Besides the examination of official policies to cars, a substantial contribution of the book lies in the analysis of the ‘presence’ of the car in everyday life. This included consumer patience, often over years, the thrift and the shrinking of the family budget while tracking the serial number on the waiting lists, the sacrifices given for this precious purchase. This multilayered picture of different perspectives towards the car is undoubtedly the main achievement of the book.

There are three other important contributions of the book. The first refers to overcoming the classical dichotomies dividing political history from social and cultural history, and dividing macro and micro levels of history. The ‘road’ to mass motorization is outlined by the Party and state perspective ‘from above’, but at the end of the day individual consumers are travelling within the perspective ‘from below’. This is transparent in the analyzed sources. In the first part of the book they are predominantly Politburo documents and ministerial decrees. The second part is based on personal evidences from newspapers and magazines. Gatejel combines statistical data as well as visual materials. The sources used are vast and could be helpful for other researchers and students working on the phenomenon of socialist automobility.

The second important point in the book is the well-grounded thesis that there is no universal socialist society and regime, once seen through the windshield of the car. Gatejel’s comparative approach shows both the general model of socialist car’s production and consumption and the major differences in motorization processes in the GDR and Romania compared to the USSR. Still, the important terminological issue of why she uses the concept of state socialism instead of communism (used by Siegelbaum), or socialism, is left unanswered in this study. The usage of those terms is not innocent and needs argumentation or at least clarification.

Finally, Gatejel’s analysis of the interrelations between West and East concerning automobility shows that they were far more complex than the clichés of ‘battle’, ‘war’, ‘borrowing’ and ‘competition’. Those interrelations were based on cooperation between communist and capitalist countries, as well as on the rivalry among communist countries themselves.

Read this book. Gatejel’s precise research into the appearance and spread of individual and family motorization in three socialist countries, and into its contradictions and dilemmas, throws light onto both automobility studies and the understanding of socialist/communist societies and political regimes.

Werner Scheltjens, Dutch Deltas: Emergence, Functions and Structure of the Low Countries’ Maritime Transport System, ca. 1300–1850 (Boston, 2015); pp. 326

Reviewed by: Joost Schokkenbroek, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Some books should be obligatory reading for historians in general. This one fits into this category, with its highly original methodology, its questions that are related to various academic (sub)disciplines (including geography, transport history, maritime history, migration and labour history), and the author’s provocative style of writing. In the Preface Scheltjens clearly tells readers that he focuses not on
the Dutch maritime trade per se, but on the carriers that made trade possible – the shipmasters that constituted the Dutch mercantile fleet. Scheltjens sets their collective course by introducing his main questions: ‘when and why did a maritime transport sector emerge in the Low Countries? What was its structure? How did it evolve? And, finally, how can the emergence, functions and structure of the Low Countries’ maritime transport system be explained?’ (p. vii).

The book comprises five chapters: chapters 1 and 2 present a general geographic overview of the Dutch maritime transport sector, the ports involved and their functions c.1300–1850. The remaining three chapters focus on the composition of community-based populations of maritime transporters, their production of services and their local business cultures. A predominant source for all chapters is the Sound Toll Registers Online (STRO), recording the toll levied by the king of Denmark on ships passing the Sound between Sweden and Denmark. These sources are ideal for Scheltjens’ attempt to provide an overview of the actors in maritime transport.

The author does not shy away from clarifying in unambiguous terms what he considers his research contributes to historiography. Firstly, it is the first analysis of the Dutch maritime transport sector comprising 550 years, explaining the entwinement between geography, operations and institutions. In doing so ‘our understanding of the Dutch economy before 1850 is advanced considerably’. Secondly, the methodology may help in developing comparative analyses of the maritime transport sector in different parts of Europe. Thirdly, this study is another contribution in which ‘database management systems are used to explore and analyse [...] primary sources, leading to novel insights’ (p. viii–ix).

The author unfolds the complex story of individual people and communities involved in the maritime transport sector. These actors hold the ‘lines’ that should be connected to the ‘nodes’ (p. 8). To get to grips with the enormous datasets Scheltjens introduces the concept of the Low Countries consisting of three deltas: the delta consisting of the estuaries of the rivers Scheldt, Meuse and Rhine; the Zuiderzee delta including Amsterdam, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, and the Wadden Islands; and the Lauwers-Dollard-Ems delta. These deltas each have their different commercial networks, bound to geography and commodities. A partly integrated Dutch maritime transport system seems to have existed at the end of the eighteenth century, with two gateways (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) and three deltas with maritime transport communities.

He then focuses on the functions of ports in the Dutch maritime transport sector, followed by analyses of the production of maritime transport services by Dutch shipmasters and the composition of their populations. The author presents a classification of ports based on functions and frequencies of ports and ship movements. In Chapter 3, he concludes that structural changes in supply and demand led to the emergence of new transportation routes whereby the ‘traditional’ bilateral trade patterns have been replaced by diversified patterns involving many locations. The impact of these changes was influenced by (in)accessibility of markets, access to operational knowledge and various other factors (p. 130). The fourth
chapter discusses the domiciles of shipmasters, including the so-called ‘hjemsted-problem’ – the issue of domicile ambiguity. Domiciles of shipmasters, registered in STRO, may differ from year to year. The author rightly claims: ‘Domicile ambiguity, however, is an issue of vital importance to the advancement of maritime history as a discipline, especially since ambiguity (in general) is a recurrent issue in many historical databases’ (p. 133).

With this impressive monograph, Scheltjens unites a wealth of primary and secondary sources to come to grips with maritime transport communities in the Netherlands during the era 1300–1850. Based on the developments in the three deltas, he discerns a number of major changes. Before the middle of the seventeenth century, the three deltas operated more or less autonomously. Shipmasters from a specific delta provided services on behalf of that specific delta. After c.1650, a process of internationalization of the maritime transport market in one single gateway per delta started. This caused a process of centralization of international trade, with maritime transport communities of secondary cities becoming dependent on the central maritime transport market of the delta. In the eighteenth century, services of shipmasters from one delta become accessible to trade networks in the other deltas. Integration of deltas started. Wars at the end of that century left their dramatic mark on the disappearance – or dwindling at best – of marinas and the supply of transport services.

After sharing my enthusiasm for this book, it is my duty as reviewer to make at least two critical remarks: Scheltjens promises to take us on a journey through 550 years of maritime transport systems, domiciles of shipmasters and their networks, their dependency on local maritime communities and their usances. However, due to his reliability on STRO, in reality this study first and foremost relates to the era 1670–1850. Furthermore, he provides the shipmasters’ story in relation to domicile and networks, not so much exploiting a bottom-up approach with its focus on the ordinary lads climbing the rigging. This might come as a disappointment to some readers.

The author actually implicitly acknowledges some of these issues, as he mentions a number of potential fields of further research (such as the presence of a maritime transport system in the Southern Netherlands). Scheltjens ends by quoting a wide range of potential additional research questions related to transport, and maritime labour markets (with shipmasters and sailors) on the last page. It is clear to me that he has just started, and there is more to be expected in the near future.

Edward M. Spiers, Engines for Empire. The Victorian Army and its Use of Railways (Manchester, 2015); pp. 198, £65

Reviewed by: Ian J. Kerr, University of Manitoba

Railways came quickly to the attention of British military men and civilian authorities concerned with public order, the defence of the realm, and the security and expansion of the British Empire. The military benefits of railways were almost self-evident. Soon after its 1830 opening the Liverpool and Manchester