

Press release

How much did the Netherlands earn from slavery?

Amsterdam, 1 July 2013 - **The Netherlands abolished slavery exactly 150 years ago, but controversy continues about how much the country actually earned from slavery and the slave trade. The International Institute of Social History (IISH), VU University Amsterdam and Leiden University intend to clarify this issue. These institutions recently received a grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for a major research project on the economic impact of slavery in the Netherlands.**

Although the public's interest in this question is significant, the academic world has thus far failed to recognize the relevance of the matter. In colonial history, the Dutch East Indies have long played a far more prominent role than the former colonies in the West Indies. This is the primary reason for the limited amount of research conducted into the economic benefits for the Netherlands stemming from slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. This lack of research is unfortunate, because recent preliminary estimates suggest that the benefits from Atlantic slave-based commerce were more robust than those of the illustrious Dutch East India Company.

The project is entitled *Slaves, commodities and logistics: the direct and indirect, the immediate and long-term economic impact of eighteenth-century Dutch Republic transatlantic slave-based activities*. The research will focus on the impact on the Dutch economy of slavery-related production and trade in the 18th century. It will investigate the direct benefits of the slave trade and the revenues derived from the plantations, while it will also examine the indirect consequences, such as favourable effects on employment in shipyards and among suppliers. Furthermore, the researchers will reconstruct the profits earned on the Dutch export of coffee, sugar and tobacco produced with slave labour. A third research focus involves the insurance and banking industry and the maritime sector, which flourished thanks to trans-Atlantic trade. The researchers will therefore also study the extent to which the port of Rotterdam's development was boosted thanks to its role in eighteenth-century Atlantic commerce.

The project is an initiative of the International Institute of Social History. The grant applicants are: Prof. Marcel van der Linden (IISH), Prof. Henk den Heijer (Leiden University) and Prof. Karel Davids (VU University Amsterdam). The requested grant amount totals €740,946. The three researchers will be working on this project for the next five years

Note to the editors, not for publication:

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