparent in the nominative censuses at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. On this basis, a clear occupational classification for a socio-professional analysis of a town cannot be fully accurate.

51 ACCIMP, L 19/60/427-5, Assemblées Générales des actionnaires, 25 mai 1908.

52 Gérard Le Bouëdec, “La pluriactivité dans les sociétés littorales. XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest*, no. 109.1 (2002): 61–90; Gérard Le Bouëdec, “Small ports from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century and the local economy of the French Atlantic coast,” *International Journal of Maritime History*, no. 21.2 (2009): 103–126; Gilbert Buti, “Gens de mer et du terroir: capitaines-vignerons et marins-forestiers de la France méditerranéenne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in *Entre terre et mer. Sociétés littorales et pluriactivités (XV<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, eds. Christophe Cérino, Aliette Geistdoerfer, Gérard Le Bouëdec, and François Ploux (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004). Apart from French historiography, several other studies on seafarers have referred to this phenomenon: Karel Davids, “Local and global: Seafaring communities in the North Sea area, c. 1600–2000,” *International Journal of Maritime History*, no 27:4 (2015): 629–646; Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Eric W. Sager, *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820–1914* (Kingston, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

Nevertheless, grouping the occupational activities of the population on the nominative censuses of 1851 and 1911 can give a clear overall image of the social restructuring of the town.

During the nineteenth century, La Ciotat faced incremental growth in industrial occupations, whereas traditional maritime professions and agriculture were in decline. New categories of workers, either with industrial specialties or unskilled, gradually emerged. Professions related to the production and operation of machinery and tools, such as boilermakers, metal turners, fitters, mechanics, and machinists, increased from 3% in 1851, to 15% in 1911. Iron shipbuilding professions, such as riveters and drillers, appeared on the census of 1911 as 3.5% of the working population, while the category of general labourer increased from 6% to 11%. The principal sector that declined as a main occupational activity in the nominative census was fishing—the profession of fisherman dropped from 9% in 1851 to only 2% in 1911. The same effect can be observed from seafaring activities, a decline from 12% to 6%, whereas the traditional shipbuilding occupations, such as rope makers and pit sawyers, had disappeared entirely by the 1911 census. Agriculture was also a sector that slowed dramatically. Taking data from the occupied population of both the urban and rural regions, agricultural professions dropped from 22% in 1851, to 7% in 1911.<sup>53</sup> This change in occupational patterns undoubtedly reflects the growing emphasis the local shipyards placed on iron shipbuilding and steam propulsion, leading to a process of decline of a traditional maritime community, and the rise of an industrial maritime reality.

The economic growth of the town in relation to industrial shipbuilding led to new social implications, and thoroughly changed the social dynamics of the area, including an important impact on local labour relations. Demographic growth had a profound effect on the long-term process of social and structural change. The mountainous provenance of most immigrants who arrived in La Ciotat during the second half of the nineteenth century, such as the Provence hinterland and Piedmont, generated different social constructions that were not connected to the maritime culture of the town.<sup>54</sup> The transformation of the rural countryside during the nineteenth century, with the dramatic decline of agriculture, the development of rail and road systems, and industrialisation, which demanded a significant labour force for the littoral industrial

53 In rural areas alone, where the majority of farmers were located, the phenomenon is even more evident: agriculture dramatically dropped from 90% in 1851, to 36% in 1911.

54 Gilbert Buti, “Provençaux des rivages, provençaux des montagnes (XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle–milieu XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle),” in *Mer et Montagne dans la culture européenne (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, eds. Alain Cabantous, Jean-Luc Chappey, Renaud Morieux, Nathalie Richard, and François Walter (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 17–29.

establishments, modified the relationship between the sea and the mountains, and created new social and cultural structures.<sup>55</sup> The shipyards in the town offered new work opportunities in the more industrial environment of a factory that generated a widespread waged labour force. Industrial workers gradually developed class-consciousness, reflected in the formation of labour unions, and particularly, in the momentous strikes that took place in La Ciotat at the beginning of the twentieth century. The increasing proletarianisation of labour, and the decline of rural sources of income during this period, turned the seasonal migration patterns of the eighteenth century into permanent rural-urban migration.<sup>56</sup>

Simultaneously, pluriactivity between the agricultural and maritime professions was replaced with industrial activities between the shipyards ashore, and on board the liners of the *Messageries Maritimes*. The transformation of the port towards industrial shipbuilding, and the formation of a private steam navigation company did not only affect activities ashore, but altered dramatically, seafarer careers, and the associated labour market. The following analysis of the transformation of seafaring activities demonstrates the clear connection between seafarers and the economy of the port.

#### 4 The Career Paths of Sailors as an Indicator of the Change

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the character of the maritime community of La Ciotat altered dramatically. Certainly, this was not only due to the industrialisation of the port of La Ciotat. The trajectories of maritime labour should be examined through the economic circumstances to which they were dependent.<sup>57</sup> As mentioned previously, a series of historical conjunctures had already affected the economic networks upon which La Ciotat depended. In this framework, the industrialisation of the port succeeded in the transformation of the professional trajectories of seafarers, and to change their social structure. The study of seamen registers maintained by the *Inscription Maritime* is a vital pathway to comprehend this transition.<sup>58</sup>

55 Buti, "Provençaux," 26.

56 Anne Winter, *Migrants and Urban Change. Newcomers to Antwerp (1760–1860)* (London: Pichering & Chatto and Routledge, 2009): 174.

57 Gilbert Buti and Alain Cabantous, *Etre marin en Europe occidentale (1550–1850)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016), 17.

58 The institution of the *Inscription Maritime* was established in 1668 by Colbert, the First Minister of State and Chief of the Naval Administration in France, as the *Système des Classes*, renamed in 1784 as *Inscription Maritime*. This institution constituted a tool for

Following each individual's career, from ship boy to sailor, and then *hors service*,<sup>59</sup> eventually reaching the end of their career, the researcher can reconstruct the professional trajectory of sailors during this transitional period. Even though this research is still ongoing, several preliminary results underline the transformation that occurred. The study of the La Ciotat registers of seamen, and the reconstruction of their personal paths, reveals the diversification of their activities, from fishing to coastal trade, long distance trade, and the navy, and shows common points of evolution, including the changes and process of adaptation.

In order to understand the professional trajectories of sailors during the second half of the nineteenth century, two databases were produced.<sup>60</sup> The first database is a catalogue of all active sailors of the period 1840 to 1920; it is a register of their personal details, and a recapitulation of each individual's service (1410 sailors in total). In the second database, three categories of sailors were separated by date of birth (almost 200 sailors for each category). From those, 50 individuals, who had long careers in shipping, were selected from each category. Their analytical career path was registered, and the following samples were created:

- I. Sailors born 1800–1810—Career started 1815–1825—*Hors Service* 1850–60
- II. Sailors born 1840–50—Career started 1855–65—*Hors Service* 1890–1900
- III. Sailors born 1865–75—Career started 1880–90—*Hors Service* 1915–25

Through the second database,<sup>61</sup> the analytical career path of three different age groups demonstrates the transition that occurred in the professional structure of seafarers in La Ciotat. The percentage of total service on board sailing ships and steamers for the three different periods, illustrates the incredible

---

information and control of the reservoir of seamen available for the royal navy. Every man exercising one of the maritime professions for over a year, was registered in the *Inscription Maritime*, for the Navy's disposal. At the same time, the state provided privileges in return for service in the navy, such as tax exemptions, military pensions, and life insurance for the families of listed seamen. The registers of seamen (*matricules des gens de mer*) are separated by port and classed by rank.

59 *Hors de Service* is the deactivation of seamen from the service of the navy when they become 50 years old. However, they were still eligible to work on the merchant marine, and their activity continued to be registered.

60 These databases have been produced with data from the following sources: Service Historique de la Défense (SHD) Toulon, *Inscription Maritime du quartier de La Ciotat*, 14 P 133–135, *Officiers mariniers et matelots (1825–1865)*; 14 P 139, *Hors de Service (1850–1865)*; 14 P 150, *Novices (1849–1865)*; 14 P 151, *Mousses (1850–1865)*; 14 P 152, *Inscrits provisoires (1860–1883)*; 14 P 156–158, *Inscrits définitifs (1865–1883)*; 14 P 164–165, *Hors de service (1865–1900)*; 14 P 170, *Mécaniciens et chauffeurs, inscrits provisoires (1865–1879)*; 14 P 171, *Mécaniciens et chauffeurs, inscrits définitifs (1863–1879)*.

61 Henceforward: *Inscription Maritime* database, La Ciotat—career paths of sailors.

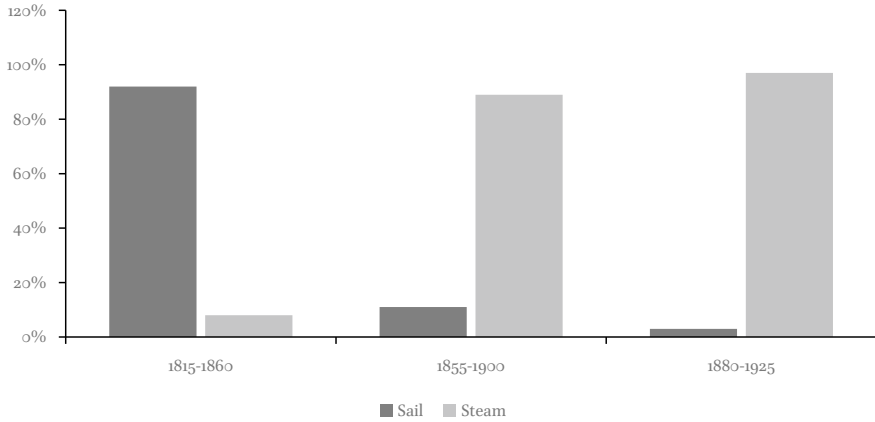


CHART 8.5 Total service on board steamships and sailing ships by percentage of the three different samples, given their career period  
 SOURCE: INSCRIPTION MARITIME DATABASE, LA CIOTAT—CAREER PATHS OF SAILORS

metamorphosis that occurred in La Ciotat during the second half of the nineteenth century (Chart 8.5).

The transformation of seafaring careers towards steam navigation is somewhat apparent in the first sample, mainly from the 1840s onwards. Some of the sailors worked occasionally on the first steamers constructed in La Ciotat, and their function on board was limited to the deck, as sailors or boatswains. In most cases, they returned to sailing ships. Those who were mostly occupied on long distance trade, worked on some of the large three-masted ships and brigs of Marseilles, and sailed towards the French colonies in South America, the Ivory Coast, the French Antilles, and the East Indies. Others focused their career on the grand cabotage in the Mediterranean, travelling to North Africa and the Levant. Another category concentrated their activities on coastal trade along the coasts of France and Italy. These activities, together with fishing in between long voyages, were interconnected trajectories for sailors who sailed between the 1820s and 1880s. Maritime pluriactivity, the participation of sailors in different kinds of maritime activities, a common phenomenon of the *ancien regime* economic reality, was still apparent.

Even though the transition towards steam navigation seems tenuous in the first sample, the registers of entries of shipyard workers does offer a different image. Despite the fact that most sailors remained working at sea, it is remarkable that 40% ended their sailing career, and moved permanently to the shipyards. For instance, Charles Villecroze, born in 1807, had a long career at sea, mainly in grand cabotage and coastal trade, combined with

limited fishing activity in La Ciotat. On 20 July 1852, he embarked for the first time on the steamer *Erickson*, and continued his career on steamers for four years. From 1856 onwards, he moved to shipyards as a labourer and continued working there until 1868. During this period, there is no record of him in the registers of the *Inscription Maritime*, apart from declaring him “inactive in La Ciotat”. Interestingly, this is also the trajectory of Jean Baptiste Gody, born in 1806. He worked as a sailor and boatswain on long-distance trade on brigs and three-masted ships, until 9 September 1857 (aged 51). A month later, he moved to the shipyards, where he worked as a labourer on the copper smelter until 1866. In a few cases, sailors worked onboard the steamers of the *Messageries Maritimes* while they worked in the shipyards. For example, Felix Martin worked on steamers from 1847. On 8 August 1853, he disembarked from the steamer *Anatole* and on the same day started to work in the shipyards as a labourer, this lasted until 1857. During this period, even though he remained in the shipyards, he worked on board two steamers of the *Compagnie* for a total service of ten months.

The second and third samples confirm a total shift of seafaring activities for the sailors of La Ciotat born between 1840–50 and 1865–75. Of these men, 89% and 97% respectively, completed service on board steamers. At the same time, professions on board underwent major changes during this period. As the Chart 8.6 indicates, there is a decline of deck professions whereas engineers and engine crew (stokers, coal trimmers, and oilers) increased dramatically.

The technical transformation of navigation caused a profound change and diversification of maritime professions. The education, training, and technical competence of the labour force was an essential component for the operation of the industry.<sup>62</sup> During the sailing era, the art of seamanship was obtained by practise onboard a sailing ship; in wooden shipbuilding, the skills were handed down from father to son, or in a practical form of apprenticeship. In industrial shipyards, the scale of production, together with new types of expertise in processing and manufacturing methods, including new materials and tools, made the training of a skilled workforce imperative. At the beginning of steam navigation, the profession of engineer, even though essential for the operation of a steamship, was greatly restricted. In this regard, the recruitment of a skilled and competent labour force for the operation of a steamship engine room was a major challenge for steamship companies.

62 Richard A. Walker, “The geography of production,” in *A Companion to Economic Geography*, eds. Eric Sheppard and Trevor J. Barnes (Malden, MA, Oxford, and Victoria, Canada: Blackwell, 2003), 125.

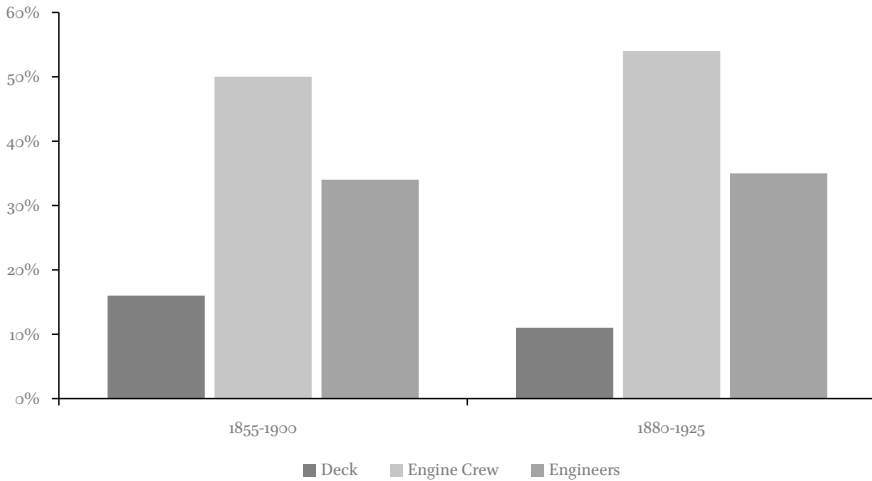


CHART 8.6 Repartition of work in percentage on deck, on the engine crew and engineers given the total careers of sailors on the two last samples  
SOURCE: INSCRIPTION MARITIME DATABASE, LA CIOTAT—CAREER PATHS OF SAILORS

The extensive shift in the career trajectory of sailors in La Ciotat was also related to the strategy of the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* to use shipbuilding as a focal point for the training and recruitment of engineering personnel. The construction centre at La Ciotat, together with one at La Seyne-sur-Mer, constituted a major location for engineering apprenticeships in Provence, whilst the *Ecole des Arts et Métiers* of Aix-en-Provence was an important core source of theoretical information.<sup>63</sup> Apart from their role in the formation of a skilled maritime workforce, the shipyards were also in charge of the employment of all engine personnel.<sup>64</sup> As Marie Couvenhes demonstrates, the percentage of chief engineers previously employed in the shipyards rose from 50% for the working generation of 1870, to 79% in 1880, and 90% in 1890.<sup>65</sup>

The transition of the maritime community can also be supported by the fact that in 1890, 59% of all machinists at the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* were born in La Ciotat.<sup>66</sup> The use of La Ciotat as a recruitment centre for experienced engineers and stokers confirms the movement of seafarers not only

63 Daumalin and Courdurié, *Vapeur et révolution industrielle*, 99.

64 As Berneron-Couvenhes points out, in 1890, 95% of engineers were hired in La Ciotat Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes*, 468.

65 Berneron-Couvenhes, *Les Messageries Maritimes*, 466–470 and Table no. 79.

66 *Ibid.*, 468.



from sail to steam, but also from deck to engine room. In this framework, La Ciotat functioned not only as a major shipbuilding centre for the *Compagnie* but also as a pool of maritime labour for their liners. In both the second and the third samples of the analysis, approximately 80% of total service on board steamers, was onboard *Messageries Maritimes'* vessels.

The analysis of sailor careers clearly confirm the transition in the maritime identity of the port, due to its function as an industrial shipbuilding centre. The link with a private shipping company, both ashore and on board, reflects the pattern of adaptation to the new economic reality. The maritime community, integrated into the practices of an industrial economy, experienced a total cultural transformation. The sailors moved from working in different kinds of maritime and agricultural activities, to depending on a waged labour system, strictly controlled by the *Compagnie*. Even though the traditional maritime culture of the population was in a process of decline, the town kept a strong connection with the sea in different ways, following the industrialisation of the port. The loss of the sailor as a highly-skilled profession was balanced by the rise of the industrial skilled maritime worker on board ships. In this way, the prestige of the seafaring population was reaffirmed through an industrial career path that retained a link to the sea.

## 5 Conclusion

The case of La Ciotat is an excellent example of the social transformation of a maritime community towards an industrial reality. The advent of steamships constituted a major breakthrough in the history of La Ciotat. This transition was not only associated with general technical changes in navigation, but also with the formation at the port of a major French steamship company during the second half of the nineteenth century. The *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* constituted the main instrument of social change in the town, by developing the industrial climate of the port, and reshaping the characteristics of its littoral society. The economic and technological development of La Ciotat depended on state policies of expansion, and had significant effects on demographic fluctuations, occupational activities, and the patterns of employment in the town. The industrial transformation of the port gave a different character to the town, mainly related to the sounds of metal workshops, and the presence of large iron ships in the port. The identity of the local community was reshaped by the shipyards and their reputation. Ship launch celebrations were a major event, which refashioned the public life of the town, with the majority of the local population celebrating the achievements of their work.



FIGURE 8.1 Emile Loubon, *Le port de La Ciotat* (1841)

SOURCE: WIKICOMMONS [ONLINE] [HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:EMILE\\_LOUBON-LA\\_CIOTAT.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emile_Loubon-La_Ciotat.jpg)

Since this period, the history of La Ciotat had been inextricably linked to industrial developments. The adaptation of the industrial shipbuilding economy of the port created strong industrial trajectories; a clear path dependence that determined the identity of the town to the present day.<sup>67</sup> Even though the shipyard of La Ciotat has changed ownership many times during the last two centuries, it has always been considered as one of the most important shipbuilding centres of the Mediterranean. After the closure of the shipyard in 1986, La Ciotat transformed into “*une station-service de luxe*”, and is now considered one of the largest yacht maintenance and refitting seaports of the Mediterranean.<sup>68</sup> The population of La Ciotat were transformed from a traditional maritime community of the sailing ship era, to an industrial shipbuilding working-class society. As the mayor of the city, Patrick Boré, declared in the *New York Times* in 2015, “Paris has its Eiffel Tower; we have the shipyard”.<sup>69</sup>

67 For the definition of “path dependence” in economic geography see: Walker, “The geography of production,” 111–132.

68 Philippe Jacqué, “Les mégayachts, planche de salut des chantiers navals de La Ciotat,” *Le Monde*, 29 November 2017, [https://www.lemonde.fr/entreprises/article/2017/11/29/les-megayachts-planche-de-salut-des-chantiers-navals-de-la-ciotat\\_5221782\\_1656994.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/entreprises/article/2017/11/29/les-megayachts-planche-de-salut-des-chantiers-navals-de-la-ciotat_5221782_1656994.html) (accessed 25/09/2020).

69 Christopher F. Schuetze, “Superyachts to the rescue,” *The New York Times*, 18 January 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/business/international/superyachts-bring-new-life-to-french-shipbuilding-port.html> (accessed 25/09/2020).