

Conference Report

Negotiating Status and Scope of Action. Interrelations between Slavery and Other Forms of Dependency in Early Modern Europe.

June 15—17, 2017

Recent research has assembled extensive evidence of forcibly transported and enslaved persons within Europe, provoking the question to what extent slavery and other forms of bondage and dependency influenced each other. The conference brought together researchers from different parts of Europe and the USA to discuss the ambiguous legal and social status of such persons and the intersections between slavery and other forms of dependency prevalent in early modern Europe like serfdom, war imprisonment, convict labor, domestic servitude, or guardianship.

MARK PONTE (Amsterdam) opened the conference with a presentation on free and unfree persons of African descent living in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. He used specific cases from the 1650s to juxtapose legal theory and actual laws pertaining to slavery with the practices of negotiating for freedom and the limits imposed on freed persons. These cases also highlighted the importance of networks maintained in Amsterdam.

These legal incongruities were also at the heart of JULIA HOLZMANN's (Bremen) presentation. Building on an early eighteenth-century case she showed how the diffuse legal situation regarding slavery and judicial practice in the Seven United Provinces and the Dutch colonies enabled slavery or slave-like conditions in the Netherlands.

Both presentations emphasized that a thorough understanding of the historic realities of slavery in early modern Europe requires a firm grasp of the evolution and use of relevant legislation. The legal and social status of a person was very much the result of negotiations between all or several involved individuals, even though unfree people definitely had less to say in these negotiations than others.

ANNEMIEKE VAN DER VEGT and MICHEL R. DOORTMONT (Groningen/Leiden) presented two stimulating biographical case studies, one of a boy servant at the Court of Orange-Nassau, the other of a successful administrator and trader in Elmina who later settled as lord of a manor near Groningen. By comparing these two contemporaries of shared West African origin and vastly divergent life stories, the presenters provided important insights into questions of the identity and perception of Africans in the late eighteenth-century Netherlands.

All papers in this panel pointed to the significance of the microhistorical approach in gaining a better understanding of the interplay between legal, social, and racial categorizations.

GIULIA BONAZZA (Florence) opened the second panel with a discussion of bondage in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italian cities. She analyzed the intersections between different forms of bondage and the growing significance of evolving concepts of race, referring to African and Ottoman slaves as well as captives of war.

JOACHIM ÖSTLUND (Lund) moved the spotlight to Scandinavia to present original research on Moors at the Swedish court, focusing especially on Adolf Ludvig Gustav Fredrik Albert Badin, who left a remarkable diary. This fascinating ego document prompted a lively discussion on the perception and self-perception of Africans in European societies, the relevance of blackness for identity, and the question of how representative Badin is for court moors during this period. A

controversial discussion also revolved around the use of pictorial sources presenting court moors.

The keynote lecture by WOLFGANG KAISER (Paris) was an enlightening overview of research on slavery and bondage in the early modern Mediterranean conducted in recent decades. Enlarging on phenomena like the Moriscos in sixteenth-century Spain or the practices of liberation and ransoming, as well as on narratives of captivity prevalent throughout the Mediterranean and Western Europe, he demonstrated the limits of common perceptions of bondage, slavery, and liberation.

In the third panel GUNVOR SIMONSEN (Copenhagen), HANNE ØSTHUS (Oslo), and JOHAN HEINSEN (Aalborg) all touched upon the problem of semantics and how the meaning of terms describing specific Scandinavian forms of bondage and servitude changed following the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade.

Simonsen explained the intricate connections between slavery, race, and trade in eighteenth-century Copenhagen. Her analysis of newspapers revealed a localization of an Atlantic ideology of race that helped to construct the discursive figure of the “negroe” in Denmark, designating both a racial categorization and a commodification. Østhus researched slaves transported from the Danish West Indies to Denmark-Norway, where they mostly worked as household servants. She investigated the legal ambiguities and labels they were given and how they were perceived in popular discourse.

The problem of identifying the meaning of slavery was also at the core of Johan Heinsen’s presentation. As Danish merchants entered into the Atlantic slave trade, convict laborers were increasingly labeled as “slaves”. Heinsen pointed out the similarities between slavery and penal labor. Historical forms of penal work in Scandinavia, the infamy associated with it, and the commodification of convict labor explain why contemporaries equated conviction with slavery.

The papers of the fourth panel moved the focus to early modern Spain and to the extent and limits of the agency of black people (both free and enslaved). AURELIA MARTÍN-CASARES (Granada) introduced the audience to her work on Juan Latino, the first humanist and scholar of African origin in Europe. She pointed out that Latino used his Ethiopian origin to profit from the cultural capital connected to the legend of Prester John, essentially allowing him to claim a Christian heritage and thus an equal standing within early modern Spanish society.

ROCIO PERIAÑEZ (Extremadura) presented her research on slaves appearing before court in early modern Spain. Significantly, her findings revealed that slaves were not only defendants but appeared as applicants and witnesses also. They could and did denounce their masters for mistreatment and other misdemeanors.

ARTURO MORGADO (Cadíz) discussed forms of liberation and social integration of former slaves in multiethnic eighteenth-century Cadiz. Morgado stressed the fact that the stigma of slavery stayed with freed slaves and their personal autonomy often remained restricted. While some succeeded in accumulating wealth, for most the new status led to poverty.

In the last panel, on the Holy Roman Empire, Great Britain, and France, ARNE SPOHR (Bowling Green) provided insights into the lives of black court musicians in early modern German principalities. Examining the lives of two trumpeters from seventeenth-century Württemberg and eighteenth-century Schleswig-Holstein, he showed the ambiguities and the dependency

characterizing the lives and careers of such men. This manifested itself in contradictory situations like a marriage necessitating the manumission of a musician who was considered a free man by his ducal employer.

REBEKKA VON MALLINCKRODT (Bremen) presented the case of an African servant in the Holy Roman Empire, who in 1790 sued his former master for payment of outstanding wages for 22 years of service. At the core of the dispute was the question of whether the servant had been a slave throughout all these years or a free person. The argumentative strategies employed show that classifications like “slave” or “serf” were applied fluidly according to interest.

KATHLEEN CHATER introduced the audience to her research on black servants in Britain during the long eighteenth century. She compared their terms of service and their legal positions to those of other servants, women, and children. There were no specific laws governing the service of black people. Instead the legal stipulations for apprentices, domestic servitude, and those regarding the position of women and minors applied to Africans as well. This led to a controversial discussion over whether a focus on the legal framework alone—which was ambiguous in most cases—can adequately grasp the situation of trafficked persons.

SUE PEABODY (Vancouver) once more returned to the problem of the free soil principle, using the case of Madeleine, a Bengali woman who temporarily lived in France, as an example. Peabody illustrated how Madeleine and her family were affected by legal provisions and manumission practices, and showed how these changed from the time of the Ancien Régime through the revolutionary period into Restoration France and the July Monarchy. Once again an adroitly employed microhistorical approach exposed the gap between legal doctrine and actual practices and brought to the fore experiences of ambiguity and injustice.

Three essential points became apparent during the course of the conference and the attendant discussions:

- The ambiguous legal and social position of trafficked people in early modern Europe. This was true even for realms like France or the Netherlands, which had explicit laws prohibiting slavery.
- The semantics of slavery, servitude, penal labor, and serfdom seem to be key to understanding contemporary views on different forms of dependency.
- Microhistorical research offers promising approaches to better understand the conditions limiting or prescribing the status and agency of unfree persons in early modern Europe.

A publication of the conference proceedings is in preparation.

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Program

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Rebekka von Mallinckrodt (University of Bremen)

SECTION 1: NETHERLANDS

Mark Ponte (Amsterdam City Archives): Negotiating Freedom. Free and Enslaved Africans in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam

Julia Holzmann (University of Bremen): Conflicts and Relations Between Slavery, Dependency, Poverty and Coerced Labor in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam—The Case “Christina from India”

Michel R. Doortmont (University Groningen & Leiden University), Annemieke van der Vegt (independent researcher): Understanding African Identity in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands: Between a Boy Servant at the Court of Orange-Nassau and a Lord of the Manor in the Province of Groningen

SECTION 2: ITALY AND SWEDEN

Giulia Bonazza (European University Institute Florence): Different Forms of Bondage in the Mediterranean: the Italian Case (1750-1850)

Joachim Östlund (Lund University): The Legal and Social Status of Persons of African Descent in Eighteenth-Century Sweden

Keynote Lecture: Wolfgang Kaiser (Paris 1/EHESS): Fragile Lives. Risk and Uncertainty in the Early Modern Mediterranean

SECTION 3: DENMARK / NORWAY

Gunvor Simonsen (University of Copenhagen): Slavery and Race in Copenhagen in the Eighteenth Century

Hanne Østhus (independent researcher): Slaves and Servants. Domestics Transported from the Colonies to Denmark-Norway in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

Johan Heinsen (Aalborg University): The Meaning of Slavery in Early Modern Denmark-Norway [interrelations Between Penal Work and Slavery]

SECTION 4: SPAIN

Aurelia Martín-Casares (University of Granada): Juan Latino: The First Afro-European Humanist from Slave Origin

Rocío Periañez (University of Extremadura): Slaves Before the Courts in Early Modern Spain: the Case of Extremadura

Arturo Morgado (University of Cadiz): Freedmen at Early Modern Spain: Ways of Liberation and Social Integration?

SECTION 5: THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE, GREAT BRITAIN, AND FRANCE

Arne Spohr (Bowling Green State University): Free Through Membership in the Imperial Trumpeters' Guild? On the Legal and Social Position of Black Court Trumpeters in the Holy Roman Empire

Rebekka v. Mallinckrodt (University of Bremen): Interrelations Between Slavery and Serfdom—German Legal Case Studies

Kathleen Chater (independent researcher): Conditions of Service in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century

Sue Peabody (Washington State University Vancouver): Barriers to Accessing France's *Sol Libre* in Early Modern France